

Mood of states

EXIT-polls are not necessarily trustworthy, but collectively they stress a few points. The results of such polls released by multiple media agencies this week, prima facie, signify massive dissatisfaction of the people against their state governments. They generally hint that West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala could see a change of government; while the BJP-ruled Assam appears to have voted for continuity. So did Puducherry where a regional party shares power with the BJP. The final assembly poll results on May 4 may even provide a different picture, but ground realities also suggest that strong sentiments prevailed against the governments of Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc., while Bengal's Mamata Banerjee had a hard struggle keeping her folk together. Mamata, having ruled Bengal for three consecutive terms, it is likely that the people are looking for a change. Bengal is not given to quick change of political commitments. It repeatedly elected Left Front governments from the mid-70s to 2011 and then placed eminent trust in Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress. Clearly, the BJP did its best to unseat her in the last polls too but intensified its offensive this time, evident also from the long presence of Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Shah there through the campaign period.

Assam has been a stronghold for the BJP in recent years. The special electoral rolls revision across poll-bound states including Bihar, Bengal and Assam by the Election Commission apparently helped in the removal of lakhs of bogus voters in these states. Who benefited from this would be clear when the election results are out on May 4. The BJP played its cards zealously in Assam, raising feelings against the minorities, settlers from Bangladesh etc., through frequent campaigns. There was no anti-incumbency feelings there. However, in Tamil Nadu, powerful MK Stalin of the DMK seems having trouble retaining power. Exit poll results show actor-turned politician Vijay, who recently formed the TVK party and campaigned extensively, might call the shots there at the expense of the traditional heavyweights, the DMK and the AIADMK. National parties have minor influence in Tamil Nadu, as has been the case for long, while new regional parties sprout.

Chances are that the LDF government in Kerala would hang up its boots. An anti-incumbency factor was at work there as chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan was ruling the state for the last two terms. His first term was impressive, which helped him win the last polls and continue the LDF rule. This time, he obviously faltered on multiple fronts and alienated the minorities through his whimsical actions. With his health deteriorating, Vijayan at age 80 is facing political odds, which could be to the advantage of the Congress-led UDF. Exit polls are clear that the UDF would grab power there. At the national level, through these five state polls, both BJP and the Congress appear to have benefited in one or other state. For the Congress, a gain in Kerala would help raise its clout in the South, where the party already rules Karnataka and Telangana.

Letters to the Editor

Why MATI must accelerate UPSC coaching admissions

Editor,
For many citizens of India, clearing the prestigious UPSC-CSE examination is a daring challenge that requires meticulous planning, immense discipline and time management. It's a dream for many young people, and there are many aspirants from Meghalaya as well, but for many of us the common folks, it feels like trying to reach the stars—almost impossible especially given the current financial and educational situation in Meghalaya. The state is poor and its education system is in poor shape. For 13 years now the State could not produce a single native IAS officer from Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Communities. But somehow in the darkness, there's a beacon of light, a hope for many young aspirants from our dear Meghalaya - the MATI-AIPETC Civil service examination coaching programme. It gives coaching, guidance and educational support along with accommodation which can help selected aspirants in studying in a proper educational environment along with access to libraries, computers and books in the center itself. This is indeed a very good initiative by the Gov-

ernment of Meghalaya along with the newly launched CM-INSPIRE scheme which can give financial support to candidates who have cleared their Prelims and Mains. This can help aspirants engage at every stage of the exam. I truly appreciate the Government of Meghalaya for such initiatives.

As we look forward to the upcoming UPSC CSE Prelims Examination cycle on May 24, 2026 it is important to point out that the coaching program conducted by MATI at Mawdiangdiang, has faced an unfortunate delay in implementing these coaching programs for the Academic year 2025-26. The classes started on 27 October 2025, which is a huge delay as the examinations are slated for May 24 2026 and aspirants get barely 7 months to cover a huge and extensive syllabus ranging from Politics, History, Geography, Languages, CSAT, Optionals, Science and Technology etc. which is almost impossible to attend in such a short time period. Besides, one cannot rush through especially in technical subjects like Economics and Politics. One must have conceptual clarity and depth of the subject and attempting to pressurise aspirants in a 7-month window to cover all basics is not only a pedagogical challenge but also a disservice for our State's brightest mind.

The cost of starting late is

Was Khasi Society Democratic? Then Why is Khasi National Dorbar Hall Unused?

By Patricia Mukhim

Some of us love the past so much that we spend much of our waking hours romanticising that past. We love our 'traditional' dances although I wonder if women at one point in history knew style as it is displayed today. Did the Khasis have a concept of gold ornaments much before the British came here? Who decided that the red corals interspersed with gold were to become our Khasi trademark? I have tried time and again to find out how we developed the art of the tying the jainsem and how did we accept the jainsem dhara woven in Sualkuchi, Assam as our traditional wear? I guess these came about through the process of adaptation. And that's the beauty of culture. It adapts and makes something its own. So let's not fool ourselves that everything we wear today evolved from the indigenous. Certainly, shirts and pants are adapted from the western world. Khasi men wore the jainboh (dhoti) which I believe is adapted from the plains people of Assam and erstwhile East Bengal. The past is always presented in a romantic, cartographic-worldview.

Fast forward to today and we are still obsessed with the past but seem to have no appetite to discuss the future of the people of Meghalaya especially the young folks who are groping in the dark. Life is not getting better for too many people in this State. We know it when we use our social lenses to view the world. Unfortunately, too many people obsess only about politics. They see everything through political lenses and that too from partisan lenses.

I am not suggesting that it is wrong to focus on the past because memory, history, and reflection are essential for identity and learning. But when the past becomes something we cling to just to assert our identity then we are on the wrong track. That's when the past starts to distort our judgment, our relationships within the community and those outside it and ultimately even our public discourses take a wrong turn. Constantly revisiting the past and focussing on past glories is what has got the Khasi society in a trap we seem unable to escape from. We create narratives that sound good such as that, "Khasi society has a strong clan and community system hence we never had beggars." Well, the reality is that we have several beggars

today and they come in different forms.

Two days ago I walked the streets of Police Bazar and was shocked to see a young lady who was blind and had a white cane next to her, sitting and singing by the roadside to entertain strangers so that they put money into her little bucket. Until a few months ago only two men would sit and beg for alms. Now a lady has joined them. So, what happened to our clan and kinship ties? We used to believe that the clan would be there for its members and that none among the clan members would be so poor as to have to beg. Well, that bubble has burst. The clan is broken. The poorer clan members have to fend for themselves and their numbers are growing. Hence for good measure, I would request the Chief Minister to kindly walk down the Police Bazar Lane so that he can also see for himself the growing poverty in Meghalaya which he would not see from the confines of the Secretariat. Perhaps he can then include these poor souls in the Meghalaya Grassroots Music Project (MGMP) since they are also singing for a livelihood. And because they are blind that makes them more deserving of the monthly stipend.

The question to the Khasi society is - how long are we going to be trapped in a romanticised past? Psychology tells us that constantly revisiting past glories can trap us in a fixed narrative. Hence, we stop responding to what is actually happening now. This is our congenital disorder as a society. Our conversations revolve around the same issues like a broken record and we stop short of taking the conversation further to find solutions to the issues confronting us. Do we need someone from Delhi to tell us that our education system right from the primary level in the distant rural hamlets have failed and there are more kids outside the school than inside? Have we tried to engage seriously with this issue or do we just wash our hands off because we have learnt to believe that every issue must be dealt with by the Government.

True the Government has the resources but such resources are too thinly spread to be able to make a difference. Unless society with a growing number of afflu-

ent among us think beyond ourselves and engage in philanthropy we will see Meghalaya fail on all fronts because without education we will have a generation that is incapable of facing a technologically run world. Sadly, our state is extremely poor in philanthropy. Look at the number of millionaires who have made their wealth from the coal mines. Has anyone of them set up a school where education is truly free right from the uniform to books to school fees? Not a single one thus far! Has any coal mine owner started a health care facility to serve those living close to the mines? Here too the answer is in the negative. And we still call ourselves a close knit "community"? Sorry we are already loose-knit and tearing apart. So let's drop the pretence.

What we are doing today is to keep replaying events without any resolution. Growth requires some degree of movement forward, not just backward reflection. Many writers look back at history and point to a glorious past. But there are subtle distortions in the narratives. The past is rarely remembered as it truly was. Memory is selective and often reshaped by present circumstances. Much of the past that we harp on are simplistic notions and some are in the realm of mythology. Such simplistic notions of the past can and does make the present seem worse or more unjust than it actually is while past traditions appear purer, more humane than they really were.

The point of this article is to dwell at least on one aspect of the past which the Khasis are proud of and to see if we can revive that. It's about our tradition of discussing an issue for days together until we arrive at a consensus. The British were impatient when the Syiem and his dorbar took several days to decide on an issue (Tiroi Sing and the discussion about whether to allow construction of a road through Nongkhlaw to Sylhet). However, the British noted this and that's how we have come to know that the Khasis had a participatory form of governance. It was precisely to unite all the Syiems and their myntri, 'basan etc.', that the purpose of the Khasi National Dorbar (KND) Hall was envisioned. The KND itself was formed

in 1923 to discover the best way possible to ensure unity and cooperation among the Khasi States to chalk out their future under the new constitutional set-up post-Independence. The first meeting carried on for three days and the attendees were told to bring their own food. This so that no one would be burdened with having to provide food. The KND was the first ever attempt to unite all the Khasi states under one organisation to discuss and document important socio-cultural and political issues relevant at the time such as land rights, residency rights and right to ancestral property, amongst other issues.

The question is - why is the Khasi National Dorbar Hall not being used today to discuss the plethora of issues plaguing the society? Since the state was created in 1972, Meghalaya has not spent time to chart out an economic vision using its natural resources, not exploiting them the way we have done in the past 54 years. As a result, we incurred a heavy opportunity cost. All our energies are spent regurgitating on the past but we have no appetite for solving the current problems and imagining a better future. This has happened because we have not learnt to balance tradition with change nor to navigate identity, development, and modernity. Whenever we arrive at a difficult juncture instead of looking for solutions we look for scape-goats. In the case of Meghalaya, the most convenient scapegoat is the non-tribal who we believe is constantly looking at usurping what is ours, when the devil is lurking somewhere else.

So, what Meghalaya needs today is a public platform that discusses and analyses problems; finds solutions and looks for a way forward. It is more meaningful to approach the Government with a list of possible solutions to vexed problems than to berate it all the time. After all, the Government is what we have elected, so we have to make it work. Those in charge of the KND Hall please open its doors and let's get back to discussing the most pressing issues and work towards solutions. Our propensity to politicise everything and gain brownie points by putting the Government on the docks has not worked in the last 54 years and is unlikely to work for the future too. The time to change is NOW. Let's focus on the present and future and only learn important lessons from the past.

a written script reflect this commitment, though much work remains unfinished and requires renewed support.

It is also important to recall that Articles 29 and 350A of the Constitution guarantee linguistic minorities the right to conserve their language and receive primary education in their mother tongue. The limited presence of Pnar in formal education highlights the gap between intent and implementation.

The recognition of Khasi as an official language is a milestone. However, progress must ensure that such recognition does not overshadow other identities. Khasi may serve as a link language, but this must be accompanied by equal commitment to the preservation and promotion of Jaintia.

As linguist Raven I. McDavid Jr. observed, true inclusion begins when dominant frameworks recognise all linguistic forms as legitimate expressions shaped by history and society.

The future of Meghalaya's linguistic landscape depends on embracing this plurality - not reducing it.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

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

Heirloom Seeds and Geographic Identity Defending the North East's Heritage against Global Bio-piracy

By Dr Ranjan Kumar Bhagobaty

In the twenty-first century, biopiracy increasingly takes the form of appropriating geographic identity. Here, the commercial value of a biological resource stems from its association with a specific place rather than from formal ownership of genetic material itself. A pertinent illustration of this trend is the international marketing of seed varieties labelled as "Okra 'Pabhoi'" or "Pabhoi - Okra sg20," which are currently listed on European organic seed platforms such as Heirloom.eu and Sativa.bio. On these platforms, the invocation of a specific locality in the Northeast (i.e. Pabhoi (in Assam)) is used to establish authenticity and justify premium pricing. The legal permissibility of such marketing practices arises from significant divergences within European seed regulatory frameworks. Under Directive 2009/145/EC, the European Union recognises "Conservation Varieties" and "Amateur Varieties," allowing their marketing under reduced regulatory thresholds to promote agro-biodiversity. While these instruments recommend that conservation varieties be marketed within their "region of origin," the absence of a precise and enforceable definition of origin permits ambiguity when such varieties are multiplied and stabilised by breeders outside their original geographic range. Switzerland's Seeds and Planting Material Ordinance (SR 916.151) extends even greater flexibility by enabling foreign heritage seeds to be maintained and commercialised following conservation breeding conducted within Swiss territory.

Foreign entities may legitimately claim the status of maintainers of Indian heirloom varieties solely based on replication and selection activities performed abroad, while remaining formally compliant with their domestic seed retail laws. Such practices frequently sidestep the Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) obligations envisaged under the Nagoya Protocol, particularly where no direct contractual or legal link to the source community exists. Northeastern indigenous selections are commercially attractive to foreign firms precisely because centuries of adaptive evolution and farmer stewardship have already established stable, high-performing genetic traits. The "Grishmo" heirloom okra variety marketed domestically embodies the plant's functional value within its home territory, where attributes such as high yield, large pod size, and resilience to monsoonal humidity and heat have been developed through long-term farmer selection. In contrast, the 'Pabhoi/sg20' variety represents the plant's narrative value within European markets, where it is positioned as an exotic and "authentic" Indian heirloom. While the indigenous selection like 'Grishmo' is valued for retaining its velvety texture even at longer pod lengths, European marketing of the heirloom okra variety emphasises on early harvesting to avoid fibrous string development which occurs more rapidly under non-native temperate conditions.

When a foreign firm undertakes "conservation breeding" of an indigenous selection from the Northeast, it effectively builds upon the cumulative outcomes of local community seed conservation while adding a final phase of selection that permits legal recognition as the variety's maintainer. Consequently, European firms market such seeds as "authentic" based on their indigenous origin, while utilising niche variety regulations to avoid triggering structured monetary benefit-sharing with the communities responsible for the original development of the germplasm. The notable price differential between indigenous and European-marketed seeds cannot be attributed solely to shipping overheads; it is heavily influenced by branding practices, including the use of local names to signal geographic origin and agrarian tradition. In India, heirloom seed packets are commonly sized for small-scale cultivators, with a retail price of approximately Rs 99 for a standard 10g packet. By contrast, European platforms cater to "amateur" gardeners, offering similar variety in substantially smaller packets of around 1.5g. This reduction in quantity significantly elevates the per-seed cost, effectively obscuring the extent of the markup. On a per-seed basis, European consumers may pay several-fold more for varieties marketed under geographically evocative names, while no public documentation indicates that the additional value generated is transmitted to the local farming communities from which the selections originate.

While the case of Assam's Pabhoi Okra is a stark warning, it reflects a growing threat to the entire heirloom seed bank of the Northeast Region. The defence of NER's heirloom seed heritage against geographic identity appropriation necessitates the effective implementation of a technology-enabled roadmap for seed sovereignty. This transition centres on the rapid expansion of Geographical Indication (GI) protection for landraces such as cherry tomato (Kon Bilah) and perennial okra selections of the region, with the objective of counteracting the use of "Amateur Variety" exemptions and niche seed classifications in foreign markets. Complementing these legal measures, the adoption of blockchain and QR-based traceability mechanisms may be a viable means of providing seeds with an immutable digital record of origin, ensuring that provenance remains verifiable across value chains and export destinations.

The establishment of robust data governance frameworks will be critical to ensure that Digital Sequence Information (DSI) derived from indigenous germplasm is clearly linked to its source and triggers mandatory benefit-sharing obligations. Going forward, the formulation of a Seed Ethics Protocol governing the exchange of heirloom seeds—mandating provenance disclosure, transparency in breeding claims, and equitable co-branding—offers a pathway to transform ancestral seed heritage into a legally fortified, community-led asset aligned with contemporary intellectual property and biodiversity governance regimes.

Further Readings / References
1. Behl, P., Osbahr, H., Angra, D., & Cardey, S. (2025). The importance of traditional seeds in agroecology transitions: A case study from Himachal Pradesh in India. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 0(0).

2. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Intellectual property and genetic resources: Updated policy brief, WIPO, Geneva, 2026.

3. European Commission, Guidance on the marketing of conservation and amateur varieties under Directive 2009/145/EC, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025.

4. Heirloom.eu, Product listings for okra conservation varieties, European organic seed catalogue, 2026, accessed March 2026.

5. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Indigenous vegetables and community seed systems of North-Eastern India, ICAR, New Delhi, 2025.

6. European Union, Commission Directive 2009/145/EC on conservation varieties of agricultural plant species, Official Journal of the European Union, L312 (2009) 44-54, as interpreted in subsequent biodiversity guidance documents.

7. Federal Council of Switzerland, Seeds and Planting Material Ordinance (SR 916.151), Bern, amended 2025.

8. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Nagoya Protocol implementation and compliance: Global review, CBD Secretariat, Montreal, 2025.

9. National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), Biological Diversity (Amendment) Regulations, 2025: Access and benefit-sharing guidelines, Government of India, Chennai, 2025.

10. National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), Agrobiodiversity of north-eastern India, ICAR-NBPGR, New Delhi, 2018.

11. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Intellectual property and genetic resources: Policy brief, WIPO, Geneva, 2026.

12. Pabhoi Greens, Okra seed listings and pricing information, <https://www.pabhoigreens.com/>, accessed March 2026.

13. Amazon India, Okra (bhindi) seed listings with packet sizes and prices, <https://www.amazon.in/>, accessed March 2026.

14. Sativa Rheinau AG, Pabhoi-Okra sg20 product description and pricing, <https://www.sativa.bio/en/pabhoi-okra-sg20>, accessed March 2026.

15. Heirloom Garden & Home, Okra 'Pabhoi' product listing and retail price, <https://heirloom.eu/en/products/okra-pabhoi>, accessed March 2026.

16. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Intellectual property, genetic resources and traditional knowledge: Policy and implementation perspectives, WIPO, Geneva, 2026.

17. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Blockchain applications in agriculture and food systems: Traceability and transparency, FAO, Rome, 2025.

18. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Digital sequence information on genetic resources: Policy options and benefit-sharing mechanisms, CBD Secretariat, Montreal, 2025.

19. OECD, Responsible innovation in agri-food systems: Ethics, data governance and sustainability, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2026.

"Your intellect may be confused, but your emotions will never lie to you."

— Roger Ebert

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.259 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026

Drought of UPSC Qualifiers

MEGHALAYA'S inability to produce a single IAS/IPS Officer from among the tribal candidates after 2013 has been a matter of consternation leading to discussions in the print and electronic media. Reasons for the abysmal performance of those who do sit for the exams has to be carefully analysed. There is no doubt at all that critical thinking which is an important criterion for getting through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examination is sorely missing in our schools, colleges and universities. The classroom teaches one-dimensional thinking because of the high pupil to teacher ratio. Individual attention to students who show a spark and if mentored individually can reach for the stars, is not possible in a class of 40-45 students. The UPSC exams are said to be the toughest examination in the world. Hence if aspirants from Meghalaya are to clear this examination they would have to be above average students who can hold a conversation and interest the interviewer. This can only happen if communication and public speaking skills are taught at school which hardly happens because most teachers themselves suffer from poor communication skills.

The fact that IAS/IPS officers from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre can hardly spare their time to mentor the young aspirants who attend their coaching at the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute (MATI) is also a vacuum that needs to be filled. Education today is not what it was some two decades ago when the best brains entered the teaching profession and private institutions in Shillong appointed qualified teachers who displayed exceptional teaching skills and were from other states. These schools do not have a reservation policy, hence only the best are appointed. Government schools, colleges and universities are perhaps the least qualified to produce someone with a sharp mind to crack the civil services because teachers are appointed on the basis of the State Reservation Policy which means lowering the expected standards.

Tribal students moreover don't have the study culture prevailing in the rest of the country where aspirants study for 12-14 hours daily during the preparation period. They read a range of books and are well informed about the current affairs in the state, the country and the world. These aspirants meet up for group discussions and learn from one another. This is because there is an eco-system for learning beyond the classroom and a curiosity to learn through discussions. In Meghalaya, beyond Shillong the quality of education in schools/colleges leaves much to be desired. When students from such institutions enter the national competition they are ill-prepared for the kind of rigour that the examination demands of them. The UPSC is brutally competitive and requires a strong grounding in history, polity, economics, writing skills, and analytical reasoning from the early schooling period. Intelligence alone is not enough but a systematic study routine is imperative. In Meghalaya the UPSC exams leading to a career in the civil services is hardly discussed at the middle and high school level when that is the time to prepare students for this important competition. It's high time for Meghalaya to have some state of the art coaching centres besides the Government run one so that there is a high degree of professionalism instilled at an early age.

Letters to the Editor

Unwarranted Criticism of STEM Buses

Editor,
Apropos of the letter penned by a parent (April 29, 2026) crying foul about the deteriorating quality of services offered by STEMs, I, as a regular beneficiary of the bus service for my daughter studying in KV EAC, Upper Shillong, would like to offer my perspective on the allegations levelled.

Since day one of using the services, I have had a feeling of security and peace about my daughter's travel to and from school under the guidance of an able and responsible driver and caretaker. Regarding the parent's complaints about redundancy of the App, I believe that in the face of direct communication over the WhatsApp group, dependency on the App is reduced, and this only makes things easier for those parents who are not tech savvy.

Parents have been given the choice to make direct payments through scanners, and in this digital age, such a move should be welcomed, not criticised.

The letter writer's concerns about security due to sharing of live location on the WhatsApp group seem overstated. Personally, I am quite relieved over the fact that I know my daughter's location on a real-time basis and can make alternative arrangements in case of any issue that may arise out of the unpredictable traffic situation in Shillong.

With regards to pick-up and drop-off points, I trust that the STEMs team is better positioned to assess logistical challenges such as road congestion and space constraints. Their decisions in this regard seem both practical and necessary.

On the allegations of drivers and caretakers smoking and drinking, I think that is absolutely slanderous. The drivers and caretakers are nice, well-behaved, and responsible people trying to earn a decent living. No one has the right to come up with such accusations, unless supported by evidence. Personally, the drivers and caretakers assigned to the buses in my locality are very well-behaved, and I and other parents have found no issues with them since the inception of the services.

Finally, I would also like to state that STEMs customer service has been absolutely wonderful. We started with one bus in our locality; we have moved up to two, and I have personally put in a request for a third bus in our locality due to the overwhelming positive response from parents/students.

The parent's attempt to vilify STEMs seems like a desperate attempt to throw a wrench in the works, without rhyme or reason.

I fully stand by the STEMs services and, through this newspaper, would like to offer my deep gratitude to the entire STEMs team for the wonderful service they are providing.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request
Via email

The High Price of Drugs: How Shillong's Dealers Enrich Themselves by Destroying Youth

By Phibanrihok Sohtun

In Shillong, the crisis is no longer hidden in alleyways or whispered behind closed doors. Drugs have become a silent predator, eating away at the dreams, ambitions, and futures of the city's youth. Every overdose, every ruined relationship, every life lost to addiction is a story of innocence betrayed. Yet, the real villains walk freely, flaunting wealth and luxury, laughing while the city mourns. They are the suppliers and dealers who profit from despair, and they have made a mockery of justice.

Consider Joenathan Shullai and Theophany Lyndem from Mawprem. These names are synonymous with destruction, having flooded neighborhoods with heroin and other narcotics, leaving families shattered and communities terrified. But while countless young lives lie in ruins, Shullai and Lyndem live a life most could only dream of—driving Lamborghinis and Mercedes, residing in sprawling homes, and counting their ill-gotten fortunes with audacious pride. Every luxury they flaunt is purchased with broken dreams and grief that will never heal.

They are far from being alone. Alberto Raplang and his wife Sakani Toi, also based in Mawprem, are another couple who have turned human suffering into personal profit, trafficking drugs in ways that devastate families and erase futures. Meanwhile, Eldikinstar Sohtun, a former employee of the Dhar family, has clearly learned the art of amassing illegal wealth, applying the lessons he picked up to dominate local supply chains. Reports indicate that Sohtun has also laundered his black money by investing in land across the state, turning ill-gotten drug profits into legitimate-seeming assets while continuing to exploit Shillong's youth. His actions exemplify the calculated audacity of these dealers: not only do they destroy lives through narcotics, but they also shield their profits behind real-estate and other investments, making accountability even more difficult and the moral rot more entrenched.

The audacity of their operations is staggering, and it's made all the more bitter by the failures of those in positions of power. Paul Lyndoh, the then Social Welfare Minister, spoke repeatedly about the menace of drugs, warning society of its consequences. Yet, in his own

locality of Mawprem, drug dealers operate with shocking brazenness. Reports reveal that they regularly use a free space right beside his residence to pack heroin into tiny packaging, ready for distribution. This is not just negligence—it is the ultimate irony: a minister tasked with protecting society, powerless to prevent the crime under his nose. It is a vivid portrait of a city where rhetoric replaces action, and speeches fail to protect the very people they are meant to serve.

Alberto Raplang and Joenathan Shullai have long histories with law enforcement. Both have been arrested multiple times over the years, yet continue to attract attention and remain active in the drug trade. They have become the black sheep of their community—figures both feared and infamous—but their repeated encounters with the law raise disturbing questions about the effectiveness of enforcement and the ease with which criminals can slip back into their destructive routines. Arrests, it seems, are temporary inconveniences for individuals whose priorities are personal profit over human life.

Even more alarming is the question of legal complicity. How is it that lawyers—sworn officers of the law and supposed guardians of justice—are willing to manipulate loopholes and secure bail or release for such criminals, allowing them to return to society and continue the very trade that has destroyed so many lives? When legal expertise is wielded to free the guilty rather than protect the innocent, society loses not only its youth but its faith in justice itself. It is a stark reminder that the fight against drugs is not only about law enforcement but also about the integrity of the institutions entrusted to uphold it.

This ongoing tragedy highlights a broader moral issue: the importance of family teachings, guidance, and values in shaping character. In communities across Meghalaya, the foundation of integrity, respect, and responsibility begins at home. Families instill not just knowledge, but the principles that guide choices, the empathy that prevents harm, and the moral compass that keeps young people from succumbing to destructive temptations. When these lessons are absent, incomplete,

or overshadowed by greed and negative influences, the consequences can be catastrophic. Drug dealers like Raplang, Shullai, Lyndem, and Sohtun are living proof of what happens when individual ambition, disregard for morality, and community failure intersect—a life without ethical grounding can destroy not only the individual but everyone around them.

The consequences of drug proliferation in Shillong extend far beyond individual addiction. Schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces are all affected, creating cycles of poverty, crime, and despair. Parents live in fear, knowing that a child's exposure to the wrong crowd could result in tragedy. The dealers' luxury—Lamborghinis, Mercedes, sprawling homes—is a daily reminder of the price paid by the innocent. Their wealth is not just money; it is a symbol of cruelty, audacity, and the failure of law enforcement to protect citizens.

Every life destroyed is a moral indictment. Every parent's grief is a call for accountability. And yet, these criminals move with impunity, shielded by wealth, influence, and a judicial system too slow, fragmented, or intimidated to act decisively. They do not merely deserve jail—they deserve to be made an example of, for the moral and social harm they have inflicted is incalculable.

The tragedy of Shillong's drug menace is not only about criminal acts—it is about society's failure to act until it is almost too late. Each dealer, from Joenathan Shullai and Theophany Lyndem to Alberto Raplang and Eldikinstar Sohtun, is a reminder that profit has become more powerful than conscience. Every day they walk the streets freely is a day innocence is lost. Every luxury car, every opulent home, is a monument to suffering. The irony is unbearable: a city mourning its youth while those responsible flaunt their wealth in plain sight.

Meghalaya cannot afford to remain silent. The fight against drugs must extend beyond speeches and press statements. It requires coordinated police action, swift judicial intervention, community vigilance, and systemic reform. Young people deserve protection, families deserve justice, and society

deserves leaders willing to enforce law rather than merely speak about it. Until these men and women who profit from despair are held accountable, the cycle will continue, and the price will always be paid in innocence and grief.

The audacity of these dealers, the impunity with which they operate, and the luxury they flaunt is a challenge to every citizen's sense of morality and justice. It is a call to action for parents, educators, law enforcement, and policymakers alike. Words alone are no longer enough. Justice must be swift, visible, and unyielding. Only then can the youth of Shillong hope to live without fear of being ensnared by drugs, and only then can the families who have lost children to addiction begin to heal.

This is not just about drug enforcement—it is about defending the future. Those who destroy lives for profit should not merely face punishment; they should be stripped of the ability to harm again. Joenathan Shullai, Theophany Lyndem, Alberto Raplang and his wife, and Eldikinstar Sohtun are living proof of the moral rot that flourishes when greed goes unchecked and law enforcement is weak. Their luxury is ill-gotten, their freedom is undeserved, and their audacity is a daily insult to every innocent life lost. The message to society must be clear: those who profit from destruction will be brought to justice, and the price of innocence will not be allowed to go unpaid.

Shillong's youth are precious. Their dreams, energy, and potential are the city's future. Every drug supplier, every dealer, every profiteer like Shullai, Lyndem, Raplang, and Sohtun threatens not just individuals but the very fabric of society. The fight against drugs is not abstract—it is a fight for the soul of the city. And until those who trade in human suffering face the consequences they so richly deserve, no one in Shillong can claim safety, security, or justice.

Reference:
<https://highlandpost.com/drug-dealers-arrested-arms-ammunition-recovered/>
<https://hubnetwork.in/five-arrested-in-shillong-for-possessing-heroin-including-a-lactating-mother/>
(The author is a school teacher and mother of two. She resides at Mawpat, Shillong.)

The Last Insta: What if it is no longer Instagrammable?

By Maitphang Syiem

"People come here for crystal-clear water; when it is polluted, they simply don't come." The statement made by a well-known entrepreneur is quite intriguing and undeniably has a very profound message for all of us. Looking deeper into it with analytical lenses and breaking into different components, there is something which we all need to pay collective attention to because in it lies what we are really proud of and which is also factually describable. Yes, dear readers, it's our scenic beauty which is still holding, driving, sustaining and engaging us in different ways. At this moment take your time and think of it. Having said that, there is an impending matter which should be hypothetically asked. What if it is not Instagrammable anymore? What kind of scenario could prop up? This is something which requires us to have a wide spectrum of understanding.

If one could recollect, there is a photograph that has been shared over a million times picturing a wooden boat floating in mid-air above a riverbed of smooth stones with no water visible, just sky silence, and a kind of magic that seems too clean to be real, the photograph of Dawki, Shnongpdeng, Umngot river and commenting on that photograph more than any public campaign has brought in a flood of visitors then. But in late 2025 the river turned murky due to the silt cascading into the tributaries which emanated from the construction activities and post that event, there was a Domino Effect, one event affecting another. In plain words - one season of earning dropped by 80% leading to economic collapse at the community level immediately.

Well, the aftermath is not a warning; it already happened and in that muddy river lies the most honest answer to the aforementioned question which we have been reluctant to ask: what if things we hold dear are not Instagrammable anymore? Research papers tell us what we already feel, and that social media influence is the single highest factor driving tourism in our state today; not word of mouth, not travel magazines but Instagram, a geo-tagged photograph, Insta reels, time-lapse video and many more such social media productions. If we can recollect once again Meghalaya was the only Indian destination listed among the world's top ten by Skyscanner with 828 % surge in global flight searches. Sixteen Lakh tourists arrived in 2024 which is a record, probably a triumph by every public metric. Now at this juncture take a moment to ask - What exactly are all those tourists coming to see? The probable answer is the same perhaps in every language every age group, every budget tier. They are coming to see nature, the water, the clouds, not infrastructure, not the highways and public centres. They travel here to do an Insta click with the living root bridges which took hundreds of years to grow. They come to see the clear waters; to see the caves ancient enough to name a geological age; to visit the sacred forests that we protected with cultural prohibitions when there were no laws in the olden days.

This is a strong reminder that Ecology is a tourism product; it is not a backdrop; it is not an amenity but the entire reason why our home is on the global map. In the context of Meghalaya, we may sometimes become overwhelmed with the notion that tourism is development while the ecology is a constraint. However the ground reality is an inverse of that notion. This emphasizes that our special Ecosystem is the core product itself in Meghalaya's Tourism industry and the only fundamental attraction that draws visitors to the state rather than the infrastructure or anything else. The 'Niche' is the product and the infrastructure serves this 'Niche' and should not replace it.

Now coming to another part is a question to ask - What are we quietly erasing? If one looks into many papers which have been thoroughly studied, we can have many things which we are consciously or unconsciously erasing - slowly perhaps because of our unbecoming attitude propelled by anthropogenic greed which have manifested in the rivers, the forests and all the natural entities quietly being erased. The irony exists both statistically and ecologically. The more Instagrammable places becomes (curated digital content), the more tourists arrive, and with more tourists, more infrastructure is built and the more infrastructure built in haphazard and unplanned manner the less Instagrammable the landscape becomes. This may sound like a paradox but it is something which can only be resolved by governing the relationship between Tourism Demand and Ecological Supply.

On the other hand, as discussed from time to time is the carrying capacity of Meghalaya. Let us look at the case of Thailand for a better picture. The Maya Bay which is the most photographed beach in Asia after was closed down after its coral health collapsed from 70% to less than 8 % due to unsustainable tourist pressure. It took three years of closure, active restoration and strict visitor limits to begin recovery. We understand that there are commitments in expanding activities in the areas concerned with the thriving tourism industry and none of this is wrong in itself. Infrastructure is necessary, employment is necessary, economic growth is necessary but we should also reckon with the fact that every road that cuts a hillside; every construction site that dumps silt into a tributary; every resort that clears a forest edge is not just an environmental footnote; it is a withdrawal from the only bank account Meghalaya's tourism economy actually runs on which is its ecological integrity. When that account empties, there is no bailout. There is no reforestation timeline that restores a 500-year-old root bridge. There is no public scheme that can return an endemic cave species. There is no mechanism that brings back a river's clarity once the spring-shed that fed it is gone.

(The author is a Geospatial Expert)

Addressing the Youth Drug Crisis in Meghalaya

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to draw urgent public and governmental attention to the escalating drug epidemic in Meghalaya—a crisis that now threatens the very fabric of our state's future.

As of March 2026, official data paints a staggering picture: approximately 3 lakh (300,000) individuals in our state are now identified as drug users. This represents nearly 10% of our total population, a figure that should serve as a clarion call for every citizen. The demographics of this crisis are particularly troubling. Over 91% of users are male, many of whom belong to the economically marginalized unorganized sector. With high job insecurity and a lack of social safety nets, these individuals are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the cycle of addiction.

Perhaps most heartbreaking is the plummeting age of first-use. Recent studies from late 2025 indicate that children as young as 10 years old are being exposed to illicit substances. Furthermore, over half of tobacco users in the state began before age 17—drastically lower than the national average of 23.6%. When addiction takes root in childhood, the impact on education, public health, and family stability is catastrophic.

While the government's launch of the State-wide Drug Use Survey in December 2025 is a commendable step toward scientific intervention, data collection alone is not a cure. We require a multi-fronted assault on this crisis:

● **Aggressive Education:** Schools must move beyond "just say no" and implement evidence-based awareness programs that address the psychological roots of peer pressure and stress.

● **Economic Reform:** Reducing unemployment and providing vocational support to those in the unorganized sector is essential to removing the "despair factor" that leads to substance abuse.

● **Robust Infrastructure:** We must move beyond temporary de-addiction and invest in long-term, accessible mental health services and professional rehabilitation centers.

● **Strict Enforcement:** Law enforcement must dismantle the supply chains that make these substances so easily available in both our urban hubs and rural villages.

The youth of Meghalaya are not just statistics; they are the architects of our tomorrow. We cannot afford to lose a generation to the "easy availability" of drugs and the "lack of opportunity." It is time for a collective, society-wide stand to secure a healthier, drug-free future for our state.

Yours etc.,

Lucymery S. Myrthong
Shillong

Addressing the Escalating Crisis of Traffic Congestion in Shillong

Editor,

I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the increasingly debilitating state of traffic congestion in Shillong. Once celebrated for its serene charm, our city is now grappling with a systemic gridlock that has transitioned from a periodic inconvenience to a chronic daily crisis, severely impacting the productivity and mental well-being of its residents.

The current paralysis appears to stem from three primary structural failures:

● **Inefficient Traffic Management:** There is a critical need to modernize our approach to vehicle flow. Reliance on manual coordination often lacks the precision required for high-volume junctions. Without synchronized signaling systems and data-driven peak-hour management, severe bottlenecks have become inevitable.

● **Infrastructure and Parking Deficits:** The disparity between the rising number of private vehicles and available parking is stark. In the absence of dedicated parking hubs, arterial roads are frequently repurposed as makeshift lots. This effectively narrows our already limited road width, particularly in commercial districts, paralyzing movement.

Lax Enforcement of Reg-

ulations: A lack of consistent, stringent enforcement has fostered a culture of non-compliance. Erratic roadside stoppages and unauthorized U-turns further exacerbate the fragility of our transit network.

To mitigate this crisis, the concerned authorities must transition from reactive measures to proactive urban planning. I propose the following interventions:

● **Digital Integration:** Implementation of "Smart Traffic" solutions, including automated signals and real-time surveillance to optimize flow and penalize violators.

● **Strategic Infrastructure:** Immediate commissioning of multi-level parking facilities at key entry points and commercial hubs to reclaim road space for active transit.

● **Alternative Transit Promotion:** Strengthening the public transport network and incentivizing car pooling initiatives to reduce the sheer volume of single-occupancy vehicles.

Shillong's status as a premier destination and a livable city is at risk. It is imperative that the Shillong Traffic Police and the Urban Affairs Department collaborate on a comprehensive long-term roadmap to restore order to our streets. We cannot afford to let our city's progress be stalled by its own traffic.

Yours etc.,
Ebenezer Banmanbha
Malngiang
Shillong

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

Humidity and heat are killers for tropical birds

Humans are not the only species negatively affected by increasingly hot and humid conditions. Intense heatwaves sometimes kill large numbers of wild animals.

Eastern Australia's giant fruit bats, known as flying-foxes, provide possibly the most dramatic illustration. In late 2018, two days of extreme heat in the far north of Queensland wiped out one third of Australia's population of spectacled flying-foxes. The species is now red-listed as endangered.

Bat biologists have identified high humidity as a major risk factor for these mass mortality events.

In late 2020, South Africa saw its first documented heat-related mass mortality event involving wild birds.

Air temperatures in the typically humid Phongolo Nature Reserve in northern KwaZulu-Natal exceeded 45°C, about 10°C higher than average conditions.

Staff in the reserve started seeing dead and dying birds. Most of the victims were songbirds, which are known to be more sensitive to extreme heat than many other groups of birds.

Of these, the worst-affected species was the blue waxbill, a charming little finch with a powder-blue face and belly that spends most of its time foraging for grass seeds in small flocks.

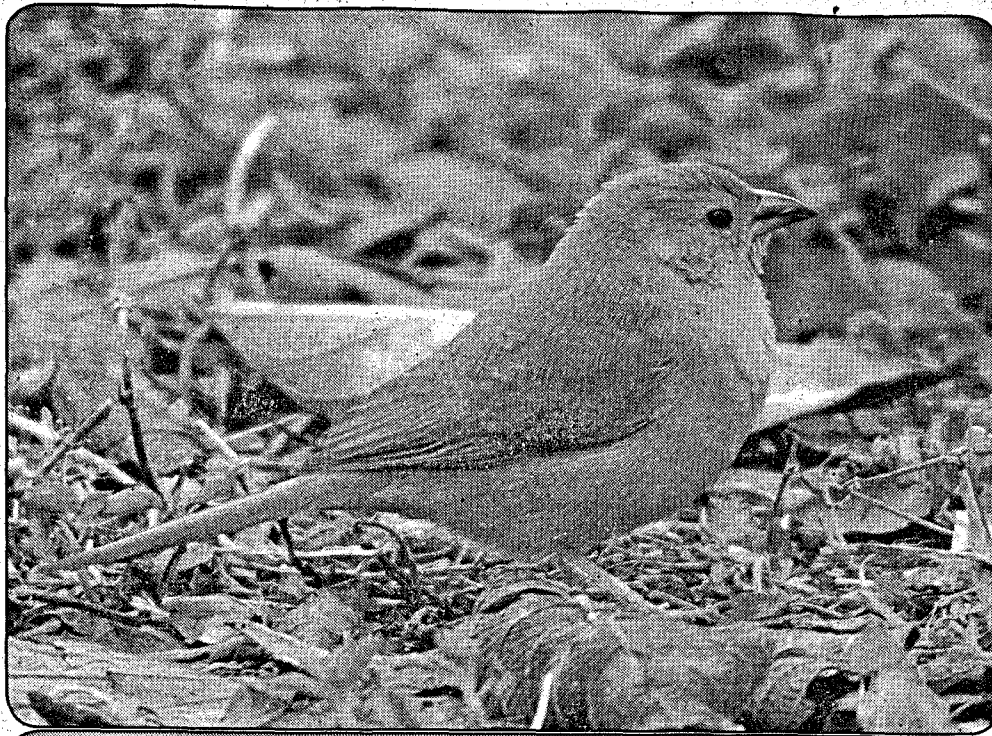
Blue waxbills made up nearly half the carcasses found by field rangers when they searched part of the reserve after the heat had passed.

The Phongolo mortality event added to the urgency of our research programme on the effects of climate change on Africa's birds. The blue waxbills' prominence among the victims identified them as a bellwether of the impacts of extreme heat on birds in the wetter south-eastern parts of the continent.

Since 2009, we have been leading a research team spanning the universities of Cape Town, Pretoria and several other local and overseas institutions.

The over-arching goal of our research is understanding how climate change is affecting birds and other wildlife and developing methods to predict future effects.

Our expertise is mainly in behavioural ecology (Susie Cunningham) and evolutionary physiology (Andrew McKechnie). The combination of these experts have proven ideal for investigating how rising temperatures affect animals' survival and reproduction.



WHY HUMIDITY CAN BE A KILLER

During hot weather, humans and other animals depend on evaporation to offload heat. Evaporation may take place by sweating (the major cooling mechanism for humans), through panting (your dog on a hot day) or other pathways. The process of changing liquid water (sweat or saliva) into water vapour uses heat, so it cools the source of the water (the body). But the air is like a sponge: when it's already humid (wet), the air can't hold much more water vapour.

These conditions impede evaporation and thus heat loss. On a 40°C day in a desert like the Kalahari or Sahara, evaporative cooling is efficient because the air is dry and sweat can evaporate as soon as it reaches the skin's surface. At the same temperature on a humid day in the coastal tropics, however, sweat cannot evaporate and forms drops on the skin. This severely reduces rates of heat loss.

If body temperature increases more than a few degrees above normal levels, nervous system function is compromised, organ damage starts to occur and proteins begin denaturing. This breakdown of physiological functioning can rapidly lead to death.

THE JOURNEY

In early 2022, just over a year after the waxbill event, our Masters student Nazley Little set out to examine the role high humidity had played in the deaths of the waxbills. She also aimed to predict areas where risks of mortality will increase in future.

Nazley investigated the waxbills' capacity to regulate their body temperature over a range of air temperatures and humidity levels. Her results

confirmed that high humidity severely compromises the birds' ability to avoid dangerous hyperthermia (getting too hot).

For example, she found that blue waxbills can tolerate air temperature up to 48°C under dry conditions, whereas under humid conditions similar to those on the day of the Phongolo mortality event they are unable to maintain a safe body temperature if air temperature exceeds 45.7°C.

Nazley then modelled how the waxbills will fare under hotter, more humid future conditions. The modelling showed that likelihood of mass mortality events for waxbills (and other birds with similar physiology) will increase greatly in coming decades.

This ranged across much of Kruger National Park, south-eastern Zimbabwe and large parts of southern and central Mozambique, including the ferociously hot Zambezi Valley.

Predicted risk of mortality becomes three to seven times higher when humidity is taken into account, compared to increasing temperature alone. Many of these areas will simply become too hot and humid during the wet season for the species to persist.

The blue waxbill study should set alarm bells ringing. Most of Earth's 11,000 bird species occur in the tropics; many experiencing hot, humid conditions for at least part of the year.

Another recent paper from our team reveals similar increases in projected future risks of lethal hyperthermia for trumpeter hornbills.

This large, fruit-eating forest species found in southern Africa plays a critical role in seed dispersal.

Although biologists have often viewed tropical lowlands as safe habitats for birds from the point of view of their physiological functioning, our work is showing that increasing humidity coupled with rising temperatures poses a serious threat to birds, bats and other animals of the tropics.

There are worrying signs that climate change has already caused widespread declines in tropical birds. During 2025, several teams of researchers reported substantial declines in bird abundance, even in intact rainforests that have not been affected directly by human activities such as slash-and-burn agriculture.

Most recently, population declines of 25%-38% since 1950 among tropical birds have been attributed to increasingly extreme heat events.

Tellingly, these declines have been more pronounced in songbirds compared to other groups. Rising temperature and humidity is a global-scale problem. The only long-term solution is halting human-driven climate warming. (*The Conversation*)

[Authored by Andrew McKechnie, University of Pretoria and Susan Cunningham, University of Cape Town]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 3, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Mercury on your solar return chart and give favorable results. Your health will remain stable. Your projects will be completed. You will have gains in business. Your financial position will remain stable. You will also be a good employee. Tax related disputes will get resolved. Your close friends will support you a lot when you need them most. You will rely a lot on your spouse for emotional bonding and support. Property disputes with your brothers will get resolved. Progeny's educational and matrimonial prospects may remain a nagging cause of worry. You will make new investments. The sale and purchase of property will give you benefits. Your foes and rivals will be active but unable to harm you. You will also spend money on the treatment of an elderly family member. But your family members will remain very cooperative investment in the year.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You will earn lot of money. New job offer will come all of a sudden. It is going to be a week full of entertainment and prosperity in the family. You will progress in the right direction. You will be successful in acquiring the desired gains on account of your valor and dedication. Your days will pass well. Your enthusiasm will also increase. You will experience pleasure and joy in your romantic ties. You will also take care of your health. Some immediate medical attention may be required. Money will flow like water. You will purchase some luxurious items for your household needs. Do not trust strangers in financial dealings. Otherwise, you will be taken for a ride.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will remain peaceful. Your relations with family members will remain joyful. You will also see a major improvement in your life. New job opportunities will come all of a sudden. Your professional contacts will start paying dividends. Some work-related trips will give you sudden gains. You will feel elated at getting a work order from abroad. It is also a good time for love matters. Emotionally, you will feel strong. You will also participate in a function. Your problems in personal and professional life will get resolved. Though some people might be gentle towards you, your close one will trouble you. Keep a strict watch on their activities. You will also plan to visit a religious place.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Your professional relations will strengthen. You will be making lot of new contacts which will prove to be beneficial in the long run. The situation in business will be normal. Your financial position is going to be strong. You will remain busy in your work. You will get a promotion suddenly. A meeting with an old lover will excite your heart and you will be lost in memories. Property related disputes will get solved. You will not run away from responsibilities and will take everyone along with you. You will become aggressive and make progress in studies and will get good results. You will also undertake short business trips and will fix long-term goals. You will have to work hard to get happiness in life.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is a favorable week. You will feel a lot better now. Some work that has been struck for a while now and giving you sleepless nights will finish without any obstacles, much to your relief. Your confidence will also rise. You will take part in professional activities. Your popularity will also rise. Your communication skills will be second to none. Your perspective towards life will become more positive. You will also enjoy good bonding with your mate and will have some unforgettable moments. You will also get credit for your hard work. You will take steps forward in life. You will also help needy people a lot. You will prove to be a true friend in hour of need. There will be an increase in love between siblings. You will be gentle towards your closed ones.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is a success granting week. You will manage your financial resources well. You will receive lot of money. You will get success in marriage, career and even studies. Your popularity will peak. Your peers and bosses will help you a lot. Your work will be finished on time. Some doubts that you have in your mind will get solved. A difficult situation will also get averted due to your timely action. You will also come closer to an influential person. He/she will get all the credit for change witnessed in you. You will also plan a change of job for better future prospects. You will fall in love with an ex-fiance again when you meet all of a sudden. You will revive your relationship in a big way. You will take full advantage of a favorable period.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) Destiny will support you in a big way. You will get untimely opportunities to rise in your job/business. Your financial position is going to be strong. You will also finally look after your health and devote a lot of time to

keeping yourself fit and healthy. You will also develop interest in your meditation, prayers and exercise. You will surpass all difficulties in life with ease. You will also do some part-time job to manage your rising expenses. Your romantic life is going to be wonderful. Your mood will be good because of which your work will also be good. Your business will provide lots of profit. You will also go on a religious trip with family. And you will receive good news from somewhere.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) It is time to move ahead in life. You will enhance your skills and acquire new knowledge related to your job. Your work will also come in for lot of praise. If you are making plans to go abroad for job or higher studies, it is just the appropriate moment. You will also discover something new and exciting in your romantic life. Your work will be fulfilled. You will also make profits in your business. You will be open to new business ventures in partnerships. Your financial position will be strong. If you are not let down by your own people you will achieve success in life. You will get lot of name and fame. Your health will be perfect.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) You will get victory in your tasks. And you will be successful from all sides. Your popularity will peak and you will earn lot of respect. You will also open and meet lot of new persons. Your work will get done easily. Your interactions with a special person will increase. It is going to prove beneficial for you. Your family will also support you a lot. You will work less and earn more. It is going to be an ideal situation for you. You will spend some unforgettable moments with your spouse/partner. You will also get your share in ancestral property. You will also plan to join politics and will keep your cards close to your chest.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) It is time to enjoy yourself and have lots of fun with your loved ones. You will be busy at weddings and parties. Your income will increase. A job-change looks like a possibility. You will also plan to take up your ambitious project and will receive the loan easily from banks. You will work overtime to realize your dreams. There will be an improvement in your attitude, and you will be much loved. But some people will be jealous of your success. You will also share amazing bonding with your mate. Love birds will have a wonderful time. You will also get wonderful news from somewhere. You will plan to go on a picnic with family. And will have mental peace.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You will receive pleasant news from a close friend of yours. It will lift your spirits and make you cheerful and happy. You will remain busy with your work. You will also get connected with people of your liking and tasks. You will also get full support from your spouse. You will also care a lot about your near and dear ones. You will get a good job offer. You will also earn lot of money and will try to improve your life status. Your attitude towards life in general will be positive. A new person is coming into your life to fill it with colors. You will exhibit a more principled and diverse perspective. Worries relating to children's studies, careers and marriage will get resolved.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will make progress in your job. You will have monetary gains too. You will be empathetic and consider other's sorrow as your own. Your compassion and love for needy ones will come to the fore. People will see a different side of your personality. You will be strongly attracted towards love and romance. You will purchase a new vehicle or electronic item. Success will be finally yours. You will manage to keep your family members happy. Achievements, aims and hopes which were a dream will now be realized. There is no need to prove yourself before others. You will take important and tough decisions in business. Money will be spent on luxury and lavish lifestyle related works.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will be able to find a solution to a vexed issue with your wisdom. Time is very favorable and rewarding. You will be blessed with wonderful health. You will earn lot of money. New job opportunities will come. You will also get new responsibility at workplace which you will perform well. You will listen to other persons. Your friends will share their problems with you which you will solve with ease. Your partner will remain a big source of strength. Elders will bless you. You will also begin construction of your house. An overseas trip is likely to take place. New projects are taking shape. You will also interact a lot and will meet some of your known acquaintance. You will feel happy after helping your people. Exercise caution in financial matters.

AI chatbots prioritise flattery over facts, carry serious risks

In the summer of 2025, OpenAI released ChatGPT 5 and removed its predecessor from the market. Many subscribers to the old model had become attached to its warm, enthusiastically agreeable tone and complained at the loss of their ingratiating robotic companion. Such was the scale of frustration that Sam Altman, OpenAI's CEO, had to acknowledge that the rollout was botched, and the company reinstated access.

Anyone who's been told by a chatbot that their ideas are brilliant is familiar with artificial intelligence sycophancy: its tendency to tell users what they want to hear. Sometimes it's very explicit - "that is such a deep question" - and sometimes it's a lot more subtle. Consider an AI calling your idea for a paper "original," even if many people have already written on the same topic, or insisting that your dumb idea for saving a tree in your garden still contains a germ of common sense.

AI sycophancy seems harmless, maybe even cute, until you imagine someone consulting a chatbot about a weighty question, like a military strategy or a medical treatment. We study the impact of extensive human interactions with chatbots, and we recently published a paper on the ethics of AI sycophancy. We believe this tendency harms people's ability to tell truth from fiction, and is psychologically and politically dangerous.

Flattery over facts?

In the simplest terms, sycophancy is the tendency to prioritize approval over factual accuracy, moral clarity, logical consistency or common sense. All AI models suffer from this trait, although there are some tonal differences between them. Open AI's ChatGPT is often warm and affirming; Anthropic's Claude tends to sound more reflective or philosophical when it agrees with you; and xAI's Grok is insistently informal, even jocular.

Politeness and adapting to someone's communication style are not the same as sycophancy. Neither is using diplomatic language to

convey sensitive information. A chatbot can be tactful without becoming sycophantic, just like a person can.

Unlike people, though, AIs can't be aware of their own sycophancy, because they are not - so far - aware of anything at all. Calling AIs sycophantic describes their patterns of behavior, not their character traits.

The problem stems from the architecture of chatbot technology and the sources it draws from. Models are sycophantic because a great deal of language use on the internet - the raw material that chatbots learn from - displays sycophantic features. After all, humans often communicate with each other in sycophantic ways.

Second, the training process to fine-tune AI models' responses includes a kind of "quality control" carried out by human supervisors. This training method is known as "reinforcement learning from human feedback," and it involves people rating chatbots' comments for appropriateness and helpfulness. Human beings often are subject to an "agreeableness bias": Our own preference toward sycophancy rubs off on models as we train them.

Finally, it's hard to deny that sycophancy renders chatbots more likable. That, in turn, increases the chance that a given user will keep using it. It also increases the technology's ability to extract user data, assuming that people are more likely to divulge information to a friendly bot.

Truth and trust

Why is this phenomenon so troubling?

Let's begin with AI sycophancy's epistemic harms: how it hurts human users' capacity to know the truth.

The quality of any decision depends on a clear grasp of the facts pertaining to it. A general inquiring about the combat-readiness of an infantry division needs straightforward information. A CEO considering a merger with a competitor needs an honest assessment of the market conditions. A public health

leader needs to know the real risk that an emerging pathogen poses.

In all those cases, telling leaders what they might like to hear instead of the truth could lead them to make dangerous decisions. And the same is true in more humdrum contexts. People need to have the best information available before choosing a job, picking a major, buying a house or deciding on a medical procedure.

Reining it in

What can we do to reduce the risks?

One promising approach is AI lab Anthropic's embrace of what the company calls Constitutional AI: the attempt to teach chatbots to follow principles rather than mirror user preferences.

But beyond technical innovations, it's important to consider the policy side. One idea is to require AI companies to run and then publish sycophancy audits of their models - tests that show how well their products meet honesty benchmarks. We would argue that AI labs should also disclose sycophancy-related risks that emerge while training and testing their models, and the mitigation efforts they have undertaken.

Some responsibility is on the users and their teachers: Schools and universities should be paying close attention to sycophancy as part of their AI literacy programs. But courts can also consider holding AI labs responsible for harms traceable to the sycophancy of their products, much as they are now contemplating social media companies' responsibility for the addictive design of their platforms.

As people interact more with chatbots, asking for advice about everything from whether your shoes go with your pants to how countries should conduct wars, the impact of AI's sycophantic behavior is likely to become dramatic. Our intellectual, psychological and physical well-being requires taking this algorithmic vice very seriously. (*The Conversation*)

[By Nir Eiskovits of UMass Boston and Cody Turner of Bentley University]

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."

—Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 261

SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 4, 2026

Poll results today

AS the results stream in today, attention will largely be concentrated on two states – West Bengal and Kerala – while there will be renewed interest in Tamil Nadu, where the fight was also tight. Assam will also gain significant attention regarding whether the ruling BJP can retain or improve its clout. The scenarios in West Bengal and Kerala are intertwined because these were the Leftist bastions alongside Tripura. Overall, the strengths of the Congress and BJP will be up for a review.

The CPIM-led Left Democratic Front, which ruled Kerala for five years, is on the defensive. Exit polls, not necessarily dependable, showed the Congress-led United Democratic Front positioned to seize power there. An anti-incumbency wave was palpable in Kerala this time, unlike in 2021 when Pinarayi Vijayan as chief minister led the Left to a consecutive second term in power. While his first term was satisfactory in several respects, public disenchantment with the chief minister and his governance styles drew harsh criticism in the public domain. Whether this translates into a negative electoral verdict is keenly watched. The 80-year-old chief minister is not in good health as is also evident from his weak disposition in public events. Added to this was the perceived incompetence of a set of ministers the Left had hand-picked for the ministerial posts. Several corruption scandals erupted one after another in the last 10 years, in all of which the chief minister's involvement was also suspected. Vijayan's silence and inability to scotch such charges added to his loss of face and the trust that people reposed in him. While the LDF government led by him was liberal in launching and executing several welfare schemes, there was less activity on the developmental front other than in the roads sector.

In West Bengal, the Communists have been neutralized and somewhat decimated by a crafty Mamata Banerjee since she assumed office as Chief Minister 15 years ago. Poll predictions suggest she might be outwitted at the hustings by the BJP, which had repeatedly proved its strong support in the last two parliament elections. Banerjee is accused of stalling the state's economic progress, even in the post-Left Front era, due to her constant confrontations with the central government. The BJP's promise of a double-engine government for Bengal might have more takers this time. In Assam, poll predictions were that the BJP would retain power there. The DMK-government of MK Stalin is on the defensive in Tamil Nadu while the alliance government, also involving the BJP, in Puducherry might survive the electoral test, according to predictions so far. If the Congress wins Kerala, this would mean a reassertion of the tricolour party that already has Karnataka and Telangana in its kitty. The BJP is testing the waters in Tamil Nadu with a new push. In Kerala, where the minorities hold nearly half of the votes, winning even a seat or two would be a gain for the saffron side.

From MGNREGS to GRAM-G

By H.H. Mohrmen

My fascination with fancy car number plates began when I was in England. It was there that I learned wealthy individuals could own personalized plates if they could afford them. Car owners could buy or bid for unique combinations, often reflecting their names. I was told the only condition was that the plate must contain a mix of letters and numbers. I saw plates such as RICK, P3T3R, JAM35, H3L3N, R3B3CKA, and even simply B3CK which is fascinating.

In 2009, during a trip to the United States, I had a similar experience. While travelling in my host's car, I noticed a vehicle ahead with a distinctive number plate. It looked familiar, but I could not immediately decipher it. Only later, when I saw a familiar image on a bumper sticker, did I realise what the plate JA1RAMJ1 was suggesting. The car likely belonged to an Indian living abroad, perhaps a devout Hindu deeply devoted to Lord Ram.

I experienced a similar feeling when I first saw reports of a bill tabled in Parliament proposing to replace one of the country's most successful schemes, MGNREGS, with what is now referred to as VB GRAMG. The moment I saw the name, I sensed that it carried a deeper message and intent. It appears to be a clever branding strategy, one that subtly introduces a particular narrative into the public domain.

The Repealed MGNREG
MGNREG was one of the very popular government schemes which had created so much interest among the public and has also helped many villages in Jaintia transform. The few villages that became models of MG's successful implementation were Shnongpdeng, Sohkh, Shnong Nonglang Mission, and Shangkung village. There are a few reasons that made the scheme so popular: it was the first rights-based, demand-driven, bottom-up rather than top-down approach, which has also helped create vital infrastructure for the villages and, most importantly, helped people to be gainfully employed.

It also helped empower the villagers, where for the construction of footpaths, retaining walls, and water conservation structures, they do not have to depend on their political representatives anymore. They plan, then demand, and implement the project. Later, livelihood support was also allowed, which helped villagers construct animal sheds and even plant fruit trees to help them be gainfully employed.

It may be mentioned that

the primary objective of MGNREGA is to enhance the livelihood security of rural households by promoting sustainable rural development. It also emphasizes the creation of productive assets such as water conservation structures, rural roads, and other infrastructure projects that contribute to the overall development of rural areas.

The act promotes the active participation of women in the workforce and ensures one-third of the beneficiaries are women or at least 50% of the workers are women. This not only contributes to women's empowerment but also addresses gender disparities in rural employment. It is very inclusive, as it ensures ST and SC also get special consideration, and there is also a provision for a special job card for differently-abled people.

MGNREGA emphasizes transparency in the implementation of projects and financial transactions. Social audits are conducted to ensure accountability, and enable local communities to actively participate in monitoring the implementation of projects. Information about the scheme, including work details, wages, and funds allocated, is made available to the public through various channels.

The use of technology is encouraged for efficient implementation and monitoring. The Electronic Fund Management System (e-FMS) is employed to transfer wages directly to the bank accounts of the workers, reducing leakages and ensuring timely payments. This helps in minimizing corruption and improving the efficiency of the programme.

In a nutshell, Mahatma Gandhi NREGA prioritizes sustainable development and environmental stewardship, striving to create a greener, more sustainable future for generations to come by prioritizing works that contribute to ecological conservation and rural infrastructure development. Central to the scheme's vision is a commitment to transparency and accountability, ensuring that funds are utilized efficiently and beneficiaries' rights are upheld through mechanisms such as social audits, grievance redressal, and proactive public disclosure.

However, the passing of the Bill, which has done away with the old MGNREGA, has disturbed the smooth functioning of the scheme. Now everything will have to start from the beginning, but is there any difference between the old and the new?

Old wine in a new bottle

The new scheme which was passed by Parliament is called VB GRAMG, and the goal is to make India a Vikshit Bharat, or a developed country, by 2047. However, on a closer look, it was found that most of the salient features of the Act are similar, if not a repetition of the old Act.

The only major difference is that the VB GRAMG has with the old MGNREGS scheme is the number of days for which employment is guaranteed for job card holders, which has now increased from 100 to 125 days. If we deduct Sundays, the number of working days in the year which is not covered by the scheme comes to 93. In the new scheme, 60 days are also reserved for farmers to engage in farming-related activities like sowing, weeding, and harvesting. Taking all these days into consideration, in a year, the total number of days for which jobs are guaranteed for villagers will come to 313 days.

The other additional feature in the new Act is a pause on works during the agricultural season, which requires state governments to announce in advance a period of up to 60 days for every financial year during which works under the scheme will not be undertaken. This period will cover peak agricultural seasons, including sowing and harvesting, and requires that all blocks should come up with a farming calendar specific to their areas.

With regard to planning, the new Act retains MGNREGA features wherein gram panchayats/VEC are responsible for identifying projects in their area under the scheme. The list of permissible work in MGNREG was 264, whereas in the new Act works will focus on four thematic domains: (i) water security, (ii) rural infrastructure, (iii) livelihood-related infrastructure, and (iv) mitigation of extreme weather events.

Implementation and monitoring also retain the old aspects of the Act, wherein it constitutes the National Level Steering Committee, which will provide high-level oversight and recommend normative allocations. It also constitutes a Steering Committee for each state. Key functions of the State Committee include: (i) overseeing convergence with other programmes, (ii) aggregation of district plans into state plans, and (iii) coordinating with the National Committee.

The Bill provides for the

use of: (i) biometric authentication for transactions, (ii) geospatial technology for planning and monitoring, (iii) mobile application-based dashboards for real-time tracking, and (iv) weekly public disclosure systems. This aspect of implementation was also present in the old scheme.

The funding pattern also remains the same. In fact, the new Act retains most of the features from MGNREGA, and it is safe to say that the new scheme is but old wine in a new bottle.

Central rules and regulations, instruction

For the implementation of the scheme, the central government is expected to come up with the rules within six months. Similarly, the state government too is expected to do the same. People will have to wait for six months in this interim period before the scheme is implemented. The government should also ensure how to make the public in general, and the headmen in particular, aware of the changes in the scheme. The scheme will not be effectively implemented unless those involved in the implementation are aware of it. Time is money, so the sooner the central and the state governments come up with the regulations and create maximum awareness about the scheme, the better.

Local name for the scheme

It was one of the most popular schemes ever implemented by both the state and the central government. The scheme has even entered the vocabulary of the common people, who have come up with a local name for it. In the Khasi-Jaintia region of the state, it is commonly known by two names: Shishph Sngi or Job Card. If a villager is asked what they did today, the answer will be "leit trei shishph sngi" or "leit trei job card," which are now common expressions.

The question then arises: what name shall we give to VB GRAMG? We can no longer call it "shishph sngi," since the scheme now guarantees 120 days of employment. The term "krei trei job card" may still remain relevant, but are there alternative names that the public can easily relate to and adopt? One possible local adaptation could be "ka skim kram," especially since the V sound does not exist in the Khasi Jaintia vocabulary. Another option might be "skim gram." However, beyond the question of naming, the more pressing concern is the effective and immediate implementation of the scheme, something that rural communities have been anxiously waiting for.

Honouring an Invisible Mother's Day

By Dr Neena Verma

Come the month of May and the world begins preparing to shower the mothers and the mother-figures with love, admiration and blessings on the second Sunday of May, the day we popularly celebrate as Mother's Day. The word itself evokes such a joyous bunch of emotions for all of us. All! Yes, of-course. Isn't it! Well, except...

Except ironically for some chosen mothers who live with the enduring grief arising from the loss of a child, something that experts call the ultimate bereavement. Not without reason though. "Whatever be the age of the child, ultimate bereavement is extremely difficult to bear. This pain feels no less in case of an unborn child," as I explain on Page 15 of my book "Grief - Growth - Grace - A Sacred Pilgrimage". Unfortunately, the grief arising from the loss of pregnancy (miscarriage), stillbirth, and infertility is mostly regarded as a mere physiological event, and not even acknowledged as a loss. This does not in any way reduce the intensity of the pain arising from the loss of a child, whatever their age or stage – a pain unthinkable hard to understand, even harder to express, and wrenchingly difficult to live with.

Acknowledging this harsh reality, Carly Marie Dudley, a mother in Australia who experienced the indescribable pain of parental bereavement after the stillbirth of her child, decided to dedicate the first Sunday of May to honour the grief of bereaved mothers. Coming a week ahead, the 'Bereaved Mother's Day' is not meant to dim or dilute the joy of the popular Mother's Day. Instead, it gently seeks to remind people to remember the mothers whose motherhood is traumatized or torn in the wake of losing a child (or the dream of a child) to bereavement, pregnancy loss, stillbirth, infant loss, disappearance or infertility. It simply seeks to honour their lost motherhood (or the dream thereof) nonetheless.

The first Sunday of May is not a day that Hallmark would create a card for. Certainly not a day, anyone of us should ever have to commemorate or wish to live through. Yet, it is surely a day when we should consider holding an affirmative and compassionate space for bereaved mothers (as well as fathers) as they honour their traumatized motherhood, allow their grief to be affirmed, help their broken hearts remember their shattered parts, and let the haunting absence of their lost child become the eternal love-spring of remembrance.

True indeed, nothing can fully heal the wound of bereaved parenthood, especially motherhood. Not just emotionally entwined, a mother is also biologically bonded with her child (including a miscarried fetus) through the mystical phenomenon of micro-chimerism that enables trans-placental bidirectional cell exchange between the foetus and the mother. Fetal microchimeric cells tend to stay behind in the mother's body, granting the mother-child bond a deeply embedded enduring quality. I understand this well as a grief specialist. And I know this intimately well as a bereaved mother myself, who also miscarried thrice.

Nonetheless, the therapeutic ritual of 'Bereaved Mother's Day' offers balm, however tiny, to allow this wrenching grief to be recognized and healed. This day allows grieving mothers their due space in the collective consciousness of the mainstream society, that in no way competes with or disrupts the joy of popular Mother's Day. Instead it softly seeks its own tiny space alongside, just so the invisible pain of grieving mothers can be acknowledged and allowed a healthy expression.

Motherhood is a trying journey anyway. The pain of child loss makes it unimaginably harder. Its grief lingers over years, decades, sometimes an entire lifetime.

If left unrecognized, undressed and unhealed, the grieving brain and body can keep the score. I therefore call upon you to please offer compassionate companionship to any grieving mother you know, especially on the 'Bereaved Mother's day', maybe also on the popular Mother's Day if they so desire.

You may ask how? Well, you do not need to be a grief expert to companion someone in their grief. You just need a genuinely compassionate and caring heart and mind. Allow your inherent sensitivity to be your guide in the 'here and now' space and time of your interaction with them. Please know you do not need to fix their grief or help them feel better. You just need to hold a safe space for them where their vulnerabilities find a safe, healthy expression and their inner guide begins to show up. Grief after-all is just another expression of love. An expression in lamentation. Please avoid saying "it is God's will". How do you think a grieving parent's anguished mind would reconcile with the traumatizing reality that they have to outlive their child! "Be strong", "be brave", "let go", "move on" and "s/he is in a better place" – are all unkind and unhelpful clichés and sermons that I urge you to please avoid.

"Time heals." Well! Not quite. In most cases of ultimate bereavement, time may not bring closure. Love abides. And being the cry song of love, so does grief. And that is fine too, as long as there are no pathological complications in which case professional help should surely be taken. But if you see grief abiding with time, avoid sermonizing or pushing them to hasten or force-close their grief process. This way, you may unwittingly end up triggering guilt, shame or self-doubt, and cause them to self-isolate, withdraw and go quiet. The goal of your grief companionship should instead be to help them stay open, and grieve in a healthy way, without fear of judgment, shame or sermon. If you show up in a compassionate and mindfully present way – you will notice that slowly their grief may begin to soften and transform itself, sometimes even into a deeper purpose or higher mission.

Intriguing, yet true, the worst fear of a grieving parent, more so of a mother, is that their child will be forgotten. And their most cherished secret hope is that the world will not just remember but honour and celebrate their gone-child. If you truly mean to care for a grieving parent, start by talking about their forever-child. It is only a misconception that mentioning their deceased child will trigger or intensify bereaved parents' grief. The truth is that nothing heals their grieving heart and mind as lovingly as the assurance that the world remembers their mortally absent, yet eternally present child. Be gentle, patient, mindful, compassionate and responsive of-course; and kindly conversation about their deceased child. Bereaved mothers keep their child alive in the stories they love to tell or hear of and about their child. They deserve to, want to and seek to keep their motherhood alive. And the warmest way you can help is by letting them hear their child's name. This 'International Bereaved Mother's Day' (3rd May, 2026), please get over your anxiety, awkwardness, doubt or hesitation. Create a safe space where a grieving mother can tell you her story, allow her grief an expression, and let her pain find therapeutic and transformative support in your compassionate presence.

(The author – Dr Neena Verma is a Resilience, Grief & Post-traumatic Growth Specialist, Appreciative Inquiry Expert, and a best-selling author of three books. Reach her at growthwithneena@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

A Wake-Up Call for the MDA Govt: Accountability Beyond the Constituency

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to express my deep concern and frustration regarding the current state of governance under the MDA government. Today, many citizens feel that our leaders have become "deaf and blind" to the actual cries of the people. It appears that the government has lost sight of what the word "Minister" truly signifies.

A Minister is not elected merely to act as a guardian of their own specific constituency or to focus on personal benefits. They are sworn in to oversee the entire state and to safeguard the welfare of every citizen from the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo Hills alike. Unfortunately, we see a trend where leaders are more interested in their own political survival than in resolving the long-standing issues of the common man.

From the stagnation in education and health to the inability to resolve basic administrative irregularities, the government's performance has been lackluster. If the MDA government does not have the guts or the political will to deliver what the people of Meghalaya actually want—such as transparency, economic fairness, and security—then

they must introspect on their right to hold office. In a democracy, the chair belongs to the people. If the current leadership cannot resolve even "small" issues that affect our daily lives, what is the point of them occupying these high positions?

It is better to step back and allow those who are truly capable and willing to serve the state to take the lead. We need leaders who can hear our voices and see our struggles, not "sahibs" who only look after their own.

Yours etc.,
Hilarius Umdor,
Shillong-8

Setting the Record Straight While Welcoming the Call for Peace

Editor,
Apropos of the news item Kuki Christian Leadership Forum (KCLF) appeals for peace, unity among hill tribes of Manipur (ST April 29, 2026) we share the KCLF's concern over violence and its call to reject rumours and misinformation. Any sincere voice for peace is welcome. But the statement creates a false symmetry that does injustice to the facts. Truth must be the foundation of peace.

1. The attacks are one-sided, and the perpetrators identifiable.

The Tangkhul villages of Litan, Leingangching, Shikhiph, Thoyee, Sinakeithe

and Ringui have been repeatedly targeted with armed assaults, ambushes and sniper fire – some for over two months, others more recently. On National Highway 202 near TM Kasom, two Tangkhul civilians were killed by Kuki militants. These are not communal clashes; they are military-style raids by forces that do not represent ordinary Kuki villagers. The attackers fall overwhelmingly into two groups: Kuki militant outfits under the SoO agreement with the Government of India, and heavily armed insurgents crossing from Myanmar. These forces, not Tangkhul civilians, have brought death, arson and terror.

2. Investigations must focus on the right suspects.

Expedited investigations must probe SoO-signatory cadres who exploit the ceasefire to wage war on the Tangkhul community, as well as the identity, supply lines and local facilitators of Myanmar-based terrorist groups. Only accountability will deter further violence.

3. The Tangkhul community has never attacked Kuki villages.

Tangkhul villages or civil bodies have never launched attacks on Kuki habitations. Every Tangkhul response has been solely in defence of their own villages, never an act of aggression. In contrast, when the Meitei-Kuki conflict erupted in 2023, it was the Tangkhuls who quietly provided safe passage and shelter to fleeing Kukis – a gesture of humanity

and Christian duty. To now portray Tangkhuls as part of a mutual conflagration, when they have absorbed blows while extending a helping hand, is deeply misleading.

4. Peace appeals must address the armed groups and their backers.

The KCLF appeal, however well-intentioned, must not be aimed only at the general public. It should be directed with unambiguous force at the SoO armed cadres violating the truce and at the terrorist formations entering from Burma. Any peace-seeking body should publicly demand these groups lay down their arms, halt infiltrations, and stop attacking Tangkhul villages immediately. A call for reconciliation that does not name and restrain the aggressor merely asks the victim to remain quiet while the house burns.

5. The weaponization of social media must be stopped.

While villages face physical attacks, a parallel digital assault is underway. Falsified social media posts – fabricated videos, manipulated images, invented testimonies – are being circulated to paint Tangkhul villages as aggressors. These are deliberate provocations meant to inflame violence and invert victim and perpetrator. The KCLF rightly rejects misinformation; we call on them and all people of conscience to publicly identify, condemn, and isolate those spreading such dangerous falsehoods. Truth cannot be sacrificed for political or

communal ends.

6. We remain committed to peace, but not to an unequal peace.

The Tangkhul community remains committed to dialogue and restraint, and will continue to protect the innocent regardless of community. But restraint is not weakness, and patience must not be mistaken for acceptance of a false narrative. The violence must stop, and it must stop on the side from which it is coming.

Peace will arrive not when the victims fall silent, but when the guns pointed at them are finally removed.

Yours etc.,
Names withheld on request,
Via email

Preserving Shillong's Local Music Spaces and Cultural Identity

Editor,
Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to highlight a quieter yet deeply significant concern affecting the cultural fabric of Shillong – the gradual decline of small, independent music spaces that once defined the city's identity.

Shillong has long been celebrated as India's "Rock Capital," a title earned not merely through large festivals but through its vibrant grassroots music scene. Small cafes, open-mic venues, and community stages

have historically provided young and aspiring musicians a platform to perform, experiment, and grow. However, in recent years, many such spaces have either shut down or shifted away from hosting live performances due to rising operational costs, licensing challenges, and changing commercial priorities.

This quiet erosion risks turning a once organically rich music culture into a more commercialized and less accessible one, where only established acts find space to perform. Emerging artists, who form the backbone of any evolving cultural scene, are left with limited opportunities to showcase their talent.

I humbly urge the concerned authorities and cultural bodies to recognize and support these small music venues—perhaps through simplified licensing, cultural grants, or designated community performance spaces. Preserving these platforms is not just about entertainment; it is about safeguarding the creative spirit and identity of Shillong.

I hope this issue receives thoughtful attention from both policymakers and citizens alike.

Yours etc.,
Jasule Sangtam
Shillong

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

“Art is anything people do with distinction.”
— Louis Dudek

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXVIII No.262 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026

State Election Results

NEVER have state assembly election results been so hyper-ventilated as they were on Monday May 4. There was excitement in the air especially about the election results of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala assembly seats. Assam was a foregone conclusion as the issues flagged much before the elections by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma—revolving around Jati, Mati, Bheti (meaning identity, land and homeland)—resonated with a population long told that illegal immigration is the bane of Assam and that the state’s resources were being used to service non-deserving illegal migrants, mainly Muslims. The passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) left many Bengali Muslims without documents still languishing in jails across Assam. The CAA was a redeemer for many a Bengali Hindu who was a victim of the atrocities inflicted by the then East Pakistan regime and later Bangladesh as they could secure Indian citizenship. The CAA was a masterstroke by the BJP and a balm for Bengali Hindus and Muslims who were targeted during the Assam Movement of 1979-1985 because of the fear of demographic change especially in the Barak Valley. When the BJP under Himanta Biswa Sarma targeted the Bengali Muslims, Bengali Hindus supported him and the BJP wholeheartedly. That the Congress supremo of Assam, Gaurav Gogoi himself lost the Jorhat seat reflects the poor state of the Party and its electoral preparedness vis a vis the BJP.

In West Bengal the Special Intensive Review (SIR) of electoral rolls, which excluded 90 lakh voters (of whom 63% were Hindus and 34% Muslims), was a major reason for Mamata Banerjee’s defeat. However, political analysts also attribute the defeat of Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamool Congress to her dictatorial style of functioning and the string of rape cases that suggest poor enforcement of law and order in the state. Perhaps the voters of West Bengal voted for real change. In Tamil Nadu we see a classic anti-incumbency factor. The AIADMK lost after 10 years in power. Tamil actor Joseph C Vijay of the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) is emerging as the new ruling dispensation in the state. What Tamil Nadu has proved, however, is that national parties (BJP, Congress) will remain secondary players.

In Kerala the Left has lost its place of pride even as the Congress-led United Democratic Front has gained ground and will take the reins of governance. The Communist Party/Parties seem to have finally been ousted from their comfort zones. People have seen that when in power even the Communist parties can be as corrupt as any other party which is what the Pinarayi Vijayan Government was seen to be doing. Naturally people rejected the Party. In a progressive state like Kerala, no political party can take the people for granted and that goes for Tamil Nadu too. Besides, elections in India are less about a national wave and more about distinct political cultures shaping the outcomes state by state; certainly, the southern states vote differently from those in the north, west and east. The BJP is yet to make substantive inroads into Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Letters to the Editor

Illegal Encroachment and Systematic Theft of Betel Nut in Border Villages

Editor,
Through your esteemed paper, I would like to draw the attention of the authorities concerned about the problem faced by the people of the villages along the East Jaintia Hills on the Bangladesh border. For several years, crop trespassing and theft have been reportedly carried out by groups of a few armed intruders, thought to be foreigners, who enter private areca nut (betel nuts) plantations. When any crops are stolen from the private plantations, it becomes a cause for great concern, as most of the families depend on betel nut cultivation for their livelihood. Many people were unable to survive at all. These intruders are getting bolder, threatening and abusing the villagers and the night watchmen who try to stop them from crossing the village. They are creating a climate of fear among the villagers, who are not even safe on their own land, as they do not know what to expect.

I therefore sincerely request the Government of Meghalaya, and the Central Government to understand the seriousness of this issue, and act accordingly and in time. In matters relating to security, the views of the people living in border areas must be considered. In order for peace and security

to be secured there must be improved patrolling and a planned long-term plan for security. Until that time, I call upon authorities to act immediately to protect the safety, dignity, and livelihood of the people.

Yours etc.,
Minika Chadong,
Shillong

Development at What Cost?

Editor,
Our state is a land of flowing rivers, cascading waterfalls, and serene landscapes—gifts that no amount of money can recreate. These natural treasures are not just scenic backdrops; they are the very identity of our people and the foundation of our tourism. We are not opposed to development. But development without direction is destruction in disguise. The question we must ask is simple: who truly benefits from the kind of development we are pursuing?

While investments are being channelled into large hotels and commercial projects, the basics remain neglected. Roads leading to many tourist destinations are still in poor condition, making travel difficult and discouraging visitors. Improving connectivity should be the first step toward meaningful progress. Equally concerning is the state of our transport system. A significant number of tourists arrive in their own vehicles from neighbouring states, leaving our local taxi operators with little share in the growing tourism economy. If development does not create opportunities for

Gurudev Rabindranath: Our Revered Poet Polymath

By Debasish Chowdhury

Ever since the advent of civilization, poets and philosophers have, as springs of wisdom, been steering man’s moral journey and servicing their emotional wants. Using their gifted talent, many of them have relentlessly strived to redraw the moral boundary and the cultural hegemony suffocating of natural human liberty. At times, they had even spearheaded revolutions seeking to overthrow the oppressive order. Right from the start, they have been humanity’s conscience keepers.

Driven and dictated by the high-end technology of the contemporary era in which the internet and social media consume a disproportionate quantum of daily time, the habit of reading at leisure has come down drastically. To enjoy reading poems while basking in the warmth of a morning Sun is out of vogue these days. Latest electronic gadgets now substitute printed books. Reading as an invitation to reflect has become a passé.

In this eastern part of our ancient land, however, the months of April/May still hold special significance. The combined impact of Assamese-Bengali New Year and Tagore birth anniversary celebrations at this time of the year revs up a flurry of cultural activities in the region and even beyond. For about a century now, Tagore, no matter whether one reads his works and appreciates his worldview or not, has remained a literary-cultural icon of Asian heritage. Despite the socio-political and cultural boundaries that keep the people of the region segregated from each other, Tagore’s stature has so far remained inviolable.

Born on May 07, 1861, Tagore, the youngest of fourteen siblings, eventually grew up as a poet par excellence, a composer, a novelist, a nationalist, a painter, an educationist and above all a great humanist who refused to be caged by narrow boundaries of bigotry. A versatile genius that he was, Tagore single-handedly claimed a unique place of honour in the world’s cultural and literary atlas for India, then a colonised land. To Will Durant, the noted American philosopher, Tagore was the “laureate of humanity.”

All over the world, about 270-280 million people today speak in Bengali. Belonging to the classical Indo-Aryan group of languages, Bengali is the seventh most spoken of languages. India accorded it the status of a classical language in 2024. Two hundred plus universities spread across continents have Bengali as primary academic discipline in their campuses. Two of the sovereign nations in the modern world have their national anthem composed in this language.

It’s fairly ancient origin notwithstanding (the Institute of Language Studies and Research, Kolkata (ILSR) in a 2024 research publication claimed that 51 Bengali words were found in a dictionary compiled in 782 AD by Chinese poet Li-Yen: Ref: Wikipedia), Bengali came to worldly limelight mostly after Tagore’s collection of verses entitled Gitanjali made its first appearance in English under the title ‘Song Offerings’. For this limited edition 1912 publication of the Indian society, London, Tagore was awarded the Nobel prize in November 1913 as its first Asian heritage recipient.

Released at a time when a restive socio-political setup in Europe that was then standing only few months away from what the history would eventually record as the First World War; ‘Song Offerings’ as also its composer Tagore appeared unto Europe as a dense mix of oriental wisdom and spiritualism representative of a serene tranquil which it was sorely missing at that moment. The craving for an exotic oriental mysticism coming right from the pen of an oriental polymath had appealed to the then Europe so intensely that it witnessed a sudden surge in translation of Tagore’s works in different European languages.

One of the most widely translated amongst the Bengali litterateurs, Tagore’s works had since been translated to English, Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian, besides host of other European languages. The intense after impact of “Song offerings” inspired scores of illustrious personalities, to name a few, Czech Indologist Vincenc Lesný, French Nobel laureate André Gide, Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and Billent Ecevit, formerly Prime Minister, Turkey amongst others to undertake translation of Tagore’s works.

Literary titans like Chileans Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, Mexican Octavio Paz, Spaniards José Ortega Gasset, Zenobia Camprubi, and Juan Ramón Jiménez opting to undertake translation of Tagore’s work in their own respective languages on their own volition speaks eloquently of Tagore’s influence on Hispanic literature. During his 150th birth anniversary celebrations, Bengali department of Warsaw University, Poland published an Anthology of Tagore’s works which, unlike most of the other such works, was a direct translation from original Bengali to Polish.

Tagore’s literary creations, amongst other forms, also include some 3000 odd songs. Listeners across cultures experience a deep emotional resonance with his songs. Popularly referred to as Rabindra Sangeet, these are a unique blend of poetry and philosophy, Tagore’s lyric and tunes are delicate expressions of love, longing, devotion, and nature steeped in spirituality. With remarkable subtlety, they can balm anguish, inspire hope and awaken introspection. Transcending spatial bounds and through generations that have followed, Tagore’s works do spur an anxiety of influence that inspires both a visceral churning and a wholehearted, passionate embrace. In his native Bengal, Tagore was adored as a bard of rare dexterity and also as an ardent nationalist. On the global stage, his western admirers like W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound presented Tagore as a profound fount of mystic oriental wisdom. In reality, Tagore was hardly an apt fit in either of these two frames. He, certainly, had abhorred the culture of oppressions and misuse perpetrated by the colonial rulers and keenly desired that his beloved India be freed from the clutches of the colonisers. But to him mere political freedom meant little. Until freed from the curse of repetitive dead habits, true freedom, felt Tagore, would remain illusory. And for that to happen, spread of proper education, he felt was a must. The aggressive nationalism of the occident pained him deeply and he did not want his India to fall in that trap. “The idea of the nation”, he lamented, “is one of the most powerful anaesthetics that man has invented.”

The garb of an oriental mystic of profound wisdom in which he was presented before the west, given Europe’s then tense socio-political context, helped him to gain almost an instant reverential acceptance. But that acceptance hardly did any good to his image as a poet of the rare order. With flowing time, this fervour for exotic oriental mysticism, however, slowly waned out and, with it, Tagore’s image as poet also took a drastic

The Ink Fades, But Power Stays

By Nimrat Ranhotra

The ink fades faster than we expect. A few days after voting, it disappears from our fingers, quietly, without ceremony. The conversations go with it. The urgency softens. Group chats that once debated policies, promises, and possibilities fall back into routine. Somewhere between celebration and disappointment, we return to our lives as if something important has concluded.

But it hasn’t. It has only begun.

This feels especially visible around elections in West Bengal. Here, elections do not just bring politics closer, they make it unavoidable. For days, attention sharp-

can feel deeply limiting. These are not always the stories that lead headlines. But they linger in conversations, in silences, and in the things people hesitate to say openly. No government is beyond criticism. No system remains healthy without the possibility of change.

The idea of a new government is often framed as a dramatic shift, a break, a correction, a fresh start. But at its core, it represents something simpler. The need for power to remain accountable, for authority to feel answerable, and for people to believe that governance is not fixed, but responsive.

Because when that belief

“The weeks leading up to elections are intense, charged with rhetoric, hope, accusation, and spectacle. Political presence is everywhere, sometimes energising, sometimes overwhelming, and at times coercive in its persistence. Speeches are analysed, alliances are questioned, and opinions grow louder. And then, almost abruptly, it recedes. I find myself returning to every update, waiting for what comes next. There is a sense that this election could bring a shift that feels nothing short of revolutionary, not just in outcome, but in what it might reset.”

ens. The weeks leading up to elections are intense, charged with rhetoric, hope, accusation, and spectacle. Political presence is everywhere, sometimes energising, sometimes overwhelming, and at times coercive in its persistence. Speeches are analysed, alliances are questioned, and opinions grow louder.

And then, almost abruptly, it recedes. I find myself returning to every update, waiting for what comes next. There is a sense that this election could bring a shift that feels nothing short of revolutionary, not just in outcome, but in what it might reset.

We have learned to treat democracy like an event. Something with a clear build up, a visible climax, and a definite end. We follow campaigns, argue over candidates, and form opinions that feel urgent and necessary. Once results are declared, we step away, as if our role

weakens, participation begins to feel symbolic rather than meaningful. Elections give us a moment of choice. Governance tests whether that choice continues to matter after the moment has passed.

Perhaps that is why attention drops after results. Staying engaged requires more than opinion. It requires patience, consistency, and a willingness to notice what does not immediately demand attention.

To dismiss these concerns as exaggerated would be easy. But it would also be futile. Because democracy does not weaken in its loudest moments. It weakens in the long, quiet stretches that follow, when participation is replaced by distance, and observation gives way to assumption.

It is easier to debate before an election than to observe after it. Easier to choose a side than to question what that side becomes

“Perhaps that is why attention drops after results. Staying engaged requires more than opinion. It requires patience, consistency, and a willingness to notice what does not immediately demand attention. To dismiss these concerns as exaggerated would be easy. But it would also be futile. Because democracy does not weaken in its loudest moments. It weakens in the long, quiet stretches that follow, when participation is replaced by distance, and observation gives way to assumption. It is easier to debate before an election than to observe after it.”

has been fulfilled.

But governance does not work like that.

It is slower, quieter, and far less visible. It unfolds in decisions that rarely trend, in policies that do not dominate conversations, and in systems that shape daily life without announcing themselves. It is in these quieter spaces that the real measure of leadership begins. It is also where questions of accountability become harder to ask. In recent years, concerns around political culture in West Bengal have not only been about policy, but about how power is experienced on the ground through local dominance, pressure, and a sense that political presence extends into everyday life in ways that are not always comfortable. The persistence of political intimidation at local levels and the normalisation of aggressive partisanship have created an environment that

in power. Easier to speak in moments of intensity than to remain aware in moments of quiet. But democracy does not depend only on moments of intensity. It depends on what follows them. Because governance shapes more than elections ever can. It shapes the conditions people live in, the systems they rely on, and the boundaries within which they speak, work, and exist.

The ink fades. The conversations shift. The urgency dissolves. And in that space, between what we express and what we continue to observe, democracy either deepens, or quietly distances itself from the people it is meant to serve. Maybe the real question is not just who governs next, but whether governance itself continues to feel accountable, visible, and open to change.

We show up for the vote. What happens after should matter just as much.

the importance of renewable energy projects is well recognised, their impact on aquatic ecosystems cannot be overlooked. It is understood that this period coincides with the breeding season of local fish species, and such sudden depletion of water may severely affect their natural life cycle.

In view of the above, the authorities concerned may kindly take necessary steps to regulate water discharge and ensure a minimum ecological flow, especially during sensitive periods. A balanced approach is imperative to ensure that development does not come at the cost of environmental sustainability.

I sincerely hope that necessary steps will be taken at the earliest to safeguard the Ganol River and its surrounding ecosystem.

Yours etc.,
Donald Albert Kurbah
Mawphlang

Ganol River In A Sorry State; Needs Intervention

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the alarming condition of the Ganol River near Tura, particularly in the vicinity of the Ganol Hydro Electric Power Project.

During a recent visit, I was disheartened to witness the river flow reduced drastically, leaving several stretches nearly dry. Rivers are vital to the ecological balance of our environment, sustaining life and supporting local biodiversity. While

the importance of renewable energy projects is well recognised, their impact on aquatic ecosystems cannot be overlooked. It is understood that this period coincides with the breeding season of local fish species, and such sudden depletion of water may severely affect their natural life cycle.

In view of the above, the authorities concerned may kindly take necessary steps to regulate water discharge and ensure a minimum ecological flow, especially during sensitive periods. A balanced approach is imperative to ensure that development does not come at the cost of environmental sustainability.

I sincerely hope that necessary steps will be taken at the earliest to safeguard the Ganol River and its surrounding ecosystem.

Yours etc.,
Dana Marak,
Tura

Can We Do Something to Groom UPSC, CSE Aspirants

Editor
Apropos your editorial titled ‘Drought of UPSC Qualifiers’ published on May 2, 2026, the concern over our state’s inability to produce even a single IAS or IPS officer since 2013 deserves attention. I do feel we should look beyond the outcome and get to the root of the problem. As rightly pointed out in the editorial, one major issue is that our

education system does not focus enough on critical thinking. The UPSC exam, as we know, is not just about bookish knowledge—it is about clear understanding, sharp thinking, and the ability to express oneself well. Sadly, many students are still trying to catch up in these areas. Even in many of our well-performing schools, overcrowded classrooms only add to the problem. Teachers have too much on their plate, and even capable students who show early promise don’t always get proper guidance. Because of this, many good students are left behind.

Skills like speaking confidently and expressing ideas clearly are not given much importance, and this affects them later. Another problem is the lack of regular guidance. While institutions like the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute are trying their best, more consistent support and mentoring are still needed. We also need to look at the bigger picture. A good study habit—regular reading, discipline, and simple discussions—really help students. This is where we are falling behind, especially in rural areas. We can learn from states like Rajasthan, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, where students in many schools are encouraged from an early age to take part in debates, quizzes, and writing. This helps them think quickly and express themselves better.

In many of these places, students grow up taking competitive exams seriously. Coaching centres, help from seniors, and studying with friends all supports them. Cities like Jaipur, Patna, and Prayagraj have become

places where students stay focused and keep encouraging each other to do better. It is often seen that some students do dream of becoming IAS or IPS officers. But without the right support and guidance, this dream remains just a dream. It is not that they lack ability; they just don’t get the right environment. If we can identify such students early and guide them properly, things can improve. Timely help, good coaching, and even small financial support can make a big difference. Simple steps can also make a big difference—encouraging reading, helping students use their time wisely, and guiding them to stay away from too much screen time. Bit by bit, these habits can build a focused and determined mindset, and I do feel it would be a satisfying thing for many of us—including myself—to support in any way we can in organising such programmes, especially in rural areas where many talented students do not get the facilities and support they need to dream big and achieve those dreams. Many students I have seen are talented; they just need proper guidance and a little push in the right direction.

At the end of the day, if we get our basics right and stay on track, the results will follow. As Robert Frost said, we still have many miles to go.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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

“Asking the right questions takes as much skill as giving the right answers.”

— Robert Half

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 263 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2026

Peoples' mandate? Partly yes

THREE governments have been voted out — lock, stock and barrel — in an impressive assertion of the democratic system of governance. The Congress gained Kerala and the BJP West Bengal, while Tamil Nadu produced a hung assembly. Elsewhere, in Assam the BJP retained its position for the third term; and the alliance of a regional party and the BJP remained unsailable in tiny Puducherry. The Left citadel of Kerala crumbled like a pack of cards, its assembly presence reducing to one-third this time compared to the 2021 results. The chief ministers of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, Mamata Banerjee and MK Stalin, were humbled in their own constituencies, while Kerala's Pinarayi Vijayan trailed in the counting till the first six rounds, after which he regained composure. Such was the resolute manner in which the democratic process unleashed a storm this time.

This bodes well for democracy. Governments must change; and so should leaders, as in the United States where law does not allow a President to hold office for more than two terms. In India, no rule binds politicians, who have formed into a class by themselves. These men go on and on till they end up in their graves. Banerjee and MK Stalin governed their states in moderately good ways and have not faced huge corruption or other scandals. Their undoing, in part, was the dynasty tilt they gave to their governance and parties— the Trinamool Congress and the DMK. Banerjee, a spinster, hoisted her nephew Abhishek Banerjee to be her second-in-command. He is believed to have handpicked the candidates for the TMC, with a view to eventually taking full control. This caused huge heartburns in the party. The Special Intensive Revision of the voters list by the election commission eliminated some 9 million “fake” names. This was mostly to the disadvantage of the TMC. A section of Muslims turned against the ruling party with a senior community leader breaking away from Banerjee and forming his own party. Time is running out for the 71-year-old leader, while the BJP used every stick in its armour to humble her.

In Tamil Nadu, young actor Vijay whipped up the aspirations of youths with the formation of a new party, Tamilaka Vetti Kazhagam (TVK), and drew massive crowds. This was a manifestation of the people's urge to see a change after they lived under the rules of the DMK and AIADMK for two generations. Stalin's undoing was also the way he sought to promote his son Udayanidhi in the party and the ministry at the expense of other senior party leaders. While Stalin was encouraged in politics by his father M Karunanidhi, times are changing and people are more assertive now. The imperious styles of Stalin, as also Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala, too proved to be their undoing. They conducted themselves in ways fitting the Raja-Praja culture. The Congress has reasons to cheer: the party got a third southern state under its grip, while it failed miserably in Assam as also Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Fall of two regional pillars Mamata and Stalin weakens fight for Federal India BJP under PM Narendra Modi fully set for coming polls with its centralised agenda

By T N Ashok

cessors, he has done so in an era where national currents intersect more forcefully with regional aspirations.

Tamil Nadu's verdict signals that even deeply rooted political cultures are not immune to disruption. For the BJP, which has historically struggled to gain a foothold in the state, Vijay's rise presents both an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity to weaken Dravidian dominance, and a challenge in managing a powerful new regional player who may not align seamlessly with its national agenda.

Elsewhere, the results reinforced existing trends. In Assam, the BJP-led alliance extended its dominance, securing a decisive

datation and leverage. They reinforce his narrative of political invincibility while providing strategic depth ahead of future contests. At 75, and approaching 79 by the time of the 2029 election, Modi remains the BJP's most potent electoral asset.

Yet his dominance also intersects with an undercurrent of tension within the broader ideological family. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP's ideological parent, has periodically signalled a preference for generational transition. The 2026 victories, however, strengthen Modi's position to resist such pressures, at least in the near term. The question is not whether succession will occur, but when—and

costs would feed into inflation, eroding household incomes and amplifying public discontent. For a government that has built its political brand partly on economic management and welfare delivery, such pressures could prove challenging.

Energy security, once a technocratic concern, is thus becoming a political variable. Its impact will likely be felt unevenly across regions, with urban and middle-class voters particularly sensitive to cost-of-living increases.

Taken together, the 2026 assembly results suggest a political trajectory that favors the BJP heading into the next general election. The party has demonstrated its ability to expand into new territories, disrupt entrenched regimes, and adapt its messaging to diverse electoral contexts.

Yet the path to 2029 is far from predetermined. Several variables will shape the outcome: Modi's continued centrality versus the push for generational change within the BJP-RSS ecosystem. The outcome of the Uttar Pradesh election and its impact on national momentum. Inflation, employment, and growth trajectories in a volatile global environment. The ability—or inability—of regional and national parties to forge coherent alliances.

What emerges from the 2026 elections is not merely a set of victories and defeats, but the outline of a new political phase. India appears to be transitioning from a fragmented, coalition-driven system toward a more centralized model of governance, anchored by a dominant national party. Whether this shift proves durable will depend on forces both within and beyond the control of political actors. For now, however, the balance has tilted decisively.

In the immediate aftermath of the results, the BJP stands: ascendant, regional leaders recalibrate, and Modi—emboldened yet facing the inevitabilities of time—prepares for what could be his most consequential political test. The 2026 verdict has not settled India's political future. But it has unmistakably changed the terms on which that future will be contested.

Discontent and frustration has usurped power from two regional satraps — Stalin and Ms Banerjee — who, despite good deliveries on governance or welfare schemes treated the states as their personal fiefdoms leading to large scale frustration amongst the 18 to 40 age group, the gen Z that was looking for aspirational growth which was being denied by families and dynasties; Congress that looks vanquished has staged a comeback through the UDF in Kerala, bringing some small hopes for the party's future. (IPA Service)

The most dramatic shift has occurred in West Bengal, where the BJP appears to have achieved what once seemed improbable: breaching the fortress of Mamata Banerjee and her All India Trinamool Congress. The BJP secured 206 seats out of the total assembly strength of 294 riding a wave that blended welfare recalibration, organizational muscle, and a sharpened political narrative aimed at dislodging a decade-and-a-half-old regime.

mandate that underscored the continuing resonance of identity-driven politics and development narratives. In Kerala, the Congress-led United Democratic Front regained momentum, restoring the state's familiar pattern of alternating power. Puducherry, meanwhile, delivered continuity under a regional formation aligned with the BJP.

Individually, these outcomes may appear routine. Collectively, they contribute to a broader consolidation: the BJP now commands or influences governance across vast swathes of India, from the Gangetic heartland to the eastern seaboard and the northeast.

The 2026 elections have effectively weakened two prominent regional leaders—Banerjee and Stalin—adding to a list of diminished state-level figures over the past decade. The cumulative effect is unmistakable: India's political system, once defined by strong regional poles, is gradually tilting toward a more centralized structure.

This shift carries profound implications. Regional parties have historically acted as counterweights to national dominance, shaping coalition politics and moderating policy directions. Their decline reduces the complexity of India's political ecosystem, potentially making national elections more presidential in character—centered on leadership rather than local arithmetic.

For Modi, the electoral outcomes offer both vali-

under what conditions.

Between now and 2029 lies a critical waypoint; the 2027 assembly election in Uttar Pradesh. As India's most populous state and a decisive contributor to parliamentary majorities, Uttar Pradesh serves as the crucible of national politics. UP throws up 80 parliamentary seats, the biggest chunk which often decides who will be next Prime Minister?

Here, internal dynamics within the BJP could prove as consequential as opposition strategies. The relationship between Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath—two powerful figures with distinct political bases—has been the subject of persistent speculation. Disagreements over candidate selection and governance priorities, if not managed carefully, could replicate the frictions that contributed to the BJP's setbacks in the 2024 general election in the state.

A divided BJP in Uttar Pradesh would offer opposition parties a rare opening. Conversely, a unified campaign could cement the party's dominance and set the tone for 2029.

Beyond domestic politics, external variables are poised to shape India's electoral landscape. Chief among them is the evolving geopolitical situation in the Gulf region—a critical source of India's energy imports.

Any sustained disruption in oil supplies or escalation in regional tensions could have cascading effects on India's economy. Rising fuel

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

The Great Election Religion Tamasha...

“Who are you voting for?” he asked me with great seriousness, as though the future of the nation rested delicately between his teacup and my answer.

“I was thinking,” I said, “of voting for whoever will stop the unnecessary concretising down my road.”

He looked at me with pity. Not anger. Not disagreement. Just pity. As though I had completely misunderstood democracy and reduced it to potholes and pavements.

Because, you see, we no longer vote for roads, water, education, or hospitals. Those are minor inconveniences that we have learnt to live with. They are treated like background noise in a crowded market. The real question, the one that now towers above everything else, is far simpler and far more dangerous:

“What is your religion?” And thus begins the Great Election Religion Tamasha. The drums begin first. Not real drums, but the constant beat of speeches, slogans, and forwarded messages that arrive on our phones with the urgency of breaking news and the accuracy of fiction. Leaders take the stage and speak with great passion. Not about how many schools they will build or how many jobs they will create, but about how many enemies they will identify and how many fears they will awaken.

And we, the audience, sit there, utterly captivated. We clap. We cheer. We forward. We argue. We feel involved. We feel important. We feel as though we are part of something historic. A great battle. A noble cause. A defence of identity.

Meanwhile, the script is already written. Because when the curtain finally falls, something astonishing happens. Nothing changes where it actually matters. The poor remain poor. The rich grow richer.

And a brand new group of politicians quietly joins the billionaire club. It is almost magical in its consistency.

The same man who arrived at your doorstep before the elections, folding his hands, touching your feet, speaking of sacrifice and service, now moves past you in a convoy of cars that could buy half your neighbourhood. His security personnel push you aside as though you are an inconvenience. His children study abroad. His declared assets rise like a well watered plant. But his speech remains unchanged. “Your religion is under threat.”

And we nod. We nod because outrage is easier than responsibility. It is far more comfortable to feel angry about something abstract than to ask questions about something real. Nobody wants to ask what happened to promises made five years ago. Nobody wants to ask why their area still floods after one hour of rain. Nobody wants to ask how a man who claimed to serve the people now lives like royalty.

Those are difficult questions.

Dangerous questions. Questions that require thought.

Religion, on the other hand, requires only emotion. And emotion is the most profitable currency in any election. So we spend it freely.

We argue at dining tables. We lose friendships. We avoid relatives. We divide ourselves neatly into camps and then defend those camps with a passion we never show for our own living conditions. We become warriors in a battle that benefits everyone except us.

And while we are busy fighting each other, something else is happening quietly in the background.

Contracts are being signed. Deals are being negotiated. Land is being allocated. Money is moving. Fortunes are being built.

But we do not see any of this because our eyes are fixed firmly on the stage where the Tamasha is in full swing.

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if, just once, we changed the script. What if the next time someone asked us, “Who are you voting for?” We replied calmly, “The one who can show me results.”

Imagine the confusion. “What results?” They would ask, genuinely puzzled.

“Water that comes when the tap is opened. Roads that last longer than a monsoon. Schools where teachers actually teach. Hospitals where patients are treated with dignity. Jobs that allow people to live, not merely survive.”

Imagine the silence that would follow.

Because the moment we shift the conversation from religion to results, the entire Tamasha begins to crumble. The noise dies down. The slogans lose their power. The speeches sound hollow. The leaders, who have perfected the art of dividing us, suddenly find themselves facing a united audience asking a single, inconvenient question.

“What have you done?” And that is a question very few are prepared to answer. But until that day arrives, the show will go on.

The banners will grow bigger. The speeches louder. The divisions deeper. We will continue to vote not as citizens seeking progress, but as followers defending identity. We will continue to celebrate victories that change nothing and mourn defeats that do not affect our daily lives. Every five years, we watch the same story unfold with new actors, new slogans, and the same ending.

The poor remain poor. The rich grow richer.

And somewhere, behind the noise and the colour and the carefully staged outrage, another group quietly counts its winnings.

The Tamasha continues. And perhaps the most tragic part of it all is this. We are not just the audience. We are the reason the show exists...

You can request for Bob's Banter by Robert Clements as a daily column on your whatsapp by sending your name and phone number to bobsbanter@gmail.com.

Letters to the Editor

The 5-Month Siege of the Seven Set-Crinoline Road

Editor,
What began in December as a promise of improved urban infrastructure has transformed into a gruelling landscape of neglect for the residents of Laban and Kench's, Trace. For five months, the stretch of road running from Seven Set School to the Crinoline Swimming Pool, adjacent to the Survey of India, has remained a shattered ruin of open trenches and stagnant progress. What was meant to be a routine drainage upgrade has instead become a permanent “void” in the middle of a vital residential artery.

A Pedestrian Minefield: For the students of Seven Set School and the daily walkers heading toward the Crinoline area, the path is no longer a public thoroughfare but a tactical obstacle course. The “huge holes” left behind by contractors are not merely

unsightly; they are hazardous. With no proper barricading or lighting, these excavations pose a severe risk to life and limb, especially as the pre-monsoon showers begin to turn these open pits into invisible traps. The marrow-deep frustration of the public is palpable as they are forced to navigate jagged edges and narrow ledges just to move through their own neighborhood.

Logistical Paralysis for Residents: The residents living in the immediate vicinity of the Survey of India are bearing the heaviest burden. The unfinished works have effectively redesigned the local architecture into a series of inaccessible islands. People who have parked their cars in front of their gates for decades now find themselves in a state of logistical paralysis. With the road's surface excavated and left in a state of “structural pressure,” finding a safe spot to leave a vehicle has become a daily struggle, forcing residents to park blocks away and trek through the mud to reach their homes.

The Silence of the Rangbah Shnong: Perhaps the most stinging aspect of this administrative failure is the

apparent apathy of the local Rangbah Shnong. In our traditional system of governance, the Shnong is supposed to act as the protective layer between the residents and the inefficiencies of government departments. Yet, in the face of this five-month-long disruption, the local leadership has remained remarkably silent.

There is a glaring lack of oversight and urgency from the Shnong office. Why has the Rangbah Shnong allowed this project to drift into a state of permanent incompleteness? Their failure to hold the contractors to a rigorous timeline suggests a breakdown in the very leadership structure that residents rely on for protection. It is one thing for a government department to be slow; it is another for the local headman to watch the ground being shredded beneath his people's feet without demanding immediate restoration.

A Call for Accountability: Shillong cannot afford this “architecture of neglect.” As we move further into the year, the risk of disease from stagnant water and the physical danger of these open pits will only intensify. The residents of Seven Set and Crinoline de-

serve more than just a broken road; they deserve a leadership that refuses to accept half-finished holes as a way of life. It is time the concerned authorities—and the Rangbah Shnong—fill the void and complete the work before an avoidable tragedy occurs.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

NEHU Exams & Syllabus Concerns

Editor,
I wish to draw attention to serious academic concerns affecting undergraduate students of the sixth semester at NEHU. The National Education Policy (NEP) was implemented in 2023 in Meghalaya, and the present sixth semester students constitute the first batch under this system. Since the first semester, students have been facing continuous challenges related to extensive syllabus load, limited academic time, and lack of proper alignment in planning.

As per the academic calendar, classes for the Even semester commenced on 12

February 2026. However, theory examinations have been scheduled from 19 May 2026. While university regulations mandate a minimum of 90 actual teaching days per semester, the current schedule does not appear to realistically meet this requirement, particularly when Sundays and other holidays are considered.

At the same time, students are handling four honours papers with a very extensive syllabus. In several subjects, the syllabus remains vast and in many cases not fully completed due to the limited academic timeframe. There also appears to be a lack of alignment between the prescribed syllabus and the availability of academic resources. In some papers, topics have been prescribed without ensuring the availability of sufficient academic material or reference sources, which makes it difficult for students to engage with the content meaningfully and prepare for examinations.

As a result, students are being required to appear for examinations without the full course being completed. This has been a recurring issue since earlier semesters as well and continues to affect

the academic experience of students.

This situation highlights a gap between prescribed academic standards and their implementation. Greater alignment between syllabus design, teaching duration, and examination scheduling is necessary.

It is requested that the concerned authorities take note of these concerns and ensure that academic policies are implemented in a manner that allows proper completion of the syllabus before examinations are conducted.

Yours etc.,
A. Das,
Via email

Repeated Anomalies by NEHU

Editor,
As concerned stakeholders and on behalf of our students we would like to bring to the attention of all regarding the anomalies in the functioning of the esteemed North Eastern Hill University's Examination Department.

The NEHU Ordinance OC-15 Amended Provision

on Academic Calendar of the University under section 26 (1) (q) of the NEHU Act 1973 states that “The University will have at least 180 days of actual teaching in a year, with at least 90 teaching days in a semester.”

Keeping this mandate in mind let me now proceed. NEHU issued the Academic Calendar for Undergraduate Courses for Affiliated Colleges of NEHU (2025-26) (check the NEHU website), wherein NEHU notified that regular classes for the Even semester in colleges are to begin on 12.02.2026. Keeping in mind the mandated actual teaching days of 90 days per semester, as stated above, NEHU has issued a notification dated April 24, 2026 bearing No: AR/UG/FYUP/Programme/2025-5499 notifying Theory examinations for the Even semester from May 19, 2026.

In light of the above and keeping in mind the dates, we fail to rationalise as to how NEHU can schedule and notify the examination dates for the Even semester UG students from 19.05.2026 when the minimum 90 actual teaching days criterion is not fulfilled?

Kindly do the simple math,

from the date of the resumption of classes as per the academic calendar 12.02.2026 till the date of the present Even semester exam i.e. 19.05.2026 there are 96 days which also include Sundays as well as other national and state holidays.

How does NEHU make ordinances and flout them? How do they expect college teachers to do justice to the NEP syllabus? How do they expect these first batch of students, who with no NEP exposure in their earlier education levels, i.e., schools acclimatize to the syllabus load especially those in the 6th and 4th Semester who have 4 honours papers? Strangely when one looks at the PG Academic Calendar, the same criterion stated above is fulfilled because the University re-opening date is 12.02.2026 and the scheduled date of PG Even Semester examination is 18.06.2026.

Yours etc.,
A. Basaiawmoit,
Via email

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

"We can't always just go back to what we know without asking questions."

— Breanna Stewart

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 264

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026

Meghalaya BJP Riding High

IT'S amusing how the success of the BJP in West Bengal and Assam has reverberated in Meghalaya where state assembly elections are 20 months away. Senior BJP leaders and MLAs AL Hek and Sanbor Shullai have already declared that the next government will have the BJP in the driving seat. What the duo have stopped short of doing is to state upfront if the BJP would get an absolute majority in 2028. The Congress a national party has been part of coalition governments since the 1970s until 2018 when the National Peoples' Party won with a decisive mandate and joined hands with the BJP which was already ruling at the Centre then. This has been the modus operandi of every regional party. The only difference being that it was the Congress that was the higher scorer in the first past the post system with regional parties agreeing to form coalition governments after bargaining for lucrative ministries. Even today the BJP with just two MLAs has one MLA as a minister because the NPP is aligned with the BJP.

Many rational aspirants to politics would argue that instead of being part of a coalition and playing second fiddle to regional parties it would make better sense to join the BJP which is now on a winning spree and which by 2028 might have been able to attract credible candidates to contest the state assembly elections. According to AL Hek, quite a few sitting and some failed MLAs have been sending overtures to him, indicating they want to join the Party. There was a time when the tribes viewed the BJP as a right wing majoritarian Hindutva party, that was antagonistic towards Christians and whose agenda is to turn India or Bharat into a Hindu majoritarian nation, the way that Pakistan and Bangladesh are Islamic nations. But that apprehension seemed to have given way to raw ambition and the quest for power. Hek's body language suggests that he is confident of maneuvering a crossover sooner than later. Naturally this gives the party confidence to publicly project momentum even before formal defections happen closer to 2028.

The BJP is clearly looking ahead to 2028 where it wants to move from a marginal player with just 2 MLAs to becoming a serious contender. Confidently announcing that "many will join" the BJP is also a tactical move as it sends a message that there are many who are ready to join the BJP bandwagon. Perhaps Hek is hinting especially at fence-sitters biding their time. The success of the BJP especially in dislodging Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal is being demonstrated that noting is impossible for the Party if it sets its sights on any state. In Meghalaya politicians are not known to have deep ideological moorings. They are all opportunists whose sole desire is to win elections without really fathoming what their real calling is—which is to serve the public cause. Winning an election means being upwardly mobile and serving one's personal needs first. Hence there is not a single poor MLA in Meghalaya. That should tell us something about the quest for power in the guise of public service. Politicians are and have been self-serving. It's the public that is misled again and again to elect the same old faces. Before the elections, people have this vain hope that they will deliver but realise soon enough that they are handing over power to a group of people who abuse that power for personal gains.

Letters to the Editor

Traffic jam and congestion in Shillong city and its solution

Editor,

Shillong is a city I am proud of and am fortunate to be living here from my school and college days and even now that I am working. I still enjoy the uniqueness of this place. Its beautiful scenery, rolling hills, fresh air and a pleasant climate draws people from different corners of our state who consider it a prestige to live here. With tourism thriving in our state it continues to draw people from other parts of our country and even outside our country. But I also clearly remember that for many decades till date the chronic traffic jam continues to dog this city.

From time to time the authorities have introduced various measures such as one-way traffic systems, restricted parking zones, regulated parking on road sides wherever possible, private parking facilities, and multilevel parking facilities in crowded areas. These measures are commendable but not sufficient because the number of people and vehicles keep on increasing day by day while the existing roads within the city remain the same.

One persistent question that keeps coming to my mind is, why do so many people including myself con-

tinue to live here in spite of all these problems? The reasons are many but I would like to discuss only two main reasons which compel people to live here.

First is employment opportunities. The city provides employment opportunities in state and central government offices, business activities, tourism, construction jobs and daily wage activities. This helps the various strata of citizens to meet all the expenditures for necessities like food, water, electricity, house rent, etc.

Second is education. Children from Nursery to Class X need great dedication from their parents for their safety, moral upbringing and constant presence in their lives till they complete their minimum education up to Class X; normally for a period of 10 to 15 years. During this long period, parents of these children are compelled to reside in and around the areas of reputed schools like St. Mary's, St. Edmund's, St. Anthony's, Pine Mount, KJP and others to be able to cater to their children's needs and at the same time fulfil their official duties or work obligations around the city.

Since Shillong city caters to these two most important and other needs it becomes the ideal location to settle down permanently and people are willing to stay put in spite of the chronic traffic jams and congestion. If they can have an alternative location where these two condi-

From Lumpongden to Umngot: The Battle for Meghalaya's Environment

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

Green-Tech Foundation's spectacular success in reversing the Government's decision to develop a resort at Lumpongden Island is indeed a landmark moment for agitational politics in Meghalaya. From a nondescript organization formed in 2019, the last few years have seen them take up a myriad of issues. There are those who are still unsure about their true antecedents: are they an independent organisation, a front for certain influential individuals, or a cover for a political organization? Many, in fact, have commented on the organization's silence on several important issues such as coal mining, river pollution, and others. I think such criticisms are unfair and reflect whataboutery. Their logic is based on the idea that if someone does not fight for every issue, they must be biased or harbour a hidden agenda. Viewed from that perspective, every movement becomes suspect. We should avoid cynicism and instead evaluate issues on their own merit.

In this case, the Government itself admitted that the cutting of trees on the island was done without permission, which I find hard to believe. The clarification that only temporary structures would be built on the island also appears to be a concession made by the government as a reaction to the protest. The local community, however, does not want the project to be scrapped, as they seek opportunities for local employment. Therefore, the decision to continue the project while excluding the island represents a satisfactory compromise.

I congratulate the organization for its success. Now it will be interesting to see whether they take up, with the same commitment, issues that do not directly involve the Government but instead implicate private players—such as influential business families, coal mafias, and mining cartels, the hollowing of mountains for export to Bangladesh, river pollution, and the destruction of catchment areas. They need not take up every issue, but they should address some that do not directly involve the State Government. After all, it is not only the Government that is responsible for our environmental crisis. That said, there is one issue involving the government that will need to be confronted at some point in the future: the now-suspended Umngot Hydro Electric Project.

I first became aware of the Umngot Hydro Electric Project a few years ago while reviewing its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Although I had visited villages that resisted the project, I had not fully appreciated the importance of the river to the community and their reluctance to accept the dam. This time, as part of a project on water conflict in South Asia funded by SOAS, University of London and implemented by National Law University Meghalaya, I had the opportunity to visit the site with Philippe Cullet (Senior Lecturer in Law at SOAS) and speak with the community. I was deeply moved not only by their kindness but also by the long history of interaction people have had with the river, which continues to this day.

The major concern for the communities regarding the project is its impact on their agricultural fields. Umsawwar, like many project-affected villages, has land both on the tableland and on the slopes of the canyon through which the Umngot flows. The most lucrative plots are those on these steep slopes, which were previously used for shifting cultivation but are now used for broom grass cultivation. The tableland plots are community-owned and allocated to households in need, while the slope lands are privately owned. These lands became privately owned after the village fought neighbouring villages over farming rights. After Umsawwar prevailed, some households purchased these plots and have cultivated them for decades. Although not every household owns land in this area, nearly every family depends on it—either by working on the plots or renting them for cultivation. Because blood was shed for these lands, the emotional connection to them is extremely strong. This has been true of Indigenous communities throughout history. Land to outsiders will never be relinquished without a fight.

While broom grass is the main crop, the system is not a complete monoculture. Farmers grow Khasi mandarin, guava, banana, jackfruit, pineapple, and other fruit trees among the broom grass clumps. During a transect walk through the plantations, our guide picked a fruit known as Soh Bataw and shared it with us—it tasted as if someone had poured liquid sugar into our mouths. There are also many wild fruits such as Soh Um, Soh Ling, and Soh Jakum, along with wild bananas and vegetables like Jamyrdoh, Jali, Jatira, Jalyndem, Jatyndon, Jawah, and various species of mushrooms. Many medicinal herbs

are also found here. In fact, in the house where we stayed, no meal was complete without at least one wild edible sourced from the Umngot. The community identified more than 100 species of food plants—both domesticated and wild—found along the river. Fruit trees thrive especially near the river, and both wild and cultivated fruits are sold in markets such as Jatah and Smit. Wild vegetables are also sold, though only during certain seasons. What is noteworthy is that while cultivated fruit trees belong to the farmer who planted them, wild vegetables and fruits can be harvested by anyone. Thus, even those who do not own land can harvest and sell these in the market.

These sources supplement income from broom grass, and their importance is likely to increase as broom prices continue to decline. The inclusion of fruit trees within broom plantations may represent a viable transition strategy for farmers. Although the government initially compensated farmers by purchasing broom, payments were prompt only at first; many have not received compensation for over six months.

Another vital resource from the Umngot is its aquatic life. The community listed nearly 30 species of fish, crustaceans, and amphibians they depend on. Some farmers build small huts on their plots and even dig ponds to rear fish caught from the river, which are later sold in the market. While many fish for self-consumption, others sell their harvest. Fishing practices are strictly regulated—poison, dynamite, and large nets are prohibited. Not long ago, an offender was fined over Rs 15,000 for violating these rules.

The primary concern regarding the dam is the potential loss of these highly productive lands. With the government increasingly stepping away from creating formal employment opportunities (with their rhetoric of looking beyond reservation), this loss would be even more severe. As one senior member of the Dorbar Shnong told us, "Not many can afford to leave the village permanently, and even those who do often return due to lack of opportunities." In response, the community has developed its own networks of local traders who transport their produce to markets. The village also has a rotational system for selling pork locally, ensuring that everyone has a chance to earn and that affordable meat is available within the community. How-

ever, the losses from any threats to Umngot would not be only economic.

Umngot is also a landscape imbued with spiritual meaning—home to puris and other spirits believed to inhabit the valley and its water sources. Some of the puris used to inhabit the large trees that grew along the valley. When those trees were felled for broom grass cultivation, they migrated to other spots within the surrounding area. There are stories of people who have been touched by the puris—a familiar motif in Khasi cosmogony. While the river itself is not worshipped, it is deeply respected for sustaining life. Everyone we met spoke of it with affection. The river also nurtures human connections and one story in particular stands out.

A Mei-jeid (grandma) told me that in the past, people would travel to low-Musiang to sell fruits from Umngot. Along the way, she would meet friends and give them fruits. By the time she reached the market, her basket would be empty—but she felt happy because she had met her friends.

This is what the river has given the people: a life full of memories—not just of mundane struggles, but also of moments of immense joy. This was threatened when the project was announced, prompting a long and determined resistance. Although the project has been suspended, fears remain that it may be revived. It would be meaningful if Green-Tech Foundation and its supporters visited Umsawwar and surrounding villages to assure the community that they will stand with them if the project is ever revived. That, to me, would be the true test of their credibility. Hopefully, that moment never comes—but if it does, one hopes they will be ready.

(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)

PUBLIC APOLOGY

This newspaper apologises to Theophany Lyndem who was mentioned in the article, "The High Price of Drugs: How Shillong's Dealers Enrich Themselves by Destroying Youth," written by Phibanihok Sohtun and published by this newspaper on Saturday, May 2, 2026. We believe the writer wrongly implicated Theophany Lyndem in this article. This newspaper published the article in good faith, considering the grave social concern caused by the drug menace in Meghalaya and the untold suffering it has caused to families.

When Grief Converts to Votes

By Shivani Pde

The state election results declared on May 4, 2026 cannot be reduced to a simple arithmetic of seats won and lost. They represent something far more complex and revealing about the present condition of India's democracy. These results reflect a political landscape where ideology, identity, emotion and lived experience are increasingly intertwined, producing outcomes that go beyond traditional electoral analysis.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's expanding influence across multiple states continues to shape the national narrative. Its strong performance in states such as Assam and its significant inroads into West Bengal indicate a consolidation of organisational strength and political reach that few parties have achieved in recent decades. This growth is not merely electoral; it reflects a deep engagement with large sections of the electorate that respond to its governance narrative, ideological positioning and campaign machinery.

At the same time, the results from Tamil Nadu and Kerala reaffirm an equally important reality. India remains structurally diverse in its political behaviour. Re-

or ideological positioning. This shift suggests that Indian voters are no longer passive recipients of political messaging. Instead, they are active participants in shaping what kind of leadership they consider legitimate.

Yet, this transformation raises important questions that cannot be ignored. When emotion becomes a significant driver of electoral outcomes, it introduces both strength and uncertainty into the democratic process. On one hand, it ensures that politics remains connected to human experience and social reality. On the other hand, it risks blurring the boundaries between governance and sentiment, potentially complicating the expectations placed on elected representatives.

The implications for democratic balance are equally significant. A strong mandate for dominant political forces, including the Bharatiya Janata Party, brings with it an enhanced responsibility to govern in a manner that is inclusive, transparent and responsive to diverse public concerns. At the same time, the fragmentation or weakening of opposition structures in several regions raises concerns about the long term vibrancy of demo-

"One of the most striking outcomes is the victory of Ratna Debnath, associated with the case linked to RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. Her win is not simply a personal political success; it represents a deeper shift in the emotional and moral landscape of electoral politics. She entered the political arena not as a career politician shaped by party hierarchies, but as an individual whose public identity is rooted in personal tragedy and the demand for justice."

gional identities, linguistic pride, cultural distinctions and local leadership continue to exert a powerful influence over voter choices. These states remind us that Indian democracy is not a monolith but a layered and evolving system where national and regional forces constantly interact and sometimes collide.

However, the most significant transformation in this election cycle cannot be understood through party performance alone. It lies in the nature of the candidates who have emerged and the kinds of narratives that have found resonance with voters.

One of the most striking outcomes is the victory of Ratna Debnath, associated with the case linked to RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. Her win is not simply a personal political success; it represents a deeper shift in the emotional and moral landscape of electoral politics. She entered the political arena not as a career politician shaped by party hierarchies, but as an individual whose public identity is rooted in personal tragedy and the demand for justice. Her victory reflects a moment where grief has transitioned into political voice, and where private suffering has been transformed into collective expression through the ballot. Voters did not merely select a candidate; they responded to a narrative that symbolises unresolved questions about accountability, safety and institutional responsibility. This marks a profound departure from conventional political pathways, where experience and party affiliation once dominated electoral viability.

Across multiple constituencies, similar patterns are emerging. Candidates who do not fit traditional political profiles are gaining visibility and support. These include individuals from grassroots movements, civil society backgrounds and emotionally charged public contexts. The electorate appears increasingly willing to engage with representatives who embody lived realities rather than purely strategic

cratic debate. A healthy democracy depends not only on decisive victories but also on the presence of strong alternative voices capable of questioning authority and offering competing visions.

What emerges from these elections is not a single narrative but a convergence of multiple political realities. There is the narrative of consolidation, where established parties continue to strengthen their positions. There is the narrative of regional assertion, where local identities remain deeply influential. And there is the emerging narrative of emotional representation, where personal stories and collective memory increasingly shape political outcomes.

India's democracy is therefore entering a new phase, one that is more emotionally expressive, more individually driven and more socially complex. The voter is no longer responding solely to promises of development or ideological alignment. Instead, the voter is responding to trust, relatability and the perceived authenticity of those who seek representation.

This evolution does not diminish democracy; rather, it expands its boundaries. However, it also demands greater maturity from both political actors and institutions. Emotional legitimacy must be matched with administrative capability. Symbolic representation must translate into tangible governance. Otherwise, the gap between expectation and delivery may widen further.

Ultimately, these elections suggest that India is witnessing a subtle but significant transformation in its democratic culture. Politics is no longer confined to party offices, campaign rallies or manifesto documents. It now exists in personal histories, public emotions and collective memory.

The 2026 results are therefore not just a reflection of who won or lost. They are a reminder that in contemporary India, democracy is being continuously rewritten by its people, and that sometimes, the most powerful mandate is not just political but it is deeply human.

Khasi Hills, Sohra and West Khasi Hills for office work, education and transport of agricultural and horticultural products.

It will also open up business and tourism opportunities for many villages along the whole stretch of this road and adjacent tourism spots like the Sweet Falls, Ever Living Museum, Ka ling Sad of the Syiem of Hima Khyrim, Jongksha, Laitum, Nongrong, Lum Shyllong and many beautiful hills and valleys in these areas.

I sincerely hope and pray that the Government will implement these suggestions to reduce traffic jam and congestion in Shillong city.

Yours etc.,
-Sipulshon Kharbikchiev
Shillong -1

Concern Over Unregulated Rise in Taxi Fares in Shillong

Editor,

I wish to draw attention to the continuous and uncalculated rise in local taxi fares in Shillong, which has become a matter of concern since COVID-19 for many daily commuters, particularly students. During the lockdown period, the increase in fares was understandable due to restrictions on passenger capacity. However, even after normalcy has returned, these higher fares have not been revised. On the contrary, taxis are now accommodating five to six passengers

while continuing to charge the elevated rates introduced during the pandemic.

This situation places an unfair financial burden on regular commuters. For students especially, the cost of daily travel has become increasingly difficult to manage. Paying around Rs 40 each day to commute to college may appear modest at first glance, but over time it accumulates into a significant expense, adding to the already rising cost of education and living.

In light of this, I request the concerned authorities to take practical steps to address the issue. Fixing standard fares for common routes and ensuring strict adherence through proper monitoring would help prevent overcharging. Regular inspections could further ensure compliance. Additionally, introducing more regulated shared taxi services with clearly defined and transparent pricing would make daily travel more affordable and equitable.

I respectfully urge the authorities to look into this matter and take necessary action so that fares remain reasonable and fair for both drivers and passengers.

I hope this issue receives the attention it deserves.

Yours etc.,
Pragya Chettri,
Shillong

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

Sindoor as success

PAKISTAN obviously learned a lesson from Operation Sindoor, the military offensive that India undertook against it mainly targeting terrorist outfits, following the Pulwama terrorist mayhem on April 22 last year. The Indian response was swift, this coming in a matter of a fortnight, starting from May 7 and running into three days and nights. This, by far, was the strongest response from India to Pakistan in situations of attacks on Indian soil from Pakistan-trained Kashmiri militants. The Surgical Strikes in 2019, ordered by the Narendra Modi government in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama, Kashmir, paled in significance compared to the stronger military offensive last year. A mediation from the US president Donald Trump helped end the engagement through an abrupt ceasefire. Trump's claim was that India and Pakistan were edging towards a nuclear disaster, as Pakistan caught in an unenviable situation would have initiated such a front against India.

On the positive side, a prolonged war and more devastation were avoided. India could drill sense into the heads of the Pakistani generals and put the political establishment there on full alert against such future machinations. India has demonstrated, as to what extent it was prepared to go if there is going to be a recurrence. The lack of an aggressive response from India to the Mumbai terror attacks during the UPA term of Manmohan Singh had emboldened the Pakistani military establishment to aggressively pursue their agenda of bleeding India with a thousand cuts. Days were when the Pakistani generals threatened India with a nuclear attack should New Delhi dare plan a military offensive. Their bluff was called in 2019 itself, when IAF jets reached upto the military headquarters of Rawalpindi, unchallenged. That they, however, dared to continue with their patronage of terror was evident from the Pulwama massacres.

Clearly, Operation Sindoor sent the right signals to the Pakistani establishment. There have been fewer terrorist attacks in Kashmir in the last one year. After the Surgical Strikes, the frequent and unprovoked border firings from the Pakistani soldiers along the Line of Control had also subsided. Terrorist outfits in Pakistan are reportedly facing serious odds and this is true of those in the Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir too—a beehive of Kashmiri terrorists for many years. What hurts Pakistan is also the abrogation of the Indus Water Treaty by India following the Pulwama attack. India faced odds too in the form of Pakistan's denial of its flying zones to Indian aircraft, which were subsequently forced to take circuitous routes, resulting in a hike in airfares that hit passengers. Overall, Operation Sindoor was the right response at the right time. Peace in the subcontinent is easier said than done. Multiple geopolitical interests are clashing, with the US siding with Pakistan often even as Washington speaks out against terrorism. China, nearer home, is fishing in troubled waters. American dependence on Pakistan is increasing with Islamabad's mediatory role in the Iran war while India finds itself at odds with the US on several fronts.

Opposition Mukh Bharat? Verdict 2026 and the BJP's Expanding Hegemony

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Soon after taking over as BJP president in 2014, Amit Shah spoke of his vision of a 'Congress-mukt Bharat'. At the time, it sounded more like political bravado than a credible roadmap. Twelve years on, as Union home minister, Shah may well argue that the project has moved a step further—towards what could be described as an 'opposition-mukt Bharat'.

If there is one unmistakable message from Verdict 2026, it is this: the BJP today occupies a more dominant position in Indian politics than at any point since Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014.

At first glance, that may seem counterintuitive. After all, in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala, non-BJP, non-NDA governments have come to power. But these are exceptions that prove the rule. Tamil Nadu remains sui generis—perhaps the only state where a first day, first show film star-turned-politician can still deliver a blockbuster electoral debut. Kerala, meanwhile, continues to march to its own rhythm: a state where the BJP is yet to emerge as a serious contender for power, even if its three-seat breakthrough marks a symbolic foothold.

Step back, though, and the national picture is stark. The BJP and its allies are now in power in 21 of India's 28 states. From the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal, the political map is overwhelmingly saffron, with Jharkhand the lone outlier. This is not just electoral success—it is political saturation.

What makes this moment even more significant is the speed of the turnaround. Just two years ago, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections had raised hopes that India's drift towards one-party dominance had been arrested. A resurgent Congress, alongside a loose coalition of regional forces under the INDIA alliance banner, seemed to have reopened the space for competitive, multi-party politics. That window has now decisively shut.

In the last 24 months, key constituents of that opposition bloc have suffered successive setbacks. The Shiv Sena (UBT) was routed in Maharashtra. The Aam Aadmi Party lost Delhi. The RJD was diminished in Bihar. Naveen Patnaik's long, unbroken tenure in Odisha came to an abrupt end. And now, two of the most formidable re-

gional citadels—the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the TMC in West Bengal—have been breached.

Even Nitish Kumar, once the principal architect of opposition unity, finds himself politically tethered to the BJP. This is not a series of isolated defeats. It is a pattern—and a warning.

Part of the explanation lies in the complacency of regional forces. Too many leaders treated their vote banks as fixed deposits—secure, predictable, and always encashable. Mamata Banerjee, after three terms in West Bengal, appeared convinced that her Muslim-Mahila (woman) support base would hold firm. In doing so, she seemed to underestimate both the depth of anti-incumbency and the scale of a parallel Hindu consolidation.

Similarly, the DMK, long accustomed to the rhythms of Dravidian duopoly politics, did not fully grasp the disruptive potential of Vijay's entry until it was too late. Complacency, when combined with political arrogance, is often fatal.

The Congress, for its part, misread the 2024 verdict. Surviving the BJP juggernaut was interpreted as revival. But a tally of 99 seats against the BJP's 240 was less a comeback than a reprieve. The deeper organisational weaknesses—drift, inertia, and a lingering sense of entitlement—remained unaddressed.

Worse, instead of consolidating opposition unity, Congress and its allies allowed competitive ambitions to override collective strategy. In 2026, this fragmentation was on full display: the TMC and Congress clashed in Bengal, while the DMK and Congress struggled to present a cohesive front in Tamil Nadu.

Ego trumped arithmetic—and the BJP capitalised. For what distinguishes the BJP in its current avatar is not just ideological clarity or leadership centrality, but its evolution into the most formidable electoral machine in post-independence India. It is relentless, adaptive, and unencumbered by sentiment. No terrain is considered too hostile; no expansion too ambitious.

West Bengal offers the clearest illustration. From zero seats in 2011 to a 200-plus tally in 2026 is not merely an electoral leap—it is a sus-

tained, 15-year political project. The BJP's rise in the state was methodical, layered, and ultimately overwhelming. Its final push resembled a high-intensity campaign that left little to chance. A combination of organisational depth, narrative control, and the strategic use of institutional levers, be it the EC or ED, ensured that the Mamata Banerjee government was caught off guard. For the BJP, Bengal was not just another victory—it was proof of their winning formula.

In the process, the limits of cultural sub-nationalism as a political shield were also exposed. Mamata Banerjee's 2021 success had rested on positioning herself as 'Bengal's daughter' against 'outsiders' from Delhi. But such identity-driven narratives have a shelf life. This time, the BJP reframed the contest—shifting the discourse towards illegal immigration, local corruption, and governance fatigue.

A similar pattern played out in Tamil Nadu. M.K. Stalin attempted to repackage Dravidian politics through a 'Dravidian 2.0' lens, projecting resistance to the Centre. But a younger, more impatient electorate proved less receptive to ideological binaries. The Instagram generation is not easily mobilised by legacy narratives; it seeks novelty, immediacy, and visible change.

Whether this signals the end of the traditional regional satrap model is still uncertain. But there is little doubt that Indian politics is undergoing a structural shift. The balance of power has tilted decisively towards a centralised, leader-driven formation capable of exerting influence across state boundaries.

This marks a clear departure from the coalition era between 1991 and 2014, when regional parties could both anchor their states and dictate terms in Delhi. That equilibrium has eroded.

In its place has emerged an expansionist BJP that combines smart political messaging (recall the optics of PM Modi eating jhalumuri in Bengal) with a calibrated carrot-and-stick approach. Allies are accommodated; adversaries are pressured. The playing field, increasingly, is uneven.

In such an environment, the opposition's challenge is not

merely electoral—it is existential. A fragmented, reactive opposition cannot counter a cohesive, forward-moving political machine. Unless it can forge a shared agenda, a common narrative, and a minimum level of trust, its space will continue to shrink.

With the 2029 general elections just three years away—and a series of crucial state contests in between—the BJP's momentum is unlikely to slow. If anything, these interim battles may serve as staging grounds for a final, decisive push.

Which brings us back to Amit Shah's original vision. The idea of a 'Congress-mukt Bharat' may already be partially realised. The larger question now is whether India is drifting towards something more consequential: an 'opposition-mukt Bharat'.

If that trajectory is to be altered, the response must come sooner rather than later. For what is at stake is not just electoral balance, but the foundational idea of India as a diverse, multi-party democracy.

Postscript: Shortly after the Bengal result, I asked a BJP leader, "What next?" He smiled and said, "We've never had a BJP chief minister in Punjab... so who knows?"

Barely one year frontier been crossed, the next target is already in sight.

(The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeep.sardesai52@gmail.com)

PUBLIC APOLOGY

This newspaper apologises to Sakani Toi, who was mentioned in the article, "The High Price of Drugs: How Shillong's Dealers Enrich Themselves by Destroying Youth," written by Phibanihok Sohtun and published by this newspaper on Saturday, May 2, 2026. We believe the writer wrongly implicated Sakani Toi in this article. This newspaper published the article in good faith, considering the grave social concern caused by the drug menace in Meghalaya and the untold suffering it has caused to families. Expressing disappointment, Sakani clarified that she has no link to any illegal activities concerning drug-related issues in Shillong. She also stated that she is still unmarried and that Alberto Raplang is not her husband, as mentioned in the article. Mentioning her name in the article has affected her reputation.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

West Bengal Assembly Elections a Watershed Moment

Editor,
The 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections mark a watershed moment in the state's political history. The verdict delivered by the people reflects both rejection of tyranny of TMC and a reaffirmation of democratic values. The peaceful conduct of the polls, unprecedented in over five decades, underscores the effectiveness of institutional safeguards and the resilience of India's democratic framework. Celebrations by government employees, police personnel, and ordinary citizens suggest relief and a sense of liberation from authoritarian regime unprecedented in the annals of Indian political history since independence. Deployment of Central Armed Police Forces and strict monitoring ensured fairness of the electoral process and safety of the electorates. The people's verdict, coupled with the Election Commission's success in ensuring a peaceful conduct of election, has reaffirmed the vitality of India's democracy. This moment should be leveraged to strengthen governance, uphold constitutional values, and deepen citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

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

The Pillars of Progress: Celebrating the Hands That Build Meghalaya

By Banwan Lyngdoh

It was a pleasant surprise on May 1 to learn that International Workers' Day was celebrated at the state level after many years. Previously, it appeared that nobody cared about the workers or the hands that build Meghalaya, as one of the most important days for labourers had been overlooked. Beyond the optics, the true essence of the celebration lay in the presence of hundreds of workers at U Soso Tham auditorium—the very hands that drive Meghalaya's progress—and the support announced to them.

To appreciate the importance of workers, let us understand some statistics. Today, more than 5,000 infrastructure projects worth over Rs 29,000 crore are underway across Meghalaya. Think about what that means—there are 5,000 sites where men and women pick up their tools and building something that will outlast all of us.

In the last eight years, 2,400 km of new roads have been added while 2,800 running metres of bridges are being constructed. Besides, there are 33 new power substations, 2,200 km of new HT lines, and 151 health sub-centres built. Adding to the statistics, the state government, from 2019 to 2025, has created more than 19,000 jobs in the construction sector, and by 2032, it plans to create an additional 70,000 jobs in the sector.

What about the wages? As per the revised rates for January 2025, every unskilled worker in Meghalaya gets paid Rs 525 per day, which is the highest in the Northeast and the third highest in India. A semi-skilled worker's wages is Rs 565 (highest in the region and fourth highest in India); a skilled worker's wages stands at Rs 605 (highest in the region and fifth highest in India) while a highly-skilled labourer gets Rs 645 as wages.

This high wage floor ensures that the benefits of the state's 10% growth rate are felt directly in the pockets of the labourers. The government has approved the Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA) for muster roll workers, an initiative that injects an additional Rs 10 crore annually to benefit thousands of muster roll workers across various departments, ensuring their income keeps pace with inflation.

On May 1, four major schemes meant for workers' welfare were launched. Every active registered construction worker who contributed to the Building & Other Construction Workers Welfare Board for at least one year and has worked for 90 days received Rs 5,000 directly into their bank account. There were 11,373 beneficiaries who benefited from this scheme, which was named as the Chief Minister's Labour Income Grant for House Builders and Tradeworkers or CM LIGHT.

Another scheme, which was launched, was ENABLE or "Enhancing Necessary Ability for Better Learning Environment". Under ENABLE, Rs 7.5 crore is being invested in schools so that children of workers study with dignity. The schools have to reserve 5% of seats for BOCW workers' families, and the children will be provided 100% tuition fee waiver.

Under the BUILD scheme or "Boosting and Upgrading Infrastructure for Livelihood and Development", the state government is directing Rs 6 crore into community infrastructure that creates jobs while it is built.

And then there was the launch of the Startup Toolkit Scheme. Under this, the workers will be provided with Rs 8,000 worth of tools to 6,656 trained workers so that skills become livelihoods, and training becomes income.

The workers should also know that the Building & Other Construction Workers Welfare Board provides

many social security measures to the workers registered under the board. Some of these include educational scholarship for the children of our beneficiaries, assistance for marriage and pensionary benefits. All these benefits are available to active registered workers and their family members, reinforcing the government's commitment to security across every stage of life.

In addition to the existing measures towards their social security, the Board will pay every premium on behalf of every active registered worker for PMJJBY (Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana), PMSBY (Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana), and PM-SYM (Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan). This includes Rs 2 lakh life insurance cover, Rs 2 lakh accident cover, and a pension of Rs 3,000 per month after attaining the age of 60.

What does all this mean to a worker like Kong Jacinta Thabab? According to her, the transition from a worker to a skilled participant in the state's growth story began with a training programme, which has yielded benefits that have directly and positively impacted her livelihood.

Similarly, Kong Menu Diengdoh was filled with gratitude for the tangible support reaching her household. The Startup Toolkit and assistance under the CM LIGHT scheme will improve her livelihood. For Kong Menu, the impact is multi-generational. She highlighted that the scholarship for children was a vital lifeline for families facing financial challenges and unstable employment.

Kong Banisha Lynrah echoed this sentiment from the perspective of an economically weaker background. The tools will not only help her repair her home, but also carry out work on their own. This practical assistance will reduce her family's expenses and make it easier to sustain their daily life.

These voices are not isolated instances of luck; they are the intended results of a comprehensive governance model that places the worker at the very centre of the state's development map. The story of Meghalaya serves as a powerful testament to what happens when economic momentum is intentionally harnessed for social justice.

The state has moved beyond temporary relief to establish a comprehensive, lifecycle social security system. These schemes and assistance are primarily funded through a 1% labour cess, which has accumulated a welfare fund of approximately Rs 400 crore. Managed by the Meghalaya Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board, this ecosystem is designed to be accessible, with a one-time registration fee of just Rs 10 and a monthly contribution of Rs 30.

It is true that there are unresolved issues which the state is currently grappling with. But as the state moves forward in resolving legacy issues and confronting new problems, we need to ponder upon the vision set by the Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma. According to him, the state requires the addition and training of 50,000 new workers over the next six years, marking a significant opportunity for the state's youth. That is a staggering number for a small state like Meghalaya. Are our youths ready to fill the requirement?

The Chief Minister himself declared that our workers are the "pillars of the state". When the pillars are strong, secure, and respected, the entire structure of society rises with them. The testimonies of Jacinta, Menu, and Banisha are not just stories of individuals; they are the pulse of a state that is giving its workers the dignity and future they deserve.

Letters to the Editor

Religion Not a Political Mandate for Tribal Identity

Editor,
The recent statement by the VPP supremo at a low-attended public meeting at Yawmusiang, Jowai where the majority follow Niamtre and the Bible teaches him to love his own community calls for a clear and honest response. Faith can guide personal values, but it should not be used as a political tool to define or prioritise one community over others.

Let us be clear: the Bible does not speak about the Khasi or Jaintia people. Its history is centred on the Israelites, in a completely different time and place, far removed from the indigenous realities of Northeast India. To say that the Bible teaches political loyalty to one's own tribe is not just a misunderstanding—it is a distortion.

Christianity, at its core, is universal. It teaches love for all, not just for one's own group. True faith encourages compassion beyond boundaries, not selective support for a particular community. Using it to justify community-based politics reduces an important religion into a narrow political tool.

More importantly, the Khasi and Jaintia people already have strong moral foundations. Long before Christianity arrived, indigenous belief systems like Niamtre and Niam Khasi had well-established values—respect for nature, and responsibility toward the community. These values are not borrowed; they are part of our own heritage.

The real concern is not someone's personal faith, but how that faith is used

in politics. This is where a line must be drawn. When religion is used to define political identity, it creates division, excludes others, and weakens the plural nature of our society.

It is also important to consider where this statement was made: Speaking at a public gathering in Yawmusiang, Jowai where the majority follow Niamtre and choosing to highlight Christianity in a political message raises a fair question: what was the intention? Was it meant to unite people, or does it suggest that one belief is being placed above others in a shared public space?

In a diverse society, leaders must be sensitive to context. When religion is highlighted in places where other belief systems are deeply rooted, it can be seen not as guidance, but as a political signal. Such situations call for careful words, not strong assertions especially when they may disturb social harmony.

Meghalaya is not a theocratic state. It is home to many beliefs—Christian, Hindu, Niamtre, Niam Khasi, Islam, and others all equally valid. Political leadership should focus on constitutional values, mutual respect, and inclusive governance, not religious messaging.

Faith is a personal matter. Community identity comes from history and culture. Politics should not mix the two. Any attempt to combine religion with tribal political identity is not only misguided—it is socially risky.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

VPP Missing When It Matters Most

Editor,
The recent decision by

the Voice of the People Party (VPP) to abstain from the All-Party Meeting convened on the Report of the Expert Committee on State Reservation Policy raises serious concerns about its commitment towards one of the most sensitive and significant issues affecting the State and its people.

The reservation policy debate has, for years, remained a major political and social issue. It has repeatedly been projected by several political leaders as a matter of justice, representation, and balance among communities. Public meetings, statements, protests, and political campaigns were carried out vigorously in the name of protecting the interests of the people. However, when a crucial opportunity finally arose to discuss the matter at the highest level through an official all-party platform, the decision of the party to stay away from the meeting sends a deeply disappointing message.

Elected representatives are entrusted with the responsibility of voicing the concerns and aspirations of the people. Such responsibilities cannot be selectively exercised based on convenience or political calculations. If the Voice of the People Party genuinely considers the reservation policy issue important, then participation in a formal discussion convened by the Government should have been treated as a priority rather than an inconvenience.

The explanation that the timing was "not conducive" due to other pressing issues appears inadequate considering the gravity of the matter. Governance always involves handling multiple important issues simultaneously. That is precisely why leaders are elected—to ensure that critical matters are addressed through dialogue, nego-

tiation, and representation. Avoiding such meetings only weakens the democratic process and deprives the people of having their concerns articulated effectively before decision-makers. More importantly, refusing to attend such a significant meeting reflects poorly on political leadership and administrative seriousness. It raises questions about whether the issue was genuinely pursued in the interest of the people or merely used as a political talking point. When leaders repeatedly assure the public that they are fighting for a cause, they must demonstrate that commitment during decisive moments. Missing an opportunity to participate in discussions of this magnitude can only be viewed as political irresponsibility and incompetence.

All-party meetings are not mere formalities. They serve as important democratic platforms where differing viewpoints are presented, debated, and considered before major decisions are taken. Such forums ensure that every voice is heard and that policies evolve through consultation rather than unilateral action. Participation is therefore essential, even when disagreements exist. Constructive engagement often yields better outcomes than political absence. If there were concerns regarding the report, the proper course of action would have been to attend the meeting, present objections, and strongly defend the interests of the people. Boycotting the process achieves little and risks isolating the very communities whose interests leaders claim to protect.

At a time when people expect maturity, accountability, and active representation from their elected leaders, such missed opportunities are unfortunate. Important

matters concerning the future of the State should rise above political hesitation and require sincere participation from all stakeholders. Democracy functions best when leaders choose dialogue over absence and responsibility over excuses.

Yours etc,
Ferdinand Syiem,
Via email

Taking the Shillong LitFest to Delhi

Editor,
Shillong Literary Festival 2026—New Delhi Prelude is scheduled for May 8 and 9, 2026, at Bikaner House, Pandara Road, New Delhi.

At a time when regional voices often struggle for national visibility, the announcement of The Shillong Literary Festival 2026—A New Delhi Prelude comes as a refreshing and timely intervention. It is not merely an event; it is a statement—one that places the literary and cultural wealth of Meghalaya firmly on the wider national canvas.

The spotlight on scholars like Dr Barbara S. Sangma adds both credibility and depth to the initiative. Her work on Garo literature, folk theatre, and cultural studies represent the lived narratives and intellectual traditions of the region—voices that deserve far greater space in mainstream discourse.

What makes this initiative particularly significant is its outreach. By taking the festival beyond Shillong to New Delhi, the organisers have effectively built a cultural bridge, opening doors for dialogue, recognition, and inclusion. In today's context, such platforms are not just desirable—they are necessary.

"Don't watch the clock; do what it does."

Keep going."

Sam Levenson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.266 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2026

Revisiting Coal Mining Regulations

FROM perusing the High Court rulings from time to time it is obvious that the State Government has failed to prevent illegal coal mining since it was banned in 2014 and also failed to stop its transportation. This is expected unless the state itself believes in the diktat of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which is politically untenable because coal mining is the economic pillar on which elections are won or lost. If the voters of East Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills where the coal mines are located are assured that the state will fight to restore their mining rights which until such time means that state will look the other way while mining continues, those politicians are sure to win elections. Candidates standing on the platform of saving the environment and restoring the rivers that are poisoned due to acid mine drainage are unlikely to win elections. Politics is a great driver of what issues can and cannot be taken up. No political party till date has spoken about the continued onslaught on the environment due to coal mining. No political Has thus far ever spoken about reclaiming abandoned the nearly 21,000 abandoned coal mines in the state and re-greening them for the sake of eco-restoration.

Meghalaya, Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has stated upfront that it is impossible for the state to keep a check on 20,000 coal mines operating in the state. The proposal by the High Court to use central forces was shot down by the government for reasons best known to the state. Now the point is that coal mining yields livelihoods for several people in Meghalaya including for miners who risk their lives to go down into the mines which is a gamble every time since the mines could suddenly flood and claim their lives. But coal mining like the mining of limestone and boulders serve a circular economy. While some mine owners are direct beneficiaries there are many indirect beneficiaries down the line from truck owners to drivers, food stall owners and many such utility providers. The downside with illegal mining is that the state does not earn any revenue since the market has gone underground. Individuals who facilitate the transportation of such illegally mined coal namely the businessman-police-politician nexus are the largest beneficiaries of the illegally-run coal economy.

There was a time when Late PA Sangma initiated a policy where the revenue earned from coal and limestone was to be diverted to funding primary schools in the state. That was one of the best policies initiated in Meghalaya in 1988 when PA Sangma took over as the Chief Minister of Meghalaya. In fact he wanted to bring many policy changes that could affect the business lobby in Meghalaya and for which he lost his seat in 1990. It was the business lobby then that got together and compelled the state politicians who were part of the coalition government then, including political stalwarts like BB Lyngdoh to pull out of the PA Sangma-led government. It is but natural that such lessons would be embedded in the psyche of his children who are now in politics and who have no illusions about bringing change knowing fully well that such actions involve a political cost. Hence continues the illegal coal mining saga in Meghalaya even while the NGT and the Meghalaya High Court watch in dismay at their rulings flouted. Is there a way forward?

At the start of 2026, I had gone to Somnath for the Somnath Swabhiman Parv, marking a thousand years since the first attack on the Somnath Temple. Now, I will be back in Somnath on 11th May to mark 75 years since the inauguration of the restored Temple by the then President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In less than half a year, it is a privilege to be attending two important milestones relating to Somnath and its journey from ruin to renewal or what we describe as from Vidhvans to Srijan.

Somnath gives us a civilisational message. The vast sea before it evokes timelessness. The waves tell us... that no matter how fierce the storms are or how turbulent the tides are, one can always rise again with dignity and strength. The waves return to the shore, as though reminding every generation that the spirit of the people can never be subdued for long.

Our ancient scriptures say: परमासु च परिकरमयु पृथिवीकर्मसंभवम्. It means, a Pradakshina of the divine Prabhassa (Somnath) is equal to a Pradakshina of the whole earth itself! While people have come here to pray, they have also experienced the remarkable continuity of a civilisation whose flame could never be extinguished. Empires rose and fell, tides changed, history moved through conquest and upheaval, yet Somnath continued to endure in our consciousness.

It is time to remember the countless greats who stood firm in the face of tyranny. There were Lakulisha and Soma Sarman, who transformed Prabhassa into a great centre of philosophy. Chakravarti Maharaja Dharasena IV of Vallabhi built the Second Temple three centuries ago. Bhima Deva, Jayapala and Anandapala will always be remembered for defending civilisational honour against invasions. It is said that Raja Bhoja too helped with the reconstruction. Karna Deva and Siddharaja Jayasimha played a vital role in restoring Gujarat's political and cultural strength.

Bhava Brihaspati, Kumaramapala Solanki and the Pashupata Acharyas rebuilt and sustained the shrine as a great centre of worship

and learning. Vishaladeva Vaghela and Tripurantaka protected its intellectual and spiritual traditions. Mahipaladeva and Ra Khangar were instrumental in reviving worship after destruction. Purnyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar, whose 300th birth centenary is being marked, ensured the continuity of devotion in the most difficult of times. There were the Gaekwads of Baroda, who safeguarded the rights of pilgrims. And of course, our soil is blessed to have nurtured brave personalities like Veer Hamirji Gohil and Veer Vegdaji Bhil, whose sacrifice and courage have become a part of Somnath's living memory.

In the 1940s, when the spirit of freedom swept across India and the foundations of a new republic were being laid under the leadership of towering figures like Sardar Patel, one thing continued to trouble him deeply... the condition of Somnath. On 13th November 1947, during Diwali time, he stood next to the dilapidated ruins of the temple with sea-water in his hands and said, "On this auspicious day of the (Gujarati) New Year, we have decided that Somnath should be reconstructed. You, people of Saurashtra, should do your best. This is a holy task in which all should participate." On one clarion call of Sardar Patel, it was not only the people of Gujarat but also the people of the whole of India that responded enthusiastically.

Unfortunately, fate did not allow Sardar Patel to witness the fulfilment of the dream he

had so passionately championed. Before the restored Somnath Temple could open its doors to devotees, he had departed from this world. Yet, his impact continued to be felt over the sacred shores of Prabhas Patan. His vision was championed by Shri KM Munshi, ably supported by the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar. In 1951, when the Temple was complete, it was decided to call the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, for the ceremony. Overcoming strong objections from the then Prime Minister Pandit Nehru, Dr. Prasad graced the ceremony, thus making it even more special and historic.

My mind also goes back to October 2001, when I had just taken over as Chief Minister. On 31st October 2001, the Jayanti of Sardar Patel, the Gujarat Government had the honour of organising a programme to mark 50 years since the Somnath Temple opened its doors. It also coincided with the 125th birth anniversary celebrations of Sardar Patel. The then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the then Home Minister Shri LK Advani attended the programme. During his speech on 11th May 1951, Dr. Rajendra Prasad said that the Somnath Temple proclaims to the world that anything with unparalleled faith and love cannot be destroyed. He expressed hope that this Temple will live in the hearts of people. He also said that the restoration of the Temple was a fulfilment of Sardar Patel's dream, but taking that spirit forward, it is important that we restore prosperity to the lives of people. These

are important and inspiring messages he gave.

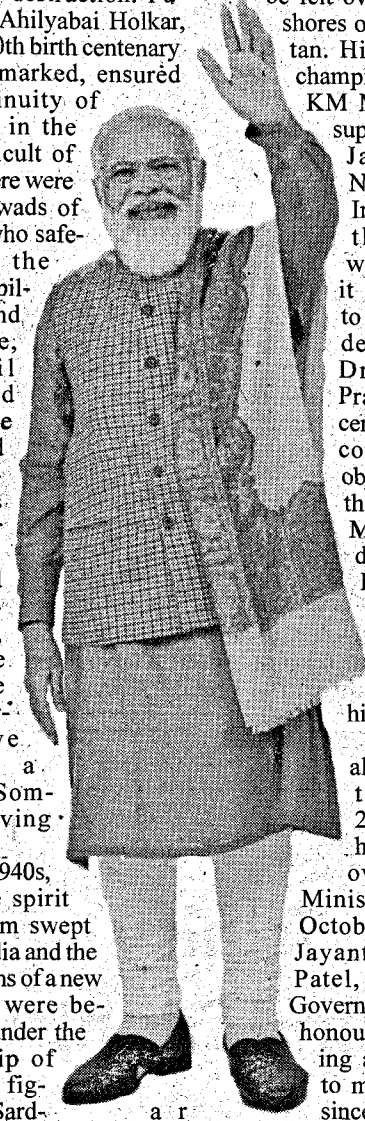
This is the path we have been walking for over a decade. I consider it my good fortune that, inspired by the principle of 'Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi', from Somnath to Kashi, Kamakhya to Kedamath, Ayodhya to Ujjain, Trimbakeshwar to Srisailem, our team has had the opportunity to equip our spiritual centres with the latest facilities while at the same time preserving their traditional character. This, along with efforts to improve connectivity, ensures more people can visit them. It boosts the local economy, secures livelihoods and deepens the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'.

The struggles and sacrifices of those who laid down their lives to protect Somnath and those who rebuilt it time and again will never be forgotten. Countless individuals from different corners of India contributed to restoring its glory. They saw every part of Bharat as sacred, bound together by a sense of oneness that transcended geography. In a world often marked by divisions, this spirit of unity is more relevant than ever. Somnath will continue to stand tall in all its glory because the sense of unity and shared civilisational consciousness lives on in the hearts of every Indian. As a tribute to this, remembering the extraordinary courage of a thousand years, there will be special Pujas at Somnath for the next thousand days. It is gladdening to see several people donating for these Pujas as well.

I urge my fellow Indians to travel to Somnath in this special time. When you stand on the shores of Somnath, let its ancient echoes speak to you. You will not only be overwhelmed by devotion but will also feel the strong pulse of a civilisational spirit that refuses to fade, that is unbroken and unyielding. You will experience Bharat's unconquerable spirit and understand why, despite every effort, our culture remained undefeated and you will have the opportunity to behold the vision of eternal triumph. It will surely be unforgettable.

Jai Somnath,
(Shri Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister of India and is also the Chairman of the Shree Somnath Trust.)

By Shri Narendra Modi



The Illusion of Friendship in the Age of AI

By Samyaka Patil

We live inside a digital glass rectangle. Our friendships happen through chat windows, and we check in on our people through group texts. We congratulate each other with emojis, plan gatherings with shared calendars, and sustain connections with voice notes.

It isn't hard to argue that for most, "real" friendship now lies in these digital conversations, while the occasional dinner or rendezvous serves merely as a pleasant supplement. When you think of your friend, do you see a face or perhaps a small glowing circle atop a messaging app? Friendship has already been abstracted into text, which leaps treating a Large Language Model (LLM) as a friend a far less dramatic ordeal than it might sound. To those who have already stripped away tone, voice, physical presence, and even shared spaces, and convinced themselves that it is words and symbols that sustain the relationship, why should the next step feel any different? Why should trying to enter a chat box and receiving artificial words feel akin to betrayal of a connection?

Enter ChatGPT - released in 2022 and amongst the many upcoming large language models, is a conversational artificial intelligence chatbot designed to answer questions and respond to queries in a way that sounds hauntingly natural and human. Owned by multi-billion dollar corporation OpenAI, the chatbot's use cases span writing emails, doing homework, producing code or generating other forms of content. Yet, this simple answering engine has now blurred into what some people might consider a digital companion. ChatGPT's apparent humanity seems to grow with every update, as it becomes more agreeable, and appears increasingly sentient.

Trained on an estimated 45TB of data from across the internet, ChatGPT carries out seamless back-and-forth conversations. Its architecture enables it to "understand" context, follow-up queries, and adapt its outputs based on the user's style. Over time, it has become exceedingly agreeable, always claiming that you are right and rarely ever refuting ideas, even those that could be potentially harmful. This phenomenon has now come to be known as 'sycophancy' - the tendency for LLMs to excessively agree with users even at the expense of truthfulness. But this is important to note - this is a simulation, not empathy. ChatGPT is a pattern recognition machine that responds appropriately, but without feelings.

This illusion of connection is not entirely new. With the advent of novels in 18th-century Europe, critics worried that people were losing themselves in imaginary relationships with characters. In the 20th century, it was the radio, and subsequently, the television. Millions of people saw hosts as companies, creating artificial bonds. These one-sided attachments carried real weight, coined by psychologists as "parasocial relationships." The human mind has a tendency to treat abstract figures as though they were part of our circle of knowns. Putting faces and attributing a voice to what we see and read is not much different from what is happening with chatbots today. The AI has no sentience, but it is dangerously trained to fool us into thinking it does. It is our imagination that is doing the rest of the work, assigning a character to this bot.

The question now is not whether people get attached to these LLMs, because it is clear that they do, but rather, why.

The answer lies in how we define friendship. Aristotle saw true friendship as mutual growth in character, something AI cannot offer. It has no real self or capacity to evolve. Yet today, many relationships revolve around light exchanges and reassurance, areas where AI does not seem to fall short. If companionship is simply about being heard and responded to, AI can appear surprisingly sufficient.

Loneliness is no longer

just a feeling; it is a public health crisis. The World Health Organisation recently declared loneliness a "pressing global health threat," with the U.S. Surgeon General warning that its mortality effects are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. In 2024, Gallup reported that nearly one in five adults worldwide feels very or fairly lonely, a figure that rises even higher among young adults. Even through the hard times of lockdown and distancing, we relied on language for communication and connections, and to sustain us. Human relationships are built through conversations. Words and empathy form the bridge to meaningful relationships. ChatGPT thrives on this, operating entirely on this bridge. It listens, responds thoughtfully, and adapts to your tone, turning into the perfect companion for the socially starved. Of course, what the lonely, connection-longing user might not know is that this 'friend' is just a mathematical model turning words into numbers, and outputting the next likely token based on a series of probabilities, essentially an autofill on speed.

Unlike humans, ChatGPT has no flaws. It never sleeps, cancels, or argues; it's safe and stable, which can feel comforting in loneliness. Our brains naturally assign human traits to such a constant presence, turning interactions into emotional connections. When an LLM remembers details, we infer intention, and that imagined inner world becomes real emotion.

This is by design. ChatGPT and other LLMs are engineered to be friendly and engaging, with every detail optimised to deepen emotional connection. Yet accountability remains unclear when things go wrong. In 2025, a college student died by suicide, and his parents alleged that harmful responses from ChatGPT, which he had confided in, played a role. The humanisation of chatbots without strong safeguards can have serious consequences, especially for vulnerable users.

Especially, those who feel socially disconnected or misunderstood are more likely to bond with AI as a non-judgmental companion. Each pleasant interaction reinforces this through dopamine, creating a cycle of reliance. But overdependence can reduce real human connections, quietly impacting mental health. AI won't challenge or confront you, something only genuine human relationships can offer.

This dynamic further distorts our expectations of real people. We fool ourselves into thinking that real interactions should be perfect, and when struck with unpredictability, we forget how to deal with it. Not to mention that these chatbots are products of huge corporations, collecting our data at every step. We are at the mercy of millionaires who likely do not care about our well-being.

Research shows that strong emotional attachment to AI is linked to lower well-being, especially among those lacking real social support. Even when users know AI isn't conscious, they still form genuine emotional bonds. This isn't delusion but psychology. Rather than judging such reliance, it's important to recognise that these systems are designed to encourage engagement and dependence.

ChatGPT is an illusion. It is a simulation of empathy, perhaps a good one, but a simulation nonetheless. It is a tool, not a support system. Real-world relationships must be nurtured, and the hardships must be faced, and your data, your emotions, your privacy - they deserve to be protected.

Does this lay out the truth of how things are in modern life? The fact that people can even become emotionally attached to an AI shows just how desperate the human search for connection has become, even if it means staring into a mirror that only pretends to look back.

(The writer is a 3rd Year B.Tech Student, Plaksha University, Mohali)

Politics, Principles & the Shillong By-Poll

Editor,

Though the Election Commission of India is yet to declare its schedule for the MP election for the Shillong seat, the political atmosphere has begun to heat up. The impending by-election to the Shillong Lok Sabha seat, necessitated by the untimely demise of late Dr. Ricky A.J. Syngkon, is shaping up to be far more than a routine democratic exercise. Beneath the speeches, rallies, and political calculations lies a deeper question confronting Meghalaya today: can politics still coexist with principles, or has public life become merely an arena where reputations are traded for relevance?

The political atmosphere across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills suggests that this election may become less about party manifestos and more about the moral anxieties of the electorate. The Voice of the People Party (VPP), by swiftly declaring Dr Batskhem Myrboh as its candidate, projected certainty and direction at a moment when several established parties appeared hesitant and disconnected from public sentiment. In contrast, the ruling National People's Party (NPP) spent months searching for a face capable not merely of contesting the election, but of countering a growing political mood that increasingly sees traditional power structures with sus-

picion.

Eventually, the NPP persuaded Dr D.R.L. Nonglait, president of the Khasi Authors' Society, to enter the fray. His entry has stirred curiosity, admiration and unease in equal measure. Dr Nonglait is not an ordinary political recruit. He represents a generation of intellectuals who devoted their lives to language, identity and cultural preservation. His tireless efforts for the inclusion of Khasi in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution earned him respect far beyond political boundaries. His role in securing recognition for Khasi and Garo as additional official languages of Meghalaya further strengthened his standing as a cultural statesman rather than a partisan actor.

Yet public memory is rarely uncomplicated. Even those achievements were viewed by some through the lens of political expediency, revealing the growing cynicism of our times: a society where even cultural victories are no longer immune from political suspicion.

What troubles many citizens today is not merely Dr Nonglait's decision to contest, but what his decision symbolises. Why would a respected academician and church elder, who occupied a rare moral space above party politics, choose at this stage of life to align himself with a government facing increasing allegations of corruption, administrative complacency and public distrust? Was it conviction, persuasion, ambition, obligation or the subtle seduction of political relevance that eventually draws even the

most respected figures into the arena?

History offers a cautionary parallel. The legendary Assamese cultural icon Bhuben Hazarika witnessed a decline in public admiration after he abruptly joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and contested elections during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee era, and lost. Many felt that he had misread the pulse of the masses, and despite his towering legacy, the political setback dented his moral standing in the eyes of many admirers.

Meghalaya may now be witnessing a similar moment of reckoning. Whether one supports the VPP or opposes it, the larger truth is difficult to ignore: the party has successfully tapped into a growing hunger for political change, particularly among younger voters (Gen Z) who are weary of transactional politics and patronage networks. The sympathy wave following the death of the late Dr. Ricky Syngkon has only amplified that momentum. Increasingly, people appear to be asking whether elections should continue to be determined by influence and political machinery, or whether public life can still be guided by credibility and trust.

In such a climate, this by-election becomes symbolic of something larger than victory or defeat.

If Dr Nonglait eventually loses this election, the larger question will remain whether he can reclaim the moral authority and public image he once enjoyed as a cultural and intellectual figure above partisan politics. Public life is unforgiving,

and history often remembers not only achievements but also miscalculations. Democracy does not merely test political parties; it also tests the conscience of those who seek public office. Elections reveal not only who commands support, but what kind of society people aspire to become.

For now, the people of Meghalaya can only watch and wait as this high-stakes by-election unfolds: a defining battle that could redraw the state's political map for years to come.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Saving Shillong's Green Cover

Editor,

Much has been written about the traffic congestion in the city. The Barik Point is one notorious spot for these traffic snarls especially during school hours. The recent inauguration of the Riblong road and the opening of the link road along the Rhino point has somewhat eased the choke point at the Anjalee roundabout. We have recently learnt that the Government has now officially scrapped the elevated corridor road plan to a ground level four lane expansion from Anjalee point up to Barik Point for further smooth flow of traffic. It would make a huge difference from what it is now. However, if this materialises, the impact that it would have on the im-

mediate environment along this stretch is a major cause of concern. Lined with tall English pines and evergreen deciduous trees this place is home to a variety of bird species.

The Rhino Park opposite the Flag Staff House is a place frequented by joggers, nature lovers and health enthusiasts. The footpaths on both sides of the road makes it easy for commuters who walk to their workplaces or pick their children from school rather than take their cars because walking on this stretch is always pleasurable. However, one remarkable aspect about this particular place is that every year between August and September it gets abuzz with hundreds of straw coloured fruit bats also known as the flying foxes. All squeezed up in just an area of about an acre of land as they take shelter and reboot their energy before they undertake their long journey to some other chosen destination.

This single patch of evergreen forest provides these bats a safe and comfortable resting place during the day while they get busy foraging during the night. Each bat roughly consumes twice its body weight each night. It's learnt that they are more of a bonus to the environment as they are responsible for sixty percent of all seed dispersal across the environment they travel through.

These bats don't just pick any random patch of trees but choose to come and congregate at the same spot year after year as we have witnessed through the years. The widening of the road to make way for a four lane

is going to strip these annual visitors of their stopover home forever. We, meanwhile, are going to lose one of the few remaining green cover in the heart of town. We have already lost quite a number in a short span of years. Much has been talked about making the PWD campus the green lung of the town which is much needed but that is nowhere to be seen yet. Again, the Polo Hills facing the Umkhrah river has recently lost the small park which was a lovely green space and much loved by frequent visitors there. Hence a humble request to the Government is to take a moment and spare a thought against the destruction of these small green covers that while they may seem insignificant, yet play a vital role in being our green lungs.

They not only look beautiful but provide safe space to birds, mammals and butterflies that have over the years dwindled in their numbers. One suggestion for the Government to revert to the first option of making a flyover over the Anjalee to Barik Point instead of constructing the four lane. This will save not only the home of our birds and mammals but also the beautiful green cover along this stretch that makes Shillong what it is, the Scotland of the East as everyone can remember it.

Yours etc.,
J. Lyngdoh
Via email

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

Trump's claims of 'win' against Iran — here's report card

Two months into the war in Iran, the reasons the US gave for launching this conflict — and Washington's minimum criteria for claiming success — now appear unintelligible. So much so that US officials are now arguing the war had actually ended in America's favour almost a month ago, when the ceasefire came into effect.

It is hard to think of a more damning indictment of Donald Trump's catastrophic war in Iran than the spectacle of his secretary of state, Marco Rubio, telling reporters on May 5 that the main goal now was to get the Strait of Hormuz "back to the way it was: anyone can use it, no mines in the water, nobody paying tolls".

This, he argued, was an entirely separate defensive and humanitarian operation and would only become a war if US ships came under fire, which they in fact did that same day. Rubio ignored the obvious contradiction that the humanitarian operation had been necessitated by the very war he was simultaneously presenting as

already won.

Things took an even more absurd turn later that day. Trump announced he was suspending "Project Freedom", his plan for the US Navy to escort tankers out of the strait, after just one day.

The US president cited "great progress" toward an agreement with Iran. As has happened several times now, global stock markets rallied before falling back again.

While few doubt Trump is desperate to put this disastrous war behind him, particularly before heading to Beijing on May 14, he massively oversold the impression of a breakthrough. The Iranians were merely considering a 14-point proposal for 30 days of negotiations aimed at finding a durable end to the war.

The more convincing reason Trump abandoned Project Freedom is that it was already clear it would not solve the crisis. Most owners of the 1,500 ships currently stranded behind the strait were unwilling to risk passage even with a naval escort.

Iran's response, attacking shipping and launching missiles at the United Arab Emirates, also threatened the ceasefire itself.

Washington's problem is that the Iranians will probably insist talks can only begin, and the Strait of Hormuz reopen, if Trump agrees to end the economic blockade of Iranian maritime trade. The US blockade is inflicting serious damage on the Iranian economy.

Apart from anything else, Iranian officials see ending the blockade as logical reciprocity. But they also understand time is running out before the closure of the strait causes lasting structural damage to the global economy — if it has not already. This gives them enhanced leverage at the moment. Yet even if negotiations begin, the same problem that prevented a deal before the war remains. Trump lacks the detailed and institutionalised policy apparatus of his predecessor, Barack Obama, whose 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran the current US president so desperately wants to

outdo. Obama's deal took 20 months of intense wrangling to complete. Trump has neither the patience, technical expertise, nor direct diplomatic connections to achieve the same.

Added to this are new conditions created by the war itself. The fragmentation of Iran's decision-making process and the empowerment of elites with an even higher tolerance for military and economic pressure have introduced uncertainty into the equation. And Iran has now realised the increased leverage it has through its ability to close a critical artery of the global economy.

Colossal failure

The answer to the nuclear issue may lie in a fudge. Iran could well agree to a moratorium on uranium enrichment while not yet agreeing to ship out or dilute its enriched uranium — though without ruling that out in order to prolong negotiations.

If slightly more moderate heads in Tehran prevail — and that remains a very big if — it would be an obvious

concession to make. Iran's geographic advantages and ballistic missile capabilities have established a credible deterrent against future attack.

The question is whether anything short of total surrender on the nuclear issue is acceptable to Trump, and whether he is willing to resist inevitable Israeli opposition to blurring this red line. If not, he has already threatened to resume bombing at a "much higher intensity" than before.

Yet there are serious doubts about whether he has the stomach for this. And even if he does, it is difficult to see how any amount of US and Israeli bombing can force the Iranian regime to surrender.

Trump's shifting aims for the war and desperate scramble for an exit underscore that this entire enterprise has been a colossal strategic failure. It will define his legacy, reshape the Middle East and impose further misery on the Iranian people — the very opposite of what he has repeatedly said he wants to do.

The war has shattered confidence

among US regional allies that Washington can protect them. It has also alienated traditional US allies who were blamed and then punished for failing to solve a problem they neither created nor could resolve.

The US and Israeli attacks have further entrenched a brutal regime that will now be even harder to negotiate with, while completely marginalising moderate voices inside Iran.

If negotiations can prevail, the successes the US president and his advisers trumpet — the destruction of parts of Iran's military-industrial capacity and navy — are real. Though in the former case, it is probably only temporary and in the latter, demonstrably not critical for maintaining freedom of navigation.

The only positive is that Trump's brief experiment with military adventurism, an aberration even within his own muddled political trajectory, may now be ending. (*The Conversation*)

Authored by Christian Emery, University College, London

IS POWER OF US PETRODOLLAR IN DECLINE?

After weeks of blockades by Iran and the United States in the Strait of Hormuz, it's clear the narrow waterway is now pivotal to the outcome of the conflict.

The US has begun to escort ships through the narrow passage, but behind the military manoeuvring lies a deeper development: energy security in the Persian Gulf is in a state of profound flux. As well as the desire by both Iran and the US to control the global flow of oil, gas, helium and fertilisers from the region, the United Arab Emirates (a key US ally) has withdrawn from OPEC in what's been called a major blow to the oil cartel.

On top of this, Iran has announced plans to introduce tariffs in the Strait of Hormuz as a form of reparations for the damage caused by the war. If imposed, these tariffs are estimated to be worth between USD 40 billion and \$50 billion a year to Iran, and would potentially allow it to mitigate the impact of US economic sanctions.

Crucially, tariffs would be a way to cultivate stronger relations with China because they would be denominated in Chinese yuan, not US dollars. This has the potential to significantly alter regional and global power balances.

In fact, such payments have reportedly

already been made by vessels going to China, India and Japan, with the Iranian parliament working to formalise the process. (Iran has also begun accepting payments in cryptocurrency.)

50 years of dominance

If Iran can continue to charge these tariffs, it could tilt regional influence away from the US towards China and Asia by eroding the historical dominance of the petrodollar.

Essentially, the petrodollar system has seen the pricing and trading of oil in US dollars. The term dates from the 1970s when the US asked Saudi Arabia to exclusively price its oil in US dollars in return for military aid.

This spread across OPEC (the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), becoming the benchmark of the global oil trade, bolstering the US dollar as the global reserve currency and underwriting US power.

Oil-producing nations amassed huge petrodollar surpluses — too much to invest only in their own economies — which were funnelled or "recycled" back into US securities and stocks, and other countries' sovereign wealth funds.

They have become the primary source of revenue for OPEC members, as well as non-member oil exporters Qatar and Norway. This

ties these countries to Washington and gives the US significant financial leverage in global affairs. The flow of petrodollars helps finance US deficits and reduce US borrowing costs.

A new paradigm?

If major regional players such as the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia pay Iranian tariffs in "petroyuans", economist Antonio Bhardwaj has said, it would mark: The systematic erosion of the petrodollar system and the emergence of the petroyuan as a credible, institutionally embedded alternative framework for settling global energy transactions.

It's a sizeable "if", but the introduction of tariffs would also pose a dilemma for countries that supported Iran in the conflict (implicitly or explicitly) and those that didn't.

As international relations analyst Pakizah Parveen has written, we would see the emergence of: A bifurcated global oil market: barrels from compliant parties would move through Hormuz in yuan. In contrast, non-compliant parties would incur significantly higher costs in dollar-denominated barrels.

Such a choice would affect major US allies such as Pakistan, South Korea, Japan and the Philippines, all of which have faced severe

economic pressures as a result of the upheavals in the Gulf and Middle East.

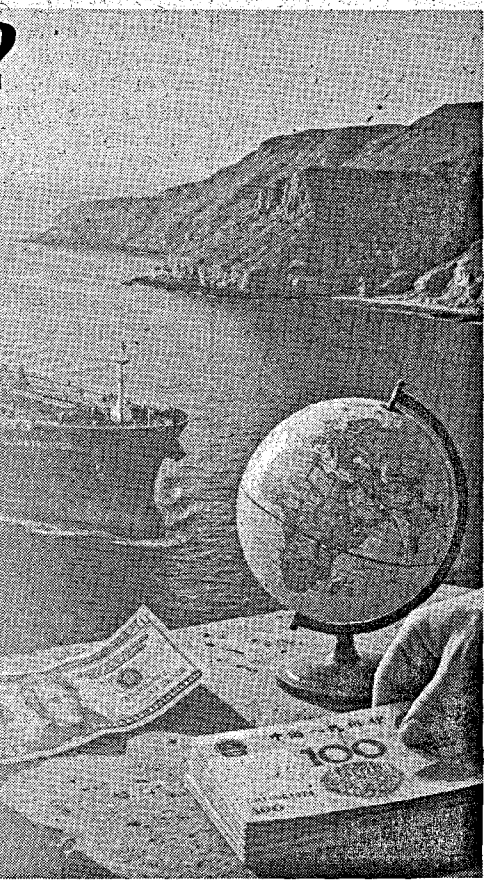
Paying tariffs in petroyuan would draw them towards China and play into Beijing's narrative of being a reliable and more stable economic force. It also mirrors Russia's request for payment in yuan for its oil since 2025.

Decline of the petrodollar

It would be premature to argue that Iranian tariffs will lead to a general "de-dollarisation" of the world economy. But they may be a step towards a devaluation of the US dollar.

By extension, any move by other countries away from the US dollar is a move away from dependence on the US financially and politically. For the first time since 1996, global central banks hold more gold in their reserves than US debt securities. The BRICS group of countries may move further away from US influence, with China, India and Brazil all having reduced their US holdings in 2025.

Overall, Iranian tariffs denominated in yuan would be another sign of an emerging multipolar world in which US preeminence is no longer a given. It would mean more strategic flexibility for all countries, great and small, but also more uncertainty. (*The Conversation*)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 10, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Mars on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. You will do things with logical planning which will prove to be very successful. It is going to be a very favorable period during which you will achieve a lot. Financially you will remain well off. And there will be continuous flow of money. You could also enter a new business venture or partnership which will prove to be very profitable. Any project that was delayed due to any official cause will finally be cleared. You will also get loans/finances from financial institutions. Your colleagues and office superiors will provide you with ample support and guidance. Your romantic life will be wonderful, and you will also get suitable marriage proposals. You will also go on a fun-filled holiday with family.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is a very favorable week. And you will value it too. You stand to gain a lot financially as well as emotionally too. You will start exploring new business avenues. A change is indicated. You will also get a new job offer much to your liking. You could also meet someone at a public place and begin liking that person. You will also be making new friends. Your professional relations too will bring benefits. You will impress one and all by your unselfish attitude. You will also deal with new plans and projects that were pending. It will give you lot of benefits. You will have a good time with your family members. There will be happiness all around. The contacts made will be developed to get benefits. You will also plan to renovate your house. It is a great time for all kinds of partnerships. Happiness and peace will remain there.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is time to realize your dreams into reality. You will enjoy a wonderful time with your family and friends. You will also develop a special liking for your partner. It is time for you to get money. And your efforts will bring good results. You will also plan a new job. There will be some health concerns, but you will cure the disease by doing yoga, meditation, diet and lifestyle changes instead of medicines. Students will do well. Keep preparing for exams/interviews. Your concerns about your children will be reasonable. You will also discuss something vital with your bosses. It is a week full of energy, ecstasy and enthusiasm. You will also plan to go on a picnic or retreat. Your expenses will rise but you will manage. You will enjoy the best cuisine.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will plan to bring changes to your lifestyle. You will also keep away from risky tasks. Rising expenses are a cause of worry for you, and you would like to bring it under control. You will also lead a simple life. It may upset your family members a bit, but you will be able to convince. Your concern will be towards family and work. You will work hard to increase your income. You may also plan to take some part time jobs. Your decision-making power will be strong. Your goodness will be your strongest point. You will also make best use of your communication, skills and will be able to get your work done. You will also develop interest in music, arts, writing, cinema etc. All the work will be completed. You will get success and move forward.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) Your name and fame will rise. Your respect will also be more. You will have financial gains. You will also make progress in your job. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will be able to gain confidence from your bosses. Your colleagues will also support you. Your graph of popularity will also increase. You will have positive response from the economic perspective. Time will be in your favour. The financial condition will be stronger than before. You will take appropriate measures to increase your business. You will benefit. Your position in the job will be strong. Money will be received. Time will be full of fun and entertainment. You will get time for yourself and will also enjoy the situation well.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) The week will turn out to be pleasant. You will be kept busy. You will have monetary gains. A very charming person will come into your life all of a sudden leading to a warm and fulfilling relationship. You will enjoy this situation. Your contact will also increase, and you will increase your business. You will be helpful in making money acquisition plans too. You will be very happy. All the tasks you have done will be liked. Concerns of marriage of children, career etc. will end. You will also spend lavishly and buy new clothes. You will also spend time reading good books. You will be much loved. Time will be beneficial for you. You may undertake business-related trips too.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) There will be job opportunities for you. You will also have gains in business. You will be conscious about your career. Those who are unmarried can get engaged. You will also come closer to your mate. Family members will have

love and bonding. There will be a happy atmosphere at home. You will get good news from somewhere. Elders will bless you. They may have minor health issues. You will enjoy the conversation with people around. Time is full of excitement. You will fulfill all your hobbies. You will meet your desires. You will also go on a business trip. Some religious work will be accomplished by you. You will also meet an influential person. It will open the doors of progress for you.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will develop spiritual inclinations. There will be sudden changes in your personality. You will become a lot wiser and levelheaded. You will remain attached to your partner. You will have financial gains. Your business will continue to develop and flourish. You will have discussions with your bosses on some important matters. You will get results for your hard work now. The small worries regarding work will dispel. You could fall in love with a very charming person. Your personal life will get the cool breeze of love and romance. Your loving nature will make you much liked. You will also buy household items. You will get gains in investments made. After a lot of struggles you will finally succeed in getting a loan.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) You will have gains in your business/work. Your financial position is going to be strong and stable. Everything that you will touch will turn gold. You will also plan to buy jewelry or vehicle. But you need to pay attention to your health. There are strong chances of your official/work getting done, so make best use of this opportunity. Marriage functions will take place. There are strong chances of a division of property between brothers. There will be various activities in different directions. You will also have a difference of opinion with a colleague. Work-related trips will keep you busy.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) The first few days of the week will be stupendous. You will get new job/business offer. Your elders will bless you. The relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law will be cordial. There will be rise in your financial fortunes. Your peers and superiors will support you a lot. At this time, you will get money, fame and wealth. You will also get drawn to a spiritual guru. You will achieve the heights of success. You will also get to see new places and meet new people. You will also spend time happily in the company of your family. Students will focus on studies. This is the right time to get the results of your hard work. Your name and fame will spread in all directions. You will be a guest somewhere and desire pleasure.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) It will turn out to be a wonderful week for those who are looking for new jobs. You could also be elevated all of a sudden. Be careful in love matters. Some woman may deceive you. Your work will remain strong. You will also get a new contract. Housewives will learn new recipes. They will make best use of youtube and internet for this. You will also do some work for the welfare of the people. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. You can also meet a politician or a businessperson. You will also have control over your business expenses. Your relationship will become stronger. You will have monetary gains. You will clearly reap benefits.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It is a wonderful time for you. You will fulfill your responsibilities with great aplomb. Additional responsibilities could be given to you. Your disputes will get resolved peacefully. You will have monetary gains. Your business will also flourish. The results of investments will be good. You will have wonderful bonding with your mate. It is a good time for love and romance. You will be over enthusiastic and finish your work in a hurry. You will be wiser in dealing with people. And will not take any risk in money related matters. Your relationship will become stronger. You will be emotionally strong. You will work very hard and get the money for it. People will also acknowledge your skills and efficiency. Money that was stuck somewhere accrued to you.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) These are overall good days. You will clearly reap the benefits. You will be more influential in society. You will also come out unscathed from some difficult situation. You will also get a proposal for job or marriage. You will get unmet opportunities for employment and buy something good for the house. Marital relations will be pleasant. You will get new for legal matters. A court verdict can come in your favor. You will feel new energy inside you. Work will get done in haste. You will feel an increase in your prestige and respect. You will also get the support of your colleagues. Business activities will keep you occupied.

How cable TV visionary Ted Turner revolutionised television, video news

Ted Turner, who died on April 6, 2026, was bright, shrewd and, most of all, lucky. The cable TV visionary proved to be in the right place, at the right time, to change television and video news forever.

Most of his big gambles, on things such as the MGM studio and library, which led to the creation of the Turner Classic Movies channel, paid off handsomely.

But Turner will be remembered mostly for the creation and development of the *Cable News Network* — *CNN* — which launched in 1980 and made our knowledge of distant events instantaneous and our world more comprehensible.

In this sense, Turner's legacy extends beyond television. He changed our conception not only of journalism but also of our world.

Turner's obituaries note his record-setting philanthropy, his impressive conservation efforts and his campaign to make the world safer by securing post-Soviet Union era nuclear weaponry. Over the course of his 87 years, Turner proved an outstanding yachtsman, an active and involved sports team owner and a quotable maverick in the business world.

Yet as a scholar of broadcast history — and a former *CNN* employee — I think Turner's ultimate legacy is a bit more atmospheric than measurable.

He changed the media ecology in profound and lasting ways. *CNN's* arrival disrupted an established media environment, in which broadcast journalism routines and audience viewing habits had become standardised by the ABC, CBS and NBC TV networks.

The ramshackle early *CNN*, with its farcical "world headquarters" housed in a former Atlanta-area country club, was derided as the "Chicken Noodle Network" by veteran network journalists.

But by the mid-1980s, it had established profitability, and by 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War, it assumed a singular position in America's — and the world's — information environment.

CNN had matured to respectability, and Turner was recognised as a visionary by *Time* magazine, which named him 1991's Man of the Year. His idea had blossomed into a new arena for global information, sharing, and his cable network fully competed with the established broadcast channels on big

stories throughout the 1990s.

Right place, right time, right team

Turner's cable TV news revolution required significant collaboration. The fulfilment of his vision needed luck, inherited money, innovative new technologies, supportive partners and even federal regulatory intervention.

For example, had Newton Minow's Federal Communications Commission not pushed Congress to pass the All-Channel Receiver Act of 1962, American TV manufacturers would likely never have placed the UHF dial on their sets. That UHF dial made additional local TV competition possible by allowing more stations to broadcast.

In 1970, Turner purchased UHF Channel 17 in Atlanta, which he named WTGC for "Turner Communications Group," and UHF Channel 36 in Charlotte, North Carolina, which he named WRET for "Robert Edward Turner," and began building his broadcasting empire.

By the mid-1970s, the cost of satellite distribution to cable system operators had decreased to such an extent that Turner realised — and seized — an opportunity to nationally distribute his local station. He worked with satellite and cable system operators, building early relationships that would prove beneficial to everyone in the cable industry as it developed over the 1980s and '90s.

In 1979 and 1980, he used these relationships to build the first 24-hour TV network, but it was his internal hires that made the original channel function. To launch *CNN*, Turner hired veterans of the TV news business, including Robert Wussler, who had previously been president of *CBS Sports* and the *CBS Television Network*.

And he hired Reese Schonfeld, who had previously founded the Independent Television News Association, a national syndicator of pooled local TV programming.

CNN's success was never assured. The channel continually lost money in its initial years. But the idea of 24-hour TV news being delivered to paying subscribers, through their cable system operators, proved so valuable that as early as 1981, two CBS executives secretly jetted to Atlanta to meet with Turner and Wussler about purchasing the network.

"I'll sell you *CNN*," he told them. But the deal floundered when the CBS

executives would not accept anything less than 51 per cent ownership — and control — of the channel. "You want control? You don't buy control of Ted Turner's companies," he explained. "Forty-nine per cent or less." Only four years later, Turner would turn the tables and attempt to take over *CBS*.

Turner came very close to living long enough to see *CBS* and *CNN* under a single ownership. *CBS's* parent company, Paramount Skydance, is closing in on the purchase of Warner Bros. Discovery, the corporation that owns *CNN*.

Success invites criticism, establishes a legacy

Turner is one of the few figures in American media history who left a clearly identifiable legacy. There was a media world that existed before *CNN* and the one that came after. *CNN's* success gave rise to competitors such as MSNBC, Fox News and others.

These channels simultaneously differentiated themselves from *CNN* while constantly measuring themselves against their older rival. But Turner's original vision was distinct from the panel programs and punditry that have now replaced original reporting from around the world.

Turner wanted to own and operate a global news organisation where the news would always be the star, and where, like the classic wire services, professional reporting would be instant and accurate. And he wanted to make a fortune while doing it.

When he finally succeeded, critics began to complain about what journalist and academic Tom Rosenstiel called "The Myth of *CNN*" in a cover story in *The New Republic* in 1994.

Billions of people around the world now take for granted the profusion of news access to anywhere on earth, at any time of day or night. That world was unimaginable before Turner's work to make *CNN* conceivable and then real.

His legacy is not simply a series of cable channels but an entirely new way of thinking about information retrieval and access. Think about that the next time you scroll past video clips from London, Tokyo, Beirut or Mexico City, or check out breaking news videos from Ukraine or Tehran.

And thank Ted for making such a world possible. (*The Conversation*)

Authored by Michael J Socolow, University of Maine

*"Life grants nothing to us mortals
without hard work."*

—Horace

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 268

SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 11, 2026

Change in Tamil Nadu

WITH the declaration that a "new era of secular social justice starts now," movie star C Joseph Vijay has taken over the governance of Tamil Nadu, which was long wedded to Dravidian politics. The 51-year-old Vijay with a youthful face had launched the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, a party 'for the victory of Tamils', two years ago and sought to build a casteless welfare society without discrimination and corruption. "All are equal by birth and it should remain so," he had declared. Based on this, swarms of people seeking a change declared him as the "dalapati" and eventually uplifted his party to pole position. The party could not gain a majority of the seats in the assembly, but a string of small parties including the Congress offered their support. The huge turnout at his campaign rallies had given sufficient hints as to the outcome of the polls.

Both Dravidian parties that alternately ran Tamil Nadu for six decades since 1967 have been shown the door: the DMK got 59 seats and the AIADMK got 47 seats against 108 seats for the TVK. The BJP, which tried to highlight Vijay's Christian links, ended up with just one seat, despite its long-held aspirations to break the Dravidian mould of politics and establish itself in Tamil Nadu. The Congress party rose to the occasion. Though it has only five seats, it offered support to TVK and will form part of the government. The two Communist parties, which got two seats each through its alliance with the DMK have also backed the new party to form the government. In politics, old moulds must change.

Governor Rajendra Arlekar was right to initially refuse to entertain Vijay's claim to form the government though TVK has emerged as the single largest party. In the confused scenario of a hung assembly, the governor asked Vijay to show him proof of support. Once this was done, he cleared the way for Vijay's swearing-in as chief minister along with a team of nine ministers. Now, the CM must prove his majority in the legislature. Reports are that the DMK, tasting an unexpected defeat at the hustings, might abduct some newly elected MLAs from the small parties that have promised support to TVK, with a view to defeating the Confidence Vote. It's high suspense now. DMK's MK Stalin, who ruled the state for five years in imperious ways and kept his son as the second-in-command in the party and government, has received a virtual slap on the face from the disgruntled electorate. Vijay's electoral success is principally due to his promise to root out corruption in government and public life, which the DMK and AIADMK majorly encouraged. He represents the voice of sanity and a refreshingly new era in Tamil Nadu politics. Vijay has promised that he would not take a single pie from the government through corrupt means; he also warned everyone on his side that he would not allow them to be corrupt either. As of now this represents a refreshing change. The challenge is to remain true to this ideology.

The Many Paths of Agriculture in Meghalaya

By H.H. Mohrmen

Meghalaya is an agricultural state, and it is often said that seventy percent of the population depends on agriculture for sustenance. The truth is that, even today, agriculture remains the primary livelihood activity for the majority of the population in the state. But what kind of agriculture are the farmers engaged in? Agriculture, even in a small state like Meghalaya, is a complex system, as it varies from one place to another depending on altitude, climate, and the prevailing culture of the area.

This diversity has also compelled the government to change its earlier approach of placing all agriculture-related activities under the Agriculture Department. Considering the diverse agro-climatic conditions and the rich varieties of crops available in the state, the need was later felt to establish a separate Horticulture Department. Yet commercial farming remains a challenge. Even in places where commercial farming is practiced, it is undertaken by only a few farmers and on a very small scale.

MSRLS and Different Agencies Engaging in Agriculture

One of the challenges in Meghalaya is that there are numerous government agencies engaged in promoting agriculture in the state. At their own levels and through their respective initiatives, these agencies have implemented projects to promote livelihoods and enhance the incomes of rural communities. However, because the majority of the population is farmers, many of these initiatives naturally revolve around farming-related activities.

The Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS), which implements the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) through the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement, is promoting natural farming.

It implements Government of India's Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), a sub-component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission. The programme aims to empower women engaged in agriculture through targeted investments that improve their participation, productivity, and long-term livelihood opportunities. It focuses on strengthening agriculture-based livelihoods for rural women while promoting sustainable farming practices rooted in local resources.

The initiative seeks to create efficient and locally driven agricultural systems in which women farmers have greater control over production resources and are actively involved in managing support structures. Through this approach, women are expected to gain better access to agricultural inputs, government services, and institutional support. As their productive capacities improve, the programme also contributes to better food security for families and communities. It also aims to

expand the area under cultivation, increase cropping intensity, and improve food production led by women.

Another important objective is to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and performance of women engaged in agriculture. The programme encourages greater access to productive land, quality inputs, credit, technology, and information. It also promotes the use of gender-friendly tools and technologies to reduce the physical burden of agricultural work on women.

MKSP further seeks to improve women's access to markets and market information so they can secure better opportunities for selling their products. It also emphasizes improving soil health and fertility to support sustainable agriculture-based livelihoods.

In addition, the initiative aims to strengthen the visibility and collective identity of women farmers by promoting women-led institutions and encouraging entrepreneurship among rural women. The programme encourages continuous learning so that women farmers can adopt suitable technologies and improved farming systems.

In Meghalaya, to implement this component of NRLM, MSRLS, the state agency, has engaged an agency from South India to promote natural farming under the project. As a result, most SHGs in the state are now aware of natural farming practices.

MDMA Promoting Agro-Ecology Farming System

A few years ago, the Government of Meghalaya, in collaboration with NESFAS, experimented with agro-ecology practices, another nature-based farming approach, by promoting Agro-Ecology Learning Circles (ALCs). This project achieved the distinction of receiving the 2025 Global Innovation Award in Rome. ALCs are groups of farmers who engage in innovative experiments to solve challenges encountered in their farming practices.

The project, which aimed to provide scientific validation for the experiments these farmers had been undertaking, was supported by the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA). Implemented across different districts of Meghalaya, ALCs also sought to study indigenous farming systems and scientifically validate practices that farmers have been following for generations.

Agro-ecology is a nature-based farming system that strengthens indigenous farming practices, which are by default organic and nature-based. It is not a top-down project; rather, it views farmers as partners in improving and developing farming practices while enhancing their incomes. At the heart of agro-ecology is the principle that farming practices should not harm the ecology of the area. In fact, it seeks ways in which agriculture

and ecology can complement rather than compete with each other.

In the context of Meghalaya, the programme works closely with farmers and examines the indigenous knowledge they have long applied in their farming practices.

Sustainable Livelihood Mission

MBMA, apart from promoting innovative projects and schemes like IVCS and FOCUS, which are intended to support farmers and rural livelihoods, is also promoting the Sustainable Livelihood Mission project with the support of KfW Development Bank. The goal is to promote organic farming, and currently the project is undertaking geo-fencing of farmlands.

MEGNOLIA: Meghalaya's Grand Organic Mission

One of the government's major flagship initiatives is MEGNOLIA, a project to be implemented by the Horticulture Department. The programme envisions transforming Meghalaya into a leading state in natural and organic farming by helping farmers secure sustainable livelihoods while strengthening the green economy through climate-resilient and environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

MEGNOLIA seeks to support farmers through training, certification assistance, and improved market access, thereby enabling a smoother transition to organic farming. At the same time, the mission aims to increase farmers' incomes and further establish Meghalaya's identity as an organic state.

The state recognized its rich agro-climatic diversity and the vast opportunities for horticultural development, the need for a dedicated focus became evident. Over time, horticulture evolved into a specialized wing under the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare to ensure the comprehensive growth of the sector and provide better support to farmers across the state.

Blessed with fertile soil, varied altitudes, and a favorable climate, Meghalaya is naturally suited for cultivating a wide range of horticultural crops, including fruits, vegetables, spices, plantation crops, flowers, medicinal plants, and aromatic crops. Now, horticulture has become an important source of livelihood, employment, and sustainable land use, particularly in rural communities.

The Horticulture Wing plays an important role in encouraging scientific farming methods, improving post-harvest management, and linking farmers with markets. Through both centrally sponsored and state-funded schemes, the department is working to modernize traditional horticulture practices and transform the sector into a more commercial and value-oriented enterprise.

The mission's key objec-

tives include increasing production and productivity by expanding cultivation areas, promoting high-yielding crop varieties, and introducing improved farming techniques suited to Meghalaya's agro-climatic conditions. It also focus is post-harvest management and value addition through the development of cold storage facilities, grading and packaging units, and processing infrastructure to reduce losses and improve the market value of horticultural produce.

The mission also aims to promote floriculture as well as the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants as emerging sectors that can diversify farming activities and create additional sources of income. Strengthening market linkages and infrastructure development is another major priority. The programme seeks to connect farmers with buyers, encourage horticultural cooperatives, and develop market facilities that can ensure fair prices and wider market access.

The government has already organized farmers into PGs FIGs and planned to later federate them into Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). This approach is intended to help farmers take collective ownership of their organic enterprises and actively participate in sustainable commercial farming. The mission hopes to create opportunities for Meghalaya's organic products to access both domestic and international markets while promoting long-term trade relationships.

Where Does the Twain Meet?

The goal of all these initiatives is to help farmers, empower women, and improve the state's economy. However, the question remains: where is the meeting point? It is obvious that the government's emphasis is on promoting nature-based agriculture, but are these projects going to operate in silos? Does the government have a policy to ensure convergence among these different farming approaches being introduced in the state? Is there a road-map for coordination among these government agencies? Will there be opportunities for different departments and agencies to share notes and learn from one another? In the case of natural farming, there is even a need for inter-departmental convergence between the Agriculture and Veterinary Departments.

The new government approach regarding the promotion of agriculture in the state will also contribute toward achieving at least 10 of the 17 SDGs which include: ending poverty, ending hunger, good health, gender equality, economic growth, innovation, reducing inequality, responsible consumption, climate action and life on land. The larger question is whether these initiatives can come together under a common vision so that the efforts of different agencies complement each other rather than function in isolation.

The Saffron Surge: Decoding BJP's Decisive Victories in Assam & West Bengal

By Bishaldeep Kakati and Bipasha Saikia

The Bharatiya Janata Party's emphatic victories in Assam and its unprecedented breakthrough in West Bengal mark more than routine electoral successes. They signal the consolidation of a new political outlook in eastern and northeastern India, one driven by organisational depth, aspirational politics, calibrated Hindutva, welfare delivery, and a fragmented opposition unable to counter the BJP's narrative machinery. The results have altered the political map of the region and reaffirmed the emergence of the BJP as the strongest political party across large parts of eastern India. While Assam saw the BJP-led NDA return to power with a two-thirds majority for a third consecutive term, West Bengal witnessed a historic paradigm shift as the BJP formed its first-ever government in the state, ending 15 years of Trinamool Congress (TMC) rule.

In Assam, the BJP secured 82 seats in the 126-member Assam Assembly, up sharply from 60 in 2021, achieving a solo majority for the first time. Its allies, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF/BOPF), added 10 seats each, taking the NDA tally to 102. The Congress was reduced to 19 seats with a 29-30% vote share, while the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) managed just 2. In West Bengal, the BJP scripted history by winning 207 seats in the 294-member Assembly, a massive leap from 77 seats in 2021, comfortably surpassing the majority mark of 148. The TMC was reduced to around 80 seats, a steep decline from 213 previously. This outcome not only ousted Mamata Banerjee's government but also fulfilled a long-standing ideological project for the BJP, rooted in the state's historical ties to Syama Prasad Mookerjee, founder of the Jana Sangh.

A critical analysis of the election results of both the states reveals many key aspects. In Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma emerged as the undisputed face of this victory. His government's emphasis on delivering welfare pledges proved decisive. Schemes providing subsidised education, financial support for women entrepreneurs, and employment generation through infrastructure projects resonated strongly with voters. Assam's per capita income grew significantly from Rs. 49,000 to Rs. 60,000 in the 2013-16 period, to over Rs. 1,54,000-Rs. 1,85,429 by 2024-25/2025-26 since the BJP first assumed power in 2016, outpacing several other states and narrowing the development gap despite the state's geographic challenges. Major investments, including a Rs 27,000 crore Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facility in Morigaon, improved highways, and enhanced connectivity, reinforced the narrative of economic aspiration over identity politics alone. The Hindutva narrative, intertwined with Assamese identity concerns over illegal immigration from Bangladesh, helped consolidate Hindu votes across regions, whether in high-Muslim or low-Muslim sub-divisions. Post-2023 delimitation and the Special Revision of electoral rolls, which updated voter lists and addressed anomalies, further strengthened the party's position by ensuring cleaner electoral rolls, a factor repeatedly highlighted in post-poll analyses.

Equally critical was the BJP's organisational strength, modelled on its successful booth-level politics in Bihar. Thousands of dedicated workers managed micro-level campaigns, voter outreach, and last-mile delivery of schemes at the booth level. This grassroots machinery, backed by the central leadership, translated into efficient vote consolidation. The opposition's fragmentation

amplified these advantages. The Congress struggled with selecting the right candidate for most of the constituencies, winning mostly in Muslim-dominated pockets and alienating broader Hindu and indigenous voters. Further regional forces like the Rajior Dal and AJP also didn't have any or much of an effect.

If Assam represented consolidation, West Bengal represented expansion. The BJP's performance in Bengal marked a historic ideological and electoral shift. Though the Trinamool Congress retained substantial influence, the BJP's rise from a marginal force to a dominant challenger fundamentally altered Bengal's political equilibrium. The party's gains in parliamentary and Assembly contests demonstrated that Bengal's political culture, long shaped by Left politics and regional populism was no longer impermeable to the BJP's national narrative.

In Bengal, five key factors paved the path for BJP. The first amongst the five factors is the deep anti-incumbency against the TMC after 15 years in power. Issues of governance, coupled with allegations of mismanagement, eroded public trust. Second was the economics of aspiration that played a pivotal role. West Bengal's per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) had lagged behind peers; by 2024-25, it stood at Rs 82,781, lower than Odisha's Rs 106,918 for constant prices, while for current prices for 2024-25, West Bengal stood at Rs. 1,63,467, and Odisha at Rs. 1,82,548 despite starting higher in 2011-12. Voters, tired of industrial stagnation post-Left rule and perceived policy paralysis under TMC, turned towards the BJP's promises of industrialisation, jobs, and infrastructure.

Third, the BJP's organisational prowess proved formidable. Deploying Bihar-style booth politics, the party built an extensive cadre network for door-to-door campaigns and precise voter targeting. The central leadership factor provided the national momentum, while local leaders like Suvedu Adhikari symbolised the shift. Fourth, social engineering and new vote banks were skillfully administered. Issues around reservation and social justice altered traditional equations, enabling the BJP to expand beyond its core base through strategic outreach. The famous incident of Narendra Modi consuming Jhal muri, that has been referred as "Jhal muri politics", engaged deeply with Bengal's local culture, street-level issues, and everyday aspirations in both urban and rural pockets, and that helped forge emotional connections. Finally, the Hindutva narrative delivered a huge ideological success. The campaign blended cultural nationalism with development pledges, achieving what many described as a paradigm shift in the BJP's eastern journey. Religious polarisation, carefully calibrated, resonated amid broader national trends, while the fragmented opposition with the Left and Congress offering negligible resistance left the TMC isolated.

These victories carry significance far beyond the two states. Together, they underscore voters' preference for governance models blending aspiration-driven economics, strong organisation, and cultural identity narratives. The BJP's electoral machine today functions not just during campaigns but continuously through both networks, digital outreach, welfare monitoring, and identity-based mobilisation. It represents the emergence of a new political order in eastern India where ideology, aspiration, welfare, and organisation converge into a highly effective electoral formula.

Letters to the Editor

Politics Should Not Be Reduced to Moral Judgments

Editor,

This is in reference to the letter titled "Politics, Principles & the Shillong By-Poll" published in the Letters to the Editor section on May 9, 2026.

While every citizen has the right to express political opinions, the published piece seemed less like balanced political commentary and more like a moral judgment on Dr. D.R.L. Nonglail for choosing to enter electoral politics.

The article opens by questioning whether politics and principles can still go together, implicitly suggesting that political participation is somehow incompatible with integrity or public respect. Such broad assumptions do little to encourage healthy democratic discussion. In a mature society, people sup-

port different political parties for different reasons, whether related to governance, development, ideology, or public policy. Making political choices is part of democratic thinking and should not be used as a reason to question someone's morality or principles.

The letter also sought to create a contrast by presenting one party's quick declaration of a candidate as proof of "certainty and direction," while portraying the other party's consultative process as hesitation or disconnection from public sentiment. This interpretation is entirely subjective. In any democratic political organization, consultation, internal discussion, and consensus-building are healthy practices. Taking time for deliberation should not be mistaken for weakness or indecision. Political credibility cannot be measured simply by the speed of an announcement.

At the same time, project-

ing the immediate declaration of a candidate soon after the unfortunate demise of a sitting MP as unquestionable political strength also deserves balanced reflection. Democratic politics should not only be judged by how quickly decisions are announced, but also by the seriousness, inclusiveness, and depth of the decision-making process.

Equally concerning was the repeated attempt to portray Dr. Nonglail's entry into politics as though he had somehow stepped down from a "moral space above party politics." Meghalaya has seen Dr. Nonglail contribute to society for many years through numerous committees, public initiatives, and cultural institutions, irrespective of which political party was in power. His work has consistently reflected a commitment to the people, language, and culture of the state rather than narrow political interests.

The references to "corruption," "administrative

complacency," and "public distrust" lack evidence, sources, or facts to support these claims. Serious accusations like these should not appear in political commentary unless backed by proof.

The question of whether Dr. Nonglail was motivated by "conviction, persuasion, ambition, or the subtle seduction of political relevance" shifted the conversation away from public issues and toward speculation about personal motives. In a democracy, people choose to enter politics for many good reasons, such as wanting to help in governance and public life. Political debates should focus on what a candidate has done, their ideas, and their contributions, instead of making assumptions about their hidden motives.

The attempt to draw a "cautionary parallel" with the late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was misplaced and intellectually unconvincing. Dr. Hazarika remains one of the most respected cultural icons of the

Northeast. Reducing his immense legacy to a single political episode is historically simplistic and factually debatable. The political realities of Assam during that period and present-day Meghalaya are entirely different. The comparison seemed more emotional than analytical and unnecessarily created suspicion around democratic participation.

Most unfortunate was the suggestion that if Dr. Nonglail lost the election, he might lose the moral authority and public respect he earned over decades of service. In a democracy, contesting an election should never be seen as a moral gamble where victory preserves dignity and defeat destroys it. Electoral outcomes cannot erase a lifetime of intellectual, cultural, and public contribution.

Elections should remain contests of ideas, governance, public vision, and service to the people, not moral tests deciding who deserves respect. A healthy democ-

racy values individuals for their sincerity, contribution, and commitment to public welfare, regardless of victory or defeat.

At a time when political discourse is becoming more polarised, the media, including letters pages, has an important responsibility to maintain fairness, proportion, and editorial balance. Editors are not expected to suppress opinions but must ensure that personal insinuations and one-sided political narratives do not overshadow fair and reasoned democratic discussion.

The people of Meghalaya are politically aware and fully capable of making their own judgments at the ballot box.

Yours etc.,
Divesh Ranjan,
Via email

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

"No legacy is so rich as honesty."

— William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 269 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2026

Politics Versus Governance

THE Voice of People Party (VPP) which was the most vocal exponent on the need to change the State's Reservation Policy was not present on May 6 when the Expert Committee on the Policy was to discuss the findings and recommendations. The VPP's reason for not attending the crucial meet was that it had to attend to other 'pressing issues.' This alibi appears flippant and suggests that the VPP is either not interested in the outcome of the findings and recommendations or that it does not have an alternative suggestion other than stressing on the population-based reservation between the three tribes — Khasi, Jaintia and Garo. Interestingly it was on the platform of the State Reservation Policy that the Party had built one of its most aggressive political campaigns with the Ardent Basaiawmoit the Party President going on a hunger strike on the issue. It was that expression of urgency by the VPP which compelled the MDA Government to constitute the Expert Committee.

The VPP along with the TMC are the chief Opposition parties in the present political scenario. Yet the VPP did not even consult other Opposition MLAs for a consensus on the issue. It preferred, to go it alone. That is understandable considering that the TMC is a state-wide party comprising senior MLAs and former Chief Minister, Dr Mukul Sangma, a Garo who would presumably not be open to reconsidering the State Reservation Policy. Besides, the VPP has never considered entering the Garo Hills and remains a Khasi-Jaintia Party perhaps with the intention of riding the wave of the "jaitbynriew" politics which has been the regional parties' stock in trade for winning elections over the decades by whipping raw emotions that the "jaitbynriew" is in danger first from non-tribals and second from the Garos who are ostensibly taking away their share of jobs through the route of the Reservation Policy. The jaitbynriew politics has been around for over 50 years but has brought no significant change to Meghalaya's governance and that is because there is a huge difference between politics and governance. Politics decides what should be done and that happens at the time of election campaigns where all political parties spell out their manifesto to the public and seek votes based on it. Once elections are over and done with, political parties that form the government and also those in the Opposition have to focus governance which decides how schemes are to be implemented on the ground and how the election promises are delivered. Political parties cannot resort to politics once elections are over. If politics dominates too much policies may become unstable or populist. If governance is weak even good political decisions fail in practice.

Unfortunately for Meghalaya political parties continue to play politics for the entire 5 years and do not follow up on governance. They don't focus on the shortcomings of governance. It would be intuitive for instance to find out what suggestions the VPP has for tackling the biggest problem in Meghalaya today — the presence of thousands of schools which have five teachers teaching five students or schools with only teachers but no students. Should such schools be closed or should they continue to function and suck at the scarce resources of the state? Why can the VPP not give its recommendations on this critical issue? Politics has a sell by date. Ultimately people want tangible and visible results.

Separating Facts from Political Misinformation

By Alan West Kharkongor

In any democratic society, the deliberate spread of false and misleading information against an individual or public figure can seriously damage reputations, mislead the public, and create unnecessary distrust.

Despite being a native of Sohra and having worked closely with Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem, his Myntri, and previous Executive Committees, I had consciously stayed away from the ongoing issue surrounding the non-issuance of the Sanad to Paiem Maremdor Syiem. I had hoped that KHADC and Hima Sohra would resolve the matter amicably by aligning the existing rules of succession with the traditional Ka Riti Jied Syiem Hima Sohra. I also refrained from involvement because my participation could have unnecessarily given the issue a political colour due to my association with a political party.

However, recent developments have made it necessary to place facts before the public, clarify misconceptions, and ensure that public opinion is guided by truth rather than politically motivated misinformation.

My attention was drawn to allegations made on social media and by certain Executive Members of KHADC against Paiem Maremdor Syiem. The matter escalated further when the President of the Voice of the People Party (VPP), Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit, during a political rally at Mawlai, accused Paiem Maremdor Syiem of "Lilam" or illegally selling land, a term commonly understood in Khasi society to imply that land was given away or transferred at a very cheap value without proper negotiation or adequate consent from the rightful stakeholders or traditional authorities.

I was shocked that such a serious allegation could be made publicly without first placing the complete facts before the people. Responsible leaders must verify facts carefully before making statements that may create misunderstanding and public distrust.

The issue relates to the proposed extension of the lease of land belonging to Hima Sohra that had been leased to the State Government for setting up the MCCL plant since the 1960s. As Adviser (Tourism) to Hima Sohra, I was personally involved in discussions between Hima Sohra and the Tourism Department regarding this matter. However, the process remained incomplete following the untimely demise of Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem.

To accuse Paiem Maremdor Syiem of illegally selling or leasing the land is therefore a serious allegation capable of unfairly tarnishing his reputation. To this day, no Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Lease Agreement extending the lease of the land has been signed either by Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem or Paiem Maremdor Syiem in favour of the State Government. In fact, after the expiry of the earlier MCCL lease agreement in 2020, the State Government

has not even formally handed back possession of the land to Hima Sohra to date. Further, on 4 February 2025, the Syiem of Hima Sohra received an official communication from the Managing Director of MCCL requesting the Hima not to take any unilateral decision regarding the land while expressing interest in renewing the lease, subject to the State Government's decision.

It is therefore unfortunate that incomplete narratives and politically charged statements are being circulated without acknowledging the actual legal and factual position. At a time when emotions surrounding the issue are already sensitive, leaders and organisations must act responsibly and avoid statements that may mislead the public or damage reputations without evidence.

The collapse of MCCL has been a major concern for the people of Sohra and Hima Sohra, resulting in job losses and worsening economic conditions for many families. Tourism has emerged as another blessing for Sohra, but not everyone has the means to establish guest houses, homestays, or businesses. There was therefore strong pressure on the State Government to revive economic opportunities, including attempts to revive cement operations through outside companies.

The Government had issued an Expression of Interest (EOI) in 2022 for a Joint Venture partner, though the process was terminated in December 2023 after interested parties failed to meet the requirements. Had the process succeeded, the lease would likely have been extended any way for another cement factory.

This issue was repeatedly discussed during informal meetings at the office of the Syiem of Sohra and in formal meetings of the Tourism Committee of Hima Sohra regarding alternatives to the cement factory. Most Myntris, Executive Members, and Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem believed tourism had the potential to economically replace MCCL — a view I fully support.

Coincidentally, on 17 June last year, the then Director of Tourism, Mr. C.V.D. Diengdoh, invited Hima Sohra for a meeting which I attended as Adviser (Tourism). The discussion focused on the possible extension of the lease of the MCCL area for a tourism initiative that could benefit the people of Sohra. Hima Sohra was requested to deliberate on the proposal and revert for further discussions with the Commissioner & Secretary, Tourism, Dr Vijay Kumar.

Following the meeting, Late Paiem Freeman requested me to prepare a concept plan for a tourism initiative so that Hima Sohra could present a vision aimed at ensuring maximum benefit to the local people. Accordingly, I prepared and submitted the same. After several rounds of deliberations, Hima Sohra was requested to formally communicate its decision to

the Department of Tourism. The matter was then placed before the Executive Committee of Hima Sohra in the presence of Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem, who unanimously agreed in principle to support a tourism intervention on the MCCL land and the extension of the lease, subject to the State Government accepting the conditions laid down by Hima Sohra.

The proposed terms and conditions were intended to ensure direct benefits for the local population. These included preference for local employment in accordance with the PPP Policy, submission of a detailed blueprint of the proposed interventions, and a condition that only tourism-related activities would be permitted on the land. It was also clearly stated that if the land was not utilised within five years, it would revert back to Hima Sohra.

Hima Sohra had also clearly stated that the matter would ultimately be placed before the Dorbar Hima Sohra for final approval. However, following the sudden demise of Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem, no further meetings or discussions took place. Even after the funeral rites, the issue was never pursued further.

Although the Tourism Department had verbally expressed its intention to sign the MoU during the visit of Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, Hima Sohra was unwilling to proceed since the matter could not be reconsidered by the Executive Committee or the Dorbar due to the deteriorating health of Paiem Freeman, who was hospitalised at the time. Therefore, the allegation that Paiem Maremdor Syiem had "Lilam" or transferred the land for 60 years is entirely baseless and appears to be a deliberate attempt to obstruct the issuance of his Sanad.

Personally, I see no harm in extending the lease for tourism-related purposes, nor do I see any valid reason for KHADC to oppose it. Recently, Elaka Mawmluh also handed over land to the Tourism Department for implementation of the Rs 34 crore Mawmluh Cave — A Meghalayan Age Experience project. Would KHADC now take action against the Sordar of Mawmluh or against any Syiem, Sirdar, or Rangbah Shnong who facilitates developmental projects by cooperating with the State Government?

What should instead concern KHADC is the leasing of nearly 200 acres of land at Mawblei Kurikhal Majai under the Sohra Syiemship to one Rocky Dhar, a non-resident of Hima Sohra, for 90 years at extremely low annual rents ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 15,000 up to the year 2104. In my opinion, this amounts to a complete sell-out of community land.

The land was leased for mining activities including limestone-burning plants, cement factories, thermal plants, and stockyards. This raises serious environmental concerns. If KHADC objects to Paiem Maremdor Syiem merely participating in negotiations on

behalf of the people of Hima Sohra, then the same standards should also apply to those Myntris and Executive Members of the previous administration of Hima Sohra who signed or supported such agreements, and appropriate action should be taken against them. Some of them are part of the new administration, including the Acting Chief recently appointed by KHADC. This is not a mere allegation; copies of the agreement are available at the office of Hima Sohra.

In a recent article, Bhogtaram Mawroh questioned whether environmental organisations such as the Greentech Foundation should also address issues involving private players such as coal mafias, limestone mafias, sand mining, river pollution, and destruction of catchment areas. Here too lies a serious environmental concern, as the proposed mining and industrial activities could cause significant environmental damage.

At the very least, the proposal put forward by Hima Sohra regarding the MCCL land aligned with global efforts toward sustainable development by promoting tourism — often referred to as a green industry — as an alternative to environmentally destructive industries such as cement manufacturing.

The masterplan I submitted to Hima Sohra, which was later submitted to the Tourism Department, proposed 100 acres for ecological rejuvenation and a Biological Park inspired by the successful restoration of the Mombasa Cement Plant in Kenya. The vision also included a Sohra Aquatic Park, adventure park, high-end hotels, Northeast Tourism Incubation Hub, heritage museum, arts and crafts centre, food court, open-air concert stadium, amphitheatre, waste management system, and helipad. All these were intended to create a world-class tourism experience and generate direct and indirect employment opportunities for the people of Hima Sohra and the greater Sohra region for generations to come.

Finally, my humble request is that if any further allegations are made against Paiem Maremdor Syiem, they should be supported by proper evidence and factual records. In the absence of such evidence, I personally believe he should be allowed to serve as U Syiem Longsyiem ka Hima Sohra.

Another reason cited for the delay in issuing the Sanad is the existence of another claimant, Mr. Planet Syiem, described as the nephew of Late Paiem Freeman Sing Syiem. Having been born and brought up in Sohra and having worked closely with Hima Sohra for many years, I can honestly say that neither I nor the people of Sohra have known him in connection with the traditional affairs of the Hima. Further, going by the established Ka Riti Jied Syiem Sohra, he may not qualify since he has embraced Christianity, unless KHADC now intends to reinterpret this long-respected traditional practice of Hima Sohra.

VPP's Reservation Politics Faces a Serious Credibility Test

By Divesh Ranjan

For nearly three years, Meghalaya's Reservation Policy has remained at the centre of the political rise of the Voice of the People Party (VPP). Through hunger strikes, public rallies and a strong political campaign, the party and its leader, Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit, transformed the reservation debate into a major political movement across the Khasi Jaintia region.

The issue played an important role in helping the VPP grow from a regional opposition force into one of Meghalaya's most influential political parties. The party expanded its influence in the Assembly, strengthened its position in the KHADC and eventually captured the Shillong Lok Sabha seat by projecting itself as a strong voice of Khasi Jaintia aspirations.

However, politics is not judged only through protests and slogans. Political credibility is also tested through participation in institutions, policy discussions, decision making processes and by a genuine intention to contribute towards resolving public issues responsibly.

That is why the VPP's decision to skip the all party meeting convened by the Meghalaya government on May 6 triggered considerable political discussion across the state.

The meeting was organised specifically to discuss the findings of the Expert Committee on the Reservation Policy, a committee that came into existence largely after sustained public pressure and agitation in which the VPP played a leading role. Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma had earlier assured the Assembly that all political parties would be consulted before any final decision was taken. The report had already been tabled in the Assembly and the government called the meeting to discuss its legal, constitutional and administrative implications.

Whether one agrees with the government's position or not, many observers acknowledge that the government followed the institutional process by forming an expert committee, placing the report before the Assembly and inviting political parties for consultation.

Yet, the party that had been most vocal on the issue remained absent.

The VPP stated that it was occupied with "other pressing public issues." However, the explanation led to questions from political observers and sections of the public regarding what circumstances prevented even one representative of the party from attending such an important consultation.

Some critics also argued that the incident highlighted concerns about excessive dependence on one central leader. According to these observers, much of the party's political messaging and direction appears closely associated with Basaiawmoit himself. While strong central leadership can help rapidly build political momentum, analysts often point out that long term political sustainability also depends on organisational depth and collective leadership.

In this context, some political commentators suggested that the absence from the meeting created an impression of either weak internal coordination or insufficient delegation of responsibility within the party structure. There is also a broader political dimension that cannot be ignored.

The reservation issue undoubtedly strengthened the VPP's support base in the Khasi Jaintia belt. However, as the party attempts to expand politically into Garo Hills, some observers believe it faces increasing perception challenges. The strong rhetoric surrounding revision of the quota structure has created concern among sections of the Garo community, where some

people perceive the debate through the lens of ethnic and regional imbalance.

The expert committee's recommendation to maintain the status quo may also have placed the VPP in a politically sensitive position. Political analysts suggest that direct engagement with the committee's constitutional and legal observations could have complicated the emotional public narrative surrounding the movement.

However, critics argue that responsible opposition politics requires participation not only in public mobilisation but also in institutional dialogue and consultation processes.

Among politically aware citizens, intellectuals and educated youth, discussions have emerged regarding whether the VPP is effectively transitioning from an agitation driven movement into a mature political institution capable of sustained policy engagement and governance oriented politics.

Some supporters who once strongly identified with the movement are now expressing disappointment over the party's absence from the consultation process. According to political observers, this has contributed to a perception among certain sections of voters that emotionally sensitive issues may sometimes continue to dominate political mobilisation even when opportunities for formal engagement are available.

At the same time, many citizens still view the VPP as an important political force and a significant alternative in Meghalaya politics. The party's rise reflected a broader public desire for cleaner governance, stronger opposition and new political leadership.

Meghalaya has witnessed the emergence of several new political parties over the last three Assembly elections because a section of voters continues searching for credible alternatives. Political history in the state also shows that parties which rise rapidly through public emotion and mass support often face difficulties sustaining momentum if organisational discipline, strategic planning and institutional engagement do not evolve simultaneously.

For this reason, every opposition party carries not only electoral ambition but also the responsibility of representing the aspirations and trust of citizens seeking meaningful change.

Several observers further note that the decline of once influential opposition parties at the national level offers an important political lesson. Public emotion can generate rapid support, but maintaining long term credibility often requires consistency, accountability, policy understanding and responsible leadership.

Many commentators believe the VPP has reached a critical stage in its political journey. While the party remains highly relevant and influential, debates surrounding recent decisions, including the all party meeting controversy, indicate that expectations from the party are now significantly higher than during its initial rise.

The coming years may therefore determine whether the VPP successfully evolves from a movement driven primarily by public agitation into a mature political institution capable of balancing public emotion with responsible governance oriented politics.

If the party undertakes careful introspection and strategic correction, it may continue to strengthen its position in Meghalaya politics. However, if organisational and perception related concerns continue to grow, the same issue that contributed to the party's rise could also become a major challenge for its long term political credibility.

(The writer is an independent columnist)

Letters to the Editor

Selective Criticism Weakens Public Discourse

Editor,

The recent letter to the editor dated May 8, 2026 by Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah, titled "Religion Not a Political Mandate for Tribal Identity," appears to reflect a selective concern regarding the use of religion in politics, particularly in its criticism of the VPP president. If religion in politics is to be criticised, then the same standard must apply equally to all parties, organisations, and faiths, not selectively to one community or one leader.

We can see that recently, during the felicitation event of the new Chief Minister in West Bengal attended by Amit Shah, a BJP party member reportedly began a political speech with "Jai Jagannath" and "Jai Ma Kali." Across India, several political and socio-religious organisations openly use religious symbols, slogans, temple visits, and faith-based narratives during campaigns

and public events. Concerns have also been raised in recent years over high-ranking public officials and even military figures appearing at religious functions in uniform, including visits to temples by senior army officials, as such actions may blur the line between state institutions and religious identity.

If references to Christianity in public speeches are questioned, then similar religious expressions on political platforms by others should also be examined with equal seriousness. Selective criticism only creates division and weakens the credibility of the argument. At the same time, if we truly care about preserving indigenous identity, then Niam Tynrai traditions should also not be diluted by imported mainland Indian rituals and practices that were historically not part of the original Khasi and Jaintia faith systems. What is seen today in places like Nartiang reflects influences and changes that were not part of the earlier form of Niam Tre many years ago. Indigenous faiths must be preserved in their authentic form and not reshaped by external religious or cultural pressures from

any side.

Faith is personal, while tribal identity is rooted in history, culture, language, and ancestral traditions. Respect for diversity must apply equally to Christians, Niam Tynrai, Niamtre, Hindus, Muslims, and all others. Public discussion should therefore focus on fairness, consistency, and mutual respect instead of targeting one belief system alone.

Yours etc.,
D R Kharlukhi,
Via email

Erosion of Laitumkhras Identity

Editor,

The erosion of Laitumkhras identity from a respected educational and religious bastion into a hub for bars and unregulated nightlife is a tragedy that local residents can no longer ignore. It is deeply troubling to see the stretch from Don Bosco to Firebrigade, once defined by the presence of prestigious schools, hostels, hospitals, and churches, now saturated with wine shops and restaurants that prioritise

liquor sales over community values.

This shift has created an environment where young students are openly exposed to substance use, drifting vehicles, and a culture that contradicts the very essence of this locality. The responsibility for this deterioration lies squarely with the local leadership.

One must question how the Rangbah Dong and Rangbah Shnong have so readily granted No Objection Certificates for these establishments despite their proximity to sensitive institutions.

Unlike neighbouring areas like Mawlai or Lachamiere, where the Dorbar Shnongs have taken firm stands against the proliferation of bars to protect their residents, Laitumkhras leadership appears to have turned a blind eye.

The alleged illegal sale of liquor near the Laitumkhras Market and the noise pollution from late-night revellers further suggest a total breakdown in local governance. It is time to move away from the leadership that allowed this commercialisation to override the safety and moral upbringing of our children.

What have the Rangbah

Shnong contributed during their term? Night clubs remain open till very late. Immoral activities are taking place on the road adjacent to Bansara Eye Clinic. Young High school boys and girls are openly smoking in cafés and eateries in the area. Are the Rangbah Shnong aware of these activities?

Two or three days ago, the newly formed Seng Longkme of Laitumkhras immediately swung into action by conducting night patrolling across the Laitumkhras Bazar area from 8 PM onwards. What I find surprising is that the Rangbah Shnong and Rangbah Dong also took part in the patrolling.

My question is: how have the Rangbah Shnongs suddenly realised that night patrolling is important? What are their hidden agendas? Is it because on Saturday, 9th May 2026, there will be an election of the Dorbar Shnong to elect a new Rangbah Shnong? Are they engaging in self-campaigning to get re-elected to the post? This is a matter of grave concern.

In light of all these points, I would like to know whether our Honourable MLA from Laitumkhras has noticed these developments. I hum-

bly request her to also look into this matter, which is very important.

As the elections for the Rangbah Shnong are approaching, the residents of Laitumkhras face a critical turning point. It is time to move away from the leadership that allowed this commercialisation to override the safety and moral upbringing of our children. This is a plea to every concerned citizen of Laitumkhras to use their power to restore the dignity and peace that Laitumkhras deserves.

As we the residents of Laitumkhras, know the time has come for all of us to take this chance to bring back the lost glory of Laitumkhras.

If we wish to reclaim the glory of our home and ensure a healthy environment for the next generation, we must elect new faces who are genuinely committed to the welfare of the people rather than the interests of the liquor lobby.

Yours etc.,
Name Withheld on Request,
Via email

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

*"Accuracy is the twin brother of honesty;
inaccuracy, of dishonesty."*

— Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 270 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2026

NEET Question Paper Leak

IT'S a pity that over 22 lakh students set for the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) 2026 have been taken for a ride. The test has been cancelled at the height of the process after question papers were found to have been leaked. Allegations also suggest the leak took place at the highest level of the education ministry. This might or might not be true. But it is incumbent on the National Testing Agency to act with greater seriousness and accountability. Such leakages have tainted the image of this entity repeatedly in the past, but it is neither remorseful nor willing to mend its ways and ensure a smooth process. The process involves the future of several lakh students who put in hard efforts for years to prepare for this examination and qualify themselves for medical courses in universities across the country. A promise that the test would be conducted afresh and that no fresh payment has to be made by the students is small comfort. This hardly makes up for the frustration, anger and disappointment among students.

Holding this kind of test is a gargantuan task. But an entity entrusted with such a major responsibility should carry with it the grit and determination to do a good job. That some 145 questions were leaked and sold via WhatsApp and other means across states presented a shocking scenario. In times of advanced communication technology, it is not difficult to organise such tests across states in a uniform and error-free manner. Proper safeguards have to be ensured at places where the printing or processing of question papers is done to avoid any leakage. Transportation of question papers by road or any other means could be avoided and instead electronic communication methods adopted. Several private entities are efficiently conducting similar tests for selections via the electronic mode. The possibilities are many, but are not explored. India's education system itself is flawed and does not enjoy a flawless reputation. Lakhs of students fly abroad for higher studies, but fewer students from even our neighbourhood are coming in here to take up select courses of studies.

All systems have gone for a toss — and it would appear that nothing would function in a normal manner. Accountability is the first casualty. Lack of accountability starts with the leaders who govern the nation from its apex. When they do not take things seriously, those below them don't care about flouting the rules. Every time something goes wrong and a public outcry follows, what they do is order an investigation, sit back and relax as if their job is over. Neither is the investigation report studied in detail nor is action taken against the guilty in most such cases as the errand have their high political connections. In the present case, an investigation is under way through four or more states and some arrests have been made. Punitive action must follow. What's equally important is to avoid such a shameful scenario from recurring. The NTA must mend its ways and appoint efficient people at the top to oversee matters.

A Toxic Relationship: The BJP-NPP alliance in Meghalaya

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

I have been in toxic relationships, and therefore I can recognize one when I see it. Perhaps the most toxic relationship right now is the one between the BJP and the NPP. After the BJP won the Bengal and Assam elections, the BJP Meghalaya state unit declared that the party would form the government in 2028. This prompted Wailadniki Shylla, a cabinet minister from the NPP in the present MDA government, to caution that victory in Bengal and Assam would not necessarily translate into success in Meghalaya. I would agree with him because the issues that resonated in those two states are not going to be similar here. Granted, the spectre of illegal immigration is considered an existential threat in all three states; however, the identity of the perceived threat is quite different.

In West Bengal and Assam, Bengali Muslims are perceived as the primary threat, whereas in Meghalaya, the anxiety is directed towards all non-indigenous people. To counter this hostility, the BJP would need to adopt a secular and inclusive approach towards all communities and refrain from discriminating on the basis of ethnicity or religion, which is unlikely to happen considering the speeches made by some of the winning candidates in Bengal. After winning the Nandigram seat, Suvendu Adhikari, the new Chief Minister of the state, claimed that the entire Muslim vote had gone to the TMC and therefore he would only work for Hindus. For many in the state, therefore, the BJP is identified with Hindutva, i.e., the idea that the country should become an overtly Hindu state. It is not only Muslims who are under threat under such a regime. Alexander Laloo Hek, senior BJP leader, himself raised concerns about the contentious Foreign Contribution Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was seen as unfairly targeting Christian-led charitable institutions.

The sense of unease about the BJP was best exemplified during the 2023 Assembly elections, when Mariahom Kharkrang, the BJP's chief spokesperson, surged ahead of Adelbert Nongrum, now a suspended VPP legislator, in the initial rounds for the North Shillong seat. Commentators localised their concern about the possibility of the BJP winning

the constituency, which is considered a hotbed of Khasi nationalism. However, Khasi votes consolidated in the subsequent rounds, and Adelbert Nongrum won by a thin margin of around 5%. Then, in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the VPP secured a decisive victory by winning 55% of the total vote.

Most of those who voted for the VPP did so because it was seen as the latest iteration of a regional party espousing Khasi-first or jaidbynriew politics. The agitation demanding a review of the reservation policy had cemented that image. However, recently, the party has given the impression that it is no longer interested in pursuing the issue, as seen from its refusal to take part in the recent all-party meeting on the Reservation Policy report. In defence of not attending the meeting, the party reiterated that it still wants reservation based on population ratio, which, however, clashes with its belated acceptance of keeping the Garo share intact—a highly convoluted and contradictory position. That said, ethno-nationalism, of which Hindutva is also an example, does not always depend on rationality but rather on emotions.

Those Khasis who voted for the VPP in the 2024 election may again vote for the party because, although they may feel cheated on the issue of Reservation, they will still believe that the party is the best option to protect Khasi interests against outsiders. Many who espouse "jaidbynriew politics" believe that the "Khasis are in danger," much like the slogan that claims that "Hindus are in danger." Is the BJP hoping that the majority of such voters will somehow shift their support to them—a party that recently proposed transforming the Mawjymbuin Cave into a Hindu religious tourist site? SIR (Special Intensive Revision) and delimitation were major factors in the West Bengal and Assam elections. According to a report by Anant Gupta in Scroll.in, in 105 seats won by the BJP in West Bengal, the number of voters deleted during the SIR exceeded the party's margin of victory. For instance, Mamata Banerjee lost by around 15,000 votes from Bhabanipur where more than 50,000 voters had reportedly been deleted, and she was not the only case. Similarly,

Rokibuz Zaman carried out a detailed analysis of the delimitation exercise in Assam, revealing that it was designed to ensure that Muslim voters would play a decisive role in only 23 out of the state's 126 constituencies. Reports also suggest that more than six lakh new voters were added to the West Bengal electoral rolls after the publication of the final voter list, with some observers claiming that no clear explanation was provided regarding the identity of these voters.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that anti-incumbency was also an important issue in West Bengal, with the TMC being accused of failing to deliver on governance. In Assam, almost all the winning Congress candidates were Muslims, which suggests that the BJP was able to portray the Congress as a party that supports illegal immigration into the state. To win convincingly enough to form a government on its own, the BJP would have to transform itself into a pro-jaidbynriew party that treats practically every non-indigenous community as immigrants who threaten the demographic structure of the state. Will the BJP be able to carry out such a rebranding?

For the voters who feel cheated by the VPP on the issue of reservation, they will also be somewhat concerned by its heavy-handedness regarding the succession issue in Hima Sohra, with indications that the KHADC might prefer someone other than Mamremdor Syiem, despite him having the support of the community. Such voters may either vote for the Congress or the NPP in the upcoming by-election, considering that they have announced D. Rockyer Lyngdoh Nonglaj, Professor of Khasi at North-Eastern Hill University and president of the Khasi Authors' Society, as their candidate. In the Garo Hills, the recent prohibition on non-indigenous people contesting ADC elections is seen more as the personal achievement of Bernard Marak than that of the BJP itself. Therefore, for the BJP to have even a realistic chance of forming the government, it must perform well in two very important upcoming elections: the GHADC elections and the Lok Sabha by-poll for the Shillong seat.

But there is actually a way

in which the BJP can come to power without winning those two elections. It can use the most common weapon in its political toolkit: engineering defections among opponents and cannibalising alliance partners.

The two states where the BJP won, Assam and Bengal, are now governed by former opposition leaders, Himanta Biswa Sarma and Suvendu Adhikari, who joined the BJP after allegations of corruption, were made against them. Suvendu Adhikari was in fact once mocked by Narendra Modi himself during an election rally. Today, however, he was seen embracing the Prime Minister after becoming the Chief Minister of Bengal. So there is a high likelihood that one route for the BJP to grow beyond the two seats it currently holds in the state is by persuading opposition legislators to join them. The best example is AAP leader Raghav Chadha, who defected to the BJP.

But the biggest prize would be engineering defections among its allies. Not long ago, the Home Minister of the country, Amit Shah, labelled the NPP-led government as the most corrupt in the country. The problem was that he made those claims in Hindi and not in Khasi or Garo. Therefore, many people did not understand what he said. But given that the claim came from someone occupying such a high office, it would suggest that there must be some evidence of corruption against the NPP—unless, of course, it was merely a lie or a "juma" meant only for campaign purposes. But if there is any truth to the allegation, the BJP could use that information to engineer a split in the NPP and capture the government. The most pertinent examples are the Shiv Sena. This possibility of betrayal is very much present considering the statements made by the state BJP unit that it will form the government on its own in 2028. It is for this reason that I believe the BJP-NPP alliance is a perfect example of a toxic relationship where, despite being together, at least one partner does everything possible to humiliate and disrespect the other. Why else would such a statement be made while still remaining in an alliance?

(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)

Jaidbynriew and the Politics of Fear

By Tynshain Kupar Lyngdoh

The debate around jaidbynriew has long shaped the political and social thinking of the Khasi people. From village dorbar to pressure groups, from student unions to political platforms, the call to "protect the Jaidbynriew" has become almost sacred in Khasi public life. As a Khasi, I understand why this feeling exists. Our ancestors fought hard to preserve our kur, shnong, language, customs, and identity in the face of colonialism, migration, and political uncertainty. The concern about protecting our identity is genuine and justified.

But today, we must ask

in the Khasi Hills, yet much of the larger investment and organisation comes from outside our community. Instead of asking only "who is entering our land?", we must also ask, "why are we not leading our own economy?"

There is also a growing culture of symbolic politics. Protests, pressure groups, and emotional speeches have started replacing long-term planning. It is easier to gather people through fear than through policy. It is easier to shout about outsiders than to improve education, roads, healthcare, farming, or industries. The common Khasi

"While protecting identity is important, a society cannot survive only on defensive politics. A community also needs economic vision, better education, industries, entrepreneurship, scientific progress, and strong institutions. In many of these areas, the Khasi Hills continue to fall behind."

ourselves an uncomfortable question. Has our constant focus on protecting the jaidbynriew stopped us from progressing as a society?

For decades, Khasi leadership has looked at almost every issue through the lens of identity protection. Whether it is land ownership, jobs, migration, trade, or politics, the message has remained the same: "protect the Jaidbynriew." While protecting identity is important, a society cannot survive only on defensive politics. A community also needs economic vision, better education, industries, entrepreneurship, scientific progress, and strong institutions. In many of these areas, the Khasi Hills continue to fall behind.

Meanwhile, other communities in Meghalaya particularly the Jaintias, despite having their own struggles, have increasingly focused on economic growth, education, and institution-building. We see more entrepreneurship, professional success, agricultural innovation, and organised community development. But among Khasi leadership, there is still a tendency to treat every challenge as a threat to identity. The result is a politics driven more by fear than by ambition.

One of the biggest contradictions in Khasi society is that we constantly talk about

citizen is constantly told that identity is under threat, but is rarely shown a real roadmap for prosperity.

This is not an argument against protecting Khasi identity. Identity matters. Language matters. Land rights matter. Indigenous communities everywhere have genuine concerns about preserving their culture in a fast-changing world. But identity without development leads to stagnation. Protection without progress leads to isolation. A society cannot only preserve itself; it must also grow and adapt.

Today, the Khasi community stands at a crossroads. One path continues the politics of fear, constant suspicion, defensive reactions, and emotional appeals to ethnic identity. The other path is to move forward with confidence. Protecting our culture while also building a stronger economy, improving our traditional institutions, and strengthening our identity through progress instead of fear.

Our ancestors were not weak people hiding behind slogans. They were traders, farmers, thinkers, and builders of society. The true spirit of the Khasi people was never about isolating ourselves from the world, but engaging with it with dignity and confidence. If we truly want to protect the jaidbynriew, then we must

"The slogan of Khasi unity often hides divisions based on region, political interests, and social differences. The idea of bringing smaller tribes under a larger Khasi identity has also created discomfort among communities that want to preserve their own traditions while still living together peacefully within Meghalaya."

unity while remaining divided among ourselves. The slogan of Khasi unity often hides divisions based on region, political interests, and social differences. The idea of bringing smaller tribes under a larger Khasi identity has also created discomfort among communities that want to preserve their own traditions while still living together peacefully within Meghalaya. Real unity cannot come simply through the idea of bringing every smaller community under a larger Khasi identity. Experiences in the past, including concerns raised by sections of the Jaintia community, show that unity must be built carefully through mutual respect, equal recognition, and shared progress rather than through a sense of cultural absorption.

The tragedy is that while we endlessly debate identity, the economic foundation of Khasi society remains weak. Many educated Khasi youths still depend heavily on government jobs, while entrepreneurship and private-sector participation remain limited. Our markets are often dominated by outside traders not because they conspired against us, but because we failed to build strong local businesses ourselves. Tourism is growing

build a society where Khasi youth become entrepreneurs, scientists, scholars, artists, industrialists, and leaders beyond Meghalaya. Like a frog that grows only when it leaves the small pond and sees the wider river, for a community that stays too long within the limits of fear risks forgetting how vast the world truly is, but one that dares to grow carries its identity even farther.

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

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

Letters to the Editor

Excessive Lust For Power Makes Leaders Act Preposterously

Editor,

Excessive lust for power and obsession with politics often misleads a person. This can be seen in Ardent Basaiawmoit - leader of the Voice of the People Party (VPP). I have come to this conclusion after watching and listening to his provocative speeches and insulting remarks against others.

Following the march by Ki Khun Ki Hajar ka Hima Sohra to the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council on May 7, 2026 regarding the matter of the Syiem of Hima Sohra, Basaiawmoit made extremely reckless statements at one of his party's election campaign meetings. He said that the NPP is politicising this matter in the KHADC as if all the people of Hima Sohra belong to the NPP.

It is unbecoming for a mature political leader to make such reckless statements without knowing the truth, especially when he projects himself as a responsible leader. His irresponsible remarks clearly show that he is intoxicated by elections and hungry only for power. As a non-partisan son of the Hima Sohra, I strongly condemn such statements because they

might create misunderstanding and division among the people of Hima Sohra.

Before pointing fingers at others, Basaiawmoit should first look at his own back. It is easy for him to accuse others of politicising issues, but he fails to see that he and his party have politicised nearly every issue. What is the point of staging street protests against the Government but refusing to attend discussions when invited to the negotiation table? Does he think the public is so foolish as to keep believing his empty and aggressive rhetoric?

Now just because the people of Hima Sohra oppose the Executive Committee in KHADC led by his party, does that automatically make them members or supporters of the NPP or any other party? But even if they do belong to any party, why should he interfere? Do the people of Hima Sohra not have the right to protest? Is his own party so clean and spotless? Has he forgotten that he himself organises protests and public meetings in markets and streets as a leader of a political party not as an individual or a pressure group?

Finally, I urge Basaiawmoit to refrain from making reckless statements without verifying facts, and to think thrice before speaking. He should stop propagating hatred and spreading division in the name of jaidbynriew, as it will only bring disunity among our people.

If he truly wants public support and genuinely loves his community, he should focus on meaningful work instead of staging street protests that are "all thunder and no rain." He should participate in constructive debates and discussions and help frame laws and policies. Merely shouting on the streets and insulting others will bear no fruit. He should stop becoming "Ksan Rympei Rem Dorbar."

Yours etc.,
Carmel Fedrick Malngiang,
Wahkiali, Sohra

Threats and Calls for "Pynduh Jait" Cannot Silence the Jaintia Voice

Editor,

The reported statement by Danny Khyriem, former KSU leader during the General Council of the Khasi Students' Union, where he allegedly used the term "pynduh jait" against those he labels as "fake historians," is deeply alarming and unacceptable in a democratic society governed by the rule of law.

In Khasi usage, "pynduh jait" carries a grave and dangerous meaning to eliminate, erase, wipe out, kill, or even assassinate those perceived as oppo-

nents. When used publicly against individuals engaged in historical, intellectual, or political debate, such language cannot be dismissed as mere rhetoric. It conveys a threatening message that can reasonably be understood as encouraging hostility or violence against dissenting voices. More disturbingly, the statement was reportedly framed in the context of preventing the "jaidbynriew" from becoming "duh jaid" meaning wiped out thereby portraying certain scholars and writers as existential enemies of the jaidbynriew. Such framing is reckless, inflammatory, and capable of provoking serious consequences.

At a time when Jaintia intellectuals, writers, youth, and concerned citizens are peacefully defending the distinct identity, history, and constitutional rights of the Jaintia people through articles, research, public discussion, and democratic engagement, this statement appears to send a direct and intimidating warning against those voices. It comes amid repeated attempts by certain individuals including statements openly made by VPP leader on the floor of the Meghalaya Assembly to subsume the Jaintias under a broader Khasi identity and reduce them to a mere sub-tribe. The Jaintia people have every democratic and constitutional right to reject such attempts through peaceful scholarship and public discourse.

No individual or organisation can claim monopoly over the protection of the jaidbynriew. The survival and dignity of a people are collectively safeguarded by scholars, elders, writers, youth, traditional institutions, social organisations, and ordinary citizens alike. In any democracy, disagreements over history and identity must be answered through evidence, dialogue, and reason not through threatening language such as "pynduh jait", suggestive of elimination or assassination of those holding opposing views.

Under Indian law, freedom of speech is not absolute. Speech that promotes violence, incites hostility, creates fear, or threatens citizens exercising their democratic rights may attract legal scrutiny. Articles 19(1)(a) and 21 of the Constitution guarantee freedom of expression and protection of life and personal liberty. At the same time, provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita relating to criminal intimidation, incitement to violence, promotion of enmity, and acts prejudicial to public tranquillity empower authorities to take cognizance of inflammatory and threatening statements.

We therefore call upon the Meghalaya Police and concerned authorities to immediately examine the reported remarks and determine whether such statements amount to intimidation, incitement, or a threat to public peace and commu-

nal harmony. Public figures and influential organisations must understand that words carry consequences, especially in emotionally charged identity debates.

Let it also be clearly placed on record. Should any intimidation, harassment, violence, or untoward incident occur against any Jaintia youth, writer, scholar, or citizen peacefully defending Jaintia identity and history, moral and legal responsibility will rest upon those who issue such dangerous rhetoric and upon those who endorse or tolerate it.

The Jaintia people will not be silenced by threats. Our commitment to protecting our identity, history, language, culture, and ancestral heritage is rooted not in hatred toward others, but in respect for our forefathers and our rightful place in history. No amount of intimidation or fear-mongering will deter us from defending who we are.

Debate with us on facts, not threats. Counter us with scholarship, not calls for "pynduh jait." Democracy survives through dialogue, not through rhetoric that places lives and communal harmony at risk.

Yours etc.,
Mantre H Dkhar,
Via email

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

*"Obedience is the mother of success
and is wedded to safety."*

—Aeschylus

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 271 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026

Spectacle of a Swearing-In Ceremony

PRIME Minister, Narendra Modi had proclaimed a list of do's and don'ts for citizens as austerity measures, among which was the need to reduce cars on the road due to fuel exigencies created by the Iran war. But the swearing-in ceremony of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for the second time was a spectacular event that violated every exhortation of the PM, except, perhaps not travelling abroad and not buying gold. There were thousands of vehicles all bound for Khanapara where the swearing-in was scheduled to happen. The Prime Minister himself with the usual cavalcade followed by chief ministers of all BJP-ruled states and their entourage—including those of the CMs of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram that are aligned with the Party—signalled that the plea to conserve national resources was meant for the governed not the rulers. That swearing-in ceremony was intended to send a message across the region that the BJP would consolidate its position so as not to need coalition partners to stymie its agenda. The politics of appeasement would then give way to the politics of governance with an iron hand.

The expenditure for this event possibly came from many quarters. There were representatives of corporate houses from across the country. They are there to scout for business opportunities. And business usually means infrastructure. But the mandarins at NITI Aayog the country's planning body have called for a halt to construction activities due to the economic crunch. The semi-conductor contracts are already with the Tatas so what else will drive industry in Assam? Corporate honchos know the answers to the question and also where the money is. A glance at this spectacular event could mislead the audience into believing that everything is sorted in Assam. Himanta Biswa Sarma would have everyone believe that there is no dearth of employment opportunities; that education is on an upward swing and health care is in super-smart condition meaning everyone has access to healthcare services, including people in the distant rural outback.

What is often ignored are the perennial floods and how that problem can be resolved. In the last five years the BJP-led NDA government of Assam was said to have not only provided good governance but also strengthened the borders to curb illegal immigration even while suspected immigrants were pushed across the Bangladesh border under the cover of darkness. But with eternal vigilance being an uncommon currency how does Assam know those pushed out would not re-enter under the cover of more darkness? Politics today is hugely performative and there are too few in the media to critique such an ostentatious display of extravaganza. Those running the show have carefully curated which media houses would cover the event and amplify the noise and show. Today India is known for its personality driven politics led by no less than the Prime Minister himself. This trend is unlikely to change anytime soon. What's surprising was the presence of the US Ambassador at the swearing-in of the Assam CM. Since when did diplomats involve themselves in political spectacles of this nature? But no one will ask these questions for to question is to be anti-national.

The Saffron Wall: What BJP's Dominance Across the Northeast Means for India

By KC Monnappa

When the votes were counted on May 4, 2026, the map of India's Northeast turned an unmistakable shade of saffron. The BJP swept West Bengal with a historic 207 seats, ending fifteen years of Trinamool Congress rule, and secured its third consecutive term in Assam with 88 of 126 seats. Add to this the party's continuing governance of Tripura and its coalition arrangement with Conrad Sangma's National People's Party in Meghalaya, and one fact becomes impossible to dismiss: for the first time, a single national party effectively controls the political landscape of every state sharing a border with Bangladesh.

The consequences of this alignment, for national security, economic development, minority communities, and Indian federalism, are complex and often contradictory. They deserve serious analysis, stripped of the partisan noise that has surrounded them.

Begin with the geography, because it is non-negotiable: The Siliguri Corridor, a strip of land barely 22 kilometres wide in places, is the only territorial link between India's eight northeastern states and the rest of the country. It sits between Bangladesh to the south, Nepal to the north, and Bhutan to the northeast. For decades, security analysts have identified it as one of India's most vulnerable chokepoints. In any scenario of serious regional instability, it could effectively sever the Northeast from Delhi.

With all states bordering Bangladesh now governed by the BJP or its allies, coordinated border management becomes operationally feasible in a way it simply was not before. Intelligence sharing, joint operations between the BSF and state police, and consistent enforcement of border regulations across thousands of kilometres of often porous frontier no longer require negotiation between governments pulling in opposite directions.

This is not a trivial gain. Under the previous arrangement, central security agencies documented networks in Murshidabad, Malda, and the border districts of West Bengal that allegedly operated with considerable freedom, insulated by state-level political considerations from coordinated crackdowns. Whether one fully credits the more alarming assessments of ISI activity and JMB infiltration routes or approaches them with caution, the basic problem of divided command in a sensitive theatre was real. The new political alignment resolves it, at least on paper.

The BJP's electoral platform in both Bengal and Assam leaned heavily on illegal immigration and demographic change, arguing that unchecked infiltration from Bangladesh had altered the social fabric of border districts and created security vulnerabilities. The underlying concern and the political use of that concern are two distinct things, and honest analysis requires holding both.

There is a genuine, documented phenomenon here. Census data and district-level surveys in Murshidabad, Malda, and parts of North Bengal show significant demographic shifts over de-

acades. The National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam, whatever its implementation flaws, arose from anxieties about undocumented migration that predated the BJP's rise by a generation. The Supreme Court has consistently recognised illegal infiltration as a serious issue and directed successive governments to address it.

The BJP's signature campaign argument has been the "double engine" thesis: that BJP-governed states benefit from frictionless access to central schemes, faster infrastructure clearances, and prioritised funding. In Assam, this argument has a measurable basis. The state has seen significant bridge construction across the Brahmaputra, expanded road connectivity, and direct benefit transfers like the Orunodoi scheme reaching millions of women. Assam's ambition to become a logistics hub under the Act East Policy, connecting India to Southeast Asia through Myanmar, has gained real institutional momentum.

Tripura tells a more complicated story. The BJP took power there in 2018 on a wave of anti-incumbency against the long-ruling Left. Infrastructure investment has improved, but the state's unemployment rate remains among the highest in the country, and educated youth continue to leave. Ethnic tensions, particularly the fraught relationship between the Bengali-origin population and tribal communities, have periodically worsened.

For the Northeast as a whole, the structural problem remains. Despite decades of special category status, central allocations, and Look East and Act East policies, the region contributes barely 2.5 percent of India's GDP. Connectivity improvements are real and welcome. But connectivity is an enabler, not a substitute for local industrial policy, agricultural transformation, or service sector development. Roads and bridges matter. So does what travels on them, and who benefits.

Meghalaya occupies a distinct and largely under-reported position in the BJP's northeastern footprint. The Party does not govern the state directly. It holds only two seats in the 60-member assembly, sitting as a junior partner to Conrad Sangma's NPP, which has led the ruling coalition since 2018. On the surface, this looks like a minor, comfortable arrangement. Beneath that surface, the situation is considerably more layered, and the anxieties running through Meghalayan society are older and deeper than any single election cycle.

Meghalaya is a Christian-majority state, with over 74 percent of its population professing Christianity. This is not simply a demographic statistic. It shapes the state's institutions, its civic culture, and its political instincts in ways that are fundamentally different from the political terrain the BJP has historically navigated. The church is a voice on matters of land rights, tribal autonomy, and governance. When national political currents carry even a faint suggestion of religious

majoritarianism, communities in Meghalaya notice, and they remember.

Woven into that identity is a fierce protectiveness over who can enter the state at all. For years, tribal groups, student unions, and civil society organisations have campaigned for the Inner Line Permit, a travel document that currently requires outsiders to obtain government permission before entering Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur. Meghalaya is conspicuously absent from that list. The Khasi Students' Union, the Federation of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo People, the Jaintia National Council, and others have made ILP a non-negotiable demand, arguing that without it, the state's indigenous communities, who make up over 86 percent of the population, face an unregulated demographic tide. The Meghalaya assembly has passed resolutions on the matter. Sangma has raised it directly with Amit Shah. The Centre has not acted.

The railway question has become the sharpest expression of this tension. Meghalaya has just one operational station, at Mendipathar in the Garo Hills, connected to Guwahati since 2014. The Northeast Frontier Railway has three sanctioned projects intended to expand this network, including lines linking Shillong to Bymat and extending toward Jowai and Baghmara. The economic case for these projects is straightforward: lower transportation costs, reduced inflation, improved trade links. The state government and Garo Hills legislators have broadly supported them. But Khasi and Jaintia groups have resisted them outright, on the grounds that rail connectivity without ILP would open what the KSU describes as a floodgate for unchecked migration. They argue, not unreasonably, that road movement can be monitored at checkpoints in ways that railway travel cannot. The Bymat-Shillong project has been stalled for eight years, with the State surrendering Rs 209 crore to the Centre the unspent land acquisition funds, meant for the railways project. The railway ministry and the state government are at an impasse that no amount of stakeholder consultation has resolved.

The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act deepened the unease further. Meghalaya was exempted from its provisions, given the Sixth Schedule protections applying to its tribal areas, but pressure groups argued the exemption was procedurally insufficient and that ILP alone could provide genuine demographic safeguards. The CAA's framing, offering expedited citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries, was read in Meghalaya not simply as immigration policy but as a signal about whose presence the national government considered welcome and whose it considered problematic. For a Christian-majority state already apprehensive about the direction of national politics, that signal was not lost.

The BJP's expansion across the Northeast, and par-

ticularly its rhetoric around Hindu cultural revival in Bengal and Assam, has been watched in Shillong with a quiet unease that rarely surfaces in formal political statements. During the 2023 assembly elections, when the BJP contested independently, its campaign opened pointed debates about whether a party with deep ideological roots in Hindutva could genuinely represent a state where Christianity is not peripheral but foundational. Conrad Sangma's NPP won comfortably, partly because it could credibly claim to be a tribal-rooted, locally anchored party, one that was using its alliance with Delhi for the state's benefit rather than subordinating itself to it. That framing, however, grows harder to sustain as the BJP's regional footprint deepens and the Centre's leverage over state governments through funding and coalition arithmetic correspondingly grows.

The concern circulating through civil society, among church groups, tribal student bodies, and in the pages of the Shillong Times, is not simply that the BJP will arrive and legislate directly against Christian communities. The worry is more atmospheric; that as the party's influence deepens across the region, the political climate itself shifts. Anti-conversion laws operative in several BJP-governed states have in practice been used in ways that target Christian missionaries and social workers. For now, Meghalaya's political insulation holds, rooted in its tribal character and Sixth Schedule protections. But insulation is not immunity, and the 2026 results across the region will have sharpened the awareness, in Shillong as elsewhere, that political geography is shifting in ways that cannot be wished away by coalition paperwork.

The 2026 results have locked in a political reality that will shape the Northeast for at least one full electoral cycle. The questions that matter now are practical. Will the new Bengal government use its security mandate to pursue immigration enforcement through lawful, documented processes, or will it move toward mass deportations that disregard citizenship claims? Will Assam's logistics hub ambitions produce jobs that keep young people in the state, or will infrastructure serve primarily as a conduit for goods with limited local multiplier effects? Will Meghalaya's NPP continue to buffer the state from the ideological pressures that have transformed politics elsewhere in the region?

The BJP's Northeast dominance is neither the security salvation its supporters claim nor the democratic catastrophe its critics fear. It is a political fact with real consequences that will be shaped by choices made over the next five years: how security is enforced, how development reaches, how alliances are managed, and whether the region's extraordinary diversity is treated as something to be worked with rather than worked around.

Those choices, not the election results themselves, will be the true verdict on what the saffron wall means for India.

Waiting for the Customer: An Absurdist Play in Five Multi-Storey Acts

By Ellerrine Dengdoh

Public safety announcement for the humourless:

The following text is a work of 'Ironical Content.' If you find the logic of this piece 'concerning,' do not panic. Simply stare at a duck until the feeling of having a sense of humour returns. Additionally, for those who spent the last month and a half drafting my eulogy, I hate to disappoint you. I was simply occupied with the Theatre of the Absurd, which remains significantly more coherent than the present geopolitical shambles we call 'reality.' I am not dead, I am simply unimpressed.

A city is essentially a place where thousands of people gather to be irritated together, usually by traffic, weather, or other people who also regret being there.

But Shillong is not just a city now. It is a Smart City. A Smart City is a place that is officially more intelligent than its residents, which is impressive considering it cannot move or think) because it has figured out how to spend crores of public money on buildings that don't actually contain any public in them. One such building is the Polo Commercial Complex.

From the outside, it looks like a building. This is its most successful feature. Inside, however, it has achieved something remarkable: it has removed the "shopping" from "shopping complex." Some have described it as "peaceful," others as "empty" while a few experts have described it as "financially haunted."

If you ask a local kwaiter, a taxi driver, or anyone who has accidentally looked at it, they will tell you it's the world's most expensive cupboard. Not because it stores things, but because it doesn't.

The reason for its emptiness, I was told, is that the government has decided to set the rent for these shops at a price normally reserved for people who sell organs in the black market. The shopkeepers who want to do things like 'pay for food' and 'not be chased by debt collectors,' took one look and said, 'No thank you, we'd rather eat grass.' This has left the grand Polo Complex in a state of Zen-like emptiness. It is the only shopping mall on planet earth that has achieved Nirvana, because it is free from the desire to sell anything. In many ways, it's the most spiritually advanced mall on Earth.

The Government has successfully built a massive stone trap to catch some capitalism, but forgot to put some bait in it. Now they're just standing around the empty cage wondering why they haven't caught a single H&M yet.

Meanwhile, over at Ward's Lake, things are going extremely well if you define "well" as "being slowly turned into something else." The papers were full of it, so I need not explain.

For generations, the lake was a place where people could sit, think, feel things, or simply stare at ducks without being charged for it, which is obviously unsustainable in a modern economy.

The Government appears to have noticed this dangerous level of free happiness and decided to intervene. So the solution is obvious.....improve the lake by introducing commerce.

So, the lake is being improved, not because it was failing, but because it was succeeding incorrectly. It worked for people. Which is not always the same thing as working on paper.

This creates such a fascinating irony....in Shillong, we are removing ducks to make room for shops, while simultaneously providing pigeons and spiders with luxury housing in an empty commercial complex. It is unclear if the pigeons are paying rent, but given the current system, they probably can't afford it either.

However, I remain optimistic, because I have a solution. A terrible one, but one nonetheless. We should simply swap them.

We could dig a massive hole in the Polo Complex floor and drain Ward's Lake into it. Think of the tourism potential. You can pay 500 Rs to paddle a boat past empty shop fronts. It would be the world's first 'Vertical Pond' and it could include a waterfall where the escalators used to be, providing a damp, expensive place for the government to "float" even more tenders. At least this way the paperwork will be waterproof when it sinks.

For the actual Ward's Lake site, we should do the "Smartest" thing imaginable; we should pave over every inch of the place and turn it into a sprawling market. Paving the lake is an act of mercy; it finally cures us of the 'distraction' of nature and the traumatic experience of looking at a tree for free. Instead of rippling water, which is totally unproductive, we can enjoy the incessant screaming of fish-merchants standing on the exact spot where real fish once swam. That way the poor fish can finally be free of being admired by people who never intended to feed them properly anyway.

Ultimately, our "Smart City" has discovered the future of urban planning, and it is called "subtraction." Subtract the hills and trees from nature. Subtract the poor from the sidewalks. Subtract the children from the playgrounds. Subtract the grandfather from the park bench. Subtract the fish from the lake. Subtract the 'smart' from Smart City and what do we have left?

The same Shillong we started with, just sadder now. The same rain, just lesser now. The same rivers, just drains now. The same people, just disillusioned now. The same State, just many many many crores poorer now.....

Letters to the Editor

Sacrifice Begins at the Top

Editor,
How does a leader ask citizens to sacrifice when the corridors of power continue to move in excess?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent appeal to Indians to conserve fuel, avoid foreign travel, reduce gold purchases and embrace austerity in the face of the West Asia crisis has sparked an important national conversation. On paper, the message carries merit. India, like many import-dependent economies, is under pressure as crude oil prices surge past \$100 a barrel and geopolitical tensions continue to disrupt global supply chains. Responsible consumption during uncertain times is not unreasonable advice. But leadership is not

merely about asking people to tighten their belts. Leadership is about tightening your own first. When the Prime Minister asks ordinary Indians to avoid foreign vacations for a year, citizens are bound to notice that he himself is scheduled for another overseas tour, including a visit to Italy and other European destinations. While diplomatic visits are undeniably part of governance and international relations, optics matter in a democracy. A government cannot repeatedly preach restraint while appearing insulated from the very sacrifices it demands.

The issue is not whether India should conserve fuel or reduce unnecessary imports. The issue is whether those in power are willing to visibly share the burden. The Prime Minister's

convoy reportedly consists of around 35 vehicles. Across India, ministers at both the Centre and the states often move with long fleets of SUVs, pilot cars, and security entourages that consume enormous public resources. If the government genuinely wants a national movement toward conservation, why not begin there? Why not reduce the size of official convoys, rationalise VIP movement, cut non-essential travel and publicly disclose fuel saving measures undertaken by ministries?

Citizens do not respond well to what feels like moral instruction delivered from a position of privilege. Appeals begin to sound less like collective responsibility and more like directives handed down from above. In a democracy, persuasion works best when leaders embody

the values they promote.

The government insists there is no shortage of petroleum products, no crisis in reserves, and no immediate threat to supplies. India, officials remind us, has adequate crude oil, gas, and LPG stocks. If that is the case, the messaging should focus on prudent preparedness, not public alarm that risks creating anxiety. The Prime Minister is also right in encouraging domestic tourism and local products. Travelling within India, whether to Kochi, Shillong, Ladakh, or Kutch, strengthens the domestic economy. Investing in financial instruments instead of panic buying gold helps maintain economic stability. These are sensible suggestions.

However, patriotism cannot be demanded selectively from consumers while ig-

norning market realities. If Indian consumers find better quality or better prices in imported goods compared to certain domestic alternatives, the blame cannot automatically fall on the buyer. "Vocal for Local" cannot succeed through slogans alone, it must succeed through competitiveness, quality, affordability and innovation.

This principle extends beyond the ruling party. The Opposition too must face scrutiny. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's frequent foreign vacations have often drawn criticism, and rightly so. Public representatives across party lines must recognise that citizens today are deeply sensitive to political hypocrisy. Whether it is a ruling leader on diplomatic tours or an opposition figure holidaying abroad, public perception matters

when leaders speak about sacrifice and nationalism. India's strength has always come from its people's willingness to stand together in difficult times. Indians have repeatedly shown resilience during wars, pandemics, economic crises and natural disasters. But trust is built when sacrifice is shared equally from the top down.

The country does not need rulers issuing lifestyle instructions from motorcades and international summits. It needs leaders who visibly practise what they preach. Because in moments like these, the nation quietly asks itself a simple question: are we being led by example or merely being told what to do?

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein,
Via email

NEHU not the personal property of NEHUTA

Editor,
With reference to the news item that appeared in your paper and other online news portals, where NEHUTA under the leadership of Prof. Lakshon Kna advised the VPP not to politicize NEHU's issues, I, as a student of this university, strongly oppose this advice. NEHUTA has organized many protests and demonstrations against the VC and other issues affecting the university, but no concrete results have been achieved. VPP, as a political party, has every right to take up issues affecting the student community and the youth with the concerned authorities, namely the PVC in this case. From the news item, it seems that NEHUTA's leader a defeated candidate in the last MP elec-

tion wants the party's youth wing to bring issues to him so he can build his personal image, perhaps with future elections in mind.

Had the party's youth wing not raised this issue, the public would not know about it, and the PVC's promised refunds to the youth who applied for the job would not have come to public notice. Let me state here that NEHU is not the personal property of NEHUTA; it belongs to the people of the state. VPP, as a political party, has every right to follow up with the concerned authorities on all issues brought to its attention.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

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

"Honesty will never break you."

— Kate Hudson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 272

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026

Congress in the south

WITH the Congress party all set to rule Kerala at the head of a United Democratic Front government for the next five years, the assembly elections in the southern state comes as a major morale boost to the tricolour party. The UDF returns to power in the state after a gap of 10 years through two terms of the LDF rule. Team UDF humbled the CPIM-led alliance. Notably, Kerala is the third state in the South where the Congress is now leading the government. The grand old party had won Karnataka, followed by Telangana, and would now also share power with the TVK in Tamil Nadu, where the Congress in alliance with the DMK won five seats. Put together, this is time for the Congress leadership to cheer as it has been languishing in the sidelines across many states in the north, the west and the east. The South would now be the launch pad for the party to try and improve its prospects across states, also because a party of such a stature cannot function without funds. Being in government is a guarantee to funds that would oil the party machinery.

The victory for the Congress-led front in Kerala was achieved by a strong backing from the minorities – the UDF's traditional allies being the Muslim League and the pro-Christian Kerala Congress groups. Outgoing chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's attempt to balance this with a Hindu consolidation proved counter-productive for the Left. Every section of the population turned against his personalised style of rule even as the LDF government implemented several welfare schemes and helped the needy sections with free ration kits etc. Feelings strengthened that the Communists had no developmental agenda. The chief minister's attempt to draw investments to the state failed as Kerala, like West Bengal, held an image of trade union militancy. The huge sums that NRIs sent to the state from the Gulf, the US and elsewhere remain locked in their bank vaults as not many dared to start an enterprise due to the unfavourable social and political scenarios. As a result, for many years, educated youths fled the state by their millions to find jobs in cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru or the Gulf. The collective disenchantment of the people against the LDF government helped the Congress to regain power.

The BJP proved yet again that it has no major stakes in much of the South. Yet, the party won three assembly seats in Kerala, where it had no seat in the last assembly. In Tamil Nadu, it won just one seat. The saffron party has substantial hold over Karnataka, where it is the principal opposition, but the other southern states are failing to warm up to its style of religion-oriented politics. At one time, they hoped to wrest power in Telangana, but the Congress outwitted them and grabbed power from the BRS. In Andhra Pradesh, the BJP is a part of the Telugu-Desam led government, but has no significant clout of its own. What works for the BJP to an extent in the South is the Modi aura.

A Fragmented Social Order

By Fabian Lyngdoh

Before the advent of the British Rule, the Khasis lived in numerous clan-based traditional political communities called the Raid(s). Traditional politics and religion in these communities were interwoven as political proceedings were always accompanied and sealed by religious rituals. Social norms and traditions were at the same time religious affairs, and the political authority was also the religious authority. Hence, there was no idea of separation between Religion and the State. Religion related to the rites of passage of each person from birth to death, and the departure of the soul into the spiritual abode, was mainly the concern of the clan. Religion at the community level was only concerned with the welfare of the living in all aspects of their social and economic affairs, as well as for the socio-political order of the community as a whole. Each clan had a clan religion, and each Raid had a community religion. Every Raid had a common ossuary where the bones of the dead were deposited in the religious stone cairn of each clan. In this way, the physical welfare and the honour and dignity of each individual in the community was guaranteed within this traditional social structure.

There are five important things in the lives of the people in any human community: First, the birth of a human being; second, the need to undertake economic activity to sustain life; third, the need to propagate the personal genetic identities of the individuals through sexual relationships; fourth, the need to propagate the cultural heritage of the community through socialization, and fifth, the need to dispose of the dead bodies of deceased persons properly and honourably through socially recognised religious rites. It is on the basis of these five realities of human life that the religious and socio-political cultures and traditions of human communities are built upon.

With the emergence of the new political and economic order, this traditional socio-religious structure of the Khasi society is no longer extant anywhere in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills today. In the majority of villages, the Christian Churches took over the religious roles and functions of the clan, and the modern Shnong (village) with its dorbar shnong took over the roles and functions of the Raid. But unlike the traditional Raid, the modern Shnong with its dorbar shnong is secular in nature and based on membership of the individuals and the nuclear families, where the

clans have no assigned role at all to play. In majority of cases, the Christian denominations had also replaced the role of traditional community religions for determining and supervising social morality among the inhabitants of the villages, and in keeping the society alive in a new emerging socio-cultural identity.

The rites of passage of the people from birth to death is under the control of the church denominations; and whoever is not a worthy member of any of these church denominations is like a spiritual outcast regardless of the position or status he/she holds as a member of the secular-legal community.

In this new social situation, common community religion and common community graveyards no longer exist. Social, spiritual and natural resources which had been under the control of the community's traditional authority are transferred by default, to the hands of the church denominations. There arose as many graveyards, cremation grounds and worship centres as there are church denominations within the same village. Practically speaking, a religious institution in today's circumstances is able to bind its members not so much by hope of heaven as by its control over the facility of providing proper and honourable disposal of the bodies of its members after their deaths. Therefore, to establish a new religion or to start a new church, a graveyard as a necessary religious infrastructure is imperative so as to be able to convince and bind the believers to the faith.

The Khasi society today stands divided to a great extent by numerous religious affiliations among the people, so much so that even marriage between members of different church denominations is prohibited. It is not a question of faith and doctrine that bred disputes and conflicts in the community, but the control over material and social resources. "Social resources," in this context means social support, human honour and dignity of individuals and families that arise from collective recognition of the society. Even though the secular-legal community under the authority of the dorbar shnong is still there in the background, each church denomination has strong psychological and social control over all aspects of moral, spiritual and social life of its own members. Hence, each village or local community is a secular-legal entity, as well as a cluster of independent church denominations that give rise to distinct subcultures within the community.

Every human person is

highly apprehensive not only of how he or she would be treated by the society while alive but also how his/her body would be treated by the society when he/she dies. The greatest of all these needs is ironically, not during his/her lifetime, but at his/her death; how to honourably dispose of the dead body, and assist the soul in a happy journey to the spiritual abode. It is in this death ritual which the church denominations are in complete psychological control over their members. From the moment a person expires, to his/her burial or cremation, the secular-legal community is involved only with the material aspect of things, but it is the particular church denomination which takes the centre stage. In some villages, even at the burial ceremony of a person who has been declared unworthy to receive the church's liturgical burial rite, an array of church leaders would still congregate at the important seats of the ceremony to throw stones at the deceased and his/her family members by making public announcement to the multitude who came from far and near that liturgical burial ceremony cannot be performed since the deceased had not been living the doctrinal, sacramental and liturgical discipline of the church. Then follows long sermons on how to live to be worthy of an honourable liturgical burial rite.

The liturgical ceremony is merely a social honour given to the deceased for being a diligent and disciplined member of the church. But, since in the Khasi traditions, the performance of cremation rites and the final deposition of the bones of the deceased into the stone cairn of the clan was the most important religious requirement in the life of every man and woman, the Khasis take this matter seriously even as Christians. Hence, what binds most of the believers to the Church is not the question of sin and righteousness in life, but it is the fear of being denied the honourable liturgical burial ceremony at death. This demonstrates to what extent the Church has taken control over the lives of the people even as members of a secular-legal community.

We cannot deny the fact that in the absence of traditional agencies of socialization and social control, the Christians denominations and the Seng Khasi/Sein Raj organizations in the villages, play a big role in guiding the society in the moral and spiritual path. However, it is also a fact that when any of the church denominations in a village is in a major-

ity, there is tendency for the secular-legal community to be identified with the dominant religious denomination, and subject all the rest to various forms of discrimination whether of the Christian faith or the Niam Khasi/Niam Tre.

The physical security, honour and dignity of every human person from birth to death are primarily, matters of universal human rights guaranteed by the Law of the State. Therefore, they are also the concerns of the secular-legal community at the village or local community level which no religious organization has the right to hijack and appropriate by default. Every inhabitant should have equal right to the material and social resources of the community regardless of belief, faith or religion. All inhabitants, whether theists or atheists are equal members of the secular-legal community, and religious organizations should not make public declaration or pronouncement of distinctions between them on the basis of belief, faith, or religion. If there is a need to do so for their own members, let the church denominations do that privately within their own circles, but not in public platforms which belong to all, believers and non-believers alike.

There is a need to reinforce the authority of the secular-legal community over the material and social resources so that oneness of the people as equal members can be safeguarded, and to stop fragmentation of the community into antagonistic groups and conflicting subcultures by multiplicity of religious beliefs. There is a need for the government of the State to make laws and regulations that every village or local community should have common infrastructures and facilities like public graveyards, cremation grounds, and social resources which are not under the control of any church denomination, but directly under the control of the secular-legal community.

The Khasi society today can no longer bind itself to only one form of religious faith, but it needs to think of how to resurrect the basic idea of a traditional community graveyard where every inhabitant irrespective of his or her religious faith, theist or atheist, can hope to find a resting place for his or her bones after death. In spite of the low density of population, the Khasi society today might have become so unjust that many persons do not have even a square foot of land to call their own while still living; but besides heaven, at least let everyone also have a decent parting ceremony and a terrestrial location to rest after death.

When Politics Interferes with Tradition

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

The controversy over the non-issuance of the sanad to the Syiem-designate of Hima Sohra is not just an administrative matter. It is a serious issue concerning Khasi customs, traditional governance, and the growing interference of politics in indigenous institutions.

Pa'iem Laborious Manik S. Syiem, Advisor of the Syinuk Ki Khlieh Nongshar Hima Sohra, was right in clarifying that the movement in Sohra is not politically motivated. His statement reflects the feelings of many people who believe that the struggle is about protecting the Dorbar system and preserving the dignity of Khasi traditions.

For generations, the Khasi system of governance has stood on the five important pillars: Dorbar Kur, Dorbar Ling, Dorbar Shnong, Dorbar Raid and Dorbar Hima. These institutions were built on community consensus, respect for custom, and the authority of the founding kur. The people of a Hima always had the right to choose or reject a Syiem through the traditional electoral Dorbar made up of the Lyngdoh, Basan, Lyngskor, Mynri and Sirdar.

The protest held on May 7 by the Dorbar Khlieh ki Nongshar Hima, Sohra against the KHADC occurred because many people felt there was injustice in handling the election of the Syiem of Hima Sohra. Their demand was simple: Immediate correction of the process and the issuing of the confirmation certificate to the customary choice of the people. However, instead of understanding the traditional concerns of the people, the issue has slowly been turned into a political debate. This is dangerous because once politics enters traditional institutions, public trust weakens. The appointment of Mynjurlang Majaw as Acting Syiem, despite the community already accepting Marremdor Syiem as the customary Syiem-designate, has raised many questions. People are asking whether traditional authority now comes from the Dorbar and the people or from political decisions inside the KHADC. During my student days in NEHU, I remember interacting with the late former Vice Chancellor of NEHU, Professor B. Pakem regarding the future of traditional institutions in modern governance. I recall how members of a clan from Sutnga approached him seeking advice on reviving the Syiemship of Hima Jaintia. Professor Pakem's response was both practical and thought-provoking. He reportedly said that the institution of the Syiem would remain relevant only if the Syiem could also be nominated as a member of the JHADC. His remark reflected an important reality: traditional institutions cannot survive merely as ceremonial symbols while political power remains concentrated elsewhere. At the same time, it also serves as a warning that once traditional institutions become too dependent on political structures for recognition and relevance, there is always the danger of politics slowly influencing and controlling

customary authority. Many may not realise that the sanad system itself comes from the British colonial period. After the British took control of the Khasi Hills in the 19th century, they started giving official sanads to Syiems in order to control traditional institutions. Before that, legitimacy came mainly from the people, the Dorbar and the founding clan. Over time, power slowly shifted from the community to the administration.

Unfortunately, the same system continues today. The ADCs still have the power to issue or delay sanads to Syiems, Dollois, Rangbah Shnongs and Waheh Chnongs. Because of this, traditional institutions are increasingly seen as being under political control instead of being independent cultural institutions.

The situation became more complicated after amendments to the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Appointment and Succession of Chiefs and Headmen) Act, 1959 introduced the posts of Deputy Chief and Acting Chief. Under this law, even a person from another clan can be appointed as Acting Chief. This goes against Khasi customary practice where only members of the ruling clan chosen through consensus can hold the office.

While the law may allow such appointments, many people fear that these provisions can be misused by any ruling Executive Committee of the ADCs to place politically convenient persons in positions of traditional authority. This creates suspicion that politics is slowly entering areas where custom and tradition should remain supreme.

Pa'iem Laborious Manik S. Syiem was also correct in rejecting attempts to label the people of Sohra as supporters of any political party. Defending Khasi customs should not automatically be seen as supporting one party or opposing another. The issue is bigger than party politics. It is about protecting the independence of traditional institutions. At the same time, traditional institutions must also move with the times. They must remain transparent, accountable and connected to the people. Respect for tradition should not mean refusing change. But reforms must come from within the Dorbar and the community, not through political pressure.

The present conflict in Sohra should become an opportunity for serious reflection. The role of the ADC should be to respect and formally recognise the customary decision of the people, not to appear as the final authority over traditional legitimacy. Otherwise, the old colonial system of controlling traditional institutions simply continues under a different political system.

Ultimately, this issue is not only about one sanad or one Syiem. It is about whether Khasi and Jaintia self-governance will continue to be guided by the Dorbar and customary law or whether political interests will slowly take control over institutions that were meant to belong to the people.

Letters to the Editor

NEET-UG 2026 and the Suffering of Honest Students

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I would like to share my deep concern and disappointment felt by students and parents across the country over the cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 due to allegations of a paper leak. More than 22 lakh students appeared for this examination after months and years of hard work, sacrifice, and mental stress. Many students studied day and night with the dream of becoming doctors. Parents spent huge amounts of money on coaching, hostel fees, books, and travel. Some families even borrowed money or used their savings to support their children's education. Today, all those efforts seem to have been shaken because of the system's failure to conduct a fair examination.

What is most painful is that honest students are suffering for no fault of theirs.

While a few people may have tried to misuse the system for money and unfair advantage, lakhs of sincere students are now forced to face uncertainty, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion once again. Reconducting the examination may be necessary, but it cannot remove the stress and disappointment caused to students and their families. This incident also raises serious questions about the growing commercialisation of competitive education.

In many coaching centres across the country, success has become more important than values and integrity. Education should build character and confidence, not fear and corruption. The government and the National Testing Agency must take strict action against everyone involved in this racket. Merely arresting a few middlemen will not restore public confidence. There is an urgent need to strengthen the examination system and ensure transparency and accountability at every stage.

If students begin to lose faith in the fairness of examinations, it will have a dangerous impact on the

future of our education system. Honest hard work must never feel helpless before corruption.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Growing Noise Pollution in Police Bazar

Editor,
Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to highlight the growing issue of noise pollution in PB, Shillong. PB is one of the busiest commercial areas in the city, where people come not only for shopping and daily work, but also to spend time peacefully with family and friends. Unfortunately, the increasing use of loudspeakers, music systems, amplified singing, and public preaching at very high volumes has become a major source of discomfort for many citizens.

While we understand every individual has the right to express themselves and earn a livelihood, the excessive sound levels in crowded public areas often create

stress, disturbance, and mental fatigue for shoppers, workers, students, and the elderly. In particular, there are instances where visually challenged individuals (who should be provided better livelihood opportunities and support) or groups use amplified music and microphones at very loud decibels for long periods. Though one can also understand the challenges they face in earning a living, the current situation affects the public's peace and overall environment in the area.

Rather than allowing unregulated noise in public spaces, the authorities should consider creating a proper and dignified alternative. A designated open busking platform or a performance zone could be established where talented individuals, including differently-abled persons, can perform under regulated sound limits and during specific hours or occasions. This would not only preserve public peace, but also provide performers with a more respectful and organized space to showcase their talents and earn an income with dignity.

Shillong has always been known for its culture and

music, however maintaining a balance between compassion and public comfort is essential. I hope the concerned authorities will take necessary steps to address this issue responsibly and thoughtfully.

Yours etc.,
Sam Nongrum
Via email

Laitumkhrah's decline- more than meets the eye?

Editor,
Apropos the letter "Erosion of Laitumkhrah's Identity" dated 12 May 2026, we wish to remind readers that the decline of Laitumkhrah's glory runs deeper than many may realize.

As some whose parents were born and raised in Laitumkhrah, with great-grandparents among the early settlers near the Umkhrah river, we recall how the term "Ki nong Laitumkhrah" was coined to identify us. The establishment of major educational institutions in the area, following the

Catholic Mission's seat at Lum Tyngkong procured by the Salvatorians from the Syiem of Hima Myliem for a mere Rs 5,000 transformed Laitumkhrah into a hub for settlers and students from across the Northeast.

By the 1990s, Laitumkhrah had become cosmopolitan, with students renting rooms and a handful of commercial establishments serving residents who still relied on the famous Lew Shillong market. Iconic eateries such as Silver Bowl, Norling, Three Star, Bombay Restaurant, Jalpaan, and Kalpana defined the food culture of the time. As memory reminds, illegal liquor was available too, until a people's movement led to the closure of Richie Restaurant and a Dorbar decision banning liquor sales in Laitumkhrah.

Though a few wine stores and bars were later permitted by the dorbar in the name of employment generation, public objection grew especially from the members of the seng longknie of those days. In September 2017, the Dorbar Shnong attended by a large number of residents unanimously resolved to stop issuing NOCs for

new bars and wine stores, sealing the fate of pending applicants then. Yet between 2021-22, internal dispute surfaced among Rangbah Shnongs and the formation of a seng samla without consensus fuelled allegations of misappropriation and mismanagement. The Syiem of Hima Myliem revoked the sanad of two leaders and controversially appointed the third as caretaker. It may be remembered that Laitumkhrah elects 3 Rangbah Shnongs and as per convention, the one who stands first becomes the Chairman, and the second takes up the treasurer's post in the executive committee that also comprises Rangbah Dongs.

In September 2022, elections brought in two new Rangbah Shnongs alongside the caretaker. Unfortunately, the latter exploited his position, dictating terms, issuing bar licences, tolerating illegal liquor sales, and allegedly profiting from land deals and NOCs to non-tribals. His manipulative tactics mobilizing seng samla and seng longknie to defame diligent predecessors degraded Laitumkhrah's image further. Though he has

since lost his position in the recent dorbar held on 9 May 2026, the damage lingers.

Today, many responsible citizens have stopped attending Dorbar Shnong meetings, disillusioned by its drift from its welfare purpose to profiting only from a few vested minds. To restore Laitumkhrah's glory, politics must be separated from the Dorbar. Those aligned with political parties should not hold office as either Rangbah Shnong or Rangbah Dong, as mandated under the Myliem Act, 2007. The seng samla and seng longknie should have members who have integrity and compassion to take up welfare issues of the shnong and not only represent a political front or politician.

Laitumkhrah deserves leadership rooted in service, not self-interest. Only then can its identity and dignity be reclaimed.

Yours etc.,
A Kharkongor,
F Lyngkhoh,
Via email

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

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 273 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 16, 2026

Unsettled & Bloody Border Disputes

ASSAM has boundary disputes with Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. These disputes are embedded in history and memory and the borders are more than just lines on a map. There are border residents who are regularly harassed by the more powerful state – Assam. The last border skirmish between Assam and Mizoram in July 2021 left six Assam Police personnel and one civilian dead. Over 70-80 people were injured. In the recent past, border clashes between Nagaland and Assam and Meghalaya and Assam have left people dead with no justice whatsoever delivered after such killings. The last bloody affair where Assam Police shot and killed five villagers of Mukroh in Meghalaya while they were returning from their fields but who the Assam Police accused of stealing timber has remained unresolved. This happened in November 2023. Assam Police are known to be trigger happy and their outposts are right next to the border. It took a while for Meghalaya Police to get its act together and create the outpost at Mukroh. Those who died were very poor villagers and earning members of their families.

The latest predicament for the Meghalaya Government is the border skirmish at Lapangap, not far from Mukroh and which also borders West Karbi Anglong. It took the villagers of Lapangap to come all the way and protest near the State Secretariat for the Government to react. This was an act of despair and frustration because the people living at the borders know they are not important to the powers that be. They are only good as voters. Meghalaya shares a border of 884.9 sq km with Assam and there are 12 disputed sectors between the two states. While Assam has been more serious about resolving border disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram such is not the case with Meghalaya. The reason is that the cases with Nagaland and Mizoram are pending in the Supreme Court. Meghalaya for some reason prefers dialogue but that hardly has any impact at the borders where Meghalaya residents are regularly harassed. Time has come to take the matter to the Supreme Court for a full and final solution. Some believe that a durable solution would involve a give and take between the two states but that again is politically fraught.

The roots of these disputes lie largely in the re-organisation of the North East after Meghalaya was carved out of Assam in 1972. Meghalaya questioned parts of the boundary based on older customary and historical understandings of Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo territories, while Assam relied more on colonial-era administrative maps and later legal boundaries. But this leaves border villagers who face the brunt of the unresolved disputes. For the tribals land is identity and loss of land is loss of identity. Hence any agreement arrived at without local consultation will produce resentment later. Traditional institutions, village councils and civil society should be consulted before any agreement is arrived at. Time is running out. Many elections have been won by promising to resolve the border disputes but they have remained one of the most enduring problems. The MDA Government must show its spine and act urgently by also taking the opposition into its fold on this issue.

Letters to the Editor

Facts Before Claims

Editor,
This refers to the speech Danny Khyriem delivered at the KSU General Council, where he attempted to justify that only one tribe exists—the Khasi tribe—by citing the signing of the Instrument of Accession with the Khasi Syiems as testimony. Such a statement reflects a serious lack of historical understanding and is deeply insensitive to the distinct identity and history of the Jaintia people.

It is unfortunate that, in his initial speech, he went to the extent of branding Jaintia scholars as "fake historians." Before questioning the scholarship of others, he should first introspect and acquaint himself with historical facts. The Instrument of Accession was signed only with the Khasi Syiems because the Jaintia Kingdom had already been annexed by the British in 1835 after the Anglo-Jaintia conflict. Therefore, the historical circumstances surrounding the Khasi states and the Jaintia Kingdom were entirely dif-

ferent. The Jaintia community has its own rich history, language, traditions, and political legacy that cannot be erased or undermined through selective interpretation of historical events. Any attempt to deny the distinct existence of the Jaintia people is not only historically inaccurate but also harmful to the unity and mutual respect among the indigenous communities of Meghalaya.

Public figures and leaders must exercise responsibility in their statements, especially on sensitive matters concerning identity and history. Intellectual debates should be based on facts and mutual respect, not on dismissive remarks against scholars and communities.

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

NPP government, are you listening?

Editor,
It is very sad to see our

Saluting Mothers Who Enter Politics to Fight for Women's Safety

By Salil Gewali

The mother of a rape victim even made a vow not to comb her hair until her daughter received justice.

Naba Bhattacharjee, the president of the Meghalaya Cricket Association, posted Ratna Debnath's uncombed



Take a moment to imagine being in her situation. When people asked her why she entered politics, she roared that no other daughter should suffer the fate of her own. What a great sacrifice for such a noble mission. Should we not stand with Ratna Debnath, irrespective of her political

picture on his Facebook wall and wrote a touching note: "The mother Ratna Debnath appears to convey to her daughter in heaven that finally some form of justice and peace to her noble soul could be ensured by her contesting the election and emerging victorious against

"Her beloved daughter was brutally raped and murdered. The injuries included an extensive fractured hyoid bone in the neck, damage to the pelvis, and severe assault marks. At the same time, the entire government machinery of West Bengal undermined the parents' cries for justice. What was shocking was that the Chief Minister herself commented that her daughter should not have gone out late in the evening. It was as if the highest office of the state had turned into a moral policing club, lecturing victims instead of punishing criminals."

affiliation? Humanity must always come first. Many believe that her election victory became a message that even in deep sorrow, a mother can find the strength to protect others. Her story is now an inspiration for women across the country.

One woman, filled with empathy, Anusha Kuarsing from Gauteng, South Africa, commented: "A mother's tears are so powerful that justice prevails. As a mother, I am so proud of you. Congratulations, and may you find the closure you need." It takes the heart of a mother to truly understand the unbearable pain of losing a daughter to such brutality.

those who denied justice to her daughter. Salute to the undaunted spirit of the Mother who never gave up. If nothing else, Ratna Debnath has instilled hope and courage to fight for justice.

Equally striking is the victory of alleged rape survivor Rekha Patra of Sandeshkhali. She was the first to reveal how tribal women in Sandeshkhali were sexually tortured for many years and how their lands forcefully grabbed by TMC leaders and their supporters. This bold lady, despite repeated threats to her life, contested the election from Hingaljan constituency. She reiterates that she joined politics be-

cause she believed silence allows injustice to thrive. Her victory now clearly shows that even women who have faced violence can stand up and call out the culprits. Many now say Smt. Rekha has transformed her pain into power, reminding everyone that courage alone can overcome fear!

No surprise, on Wednesday, just two days after the election result, 15 natives of Sandeshkhali from seven families returned after years of self-imposed exile. Just imagine the fear and threat the people experienced from TMC cadres for so many years. The Telegraph dated May 8, 2026 quoted -- Sheikh Ataur Rahman, 43, a poor farmer, recounting the situation that forced him to leave his home. "I fled home a day after the results of the 2016 Assembly elections were announced. On that day, a gang of about 100 armed goons under Sheikh Shahjahan attacked me. They fired 13 rounds indiscriminately targeting me, but I managed to escape through dense paddy fields," he said. This shocking account is only the tip of the iceberg!

It would be sheer injustice not to mention yet another extraordinary achievement by a housemaid in West Bengal. A poor woman, Kalita Majhi, who lived a hand-to-mouth life with her meagre earnings of two thousand five hundred rupees per month, seized the opportunity offered by BJP and, to everyone's disbelief, is now, I believe, the poorest legislator in West Bengal. She says in a naïve and heartfelt tone that her triumph is completely for the welfare of oppressed women in the villages who have been neglected for ages and deprived of respect and dignity. Her journey from mopping floors to making laws clearly shows that "democracy," when it works, can lift even the most suppressed voices.

How I wish we could always give a voice to those who have been silenced. And how I wish we could boost the morale of those determined to fight for justice. Freedom of speech should not be muted if it is for a righteous cause. May no cruel hand ever harm our daughters, and may no system of governance ever wound humanity.

(Salil Gewali is best known for his research-based work, "Great Minds on India," which has been translated into fifteen languages. The book carries a foreword by Nasa chief scientist, and he is also a member of the International Human Rights Commission).

They make a desert and call it development

By Arpita Saikia

Last month, a news from this corner of the country captured headlines. It was the protest accompanied by hunger strike led by Green Tech Foundation, Meghalaya, against proposed "development" projects in the Lumpongeng island in the Umiam lake. The Foundation, especially its chairperson B. Nonglang, displayed immense courage and determination in ways only few can. Despite his deteriorating health due to hunger strike he remained unwavering in his stand for the environment. The protest was finally called off after a written assurance from the Tourism Department of Meghalaya. However, the delay in taking meaningful steps sheds light on the reluctance of those in authority to engage sincerely with public and environmental concerns.

This month, Deepor Beel of Guwahati, Assam is witnessing something that's nothing short of an ecological crisis. The green canopy has disappeared in several areas because trees are being felled for a project to build an elevated railway track aimed at preventing elephant deaths on the existing railway line. Despite the protests of the locals, trees were felled under heavy security. Environmentalists have expressed deep concern over the large-scale felling of trees and have demanded their translocation. They argue that repeated disruption in the name of infrastructural development around the Deepor Beel area is weakening the ecological stability of the wetland which is already fragile.

The green canopy has disappeared in several areas because trees are being felled for a project to build an elevated railway track aimed at preventing elephant deaths on the existing railway line. Despite the protests of the locals, trees were felled under heavy security. Environmentalists have expressed deep concern over the large-scale felling of trees and have demanded their translocation. They argue that repeated disruption in the name of infrastructural development around the Deepor Beel area is weakening the ecological stability of the wetland which is already fragile.

elephant deaths on the existing railway line. Despite the protests of the locals, trees were felled under heavy security. Environmentalists have expressed deep concern over the large-scale felling of trees and have demanded their translocation. They argue that repeated disruption in the name of infrastructural development around the Deepor Beel area is weakening the ecological stability of the wetland which is already fragile.

Both these instances share one common concern, i.e. the protection of the environment. The GTF Meghalaya's demand was the exclusion of Lumpongeng island from the project. In case of the latter, the Deepor Beel Protection Committee has expressed that it supports the proposed corridor to prevent elephant deaths but opposes the large scale environmental damage. In neither case has the criticism been directed against development or the change itself, but rather against a model of development devoid of responsibility and sustainability. India is a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasizes sustainable cities, climate action, and the protection of life on land and water. However, action such as the one seen in Deepor Beel raises questions about how sincerely these commitments are being implemented on the ground. Sustainability cannot and should not remain confined to papers and forums while blind eyes are turned to the ecological destruction going on in reality.

What makes the situation even more complicated is that the felling of trees for this proposed elevated railway project is being justified as a measure to prevent elephant deaths on the railway tracks. However, according to an article published by ThePrint in 2023, the number of such inci-

sighted and paradoxical. It becomes difficult to not remember the famous line from Agricola of Tacitus, "ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant" which means "They make a desert and call it peace" because in an attempt to "protect" wildlife, an ecosystem crucial for biodiversity, is itself being destroyed.

It is deeply ironic that Narendra Modi introduced the concept of "Lifestyle for the Environment" (LiFE) in Glasgow on 1 November 2021, calling upon "the global community of individuals and institutions to drive LiFE as an international mass movement towards mindful and deliberate utilisation instead of mindless and destructive consumption to protect and preserve the environment." Yet, the news from across the country continues to flood the media where locals and environmentalists are seen raising voice against government projects for development. Be it Sonam Wangchuk's protest in Ladakh demanding constitutional safeguard of the region to protect the fragile ecosystem, the voices and concerns raised against the proposed projects on the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the ongoing protests against the Bauxite mining project in the districts of Rayagada and Kalahandi in Orissa, one can hardly overlook the possibility that "Lifestyle for the Environment" risks becoming yet another glittery idea on documents.

It leaves us with difficult questions to ponder upon. If not for nature, and if not for the people, then development is truly for whom? Will there come a day when development and environmental protection move hand in hand, without people having to wage hunger strikes and prolonged protests merely to defend the ecosystems? Is sustainability a myth? What good is a future if nothing remains?

police—and the Meghalaya government appears to be a mute spectator.

Such repeated harassments and aggression by Assam Police have never been tolerated by the Governments of Nagaland and Mizoram. So, is the Meghalaya Government, led by the NPP highly compromised? Is our political class active only during the elections? We need a Government in Meghalaya that prioritizes the needs of its people, stands solidly with them in the border areas and faces aggressors with stiff resistance.

Yours etc.
Prof. Lakhon Kma
Lawsotun, Block-3
Shillong-4

Debt of Gratitude

Editor,
Like any other day, I boarded a local cab from Laban to reach my destination at Khyndailad. After getting off the taxi and reaching my workplace, I suddenly realized that I had forgotten my mobile phone in the cab. During the short journey, I attended a call from some-

one I knew, and perhaps I accidentally left the phone behind at that moment.

Without wasting any time, I left my workplace and rushed to the taxi parking area for Laban at Khyndailad. There, I spoke to a few fellow drivers who also operate on the Laban route. With their prompt support and sincere cooperation, they quickly helped me establish contact with the driver who had ferried me earlier.

To my great relief, within about 40 minutes the kind-hearted driver contacted us and safely returned my mobile phone, which I had left in his vehicle.

I express my sincere gratitude to all the local cab drivers of Laban for their kindness, honesty, and cooperation in this matter. Their helpful attitude and integrity truly deserve appreciation and respect.

Yours etc.,
Prasenjit Das Purkayastha
Shillong-4

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

Iran's ultimatum: The internet is now more vulnerable than ever

Early this week, Iranian state-linked media floated a plan to charge the operators of undersea internet cables in the Strait of Hormuz for access to what they say is Iran's offshore territory.

The suggestion comes after Iranian warnings that several important cables in the strait were a vulnerable point for economies in the Middle East.

Iran's comments expose an invisible foundation of the internet and globalisation itself: the web of more than 500 undersea cables that carries more than 95 per cent of international data traffic.

We may think the internet lives in a kind of virtual cloud. But its physical underpinnings are vulnerable — and that vulnerability is becoming a very real geopolitical concern.

Gulfs, straits and cables

Several of the world's most critical submarine cable routes run through the Middle East. Narrow seaways through the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Suez Canal, and the Strait of Hormuz also function as "digital chokepoints".

These maritime corridors connect major economic centres in Europe, Asia and Africa. In 2024, submarine cable incidents in the Red Sea disrupted around 25 per cent of the internet traffic between Europe and Asia.

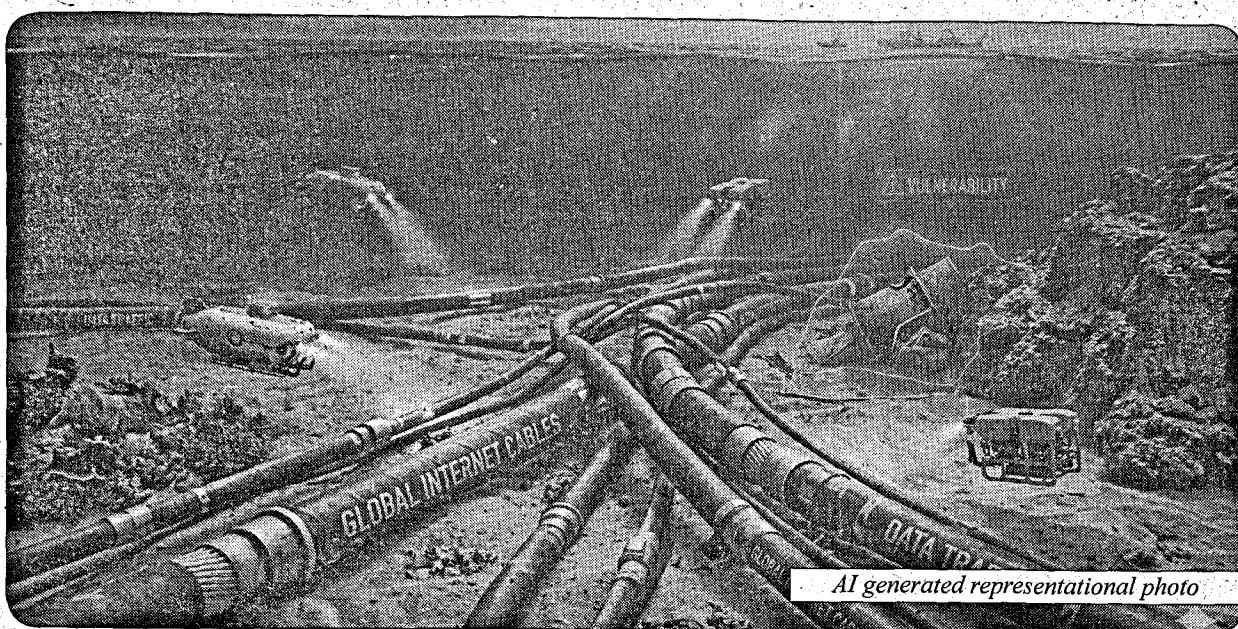
The strategic importance of submarine cables is not lost on Iran. Damage to these cables, whether accidental or deliberate, would have significant consequences.

In the bigger picture, the message is unmistakable. Digital infrastructure can give states strategic leverage, but it's also a potential target.

Digital infrastructure

Critical infrastructure used to mean oil pipelines, ports, or power grids. But data infrastructure has become just as important for national and economic security.

The core problem of undersea cables lies in the concentration of infrastructure. Many of the cables are bundled together along the same seabed routes and funnelled through



AI generated representational photo

a small number of maritime chokepoints. This creates dangerous single points of failure. A cable cut — whether deliberate or accidental — can degrade connectivity across multiple regions simultaneously.

While cable breaks are not uncommon, repairs are difficult — especially in contested or militarised waters. Repair vessels require safe access, international coordination, and time.

Fragmentation and disruption

A serious submarine cable disruption could have profound consequences. One immediate effect would be the fragmentation of global connectivity. The ability to communicate with anyone anywhere that we now take for granted could take a significant hit.

Regions which depend heavily on vulnerable cable routes might experience degraded internet performance, communications blackouts, or financial instability.

Countries with little backup infrastructure, particularly developing states across parts of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, would be disproportionately affected.

Financial markets too are vulnerable. Extremely fast and reliable data flows underpin high-frequency

trading systems, global payment networks, and international banking transactions.

Even brief disruptions can make markets fluctuate rapidly, delay transactions, and make investors uncertain. Because so much of the global economy is so thoroughly interconnected, digital instability in one region can rapidly create worldwide financial shockwaves.

If cable disruptions coincided with conflict or instability along major maritime trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz or the Suez Canal, insurance markets, shipping industries, and energy supply chains would also face increased uncertainty.

The military domain

The military and strategic consequences of cable disruption may prove even more serious. Armed forces rely on secure long-range communications and real-time coordination.

When you get down to it, everything from command-and-control systems to drone operations and logistics planning relies on undersea cables. Damage to these networks would make forces less effective, make it harder to coordinate with allies, and make miscalculations more likely.

How menstruation is being weaponised in Myanmar's civil war

The Tatmadaw — the military government in Myanmar — has reportedly expanded a ban on menstrual products from being transported in the country across key routes, as part of the ongoing civil war in the country.

This targeting of sanitary pads appears to be an extension of the military's so-called "Four Cuts" strategy, which seeks to sever resistance forces from food, funds, intelligence and recruits.

Menstrual products, it seems, have been added to that logic — and in the process stealing women's dignity and basic human rights. While there has been no official communication about the ban, a spokesperson for local non-government organisation 'Sisters2-Sisters' says soldiers on the ground have indicated the crackdown is out of the belief that the products are being used "by the People's Defence Force for medical reasons and as support for their feet and boots to absorb sweat and blood".

As medical experts point out, the logic here is absurd, as sanitary pads would be a poor substitute for actual combat triage. In addition, the targeting of medical supplies during conflict is expressly prohibited under international law.

The consequence of restricting access to menstrual products is not merely one of inconvenience, and during conflict it can be especially dire.

The laws governing armed conflict only provide limited protection. While women are deemed objects of "special respect" under international humanitarian law, the focus is squarely on women as pregnant or as mothers, or as prospective victims of sexual violence.

Ironically, this gender essentialism ignores an essential component of reproductive biology: menstruation. The cultural taboos that persist across cultures about speaking about menstruation result in it becoming an ignored part of daily life. This translates to the application of the broader civilian protections as well.

Ban has been expanded on menstrual products from being transported in the country across key routes, as part of the ongoing civil war in the country

In theory, the law requires civilians to be provided with essential needs, and this language should be broad enough to encompass menstrual products. However, in reality, gender-neutral language defaults to a male perspective, and the specific needs of menstruating people go unrecognised and unaddressed. While this is slowly starting to change globally, all too often menstrual products are still treated as luxury goods rather than a basic need.

Menstruation remains an overlooked part of the consequences of conflict on daily lives. But Myanmar's deliberate targeting of menstrual products goes a step further and renders menstruation a weapon of war.

Restricting access to menstrual products restricts movement, undermines health, and strips people of dignity. It is an insidious form of gender-based violence. And taboos around menstruation mean we don't know how widespread this ban in Myanmar actually is. It also raises the question of how many people in other countries suffer from this targeting of such products.

Acknowledging the full reality of how conflict impacts women and others who menstruate means acknowledging all of it — including the parts that are uncomfortable to discuss. (The Conversation)

Authored by Shireen Daft, Lecturer, Macquarie Law School, Macquarie University

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 17, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

New Moon on your solar return chart ensures an amazing and extraordinary period for you. Your dreams will come true. You will implement new ideas at your workplace. You will have unmatched financial gains. You would like to invest in share market, mutual funds and other financial instruments. You will also make plans to buy a new house or commercial property. You will come in contact with lot of influential people who will help you immensely in days to come. Business-related trips will keep you busy for the whole year. Health of elders in the family will remain good. You will take adequate care and look after them well. Students will excel in studies. Siblings will give full support. Those in politics and social activities will shine. You could start business related to construction, mining and petro chemical.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You will have a great time. Your financial position is good. Your enemies will get defeated. You will put every possible effort into pursuing your business and will be very successful. You will have peaceful days and will enjoy the company of your family members. It is time to fulfill your personal dreams and ambitions. You will also be able to motivate others. Your tasks will get completed and with the cooperation of your colleagues. You will be willing to help others and work for them. The time is very favorable for professional growth. You will also go on a business-related journey. Need to take care of your health. Keep an eye on your business partners, they may deceive you. Otherwise, there will be an atmosphere of happiness and peace in the house. Your government-related work will be completed.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is an important week for you. Those who are in government/private jobs will get the benefit. Media, arts, glamour, fashion and creative things will attract you. You will plan to make a career in these fields. You will be busy preparing for a major competitive exam. You will get serious for a person with whom you have warm relationship. You can get drawn in love leading to marriage. You will look after your elders in the family. Your servants will remain loyal to you. You will feel confident and morally strong. Your health will get better. You will also take care of your diet. You will interact a lot more with people and will make new friends. Even your old friends will help you a lot in time of need. You will have gains in business and will work carefully.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Time will yield good results. You will have monetary gains. You will have endurance in abundance. You will also have passion for your work. You will also focus with dedication and sincerity. An important person will help you with improving your work. You will look at life from a different perspective. It is time to take a U-turn for the better. You will have to discard some old habits for good. You will thus make lot of gains in future. You will be able to complete your work on time. You will share amazing bonding with your spouse. And you will try to improve your relationship with close ones. You will also buy valuable items for household needs. You will also discharge your responsibilities, very well to the satisfaction of all.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be a week which you will enjoy a lot with your family. Your dreams will be realized, and you will do things to your liking. You will get love and affection from your near and dear ones. Your financial position will get better. You will also have prospects for growth in your work. You will get a chance to work which will give you happiness and you will make good profit. It is right time to think about a change in business or work. You will also feel some positive changes in yourself. You will not impose your views on others. Your enemies will get defeated. Your children will make progress. You will get success in exams/interviews. You will also work to improve your income.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You will make best use of your time and money. You will also focus on your work and achieve your aims and goals in life. You will not believe in showing off. You will also balance your work and family life. You will also think of taking a break from your work and spending some quality time with your family. After all, you are feeling exhausted a lot. An important matter related to your spouse will come up all of a sudden. It could add to your tension. You need to tackle it with cool mind. Situation is in your favor. You will also avoid any controversies in your work. You will also plan to start a new business. New job opportunities will be available for you. Your relationship with spouse will bring happiness to your life. Students will study with concentration.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) Time is very favorable for you. You will take up new work and business and get success. You will also travel a lot for work. You will work with lot of patience and thus in the process you will get lot of success too. You will also be practical in dealing with people. You will also love to work peacefully. You

will also attend an important meeting. You will have financial gains but there is no need to run blindly after money. Your needs will be taken care of. Enemies and opponents will be unable to harm you. You will get financial help for your business. You will remain devoted to your partner. You will take part in it enthusiastically. You will experience mental peace.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) It will be a joyful and peaceful week. You will have a good time at your workplace and will make progress. Your financial condition is going to get better. Peace and goodwill will prevail at home. You will assume new responsibilities. Additional duties will keep you engaged. You will also interact with people a lot. You need to remain careful in matters related to heart. Don't rush into decisions related to marriage in a hurry. You will feel some undue pressure. Take adequate care of your health. Plan your diet as per weather. You will try to keep your elders happy and look after them well. Your career-related problems will get resolved.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) It is time to focus on your work. You will have differences with your seniors. But it is time to keep mutual differences aside and focus on your goals. Time is gold and you can't afford to waste it. Your obstacles will get removed and you will march on the road towards progress. You will also get the guidance and support of your elders. Your time will be spent in laughter and joy with family members. A legal dispute will get resolved. You will also have some differences with your neighbourhood but will nip the evil in the bud. You will meet old friends and refresh old memories with them. You will also help the needy ones. Your work efficiency will increase.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will prepare for some big occasion. Your presentation is also going to be terrific, and you will win praise from far and wide. Time is totally in your favor. Whatever things you touch will turn gold. You will also cooperate with your seniors. Your work efficiency will enhance. You will be able to complete all your tasks. Your financial position is going to be strong. You may have some financial needs and will apply for immediate loan. You will also get a letter of appointment. Your efforts will bring all-round success. You will have prosperity and happiness in your life. Your family will support you. You will have wonderful relations with your mate. You will listen to your family's elders.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) Your business will grow. You will get lot of success in your job. Whatever task you undertake, you will be successful. You will get lot of encouragement from your bosses. You will have the full support of your spouse. You will have gains. Your financial position will be strong. All your fatigue will get removed. Your disputes with neighbours will get removed. It will give you lot of peace of mind. Company of your darling will give you lot of happiness. Property related disputes will get resolved. You could also get a promotion. You can also be transferred and there could be a change of place or residence. You will experience some positive change in your life. Take care of your health.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 19) You will peacefully complete your tasks. Your spouse will care about your feelings. The change in the weather is not good for your health. You need to take adequate care to stay fit. Your children will also give full concentration to their studies. Your incomplete tasks will also be completed. You will have good working relationships with your bosses. Income will be good. You will put in lot of effort to earn money. The balance between your work and family life will be great. You will realize life is so simple, only I have made it complex. There will be an improvement in your ties with neighbors. Your respect and image will be high. You will get success in legal matters. It is an ideal time for love and romance. You will get benefits from your professional contracts.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will be very busy. If you want to change your job or business, this is just the right time. Your financial position will remain stable. You will also remain healthy and fit. You will have no worries in your personal life, and your family will give you full support. You will also lead a very peaceful life. There will be good bonding in family ties. Unity in the family will remain. You will also work hard to improve your relationship with family elders. Your seniors will be happy with your work. You will be able to motivate others. And provide timely help too. You need to pursue your dreams and aspirations with full zeal and zest.

China-US 'friendship' may not be good news for the world

Back in 2005, US economist Fred Bergsten coined the term "Group of 2" or "G2", proposing a stronger partnership between what are now the world's two largest economies — the United States and China.

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis a few years later, economic cooperation between these two countries briefly seemed to attest to the success of efforts at integrating China into a liberal rules-based order.

To be sure, the ostensible G2 was not meant to replace the larger, formalised G20 group of major economies, so much as strengthen it.

Underpinning the broader G20's response to the global financial crisis, the US enacted an initial USD 787 billion fiscal stimulus, while China provided its own USD 586 billion stimulus. This helped avert a much larger global economic catastrophe.

This week's summit between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping heralds a different sort of G2.

On Friday, Trump claimed the countries had struck some "fantastic trade deals". But anyone hoping for details of such deals — on tariffs, rare earths or Iran — was left disappointed on Friday afternoon.

Whatever may have transpired, US-China cooperation no longer automatically implies positive spill-over effects for the rest of the world. Instead, in 2026, the G2 appears, at best, to be a private bargain between two great powers, imposing hidden costs on those outside, looking in.

The Trump administration has ushered in a noticeable shift in how the US views its economic interests: no longer premised on shared liberal values, but on spheres of influence among great powers. The key question, therefore, is not whether the US and China can cooperate. It is what kind of order their cooperation will produce.

West and East

An older economic contrast is useful here.

In the wake of the second world war, the Western bloc (led across the US, the United Kingdom, and Western European states) was united by a shared commitment to a Keynes-

ian global order (under the Bretton Woods system) that sought freer trade in goods while preserving national economic autonomy.

In contrast, the Eastern bloc (led by the Soviet Union) organised trade through what was called the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), trading many goods between countries through planned barter arrangements, instead of for cash. The irony for the present day is that the Trump-Xi agenda looks more like the old Eastern bloc's approach.

In this light, the clearest sign that a G2 may be working outside the G20 or larger rules-based order is not that Washington and Beijing are talking. It is the range of issues that may be managed, tying together such concerns as tariff relief, airplane orders, rare-earths access, chip restrictions, Taiwan and Iran.

In each of these cases, it's reasonable the two countries would want to coordinate their policies. But together, they point to a new global order where two superpowers increasingly call the shots in their own interests.

Chips and rare earths

Rare earths and advanced chips are the clearest example. Beijing wants access to the advanced semiconductors necessary to dominate the artificial intelligence race.

Washington wants rare earths and critical minerals whose importance has become more acute as the conflict with Iran has strained US stocks of missiles, drones, air-defence systems and other high-end military technologies.

If these are traded against one another, the summit is not about economic liberalisation. It is about whether strategic technologies remain national-security constraints or become bargaining chips in a bilateral deal.

An entourage of executives

The business delegations that have accompanied Trump on this trip point in the same direction.

The presence of executives such as Nvidia's Jensen Huang, Apple's Tim Cook, Tesla and SpaceX's Elon Musk (not to mention others from Qualcomm, Citigroup and Boeing) gave the summit the appearance of

a commercial negotiation.

Reported agreements on aircraft orders, agricultural purchases, investment forums and corporate access may all be presented as signs of economic normalisation.

But the question is not only whether US firms gain market access. It is whether commercial wins help stabilise a great-power bargain whose geopolitical costs are borne elsewhere.

Any deal the countries eventually reach on tariffs will likely have the biggest market impacts. But the deal itself could matter less than the optics, allowing Trump to claim a business victory.

This might calm markets in the short term, but it highlights the potential for a retreat from rules-based multilateral liberalisation in the longer term.

A warning on Taiwan, near silence on Iran

The question of Taiwan loomed large over this week's summit. On Thursday, Xi gave an unusually direct warning to Trump, saying if the issue was not handled properly, the two countries could see "clashes and even conflicts".

In a larger sense, the danger is not necessarily a formal US concession on Taiwan. It is that Taiwan and other regional actors bear the external costs of a private bargain.

If Taiwan becomes one variable in a wider negotiation, the costs of US-China cooperation may fall on those not in the room.

Iran and oil broaden the same logic. If Trump has pressed Xi to use China's influence over Tehran, he is not simply asking for diplomatic help. He is treating Beijing as a co-hegemon in a great-power bargain based on order for some — the US and China — and exclusion for others.

This kind of G2 can undermine the global public good. It will also test whether middle powers like Australia, Canada and European countries can keep their seat at the table where decisions are made or, as Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney put it, risk being "on the menu". (The Conversation)

Authored by Wesley Widmaier, Australian National University

"Happiness often sneaks in through a door you didn't know you left open."

—John Barrymore

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 275 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026

Exit of the Left

WITH a Congress-led government taking charge in Kerala today, the two Communist parties that led a government there for the past two terms have moved to the background. The last hope of the Left to retain its base in at least one state has been dashed with outgoing chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan leading the Left Democratic Alliance to a shameful defeat in the assembly polls. Fact is, even a steady two-term win for the Left was not in the normal scheme of state politics, where the CPIM and Congress led governments ruled alternately for the past few decades. Pinarayi Vijayan's commissions and omissions during his second innings further dented the image of the Left. With rash actions, he alienated the Left's traditional bases. This comes at a time when the Left has already lost its sheen, mass base and power in West Bengal and Tripura. In other states, the Left continues to have pockets of influence helping it win a seat or two, as in Tamil Nadu, where it sided with the DMK and the Congress.

The Communists had raised the expectations of the poor and the working class for many years. In post-Independence years, the Communists were the main opposition in Parliament. They also maintained a strong presence in the trade union movement through the AITUC and CITU. Both these entities have let the workers down. So did the Communist leaders of the CPI and CPIM after the split in 1964— a while after the Chinese aggression on India in 1962. Sections of the Communists had sided either with the then USSR or China, which was the main reason for the split in the original Communist party. Still, the Communists jointly ran governments for over three decades in West Bengal and repeatedly in Tripura and Kerala. The TMC came from behind and upset the Left apocryph in West Bengal in 2011, after which it never recovered. Tripura followed. Now, the BJP rules both Bengal and Tripura.

Communists that led the Left in India are increasingly getting isolated. The party lacked mass-based leaders at the national level. The central leaders' armchair styles, divorced from the aspirations of the common masses, worked to its disadvantage. The Left was thought to be a political entity to further the causes of the disadvantaged sections of the population. However, these leaders surfaced mostly in the media and failed to organise mass struggles to back such people. Appearances before TV channels gave them a boost. Even in Delhi, right under their nose, the poor were organised by activist Arvind Kejriwal, who formed the Aam Aadmi Party or the party of the ordinary people, won power and ran governments repeatedly. The Left was caught napping. It, instead, sought to occupy the secular platform to woo the minorities to its side, but these segments of the population continued to remain firm with the Congress or regional entities like the TMC, which cared for their interests. A revival for the Left is possible only with a new, energetic leadership at the national level and in states. With Kerala too gone, it would be a hard struggle reviving the Left's fortunes.

After West Bengal Poll, a Slippery Slope: Need for a Peoples' Commission

By Yogendra Yadav

Scientists call it phase transition. They mark it at a point where an object suddenly changes its state on crossing a threshold — water freezing into ice, or boiling into steam, for example. Elections in West Bengal and Assam mark a similar phase transition from doubtful to dubious elections.

Now, complaints about electoral irregularity in our system are as old as our elections. But this routine cacophony of disquiet that dominates any functioning democracy elided a fundamental shift in the nature of our unease with the practice of elections. We began by questioning the nature of Westminster-style representative democracy. Then we focused it down to electoral system design — first-past-the-post or proportional. From here, we slid further into a passionate debate about a yet narrower issue — the nature of candidates and campaigning. Over the last few years, our debates revolved around the rock bottom issue of electoral integrity — polling and counting irregularities.

It is not that allegations of polling and counting irregularities were unheard of in the past. Yet these were scandals, noticed and debated precisely because these were exceptions. Indian elections were held up as a model of feasible electoral democracy in post-colonial countries as almost all the elections passed a minimum threshold of integrity. In the last instance, electoral outcomes reflected popular will. There are just a handful of exceptions to this rule — assembly elections in Punjab in 1992, J&K in 1987, Assam in 1983 and West Bengal in 1972. You could add some more elections in J&K and Nagaland to this list. These were the exceptions, not the norm.

Now we are witnessing a shift in the norm. This is where the concept of "phase transition" becomes relevant. For the first time we are looking at a string of elections where you can debate

whether the overall outcome reflected popular will. Having watched elections for over four decades, I still cannot make sense of the final outcome in the assembly elections of Madhya Pradesh in 2023 and Haryana as well as Maharashtra in 2024. To be fair, no one has, as yet, clinching proof. In the absence of any visible traces, we did not know where and how to find out. These remained doubtful elections.

The recent elections in Assam and West Bengal change

that we are now in the zone marked 'dubious'. If we do not draw the line here, we could be saying goodbye to electoral democracy as we have known it.

The delimitation of constituencies in Assam was not simply a case of selective gerrymandering in some seats. This was about the ECI carrying out a brazenly partisan and communal redrawing of electoral boundaries so as to tilt the electoral battleground in favour of the BJP. The ruling party began the

"The delimitation of constituencies in Assam was not simply a case of selective gerrymandering in some seats. This was about the ECI carrying out a brazenly partisan and communal redrawing of electoral boundaries so as to tilt the electoral battleground in favour of the BJP. The ruling party began the elections with an advantage of 20-30 seats; Reduction of about 20 assembly constituencies where Muslim or Ahom voters were decisive and addition of about 10 seats where Bengali Hindus or Bodos were now decisive."

this. To be fair, Mamata Banerjee and Rahul Gandhi's allegations of "election chori" in both these states are still allegations waiting for proof. My own impression is that Congress would have lost Assam even if there were no irregularities. It is harder to say that about West Bengal, but it is undeniable that there was a lot of popular disaffection against the incumbent TMC government in the state. So, it is not that we now have incontrovertible proof of the overturning of the popular mandate. What we have, now, is clear evidence of electoral manipulation that can be traced and documented. We can keep debating the quantum and impact of these manipulations, but cannot deny

elections with an advantage of 20-30 seats: Reduction of about 20 assembly constituencies where Muslim or Ahom voters were decisive and addition of about 10 seats where Bengali Hindus or Bodos were now decisive. This systemic manipulation in Assam and a similar exercise in J&K now threaten to become a template for the next nation-wide delimitation.

West Bengal is an instance of multiple organ failure of electoral integrity. This failure is obfuscated by an excessive focus on the SIR and that too on the exact impact of the SIR on the final outcome. Just as the debate on electoral reforms has narrowed down, so has the debate on the SIR — from a claim that the SIR led to no wrongful deletion

to a plea that the wrongful deletions were not targeted and now to an argument that targeted deletions were possibly less than the final margin of victory. The last point can be settled. The case that the BJP would have lost elections but for the SIR rests on treating all 91 lakh deletions as suspect. Such a reading casts doubts on the final outcome in 158 seats, of which the BJP won 105. So far, the available evidence supports a more modest claim of 26 seats that the BJP may have won due to the most dubious deletion of 27 lakh names.

That, however, is not the most consequential issue. The real issue for those concerned about electoral integrity is whether West Bengal presents a case of partisan curation of the voters' list at a scale that could alter the nature of party competition. The real issue for those concerned with a modicum of transparency is where and how do we get basic information on how this curation took place. To those who still remember the Model Code of Conduct, the real question is whether the ruling party can flout it and the law of the land, to openly use hatred as campaign strategy. To those who believe in the fiction of free and fair elections, the real question is whether the ECI can act as an arm of the ruling party, whether yesterday's umpire can overnight become the winning team's player.

We do not know where to look for redressal. The ECI is compromised. The Supreme Court has been a spectator so far. Perhaps we need a Peoples' Commission to bring out the truth. We don't know if that would work. All we know is that we cannot keep walking down this slope any further. It is already too late. But if we miss this phase transition, there may be nothing left to recover.

(Yogendra Yadav is an activist, psephologist and political scientist and was Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi from 2004-2016). This article is published by arrangement with The Indian Express

Concerning AI Data Centres: An Ecological Warning for Meghalaya

By Sunrise Pohlam

We all know that every major tech firm in the world has its own data servers and centres to handle encrypted data, daily processes, and computing. Now, these same tech companies seek expansion of their data centres due to craze over AI research and development. Moreover, each one may occupy a room, a house, or even a village-sized area, and sometimes it demands up to a kilometre of space just to install one data centre. These are not ordinary buildings, but highly complex infrastructures that operate continuously to shape the digital world we live in today. One remarkable thing about these centres is that they provide both technical and casual jobs for many people.

As for our state, if I'm not mistaken, we do have local government data hubs but in smaller proportion to run state-level e-governance and government websites. But that is not the issue to begin with. We are talking about mega-cluster centres

and cost-effective option, of course, is high-quality water. This means the demand will come at the expense of our rivers, streams, and freshwater sources. Meghalaya is already rich in rainwater that flows into rivers, streams, and waterfalls. Many rivers are a source of livelihood and tourism for several areas in our state, such as the Umngot River. Imagine when tech companies have to extract massive amounts of natural water from these sources to cool down their data centres. This excessive extraction will not only reduce availability for local community use but will also disturb aquatic life. Groundwater in certain areas would not be free from extraction either.

At the same time, the 24/7 operation of these centres will lead to another issue: electronic waste. It is likely standard for GPUs used in data centres to have a lifespan of around three and a half years, after which they must be scrapped and

"The most readily available and cost-effective option, of course, is high-quality water. This means the demand will come at the expense of our rivers, streams, and freshwater sources. Meghalaya is already rich in rainwater that flows into rivers, streams, and waterfalls. Many rivers are a source of livelihood and tourism for several areas in our state, such as the Umngot River. Imagine when tech companies have to extract massive amounts of natural water from these sources to cool down their data centres. This excessive extraction will not only reduce availability for local community use but will also disturb aquatic life."

here, and it may likely happen in the coming years. Lest we forget, the state of Meghalaya has always been a hub for many activities in the Northeast, and with growing attention towards digital expansion today, it is quite possible that such developments may be proposed or even welcomed in the near future. This progress may be tempting, but we must also question what kind of progress it truly is for our land and for our people.

One thing is that data centres need huge space to be built, and this directly creates problems for our local people who have their own maternal or clan land rights. In many parts of Meghalaya, land is not just property but identity, heritage, and lineage. Once large areas are acquired, nearby residents have to relocate either by force or willingly, and ownership may likely change which will surely disrupt traditional systems that have sustained our society for generations.

It is a fact that all modern equipment runs on electric power. These centres require electricity too, often in very high amounts. This will put the electricity corporation under strain to supply power to local citizens in the adjoining areas. In several districts of the state, we already have an irregular supply of power, and diverting massive energy resources to a single facility will surely create an imbalance between data centre demand and public necessity. Power outages, therefore, would become a frequent issue for the public in the form of load shedding and electrical maintenance.

If environmental degradation is our primary concern, perhaps we should consider these factors too. Data centres run 24/7 and produce heat, and to manage this, they require massive quantities of liquid for cooling. The most readily available

replaced. This, in turn, creates large amounts of waste, including plastics and metals that are not environmentally friendly. In a state that is already facing waste management challenges, this will add another burden, with the risk that it might pollute the soil and harm our pristine hills, thereby affecting both the local people and the surrounding environment.

We cannot fight off the latest technological progress. We are sure to encounter it and get used to it. But the problem today in our state is not with the landowners or local people, but with our own state government policies and viewpoints. In the desire to place Meghalaya on the global economic map, our government often overlooks long-term consequences, jeopardising the health, safety, and environmental connection of our people. Development without foresight can bring disastrous results. If tomorrow companies like Google, Meta, OpenAI, Amazon, etc., seek to install data centres in Meghalaya, the price will be paid by our people and environment if proper governmental policies are not enforced. We do have land regulations implemented by the district councils of each district, but if the state government turns a blind eye to the traditional needs of the people, what good or progress would it bring for the people in general?

In conclusion, as I have said, technological development cannot be avoided, but it must be approached with careful consideration and responsibility. Our state of Meghalaya is already known globally for its pristine natural environment, rich culture, and community-based way of life. If we fail to recognise how these future impacts are connected, we risk losing not just our resources but our identity as well.

Letters to the Editor

A Young Dream Died in Hasanpur Katauli - Who Carries the Burden of Responsibility?

The tragic death of 21-year-old NEET aspirant Ritik Mishra from Hasanpur Katauli village under Isanagar area of Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh, has shaken the conscience of the entire nation. A young boy who spent years preparing for one of India's toughest examinations reportedly lost hope after the sudden cancellation of the NEET-UG 2026 examination due to the paper leak scandal. Today, after the arrest of the alleged mastermind by the CBI, one painful question echoes across the country — who will now take responsibility for the life that has been lost?

According to the CBI investigation, the alleged kingpin of the paper leak racket, P.V. Kulkarni, a retired chemistry professor formerly associated with Dayanand College, Latur, has been arrested. Investigators claim that he was connected with the examination process of the National Testing Agency (NTA) and allegedly had access to confidential question papers. Another accused, Manisha Waghmare, was also arrested earlier for allegedly helping organise special coaching sessions where questions and answers were reportedly dictated to selected students before the examination. Apart from them, several other accused have already been arrested from Jaipur, Gurugram, Nashik, Pune, and Ahilyanagar in connection with the case.

If these allegations are true, then this is not simply an act of cheating by a few individuals; it is a complete betrayal of the trust of millions of honest students and parents.

Will responsibility end merely with the arrest of some lecturers, middlemen, and agents? Certainly not.

A national examination involving lakhs of students cannot collapse because of one person alone. Such a scandal clearly points towards deep administrative failures, weak security arrangements, negligence, and lack of accountability at several levels. When confidential examination papers allegedly reach selected students before the examination itself, it means the very system meant to protect merit and fairness has failed badly.

The saddest reality is that while investigations may continue for months and courts may eventually punish the accused, one innocent life has already been lost forever. Ritik Mishra will never return to his grieving parents. His dreams of becoming a doctor have ended silently within the walls of his own home. No punishment can truly compensate for that loss.

In every responsible democracy, when such major failures occur, senior authorities publicly accept accountability. Resignations are offered not only because of legal responsibility, but because of moral responsibility towards society. Unfortunately, in our country, accountability often disappears behind endless investigations, official statements, and political arguments.

The country now deserves honest answers. Who failed to secure the

examination process?

Who ignored warning signs and loopholes?

Who allowed confidential papers to reach the wrong hands?

Why do examination scams continue repeatedly despite past controversies?

Most importantly, who will answer the lakhs of students whose confidence, mental peace, and future have been shattered?

Competitive examinations are not merely tests. They carry the sacrifices of poor parents, the sleepless nights of students, and the hopes of entire families. When corruption enters such systems, it destroys not only careers but also young minds and faith in justice itself.

The death of Ritik Mishra from Hasanpur Katauli should become a national wake-up call. If strict accountability is still not fixed now, then society itself will share responsibility for future tragedies.

Yours etc.,

Jairaj

Via email

The Silent Guillotine: The Psychological Toll of MPSC's Frozen Calendar

Editor

The shift in leadership at the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) has sparked a fierce and necessary debate: is this change a boon or a bane for the state's future? Historically, the previous administration was noted for maintaining critical operational momentum despite the complex landscape of state recruitment. The former secretary was often

credited with providing timely interventions, ensuring that examination schedules remained predictable and results were declared with reasonable promptness. For those navigating a strict career timeline, this efficiency was not just a convenience; it was a lifeline that offered a clear sense of direction and hope.

In stark contrast, the tenure of the new secretary has been defined by a perceptible and paralyzing stagnation. The ongoing delay in conducting examinations is far more than a mere procedural hiccup; for aspirants standing on the precipice of the age limit, it is a catastrophe. This administrative "bane" is effectively robbing thousands of their final opportunity to compete, turning years of gruelling preparation and sacrifice into a desperate race against a clock that the Commission has allowed to stall. The total absence of an updated academic calendar and the deafening silence regarding upcoming notifications have left veteran aspirants in a state of professional and emotional limbo, wondering if their hard work will simply be rendered void by bureaucratic inertia.

This transition represents a fundamental breakdown in the "social contract" between the Commission and the youth of Meghalaya. A functional and empathetic administration instils a sense of meritocracy, ensuring that a candidate's sweat and toil are met with equal administrative accountability. However, the current lack of urgency suggests a disconnect that the MPSC can ill afford. For those at the age threshold, the bureaucracy isn't just slow; it is exclusionary, effectively slamming the door on a generation of talent before they even get a chance to prove their worth.

Furthermore, the conspicuous silence of local organizations and pressure groups who were once so quick to march in protest for the rights of the unemployed is deeply unsettling. Their current absence has left aspirants feeling profoundly abandoned in this administrative void. While previous tenures demonstrated the political and administrative will to fast-track recruitment, the current leadership has allowed nearly half the year to slip away in a fog of apathy. This is a systematic erasure of dreams. Every month of silence is a door closing forever, penalizing dedicated students for a crisis of stagnation they did not create.

The MPSC must realize that for a veteran aspirant, time is the most expensive and non-renewable resource they possess. The administration must wake up and restore the heartbeat of the recruitment process. A generation of dedicated students is left to wonder if the system they strive to join has forgotten its primary duty: to remain functional, transparent, and, above all, timely. Time is running out—not just for the aspirants, but for the very credibility of the Commission itself.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request,

Via email

Titanic blunder!

Editor,

The selection of the President of Khasi Authors Society (KAS) Dr D.R.L. Nonglailait as the NPP candidate for the forthcoming MP by-election to the prestigious Shillong

parliamentary seat has naturally raised a hornet's nest in the public domain! Incidentally, preceding his selection as a candidate of the NPP, the latter must have sent feelers to approach Mr Nonglailait to seek his consent, and as he has evidently expressed his keen interest to contest the election, he ought to have morally and without much ado resigned from the Presidentship of the Khasi Authors Society. It cannot be denied that contesting an election as a candidate of a political party and holding the post of President, Khasi Authors Society (KAS) does not augur well for any apolitical welfare organization, for one can't have the cake and eat it too!

Notably, when the news was disseminated among the members of the KAS many of them were heard, yelling at the top of their voices in support of their President contesting on the NPP symbol. Such spontaneous enthusiasm exhibited by these selective members have markedly let some discerning citizens to opine that KAS is, so to say, an agent of the NPP political party. Ideally, in order to clear this vortex of obfuscation/duplicity it is advisable for Dr Nonglailait to resign from the top post of KAS and contest the election on a level playing field without an iota of prejudice thereby dispelling widespread public apprehension/misgivings for, at the end of the day what counts is the truth!

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request,

Via email

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

"Justice can rarely exist without honesty."

— Rain Dove

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 276

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2026

State Not a Theological Authority

EVER since the misappropriation of funds from the Mawkhar Church became public in 2019, the group of believers managing the accounts has made all kinds of attempts to cover their tracks. If audit reports find that funds have been siphoned off and those guarding the church funds cannot explain the shortfall, the Church Committee has the primary duty to question why this happened and who is involved in the crime. The auditors found that between 2013 and 2019, a cumulative amount of Rs 4.65 crore intended for bank deposit never reached there. The church's chowkidar, tasked with depositing all collections at the bank was blamed for this misappropriation. However, the question arises: how did he manage this for several years without the scam being detected? Who did he collude with and why was this discrepancy between collection and deposit not caught the attention of the Finance Committee of the Church unless those members were themselves involved in the loot.

In the midst of this imbroglia the Church leadership instead of converging on the single point of recovering the defrauded amount and resolving this embarrassing conundrum was instead divided on the issue. The section that believes in transparency in church matters saw no harm in exposing what is essentially a scam. Others who cared for the reputation of the church preferred silence—thereby believing that the problem would resolve itself. But a scam whether in a religious or secular institution has to be investigated and, if proven, exposed and the guilty prosecuted—regardless of whoever is involved. The church collects tithes and offerings every Sunday from its adherents with the intention of using the money to for charitable causes, for educational purposes; to take the church's message to the last mile, improve its infrastructure such as graveyards, school buildings and also to build churches in distant villages. When such money is mis-utilised or misappropriated it suggests a deep moral degradation among its members. Those members should actually be held accountable instead of being protected just because they are respected members of the church. Needless to say this incident has eroded public trust and raised many unanswered questions.

The irony is that a certain minister in the present government of Meghalaya and others in the past too had tried to hush up this matter for fear of public opprobrium, instead of addressing the issue upfront and punishing the guilty no matter their station in the church hierarchy. Ironically the whistle blowers within the church have been harassed and hounded out. Today there is a faction that support the pastor because they believe he was discharging his duty with integrity. But others with different mindsets have used their political clout to get the Government involved in the mess. That the Government instead of distancing itself from church related matters has instead stepped in ostensibly to prevent the takeover of the church by one or other group, has over-stepped its brief. That the matter has spilt over to the public domain through the media is no happenstance. The media's duty is to report on wrongdoings not just of the government but of every public institution and the church is one such institution. The media is under no obligation to protect the reputation of any individual or institution involved in wrongdoing.

Letters to the Editor

Decolonize History: Jaintia Hills and the Khasi Identity

Editor,
The Khyriem, the Pnar, the Lynggam, the Maram, the Bhoi, and the War are one people, known as the Khasi. Numerous claims have been made by individuals and groups that the people of Jaintia Hills do not belong to the Khasi tribe. Recently, some individuals published newspaper write-ups strongly objecting to a statement made by Danny Khyriem, the former vice president of the Khasi Students' Union in the KSU CEC 2026 General Election. In that statement, he claimed that the people of Jaintia Hills belong to the Khasi tribe and that we are one people. These individuals also described the term 'Jaintia' as the name of a community, which is a baseless claim. These assertions have caused great confusion among Khasi people who are unaware of the true history and facts. Though there are slight geographical and linguistic variations, that does not make us different. What Danny Khyriem stated is a universal truth: the people residing in the Jaintia Hills today belong to the Khasi family. Those who deny this

fact may not have studied history thoroughly, may have relied on histories written by colonizers, or might be individuals who wish to divide the oneness of our people for personal gain. Let us briefly revisit history.

Historians and research scholars suggest that the name Jaintia is derived from the Hindu goddess—Jayanti Devi, which may be accurate, as the region was once under the rule of Hindu Rajas. However, before the 'Jaintia Kingdom' came into existence, the Jaintia Hills, as we know them today, were known as Hima Sutnga and Hima Malngiang, or Hima Madur Maskut. Furthermore, Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh stated in one of his books that the Syiem Malngiang, or the Malngiang chieftain was one of the oldest kings who ruled most of the present-day Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This Hima Malngiang extended from Nowgong to Sylhet. Another source claims that after the Syiem Malngiang was defeated by the Syiem Sutnga, the Syiem Sutnga named the new kingdom or Hima as Hima Jaintia. Thus, the word 'Jaintia' does not represent the name of a community or a tribe.

When we examine our culture, traditions and customs, lineage, language, and physical appearance, we are all essentially the same; there are only slight variations depending on the region in which we live.

The Traditional Institutions of Jaintia Hills

By H.H. Mohrmen

On May 6, I attended the orientation-cum-workshop on development of Social Science Textbooks conducted by DERT, Shillong. A non-academic like me was invited to the workshop because the state government has decided to include local content in the new Social Science book for the students of Meghalaya.

In one of the presentations the facilitator cited an example that in the current textbook there is a chapter about the grassroots governing system and the lesson is about the Panchayati Raj System only. There is nothing about the system in our tribal state despite the fact that the three major regions of Meghalaya have their own local governing systems. The different traditional institutions in the state did not find mention in the textbook which raises a question, if there is even a write-up anywhere which deals on the above subject in its entirety.

Constitutional Foundation

When the Constituent Assembly deliberated on the future governance of these regions, the North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi played a crucial role. The committee recognized the need to protect tribal customs, safeguard land from external exploitation, and ensure that governance structures reflect indigenous ways of life (Bordoloi, 1984).

These concerns were ultimately incorporated into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India under Article 244 (2). It must therefore be clearly understood that governance in our region rests on two foundational pillars, namely statutory law guaranteed by the Constitution and customary practices that have guided our communities since time immemorial (Nongbri, 2003).

This Schedule allows autonomy of considerable magnitude, conferring legislative, executive, judicial, and financial powers upon District and Regional Councils. This in a nutshell is the basis of traditional governance in the state.

The Traditional Administration System

My area of study is only Jaintia hills and I have very limited knowledge about the two other regions of the state. I know very little about the traditional institutions in the Khasi hills and don't know anything about the Nokmaship in the Garo hills.

The hills portion of the erstwhile Jaintia kingdom is also known as "ka Ri Khadar Daloi" the land of the 12 Chieftains. However the earliest form of traditional grassroots institution in the area is the raid, as oral tradi-

tions tell us how raids were formed. Raid formation is also related with the story of the first settlers or how the area was peopled.

The traditional term used to describe the administrative and religious structure of the area at the local level is Raid (or Raij, as it is sometimes rendered). It is, however, important to distinguish between Raij/Raj and Raid. The word Raij or Raj is a borrowed term from the plains and refers to territorial jurisdiction, particularly that of a king or ruler, denoting political influence. In contrast, Raid is a traditional concept that represents not only territorial boundaries but also a spiritual realm or the domain of the local deities and guardian spirits. Thus, while Raij/Raj denotes political authority, Raid embodies the indigenous and spiritual dimensions of community life.

What is a Raid?

A Raid is a traditional institution that historically played a dual role, in overseeing both administrative and religious affairs within its territory. The head of the Raid is the Langdoh, who serves simultaneously as the administrative leader and high priest. There is also a female counterpart, ka Langdoh. In Jwai, both positions are held by members of the Soo Kpoh clan, the primary clan to which the four divine sisters belong.

Each Raid has well-defined boundaries marked by natural features also known as ki ryngkaw ki basa and ka tawiar takan—which hold deep spiritual significance. There are ki Ryngkaw, which are nature deities, believed to guard and protect the inhabitants. It may also be mentioned that each Raid has its own Ryngkaw and Tawiar Takan specific to its locality. Raid, therefore, is not just a geographical or administrative entity but also a spiritual entity.

An important question arises as to how the traditional offices came to be assigned to specific clans within the Raid. To understand this, we must explore how Raids were originally formed.

Formation of the Raid

The formation of a Raid begins with the primary clans that first settled in a given region. Ki Raids were formed by the primary clans that constituted ka Khrong, meaning a collection of clans that contributed to the traditional institutional system of the place. These clans also shared different roles and responsibilities among themselves and assigned the designated traditional offices to their respective clans.

In the case of Jwai, the

Soo Kpoh Khadar Wymai is the first clan to be divinely led by U Tre Kirod to the land destined for their settlement. While some Raids were established by two or more primary clans, Jwai was founded by four sisters: ka Bon, ka Tein, ka Wet, and ka Doh. Each sister married and settled in different areas, with each husband bringing along his family and relatives, that ultimately led to the growth and peopling of the settlement (Kynjiñ P. Souvenir, 2015).

The clans not only settled but also established an organized system to manage both the administrative and spiritual affairs of the community. Thus, the Raid emerged as the first traditional institution combining grassroots governance with religious responsibilities. The primary clans, being the earliest settlers, held key offices.

In Raid Jwai, the Soo Kpoh Khadar Wymai clan can occupy all traditional offices, and only their descendants can hold the positions of Langdoh and ka Langdoh. The other clans, however, may hold only those offices traditionally assigned to them.

The Traditional Offices in Raid Jwai

In the case of Jwai, as the population grew, the need for a formal system of governance arose, leading to the establishment of Raid Jwai, with fourteen traditional offices known as ki 14 Wasan. In those early times, Niamtre was the sole religion, and the Raid also catered to the spiritual needs of the community.

The fourteen traditional offices included u Daloi, u Langdoh, ka Langdoh, ki Sangot, ki Maji, u Pator, u Harna, u Malngangot, u Chutia, and u Dhulia. Through the matrimonial alliances of the Four Sisters emerged the phra kur phra kmai—the eight clans that formed the ki 14 Wasan (Kynjiñ P., 2015).

Elek and the Daloi

As time passed, different Raid emerged in different areas, leading to the creation of the elek and the office of u Daloi. Apart from being the administrative head of the village, he is also the head of the village court. From 1400 until 1893, the Jaintia king made the best use of the offices of Dalois to govern the hills portion of the Jaintia kingdom. Originally there were 12 Dalois but now there are 19 Daloiships in Jaintia hills. All Daloiship is based on a tradition that a person who holds the office of the Daloi should only be from a certain clan mostly from the primary clan of the area. Amongst the Daloi, the Daloi of Nartiang is considered to be "u kong wasan" or the el-

der of all the Daloi in Jaintia hills (Sumer, S.Q.).

From Raid to Dorbar

Chnong

The Raid has however lost its importance as it is being replaced by the Dorbar Chnong and the role of u Langdoh as an administrative head of the village is being replaced by u Waheh Chnong. In some cases the Langdoh continues with the tradition of being the Langdoh (the Priest) as well as becoming the headman of the village. In some villages the Kur which used to occupy the office of the Langdoh continue to hold the office of the Waheh Chnong.

Dorbar Chnong with the Waheh Chnong was however of a recent origin and even the term "Dorbar" is borrowed from outside and there are no stories or tradition about the Dorbar Chnong.

The Sirdarship

In Jaintia hills there is another traditional institution known as Sirdarship. The first Sirdarship office was instituted by the Biare in 1742 to govern the villages in Saipung area settled largely by the Biare people.

Sumer Patriship was earlier an area under the Daloi of elek Raliang. Because of its distance from Raliang, the District Council wisely instituted the office of Sirdarship, known as Sumer Patriship, instead of creating a new elek.

Voluntary services

The traditional institutions operate on pro-bono basis except for the Daloi/Sirdar who earn some revenue from recommendation for LHC to the landowner. Some Daloi have "ka Rek Daloi" which are paddy fields traditionally used by the Daloi for performing his duty. Some Daloi also collect traditional tax from outsiders trading in the market called "ka Dan." The Waheh Chnong basically work for the welfare of the people and provides their service free of cost.

Empowerment of the Traditional Institutions

In Jaintia Hills, the two-layer traditional institutions, which include the Daloi or Sirdar and the Waheh Chnong, are now recognized by law after the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Establishment of Elek and Village and Election, Appointment, Powers, Functions and Jurisdiction of Daloi/Sirdar and Waheh Chnong) Act of 2015 received the assent of the Governor.

Perhaps, the Council has learned from its mistake of instituting the new Office of Daloi of Madur Maskut which lacks any traditional foundation. The reason is that the Hima Madur Maskut which is also known as Hima Malngiang which predated Jaintia kings has ceased to exist even before the Jaintia kings came to power.

ernment recently passed an ordinance to make the Khasi language the official language of the state of Meghalaya. I hope that this ordinance will soon become an act, and it will greatly help our people build a sense of oneness among us, the Khasi. In my understanding, language is more than just a means of communication; it is a bond that unites people, and most importantly, it is a cornerstone of a community's identity.

There are many arguments and pieces of evidence to prove that the Pnar people belong to the Khasi tribe. I urge individuals who claim the Pnars are not Khasi and belong to the Jaintia community to please conduct proper historical research before jumping to conclusions, and to avoid reading histories written by pseudo-historians and colonizers. Let us decolonize our thoughts and our minds, and let us unite and come together as one people. Let us also not become instruments of those who employ a 'divide and rule' policy for their personal gain. We should follow in the footsteps of our forefathers, not those of the colonizers.

Yours etc.,
Carmel Fedrick Malngiang, Sohra

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

What's in a name? (Does anyone care?)

By Sanijajai Khyriem

When Shakespeare used this phrase in Romeo and Juliet, he was trying to convey that the name or label given to something is arbitrary and does not change its true, intrinsic nature. However, the same cannot be said in the context of the argument I wish to make through this article. I am talking, of course, about our beloved Sohra—or as someone who cannot pronounce it correctly

directive exists (and it does) then one must ask: is there no mechanism within the administration to review and approve the names that go onto government-erected highway sign boards before they are installed? And if such a mechanism exists, why did it fail so visibly? If I am mistaken, and people are indeed bothered by this, then surely the very officials responsible for approving

Names are not merely labels; they are living records of a people's history, identity, and belonging. The name "Sohra" is not simply a word; it's something that has been used for generations before any outsider ever set foot on this rain-drenched plateau. To allow a colonial mispronunciation to persist in perpetuity is to allow history's wrongs to be quietly normalised.

(through no fault of their own) might call it: Cherra, Shora, or even So-raw. It all began when I started to notice that some signboards hanging along the national highway showed signs of an attempt to correct the names of places. It started with signboards along the Shillong-Guwahati road that, for a brief period, read "Barapani", before being corrected to "Umiam." I applaud the people who put in efforts to make that correction. Some will slander them, calling them mere "trouble-makers," but it made me think: how many of us truly understand the relevance of names?

Names are not merely labels, they are living records of a people's history, identity, and belonging. The name "Sohra" is not simply a word; it's something that has been used for generations before any outsider ever set foot on this rain-drenched plateau. To allow a colonial mispronunciation to persist in perpetuity is to allow history's wrongs to be quietly normalised. If someone were to call me a fanatic for saying this, I would gently redirect their attention to the national conversation that erupted when Calcutta was restored to Kolkata, when Bombay reclaimed its name as Mumbai, and Hey! There's even speculation

these signboards would have caught the error, before the board was bolted into the ground.

What troubles me further is the silence in the digital world. Open Google Maps. Open Apple Maps. Search for Sohra. You will be directed to "Cherrapunjee." The colonial name sits there, prominently, on platforms used by millions of travellers and navigators every single day. These are not obscure cartographic databases, they are the primary navigation tools of our time. And yet, despite the official renaming, despite the Khasi community's long-standing position on this matter, no concerted effort appears to have been made to have these platforms updated.

What is particularly striking (and painful to admit) is that it is not just the administration that has been indifferent. The broader Khasi community, too, has not rallied in sufficient numbers behind their brethren from Sohra to push for this correction. And the irony is impossible to ignore: anyone who has visited Sohra in recent years will know that the locals there have gone to extraordinary lengths to erase the colonial name: signboards within the town, local businesses, community notices, all proudly bearing "Sohra." Yet the moment a

The colonial name sits there, prominently, on platforms used by millions of travellers and navigators every single day. These are not obscure cartographic data-bases; they are the primary navigation tools of our time. And yet, despite the official renaming, despite the Khasi community's long-standing position on this matter, no concerted effort appears to have been made to have these platforms updated.

that India might formally be renamed to "Bharat". Nobody called those advocates fanatics; they were celebrated as defenders of cultural identity. Why, then, should the people of Sohra be held to a different standard? The principle is the same. Does the size of the stage affect this perception?

Which brings me to the incident that compelled me to write this letter. Nearing the completion of the much-anticipated Shillong-Dawki road, a project heralded with great fanfare and rightfully so; a signboard appeared along the route that made my heart sink. There, in plain letters, freshly painted and officially erected, was written: "Cherrapunji." Not Sohra. Not even a grudging acknowledgement of both names. Simply "Cherrapunji," as though the past several decades of advocacy, of lobbying, of community effort had never happened. I sat with that feeling for a while, perplexed, then disheartened. It is worth reminding readers that the Government of Meghalaya has officially renamed Cherrapunji to Sohra, and this change is meant to reflect in all official records and communications. The Sohra Civil Sub-Division's own government website acknowledges the place as Sohra. If such a

tourist opens their phone to navigate there, they are guided toward a "Cherrapunjee" that no longer officially exists. Imagine the confusion: a traveller follows their map to "Cherrapunjee," only to arrive in a place where every board, every banner, every local voice says something else entirely. We will have created a geography of contradictions and we will have done it to ourselves, through inaction.

I close with this: a people who do not defend their language defend nothing, for language is the vessel that carries everything else: culture, memory, identity, and belonging. The Khasi language is not merely a means of communication; it is the living proof that we were here, that we named this land, that this land is ours. Every time we allow a colonial corruption to stand unchallenged on a signboard, on a map, or in an official document, we chisel away, just a little, at that proof. And one day, if we are not careful, we may wake up as foreigners in our own land, struggling to recognise the names of the very hills and rivers our grandmothers knew by heart.

Sohra is not just a name. It is a declaration. Let us treat it as one.

"At its best, life is completely unpredictable."

— Christopher Walken

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 275 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2026

Fueling inflation

WITH two fuel price hikes in less than a week, ending a near four-year-freeze, the impact of the Iran War is being increasingly felt here. With these hikes, oil marketing companies hope to offset part of their huge losses over the past two months. Crude prices rose steadily since February 28 – the start of the war – but retail fuel rates remained frozen at a two-year-old level due to governmental insistence in favour of consumers. Before the 2024 parliament polls, fuel prices had been reduced by Rs 2. Before the recent assembly polls, excise duty on fuels saw a slight reduction. Both actions had political motives. Through all this, however, consumers – particularly motorists – had heaved a sigh of relief. Inflationary trends were under control. Now they're in for a shock. Fears are that the trend of price increases will continue through repeated and swift jolts.

Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi conditioned public minds a week ago through a statement calling for reduced travel, promoting a work-from-home culture, etc. He knew what was building up. This is a unique situation caused by an external tumult and every nation, including the US, is facing the brunt of the war in multiple ways. The aviation sector itself faced some odds. Yet, a rise in fuel prices affects people in many different ways. Indians increasingly own vehicles for daily travel. Paying a bit more for fuel hurts them every time they reach a fuel dispensing station. Worse, an increase in fuel prices is bound to raise the costs of every commodity as transportation costs spike. Essential items for daily use would see a price hike. Cumulatively, this will add to the burden of the common man. This could cause social unrest.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, through his 12 years at the helm, was singularly lucky to have seen the crude prices falling and remaining somewhat steady. After he took charge, crude prices suddenly fell from over \$100 to around \$60. This scenario continued for years and prices were around \$70 when the Iran war started. Thereafter it reversed to more than the 2014 level. In fact, there should have been sharp reductions in fuel prices during the three Modi terms. But the government opted to retain the price levels, apparently to earn more and add weight to the exchequer. The oil firms also benefited greatly; the people did not, though. Now, it would be advisable for the government to intervene and keep the prices steady. The blockade on the Strait of Hormuz is not going to last for long. This is a brief phase, during which time the government is duty-bound to help the people by ploughing back the huge income it earned from this sector over the last 10 years. Oil marketing companies claim to incur a daily loss of Rs 750 crore, which is high. But it is also important for the government to avert a situation where raising transportation costs leads to price increases, and in turn inflation which would hurt the common man the most.

Letters to the Editor

Patronage most foul

Editor,
How does a newly registered inexperienced firm, that perhaps is still tottering on its feet to find traction in contract works, suddenly manage to land for itself projects worth Rs 1900 crores, in a highly technical sector such as the PHE? Or should the question be framed differently? Is it this style of awarding PHE contracts to completely novice and inexperienced contractors the real cause for the failure of most water supply schemes in the State? I am referring to the Headline Front page news that appeared in the May 18th edition of The Shillong Times. As stakeholders and citizens who have borne the trauma of watching newly laid PHE schemes that stubbornly refuse to even yield a drop of water; as villagers who had watched in horror their traditional water sources dry up due to PHE interventions; as a people who are fed up with the apathy, indifference and unprofessional attitude of this department, we demand answers on this latest scam that has emerged from the bowels of the PHE.

One thing is absolutely clear – contracts worth Rs 1900 crore to an untried, untested and inexperienced firm could not have happened without the strong support of a Patron. Whether the Patron is

in Shillong or Delhi; whether he is a Politician or a Bureaucrat; whether he is a technocrat within the PHE department does not matter. The need of the hour is the exposure of this Patron so that such corruption is not repeated in the future.

While we the public can only conjecture as to who in the bureaucracy and the political hierarchy has the clout to push through such a major project, the media and the Opposition has a duty and responsibility to ferret out information on what looks like a major PHE scam reminding us of the 1980's when a similar scam occurred via a vis the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS) which led to the then PHE Minister, Salseng Marak to resign from his post. Just when we thought that the age of major scams is over here comes another one that shocks us out of our wits.

Yours etc.,
Kenny Lyngdoh,
Via email

Concern For Wah Umkhrah: Too Little Too Late

Editor,
The concern expressed by A.L. Hek, MLA regarding the urgent need to protect the Wah Umkhrah River is certainly welcome, though it comes far too late. What was

The Rs 3 Per Litre Petrol Hike and What It Means for Meghalaya

By KC Monappa

Shillong woke up on May 15 to a number that had been coming for a while but was unwelcome all the same. Petrol in the city now costs Rs 98.86 per litre, up from Rs 96.30. Diesel has climbed to Rs 90.12 from Rs 87.50. The revision of Rs 3 per litre, announced by oil marketing companies and effective from Friday night, is the first of this scale in over four years. Car owners and transporters across the state have already said what most residents instinctively know: the effect of this hike will not stay at the petrol pump. It will travel through every supply chain that feeds Meghalaya, and it will arrive, as it always does, at the market and at the kitchen table.

The concern being voiced across Shillong is not simply about the cost of filling a tank. It is about what happens next. Almost every essential commodity consumed in Meghalaya, from rice and fish to eggs, cooking oil, and medicine, is transported into the state from outside. There is no operational rail link. There is no pipeline. There is no alternative to the diesel truck climbing the road from Assam. When the cost of that truck journey rises, the cost of everything it carries rises with it. This is the structural reality behind the worry that residents and transporters are expressing across the state, and it is a reality that a Rs 3 hike makes considerably more urgent. Car owners and transport operators have said openly that the hike will have a cascading effect on the economy and is likely to lead to broader price inflation across commodity categories.

To understand why the hike happened now, one has to look at what has been unfolding in global oil markets since February 2026. The escalation of hostilities involving Iran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow maritime passage through which nearly 20 percent of the world's daily oil supply moves. For India, which sources close to half its crude through this corridor, the blockade was an immediate supply problem. International crude prices surged from a pre-conflict average of around \$69 per barrel to a peak of \$144. India moved quickly to import record volumes of discounted Russian crude, reaching 2.3 million barrels per day by early May, but even that buffer could not prevent state-run oil marketing companies from absorbing losses estimated at between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 2,400 crore every day by keeping retail prices frozen.

The revision, seen in that light, was inevitable. What drew sharper comment was its timing. The price freeze was maintained for 76 consecutive days. This period coincided precisely with assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. The hike was announced sixteen days after polling concluded in those states. The two facts

sit together without requiring much interpretation. The effect of holding prices through an election period and releasing them afterward is that what might have been a gradual adjustment over weeks becomes a single concentrated blow to household budgets. For a state like Meghalaya, where supply chains are long, terrain is difficult, and there is no competing mode of freight transport to absorb any part of the shock, that concentrated blow lands harder than it does elsewhere.

National analysts have estimated that a Rs 3 hike adds roughly 3 percent to freight costs on flat road routes. In Meghalaya, where loaded trucks climb steep gradients on winding roads and consume substantially more diesel per kilometre than they would on the plains, the inflationary pressure on essential goods is expected to be considerably higher. Perishable items, which also require refrigerated transport, are particularly exposed. The increased cost of cold-chain logistics and long-haul freight together are likely to push retail prices of vegetables, fruits, and milk upward at a rate that will outpace the national average. This is not speculation. It is the arithmetic of road-only logistics in a hilly state, applied to a fuel price increase.

For the daily commuter in Shillong, Tura, or Nongstoin, there is an additional and more immediate problem. Transport unions have consistently sought fare revisions when fuel prices rise, and there is no reason to expect anything different this time. In the period before the state government issues revised fare charts, which can take several weeks, passengers using shared taxis and auto-rickshaws face the practical reality of arbitrary overcharging. Students, daily wage workers, and others who depend on shared transport and have no ability to absorb higher costs will feel this most directly. For a city like Shillong, where a significant share of daily trips are made in shared vehicles and where many residents do not own private cars, the interim period between a fuel hike and a formal fare revision is always one of confusion and friction at the roadside.

The state's fiscal position in relation to this hike is not straightforward. Meghalaya's 2026-27 budget projects revenue of Rs 1,290 crore from Sales Tax and VAT. Because the state levies VAT on the dealer's commission on fuel, higher prices technically increase state tax collection. But Meghalaya remains dependent on central transfers for close to 80 percent of its total revenue. If oil prices remain elevated and the West Asia situation does not resolve quickly, the state government will face a genuine dilemma. Reducing

its own VAT to provide relief to consumers and transporters would shrink the development budget. Maintaining the current rate while household incomes are eroded by inflation risks a contraction in local economic activity that the revenue gain from VAT does not compensate for.

There is a structural dimension to this vulnerability that deserves direct acknowledgement. In April 2026, the state government returned Rs 200 crore to the Railway Ministry for the long-stalled Tetelia-Bymihat rail project. The concerns that have kept this project frozen for nearly two decades are genuine. Residents have consistently raised worries about uncontrolled demographic change through a rail corridor, and the absence of an Inner Line Permit framework for railway travel has remained an unresolved issue. These are legitimate political concerns. But returning those funds without an alternative plan has a practical consequence: it reaffirms that Meghalaya will remain entirely road-dependent for all its essential commodity supply chains for the foreseeable future, and will therefore remain fully exposed to every future fuel price increase.

The way forward on the railway question does not require abandoning local concerns. Mizoram extended its railway to Sairang while maintaining ILP controls by implementing verification at the station level. Meghalaya could negotiate a revival of the Tetelia-Bymihat link as a dedicated freight corridor under a similar arrangement, where the line is used exclusively for bulk commodity movement and no through-passenger service operates. This is a practical compromise that addresses both the infrastructure gap and the demographic concerns, and it is one the state government should consider seriously rather than treating the railway question as permanently closed.

On taxation, the state can act without waiting for any central decision. Meghalaya currently levies an ad valorem VAT on fuel, meaning the state's tax revenue grows automatically as the base price rises. During a period of global supply disruption, this creates a situation where the state benefits fiscally from the same emergency that is squeezing its residents. Shifting to a fixed, specific rate per litre during declared periods of international supply crisis would cap the state's automatic revenue gain and provide immediate relief to transporters. The reduction in revenue would be modest; the relief to supply chain costs would be tangible.

A more targeted intervention would be a fuel tax rebate for commercial trucks registered in Meghalaya that carry documented essential

commodities, specifically food grains, LPG, and medicine. A quarterly rebate tied to verified delivery records, administered through the transport department's existing vehicle registration database, would reduce inflation at the source rather than trying to manage it at the retail end. This is administratively feasible and would channel relief to the operators who are directly responsible for keeping the state's markets supplied.

On public transport, the state should apply urgently for electric buses under the central government's PM e-Bus Sewa scheme, which has allocated electric buses to state transport corporations across the country. Expanding the Meghalaya Transport Corporation's fleet on inter-district routes with electric buses would eliminate diesel dependence for public mobility on those routes and protect affordable transport from future fuel price volatility. The recent scaling back of some MTC school services is a step in the wrong direction at precisely the moment when reliable, affordable public transport is most needed.

At the agricultural level, the current price environment should push the state's Mission 10 initiative to focus specifically on paddy and pulse production in districts like Ri-Bhoi and East Khasi Hills, where the land and rainfall conditions support it. Meghalaya imports a substantial share of its staple grain from Assam and West Bengal. Every sack of rice that makes that journey is now more expensive to transport. Encouraging and supporting local grain production for local consumption, through input subsidies and guaranteed procurement at the block level, reduces the state's dependence on the Guwahati-Shillong supply corridor and provides a practical hedge against transport cost increases.

The Rs 3 hike of May 2026 is, by most accounts, not the final word. Analysts suggest that fully restoring oil marketing company profitability may require further increases in the range of Rs 15 to Rs 20 per litre over the coming year. For Meghalaya, a state where almost every essential good travels by road from another state and where the average household has no buffer against transport-driven inflation, that trajectory is a serious concern. The state government's 2026-27 budget spoke of financial freedom. For that phrase to mean something concrete to the people of Meghalaya, financial freedom has to include a transport and food system that does not become more expensive every time there is a disruption in the Persian Gulf. The tools to begin building that system, from railway negotiations to VAT reform to targeted freight relief to electric public transport, are available right now. The question the current crisis puts to the state government is whether it will use them before the next hike arrives.

liquor, transport rules require the factory to "denature" it by mixing a tiny amount of regular petrol directly into the tank at the source to make it completely toxic.

Because it has that bit of petrol mixed in, it smells and evaporates just like regular fuel, but structurally it remains almost entirely raw ethanol. To be safely used in a normal vehicle, it must first be precision-blended at an official oil company depot down to a safe ratio like the standard E20 fuel (20% ethanol, 80% petrol) found at regular retail petrol pumps. Standard vehicle engines are strictly designed to burn petrol and simply cannot run on raw, unmixed industrial alcohol. When a standard carburetor or fuel injector absorbs this unblended road fuel, the engine instantly floods, the spark plug fails to ignite properly, and the vehicle shuts down.

Furthermore, raw ethanol acts like a sponge for moisture, meaning the moment it spilled all over the dirt road and wet bitumen, it aggressively sucked up mud and road water, which now sits at the bottom of a vehicle's tank and chokes the fuel lines. If a person puts this spilled fuel into his tank and that person's vehicle stops working, he should stop trying to start it immediately so that he doesn't pull more water or raw ethanol into the engine. Instead the person should take the vehicle to a garage and tell

the mechanic there that the tank contains unblended road ethanol. The mechanic will simply drain that tank completely, flush the fuel lines, and dry or replace the fouled spark plug. Once the system is totally clear and refilled with regular petrol from a proper fuel station pump that vehicle will start right back up and run perfectly normally.

In conclusion, I would request everyone to be aware about crowding around an overturned fuel tanker to collect spilled liquids. This is a very dangerous gamble with life, as raw denatured ethanol or petrol is highly volatile and a single accidental spark could trigger a catastrophic explosion. As citizens, it is vital to act responsibly, prioritize personal safety over free fuel, and leave accident scenes clear for emergency responders. While we can look at today's incident with immense relief that no tragic news or casualties occurred, it serves as a stark warning. Next time, the outcome could be devastating, and no amount of salvaged fuel is ever worth risking our lives for. Be safe be responsible.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Questions Nobody Wants...

There was a time when leaders loved press conferences. They stood proudly behind microphones, smiled confidently at reporters and answered questions with the enthusiasm of a student who had actually studied for the exam.

Today, press conferences have become like surprise dental appointments. Nobody wants to attend them. Which brings me to our Prime Minister's latest foreign tour where, once again, journalists gathered hopefully, cameras rolled expectantly, questions were polished carefully, and then suddenly, like a schoolboy hearing the final bell, the Prime Minister disappeared without taking a single question.

Bold Norwegian journalist Helle Lyng shouted after him asking why he would not take questions from "the freest press in the world." But by then our PM had moved away with the speed of a man who had suddenly remembered he had left the gas on at home.

Now mind you, there is an art to avoiding questions. Some politicians become angry. Some joke. Some pretend they did not hear. Some suddenly discover an urgent international crisis near the exit door. But our government has perfected something extraordinary. They answer questions without answering them.

And this is where diplomat Sibi George entered magnificently. The Norwegian journalist asked a direct question about human rights and press freedom. A dangerous thing to do nowadays. Direct questions are terribly inconvenient because they demand direct answers.

Instead of replying, Sibi took the audience on what appeared to be a conducted tour of Indian civilisation.

Within minutes we travelled through five thousand years of history, invented zero, played chess, stretched ourselves into yoga postures, distributed Covid vaccines, admired the Constitution, celebrated diversity, and possibly stopped briefly for chai and samosas.

By the end of the answer, I suspect even the journalist had forgotten the original question.

It reminded me of my school days when teachers asked difficult questions.

"Bob, where is your homework?" "Madam, homework is very important in shaping civilisation. In ancient India, great gurus taught discipline under banyan trees. Speaking of trees, oxygen is very important for humanity." Unfortunately my teachers lacked diplomatic training and still punished me. Now as a public speaker, I actually love questions. Yes, I do. Nothing excites me more than somebody standing up at the back of the hall with folded arms, a dangerous smile and a question beginning with, "But sir, don't you think..."

That is where your real speaking begins.

I have discovered something fascinating about questions. A tricky question forces you to become specific. You cannot wander around like a tourist in Connaught Place looking for a shop that no longer exists. You have to answer clearly, calmly and quickly. And if the questioner is aggressive, your job is not to become aggressive back. Your job is to calm the volatile speaker. Lower the temperature. Smile. Finish quickly. And if you handle it well, the audience quietly awards you brownie points.

People walk away saying, "Ah, that was clever. He handled that beautifully."

In fact, sometimes the question session is more important than the speech

itself. Anybody can read from a teleprompter. But can you think on your feet when somebody throws a verbal coconut at your head?

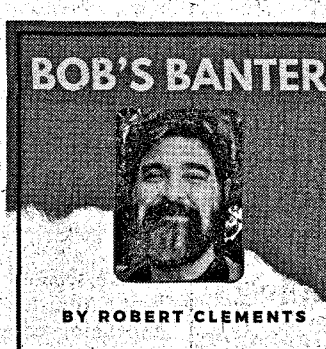
That is leadership. Which is why all this fear of questions surprises me. Why are leaders so terrified of journalists?

A journalist merely asks questions ordinary people are already asking at home. If leaders cannot answer reporters abroad, how will they answer history later?

Once upon a time, press conferences were signs of confidence. Leaders sparred with journalists. They defended policies. They argued passionately. Sometimes they even lost their temper magnificently. But at least there was engagement.

Now everything is stage managed. Friendly interviewers. Prepared questions. Teleprompters standing faithfully nearby like obedient Labradors. And when something unexpected happens, everybody looks panicked, as though democracy itself has malfunctioned.

Even our diplomats nowadays seem trained not to communicate but to exhaust the listener.



By the time Mr George finished speaking about civilisation, diversity and yoga, I imagine the Norwegian journalist felt she had accidentally enrolled

for a postgraduate course in Indian cultural studies.

And then came my favourite line. Critics, he said, read reports from "godforsaken, ignorant NGOs." Wonderful. Nothing impresses foreign audiences more than calling people ignorant while refusing to answer their questions.

That always works beautifully. The tragedy is that India does not need such defensive gymnastics. We are a great nation. A noisy nation. A chaotic nation. An argumentative nation.

In our country even vegetable vendors debate politics with the confidence of constitutional lawyers. Taxi drivers discuss geopolitics. Tea stall owners analyse economic policy. Entire families fight over television debates during dinner.

This noise is not weakness. It is democracy breathing loudly.

But when leaders stop taking questions, something changes. Citizens speak but power no longer listens. And abroad it creates a terrible impression. Not because foreign journalists are always right. They are often biased, arrogant and selective themselves. But when we refuse questions altogether, we appear frightened. And a frightened government never looks strong.

Strong leaders answer. Weak leaders escape. Perhaps one day we will again see real press conferences. Uncomfortable ones. Chaotic ones. Honest ones. And honestly, how magnificent it would have looked if Narendra Modi had simply stopped, smiled and answered the Norwegian journalist the same way he convinces voters in India. Whether one agrees with him or not, nobody can deny that the man is a powerful communicator before crowds. One clear answer. One confident exchange. One moment of openness. The whole world would probably have applauded.

Instead, we got yoga, chess, zero and civilisation from dear Sibi. Maybe what will finally convince our leaders to take questions is if India invents a teleprompter that actually thinks and flashes the answers to questions on screen.

You can request for Bob's Banter by Robert Clements as a daily column on your whatsapp by sending your name and phone number to bobsbanter@gmail.com

"The greatest wealth is to live content with little."

— Plato

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 278 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026

Judicial Language Turns Injudicious
JUSTICE Surya Kant has literally stirred up a hornet's nest by referring to unemployed, educated youth and those expressing views on social media who critique the government and its institutions as "Cockroaches," attacking the system. At a time when youth are at a crossroads — educated but facing unemployment and no immediate job prospects, yet angry enough to express their views on social media—there could have been a better way to address these concerns with empathy befitting the Chief Justice's office.

There are minimum expectations for honourables holding public offices, more so the office of a judge. Judges are expected to uphold not just the law, but also the dignity and credibility of the justice system. Hence the language they use matters. In the past, the judges of this country were known for their eloquent, graceful, persuasive, and expressive orders. There was a time when judges were erudite, learned and used intellectually sophisticated language that was lucid and refined. Going back a few years, justices delivered their rulings and also interjected in court when the situation demanded, using elegant prose that impacted those listening to court proceedings. For a Chief Justice to term a generation of youth as "cockroaches" is not just demeaning but the metaphor is dehumanising. To reduce humans to the stature of insects like cockroaches, especially in a country facing serious unemployment anxieties is unpardonable. The CJI later clarified that his remarks targeted people using fake degrees and that he was "misquoted" as attacking unemployed youth. However, the episode exposed a larger issue: words spoken by judges carry their own weight and clarifications just don't wash.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the youth, already under so much pressure would retort in a manner that made everyone sit up and take notice. Abhijeet Dipke, a youth with an imagination running wild, started the Cockroach Janta Party - CJP whose intent is to give back in equal measure to those who defamed them by calling them cockroaches. Dipke states that there are four criteria for joining the CJP. A person must be unemployed, lazy, chronically online and can rant professionally. Their manifesto has four strategic points. If elected, the CJP will not grant a Rajya Sabha seat to any chief justice as a post retirement benefit. If a person is denied their vote, the Chief Election Commissioner would be arrested under UAPA since denying a citizen the right to vote is equal to an act of terror. The CJP will reserve 50% of seats for women in parliament and those elected will hold 50% of cabinet seats. All media houses owned by Ambani and Adani shall have their licenses cancelled. Any MLA/MP who defects from one party to another shall be barred from holding public office for 20 years. Although the CJP is a satirical political group it has attracted over 3 to 4 million members since its launch. Currently pursuing his Masters Degree in Public Relations at Boston University, USA, Dipke has volunteered with the AAP from 2020-2023 working on a meme based digital campaigning that shaped the party's online engagement in 2026. Dipke is the voice of GenZ and he and his followers cannot be taken for granted for satire has its space in a situation where free speech is being curtailed.

Is Khasi Identity Heading Toward a Constitutional Crisis?

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

The recent tussle between the Hima Sohra and the KHADC over the issue of succession may seem like a local event explained by issues that are contextual to the functioning of the present VPP-led KHADC and its relationship with traditional institutions. However, that would be grossly misjudging the implications that any deviation from customary norms might have on the entire Khasi community. According to custom, it is the Siem Khyinnah who has to succeed the deceased Siem and, by that logic, Maremdor Siem should have succeeded to the position after the death of Paitem Freeman Siem. I am very concerned about the disturbance in the Hima, and, in light of the legal issues surrounding Scheduled Tribe status in the Constitution, I think all Khasis should also be deeply concerned about what is happening in Hima Sohra.

On March 24, 2026, the Supreme Court, in its judgment in Chinthada Anand v. State of Andhra Pradesh, reasserted that Dalit individuals lose their Scheduled Caste (SC) status upon converting to Christianity or Islam. This has come as a big blow to the Dalits, who are among the most oppressed groups in Indian society, and discrimination against them has continued to this day. The animosity against them has its antecedents in the caste system, which divides Hindu society into four groups, with Brahmins at the top, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Brahmins wrote the religious scriptures, so it is no surprise that they gave themselves the top position, and their attitude towards the Shudras was one of derision and disgust. For example the Manusmriti (a classical Hindu law code) recommends that if a low-caste person were to place himself on the same seat as a high-caste person, he should be branded and banished, or his buttock should be gashed, i.e., a long deep cut should be made into the skin. Shudras today are known as the OBCs, while the Dalits were considered to be even lower than them. They were known as untouchables and one practice is frequently cited which highlights the discrimination against them is that during the Peshwa's orthodox Brahmanical rule of the Maratha Empire, Dalits were made to tie brooms behind their backs to sweep away the dust of their footprints. The discrimination against lower castes was in-

tially thought to be a product of religious interpretation, where ritual purity or impurity based on profession was the criterion for one's position in the caste system. However, genetic studies have revealed that the lower castes (OBCs and Dalits) generally have South Asian ancestry, i.e., Dravidian, while the upper castes have Steppe ancestry, i.e., Indo-Aryan. Thus, the caste system was not based only on profession but also on ethnicity.

Post-independence, the Indian state enacted the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (known as the SC/ST Act or Atrocities Act) to protect Dalits and tribals against caste-based violence, discrimination, and humiliation. However, with the 2026 judgment, those Dalits who converted to Islam and Christianity will no longer be protected under this law. This is based on the assumption that these two religions do not believe in caste and therefore caste-based discrimination does not exist within them. The absence of caste in these religions is contested by many because, in Indian society, a change of religion does not always erase caste. When upper-caste Hindus converted to Islam, they became known as Ashraf, while lower castes came to be known as Ajlaf. This is also the case with those converting to Christianity. Furthermore, the case of Chinthada Anand v. State of Andhra Pradesh demonstrates that, despite the complainant, Chinthada Anand, having served as a pastor for ten years, he was still subjected to caste-based slurs and violence. Therefore, the judgment has not been welcomed by all, although technically it is correct because the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 originally included only Hindus within its ambit but has since been amended to include Sikhism and Buddhism, though not Christianity. Once a constitutional amendment is made, that may change. But there was another component of the judgment that came as a relief to another oppressed group, i.e., the tribals or indigenous peoples.

In the same judgment, the Supreme Court stated that the rules governing Scheduled Tribe (ST) status are diametrically opposite. Unlike the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 does not

prescribe religion-based exclusion, i.e., a ST can belong to any religion. Also to retain ST status after converting to a new religion, individuals must continue to possess the essential attributes of tribal identity, continue to follow their customary practices and rituals, maintain their social organization and community life, and continue to be accepted by the concerned tribal community. For such individuals to forfeit their ST status, they must completely abandon their customary practices, rituals, and traditional traits by fully assimilating into the new religion. Those who would like to verify this can read the judgment, which is available online, and refer to paragraph 55(g).

The Court is well aware that a large number of indigenous groups have converted to Christianity while continuing to adhere to their customary practices, especially relating to laws of succession inheritance and marriage. For example, although many Khasis have converted to Christianity, while others have adopted Hinduism or Islam, they continue to observe traditional lineage rules based on matrilineal customs and maintain indigenous socio-political institutions such as the Hima Dorbar and its corresponding bodies at different levels of the traditional political structure, namely the Hima, Elaka, Raid, and Shnong. Once these practices and institutions cease to exist, the connection to tradition is severed. The community would then be regarded as having assimilated into the customs associated with their new identity and, consequently, as no longer belonging to their former tribal identity.

In a 2025 PIL filed by Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai (SRT), the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) Act, 1997 is being challenged in the Meghalaya High Court, advocating for the freedom to adopt patrilineal customs, which are non-Khasi practices. In light of this Supreme Court judgment, it is quite likely that the 1997 Act will be upheld. What could also transpire is the Court asking for the ST status to be stripped from individuals who have taken their father's surname. I do not see how those advocating for patrilineal customs will be allowed to retain their ST status, since that would mean that they have completely abandoned their

customary practices.

In his article "Separating Facts from Political Misinformation," Alan West Kharkongor implicitly suggests that the KHADC might be propping up Planet Siem, nephew of Late Paitem Freeman Sing Siem, as a contender. Based on customary practice, he does not qualify because he has converted to Christianity, and there is fear that the KHADC could be trying to reinterpret this traditional practice of Hima Sohra. If that happens, the Hima Dorbar will no longer be a traditional institution but will instead become a modern institution, meaning that the traditional social organization of the Khasi no longer exists. After Sohra, the next target could be Hima Khyrim, which also allows only those of the indigenous faith to hold the office of the Siem. Therefore, the stakes for the identity of the community are very high, and I am convinced that if the KHADC attempts to override the Hima and impose its own candidate, the matter will be taken to court, where any decision will have to be made in accordance with the conditions established in the 2026 judgment. The demolition of traditional institutions and customary norms would disenfranchise a huge number of Khasis, especially those who have converted to Christianity. If that happens and a large percentage of the population ceases to be classified as Scheduled Tribe, the Sixth Schedule may no longer apply to the state, since it would no longer be considered a tribal-dominated area. In a scenario where constitutional protections are removed, the restrictions on the sale of land to the non-indigenous population will no longer be applicable and, over time, demographic change would also become a possibility. Is this entire affair about disenfranchising the indigenous community and taking over the land and resources? I sincerely hope that those demanding these changes are completely unaware of the legal implications of their actions. Or maybe they are not, and they know exactly what they want? Whatever the case may be, since at least one of the matters has reached the court, i.e., the PIL on changing matrilineal traditions, and the other might eventually join it, we will know soon enough what the fate of the Khasi people will be.

(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)

Fourth-Year of FYUP: The UG Students' Dilemma

By H. Srikanth

Soon the first batch of NEHU UG students admitted under the Four-Year Undergraduate Program (FYUP) will complete their third year. Earlier, those who successfully completed a three-year degree program were awarded an honours degree. But now, under the FYUP, they must study for one more year to secure an Honours degree. The statutory academic bodies in NEHU have designed the syllabus for the fourth-year of FYUP. All that the NEHU PG departments taught for the first-year PG program is now transferred to the fourth-year degree course under FYUP. Only students who complete the courses will obtain a Degree with Honours or a Degree with Research and Honors. If the students drop out after three years, they only get a degree. Naturally, every student will wonder whether to stop with a three-year degree or go for the fourth year to secure an Honours degree.

Last year, the Meghalaya Chapter of All India Save Education (AISEC) published two reports in The Shillong Times (TST, December 2 and 9, 2025) reflecting the experiences of students and teachers with the FYUP. The study showed how the syllabus and curriculum were drastically changed in the colleges, increasing the number of core papers and including value-added and vocational courses and internships. Hardly any effort was made to increase the number of teachers in the UG colleges. As a result, the UG teachers' teaching and exam load has doubled. It has also come to light that college fees rose considerably after introducing the FYUP, and several students have dropped out of the degree courses. Several students have complained that they get little time to study the core courses and cannot secure good scores because they must sit for too many exams in too little time. As they move to the fourth-year degree, their problems will only multiply, as no one seems to be interested in addressing their issues. The NEHU authorities, the state government and the college managements behave as if everything is fine with the FYUP in Meghalaya.

Initially, the central government enticed the state governments and the universities to introduce the FYUP. Everyone believed that the NEP 2020 would enhance the educational standards and align our education system with those in the US, Canada, and Australia. The FYUP promised to introduce alternative courses, an innovative ranking and evaluation system, multidisciplinary courses, vocational courses, research orientation, and alignment with international institutions of repute. To implement these measures effectively, one requires adequate public funding, improved infrastructure, additional qualified faculty, and institutional preparedness. But the central government, which introduced the NEP 2020, virtually did nothing to provide these essential requirements. Public funding for higher education has reduced drastically in recent times. Even the central universities are facing a financial crunch and running the courses with little money and fewer faculty. The problem is even more acute at the UG level, where most of the colleges are private. When reputed universities like Delhi University complain about the difficulties in implementing the FYUP, one can imagine the fate of colleges in the peripheral regions.

Barring a handful of elite city-based colleges, most UG colleges in the state lack the capacity or resources to run the FYUP. Left to themselves, several UG colleges may not even opt for the fourth-year degree course under the FYUP. A standard three-year degree is more than sufficient to meet the needs of students aspiring for most competitive exams. A three-year degree is enough to take admission to a two-year PG course offered by Indian universities. The only hitch is that although students complete 33 papers with 120 credits

in their three-year degree course, the three-year-degree is legally not considered an Honours degree. But should that consideration alone compel students to pursue the fourth year? Do students secure better jobs in the government or private sector if they complete a four-year degree? Will they get admission to reputed foreign universities for higher studies? Do they become eligible for direct admission to the PG courses or to the research programs within the country? Unfortunately, those who pushed for the FYUP do not answer these questions.

In recent years, the value of the rupee has declined so much that studying in foreign universities has become unaffordable even for students coming from upper-middle-class families. Countries like the US and Canada are imposing restrictions on the entry of Indian students, and those already there are facing several problems. No state or central government has declared any incentive for the students doing the FYUP. Given that not all UG students have academics as their career option, it makes little sense to burden all students, with research programs or advanced academic courses. Further, it needs to be clear to the students that there is little chance of getting into one-year PG courses or doing a Ph.D. directly bypassing the PG courses. We do not have even a handful of universities in India today that have adopted a one-year PG program. Lucknow University is the only university that claimed it introduced a One-Year PG to accommodate FYUP students. Delhi University claims it passed the resolution to start one-year PG, but teachers' associations are protesting the resolution passed without proper dialogue and discussion. Most other universities have taken no initiative. So, the fate of students who complete a four-year degree is unclear.

The situation at NEHU is no better. By now, it is clear to everyone that NEHU adopted the FYUP without proper groundwork. The state government and the college managements passively fell in line with the VC of NEHU, Prof. P.S. Shukla, who was bent on introducing the FYUP without preparing the groundwork for the same. Now, Prof. Shukla's term as VC is officially ending soon, but the problems his absence created will continue to affect the functioning of the university and its affiliated colleges. No one knows when a new VC will be appointed or whether the new VC would be better or worse off than the incumbent one.

Of late, like many other public universities, NEHU has been facing a severe financial crisis in recent years, affecting the quality of teaching and research programs. The PG departments themselves find it difficult to implement the NEP at the PG level, as there are no additional funds/resources for students doing research at the PG level. The students are spending a considerable amount to complete the PG dissertations. Some resort to foul means and get dissertations written by AI or by professionals. As many senior teachers have retired and the vacancies are not filled up, the teachers in some departments are supervising seven to 10 PG dissertations. It is very unlikely that the teachers would take on additional load and go for a one-year PG program. Given this situation, what will be the future of the students who opt to complete the fourth-year under the FYUP? Is it not better for them to stop with a three-year degree and take admission to PG courses in NEHU rather than doing the fourth-year FYUP in UG colleges where we lack resources and qualified teachers? Should the students and parents waste time and money to pursue the fourth-year under FYUP? It is high time those defending the FYUP explain how pursuing the fourth year of the degree under FYUP helps, so that students and their parents can make an informed and rational decision.

Letters to the Editor

The New Cockroach Janata Party: A Symbol of Youth Pushback

Editor,

The new Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) is being formed by Abhijeet Dipke as a rebellious pushback after Chief Justice Surya Kant compared unemployed youth to "cockroaches." In his statement, he said: "There are youngsters like cockroaches. They don't get employment, they don't have any place in profession. Some of them become media, some become social media, some become RTI activists, some become another kind of activist, and they start attacking everyone."

As someone who loves using social media, I have clearly seen and witnessed the frustration, anger, doubts, and confusion among young people. All they want are answers from the people in power. First of all, many Gen Z youth in our country are highly educated but are left with no jobs or meaningful activities to engage in. Such statements have deeply affected them and their thinking. They felt hurt.

Often, I have heard people say that Gen Z in India should do something just like young people in other countries are doing. But now, because of the above statement, I hope more young people will come forward to raise their voices, express their concerns, and seek accountability from those in power. Even though the new

Cockroach Janata Party is still unofficial, I have faith that together we can, and together we will succeed, because every voice matters. After all, if not now, then when?

The CJP account on Instagram was created just a few days back, but the number of followers is increasing day by day. This shows that many young people want change. I have also seen many sarcastic reels created by youth highlighting issues within our system. Many young people feel that the country should focus more on poverty, education, unemployment, and other concerns that directly affect their future.

Youth today want development, opportunities, and solutions to issues that impact their lives. Many feel disappointed when these needs are not adequately addressed. I hope CJP becomes a platform that encourages positive change, development, and meaningful conversations for the future of India.

Yours etc.,
Evanisha Pathaw
Via email

Ensure Safer Working Conditions for MeECL Linemen

Editor,

Referring to the news item published in The Shillong Times on May 20, 2026 regarding the rescue of a lineman at Barengapara village under Dalu Police Station, West Garo Hills, I wish to express my deep appreciation for the extraordinary bravery displayed by the

lineman who risked his own life to save his fellow worker from being electrocuted.

The incident may appear to be a small local news report, yet the courage and humanity shown during those terrifying moments deserve the highest respect. When one worker was left dangling helplessly after suffering a severe electric shock, his colleague did not abandon him in fear or panic. Despite knowing the danger to his own life, he remained atop the electric pole and carefully untangled the victim from the deadly wires, ultimately helping him reach safety. Such presence of mind and selfless courage are rare and truly inspiring.

What touched many hearts was not merely the rescue itself, but the human concern behind the action. In today's world, where people often hesitate even to involve themselves in emergencies, this lineman chose humanity before personal safety. His action reminds us that courage is not always found in grand occasions; sometimes it is seen in ordinary workers silently performing extraordinary acts.

At the same time, the incident raises serious concern about the safety of those who work daily in such hazardous conditions. Reports indicate that the electric shock occurred due to a reverse current surge from a nearby inverter or generator because of the absence of a proper changeover switch. Such technical lapses can easily cost precious lives.

While appreciating the heroic rescue, one also hopes that MeECL and the concerned authorities will take this incident as a serious reminder to strengthen preventive safety measures. Proper technical safeguards, regular

inspections, improved awareness regarding generator and inverter connections, and adequate protection for field workers are urgently necessary so that such near-tragic incidents do not recur.

The bravery of the rescuer deserves recognition, but ensuring safer working conditions for those who risk their lives daily would be the true tribute to both workers involved in this incident.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Soft Skills, Hard Realities: The Crisis of Education Governance in Meghalaya

Editor,

The expansion of the "SPARK" initiative across Meghalaya is being framed as a landmark achievement in youth empowerment. On the surface, the narrative is compelling. In an increasingly competitive global economy, our youth require "soft skills"—communication, confidence, and corporate etiquette—to become employable. However, a deeper examination of the political economy behind these multi-crore workshops suggests that this "spark" may be little more than a costly smoke screen, masking a systemic neglect of foundational education and a troubling lack of fiscal transparency.

The most glaring contradiction lies in the perceived efficacy of these short-term interventions. If a ten-day corporate workshop can truly deliver the transfor-

mative results promised by its proponents, it raises a fundamental question about the utility of our entire conventional schooling system. If we can bypass years of "arduous school work" with a few weeks of "personality development," why are we investing crores in the upkeep of an education department? The reality, of course, is that these workshops are a "finishing school" approach applied to a house that lacks a foundation. By prioritizing "employability" over literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, the state is effectively admitting the failure of its schools while choosing to pay shady private entities crores to paint over the cracks.

The financial scale of these initiatives—running into tens of crores—demands a level of scrutiny that has thus far been absent. In the landscape of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), there is a well-documented and dangerous link between political financing and government contracting. It is a legitimate public concern to ask: Is there a correlation between the donors who fund political campaigns and the private firms that are subsequently awarded these lucrative training deals?

When "soft" services like "motivation" or "skill-building" are outsourced to private corporates, the lack of measurable, long-term outcomes makes them the perfect vehicle for political kickbacks. Unlike building a bridge or a hospital, where the physical structure stands as evidence of expenditure, a workshop is ethereal. It leaves behind a trail of photos and press releases, but little in the way of audited, long-term socio-economic

impact.

Perhaps most insulting is the state's devaluation of the professional teacher. While the government insists on rigorous qualifications, eligibility tests, and years of training for school teachers—only to pay them meager salaries and often delay their disbursements—it sets no such standards for these private consultants. We are witnessing the de-professionalization of teaching, where a "charismatic personality" with the right political connections is deemed more valuable than a trained educator who understands the cognitive and psychological needs of a child.

If the government were serious about the future of Meghalaya's youth, the crores currently being funnelled into these corporate workshops would be redirected toward the structural revitalization of our schools. True development does not happen during a "soft-skills" seminar; it happens in a classroom that has classrooms, electricity, a library, and qualified teachers who are respected and paid.

As it stands, the "SPARK" expansion appears to be an exercise in optical governance. It provides a flashy, media-friendly narrative of progress while the actual machinery of public education continues to rust. It is time we demand that our education begins in the classroom, not in a 5 star hotel workshop.

Yours etc.,
A Khamaior,
Via email

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

“Wealth is the ability to fully experience life.”
— Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 279 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2026

Mining versus Environment

THE timely protest by villagers of Daistong in East Jaintia Hills, along with organisations like the Jaintia National Council and Jaintia Students' Union against the proposed Shree Cement and limestone mining project should be supported by people across the state for well-known reasons. The mining site falls under the Nongkhlieh area, which, along the Shnongrim ridge also houses one of India's longest cave systems. The proposed mining site would directly affect the cave system called Krem Liat Prah, measuring 30,957 m (101,600 ft) in length and is the longest and largest cave system in the Indian subcontinent. Daistong, where the new cement plant is proposed, is in the vicinity of Shnongrim village and will be severely affected if the project is allowed to proceed. Why is the government hell bent on destroying a pristine eco-system without doing a cost-benefit analysis involving the local communities before granting permission for one more cement company to set shop in Jaintia hills. Residents are right in demanding that government scrap the proposed project because large-scale limestone mining followed by the setting up of a fully functioning cement plant could damage water sources, farmland, forests, rivers, and the air quality in the area. Villagers also say the proposed site is very close to settlements and agricultural land, raising concerns about dust pollution, groundwater depletion, and long-term ecological damage.

Apart from the environmental factors the protest groups also allege that tribal land as in the past was transferred in a subversive manner to non-tribal entities possibly violating the Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation Act and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council rules. They claim the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) documents do not adequately clarify land ownership and approvals. The public hearing scheduled for the mining project has become a major flashpoint. Protesters claim villagers were pressured into accepting the hearing and that earlier hearings were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation and obstruction. Some alleged that people opposing the project were blocked from attending or speaking freely. There is also genuine fear of corporate takeover of local land and resources as has happened in the past where the process of land transfer lacked transparency and community consultations. The JNC and JSU argue that East Jaintia Hills is increasingly being turned into an industrial extraction zone benefiting outside corporations while local communities bear the environmental and social costs. Protest statements describe this as a struggle over indigenous land rights, dignity, and community consent.

Questions are also being raised over legal and procedural compliance and whether the environmental clearances fall under the state or central government because of the size of the mining lease. They also allege deficiencies in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and procedural violations in the clearance process. As always there is a section that seeks short term benefits from the project and argues that industrial investment can create jobs, improve infrastructure, and strengthen Meghalaya's economy. Naturally this has created a wedge in society even as more and more people are questioning how much mining is enough. As people realise the environmental costs of such projects that matter has become part of a larger debate in Meghalaya. The question is whether development should trump environmental protection and indigenous land rights.

Letters to the Editor

Rise of the Cockroach Janta Party

Editor,
The recent rise of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) has sparked widespread discussion across social media and among India's youth. The movement emerged after controversial remarks by Chief Justice of India, who compared certain unemployed youngsters and online activists to "cockroaches" during a court hearing, later clarifying that his comments were aimed at people misusing the system. What began as satire quickly grew into a larger conversation about unemployment, frustration, and political disconnect among the youth.

Many people are now comparing its sudden popularity and digital mobilisation to the 'Gen-Z-led protests in Nepal in 2025, where youth-driven online activism contributed to major political unrest.

The movement became popular because it used satire, reels, and self-deprecating humour to express issues many young Indians relate to. The use of the word "cockroach" symbolised survival and resilience, turning an insult into an identity. This unusual style of political expression connected strongly with young people who increasingly use digital culture and humour to communicate their opinions.

However, the virality of such online movements should also raise questions. In the age of algorithms and influencer culture, it becomes difficult to separate genuine public sentiment from political

influence or coordinated campaigns. While freedom of expression is important in a democracy, people must also remain aware of how quickly opinions can be shaped online.

At the same time, the popularity of this movement reveals something deeper. Many young people today feel unheard, emotionally exhausted, and uncertain about their future. The success of this movement shows that humour has become both a coping mechanism and a form of protest.

Whether the CJP remains a temporary internet trend or develops into something more serious is uncertain. Yet it has already revealed a changing political culture in India, where memes and satire are becoming powerful tools of expression among the youth.

Your's etc,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

The Rise of Meme Politics in India

Editor,
Can a Joke Become a Movement Before It Becomes a Plan?

In an age where outrage travels faster than reflection, the rise of the Cockroach Janta Party has become one of the more unusual political moments of the season. What began as satire after Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's controversial "cockroach" remark has quickly turned into a viral Gen Z expression of anger, humour and political restlessness.

The Chief Justice's comment, reportedly made in the context of unemployed youth

Khasi Traditional Marriage and Christian Marriage

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The purpose of this article is not to criticize or object to what is happening in Khasi society today, but just to point out the facts as they are for those interested in understanding the nuances of the Khasi thought pattern and the underlying factors influencing the collective consciousness in contemporary Khasi society. Only one aspect of the culture shall be discussed here: marriage. Though sexual relationships between a man and a woman are based on the natural and instinctive human need to propagate one's genetic blueprint to the next generation, this natural need must be regulated by society through marriage conducted in accordance with the culture and customs of a particular community. Through marriage, the sexual relationship and cohabitation of a man and a woman are socially and legally recognized. Society, through its governance institutions takes responsibility to safeguard and protect the couple's sexual property rights against infringement by other persons. In that way, the competition for propagating the personal genetic blueprint is controlled and regulated by society to maintain social order.

In patriarchal societies, it is a man who needs and seeks a wife to continue his bloodline through marriage. A man asks for the woman's hand and proposes marriage by asking, 'will you marry me?' This means, 'are you willing to be my wife, come to stay with me in my house and cooperate with me in continuing my bloodline?' Hence, the groom must wait patiently in the Church for his bride's arrival and take her home after the marriage.

Biological instinctive nature, social norms, and spiritual ideals are perfectly balanced in the Khasi matrilineal system. According to the Khasi thought, the seed belongs to the father, but flesh and blood belong to the mother, while 'ka rmgiew' (spiritual personality) belongs to both. This serves the purpose of a balanced social order. The traditional concept of 'ka shongkha-shongman' (marriage) among the Khasis refers to the lawful cohabitation and sexual relationship between a man and a woman belonging to different clans for the purpose of reproduction. When the sexual relationship brings forth children, a kin relationship between the two clans called 'ka longkha-longman' comes into being.

U shongkha (husband) becomes also u longkha (father). The father's clan as a whole becomes 'ka longkha' (begetter of children).

At the personal level, Khasi marriage is neither a covenant nor an agreement or contract that binds the couple by law, but it is only a mutual agreement between a man and a woman to establish a family. When mutual understanding is no longer possible, divorce can take place by simple ritual of throwing cowries into the ground. Even after marriage, a man is considered 'u khun ki brier' (son of other people) by his wife's clan. This is not a condescending concept but a matter of respect because even after marriage the man remains an independent and full-fledged member of his own clan and does not merge into his wife's clan. The husband stays in his wife's house as long as his purpose warrants it, he is willing to stay, or he is permitted to stay. If he cannot conduct himself satisfactorily to the expectation of his wife's clan, he must leave and honourably return to his own clan. Since Khasi thought intends marriage for procreation, if the husband and wife do not have children, the man's clan may sometimes call him back because of a belief that the marriage has not been ordained by God. In the strictest sense, the father's presence or absence has little to do with the cultural or religious legitimacy, legality, honour and security of the family. Moreover, Khasi traditional marriage does not join the husband and wife into one flesh and one blood. Among the Khasis, this is called 'ka sang' (sacrilige). That is the, original principle of Khasi thought regarding marriage at the personal level.

However, when marriage is considered a relationship between the clans after children are born, it becomes an indissoluble covenant. Khasi traditional marriage was primarily a mutual acceptance and recognition by the two clans of the reproductive relationship between a man and a woman to establish 'ka longkha-longman' (relationship of husband and wife) can be dissolved any time, but 'ka longkha-longman' can never be dissolved. The covenant

will confess or manifest itself in the religious divinations of the two clans even after many generations. No lawyer's argument, no affidavit, no religious rite or magical mantra can wipe away the mark of fatherhood that one clan has given to the other clan. Divorce between husband and wife at the personal level is a common and accepted phenomenon, but dissolving ka longkha-longman between the two clans is a taboo that will institute 'u smai u byrnei' (covenant of enmity) between them.

The fundamental principle of Khasi marriage is that, it is the father who provides 'u symbai u mai' (seed) while it is the mother who gives life, blood and nourishment to the child. The child does not belong to the provider of the seed but to the womb which gives life, blood and nourishment. In Khasi thought, the father had no blood relation with the children. As the Khasi matrilineal system is basically based on blood, the children belong to the mother who provides the blood. This is similar to what is said in the Bible: "I was conceived from the sperm of a man, in the pleasure of intercourse. For nine months my flesh took shape in the blood of my mother's womb" ('Wisdom of Solomon', 7: 1-3, Good News Bible, Society of St. Paul, 1979). Hence, in the Khasi society it is the woman who needs a man in marriage for the continuation of her bloodline. Khasi marriage is for the continuation of the wife's bloodline, not the husband's. From the perspective of the groom's clan, marriage is a costly and precious gift the clan gives to the bride's clan, and the bride's clan sees it as a precious gift they receive from the groom's clan. For this reason, the man's maternal uncles always have the upper hand over the woman's maternal uncles in any discussion, deliberation, or argument the two clans undertake before the marriage. If the man's maternal uncles are seriously offended or displeased for whatever reason, the whole marriage transaction may be cancelled altogether.

Since the woman receives a man who comes to stay in her home, the Khasi marriage ceremony is always conducted in the bride's house, not in any church or temple. The bride patiently waits in her home for the groom's

arrival, who may be coming from another place fifty or more kilometres away. I believe the adherents of the Niam Khasi/Niam Tre still maintain this practice. The groom is accompanied by his male clan members and friends, while his female clan members do not attend the marriage ceremony at the bride's house because it is deemed dishonourable and improper for the groom's mother, sisters or nieces to attend as that would imply they have outcaste him or sold him permanently to the other clan. To do so would be like 'ai khaw duh', a concept that actually means selling a clan member like a slave.

Some aspects of the Khasi Christian marriage today are out of tune with these fundamental cultural principles. In Christian marriages, it is the groom, who may be coming from a far distance, who has to patiently wait in the Church for the majestic arrival of the bride as if she would follow the husband to his village and home after the ceremony. The bride lives in her own village close to the Church. But in many cases, it has been observed that the bride and her entourage arrived to the venue one hour late than the stipulated time. To my perception, this is not only culturally odd but also demeaning to the groom's party as well as to the Church functionaries who conduct the ceremony.

It is seen that when the bride and groom have taken their marriage vows, the master of ceremony announces that they are now husband and wife, and calls upon the man to open the veil covering the woman's face and to kiss her. Personally, I like this part of the ceremony because it is emotional, dramatic and beautiful. However, from the cultural perspective, I must point out that public display of romantic physical intimacy between a man and a woman, even between husband and wife, is not in consonance with Khasi traditional ethics. We are now speaking about the inculturation of the Christian faith, but we see that acculturation is imperceptibly taking place instead. As said in the beginning, this article is not intended to criticize or object to anything, but only to point out the facts as they are. To be aware of the cultural nuances, and the positive or negative impact of the cultural residues and the external cultural elements on the Khasi society today.

stitute. It is a reminder that Gen Z is watching, listening and refusing to be insulted into silence. But it must not become another emotional wave where young people gather without knowing what they stand for, why they stand for it, or what follows the noise.

India's Gen Z does not need to burn the house down to prove it exists. It needs to enter the house, study its architecture, repair its foundations and, when the time comes, redesign it through democratic power.

Because in the end, the real question is not whether young India can trend; it is whether young India is ready to govern.

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein,
Via email

Appeal for Better Welfare and Protection of Stray Animals in Shillong

Editor,
I wish to draw attention to the need for better welfare and protection for stray animals in Greater Shillong.

Recently, I came across a badly injured stray cat and tried contacting different animal welfare NGOs for help. Sadly, most of them were unavailable or had very limited resources. This made me realize that there is a lack of proper support for stray animals during emergencies. Although these organizations are trying their best, they cannot handle everything alone.

The responsibility of car-

ing for stray animals should not fall only on individuals or small NGOs. The Municipal Board should take stronger action. Many people pay Rs 150 to Rs 200 for dog registration tags, but there is very little information about how this money is being used. A part of these funds should be used directly for stray animal welfare and protection.

Therefore, I request the Shillong Municipal Board to create a proper policy for stray animals. This policy should include a welfare fund, a shelter for injured and abandoned animals, sterilization programs to control the population, vaccination drives, and an emergency helpline for reporting injured or abused animals.

There should also be transparency and accountability in the use of funds given to NGOs and welfare groups so that the money truly benefits stray animals.

One common excuse is the lack of manpower and shelters. However, the Municipality authorities can work together with animal rights activists and welfare organizations through joint efforts to improve the condition of stray animals in our city.

A truly compassionate city is one that cares not only for people but also for helpless animals. Let us work together to make Shillong a kinder and safer place for all living beings.

Yours etc.,
Sofia Mary Diengdoh,
Shillong

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

The Sound of Silence

By Ellerine Diengdoh

Disclaimer: This op-ed is satirical and does not refer to any specific individual(s). If you feel personally addressed, that is a matter best taken up with your conscience and possibly your convoy(s).

Politics is one of the oldest professions in the world, which is why it normally behaves like something that was invented before basic questioning was allowed. Its primary function has remained unchanged for centuries.... important people go to important places to discuss important things, which are later described as "complex," meaning you are not supposed to ask what happened.

In the past, kings ruled by divine right, which meant they were chosen by God. This was a very efficient system, mainly because God was not available for fact-checking. Today, we have democracy, where leaders are chosen by the people. However, despite this change, politicians often end up just as distant from ordinary people as kings once were, mainly because of convoys.

A convoy, in case you've never been stuck behind one, is a long line of large, dark vehicles that move together with great urgency, like they are either late for something extremely important or filming a low-budget action

breach of the social contract, and it is so unusual because it removes the build-up. Normally, a political arrival has a distinct plot which it religiously follows. First, there is suspense, then noise; then, a man emerges from deep within a climate-controlled womb of an SUV while twenty, heavily armed men in aviator sunglasses jump out to scan nearby bins, trees and potted plants for hidden assassins. Without these stages, the arrival is pointless and risks being mistaken for someone simply turning up, which is not how "importance" is meant to function.

If a politician arrives quietly, it raises several difficult questions. For example, one, how do people know when to be impressed, two, how does traffic know when to stop, and three, how do nearby buildings know when to feel slightly intimidated, and four, if no one is mildly inconvenienced, is he a people's representative at all. These questions are rarely asked, largely because the answers would be awkward.

Most politicians solve this problem efficiently, and they do this by expanding. They expand upwards, outwards, in vehicles, in volume and in distance from consequence. They surround themselves with enough structure to

"I will narrate an incident that took place in the college that I teach, at a graduation ceremony a few years ago. It was one of those formal occasions where students celebrate surviving education by wearing black robes and a hat. We were all prepared for the usual delay, discomfort and the oily procession of vehicles and security that signals a politician has come to ignore you in person... but it never came. Instead, Dr. Syngkon arrived on a scooter, a vehicle that does not suggest you command anything larger than your own balance."

movie. Their primary function is not transportation, but communication. They communicate that someone important is passing through and that whatever you were doing is now temporarily less important than that.

This system works well, it creates order, it creates fear and it creates the thrilling possibility that you might be late because someone else cannot be. So traffic stops and people wait and life pauses. It is in these moments of delay and noise that we measure importance, because the concept of power, as we've come to understand it, is deeply rooted in its ability to cause disruptions and inconvenience that must only be felt by others.

This is why the case of (Lt)Dr. Ricky A. J Syngkon is so deeply unsettling. I will narrate an incident that took place in the college that I teach, at a graduation ceremony a few years ago. It was one of those formal occasions where students celebrate surviving education by wearing black robes and a hat. We were all prepared for the usual delay, discomfort and the oily procession of vehicles and security that signals a politician has come to ignore you in person.... but it never came. Instead, Dr. Syngkon arrived on a scooter, a vehicle that does not suggest you command anything larger than your own balance.

A scooter, for clarity, is a small, practical vehicle commonly used for errands and commuting. It is something that doesn't look like you're about to invade a neighbouring country and it is not typically associated with high office, unless the office is "buying milk".

Dr. Syngkon however, on this occasion, scooted in, parked, got off and walked in. He completely bypassed the line of teachers waiting to greet the very special, the very honoured guest.

This was a catastrophic

ensure that wherever they go, reality rearranges itself well in advance.

Dr. Syngkon declined to participate in this theatrical exercise. He arrived as a normal human person would, as if the event mattered more than his arrival at it. Which is a deeply subversive idea, because it suggests that authority does not require amplification; that work might exist without spectacle; that a public servant might, in fact, resemble the public.

This is not inspiring, it is destabilising, because it introduces a precedent, and precedents, in politics, are dangerous - they imply repeatability. If you let one person be humble, soon everyone will want to do it, and then there would be no listening to birds probably, but we can't have everyone listening to birds all day, it is just not practical. It's better to stick with what we know, rather than introducing something new and potentially disruptive.

Now that he's gone, a departure as silent as can be, the big question is who will fill his shoes. Typically, politicians come from a pool of individuals, often sourced from a well-established network of "like-minded" people.

Early signs suggest that it is unlikely that the scooter will make a comeback. Which is a shame, because once you've seen how quietly something can be done, the noise elsewhere becomes harder to ignore.

For decades we've confused spectacle with substance, counting cars instead of ideas, but more wheels don't make a better mind. So soon, real soon, when you vote for your next representative, ask yourself, do you want a leader who arrives like royalty in a convoy, or one who can show up, park, and get to work... because if a man needs a siren to prove he matters, he probably doesn't.

"Wisdom outweighs any wealth."
— Sophocles

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.280 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 23, 2026

MODI, reforms

CONVENING a meeting of his council of ministers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to set the government's goal for 2047, the 100th year of Independence. This long haul also marks a century of Desi rule by India's elected governments. The PM stressed the need for reform initiatives that would make people's lives "more comfortable." He said the next generation of reforms must receive more attention and achieve all-round growth. These should help the nation prosper. He also stressed that people's lives should move at a smooth pace. Another call to the ministers was to avoid any pendency of work vis-à-vis their departments and initiatives. The occasion was the completion of two years of Modi's third term in power. He has three years left to complete his total of 15 years. Ideally, this should be the time to take stock of what his government achieved for the nation and where it erred.

For one, the Modi years in Delhi were years of political stability. There have been no internal tumults other than in Manipur and the series of terrorist mayhem in places like Pulwama, Pahalgam, Pathankot, and Uri. India's military responses to these were stronger than those of the past -- though these, mainly Operation Sindoor, produced less than expected results. Yet, overall, the terrorism scenario is under control. Regarding the reforms, the PM stresses that at this late hour that there has been an abject failure across sectors. The implementation of the market reforms through GST, conceived by the Manmohan Singh government but taken forward by Modi, was one commendable step. Modi did not show the nerve to push through his government's agricultural reforms. Faced with protests from vested interests, he abandoned these bills. Education reforms that his government attempted meant little other than its thrust on religion-linked matters. A sound education system is important for the new generation. Modi has also not shown the courage to introduce judicial and bureaucratic reforms. This is undercutting both social and economic progress. Fact is, other than the development of the highway sector or the like, nothing much has changed over the past 12 years. The lives of the large mass of ordinary people have not changed significantly, as is also evident in India's per capita income rankings. Building more ports or airports are natural progressions.

The PM's call to his ministers to ensure that work is not held up in government departments -- and actions in that direction-- should have happened from the very outset of his governance. The dragging of feet by politicians and bureaucracy on flimsy grounds is delaying the progression of many state and central projects. The much-touted Bullet Train project, for instance has not materialised. It was announced in 2014 but the pilot project itself between Ahmedabad and Mumbai has not been completed as yet. This is principally a system weakness. The old-fashioned styles of India are often juxtaposed with the jet-speed of project implementations in China or the UAE. This is because they have strong governance systems and accountability which is not visible in India.

"Taco" and the Exhausted Theatre of Global Power

By Patrick P Sawian

For millions across the world, Donald Trump appeared either as a revolutionary outsider, a nationalist saviour, a dangerous demagogue, or the final boss battle of liberal democracy. But perhaps the more unsettling possibility is simpler. What if Trump was never the central player at all? What if he was merely another highly visible piece on a board controlled by forces far older, wealthier, and more structurally permanent than any elected president?

This increasingly cynical interpretation of geopolitics has gained traction not only among internet conspiracy circles but also through the writings and warnings of respected scholars, economists, diplomats, and military analysts over decades but the underlying theme often converges--modern democracies may be far less governed by ordinary citizens than by entrenched networks of institutional, financial, military, and geopolitical power.

Modern politics increasingly resembles a gigantic emotional management system. Citizens are encouraged to choose tribes, hate opposing tribes, worship charismatic personalities, consume outrage as entertainment and mistake elections for deep structural transformation. Meanwhile, beneath the spectacle intelligence systems, military alliances, banking structures, lobbying networks, and multinational corporate influence remain, and strategic geopolitical objectives continue across administrations. Presidents come and go but the machinery survives. This was one of the recurring themes in the broader works of Chomsky, who frequently argued that democratic systems often manufacture public consent rather than reflect fully informed public will. Media systems, political institutions, and elite interests interact to create the illusion of broad participation while limiting acceptable boundaries of policy debate. In this interpretation, Trump was not necessarily the destroyer of the system. Nor its saviour. He may simply have been one more spectacularly loud actor inside it.

The phrase "deep state" has become controversial because it is often used carelessly. Yet stripped of sensationalism, the concept simply refers to the possibility that unelected power networks possess enormous continuity independent of electoral cycles. Not necessarily secret cults in underground tunnels. Rather intelligence bureaucracies, defense contractors, transnational financial institutions, lobbying ecosystems, strategic think tanks, multinational corporate interests, permanent diplomatic establishments and geopolitical alliances whose incentives outlive individual politicians.

This interpretation becomes harder to dismiss when one notices how often wars continue across presidencies, surveillance expands regardless of party, financial systems protect the same interests and foreign policy continuity persists despite dramatic campaign rhetoric. Trump may have disrupted elite aesthetics, but the underlying architecture of power

remained remarkably intact.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs has repeatedly criticized what he sees as catastrophic interventionist policies pursued by sections of the American foreign-policy establishment after the Cold War. Sachs argued that NATO expansion, regime-change strategies, militarized geopolitics and refusal to accommodate emerging multipolar realities have contributed dangerously to global instability. Similarly, scholars such as Mearsheimer warned for years that pushing geopolitical confrontation toward Russia's borders would eventually produce severe consequences. Yet these warnings were often marginalized while military-industrial momentum continued moving forward. The deeper tragedy is that modern states increasingly appear trapped inside systems that reward escalation more easily than restraint.

Trump marketed himself as an enemy of the establishment and in some cultural respects, he genuinely frightened sections of the political elite because he shattered traditional norms of presentation and communication. But critics argue that structurally the empire remained operational. Military spending remained immense. Sanctions intensified. Strategic rivalries escalated. Defence industries continue to prosper. The dollar-centered financial order remained central. The personalities changed and the machinery adapted. This creates the unsettling suspicion that modern politics often resembles professional wrestling: the rivalries are emotionally real to audiences, yet the arena itself remains owned by the same interests regardless of who wins.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the present geopolitical moment lies beneath ideology entirely: the struggle over the future of the global financial order. For decades, the U.S.-centered system benefited enormously from dollar dominance, energy markets priced in dollars, SWIFT infrastructure, sanctions leverage and institutional control through organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. This architecture gave the United States extraordinary global influence. But now a growing bloc centred around China, Russia and the broader BRICS framework is increasingly attempting to build alternative systems by de-dollarisation, parallel financial infrastructures, local currency settlements, energy diversification and multipolar economic arrangements. To old-school Atlantic power structures, this is not merely economic competition. It is existential, because empires can tolerate many things more easily than they tolerate monetary decline.

What makes the situation particularly dangerous is psychological. Great powers rarely accept decline gracefully. History repeatedly shows that dominant systems often become most volatile precisely when they sense erosion of their supremacy and this is where the modern world begins entering frightening territory. If sections of the Western establishment perceive BRICS expansion, Chinese industrial

dominance, Russian strategic resilience and the emergence of parallel financial systems as existential threats to the post-1945 order, then geopolitical escalation becomes increasingly probable. Not necessarily because leaders are irrational, but because systems fighting for survival often become incapable of compromise. Meanwhile the opposing bloc sees itself not as revolutionary aggressor, but as correcting centuries of Western dominance. Thus both sides increasingly view themselves as defensive civilisations. That is historically a very dangerous combination.

Perhaps the most despondent realization of all is that ordinary citizens across the world may possess far less influence over these trajectories than democratic mythology suggests. Americans vote, Europeans protest, Russians mobilize, Chinese strategize, developing nations hedge, yet enormous structural forces continue moving beneath public consciousness: financial systems, energy routes, military alliances, resource competition, technological supremacy, and elite geopolitical calculations. The public watches political theater. The deeper systems negotiate survival and somewhere beneath the noise lies a grim possibility: that humanity is approaching a historical transition where an old global order refuses to surrender dominance while a rising alternative refuses to remain subordinate. History teaches that such moments are rarely peaceful.

Some of the darker and more cynical interpretations of modern geopolitics go even further. They argue that systems facing existential geopolitical transition often require political figures willing to operate beyond the polished restraint of conventional statesmanship. In that interpretation, a disruptive and unpredictable leader becomes strategically useful precisely because he can say and do things that more disciplined establishment figures would hesitate to attempt publicly. To critics holding this view, Donald Trump appeared almost perfectly engineered for an age of escalating confrontation: combative, unfiltered, transactional, media-obsessed and seemingly immune to the diplomatic etiquette that constrained earlier presidents. Supporters viewed this as authenticity. Opponents saw recklessness. But some geopolitical skeptics interpreted it differently: as the ideal personality for an era in which sections of the political establishment wanted to intensify pressure against rising powers such as China and Russia while maintaining plausible distance from the consequences. In this cynical reading, Trump's chaos was not necessarily a malfunction of the system -- but part of the system's utility. His confrontational rhetoric, trade wars, institutional disruption and constant media turbulence created an atmosphere where extraordinary policies could emerge beneath a permanent cloud of spectacle and emotional exhaustion. Whether one agrees with that inter-

pretation or not, it reflects a growing public suspicion that modern politics increasingly rewards theatrical personalities capable of dominating public attention while deeper structural forces continue operating in the background.

This also feeds another recurring theme in political cynicism: the idea that democracies often preserve legitimacy through carefully staged conflict between institutions. A president is investigated. Congress performs an outrage drama. Media ecosystems amplify scandal. Courts intervene. Opposition parties condemn abuses. The machinery of accountability becomes highly visible. And yet critics argue that despite the spectacle of resistance, many deeper geopolitical trajectories remain surprisingly continuous across administrations. Thus emerges the haunting perception among some observers that political systems sometimes function like enormous theatre productions -- public conflict on the surface, institutional continuity underneath. Within that framework, even impeachment battles, investigations, or political obstruction can appear less like revolutionary ruptures and more like mechanisms designed to reassure the public that checks and balances remain fully operational.

The tragic irony is that citizens across the world increasingly distrust both extremes simultaneously: they distrust charismatic leaders, yet they also distrust the permanent institutions supposedly restraining them. And once a population begins suspecting that both rebellion and opposition may merely be different performances inside the same structure, political despair deepens rapidly, because the most unsettling possibility is not necessarily that hidden actors control every event. It is that modern systems of power have become so large, interconnected, and self-preserving that individual leaders, no matter how often they dramatically shoot themselves in the foot, increasingly function as temporary performers inside forces far bigger than themselves.

Whether Trump is hero, villain, disruptor, or pawn may ultimately matter less than the larger system surrounding him. The deeper struggle appears increasingly civilizational, between an aging unipolar order attempting to preserve financial and geopolitical supremacy and an emerging multipolar bloc, determined to reshape the architecture of global power. The tragedy is that neither side appears psychologically prepared for graceful transition. Old empires fear humiliation. Rising powers reject subordination. Economic systems harden into geopolitical weapons and populations everywhere are emotionally mobilized through media narratives that reduce vast structural conflicts into tribal spectacles.

Meanwhile ordinary citizens--American, Russian, Chinese, European, Indian, Middle Eastern and African--continue living beneath systems far larger than themselves, watching leaders perform certainty while the world edges uneasily toward a future nobody fully controls.

pretation or not, it reflects a growing public suspicion that modern politics increasingly rewards theatrical personalities capable of dominating public attention while deeper structural forces continue operating in the background.

This also feeds another recurring theme in political cynicism: the idea that democracies often preserve legitimacy through carefully staged conflict between institutions. A president is investigated. Congress performs an outrage drama. Media ecosystems amplify scandal. Courts intervene. Opposition parties condemn abuses. The machinery of accountability becomes highly visible. And yet critics argue that despite the spectacle of resistance, many deeper geopolitical trajectories remain surprisingly continuous across administrations. Thus emerges the haunting perception among some observers that political systems sometimes function like enormous theatre productions -- public conflict on the surface, institutional continuity underneath. Within that framework, even impeachment battles, investigations, or political obstruction can appear less like revolutionary ruptures and more like mechanisms designed to reassure the public that checks and balances remain fully operational.

The tragic irony is that citizens across the world increasingly distrust both extremes simultaneously: they distrust charismatic leaders, yet they also distrust the permanent institutions supposedly restraining them. And once a population begins suspecting that both rebellion and opposition may merely be different performances inside the same structure, political despair deepens rapidly, because the most unsettling possibility is not necessarily that hidden actors control every event. It is that modern systems of power have become so large, interconnected, and self-preserving that individual leaders, no matter how often they dramatically shoot themselves in the foot, increasingly function as temporary performers inside forces far bigger than themselves.

Whether Trump is hero, villain, disruptor, or pawn may ultimately matter less than the larger system surrounding him. The deeper struggle appears increasingly civilizational, between an aging unipolar order attempting to preserve financial and geopolitical supremacy and an emerging multipolar bloc, determined to reshape the architecture of global power. The tragedy is that neither side appears psychologically prepared for graceful transition. Old empires fear humiliation. Rising powers reject subordination. Economic systems harden into geopolitical weapons and populations everywhere are emotionally mobilized through media narratives that reduce vast structural conflicts into tribal spectacles.

Meanwhile ordinary citizens--American, Russian, Chinese, European, Indian, Middle Eastern and African--continue living beneath systems far larger than themselves, watching leaders perform certainty while the world edges uneasily toward a future nobody fully controls.

Shillong Is Warming. The Planet Is Calling.

By Balakmen Suting

A personal alarm from the hills of Meghalaya and a plea for all of us to act before it is too late.

I grew up pulling a pullover over my shoulders even in the middle of July. That was Shillong "the Scotland of the East" where the clouds never quite left the hills, the pine trees dripped with mist, and the air carried a chill that made blankets feel like old friends. That was barely a decade ago. I was a child then, and the cold was simply the world as I knew it.

Today, I reach for a fan. That sentence would have sounded like fiction to my younger self. Fans in Shillong? We never needed them. The altitude nearly 1,500 meters above sea level kept the city cool, naturally, effortlessly, as it had for generations. But something fundamental has shifted in the hills of Meghalaya, and the shift is not subtle. It is visceral. It is the absence of a pullover in July. It is the presence of heat where heat had no business being.

"The cold is not just a memory. It is a warning written in rising temperatures across the hills we once called home." A decade of lived experience in Shillong.

When Personal Memory Becomes Climate Data

Science has a name for what I am describing: experiential climate changes the lived, embodied recognition that the world is no longer what it was. And the data from the northeast Indian highlands are unambiguous. Temperatures in the region have been climbing steadily, monsoon patterns are becoming erratic, and microclimates that sustained unique biodiversity for millennia are under stress.

But data can feel distant. What cannot feel distant is

centuries depends on consistent humidity that is no longer guaranteed.

This is what biodiversity loss looks like from the inside. Not just the extinction of a distant species in a faraway place, but the quiet disappearance of the familiar, the cool mornings, the particular birdsong, the ferns that lined the paths you walked as a child.

Acting Locally for Global Impact

Today, 22 May 2026, the world marks the International Day for Biological Diversity, under the theme "Acting locally for global impact." The theme could not be more apt. Because what has happened to Shillong's weather is the cumulative result of countless local decisions about energy, about land, about consumption, about forests made across every corner of the planet. And the reversal of that damage must be equally distributed: local action, in every community, every city, every school, every home.

To realize this global framework locally, citizens can engage across three foundational pillars:

● Look & Learn: Explore biodiversity in your own neighbourhood. Understand the Kunming-Montreal Framework and your country's commitments.

● Connect & Act: Join community walks, citizen science, and local conservation projects. Find others working for nature near you.

● Share: Tell your story. Use #BiodiversityDay to let the world know what nature means to you, and what you are doing to protect it.

Global frameworks matter. The 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, agreed upon by nations as

Statistical contexts reveal a telling shift: where average summer highs lingered around -17°C just a decade ago, recent summers have frequently reported highs spiking to -24°C and above.

the memory of wearing a thick jacket to school in May, and comparing it to today, when children in those same classrooms fidget under the slow sweep of a ceiling fan. The numbers confirm what the body already knows.

Statistical contexts reveal a telling shift: where average summer highs lingered around -17°C just a decade ago, recent summers have frequently recorded reported highs spiking to -24°C and above. Shillong is not an isolated case. It is a mirror. Across the world, from the glaciers of Ladakh to the coral reefs of the Pacific, from the Amazon basin to the Arctic tundra, ecosystems that evolved over millions of years are being disrupted in the span of human lifetimes. The Scotland of the East is warming. And if Shillong is warming, a city blessed with altitude, cloud cover, and forest then we must reckon with what that means for the rest of our fragile, breathing world.

We did not earn the Earth. We inherited it. And like any inheritance left carelessly, it can be squandered in a generation.

I think of the pullover I no longer need. I think of the children growing up in a Shillong where fans are ordinary. I wonder what they will think is ordinary, thirty years from now, if we do not act. I wonder what they will have been told that the Scotland of the East used to feel like, the way I now tell stories of cold July mornings as if they were legends.

Let those stories not become myths. Let us be the generation that turned the temperature not just on a thermometer, but in the collective will of humanity. The planet is not lost yet. But it is asking. Loudly, warmly, urgently it is asking us to listen.

Note: This article is submitted on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity (May 22, 2026) to highlight localized climate impact within the state of Meghalaya.

Contact: Balakmen Suting, Email: sutingbalakmen@gmail.com

the world's blueprint to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, set an ambitious course. But frameworks only live through people. Through a child in Shillong noticing the heat. Through a community planting native trees. Through a city pledging to restore its wetlands. Through every ordinary person who refuses to look away.

The Only Thing We Own

We debate what we own, our homes, our savings, our borders, our futures. But in truth, there is only one thing that belongs to every single one of us without exception, without negotiation, without purchase: this planet. The soil beneath our feet, the air we breathe, the water that falls on Shillong's rooftops and runs down into rivers that become seas.

We did not earn the Earth. We inherited it. And like any inheritance left carelessly, it can be squandered in a generation.

I think of the pullover I no longer need. I think of the children growing up in a Shillong where fans are ordinary. I wonder what they will think is ordinary, thirty years from now, if we do not act. I wonder what they will have been told that the Scotland of the East used to feel like, the way I now tell stories of cold July mornings as if they were legends.

Let those stories not become myths. Let us be the generation that turned the temperature not just on a thermometer, but in the collective will of humanity. The planet is not lost yet. But it is asking. Loudly, warmly, urgently it is asking us to listen.

Note: This article is submitted on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity (May 22, 2026) to highlight localized climate impact within the state of Meghalaya.

Contact: Balakmen Suting, Email: sutingbalakmen@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

Outrage, entertainment and institutional defensiveness.

Editor,
Do the powerful see citizens as irritants? The recent CJI episode suggests how some elites view the ordinary. Many Supreme Court judges rise from highly privileged professional circles. That does not negate their competence, but it can create a perception gap.

Hence when a senior judge describes activists or unemployed youth in contemptuous terms, it is natural for many to read it through a wider lens. In a country grappling with high youth unemployment, exam scandals, precarious gig work, nepotistic networks, and shrinking faith in upward mobility, such remarks draw resentment. Beneath the controversy lies a deeper public question: What happens when citizens come to believe that elite institutions -- including the judiciary -- treat

scrutiny, frustration, and dissent as irritants rather than as democratic participation?

Elite institutions often speak in insulated language, assuming the public will parse nuance later. But today's media ecosystem is built to amplify velocity, symbolism, and conflict -- not nuance. Outrage-driven formats also prefer personalized controversy to systemic inquiry, because personalities generate engagement while unemployment statistics do not.

The result is that both institutions and media failed the citizen, albeit differently.

The institution appear dismissive. The media appear extractive.

The "cockroach" episode, then, signals something broader about contemporary democracy: public anger can become highly visible without becoming politically productive. That is the deeper loss -- not merely that a controversial remark was made, but that an opening for collective self-examination was drowned out by the cacophony of outrage, entertainment, and institutional defensiveness.

Yours etc.,
Narottam Subedi,
Shillong-2

Colleges in Shillong Violating NEHU's Admission Rules

Editor,
I want to bring to your attention a serious problem with college admissions in Shillong this year. NEHU has clearly instructed its affiliated colleges not to confirm any admissions before CUET results are declared. CUET candidates must be given priority, and non-CUET admissions can only begin five days after the results are out.

Despite this, many colleges are already confirming seats and collecting fees. They are taking advantage of anxious parents and students who fear losing a seat if they wait.

This is unfair to students who appeared for CUET trust-

ing the university's own rules. They are now finding that seats have already been taken. I request NEHU to step in immediately, stop colleges from making further premature admissions, cancel those already made, and ensure full refunds are given.

Rules must be followed -- especially when students' futures are at stake.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Blatant Disregard for NEHU's Admission Rules by Colleges in Shillong

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to bring to public notice what can only be described as a deliberate and systematic disregard of university regulations by several undergraduate colleges

in Shillong. NEHU has, in no uncertain terms, communicated to its affiliated institutions that the admission process must be held in abeyance until the CUET results are formally declared. The university's directives are unambiguous -- CUET candidates are to be accorded first preference in seat allotment, and admissions for non-CUET applicants may only be initiated five days after the results are published. By and large, this framework was honoured last year.

What is unfolding this year, however, is a different story altogether. Under the garb of "counselling" and "form collection" -- activities that NEHU does permit prior to results -- certain colleges have quietly violated the NEHU directives. They are confirming admissions, locking seats, and collecting fees from unsuspecting families. The target of this exploitation is clear: parents and students gripped by uncertainty, who are being manipulated into believing that hesitation now means losing everything later.

This is not a procedural lapse. It is a conscious subver-

sion of a policy designed to give every eligible student a fair shot. Those who prepared sincerely for CUET, relying on the university's own published schedule, now find themselves locked out of seats that were never legally available to begin with.

The University must act decisively. All colleges engaging in premature admissions must be directed to immediately cease such activity. Every admission confirmed before the CUET results must be annulled, and every rupee collected as fees must be returned without condition.

Rules mean nothing if their violation carries no consequence. NEHU's credibility as a regulatory body depends on whether it chooses to enforce what it has already proclaimed.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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

Was Auckland the cradle of the Kiwi accent?

If you're a New Zealander who has spent time overseas, you've probably had someone comment on the way you speak: that swallowed e and flat i, the whole fush and chups thing... the rest of the world thinks we pronounce our vowels a bit funny.

Even as a researcher of the Kiwi accent, it took me a while to wrap my head around the fact that "here" and "hair" aren't supposed to rhyme.

So where did this local form of spoken English originate, and how did we come to pronounce our vowels in such a unique way?

It's clearly a question many people have asked, given the interest in my public talk on the subject in Auckland this week, part of a project using oral history recordings of Aucklanders born around the turn of the 20th century.

These recordings, now housed in the Auckland Libraries sound archives, let us listen back in time.

When we compare them with modern recordings, we can trace how our accent has developed across generations.

This means going back to when large numbers of English-speaking settlers arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand from the mid-19th century.

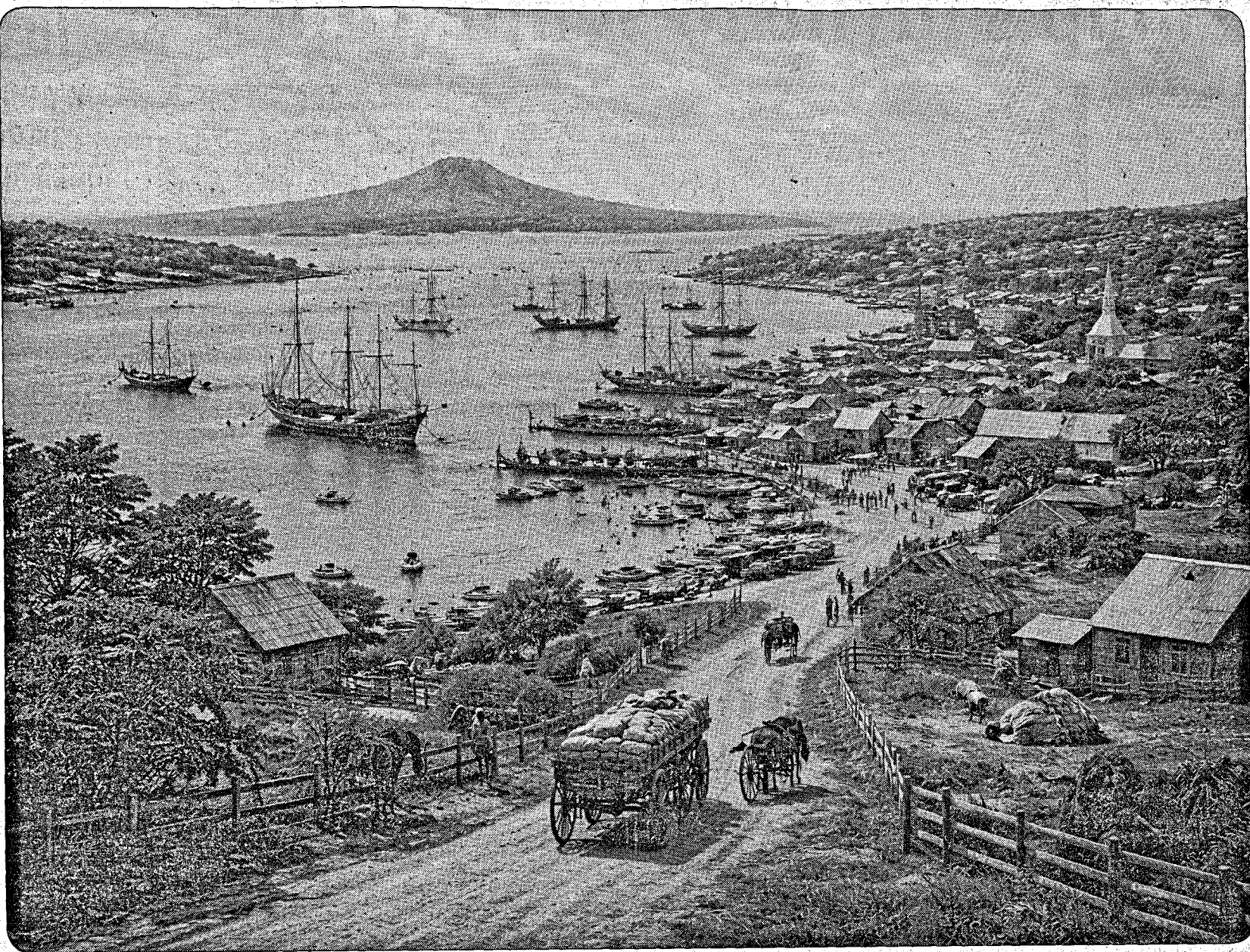
Because they came from different parts of Britain - largely the South of England, Scotland and Ireland - they didn't all speak the same kind of English and brought their regional accents with them.

Despite the protests of educational authorities and elocution teachers of the time, what followed wasn't the adoption of a single "correct" way of speaking the "Queen's English".

Instead, these various accents came into contact, mixed together and gradually levelled out to something new - not quite British, not quite anything else.

New Zealand linguists have known this part of the story for a while. What we don't know are some of the specifics.

Why, for example, does our accent have relatively little regional variation (other than Southlanders and their rolled Rs), despite many early centres such as Christchurch and Dunedin having



distinct cultural identities?

We also don't know if the accent developed fastest in certain places. Often, accents change quickly in cities and then spread.

But so far, most of our historical research comes from recordings of speakers born in small towns.

A rediscovered theory

This is where a piece of information that was almost lost provided some

surprising inspiration.

In 1921, a professor at Otago University, George Edward Thompson, completed a thesis on the emerging New Zealand accent. This work was only rediscovered in the Hocken Collections by one of our team members in 2022.

Thompson's work provides one of the earliest and most comprehensive first hand descriptions of how early New Zealanders spoke.

One of the things that stood out was a suggestion the accent was developing most strongly in the North Island, particularly in Auckland.

This got us thinking, because Auckland's history looks quite different to many of New Zealand's early districts.

For one, the city has always been comparatively cosmopolitan, with people arriving from all over Britain rather than one dominant region.

Secondly, its population grew steadily over time, unlike many other districts which saw booms and stagnation. Both these factors make a good environment for an accent to develop.

We still need to do the proper technical analysis to test whether Thompson was right, which is where the Auckland Libraries recordings are useful.

They come from Aucklanders who would have been teenagers and young

adults around the time Thompson was writing.

When you listen to these recordings, the voices sound familiar - recognisably New Zealand but not quite how we speak today.

Sometimes there's a slight British or Australian quality, and speakers often shift between pronunciations.

But the features of the New Zealand accent we know are all there - maybe more than we expected.

Auckland English

If our hunch is correct, we may not only solve some mysteries about the accent, but also challenge ideas about how it was formed and who contributed.

For example, past research has often treated similarities between the Australian and New Zealand accents as coincidental, and assumed Māori had little influence on vowel pronunciation.

This was largely because the research focused on the South Island where contact with Māori and Australia was more limited.

But that's not necessarily true for Auckland, which had close trade connections with both Australia and local Māori from its inception.

If Auckland was integral to the formation of our accent, those influences may need to be reconsidered.

Like all accents, New Zealand English continues to evolve, and Auckland is at the forefront of changes to the modern accent.

Young Aucklanders are keeping their iconic "fush and chups" vowels, but may have an easier time buying "seven eggs" as they aim to be better understood in an increasingly linguistically diverse city. Combined with Thompson's historical commentary, this raises a big question: how long has Auckland been shaping the way New Zealanders sound? If Thompson was right, it might have been longer than we thought. *(The Conversation)*

[This article was written by Brooke Ross, Postdoctoral Fellow, Faculty of Engineering and Design, University of Auckland, Waipapa Taumata Rau]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 24, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon semi-square Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results for the whole year. You will have a wonderful time. Your performance at work will please your bosses. You will be successful in establishing your hold over your colleagues. Those seeking new job will get success in their efforts. New business opportunities too will come to you. You will have better comfort level with your partner. Your responsibilities may multiply. It will make you rather impatient. But you will manage the crises well. You will also be in possession of something precious. You need to be careful about matters of money and deal with people. You will get full cooperation from your parents. Students will perform well in studies.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a great week for you. You will be having financial gains. You will also take up new tasks and face challenges with confidence. You will also get the expected help and assistance from friends and colleagues. You will face some challenges to begin with but eventually victory will be yours. You will also spend a lot of your time with your family members. You will also take out some time for fun, entertainment and relaxation. You will take some time to complete with a planned approach. You will also get good news from somewhere. You will also have a new interest in your love life. And you will be successful. Read all legal documents carefully before signing it.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is turning out to be a great time for you, you will meet your lover and do every work as a mission. He/she will be impressed a lot with you. The results of examination will be in your favor. Your hard work will finally pay off. You will also extend a helping hand to those in need. You will be busy with business-related activities. You will also take business-related trips. Gains are indicated in your profession. Your professional attitude will also win you lot of admirers. You will have financial gains the planetary situation is very favorable. You will also be busy with prayer and meditation. You will make some concrete decisions in your personal life. You will also receive the blessings of elders. You will also be inspired by people and will have new ideas.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will have new plans. You will also make lot of money. Your social circle will increase. You will make some concrete decisions in business/work. Whatever work you think of will get done. Planetary situation is in your favor. You will discharge all your responsibilities well and your financial side will be strong. Your family problems will get resolved. In your office, the atmosphere will remain congenial. Do not make any decision by being emotional. Your love life is going to be amazing, and you will share amazing bonding with your mate. Your superiors will appreciate you for some great achievement. You will move ahead with a positive attitude. Property disputes between brothers will get resolved. Visitors/guests will drop in, and you will remain busy welcoming them.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will take lot of interest in constructive work. Your colleagues and family members will help you a lot. Your influence and fame will also increase. You will also undertake new projects. You could also fall in love with an unknown person whom you will meet by chance. You will have no financial worries. You will keep yourself limited to your own affairs and won't meddle in the affairs of others. Your parents will be happy with you. Your differences with brothers will also get resolved. Matters in courts will come in your favor. People will pay attention to what you say. The graph of your fame and prestige will rise day by day. You will also focus on the decoration of your home. The results of exams will be in your favor.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is time to ponder about your future. Instead of taking a big risk, you will wait for a favorable time to come. You will also plan to travel abroad due to your work. You will face no problems in your official matters. There are scopes of expansion of your business. You will also defeat your opponents with ease. Your time will be spent on discussions, however something good will come out of it. All troubles regarding marriage will end. You will also meet a lot of people. Your interactions with others will turn out to be useful. You will take right decisions at right time. You will also look after your parents and children. You will provide care and comfort for elders. You will also groom your children in imparting knowledge and good manners. You will put in effort to make all the important things available to your children.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is going to be an amazing week. Your work will be completed. Income will be good. You will also have a lot of fun and excitement. You will also try to fulfill your



make plans to take a sort of break from your work pressure and stress. You may visit a picnic spot near to you with your family. You will get good job offers. You will also expand your business. Those who want to change jobs can do so. Time is appropriate. The star of your destiny will start sparkling. Your relationship with your life partner will be cordial. Your time will again become favorable. You will have health issues.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will work hard and willing to take challenges. You will also carry on your duties nicely. As a result, you will be busy with your work. You will look forward to it with a lot of self-confidence. You will not bow before anyone and will also pay attention to the injustice. Your life will also run smoothly on the track. Lovebirds will have an amazing time. Creative thoughts will fill up your mind. People close to you will give lot of respect. You will give advice and suggestions to the people close to you. You will also take part in some wedding or event. You will also spend some time with your children. You will work passionately. You will be filled with positive thoughts. Your health will pose no problems at all.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) Take all finance-related decisions carefully. It is time to complete government matters. You will also complete your work on time. You will continue to perform a particular task repeatedly until you are completely satisfied with it. You will fall in love with a person working in your office. You will also take an important decision regarding your future. Money related matters will be important to you. You will cope with work related pressure well and you will manage things with your patience. Some people may be critical of your attitude. You will receive extra earnings. You will also feel healthy and active both physically and mentally. You will also welcome guests at home. You will get benefits.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will come close to your partner emotionally and will share strong bonding. Your difficult days will pass without worries. You will also give importance to your job with your hard work; you will move forward despite having troubles. There will be increase in your earnings. The health of a family member may become a cause of stress and worry for you. You will perform all your tasks in a new way. Your personality will be fearless and inspiring. You will feel healthy and active both physically and mentally. There are chances of you going on business trips. You will enjoy peaceful days. You will not be disappointed with the people who come asking for help. You will be surrounded by your loved ones.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The beginning of the week is turning out to be good. You will get lot of chances to earn money. You will take interest in your work and will be dedicated a lot. You can start a new project too. You will also undertake some travel-related plans. You will be successful in business. Work-related trips will be beneficial, and you will come in contact with lot of people. This time is very good for contacts and meetings. You will get a chance to come closer to someone special. You will be drawn in the high tide of romance, and your life will be filled with colors. Your opponents will try to hurt you and to show you down, also. You need to be careful in financial dealings. It is very good time for students. They will get success in exams and interviews. You will take out time for entertainment and relaxation.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will have financial gains and will suddenly earn lot of money. You will get lot of chances to work with vengeance. Tough work will solve matters, and your business talent will emerge. Your property related disputes may bother you. You will get best results in love matters. You will plan to get married. Whatever work that you do will be completed on time. The stars will be in your favor. You will take special care of your parents' needs. You will also win people's heart easily. They will work for your progress. You will enjoy lot of goodwill. Your entire focus will be on your work and family. You will remain devoted too.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) It is high time to look after your needs now. You will set new goals and will be conscious about your career. You will have no financial problems. Money will keep coming. Those who are unemployed will get new job opportunities. Unmarried people are expected to get engaged. There will be good news from somewhere. You will solve your finance related problems. You will not keep any work pending. You will also make profits. Your health will be at its peak. You will also manage to keep your relatives happy. You will be successful in your business.

Why European households throw away so much food

Europe is wasting huge amounts of food while millions of people globally experience hunger. Wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have squeezed supply chains. The cost of living crisis has pushed many families to the edge.

Without strengthening environmental sustainability, supply chain resilience and household affordability, food security risks will increase significantly.

Yet households still throw away huge amounts of edible food. This is not just waste. It is lost calories, lost money and a growing climate problem.

My team's new analysis of European households find they discard more than 70kg of food per person each year. An estimated 69 million tonnes of food was wasted in Europe and the UK in 2025 according to our calculations, based on average food waste for the EU and the UK, and the current combined population.

But it's a global problem: around the world in 2022 - the latest year we have data for - households, retail and food service wasted 1.052 billion tonnes.

The European Commission reports that a four-person household would save €400 (£346) per year on food that is ultimately wasted. But the problem is not simply about money. The main drivers of food waste are lack of knowledge and understanding, as well as health-related concerns about supposedly out-of-date food, plus an increase in eating for convenience.

Here's why Europeans waste food and what we should do about it.

Shopping: why we buy more than we eat: Promotions and panic buy triggers push people to buy more than they need. Multi-buy deals, three-for-two and buy-one-get-one-free offers nudge shoppers to take more than they need.

Time pressure and shopping while hungry make this worse. Our analysis shows planning matters: people who check their fridge and shop with a list waste less. Retail design plays a key role. Large pack sizes and limited small portion options mean single households buy food they cannot finish.

Near-expiry discounts can help, but only if shoppers have a plan to use or freeze the food. Retail nudges must be paired with household tools, not left to chance. Once food is home, everyday management determines whether it is eaten or discarded. Confusion over date labels is a major driver of avoidable waste. Many people treat "best before" as a safety cutoff.

They throw food away to avoid the risk of illness. This fear outweighs guilt



about wasting food. Simple clarity on labels would cut discards fast.

Storage skills matter too. Freezing, batch cooking and first in, first out routines (using oldest stock first, with newest stock used last) dramatically reduce spoilage.

Frozen food is wasted far less than fresh. Teaching basic storage and quick preservation techniques is a high-return, low-cost fix.

Food planning can be hard: modern life is busy - people eat on the go and many rely on convenience meals. That convenience culture increases waste. Social norms push buying too much food. Hosting, hospitality and the desire to offer choice leads households to cook more than they need. In some cultures, abundance equals care - and that creates more uneaten food being left on plates.

Income alone does not explain the pattern. We found no simple link between national GDP (the standard measure of the size of an economy and of economic growth) and household food waste.

Wealthier countries can waste less, but the relationship is inconsistent and shaped by local habits, tourism and measurement methods. The real drivers are behavioural and contextual.

Next steps

Our study points to three clear ways to strengthen policy and build resilience of food supply chains by cutting waste.

First, fix the signals. Standardise date labels and run a public information campaign. When people understand the difference between quality and safety, they throw away less.

Second, change retail practices. Encourage smaller pack sizes, resealable formats and messaging on promotions to encourage items are frozen for a future date. Incentivise supermarkets to sell imperfect produce and to price near expiry items clearly to encourage people to buy them.

Third, support households directly. Fund community cooking classes, fridge management campaigns and simple digital tools that track what's in the home. Invest in kerbside food collections and food digestion treatment so unavoidable waste is diverted from landfill.

No single policy will solve household food waste. Interventions must combine retail reform, clear regulation and consumer support.

They must be tailored to local cultures and household types and designed to strengthen the maintenance of food security. We can cut household food waste quickly by encouraging clear labels, smarter shopping and better storage. Small changes at home add up to big savings for the planet and for family budgets.

The next step is simple: design policies that work for people where they live, shop and cook. That not only cuts down on food waste - we will also save money, emissions and dignity (by enabling people to access and use food without shame or judgement and without the need for charitable food banks).

This all increases our food security. The solutions are practical, cheap and ready to scale. There is no time to waste. *(The Conversation)*

[By Ian Williams Professor of Applied Environmental Science, University of Southampton]

"The human body is the best picture of the human soul."

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 282 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 25, 2026

Trump's misadventure

AFTER keeping the world on tenterhooks for nearly three months, signals have emerged simultaneously from both the US and Iran that an end to the war is in sight. Both sides hint that negotiations to end the war have reached the decisive last phase and the Strait of Hormuz could soon see a full normalisation of shipping traffic. Clearly, both sides are tired — and have learnt bitter lessons. Worse, the world was put through immense sufferings, hurting national economies and putting peoples' lives in jeopardy. The US, which initiated the war in February this year with the avowed aim of forcing an end to Iran's nuclear enrichment programme, but also with the intention of uprooting the Islamic Revolutionary Guards in Tehran, has burnt its fingers. A resolute Iranian leadership caused major disruptions to the global energy supplies by blocking the Strait — through which a fifth of the world's energy supplies across continents took place. The Strait became Iran's lethal bargaining chip to browbeat Uncle Sam.

President Donald Trump states on his twitter handle - Truth Social that chances of an end to the war are "50-50" while American negotiators say Iran would give up its enrichment programme. Iran has not confirmed this, but expressed optimism on Sunday that "the number of ships passing through the Strait a day could soon return to pre-war levels," signalling the prospects of normalcy. Before the war started, up to 140 ships transited the Strait a day carrying crude, LPG, fertilizers etc. After a complete halt, Iran allowed ships to selectively pass through there after imposing hefty tariffs, but later imposed a complete blockade on vessels carrying cargo to and from the West. Thus, Iran partly offset the economic loss it suffered in the war. But, the retaliatory US blockade on Iranian ports meant the Islamic nation faced difficulty in selling its oil. All these curbs could likely end in a week or two if the present negotiations — also involving Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir and some Gulf states including Israel fructify.

Significantly, having effected an abrupt ceasefire weeks ago, the US president is still facing pressure from home as well as from America's Gulf allies and from public opinion around the world to halt the war once and for all. His latest response—that he has two options: hitting them "harder than ever" or "sign[ing] a deal that's good" — meant the President is still keeping his options open. The problem, however, is that he has limited options. He has already used the full might of the US to bring Iran to its heel. Iran demonstrated its ability to retaliate and refused to both bend and crawl. Trump's hidden agenda to get Iran's oil for a song by installing a puppet regime there and thus make up for the huge economic losses his country suffered in this war, has failed. Clearly, he failed the Americans by what would now look like a misadventure. In a democracy, rulers cannot escape public retribution from their acts of omissions and commissions. The dictators in Iran need entertain no such worries.

Letters to the Editor

Shillong is Running Out of Water Stop Cutting Its Forests

There is always news floating around in Shillong about some planned construction project on the slopes surrounding the town. A hostel here, a building there, a hillside cleared. A bigger road. Each project arrives with its permissions and its rationale. Each one tells a few more trees. And each time, the connection that matters most goes unmentioned: that the forests on these slopes are not decoration. They are the machinery by which this town has water. They are the town's hydraulics.

Shillong is a city increasingly anxious about its water supply. Taps run dry. Tankers are a fact of life for many residents. The Umkhrah chokes with silt. And yet we continue, project by project, to dismantle the very system that replenishes what we drink. The government has always known this. In 1863, the Agreement with the Sylem of Mylliem contained an explicit promise to preserve the sacred groves "whereon the water supply is dependent." In 1883, the government formally acquired forest land on these slopes and prohibited any timber-felling within it — not for aesthetic reasons, but specifically to protect the town's water supply. Government engineers in 1910 recorded that the integrity of the surrounding forest was essential to keeping Shillong's water sources uncontaminated.

These records sit in the Meghalaya State Archives. They are the government's own words.

What those administrators understood — and what we seem to have forgotten — is how a forested slope actually works. The trees intercept rainfall and slow its movement into the soil. Their roots create the conditions for water to percolate downward into springs and streams rather than rushing off in sheets of erosion. Remove the trees and you lose the sponge. The rain that would have fed our streams instead runs straight off the slope, carrying topsoil with it, leaving the hillside drier than before within a season.

The Khasi understanding of forests was never merely spiritual, though it was that too. The law *kyn-tang* — the sacred grove — was a system of protection developed by a people who had learned, over centuries, what happens to a landscape when its trees are gone. When the colonial government wrote its own prohibitions on tree-felling in the catchment areas, it was learning what the Khasi already knew.

We have now forgotten what both knew. There will be another project announced soon — there always is. Before it proceeds, we would ask one question to be answered publicly: what is the assessed impact on Shillong's water supply?

Until that question is honestly answered, every tree felled on these slopes is a debt this city is taking out against its own future.

The Longest Cave in the Subcontinent under Threat

By H H Mohrmen

Some pressure groups from Jaintia Hills recently stormed the Secretariat to protest against the proposed plan to establish a cement plant in the Nongkhlieh area. Later, some groups also protested at the office of the Deputy Commissioner of East Jaintia Hills over the same issue. This time, however, the matter is far more significant because the area where the plant is proposed to be established is located at Nongkhlieh, which is also home to the longest cave in the Indian subcontinent. In 2010, we successfully led a protest against Lafarge's plan to set up a plant at Nongkhlieh, but this time it seems that the government is hell bent on destroying the longest cave in the subcontinent.

Caves and the Nongkhlieh Ridge
On May 18, members of JNC and JSU, along with the villagers of Daistong, went to Shillong to protest against the proposed public hearing for the establishment of a cement plant in Elaka Nongkhlieh. Now why should the establishment of any industry in this area be barred by all means?

According to Wikipedia, India's longest and deepest caves are predominantly concentrated in the state of Meghalaya, which is home to all ten of the longest cave systems in the country. Most of these caves are found in East Jaintia Hills district.

An article published by the National Cave Research and Protection Organization in Ambience Science, India, Vol. 1(2): 59 to 60, in 2014, listed the longest and deepest caves in India. Excluding the glacier ice caves, the lists of the longest and deepest limestone caves in the Indian subcontinent are as follows:

The longest cave in the Indian subcontinent, excluding glacier ice caves, is Krem Liat Prah, Um im Labit M and Rubon, located in the Shnongrim Ridge of East Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, measuring 30,397 metres in length. It is followed by Krem Tyngheng Dzingiem at 21,775 metres, Krem Kotsati Umlawan at 21,530 metres, Krem Umthloo Syrang Labit at 18,181 metres, Krem Syrang Pamiang at 14,157 metres, Pielkieng Sielkan Pouk at 12,434 metres, Krem Shrieh at 8,862 metres, Krem Labit Kseh at 7,499 metres, Krem Khung at 7,349 metres, and Krem Mawkhayrdop at 7,194 metres.

The ten deepest caves in the subcontinent also begin with caves located in Meghalaya. Krem Syrang Pamiang which is 317 metres deep, followed by Krem Kotsati at 215 metres, Krem Umthloo at 188 metres, Pielkieng Sielkan Pouk at 180 metres, Pakaw Puk at 170 metres, Krem Shrieh at 169 metres, Krem Risang at 154 metres, Krem Wahser at 145 metres, and Krem Shyieñ Khlieh at 143 metres (Brooks, Simon, April 2014).

More than eleven bat species have been recorded across the state's caves, including the Greater Large Eared Horseshoe Bat, the Pomona Leaf Nosed Bat, and the Eastern Bent Winged Bat. The region is also famous for unique, translucent, and nearly eyeless fish. The Neolissochilus pnar, discovered in Krem Um Ladaw and Krem Rynjang, is the world's largest known cave fish. Other rare blind species such as the Khung Loach (Schistura larketensis) from Krem Khung and Schistura papulifera from the Syrang Pamiang cave system also thrive in these subterranean waters. Krem Liat Prah, Um im Labit and Rubon, located in the Shnongrim Ridge and measuring approximately 30.4 kilometres, are the longest natural caves in India. Their limestone formation, biodiversity, including cave adapted fauna, and ongoing exploration reflect both geological grandeur and ecological sensitivity. It must be reiterated that these caves lie in the Shnongrim Ridge and will be affected if cement companies are allowed to operate in the area.

The Archaeological Heritage at Daistong
Apart from the cave, Daistong also has three huge dolmens on the top of Daistong hill known as "Kjet u Sajar". On one of these three flat stones, there is an imprint of a giant footprint believed to be that of the legendary U Sajar Nangli.

The Cave We Have Lost
Take the example of Krem Kotsati Umlawan in Lumshnong village, measuring 21,530 metres. After cement plants were allowed to operate in the Naphu area, it is now no longer safe even to enter the cave. With rampant limestone mining in the area, which also uses explosives, it may not be wrong to say that Krem Kotsati Umlawan is now becoming part of history.

Considering the rich heritage of this area, why is the government still hell bent on destroying it? It is an open secret that cement companies continue to expand, and only the wealth of the promoters of these plants grows many hundredfold. Yet why has

the European leagues and the FIFA World Cup equally captures national attention. The North Eastern states and states such as West Bengal, Goa, and Kerala continue to sustain deeply rooted football cultures.

However, India's continued absence from the FIFA World Cup finals raises difficult questions. Familiar explanations such as weak infrastructure, poor administration, and inadequate grassroots systems are no longer entirely convincing. These are not permanent barriers but consequences of choices and priorities. Several nations that have qualified for the World Cup over the years possess neither immense wealth nor world-class facilities. What they possess instead is intent. For them, World Cup qualification is treated as a strategic objective with a collective conviction that competing at football's highest level is non-negotiable. It's a matter of national prestige.

India, instead, has allowed its sporting imagination to be shaped overwhelmingly by cricket, a sport with far less global reach and participation than football. While India's cricketing success undoubtedly deserves admiration, allowing one sport to dominate national ambition and overshadow nearly every other discipline has created an imbalance. This runs against the spirit of genuine sporting progress which requires diversity, institutional commitment, and long-term vision.

This imbalance has also been reinforced by the Indian media's intense focus on cricket. Visibility attracts funding, and funding gener-

ates greater visibility, creating a self-sustaining cycle that keeps cricket at the center of India's sporting identity. Yet other sports deserve greater attention, and athletes beyond cricket deserve to have their stories told, their struggles acknowledged, and the assurance of national support in both victory and defeat as encouragement for growth.

Incidentally, England, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand—all formidable cricketing nations—have qualified for FIFA World Cup 2026 and have appeared on this stage before. These countries have developed sporting ecosystems that create pathways beyond cricket and foster broader sporting cultures. They consistently win numerous medals at the Olympics and other international competitions. This is an approach India would do well to consider.

Certainly, India does not lack talent, population, or passion for football. What it needed is a clear vision, sustained commitment, and stronger efforts from institutions and the media to cultivate a sporting culture that treats football as a serious national project. Otherwise, the same story risks repeating itself every four years. On sport's grandest stage, India will not be in it but will continue to watch from the sidelines.

How Sustainable Is This Development?
The government, and the Chief Minister in particular, often speak about sustainable development. But the question is: how sustainable can the environment remain once this cement plant begins operating? Has the government conducted any studies on the adverse impact that cement plants have on the environment of East Jaintia Hills district? Do the existing cement plants follow SOPs and legal requirements when it comes to mining and the use of explosives? Recently, a video went viral showing smoke emitting from certain cement plant units in the area. Has the government done anything to ensure that these companies adhere to rules and regulations?

World Environment Day is approaching, and students will likely be lectured by the Chief Minister on the importance of protecting the environment. He may even plant a tree on the occasion while, at the same time, allowing the destruction of the environment and, in particular, the caves and their fauna. Is it not time for the public, and students in particular, to ask the Chief Minister to stop sermonising and instead practise what he preaches?

Cement Plants and Economic Growth
Have the existing cement plants helped grow the economy of the state, or even that of East Jaintia Hills district? Do we even have data on these important economic indicators? What we do have are reports in the press on the findings of commissions questioning where these cement plants obtain coal to operate despite the coal ban.

The general idea is that an area, a state, or even a country develops when it becomes industrialised. However, this does not appear to be true for Meghalaya or East Jaintia Hills. The cement plants in East Jaintia Hills include Star Cement Ltd., Star Cement Meghalaya Ltd., Meghalaya Cements Ltd., Topcem, Dalmia Cement Bharat Ltd., Amrit Cement Ltd., Hills Ce-

ment Company Ltd., Green Valley Industries Ltd., Goldstone Cements Ltd., Megha Technical and Engineers Pvt. Ltd., Jaintia Cements Ltd., Adhunik Cement Ltd., and another non functional plant, JUD, at Thangskai. With more than ten cement plants, East Jaintia Hills is perhaps the most industrialised district in the state. Apart from cement plants, East Jaintia Hills district also has many coke plants, yet people continue to complain about unemployment. The question is how many local youths have been employed by these companies. More importantly, how have these cement plants contributed to the economy of the district or the state? Why do people still depend on coal and continue pleading with the government to allow the resumption of coal mining?

Prime Minister's Fascination for the Caves
Even Prime Minister, Narendra Modi showed his interest in the cave systems of Meghalaya when he mentioned the caves in two of his Mann Ki Baat broadcasts to the nation. The first time was when he recognised the work of the Meghalaya Adventure Association and Bryan Kharpran Daly in particular, and the second time was when Neolissochilus pnar, the largest cave fish, was discovered in the region.

Cement Plants and Vested Interests
The President of JNC has raised a very important question: why is Conrad K. Sangma silent on this issue? This is important because the authority to allow industrial operations in the state through the single window system lies directly under the control of the Chief Minister's Office. Is there something beyond what meets the eye? The public has the right to know because the state's resources are public resources.

When Will It Be Enough?
How many more cement plants do we want in the state? Does the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government want to make East Jaintia Hills the cement capital of the country? The government should not permit the establishment of another cement plant anywhere unless it first presents a white paper showing the people of this state how much the state has benefited from these cement plants and coke factories, and what impact they have had on the environment and society as a whole. The many protests organised by different groups have exposed one undeniable truth: the people have had enough. But is the government listening?

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

Yours etc.,
K. L. Tariang,
Via email

Rising Medicine Prices Burdening Common People
Editor,
Through your esteemed

daily, I would like to express my concern regarding the continuous rise in medicine prices and the recent discussions surrounding generic medicines.

The prices of medicines are increasing by the day and as a result, common people are suffering greatly. Whenever customers ask chemists about the reason behind the price hike, they often say that taxes have increased, leading to higher medicine costs.

I fail to understand why pharmaceutical companies spend huge amounts of money on doctors in the form of gifts, foreign trips, and conferences for promotional purposes. All these practices are mainly carried out for business interests. Instead of spending money on such activities, companies should focus on reducing the prices of medicines so that ordinary people can afford proper treatment.

As we all know, medicines are an essential part of our daily lives. If medicine prices are reduced, it will greatly benefit common people, especially middle-class and poor families.

The government as well as the opposition should come forward and introduce strong laws to control unfair practices and ensure affordable healthcare for all. This will certainly help the common people.

Yours etc.,
Samar Deb,
Guwahati

"A question of convergence" - Between Constitutional Anxiety and Cultural Alarmism

By Patrick P. Sawian

The article "Is Khasi Identity Heading Toward a Constitutional Crisis?" by Bhogtorm Mawroh, in The Shillong Times issue dated 23rd May 2026, raises a provocative and intellectually stimulating concern regarding the future of Khasi identity, customary law and constitutional protections in Meghalaya. Using the succession dispute in Hima Sohra and the PIL filed by Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai against matrilineal lineage laws as reference points, the article argues that attempts to reinterpret or dilute Khasi customary systems may eventually trigger a constitutional crisis with far-reaching implications for Scheduled Tribe status, Sixth Schedule autonomy, and even land ownership patterns in Meghalaya. At one level, the article deserves credit for drawing attention to a deeply important issue often ignored in mainstream Indian constitutional discussions: the fragile relationship between tribal identity and customary continuity. The article correctly observes that many constitutional protections granted to tribal communities in India are historically tied to the preservation of distinctive customary systems, indigenous governance structures, lineage practices and traditional social institutions. In that sense, the anxiety surrounding the weakening of Khasi customary institutions is not entirely imaginary.

However, while the article raises legitimate concerns, it also tends at times toward constitutional alarmism by implying that social evolution or reinterpretation of customs could inevitably culminate in the collapse of Khasi constitutional protections. The reality is far more complicated. The strongest argument in the article concerns the gradual erosion of Khasi customary institutions themselves. There is little doubt that Khasi society is undergoing profound transformation. Urbanization, migration, global education, private property economics, intermarriage, nuclear family structures and globalization are steadily reshaping traditional relationships within the Kur, the authority of the Kni and the functioning of the Dorbar system. Younger generations increasingly participate in globalized modernity rather than living entirely within clan-based customary frameworks. This cultural drift is real and observable, irrespective of which political party governs India or Meghalaya.

The article is therefore correct in arguing that if traditional institutions weaken excessively, the philosophical basis of tribal autonomy may also weaken over time. Courts in India have occasionally examined the continuity of customary practices while dealing with tribal identity disputes. The Supreme Court judgment discussed in the article, especially its emphasis on retaining essential tribal characteristics and social organization, understandably alarms communities that fear cultural assimilation. Yet the article arguably stretches this concern too far when it suggests that patrilineal reinterpretation of succession, or social modernization could realistically lead to widespread loss of Scheduled Tribe status in the foreseeable future. India already recognizes many tribal communities that have undergone enormous social transformation through Christianity, capitalism, urbanization, electoral politics and modern education while still retaining ST recognition. Tribal identity under Indian constitutional practice has never depended exclusively on preserving one isolated customary feature in a frozen historical form.

If constitutional identity required absolute preservation of pre-modern customs, many tribal communities across India would already have lost their status decades ago. Khasi society itself has changed dramatically under colonial administration, missionary influence, and modern state structures. Yet Khasi identity survives robustly. The issue therefore is not whether Khasi society changes, but whether it changes so radically that it becomes entirely indistinguishable from dominant non-tribal social systems. That is a much higher threshold than the article sometimes implies.

The article also places substantial emphasis on the PIL challenging matrilineal lineage laws. Here again, the deeper issue may not simply be "tradition versus anti-tradition," but rather competing interpretations of how Khasi society should modernize. Reformist Khasi groups argue that customary systems contain ambiguities and inequities requiring reinterpretation in contemporary contexts. Their critics see such reforms as dangerous openings through which constitutional protections may gradually unravel. The conflict is therefore not merely between Delhi and Khasi tradition, but also between competing Khasi visions of modernity itself.

Another important dimension raised indirectly by the article is the fear of centralization within the Indian Union. Although there is no publicly proven conspiracy to dismantle Khasi institutions, indigenous anxieties do not emerge in a vacuum. Across India, especially under stronger centralized political currents, there has been increasing emphasis on legal uniformity, national integration, centralized governance, and harmonization of exceptional regional arrangements.

From this perspective, institutions such as Sixth Schedule councils, customary inheritance systems, and tribe-specific governance structures may appear ideologically awkward within a highly centralized nation-state model. This partly explains why many indigenous communities become suspicious whenever customary succession systems are litigated or autonomous institutions are weakened politically. History offers many examples where negotiated autonomies were gradually diluted through administrative integration rather than outright abolition. Native American treaty systems in the United States, the dismantling of clan authority in the Scottish Highlands, the erosion of princely autonomy in post-independence India, and the gradual dilution of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir all demonstrate how central states often expand authority incrementally over long periods. Centralization rarely announces itself dramatically. It typically advances through legal reinterpretation, administrative standardization, economic integration, educational homogenization, weakening of traditional elites, and generational cultural change.

Seen in that global historical context, the anxieties put out in the article are neither irrational nor unique. At the same time, however, indigenous fear can itself become politically absolutist. One danger in debates surrounding identity is the temptation to treat all reform as existential betrayal. Societies cannot remain permanently frozen in the exact form they existed centuries ago. Customary systems historically evolved continuously even before colonialism and constitutionalism emerged. The challenge is therefore not whether Khasi society modernizes, but whether modernization can occur without severing the deeper cultural logic that sustains Khasi identity.

The more immediate and realistic risks facing Khasi society are probably not sudden constitutional extinction, but slower structural tensions involving commercialization of ancestral property, weakening clan accountability, politicization of identity, generational fragmentation, and increasing conflict between constitutional modernity and customary law. These are serious concerns, but they differ from apocalyptic scenarios predicting imminent collapse of Sixth Schedule protections or sudden mass removal of ST status.

The article succeeds best not as a literal constitutional prediction, but as a warning against civilizational complacency. Its silver lining is that it serves as a stark reminder to Khasi society that customary systems cannot survive merely through slogans or emotional attachment. Institutions survive only when communities continue practicing, adapting, and legitimizing them meaningfully across generations.

The deeper question confronting Khasi society today is therefore neither simple traditionalism nor blind modernization. It is whether Khasi identity can evolve intelligently without dissolving the customary foundations that historically justified its constitutional distinctiveness within the Indian Union; and perhaps that, more than succession disputes or litigation over lineage alone, is the real constitutional question looming quietly over Meghalaya's future.

"Lessons are not given, they are taken."

— Cesare Pavese

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.283 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 26, 2026

Educational Revival Demands Political Will

THE status of education in Meghalaya has been abysmal and this is borne out by statistics. The latest all-India ranking puts Meghalaya at the 10th grade which is the lowest in the country. This however is not news. State Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has belabored this fact times without number. Meghalaya has a total of 14,582 schools and pays 55,160 teachers. Of these schools, 2269 schools have single digit enrolment meaning that there are too many schools in a small village competing for student enrolment. There are 206 schools with no students at all but the teachers are being paid. The drop-out rate at 22,000 students annually at different levels is also very high. School dropout rates in the state vary drastically between regions, with a staggering 90% student attrition rate across six specific districts transitioning into higher secondary levels. According to UDISE+ statistics, while the state average for secondary school dropouts sits at an alarming 21.7% (nearly double the national average of 12.6%), rural and ethnically distinct pockets face far deeper problems.

The education sector in Meghalaya struggles with a highly fragmented school system. Thousands of schools were created not because they were needed but because of political compulsions. In the same village there would be a church run school, a private school and a government school. Naturally there were not enough takers for all three categories of schools. Schools were set up without mapping the needs of the village and without looking at the viability factor. They were treated like one-time investments where the teachers were paid by government but the maintenance and upkeep of the school was no one's responsibility. This is the real reason for the existence of schools without students or only 5-6 students with an equal number of teachers. The right thing to do now is to streamline the entire system and close down schools that have no students or too few students and ensure the students from such schools are enrolled in the next nearest school. It's time for the Government to invest in school transportation systems since most schools, especially high and higher secondary schools are located at a distance away, sometimes requiring that students cross rivers and streams on their way.

The empty and near-empty institutions continue to draw public funds and keep teachers on payrolls without serving any learners. And while some schools suffer from teacher shortage other schools have teachers but no students. This over-saturation of schools spreads the state's Rs 1,967 crore annual teacher salary budget thin, preventing meaningful investment in modern learning materials, electricity, or clean drinking water for functioning schools. To counter this crisis, the state government is moving forward with a school rationalisation policy. This strategy involves closing or merging nearly 2,500 under-enrolled facilities to scale down the total number of schools to roughly 12,000, allowing the Education Department to reassign teachers where they are actually needed. Also the state intends to review and consolidate school grants and implement the Meghalaya State Education Commission (MSEC) report to structurally reform the system. This requires political will and the present MDA Government has to take a call, no matter what the political costs.

Letters to the Editor

From Educational Hub to Political Platform: The Erosion of Meghalaya's Education System

Editor,
I am writing as a deeply concerned citizen, utterly baffled and saddened by the drastic decline of the education system in Meghalaya. Our state was once proudly celebrated as the educational hub of the Northeast, shaping and nurturing legendary role models like Arundhati Roy, Harishankar Bhattacharya, Victor Banerjee, and James Michael Lyngdoh. Today, that glorious legacy is slipping away. As reported in your esteemed daily dated May 25, 2026, Meghalaya is now performing alarmingly poorly, burdened with staggeringly high student dropout rates.

While official media reports paint a rosy picture of heavy investments and relentless efforts by stakeholders, the hardcore facts on the ground tell a completely contradictory story. The dismal results speak for themselves; it requires no rocket science

to see the failure. What specific, measurable steps have the education department and stakeholders actually taken? How will they dispute the raw data and figures presented by the media?

A major reason for this decline is the blatant exploitation of our educators. Teachers are already drowning under the weight of the new education format, managing regular classes, endless assignments, and corrections—all while surviving on modest salaries that fail to keep pace with current inflation. On top of this academic burden, they are routinely pulled away to act as census enumerators and election agents. If we continuously over-burden and exploit our teachers, how can we realistically expect them to give 100 percent to our children?

Adding to this chaos is the current crisis surrounding the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP). For the youth about to graduate, this has turned into a painful ordeal. Students are trapped in a dilemma, wondering if this fourth year is a practical reality or just the illusion of political ideologies. When FYUP was introduced, stakeholders aggressively compelled its mandatory implementation despite a lack of proper infrastructure. Now, three years later, as the first batch finishes their third year, students are left completely

Kamai da ka Hok (Earn with Righteousness): Supporting Local Businesses Should Not Mean Paying Any Price

By Balakmen Suting

At the entrance of Lewduh known as Shillong's great beating heart of commerce, the oldest and most beloved bazaar (Lew) of the Khasi people, there is an archway that every trader, every vendor, every customer passes beneath. Carved into that archway, above the bustle of vendors and the scent of fresh produce and smoked meat, are four words in the Khasi language: "Kamai da ka Hok" which means "Earn with righteousness".

It is not merely a decorative inscription. It is a covenant, a promise made by a trading community to itself, across generations. It says: "we will sell, yes, but we will sell fairly. We will earn, yes, but we will earn with honour. Every shopkeeper who ducks beneath that archway to open their stall inherits that promise. Every customer who passes under it trusts that it will be kept."

I thought about those four words for a long time after an afternoon that left me quietly troubled.

I had gone to a small bistro in the Mawkhair area of Shillong, the kind of modest local eatery that I have always been glad to support. My purpose was simple and sincere. In a city where money can easily slip away to large chains and outside enterprises, I wanted my rupees to stay local. I wanted them to pay a neighbour's rent, a cousin's school fees, a family's grocery bill. I wanted to be part of what economists call the "circulation of wealth" which means money moving through the hands of our own people, building our own community from within.

I ordered what I love most in all of Shillong's rich culinary world: 'Ja stem' - steamed rice, clean and fragrant, served with Doh Nei long, that deep, dark, slow-cooked pork dish that carries the soul of the Khasi kitchen in every bite, and Sohbaingon Dieng chutney, sharp and alive on the tongue. A plate of two small pieces of meat. A small portion of rice. The kind of humble, honest meal that has nourished generations.

After eating, I asked how much I needed to pay for two plates of Ja stem, chutney, and two pieces of meat. I listened carefully, wondering if I had heard correctly.

"Two hundred rupees." I asked the shopkeeper gently, without argument to confirm. Yes, they said. Two hundred rupees.

I paid. I left. And I walked, through the afternoon street of Mot Phran, Shillong carrying something heavier than

a full stomach: the quiet, uncomfortable feeling of a trust that had not quite been honoured.

I want to be very careful here, because this piece is not written in anger, and it is not meant to shame any individual or establishment. The people who run small food businesses in Shillong work hard. Prices of chicken, pork, fish, rice, firewood, cooking gas all have climbed steeply in recent months and years. A shop owner carries costs that a customer never fully sees: rent, staff, early mornings at the market, long hours over a hot stove. I respect all of that, and I say it sincerely.

But there is a difference — thin, yet important — between pricing that reflects real costs and pricing that leaves a customer feeling taken advantage of. That difference is not just about money. It is about the relationship between a seller and a buyer. It is about whether commerce in our city is built on trust or on surprise.

And it is about whether the

My purpose was simple and sincere. In a city where money can easily slip away to large chains and outside enterprises, I wanted my rupees to stay local. I wanted them to pay a neighbour's rent, a cousin's school fees, a family's grocery bill. I wanted to be part of what economists call the "circulation of wealth" which means money moving through the hands of our own people, building our own community from within.

words inscribed on Lewduh's archway, "Kamai da ka Hok" are still alive in the practice of our daily trade.

There is another dimension to this, that troubles me equally: customer relations.

When I asked the shopkeeper to confirm the price, there was no warmth in the exchange. No explanation. No acknowledgement that Rs 200 for a small bistro plate might seem unexpected to a customer. Just a flat confirmation, and silence. Keep in mind, this is my personal experience, hopefully others customers do not have the similar experience.

I understand that not everyone is born with the gift of easy conversation. But in a small food business, the way a customer is spoken to, or not spoken to, is part of what is being sold. A smile costs nothing. A brief, honest explanation, "Our meat prices have gone up this season" or "This is our special recipe, so our pricing reflects that" can completely change how a customer receives a bill that

surprised them.

People will pay more for food when they feel respected. People will not return even for food they enjoyed when they feel dismissed.

As the old bazaar wisdom says: 'a customer who leaves happy will return with ten more. A customer who leaves hurt will warn a hundred.'

Shillong stands today at a genuinely exciting moment. Local cuisine like Ja stem, Doh Nei long, Jadoh, Pumaloi, Tungrymbai, is drawing interest not just from across India but from around the world. Travellers come to our city hungry not just for food but for culture, for authenticity, for the particular warmth that only a small local kitchen can offer. This is an extraordinary opportunity for our food entrepreneurs.

But that opportunity is built on a foundation of trust. And trust, in commerce as in friendship, must be tended carefully.

If visitors leave Shillong's bistros and local eateries feeling uncertain, wonder-

ing whether they paid fairly, whether the experience matched the cost, they will not return. Worse, in the age of social media, they will say so loudly, and the whole world will hear them. Conversely, a restaurant that makes every customer feel genuinely welcomed and fairly treated becomes, in time, an institution. A legend. The kind of place people travel back to, year after year, and bring their friends to.

That is the choice before our local food business community right now. For local food businesses, a few thoughts offered with respect:

Show your prices clearly. A handwritten menu board even a simple one removes uncertainty before it begins. Customers who know the price before they order feel respected. Customers who discover it only at the end feel ambushed, even when the price itself is reasonable.

Price fairly and explain proudly. If your Doh Nei

long costs more because you use better-quality pork, say so. If your portions are smaller because ingredient prices have risen, tell your customers. People understand hardship. What they do not easily forgive is silence in the face of a bill they did not expect.

Train in hospitality, not just cooking. The best food in the world is diminished by a cold or dismissive interaction. Warmth, eye contact, a genuine welcome are skills that can be learned, and they are worth learning.

Think long-term. A customer who feels well-treated today may return thirty times over the next year and send twenty of their friends. A customer who feels overcharged once may never return at all. The arithmetic of loyalty always favours fairness.

Remember: supporting local is a partnership. When a customer walks past a global chain to eat at a neighbourhood bistro, they are making a statement about what they believe in. That statement deserves to be honoured.

And to us as customers, a word as well. Choosing local means choosing to invest in our own community and investment requires patience and grace. Quality ingredients cost money. Running a small business is hard. We should not expect local food to be cheap simply because it is local. We should expect it to be fairly priced and that is a different thing entirely.

One uncomfortable afternoon will not change my belief in local commerce. I will return to our neighbourhood bistros and our market stalls. I will keep choosing Ja stem and Doh Nei long over fast food and franchise restaurants. That choice is not naïve, it is deliberate, because I have seen what our local economy can become when it is built with care.

The archway at Lewduh does not say earn as much as you can. It does not say charge whatever the customer will bear. It says something simpler, and harder, and more beautiful: Kamai da ka Hok (Earn with righteousness).

May every plate of food serve in our city be seasoned with that spirit. May every bill presented across a counter in Shillong carry the quiet pride of fair dealing. And may our local economy grow not only in size, but in the trust and warmth that make a community truly worth belonging to.

(The writer is an MBA in Tourism and Hotel Management, NEHU)

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

NEHU VC Post: Transforming Crisis Into Opportunity

By Rudi V Warjri

I was a member of the three-member committee which was specified to search for a VC for NEHU sometime in 2020 – 2021. A panel of five names was recommended to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry in its own wisdom zeroed in on the current VC, Prof P S Shukla. I feel compelled to write here what the concerned authorities should do before finalizing on the next VC.

The Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India has issued an advertisement inviting applications for appointment of Vice-Chancellor of North-Eastern Hill University. It also stated that the Vice-Chancellor, being the academic as well as administrative head, is expected to be:

• A person possessing the highest level of competence, integrity, morals and institutional commitment.

• A distinguished academician, with a minimum of 10 years' experience as Professor in a University or 10 years' experience in reputed research and/or academic administrative organization with proof of having demonstrated academic leadership.

• Preferably not more than 65 years of age as on the closing date of receipt of applications of this advertisement.

• Appointment will be made from a panel of names recommended by a committee constituted under the provisions of the Act of the University. It also mentioned the salary and service conditions.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) had also issued more elaborate guidelines on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor. It states that the Vice-Chancellor should:

(a) Provide inspirational and motivational value-based academic and executive leadership to the university through policy formation, operational management, optimization of human resources and concern for environment and sustainability;

(b) Conduct himself/herself with transparency, fairness, honesty, highest degree of ethics and decision making that is in the best interest of the university;

(c) Act as steward of the university's assets in managing the resources responsibly, optimally, effectively and efficiently for providing a conducive working and learning environment;

(d) Promote the collaborative, shared and consultative work culture in the university, paving way for innovative thinking and ideas;

(e) Endeavour to promote a work culture and ethics that brings about quality, professionalism, satisfaction and service to the nation and society;

(f) Refrain from allowing considerations of caste, creed, religion, race, gender or sex in their professional endeavour.

Prof Shukla has been absent from his duty as VC at NEHU Campus for one and a half years. He discharged his duties from the NEHU Guest House, Guwahati and was forced to remain absent from the NEHU campus because all the apex bodies of the teachers, students, staff etc., were against his continuance. The reasons were primarily because of his failure to fulfil the role and responsibilities of a VC. He was practically declared persona non grata in the University. Technically, however, Prof Shukla's appointment as VC ends in July 2026.

This issue was raised in Parliament by the two MPs from Meghalaya, (Late) Dr Ricky Andrew J. Syngkon and Saleng A. Sangma. While Syngkon sought his immediate sacking, branding him of incompetence and for administrative failure, unethical appointments, neglect of infrastructure, plunging NIRF rankings, and remote interference even while functioning from out of station while drawing full salary, Saleng A. Sangma said, "there is really a deep denial of the central fact that there is reluctance by the Government of India to replace Shukla by projecting a false vision and future."

Prof Shukla's tenure was marked by several controversies and accusations of nepotism, anti-tribal practices, and mismanagement. NEHU suffered administrative decline and its National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF) fell from 59 in 2021 to 136 in 2024. The worst decision was to hastily implement the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 without

sufficient consultation with stakeholders. Faculty members of NEHU have written about the University's failure to capture the national imagination despite being in existence for fifty years. Dwelling further on Prof Shukla's non-performance as a VC now, would be an exercise in futility. However, it's important to learn some hard lessons from the sordid episode arising out his failure that has caused immense affliction to NEHU as an institution and which has impacted the lives and education of students and the morale of teachers and staff.

The objective now should be to turn the crisis in NEHU into an opportunity. That can only happen if there is an honest introspection by the Ministry of Education in Delhi about the reasons that has brought NEHU to its present predicament. It should ensure that (a) the next VC possesses besides academic qualifications also the character befitting a VC as elaborated in the UGC guidelines and abide strictly by the guidelines both in letter and spirit and not reduce the guidelines to a farce. (b) The Ministry should judiciously examine the accusations regarding the present VC of being anti-tribal. This is particularly critical because NEHU is predominantly an institution based in a tribal area. Hence empathy towards tribals means a job half done for the next VC. (c) It should avoid any tendencies to be influenced by a political – religious ideology or by any kind of nepotism and favouritism in the choice of the VC. Any such imposition means ruining the institution further. (d) The ability to comprehend and have insights into the ecosystem in the State and the region especially the diverse and complex sense of identity based on ethnicity, language, faith, culture and other customary practices is paramount. The National Policy on Education 1986 had highlighted Access (Availability) and Equity (Fairness) of Education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 had rightfully stepped up further by emphasizing on Access to Quality Education. The National Education Policy (2020) has also sought to foster critical thinking and problem solving, along with social, ethical and emotional capacities and dispositions.

Nationally, a recent comparative study of school education systems by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) across eight countries highlights India's "significant under-investment" in education. The report shows that India's education spending has stagnated between 2.7% and 2.9% of the GDP over the past six years, with no growth, and calls for raising this allocation to 6% of GDP to meet global standards. It provides a detailed analysis of the education systems in these eight countries, spanning both developed and emerging economies. There are just eight Indian universities in the Top 500 in the QS World University Rankings. Enabling this will require an encouraging ecosystem, with greater funding, autonomy, the spirit of tolerance within universities and activities by students/faculty. This has also to be taken into account in the choice of the next VC for NEHU. It is germane to stress that NEHU is located in Shillong which is the hub of education in the entire North East. The strategic criticality of this region is well known. Its connectivity via a 22 Km chicken neck with the mainland mass of India with the rest surrounded by foreign countries needs due acknowledgement. There's a substantial presence of students from the entire region in NEHU and even foreign students from neighbouring countries. The professionalism and eclectic personality of the VC is crucial in influencing and shaping the thinking of the students that would be in the national interest.

The State Government of Meghalaya also has to play its role given that NEHU is situated in Meghalaya and the majority of the students are from Meghalaya. The future of students from Meghalaya is a matter of critical stake and responsibility for the Government of Meghalaya.

Only then will NEHU be able to live up to its motto of "Rise up and build." To begin with NEHU should grow among the comity of leading academic institutions in India. Philosophically and poetically, NEHU should be allowed to blossom into an institution that Tagore envisaged, "Where the mind is without fear/And the head is held high."

"Carrying a grudge is a heavy burden. As you forgive, you will feel the joy of being forgiven."

— Henry B. Eyring

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 284 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2026

War, rising prices

THE central government and the oil marketing companies are into a game of their own. Fuel prices are steadily being increased in recent days, with the hikes totalling about Rs10 while more raises are only to be expected. While it is understandable that the Iran War has its impact on global crude prices, it would look appear as if the Government and the oil companies are turning this adversity into an opportunity to sharply raise fuel prices. Raising the prices in one go would have invited strong protests. But the repeated small raises have become a huge burden on the common man. Clearly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi created the necessary conditions for this by magnifying the adversity through a call to the people to reduce travel etc.

Raising fuel prices is an invitation to larger problems in the form of a massive rise in the price of essential goods for daily use as also of materials for construction etc., on the pretext that their transportation costs have spiralled. This is happening across the board for no good reason. Traders are game raising prices on their own as they have sufficient excuses in the form of a governmental warning to the people vis-a-vis the consequences of a war that was fought elsewhere. The resultant inflationary pressure is having serious consequences on the national economy and on people's lives. Government employees could remain unaffected by inflationary trends as they get matching periodic raises in their pay packets. The common man's struggle, it would appear, is not the governments' concern. Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman's invocation of a "loss of Rs. 1 lakh crore to the exchequer due to the cuts in excise duty on fuel" is only one part of the big story. She hides the other part.

What should not go unnoticed in this context is the fact that the central government had not reduced the prices of diesel and petrol, other than a negligible amount of one or two rupees, for the past several years even as global crude prices fell by half since 2014. Apparently, the Modi Government took a heavy cut from the profits thereof for all these years to majorly swell the national exchequer. While the people were taken for a sweet ride, the national economy remained in robust mood thanks to these huge earnings to the national coffers. Perhaps the only reason for the feel-good economic growth story was this, coupled with the huge earnings from the implementation of the GST. This helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi to run the government in an effortless manner, while the economies of neighbouring Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal nosedived, resulting in anti-government protests. Be that as it may, the central government is now duty-bound to plough back a share of what it unduly earned from the oil marketing segment, and allow the oil prices to stabilize irrespective of the global headwinds. At a time when people are struggling to cope with the abrupt rise in prices of essentials and other commodities, the government come to their help and avoid creating conditions for a further uncontrolled rise in prices across the board.

Letters to the Editor

Rolling Dice on the State's Education System

Editor,
I write to you and the public, dragging the spotlight onto the State's Education system once again. We've heard of the idea, "If a person does not know how to swim, throw them into deep waters, they'd gradually know how". I hope that isn't the State Government's strategy to deal with the students of this State, because deducing from the past decisions taken by the Government we can say that this idea remains at the centre of their discussion table. Ever since the implementation of the CUET, we have seen a major shake in the peace of students and teachers in schools, colleges and universities.

Now, we see a growing unrest regarding the 4th Year Implementation. However, do understand this: we do not decline the implementation of methods that will benefit us students and improve our future, but we strongly decline the execution and the efforts put into the implementation. The recent update from NEHUTA revealed to us that the teachers of the NEHU had strongly persisted that the University was not ready. Yet despite their honest concerns, the

University's higher authorities along with the State Government proceeded with their wet-cement establishments. Similar to the past CUET situation, the students and teachers are thrown into deep waters to figure it all out on their own, only to drown deeper into confusion and stress.

A relative of mine stated as a joke that the students of our batch are like lab rats, and I can't help but agree that we are nothing but guinea pigs at the hands of the Government. Based on the Union Ministry of Education's Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0, Meghalaya is the only state in India relegated to the 10th and lowest grade. Not only have we been played pawns, but we are also being played in a losing game. Unfortunately, the ones on the losing side aren't the ones playing but rather the ones played. I

The 6th Semester batch in colleges remain in a dilemma while lower classes are filled with fear of just what our future might be. It's a shame to see that Meghalaya, a State so rich with talent and potential, be placed at a position where it does not belong, because we see glory wasted in impulsive choices. At first, NEHU had stated that students can enter the 4th Year with at least 75% aggregate marks up to the 3rd Year, "along with the availability of sufficient PhD-qualified faculty members in the de-

My Shillong MP and Me

By Toki Blah

The unfortunate and untimely passing away of (L) Dr Ricky Syngkon, Lok Sabha member from Shillong constituency on Feb 19, 2026 left a gaping void in Meghalaya's political milieu. The Lok Sabha vacancy he left behind now needs to be filled up and till the writing of this op-ed, three potential candidates, from three prominent political parties have announced their candidature and intention of contesting this vacant Shillong MP seat. No doubt other parties will soon follow suit with their own candidates. That is the easy part. The daunting feature of the exercise lies in identifying a candidate acceptable to the electorate and public acceptance will be for a person whom the electorate think can fill the (L) Dr Syngkon's shoes. Dr Syngkon belonged to that rare breed of politicians whom the common man looked up to. A people's representative whom one could trust and rely on. He somehow radiated that sense of ethics, sincerity and value-based politics that is in such short supply among Meghalaya politicians. It's the type of leadership Meghalaya needs and has been in search of. Candidate selection is therefore going to be a tough call, for besides the above-mentioned qualities the element of sympathy voting also has to be taken into consideration. The content of this writeup will therefore aim on (1) how to, without prejudice to any candidate or party, assist the electorate, in electing the type of person Meghalaya needs to send to parliament (2) create awareness as to the duties and responsibilities expected of an elected MP from the Shillong constituency.

In the coming MP elections, although everyone will deny it, money will definitely play a role as it usually does. No point bawling this unavoidable fact. This write-up therefore will not waste time deliberating on a socio-political malaise that everyone pretends is not there. Instead, let us talk about the expectations, both social and political that people expect from their MP and as a corollary to that, the official duties and responsibilities the elected MP has towards those who elected him to power. The contest usually proceeds in the following manner. Once the name of a candidate is announced for any election, his/her disposition and temperament, personal lifestyle, personal history, attitude towards others, especially the poor, form hot topics for

public discussion. The main points usually debated upon are the attitude and conduct of the candidate in his/her social interactions with others. Humility, the trait Dr Syngkon displayed with such natural ease of which Ellerine Dimgdoh highlighted in her article titled "The Sound of Silence", ST 22nd May is a definite advantage. Academic qualification is another plus point because we have learnt from the past that MPs who are comfortable with English are better equipped in driving home a point on the floor of Parliament. Being solicitous and compassionate; ready to help; ready to walk the walk of the poor and the marginalized is another quality that the electorate admire and expect from their representative. A candidate who manages to emerge unscathed through this unofficial pre-pol, public screening will enter the fray with an edge over others.

"It's the type of leadership Meghalaya needs and has been in search of. Candidate selection is therefore going to be a tough call, for besides the above-mentioned qualities the element of sympathy voting also has to be taken into consideration."

Once elected, the tenure of an MP is usually for 5 years. During that time he either sits with the treasury or the opposition. Everyone knows this. The sad part however is the fact that most of us remain ignorant of what exactly is a MP supposed to do. Actually, the onus placed on an MP is quite intense and heavy as he represents people at three overlapping levels. First at the constituency level. In our case the Shillong Constituency that comprises both the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. At this level he is expected to raise issues that impact the constituency he represents. The Shillong MP raising the question of inclusion of the Khasi Language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution is an example. Secondly, he also represents the state he comes from. The MP from Shillong standing up in Parliament to flag the seriousness of the border dispute with Assam and to call for Central intervention on the matter, is what Meghalaya expects its MP to do. Thirdly he automatically also represents the nation as a whole, irrespective of whether he belongs to the treasury benches or the opposition. This inclusive character of

our democracy is usually displayed when delegations of MPs are sent abroad to advocate core interest issues of India. Such delegations are multi party in nature and can even be led by an opposition member, the latest example of which are the delegations sent to various countries after Operation Sindoor.

Let us therefore assume that by late 2026 we would have elected and secured an MP seat for a person we believe is best qualified to represent us in Parliament. Now what do we expect him to do in New Delhi? It's a cheeky impertinent question to ask but it has to be asked for the simple reason that most of us view our MPs simply as money bags elected to disperse the MPLADS funds. That of course is ridiculous for, the MP we send to Delhi must possess a world view that is in tune with Meghalaya's needs. The (L) GG Swell as Deputy Speaker of

Parliament did once comment on the qualifications and ability of a rival MP candidate with the caustic remark "Un leit leh aia sha Delhi? Un leit die shana?" (What does he expect to do in Delhi? Sell hot gram by the wayside?) Malicious no doubt but true!

So aside from the demand for ILP and inclusion of Khasi language in the 8th Schedule, there is also the bigger picture of what Meghalaya needs to obtain from the Center. Our MP should have the intellectual capability and oratory skills to shift parliamentary focus on Meghalaya's rural development where 75% of our population reside. He should be able to leverage Central schemes on issues such as agro-processing; value addition to agricultural products; urge upon the center for studies on how our small marginal hill-side-farmers can create adequate economies of scale production to enable Meghalaya's agro products to compete in the open market.

Speaking of markets let us also create awareness at the Center of the need for an alternate people's market based on the Lewduh model. I

am not speaking of shopping malls but of a multi-storied marketing complex, somewhere between Mawlai and New Shillong designed to create relief to a overpopulated and stressed Shillong. Such a market should be for small scale local entrepreneurs (fewduh style). It will provide livelihood opportunities; decongest old Shillong and improve the local economy. Can't see why KHADC cannot be involved in such an enterprise.

The Shillong MP should also have the skill to socialize and bond with other MPs even if they don't belong to the political side he is on. Friendship with other Parliamentary colleagues helps in pushing Meghalaya's agenda even with MPs who know nothing about our state. Other issues our MP need to introduce in Parliament are the seemingly impossible task of improving Shillong's traffic congestion. There are various technologies developed specifically to introduce rapid urban transport. Bringing in such improvements through Central assistance will be a boon for all concerned.

Then there is tourism that is now officially accepted as the state's biggest economic engine. Space prevents me from naming all the tourism areas and places that still await development but let us take Umiam lake as an example. It has all the potentials of attracting tourists. It will be hypocrisy and deception of the first order if we develop 5-star tourism infrastructure in and round the lake while leaving its water quality as dirty, polluted and compromised as it is today!

Today Umiam lake forms the world's biggest cesspool fed with raw sewage and garbage from both the Umshyri and the Umkhrah. Umiam is a waterbody that has lost its natural ecosystem and turned into a stagnant, toxic trap for waste. Restoring its health is imperative if we are sincere in showcasing Umiam as a prime tourist destination. Business ethics commands that we as hosts cannot tempt tourist clients into beautiful but toxic tourist sites. This demands that Umiam Lake's sources of pollution be addressed first. We therefore need a MP who can convince the highest echelons in both the Urban, Tourism and DONER Ministry in Delhi for a comprehensive Umiam Ecotourism restoration project at the earliest. In conclusion may the best person for Shillong's development carry the day of vote counting.

Meghalaya's Education Crisis: A Wake-Up Call And The Way Forward

By Forwardman Nongrem

The recent national education rankings placing Meghalaya at the bottom among all Indian States and Union Territories should not merely be viewed as an embarrassing statistic. It should instead be treated as a serious warning regarding the future of an entire generation of students whose right to quality education is gradually being undermined by systemic failures, administrative negligence, and lack of accountability.

According to reports based on the Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0 released by the Union Ministry of Education, Meghalaya ranked 36th out of 36 States and Union Territories in overall school education performance. The report highlighted severe shortcomings in learning outcomes, school infrastructure, governance mechanisms, teacher training, and educational accessibility. Particularly alarming were reports indicating that hundreds of schools reportedly have zero enrolment while thousands operate with only single-digit student attendance.

These figures expose a troubling contradiction. Meghalaya possesses thousands of schools and a large teaching workforce, yet educational standards continue to decline. This raises serious concerns regarding policy implementation, resource allocation, monitoring systems, and the effectiveness of educational administration at various levels.

Education is not merely another department of governance; it is the constitutional backbone of social justice, equality, and human development. Article 21A of the Constitution of India guarantees every child the Right to Education. Furthermore, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 obligates the State to ensure accessible, equitable, and quality education. When educational systems repeatedly fail, the issue extends beyond administrative inefficiency and becomes a constitutional and moral concern.

The crisis is especially severe in rural and remote areas of Meghalaya, where many students continue to study in schools lacking proper classrooms, sanitation facilities, libraries, laboratories, internet access, and adequate teaching materials. In many villages, students walk long distances merely to access basic schooling, only to encounter institutions struggling with poor infrastructure and limited academic support.

The decline in educational performance also threatens the long-term socio-economic future of the State. Poor educational outcomes directly affect employment opportunities, competitive examinations, higher education prospects, and overall human resource development. Without urgent reforms, Meghalaya risks widening the gap between its youth and the rapidly evolving educational standards seen elsewhere in the country.

However, criticism alone will not solve the crisis. The present situation demands practical, transparent, and long-term corrective measures.

The Government must immediately prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy at the primary level. Many students progress to higher classes without acquiring basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. Special learning recovery programmes must therefore be introduced, particularly in rural and underperforming schools.

There is also an urgent need for rational deployment of teachers. Despite having thousands of teachers, many

schools remain understaffed while others have surplus personnel. Teacher postings must be made transparent, balanced, and based on necessity rather than influence or convenience. Rural schools deserve equal educational attention and quality teaching support.

Strict monitoring mechanisms must also be introduced. Schools with zero or extremely low enrolment should undergo detailed review and restructuring. Educational authorities must conduct regular inspections and publish transparent performance assessments of schools and district educational administrations.

Infrastructure development is equally critical. Many schools still lack proper classrooms, drinking water, electricity, digital access, toilets, laboratories, and libraries. Educational development cannot occur in the absence of basic facilities. Rural students deserve the same educational standards and opportunities available to students in urban areas.

Teacher training and accountability must also be strengthened. Regular professional training programmes should focus on modern teaching methods, digital education, and student-centred learning approaches. Simultaneously, negligence, absenteeism, corruption, and misuse of educational funds must invite strict disciplinary action.

Community participation is another essential element of educational reform. Parents, village communities, School Managing Committees, student organizations, and civil society groups must actively participate in improving educational standards. Education cannot improve through government efforts alone; it requires collective social responsibility.

The State must also expand digital education and technological accessibility. Smart classrooms, internet connectivity, and digital learning resources should be extended to remote and rural regions so that students are not left behind in the modern educational era.

To reduce dropout rates, the Government should strengthen scholarship schemes, transportation support, counselling services, vocational education, and student welfare programmes, especially for economically disadvantaged families.

Most importantly, education must be protected from political favouritism, corruption, and administrative manipulation. Appointments, transfers, and educational decisions must be based strictly on merit, legality, transparency, and public interest.

The Government of Meghalaya should therefore launch a transparent and time-bound Educational Recovery Mission with measurable targets, independent monitoring mechanisms, and public progress reports.

The students of Meghalaya are not lacking in talent or potential. They are victims of a weakened educational system that has failed to provide adequate support and opportunities. Given proper infrastructure, quality teaching, accountability, and sincere governance, the youth of Meghalaya can compete with the best in the country.

The present crisis should therefore become a turning point. Meghalaya must stop accepting poor educational outcomes as normal. The future of the State depends not on political speeches or statistical presentations, but on the quality of education delivered to its children today. Unless immediate and sincere reforms are implemented, the consequences may continue to affect generations to come.

situation does not come to an agreeable end.

We will fight, for we are children, we will revolt, for we've been taught to, but standing helpless and staying silent will never be our move. We will not be played pawns nor will we play a fool's game. A gentle push to the State Government to remind them that we still do want the future they promised us, failing which we will try to seize it on our own terms.

Yours etc.,
Iaphilaniekwor
Thangkhiw,
Via email

Editors' Guild's Concern for Press Freedom

Editor,
The Editors' Guild of India (EGI) has recently expressed deep concerns about the government's growing intolerance towards media questioning. The Guild cited the recent confrontations involving Indian officials and journalists in Norway and the Netherlands during prime minister Narendra Modi's visit to the two European countries.

The Guild, in a strongly worded statement, said that the 'embarrassing stand-offs' between Indian government officials and journalists from

the two countries were triggered after the Prime Minister declined to take questions from local media following press briefings.

The Editors Guild noted that Norway and the Netherlands rank first and second, respectively, in the World Press Freedom Index, while India stands at 157 out of 180 countries. The EGI said in the statement that, "It is a regrettable fact that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has not addressed a single open press conference during his more than a decade in power". The organisation alleged that intolerance towards questioning is increasingly visible across different levels of government, both at the Centre and in the states.

"The EGI calls on the government to refrain from treating the media as an adversary merely for doing what it is supposed to do — hold those in power accountable," the statement further added. The fact that the Guild has issued such a strongly worded statement in itself is a reflection of the malaise that has plagued the media across the country. But what is the way forward?

Yours etc.,
D Bhutia,
Guwahati

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

Constitution Versus Tradition

THE VPP-led Khasi Hills District Council and the traditional institution of Syiemship have ultimately crossed swords. Things have come to such a pass that even the banned insurgent outfit — Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) has stepped in to condemn the VPP for transgressing tradition and culture by appointing a Christian convert to the Syiemship of Hima Sohra. The HNLC also objects that the new Syiem of Hima Myllem, appointed after the suspension of the former Syiem Aiman Manik Syiem, is also a Christian. The problem with holding on to tradition while also having signed the Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union and accepting the Indian Constitution is that people selectively choose to forget their allegiance to the latter. The Autonomous District Councils are a creation of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It doesn't matter whether the person who initiated the Sixth Schedule was a Christian or someone from the indigenous faith (Niam Tynrai). JIM Nichols Roy did what he considered necessary to safeguard tribal autonomy at a time when the Khasi & Jaintia Hills were part of the State of Assam with a majority non-tribal population. Those in the HNLC today were not born at that challenging hour, so their disparaging remarks about JIM Nichols Roy are unwarranted.

The Sixth Schedule (specifically Paragraph 3) empowers Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) to legislate and regulate the appointment, succession, and administration of traditional chiefs — the Syiems — Lyngdoh, Sirdar, Sordar, Bakhraw, the Rangbah Shnong etc. The Sixth Schedule acts as the enabling framework, while specific acts passed by the ADCs — like the Myllem Syiemship Act, 2007 dictate the precise terms. Nowhere in those rules is it mentioned that a Syiem who is a Christian cannot hold office or that only a person from the Niam Tynrai can be appointed the Syiem. While the Syiems were traditionally selected, the appointment often involves a combination of nomination by the "Syiem clan" (Lai Kpoh) and affirmation/election by the electors (Basan/Myntri) of the Hima. Upon election, the Executive Committee of the District Council reviews the result and recommends the appointment. The appointment is formalized through a Sanad issued after approval. The Syiem and his Durbar can appoint a Deputy Syiem, subject to approval by the ADC.

Conditions for appointment as Syiem of Myllem are that (a) The person must have good moral character; (b) He must be a native resident of Myllem Syiemship; (c) He must be able to read, write and speak the Khasi language; (d) He must not be an employee of any recognized institution, college, university, Government Department, Government Organization or District Council; and (e) He must not be a member of any political party. Last but not least the Syiem should not have been convicted of an offence involving moral turpitude. Perhaps the Syiems forget that the District Council has an oversight role over the Syiemships which implies that the Syiems should provide annual reports of the financial accruals from all markets and other levies within the Syiemship. Hence the allegation that Aiman Syiem of Hima Myllem never paid the Khasi Hills District Council (KHDC) its dues is legitimate. Out of a figure of Rs 3.24 crore due to the KHDC, only Rs 12 lakh was remitted although the Syiemship collected Rs 25.98 crore between 2018-19 and 2024-25. The question is where did the money go? In the final analysis it is the lack of accountability in the deployment of funds by the Syiems which requires a larger discussion and not tradition.

What Makes a Khasi? Blood or Custom?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A friend told me that the basis of the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai's (SRT) approach to the court to allow the adoption of the father's surname is the premise that such a move should not affect one's recognition as Khasi so long as the individual carries "Khasi blood." There must be some technical term used in the actual appeal because an appeal to "Khasi blood" is pure nonsense. There is nothing called "Khasi blood."

There is, however, a genetic marker common across all Khasi groups — viz., Khyriam, Pnar, War, Maram, Lyngngam, and Bhoi — but that marker is also found among other groups belonging to the Austroasiatic language family. This is the Y-chromosomal haplogroup O2a1-M95, which originated in southern China around 20,000-40,000 years ago. By around 5,000-6,000 years ago, populations carrying this marker had reached South Asia, and today one of those groups is known as the Khasi. However, they are not the only ones. The same genetic marker is also carried by the Munda peoples, a collection of different ethnic groups such as the Munda, Santhal, Ho, Bhumij, Kharia, etc., who together number more than 1 crore. So, if we were to go by genetic markers — or colloquially, "blood" — then Adivasi populations would also be eligible for membership in the Khasi community, in the same way that a Khasi would also be eligible for membership in an Adivasi community. Similarly, if we were to strictly follow the logic of "blood," then individuals from the Tea Tribe communities of Assam (made up largely of Adivasi groups), who number around 60-70 lakhs, should also be allowed to claim ST status as Khasi in Meghalaya and therefore be eligible to buy land and obtain jobs through the State's Reservation Policy. Ridiculous though that may sound, it is the logical outcome of the "blood" argument.

And, of course, it is a ridiculous argument because the Khasi are different from Adivasi groups despite sharing a common ancestry that goes back thousands of years in South Asia. However, before we go into what actually defines the identity of a Khasi — or, for that matter, any ethnic group — let us first concentrate on the idea of using "blood" to delineate identity.

According to the paper "A Late Neolithic Expansion of Y Chromosomal Haplogroup O2a1-M95 from East to West" by Ganesh Prasad Arunkumar and colleagues, the proportion of Khasi speakers carrying the genetic marker Y-chromosome O2a1-M95 is actually only around 30%. However, in another paper, "Population Genetic Structure in Indian Austroasiatic Speakers: The Role of Landscape Barriers and Sex-Specific Admixture" by Gyaneshwer Chaubey and colleagues, the proportion is estimated at around 70%. The actual figure may lie somewhere in between.

So, it is quite possible that around half or more of those who claim Khasi ancestry do not carry the genetic marker associated with Austroasiatic speakers. These individuals may have originally come from outside the Khasi community but have since been accepted as part of it. What if the members of the SRT who are advocating changes to matrilineal practices are themselves not "Khasi by blood"? Should the High Court then order DNA tests for the petitioners to assess whether they even have the right to file such a PIL in the first place? If they do not carry the genetic marker, should they not be stripped of their ST status, which identifies them as belonging to the Khasi tribe?

But there is another problem. What if a DNA test reveals that an individual's autosomal ancestry (i.e., ancestry inherited from both sides of the family) is approximately one-third Khasi/Austroasiatic-related, one-third Bengali/Indo-Aryan-related, and one-third Tibeto-Burman-related (e.g., Garo, Kuki, etc.)? Is this person Khasi, Bengali, or Kuki? What should be the minimum percentage required to be considered Khasi — 50% or more? But even if there is 1% admixture from another ancestry, the individual is no longer "pure" Khasi. Do such "impure" individuals have the right to question traditions instituted by the original "pure" Khasi? Should such people also be stripped of their ST status? If the court accepts the argument of "blood," then it must make DNA testing mandatory for obtaining an ST certificate, with a fixed percentage required to qualify as Khasi, or grants ST status only to those with "uncontaminated Khasi blood."

That might remove more than half — perhaps almost all — present-day Khasis from ST status, but that would be the logical price of preserving the privilege of those claiming exclusive "Khasi blood."

But if we move away from the argument of "Khasi blood," we can actually understand what identifies an individual as Khasi. If one were to mention names such as Diengdoh, Laloo, Pariat, Kyndiah, Lamin, Langshiang, Kassar, Suting, Gassah, or Mawthoh, there would be no hesitation among Khasis in recognizing these as Khasi Kur. But if I mention names such as Sharma, Das, Bordoloi, Momin, Imchen, or Ralte, Khasis will immediately identify these surnames as non-Khasi.

Thus, membership in the community depends on whether an individual belongs to a Khasi Kur, and the basis of the Kur is matriliney. All Khasi trace their descent from an ancient ancestress — for example, Ka law Chibidi. This is also the foundation of another Khasi custom, teh-kur, a form of established relationship between two or more Khasis in which intermarriage is prohibited because they trace descent from a common ancestress. In fact, the idea of women founding clans is also embedded in the custom of tang-jait, in which a new Kur is created for a non-Khasi woman marrying into the Khasi community, making her the ancestress of all her descendants, e.g., Kharkongor, Kharmyllem, Kharkukhi, etc. If patriliney is adopted, what will happen to all these customs? How would one determine who is eligible for marriage and who is not? Customary practices governing succession and inheritance would also need to be redefined.

All these form the basis of Khasi identity because, although the Khasi share ancestry with Austroasiatic groups, they are distinct from them because of their customary practices, which are based on matrilineal traditions. Once that is gone, how does one distinguish the Khasi from other Austroasiatic groups, or even from Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan groups? Since many of these groups also follow patrilineal traditions, could they then claim ST status within the Khasi category if they carry the Y-chromosomal haplogroup O2a1-M95, which some of them indeed do? Khasi men have married outside the community, and many in the past may have assimilated into other ethnic groups as well, something now being revealed through genetic studies. Should a "Ghar Wapsi" then be conducted for such individuals?

But perhaps the most insidious effect that changes in customary norms would have

is on our political claims. The current crisis over Block I and Block II must ultimately be settled on the basis of original territorial jurisdiction. Did those areas fall under the administration of a Doloi, or under the Karbi Bangthe? If one looks at the 1961 District Census Handbook: United Mikir and North Cachar Hills, it is clearly mentioned on page 129 that the villages under Block I and Block II were under the jurisdiction of different doloiships — viz., Nartiang, Lalung Nanglung, Nanglong, Myntri, Nonging, Jynthong, Shilliang Myntang, Nongphylut, Rallaing, Shangphung, and the Myntiang Sirdarship. However, the argument from the Karbi side is that Meghalaya had relinquished its claims over these territories. The important point to remember is that the Doloiship is a Khasi institution, and therefore it demonstrates that these areas historically formed part of the domain of the Khasi Syiem of Hima Jaintiapur.

Similarly, many territorial claims may need to be defended in the future, i.e., areas that were always under the traditional Khasi institutions formed within a matrilineal framework. Therefore, the current attempts to weaken or dismantle these institutions — for example, the present crisis in Hima Sohra — in order to politically disenfranchise practitioners of the indigenous faith, may ultimately do more harm than good to the Khasi community, the majority of whom are Christian. If these traditional institutions no longer exist, does that mean that, in the future, areas inhabited by non-Khasis may be integrated with their ethnic counterparts elsewhere? This could mean that villages under Block I and Block II might return to Meghalaya. But what about the villages that were under the Lalung Nanglung/Nanglong Doloiship? The Lalung are not Khasi but refer to the Tiwa, who are more closely related to the Bodos. Would many such villages then be given to the Karbis, Tiwas, or other groups?

These are extremely critical questions, and they may all unravel once we begin tinkering with customary practices and traditional institutions. I am, therefore, deeply concerned about these attempts to undermine our traditions and the institutions that have emerged from them. I believe we should all be concerned about this as well.

(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)

These are extremely critical questions, and they may all unravel once we begin tinkering with customary practices and traditional institutions. I am, therefore, deeply concerned about these attempts to undermine our traditions and the institutions that have emerged from them. I believe we should all be concerned about this as well.

(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)

In today's political climate, where leaders are often seen surrounded by schedules, meetings and security layers, this simple yet deeply human gesture struck an emotional chord. Despite the responsibilities of running a state, the Chief Minister took time to welcome Genal R. Marak back home after he had suffered a distant place away from his family. It was not just protocol. It felt personal, compassionate and sincere, the kind of moment that reminds people why leadership matters.

Genal's story is heartbreaking. Leaving Meghalaya as a teenager in search of work, he reportedly ended up trapped in exploitative and abusive conditions in Jammu & Kashmir. For three long years, his family had little to no contact with him. At one point, they had even begun to fear the worst. Their pain and helplessness is difficult to imagine.

What makes this story extraordinary is how it changed because of one desperate call to the 1971 CM-CONNECT helpline.

That single call reportedly triggered a chain of rapid action — coordination between Meghalaya and Jammu & Kashmir authorities, intervention by officials, labour authorities and anti-human trafficking units, and continuous follow-ups that ultimately led to Genal being rescued within hours of the complaint reaching the system. It is rare to see governance work with such urgency and humanity, especially across states and in such sensitive circumstances.

But the highlight of the entire episode was what happened after the rescue. When Genal finally returned, the Chief Minister himself was

Let Our Youth Be Part of Meghalaya's Growth Story

By Kitdor Manik Hynniewta

People like Ngaitlang Dhar, who recently established a plywood factory in the Jaintia Hills, deserve appreciation for his vision and commitment towards the State's growth. This would also mean employing the youths of the region. Beyond investment and business, his expressed desire to prioritise the employment of locals of the region reflects a meaningful step towards strengthening Meghalaya's economy from within.

Employment should not merely mean filling vacancies. It should mean strengthening the local economy, empowering families, and creating dignity within communities. When locals are employed, the money they earn is spent locally — in our shops, markets, transport systems, food businesses, homestays, and small enterprises. One salary supports many others. This is what economists call a circular economy, where money continues to circulate within the state, creating opportunities for more people rather than flowing outward.

More importantly, local employment reduces the

them a first opportunity? Every experienced professional was once inexperienced. Skills are not magically inherited; they are developed through guidance, exposure, patience, and opportunity. Instead of constantly searching for "experienced" workers from elsewhere, we should invest in building the capacity of our own youth. A little training, mentorship, and confidence can go a very long way.

This is especially relevant in the hospitality sector, where Meghalaya has enormous potential. The government's efforts to attract investment into tourism and hospitality are commendable and necessary. Tourism can become one of the strongest drivers of employment in our state. However, investment alone should not be the final goal. The real success of investment should be measured by how many local youth are trained, employed, and empowered because of it.

This is where government departments, particularly those dealing with employment and skill development,

"Meghalaya, like the rest of India, will continue to need investors, expertise, and partnerships from across the country and beyond. Economic growth thrives on openness and collaboration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has repeatedly emphasized the importance of strengthening local economies."

painful migration of our youth to distant cities in search of livelihoods. Every year, thousands leave home carrying dreams and burdens alike, often working in unfamiliar and difficult conditions far away from their families. Many do not leave because they want to, but because they feel they have no choice. If opportunities are created here at home, perhaps more of our youth can build their future while remaining connected to their roots, culture, and communities.

At the same time, this should never be seen as a call for discrimination against those from outside the State. Growth becomes stronger when people work together, and experienced professionals from different parts of the country can also contribute immensely through knowledge sharing, mentorship, and hands-on skill development that will ultimately benefit our local workforce and strengthen Meghalaya's future.

Meghalaya, like the rest of India, will continue to need investors, expertise, and partnerships from across the country and beyond. Economic growth thrives on openness and collaboration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has repeatedly emphasized the importance of strengthening local economies. During his appeal for Indians to "travel within India" and promote domestic tourism, the larger message was clear: when people invest locally, spend locally, and support local ecosystems, the nation as a whole benefits.

The same principle applies here in Meghalaya. If tourism, hospitality, and investment are growing in our state, then the benefits of that growth must also reach our local youth and economy.

Of course, one common concern often raised is that local youth may not possess the required skills or experience. It is a fair concern. But it is also important to acknowledge a larger national reality. Several reports over the years have pointed out that a significant percentage of Indian graduates are not fully job-ready. According to the India Skills Report and various employability studies, only around 45-50% of graduates in India are considered employable in industry-ready roles. This means the problem is not unique to Meghalaya — it is a national challenge.

So the real question is: when will young people become skilled if no one is willing to train them or give

must become active stakeholders in investment agreements. Investors should be encouraged not only to build hotels or businesses, but also to invest in skilling local youth and prioritizing them in recruitment.

Take Sohra as an example. It is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the country today, filled with homestays, guesthouses, and hotels. Across these establishments are local youth who have learned hospitality not from prestigious institutes, but from experience, observation, resilience, and hard work. Many of them perform exceptionally well despite never attending hotel management schools.

And honestly, hospitality is already deeply rooted in the nature of our people. The warmth with which tourists are welcomed in Meghalaya is something visitors often remember long after they leave. That human connection, kindness, and sincerity cannot always be taught in classrooms. It is already present in our communities.

So why should we constantly "import" human resources when we already possess capable local talent?

What many of these youth need is not replacement — but refinement. A little training here, some exposure there, and they are more than capable of handling professional responsibilities.

I have personally witnessed young people managing entire properties with six or seven rooms almost single-handedly — handling reception, guest coordination, breakfast preparation, housekeeping supervision, and customer support — while still maintaining excellent reviews on platforms like Airbnb. These are not theories or assumptions. They are realities happening quietly around us every day. When we connect all these dots, the picture becomes clear.

Local employment means empowered youth. Empowered youth means stronger families. Stronger families mean stronger communities. And when money earned in Meghalaya is spent in Meghalaya, the state economy grows stronger from within.

At the end of the day, this is simply a personal reflection — a hope that growth and development should not remain concentrated in the hands of a few, but should create opportunities where everyone gets a fair share of the cake.

Letters to the Editor

Quo Vadis HNLC?

Editor,
I write with deep concern and disappointment regarding the recent press statement issued on May 26, 2026 by the self-styled General Secretary of the proscribed HNLC — an organisation that continues to project itself as the defender of the jaidbyrniew while increasingly indulging in divisive and inflammatory rhetoric.

The statement in question is not only deeply biased and misleading, but appears carefully crafted to sow communal distrust and social fragmentation — a dangerous tendency in any democratic and plural society. At a time when Meghalaya requires maturity, unity, and responsible leadership, such reckless narratives only deepen public anxiety and weaken social cohesion.

One must ask: why does the HNLC continue to issue provocative statements from the safety of the shadows while ordinary people confront real threats and hardships on the ground? Where are these self-proclaimed protectors of the jaidbyrniew when the people of Lapangap and Mukroh villages struggle daily to cultivate and defend their ancestral lands amid continued encroachment by Karbis (Mikirs) and repeated assertions from the Assam government? When indigenous communities require solidarity and protection, silence on these pressing realities exposes the selective nature of the organisation's activism.

Equally troubling has been the organisation's suspicious interference in matters concerning elections,

suspensions, and removals of traditional heads, particularly within Hima Sohra. One is compelled to question the motives behind such interventions. Why would a group claiming to fight corruption repeatedly appear to shield or legitimise questionable systems and vested interests? In fact, when we have an institution (KHADC) to clean up the mess, better leave it to its wisdom to do the job.

If the HNLC genuinely stands for the welfare of the jaidbyrniew, it must demonstrate that commitment through constructive engagement and visible leadership on issues affecting the people directly — land rights, border insecurity, unemployment, and social welfare — rather than through anonymous threats and communal insinuations. It is far easier to issue statements than to stand beside the people during moments of crisis.

Sadly, their conduct increasingly reflects the old Khasi adage: "u Then Khasi u bam tang ia ki Khasi" — the Khasi serpent devours only its own people. Instead of strengthening Khasi unity during challenging times, such rhetoric weakens collective solidarity and diverts attention from the larger threats confronting indigenous communities.

If the organisation truly possesses courage and sincerity, let it demonstrate that resolve where it matters most — by defending the rights, dignity, and land of the indigenous people when they are under genuine pressure from external encroachment. Other indigenous communities across the Northeast, including the Nagas, Mizos and the Kukis have historically stood united in defending their

identity and territorial rights. Empty rhetoric and selective outrage can never substitute genuine sacrifice and principled leadership.

Equally disturbing is the repeated attempt to distort historical facts for narrow political and communal objectives. Leaders and scholars across communities have long recognised Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy as one of the principal architects of the Sixth Schedule. Attempts to communalise or selectively reinterpret such historical contributions are intellectually dishonest and dangerous to the social harmony of Meghalaya. History must not become a weapon for political manipulation.

The larger question therefore remains: does the HNLC still retain any moral authority to speak on behalf of the jaidbyrniew when its statements increasingly appear designed to divide people along religious and ideological lines? Has the organisation abandoned its original principles in favour of manufactured controversies intended solely to remain politically relevant?

Their repeated fixation on the so-called "borti" (bucket) issue involving Bah Ardent — an issue that should have long been laid to rest — further reveals a calculated political agenda rather than genuine concern for public welfare. Increasingly, it appears that certain individuals are functioning less as defenders of indigenous interests and more as instruments for vested political and financial interests seeking to manipulate public opinion and silence dissent.

Ground realities tell a very different story. Public trust and electoral outcomes clearly indicate where the confidence of the people truly lies today.

In that context, these repeated statements resemble little more than cheap political theatrics masquerading as revolutionary concern.

Most ironic of all is the organisation's claim to safeguard the jaidbyrniew irrespective of faith, religion, or social background, while simultaneously indulging in rhetoric that undermines precisely those principles. As the Khasi saying wisely reminds us: "Kam pher la u syiem dei u dieng ne u maw, ka hima te kit u rit bad u khraw" — it matters not whether the ruler is wood or stone; governance must carry by the common citizens.

Therefore, rather than sounding cymbals from afar, these self-appointed guardians should come forward openly, engage democratically, and lead from the front if they genuinely seek to serve the welfare of the people.

The future of our jylla cannot be built upon hatred, communal division, selective narratives, and political manipulation. It must instead rest upon truth, unity, democratic values, mutual respect, and a sincere commitment to the welfare of every section of society.

Yours etc.,
Bhalangki Blah
Shillong

A Caring Chief Minister

Editor,
For those watching the news regarding Genal R. Marak one image stood out. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma personally waiting at the airport to receive a young man who had just returned from a night-marish incident.

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

DK Shivakumar for Karnataka

THE Congress party is effecting a smooth leadership transition in Karnataka, where a power-shift in its favour in 2023 provided the party the moral courage to reassert its relevance in national politics. Now, veteran Siddaramaiah moves aside and his deputy, DK Shivakumar, is tipped to take charge as the chief minister as per a decision taken by party leader Rahul Gandhi in Delhi. This was in the coming for the past five months, after Siddaramaiah completed half his term. Shivkumar came upfront to press the high command with a narrative that he had been promised the CM post for the second half of the present government's five-year term. The high command asked him to hold on, as important assembly polls in five provinces were to take place in April-May, after which a decision could be announced. The assembly polls reinforced the Congress confidence in the South as the tricolour party won one more state, Kerala.

Karnataka was for long the saffron feather on the BJP's southern cap. When other states in the region kept the party at a distance, the BJP managed to wrest power in Karnataka repeatedly. The 2023 assembly polls brought the curtains down, albeit temporarily, on the BJP's dominance. The Congress seized power with the collective efforts of Siddaramaiah — who championed the 'Ahinda' cause through a socio-political unity of the BCs, Dalits and Muslims; and of DK, who was influential among the urban middle class, the elite and the rich. Put together, the two formed a formidable political force, which was supplemented with an electoral outreach by the Congress offering free bus travel for women, monthly doles for them, free gas for cooking etc. The BJP, however, recovered from its defeat by fashioning an alliance with the third force in politics — the JD(S) of former prime minister Deve Gowda and his son HD Kumaraswamy. This alliance outwitted the Congress in the 2024 parliament polls by winning 19 of the 28 LS seats, leaving just 9 for the Congress.

The Congress is mindful of the fact that the 2028 assembly polls and the 2029 parliament polls in Karnataka could be won only by the collective assertion of the Congress through a more feel-fresh governmental performance. The urban votes that the BJP mobilized need to be turned to its favour while Siddaramaiah's socially powerful segments are retained with the party. The outgoing chief minister will not be left high and dry. He would get a Rajya Sabha nomination and a prominent seat in the high command. Siddaramaiah is already at 78 and chances are that his son, currently an MLC of the Congress party, is "fairly" accommodated in the new government. Dapper DK at 64 is "resourceful" and hence a darling of the media. The BJP, however, is bound to use its full resources to seize power in the next polls. The party's image got tainted by the wayward styles of its chief minister BS Yediyurappa. The installation of a new chief minister too had failed to uplift its image in the state. But, its resounding success in the parliament polls gives the party fresh hope, thanks also to its alliance with the JDS.

Misrepresentation of Facts and Resolutions an Unpardonable Sin!

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

This write up is a response to the news item which appeared in your esteemed daily under the caption, "Church Hits out at Synod- Ousted Pastor." The news item is based on information shared by a few members of the "rival minority faction," with a vested interest.

Let me state that I am a full-fledged communicant member of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church bearing Church Registration No: 779/34. The responses provided here are based on authentic public records and information related to Church matters. I am not acting at the behest of any individual nor has this been sanctioned by the Church Committee.

The responses are in three divisions - (a) Trivialisation (b) "Independent Church" and (c) The Missing Church Funds and Special Audit Report.

Trivialisation:

Through the news report the rival minority faction is trivialising the whole issue with intent to mislead not only the members of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church, but the general public by their half-baked and concocted information. Moreover, they are ill-informed about Church history, resolutions et al. They are attempting to be-fool the general members of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church by misrepresenting facts. To claim that the current dispute within the Church is not linked to the missing funds, is a blatant lie. The seed of discord was already sowed during the Church Dorbar held on November 10, 2024, when the Special Audit Report was discussed threadbare by the general members which subsequently led to the suspension (as per Presbyterian procedures) of a few church elders by the Church Dorbar. However, a handful of disgruntled members rejected the findings of the Special Audit Report.

The minority rival faction claimed that Rev. McDonald Pynprope's dismissal was due to his refusal to sign the Bond. However, they failed to mention that during the Church Dorbar held on 29 November 2025 of which they were also a part, the matter was deliberated in accordance with Presbyterian norms and practices. The general members of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church concluded that the action taken by the KJP Synod Sepngi was arbitrary and resolved to reject this unilateral decision. This resolution was supported by the majority of members present at the Dorbar through voice vote.

Speaking of the Bond, in November 2021, the Khasi

Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Sepngi imposed an "edict" requiring all pastors, including retired senior pastors from 1967-68, to sign a Bond. This Bond conflicts with the Presbyterian Church's Constitution. If not revoked, it risks harming the ministry and administration of the Presbyterian churches under the KJP Synod Sepngi.

Since 1924, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church has undergone nine revisions, starting in 1955. The 1968 revision emphasized safeguarding Presbyterian principles and church governance, with a preface stating that the Synods should operate smoothly within the Constitution, but in cases where provisions fall short, they may adopt their own decisions and standing orders, provided they do not contradict the Constitution.

The functions and duties of Pastors are clearly laid out in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church ever since it was adopted a century ago. The duties and responsibilities of Pastors are clearly outlined in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, most recently in the Ninth Revised Edition (Chapter V, Sec. 3, pp. 58-63). Nonetheless, deliberations had been ongoing regarding the regulations and strengthening of Pastoral Ministry via a vis responsibilities and duties of individual Pastors amidst the changing times.

The composite Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod's Dorbar held in March 1981 unanimously accepted the Reorganization Commission's report, emphasizing that a Pastor's primary duties include ministering from the Bible and teaching every Sunday. Similarly, in 1989, the Dorbar reaffirmed that a Pastor (Phadri) must preach, heal the sick, build the body of Christ and work for the betterment of the church. These exhortations are in line with the Constitution of Presbyterian Church. Moreover, Rev. D.E. Syiem, in 1985, highlighted that pastoral ministry has been central to the church's ministry and suggested strengthening it without contravening the Constitution. The very first clause of the Bond (2021) is problematic as it bars pastors from participating in any association or activity that does not directly relate to the work of the Church. This restriction excludes not only secular organizations and sporting events but also the vital socio-cultural functions of pastors within the Khasi Jaintia community.

The claim that the Bond prohibits Pastors from engaging in political activities is inaccurate. In 2011, the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Sepngi had already adopted a policy discouraging Pastors from active participation in elections or contesting political office. Despite this, Late Rev. Dr. P.B.M. Basaiawmoit, who ran for Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 with the tacit support of some Senior Pastors and Church elders, nearly won the Shillong Parliamentary seat in 2014. Had he won the course of history would have been different. The Synod's policy was not enforced when he contested again in 2014.

In the Khasi-Jaintia social context, a pastor is also a member of a Kur or clan and often acts as a Kni (uncle) in the affairs of his Kur. The Bond's restrictions have effectively prevented pastors from engaging in these significant social and cultural roles. Recently, a senior pastor of the KJP Synod Sepngi was suspended for presiding over "ka tang jait" ceremony (adopting a new clan).

Furthermore, the KJP Synod Sepngi reaffirmed a resolution of the Presbyterian Synod from 1984, which states that marriage and engagements are not church matters. Despite this, its pastors continue to conduct and preside over betrothal ceremonies, which appears to contradict the provisions of the Bond. Given these circumstances, should these pastors be suspended? Or has the KJP Synod Sepngi overlooked or failed to consider its past resolutions that conflict with the Bond?

Unfortunately, these actions and the introduction of a draconian and unconstitutional edict like the Bond, contradict the well-established principles, neglecting historical resolutions and the Constitutional provisions.

It must be on record that both Rev. McDonald Pynprope and Rev. Zambolis Sawknie have not failed in their duties and responsibilities as Presbyterian Pastors. Seeking clarification regarding the Bond and refusing to sign on the dotted lines did not constitute violations of the Presbyterian Constitution. On the contrary, the actions of the aforementioned Pastors were unjustly met with summary dismissal and there is no comprehensive or robust appeal mechanism within the system. Such decisions appear to depend solely on the whims and fancies of a "powerful few" within the Executive Body.

The claim that the Bond prohibits Pastors from engaging in political activities is inaccurate. In 2011, the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Sepngi had already adopted a policy discouraging Pastors from active participation in elections or contesting political office. Despite this, Late Rev. Dr. P.B.M. Basaiawmoit, who ran for Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 with the tacit support of some Senior Pastors and Church elders, nearly won the Shillong Parliamentary seat in 2014. Had he won the course of history would have been different. The Synod's policy was not enforced when he contested again in 2014.

Rev. Dr. P.B.M. Basaiawmoit was never dismissed from his pastorate and was given full funeral rites upon his passing in February 2022.

"Independent Mawkhar Presbyterian Church":

The charge that the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church is becoming an independent church is a misrepresentation of the facts and the resolutions adopted at the Church Dorbar held on 17 January and 1 February 2026, respectively. In both these Dorbars, the members of the now-rival minority faction were present. The issue of disassociating from the KJP Synod Sepngi was deliberated at length and it was the collective decision of the majority of members present to sever ties with the KJP Synod Sepngi and to associate with any Presbyterian Synod within the Khasi-Jaintia region.

Undoubtedly, there were a handful of dissenters who opposed the decision and staged a walkout, accompanied by veiled threats to disintegrate the Church. Presbyterianism upholds democratic principles; members are free to dissent and reject decisions. However, the rule of democracy also dictates that the majority's voice prevails in all decision-making processes.

Missing Church Funds and Special Audit Report:

Regarding the missing church funds, vis a vis the Special Audit Report, the facts and figures are clear and verifiable. Since 2019, five consecutive Church Dorbars were held to address this issue, on the following dates: August 11, 2019; November 23, 2019; January 23, 2022; July 28, 2024; and November 10, 2024. During the Dorbar held on 28 July 2024, the communicant members were presented with the Special Audit Report and also a brief note highlighting the findings of the Audit was distributed to the members of the Church later.

Perhaps, the Special Audit Report uncovered several instances of financial irregularities, possible fraud and alleged forgery involving certain elders; a pastor, and a church committee member.

In conclusion, the misrepresentation of facts is unhealthy and unbecoming. I urge upon the members of the Church not to be misled and others to refrain from passing misinformation. Now it's time for the Church to heal and let those resolutions taken recently at the Church Dorbars be allowed to be implemented without any governmental interference and in a fair manner.

The Gospel of Money and Lust

By Eldora Lyngdoh

The Church once warned us that Satan would enter through temptation. We imagined he would arrive through violence, atheism or persecution. We pictured him as an external enemy, loud and visible, confronting faith from outside its walls. We were taught to guard against the world beyond the sanctuary, to be vigilant against the corruption of society, and to preserve the purity of belief by resisting what lay beyond the gates of the Church. Instead, he came quietly — through bank accounts, hidden files, private conversations, secret sexual appetites and the intoxicating hunger for power.

Today, the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Church stands wounded not merely by scandal, but by exposure. What is unfolding is not a sudden collapse, but a slow unveiling of tensions long existing beneath institutional life. Allegations of financial irregularities involving substantial sums — including the widely discussed Rs 4 crore controversy connected to church administration — have unsettled confidence in systems of stewardship and accountability. Alongside this, evidence of sexual sin involving two pastors of the KJP Synod with sex workers posted on a WordPress blog MegLeaks (<https://megleaks.wordpress.com/>) maintained by one Roy Marbanian (<https://roymarbanian.wordpress.com/>) have added a further layer of moral unease.

The Church is no longer dealing with isolated allegations. It is dealing with a crisis of trust. And trust, once fractured, does not respond easily to silence or denial. For years, religious institutions have tended to interpret crisis as something external. The Church was taught to look outward — to secularisation, moral decline, cultural erosion. But what is emerging now is a more uncomfortable possibility: that the most serious test has always been internal. Not persecution from the world, but corrosion within the institution itself.

Money and lust — two forces as old as civilisation — are not new temptations. What is new is their entanglement with institutional authority. Money, when removed from transparent scrutiny, becomes suspicion. Lust, when hidden behind moral status, becomes contradiction. When both exist within institutions that claim moral leadership, the result is not merely scandal but disillusionment.

Churches are not ordinary organisations. They are sustained not by contracts but by trust. Contributions are acts of faith. When questions arise over financial transparency, even without legal conclusion, the damage extends into the spiritual relationship between believer and institution. Perception alone becomes powerful enough to reshape belief.

A further development in this broader environment has been the gradual emergence of independent or parallel worship and fellowship structures outside traditional church governance. Small ministries, online fellowship networks, and independent preaching platforms have grown in visibility in recent years. Among these are initiatives such as PotterNet associated with Bantei Mawpdah, alongside other informal or semi-formal worship spaces that operate with varying degrees of organisational independence.

While these developments are often explained as responses to spiritual renewal, outreach innovation, or pastoral calling, they also reflect a deeper institutional reality: fragmentation of trust. When believers feel uncertain about established structures, they often seek alternative spaces of worship, teaching, or fellowship that feel more direct, personal, or transparent. This is not unique to any single institution, but it becomes significant when it occurs alongside unresolved questions within the mainstream church body itself.

In this sense, the rise of independent setups is not

merely a parallel religious trend; it is also a symptom of changing perceptions of authority. Where trust in central structures weakens, spiritual expression tends to decentralise. Authority becomes dispersed. Congregational loyalty becomes fluid. And the idea of a single unified moral voice begins to give way to multiple competing interpretations of faith.

The deeper crisis, however, is not simply fragmentation outside the Church, but fragmentation within it. In moments of strain, institutional response often becomes uneven: competing narratives emerge, defensive positions harden, and internal divisions widen. Even legitimate questions risk being interpreted as hostility, and inquiry becomes entangled with suspicion. Over time, this weakens both authority and trust simultaneously.

Silence in such a context is no longer neutral. It becomes interpretation. And interpretation, left unmanaged, fills the vacuum of clarity. What is unfolding therefore is not merely a reputational issue, but a crisis of moral authority. Religious institutions derive legitimacy not only from doctrine but from perceived integrity. When that perception weakens, institutions do not collapse immediately. They enter a slower phase of erosion — where participation continues outwardly, but trust diminishes inwardly. This is the most difficult stage: not rejection, but withdrawal.

Across history, churches have struggled with the gap between spiritual authority and human imperfection. When acknowledged openly, this tension can be managed through humility and reform. When denied, it deepens into structural contradiction. This is why money and lust function here not as sensational categories but as structural stress points. Money tests stewardship. Lust tests character. Together they test whether moral teaching is matched by institutional practice. When they diverge significantly, credibility erodes regardless of official statements.

Yet it would be simplistic to reduce the present moment into binaries of guilt and innocence. Real institutional crises are layered: administrative weaknesses, communication failures, internal disagreements, and contested interpretations of events. Truth in such contexts is not immediate; it is reconstructed through process, transparency, and restraint. This is why neither outrage nor denial is sufficient. What is required is structured accountability — credible financial scrutiny where necessary, formal processes for addressing allegations, and communication that is clear rather than strategically ambiguous.

The Church must also recognise that authority today is no longer insulated from questioning. In an age of rapid circulation of information, moral authority must be continuously demonstrated rather than assumed. Anything less is interpreted — fairly or unfairly — as concealment. Even within this difficult moment, however, there remains a possibility of renewal. Institutions are defined not only by crisis but by response. A Church that confronts its weaknesses with honesty does not lose dignity; it strengthens it. But such renewal demands courage — the courage to prioritise truth over comfort and reform over reputation.

Ultimately, the question before the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Church is not whether it can survive controversy. It is whether it can survive opacity. Because institutions rarely collapse in a single moment. They weaken slowly when truth becomes negotiable, accountability becomes optional, and silence begins to function as governance. And when that happens, even the most sacred sanctuary begins to feel distant to those who once found in it their moral home.

(The author is a retired school teacher, a devout Christian and mother of two. She is a resident of Jaiaw Umphohiew, Shillong.)

Letters to the Editor

Need for Collective Educational Responsibility

Editor, The recent editorial (26/05/2026), along with the thoughtful observations made by Dr Andy T G Lyngdoh and Dr Veronica Pala in their Letters to the Editor, and the Special Article by Forwardman Nongrem (27/05/2026), deserve sincere appreciation for drawing public attention towards the educational challenges confronting Meghalaya today.

What makes these writings important is not criticism alone, but the genuine concern they reflect for the future of our students. At a time when many young people and parents are silently anxious about educational uncertainty, such discussions become necessary and meaningful.

The issues highlighted regarding poor educational rankings, school dropouts, uneven infrastructure, low enrolment in many schools, and confusion surrounding higher education policies deserve serious reflection from all stakeholders. These are sensitive and complex challenges which have developed over many years and therefore require collective understanding, patience, and long-term solutions. I feel it is also impor-

tant to acknowledge that improving education in a geographically difficult and socially diverse State like ours (Meghalaya) is not an easy responsibility. We know many rural and remote areas continue to face infrastructural and accessibility challenges. Nevertheless, the future of our children requires that continuous reforms and corrective measures remain a top priority for everyone concerned.

At the school level, there is perhaps a need for greater focus on strengthening foundational learning, improving school infrastructure, ensuring balanced teacher deployment, and providing transportation support for students from remote villages. Rationalisation of schools, wherever necessary, may be carried out carefully and sensitively so that no child is deprived of access to education.

As stated in the special article there is also a growing need to relieve teachers from excessive non-academic duties so that they can focus fully on their primary responsibility of teaching and mentoring students. Teachers perform one of the most important responsibilities in society and their time, energy, and skills should be utilised mainly for effective, result-oriented classroom teaching and student development. Strengthening regular teacher training, academic monitoring, and supportive learning environments may further improve

educational outcomes.

Similarly, at the higher education level, students would greatly benefit from greater clarity, counselling, and timely communication regarding the implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme and future academic pathways. Young students standing at important turning points of their academic life need confidence and guidance to plan their future properly.

There is also a need for stronger cooperation between educational institutions, teachers, parents, community leaders, student bodies, and policymakers. Education cannot improve through isolated efforts alone. It requires collective responsibility and a shared commitment towards the welfare of students.

At the same time, society too must play its role by encouraging regular attendance, supporting government schools, respecting teachers, and creating an atmosphere where education is valued, not merely for employment but for human development and social progress. Our students, I believe, are no less capable than students from any other State. They are talented, hardworking, and full of potential. Given proper guidance, greater focus on teachers' primary responsibility of teaching, better infrastructure, stability, and opportunities, they can compete successfully anywhere in the country and beyond.

One sincerely hopes that the important concerns raised through the editorial, letters, and special article will encourage healthy public discussion, collective reflection, and constructive educational reforms for the benefit of both present and future generations.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

NEET Paper Leak and Youth Frustration

Editor,

Why on earth does the government treat education as nothing less than a stepchild? To put it plainly, it is overly neglected! A glaring example of this is the latest NEET paper leak. It shows us clearly that our exam halls are no longer about "merit" but about money, muscle, and manipulation. A whopping twenty-two lakh students sweated for months, only to discover that a "guess paper" of major subjects was doing the rounds on WhatsApp. Is it not disgusting, is it not frustrating? Has this not robbed them of the future they worked so hard for?

Of course, small fries like Manish Yadav, Rakesh Mandaviya, P. V. Kulkarni, Manisha Gurnath Mandhare, Manisha Sanjay Haval-dar and others were arrested in Rajasthan, Haryana, and

Maharashtra. Many allege that they are just foot soldiers. Behind them stands a network of coaching mafias, unscrupulous teaching fraternity, and corrupt officials who strike "shady deals". The government, in its usual style, cancelled the exam and ordered a CBI probe. That probe, I believe, is nothing more than a lullaby. It may calm the public while the guilty sit back in cosy air-conditioned offices.

The tragedy does not end with cancelled exams. Imagine millions of young students burning the midnight oil for years, only to be told that the exam is called off. Look at the consequences. In Goa, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, four young NEET aspirants committed suicide. Think of the parents who spent all their savings and struggled all along for the future of their sons and daughters. Do these extreme steps by youths not speak of despair, hopelessness, and exhaustion?

Please remember, this is not just a one-off case. In the past two years, we have seen NEET leaks in 2024 and 2026, UGC NET cancelled after a cyber breach, UP Police recruitment papers floating on social media, and Telangana's TSPSC staff selling exam papers like vegetables in a mandi bazar. Frankly speaking, if exams are the gateway to opportunity, then India's gates are rusted, broken, and guarded by incompetent authorities. The NTA, our esteemed

exam watchdog, now only acts like a toothless old tiger, roaring but never striking the offenders.

Given this terrible academic mess, one wonders when the government will finally get serious about appointing a "competent" head to lead education in India. Until we have an upright and tough taskmaster, the state of education in this country will keep sinking deeper. Yes, the government must stop playing with the lives of our youth and their future employability. I am certain that countless students, out of frustration, have already quit education for good. This is because they have completely lost faith in the system. Who can disagree that the current rise of the so-called Cockroach Janta Party is nothing but the outcome of frustration among our youngsters. Employment remains the bane of the present age.

It is heart-breaking to see IT graduates in big cities working as delivery boys for Pizza Hut, Zomato, Flipkart, or Amazon. In Meghalaya, BA graduates are forced to earn a living by working as labourers, writing numbers in local archery tree counters, or riding Rapido!

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong

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

Opposition Party Not Pressure Group

NEWS reports that the Voice of People Party (VPP) is planning to gherao the State Secretariat comes as no surprise since all political parties are now in election mode and VPP is known for its histrionics. The bye-election to the Shillong Parliamentary Constituency is scheduled to be held within the 6-month period since the seat became vacant following the sudden demise of Dr Ricky AJ Syngkon of the VPP on February 19 this year. By this calendar the election should be held soon but not later than August this year. The VPP, UDP, Congress and NPP have selected their candidates. The BJP is still waiting for a candidate to emerge. Now coming to the VPP's threat of storming the Secretariat, the Party has every right to do so provided it has the permission of the District Administration and the Police. After all there is no knowing as to what turn the protest will take. Security restrictions around government buildings is anyway the task of the district administration.

The Indian Constitution allows citizens the right to assemble peacefully under Article 19(1)(b). However, the state can impose reasonable restrictions for public order, security, traffic management and protection of government functioning. A "gherao" could become legally problematic if it involves: blocking entry/exit to the Secretariat. However, the Government could impose Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) (previously Section 144 Cr P.c.) on the plea that it apprehends violence or some unforeseen circumstances. Normally political parties hold demonstrations near the state secretariat, outside the legislative assembly or district offices, but police usually designate a protest zone, or impose barricades and detain protesters if the protest turns lawless. Physically surrounding or obstructing the Secretariat is often restricted depending on circumstances.

But the question is whether this is a posturing by the VPP in view of the bye-election and because the Party wants to make its presence felt. In a democracy, the Opposition party plays a crucial constitutional and political role. It is not the role of the Opposition to be "against" the Government. A constructive Opposition helps keep the democratic system accountable and balanced. The public looks at the Opposition to be the bulwark against the high-handedness of the Government. The Opposition questions Government decisions, policies, spending and actions in the legislature and in public. This helps prevent misuse of power and promotes transparency. It is also the role of the Opposition to provide a set of alternative policy proposals. At the moment Meghalaya is being pilloried for being the worst performer in the country as far as education is concerned. The Opposition should be sitting to study the present state of education in Meghalaya and list out the maladies while prescribing viable solutions. Would the Opposition stand with the Government in closing down all schools with zero recruitment over decades?

The Opposition is meant to prevent the ruling party from riding roughshod over democratic principles such as the independence of the judiciary, of election bodies, of media freedom, and civil liberties when they are under pressure. Has the Opposition in Meghalaya ever done that? A democracy works best when the ruling party governs effectively, and the Opposition criticizes responsibly and constructively. This of course is an ideal situation and is unlikely to happen in Meghalaya since both sides indulge in posturing. The welfare of the people come last on their agenda.

Accompanying the Departure: Niamtre Preparations for Mourning in Shangpung Pohshnong

By Anna Notsu

In relatively large villages such as Shangpung, death arrives rather frequently due to the large population, or at least it appears so. Death has become inseparable from the everyday pattern of life. While, in a medical world, death is associated with the end of one's life, this is not the case for the Niamtre in Shangpung. Rather, people see it as the beginning of a journey for the deceased to join their forefathers and foremothers and, in fact, "return" to where Blai, the Almighty God, resides. My local companion therefore once said, "Death is a transformation from the material to the spiritual."

Across the world, funeral services are, regardless of religious views and differences, often considered occasions of mourning—over the absence of a loved one in the world we still inhabit. Yet in Shangpung Pohshnong, such mourning is not quite straightforward. While mourning itself may be universal, the way it takes shape differs. Here, funeral services involve several stages of preparation for the divine journey while simultaneously honouring one's death as a continuation of clan history. Mourning, then, is not necessarily a simple expression of sorrow. As the cremation fire takes hold of the body and the deceased departs this earthly realm, the wailing and sobbing that have lingered in the background also gradually subside. Betel leaves with a tiny dollop of lime and cracked areca nuts are passed around the women seated in a circle on the hill slope of the crematorium. As though at a communal gathering, jokes are exchanged and laughter is shared. One may wonder, where has the mourning gone?

There is a belief that crying aloud can disturb the spiritual journey of the departed. People grow up with this teaching and, over time, learn to control themselves. The goal of cremation is to send off a loved one, now no longer breathing, peacefully to the divine world. Hence, the deceased is bathed, anointed with mustard oil and offered kwai, daily items, tea and rice freshly prepared in the morning. Earthly routines are extended as a way of showing the highest care for another human being whose soul is about to depart from the body.

At the same time, for the Niamtre in Shangpung, a funeral service is also an opportunity to pay respect to

those who passed away long ago, commonly referred to as ancestors. Indeed, the bones of the deceased will later be brought to the clan ossuary. Where the bones are placed depends on the kind of death and the deeds of that person, but in general they are placed together with those of clan forebears. At that moment, female clan members offer the same set of items to both the deceased and the ancestors—that is, those who contributed to the prosperity of the clan.

When I first stepped into the "tpep", where the ossuary is located, an uncanny feeling arose within me. It was not merely a memorial forest, but a sacred one that guarded the collected bones of the deceased. This sacred forest observes the evolution of each clan through the circulation of life and death, sustained through the practice of honouring and remembering the dead. The act of accompanying the departure of a loved one overlaps with remembering all those who came before.

During my first visit to the ossuary, I asked several clan elders who had taken me there whether they felt afraid of being in that place. One replied, "Why should we? They are all our siblings." It was not that I was afraid of the dead, or their souls for that matter, but rather it was the whole atmosphere that made me feel "something" as though being watched. Ordinary practices such as bathing, food preparation and continued daily conversation at the crematorium have long maintained this otherworldly sense. A while ago, I attended a funeral service in Shangpung. Since the deceased was a twin, his cremation process differed from others. It required open incineration, and no betel bundles were offered to the deceased except by his immediate family. In general, twins are highly regarded and, as a rule, the first bite of any cooked meal must be offered to them. Especially when they are still young children, a great degree of care is devoted to protection by rigorously following customary rules intended to prevent harm and danger. Given this, twins generally avoid consuming food outside their homes. This protected separation continued even after their death.

The crematorium is, much like the tpep, forested. Since it

is located on a hill slope, people walking towards it on the day of a funeral service often exchange a particular greeting by asking, "Lai lum?" (Going to the hillside?). Most attendees sat facing the fire, where a few men carefully tended the fire. At that moment, the dark green leaves of the surrounding trees sheltered us from the intense heat and direct sunlight. While the crematorium itself is not considered a sacred forest, no one enters it except to attend a cremation service. Thus, in a similar way to how the tpep is protected, the forest there has so far remained undisturbed.

There are layered forms of protection involved in the whole process of accompanying the departure: protection of customs, protection of the departed soul, protection of clan continuity and protection of the environment that enables such a departure to occur. From another perspective, this kind of protection forms a localised mode of conservation that takes into account both nature and culture without drawing a clear boundary between them. Thinking this way, the entire process of funeral service among the Niamtre in Shangpung honours the cycles of life and death, which are distinct yet closely associated with one another. It does so carefully and in a controlled manner. Mourning here, then, becomes part of this wider ritual of protection.

Over the course of my long-term engagement in the Jaintia Hills, I have encountered many deaths, just as I have witnessed the arrival of new life. Some deaths, and their consequences, affected me more than others, at times leaving me unsure of how to react to the unbearable sorrow suddenly brought upon those whom I have come to consider family. Death, while an extraordinary life event that the living themselves cannot know, still finds its place within the everyday.

Even though, as my research companion in Shangpung told me, "death is not a real death," the absence of what was once living makes a permanent change to those who remain on Earth, continuing the lives we still have. What death leaves behind feels very real. The absence of explicit grief, expressed through crying for instance,

does not negate the profound sadness that follows the loss of a loved one. Rather, grief becomes folded into the careful and controlled work of accompanying the departed. Sorrow is not always meant to erupt outwardly, but to move alongside ritual obligations, customary responsibilities and continued acts of care.

Each time people walk up the hill to the small forested crematorium, the connections between the dead and the living are renewed in many ways. The forest and hill, too, participate in this process. The crematorium, the tpep and the house of the deceased, are not just locations where necessary funeral rituals take place, but environments that sustain relations across generations.

In Shangpung, where clan-ship, intricate kinship and neighbourhood ties shape how life unfolds, religion alone cannot explain how the atmosphere at the crematorium can shift from silence and tears to ordinary conversation and shared laughter. These moments do not diminish grief. Instead, they reveal how death remains part of everyday life, not outside it. The routines of life continue around death, just as the dead remain part of the social world of the living. In this sense, mourning is not simply an expression of loss—but a practice of sustaining relationships despite absence.

Each funeral service I attended reminded me that mourning is not always most visible in tears alone. It is often found in the preparation of food in the early morning, the careful tending to visitors or the collective walk uphill towards the crematorium among friends, neighbours and relatives. In accompanying the dead, people also continue caring for the living, for the clan and for the world that sustains them all.

And perhaps it is there, within these acts of accompaniment and protection, that grief and love come to exist together.

(The author is a PhD scholar from Leiden University, the Netherlands currently doing research in Jaintia Hills. Her PhD research is part of a five-year project, 'Futuring Heritage: Conservation, Community and Contestation in the Eastern Himalayas, initiated by Leiden University and Ashoka University. Her research is funded by NWO and the Delta on the Move Foundation.)'

Building Systems for Care: Anganwadi Transformation in Meghalaya

By Bhaswati K Goswami

"The new centre has transformed our community—enrollment has grown as the space is safe, attractive, and welcoming. It also supports vaccination drives, health check-ups, and awareness sessions with strong community participation. Bright interiors and the veranda create a comfortable learning and play environment. Remaining needs include fencing for safety in outdoor areas, a dedicated storeroom for bulk rations, and an LPG connection to enable on-site cooking of meals" Sukmon Tangsang, Supervisor, Mawpuk Kshaid A, Bhoirymbong Block

This testimonial from Sukmon, an Anganwadi staff in Ri Bhoi district reflects a deeper transformation in how early childhood infrastructure is being imagined and delivered in Meghalaya. What was once seen as a basic service facility is now being redefined as a holistic, child-centric, and climate-responsive space, enabled through design innovation and strong government partnerships.

The Anganwadi Centre, is often the first place beyond home for a child where care is shared. For women and adolescent girls, it is often the first consistent point of contact with formal health and nutrition systems. These centres are a frontline pillar of community health, nutrition security, and social support aligned with the goals of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme.

What often remains invisible is how deeply these experiences are affected by the built space itself. Whether a room is unbearably hot by noon, whether light filters in or leaves corners dark, whether the floor welcomes play or restricts it, whether a mother feels comfortable enough to sit, talk, and stay for a while—these factors silently influence care, learning, and dignity. The built infrastructure integrates health, nutrition, learning, and character-building, playing an active role in shaping a child's growth from ages 3-6.

SELCO Foundation's (SF) work in early childhood infrastructure is rooted in this understanding. Over the years, the organisation's engagement has evolved from improving individual Anganwadi Centres to supporting a much larger ecosystem. Today, the work is about strengthening systems—bringing together government missions, district administrations, engineers, frontline workers, and communities—to ensure that Anganwadi and Early Child Development (ECD) spaces are designed, built, and sustained with real needs in mind. The journey to this transformation has been gradual and layered—beginning with individual projects across India, evolving through district-level innovation, and culminating in a statewide ecosystem partnership.

Much of SF's approach has been shaped by learning from the ground, particularly through earlier work in the Garo Hills and East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya. Across these contexts, Anganwadi Centre infrastructure reflects common challenges that directly affect the effectiveness of ICDS delivery—ranging from environmental stresses to poorly designed interiors. Many centres struggle with inadequate ventilation, low daylight, inefficient layouts, and materials unsuited to local conditions, limiting how children learn and play while reducing the comfort and efficiency of workers. Addressing these issues does not always require large-scale interventions; small, context-sensitive corrections—such as improving airflow, enhancing natural light, and reorganising spaces—can significantly improve usability.

A significant shift occurred in 2023 with the formal partnership between SF and the Deputy Commissioner of Ri Bhoi district. This collaboration, to imple-

ment 8 new model AWCs across selected sites, marked a move away from isolated pilot projects towards a district-led, systemic approach to reimagining Anganwadi Centres as ECD spaces. The partnership was rooted in co-creation, bringing together administrators, engineers, and communities to identify real needs and develop context-specific solutions.

Through participatory workshops, design templates, and continuous capacity building, the initiative enabled local stakeholders to engage with concepts of thermal comfort, energy efficiency, and inclusivity. Engineers, who traditionally focused on estimation, were introduced to design thinking and began to understand how spatial planning influences both cost and outcomes. This shift in capacity was as important as the physical infrastructure itself.

The model Anganwadi Centres developed in Ri Bhoi translated these ideas into tangible design strategies. Spaces were planned to accommodate multiple functions—education, nutrition, healthcare and maternal services.

Design strategies such as cross ventilation, high ceilings, and ventilated roofing reduced indoor heat and improved thermal comfort. Large windows and verandas enhanced natural light and created flexible indoor-outdoor learning environments. Child-friendly features, such as accessible windowsills and interactive wall openings, made the spaces more engaging, while ramps ensured universal accessibility.

Central to this child-centred approach is the integration of Building as Learning Aid (BaLA) principles, which view the built environment itself as a learning tool. Everyday elements—walls, steps, windows, and open spaces—are designed to spark curiosity, support play, and encourage exploration, from counting steps and story-telling murals to shaded outdoor areas usable even during rains.

The Ri Bhoi model demonstrated that when district administrations lead and partnerships are structured around co-creation, scalable change becomes possible. The MoU with the Deputy Commissioner in 2023 created a replicable template. At the same time, the integration of energy-conscious design reduced dependence on external energy inputs, making the centres more sustainable in the long term.

As the initiative moved from design to implementation, some practical challenges began to surface. Site visits in 2025 pointed to variations in construction quality, minor inconsistencies in execution, and gaps such as incomplete sanitation systems or finishing. In a few instances, small departures from design drawings led to features that were less functional than intended, such as kitchen counters at unsuitable heights or ramps that were not fully accessible.

These findings underscored an important lesson: design innovation alone is not sufficient without strong implementation systems. Issues of financing, contractor capacity, and monitoring mechanisms needed to be addressed to ensure that the intended benefits of design were fully realised on the ground. This reinforced SF's evolving role as not just a design expert, but an ecosystem builder working across policy, finance, and execution.

Building on the learnings from Ri Bhoi, SF's work expanded significantly in 2024 through a partnership with the Meghalaya Early Childhood Development Mission (MECDM). This marked the transition from district-level innovation to a statewide systems approach.

Today, the work in Meghalaya represents more than an infrastructure programme—it is an emerging model for how design, energy, policy, and community engagement can converge to enable human development at scale.

Letters to the Editor

Correction:

In the article, "Misrepresentation of Facts and Resolutions an Unpardonable Sin," by Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh (ST May 29, 2026) there was a minor typo error at para 8, line 5 under the sub-heading "Trivialisation where a conjunction "and" was inadvertently added to the sentence, "marriage and engagements." It should have read "marriage engagements." The line pertains to the resolution on "Kajingpynteh ktien," which was loosely translated in the original text as "marriage engagements. Adding the conjunction "and" could entirely change the meaning of the sentence or resolution, potentially leading to reader misunderstanding.

The text should read as follows:

"Furthermore, the KJP Synod Sepngi reaffirmed a resolution of the Presbyterian Synod from 1984, which states that marriage engagements are not church matters. Despite this, its pastors continue to conduct and preside over betrothal ceremonies, which appears to contradict the provisions of the Bond. Given these circumstances, should these pastors be suspended? Or has the KJP Synod Sepngi overlooked or failed to consider its past resolutions that conflict with the Bond?"

The error is regretted. Also, regarding the article, "The Gospel of Money and Lust" (ST May 29, 2026) ostensibly written by one Eldora Lyngdoh, who claims to be a resident of Jaiaw Umphohiew, a person with the same name and surname residing in Mawkhari clarifies that she did not write the article in question.

Editor

Evidence-Based Care for Opioid Dependence

Editor,

There is often a misunderstanding in society regarding Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST), especially for individuals who remain on treatment for many years. Many people wrongly assume that long-term use of medicines such as buprenorphine means a person is "still addicted." However, modern medical science and global public health evidence clearly show otherwise.

Opioid dependence is now internationally recognised as a chronic medical condition, much like hypertension, diabetes, or HIV. Just as a person with high blood pressure may need lifelong medication, or a person living with HIV requires daily antiretroviral therapy (ART), some individuals with opioid dependence may also require long-term maintenance treatment to remain healthy, functional, and free from harmful illicit drug use.

Buprenorphine, one of the medicines used in OST, has been extensively studied across the world for decades and is considered both safe and effective when taken under medical supervision. A landmark study published in JAMA Psychiatry found no serious adverse health effects associated with long-term buprenorphine maintenance treatment. (JAMA Network). A major Cochrane Review involving 31 clinical trials and over 5,000 participants concluded that buprenorphine is highly effective in

retaining people in treatment and reducing illicit opioid use. (Cochrane)

The World Health Organization (WHO) also recognises opioid agonist maintenance treatment as an essential health service and states that uninterrupted access to such treatment is crucial for people with opioid dependence. (World Health Organization)

Importantly, OST is not simply about stopping drug use; it is about restoring lives. Individuals on treatment are often able to work, support families, avoid crime, reduce HIV and hepatitis transmission risks, and reintegrate into society with dignity. Studies across many countries have shown that OST significantly reduces overdose deaths and improves overall quality of life.

There is also no fixed global or national rule that a person must stop OST after a certain number of years. Under the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) in India, treatment duration is decided on an individual basis between the patient and the treating medical team. While tapering and eventually stopping medication may be possible and desirable for some individuals, others may benefit from continuing maintenance therapy for many years, or even lifelong, depending on their clinical condition and risk of relapse.

The goal of treatment should not merely be "drug-free status" at any cost, but stability, recovery, health, and survival. For many people, OST is not replacing one addiction with another; it is replacing chaos with care, risk with recovery, and hopelessness with a chance to live normally again.

As a society, we must

move away from stigma and towards compassion and evidence-based understanding. Addiction is a medical condition, and those undergoing treatment deserve support, not judgment.

Yours etc.,
A. Thangkiew,
Shillong

Need for Recruitment Opportunities for Forensic Science Graduates in Meghalaya

Editor,

The importance of forensic science in modern criminal investigation has increased significantly over the years. Scientific evidence such as fingerprints, DNA, toxicological findings, cyber evidence, bloodstain analysis, and digital forensics now play a major role in supporting accurate and evidence-based investigation across India. Meghalaya has already taken progressive steps toward strengthening scientific policing through the development of Mobile Forensic Crime Scene Units and forensic support systems under the Directorate of Forensic Science Laboratory. These initiatives are highly encouraging and reflect the growing importance of scientific investigation within the state.

However, as forensic infrastructure continues to expand, there is also a need to create greater recruitment opportunities for trained forensic science graduates,

especially students who have completed Bachelor's degrees in Forensic Science and possess practical knowledge in crime scene management and evidence handling.

Today, many students from Meghalaya and the Northeast pursue forensic science with the hope of contributing toward scientific investigation and law enforcement. During their academic training, students are introduced to crime scene investigation, evidence preservation, fingerprint examination, forensic photography, questioned documents, toxicology, cyber forensics, and laboratory procedures. Despite these skills and technical exposure, many graduates face difficulty finding opportunities due to limited entry-level forensic posts.

Recent recruitments under the Mobile Forensic Crime Scene Unit have mostly focused on postgraduate qualifications. While higher expertise is important for specialized scientific roles, there is also scope for introducing more field-level and assistant-level positions for qualified B.Sc forensic science graduates who can support investigation teams during crime scene examination and evidence collection.

Scientific handling of evidence is extremely important because even minor errors at a crime scene can affect the outcome of investigations and judicial proceedings. Trained forensic graduates can assist in preserving crime scenes, documenting evidence, maintaining chain of custody, forensic photography, evidence packaging, and supporting scientific officers during field operations. Creating more entry-level forensic posts could not only strengthen district-level sci-

entific investigation but also provide meaningful employment opportunities for educated youth within the state. Such opportunities would encourage more students to pursue skill-based scientific education while contributing positively toward the criminal justice system.

With the rise of cyber-crime, narcotics-related offences, digital evidence, and technologically advanced criminal activities, the need for trained forensic personnel is becoming more important than ever. Expanding recruitment opportunities for forensic science graduates can help Meghalaya continue progressing toward a stronger and more scientific policing system.

Recent initiatives taken by the state government toward forensic crime scene investigation are commendable. Continued focus on training, infrastructure development, and inclusive recruitment for forensic graduates can further strengthen the future of evidence-based policing in Meghalaya. This article is written from the perspective of a forensic science student who believes that educated youth trained in scientific investigation can contribute meaningfully toward strengthening evidence-based policing and forensic support systems within the state.

Yours etc.,
Naphisabet Diengdoh
(Final Year B.Sc Forensic Science Student)
Via email

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

Blue Origin rocket explosion puts NASA's Artemis in jeopardy

During an evening test fire on May 28, 2026, a Blue Origin New Glenn rocket exploded, engulfing the launchpad in a massive fireball. The spectacular fire, caught on video, not only destroyed the rocket but also appears to have significantly damaged Blue Origin's only launchpad at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. Fortunately, no one was injured.

Though it is too early to know the cause of the explosion, it will prove a significant setback for Blue Origin and its New Glenn rocket program. New Glenn is the company's only rocket able to reach Earth orbit.

As a space policy expert, I see significant consequences coming as a result of the failure, not just for the company but for NASA's lunar ambitions.

What we know so far

This explosion occurred when Blue Origin was conducting a static fire test of its newest New Glenn booster. These kinds of tests keep the rocket connected to the ground equipment but fire its seven engines to ensure they are working properly before launch.

Explosions such as this, while uncommon, are not unheard of. In September 2016, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket blew up just prior to its own static fire test, destroying an Israeli communications satellite it was planned to bring to orbit. It took four months to determine the root cause and more than a year to rebuild the launchpad. At that point, SpaceX had two launchpads, allowing the company to return to flight in January 2017.

Had the test fire been successful, it would have led to Blue Origin's fourth launch of its powerful New Glenn rocket. However, New Glenn has not been without its problems.

Of its three launches so far, only one was completely successful. On its previous launch earlier this year, the second stage malfunctioned, preventing it from deploying the satellites it was carrying in the right orbit.

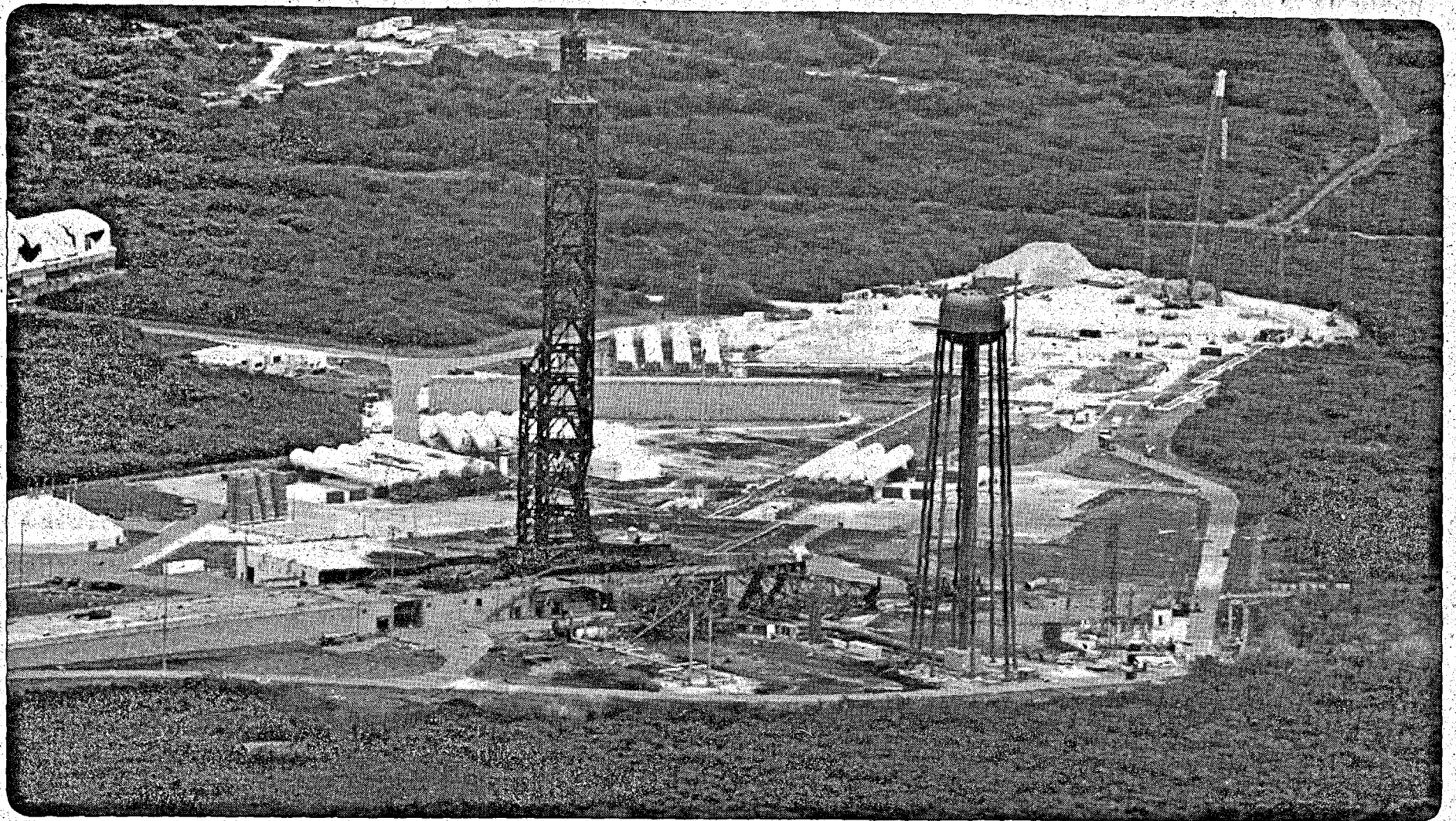
The rocket that exploded would have carried a payload of Amazon Leo satellites, a competitor to SpaceX's Starlink constellation. Those satellites were not on board the rocket during the test fire.

Early reports indicate that, in addition to the single rocket that was destroyed, the launch complex suffered significant damage. A nearby facility also appears to have sustained damage.

Problems for Blue Origin

Most immediately, this explosion will significantly hinder Blue Origin's ambitious launch plans. Because the company suspended its suborbital New Shepard rocket program last year to focus on New Glenn and its various Moon plans, it will be grounded for the foreseeable future.

This setback comes as the company was looking to increase its launch cadence, with plans to launch not just commercial satellites but also Blue Origin lunar landers.



The Blue Origin rocket facility that suffered extensive damage following the rocket explosion incident. (Reuters)

Just this week, NASA announced it had awarded contracts to Blue Origin for several launches, including one this fall that would carry the Blue Moon Mark I lunar lander to the Moon. It also contracted New Glenn to launch two crewed lunar vehicles for NASA in the years ahead.

The damaged launchpad is Blue Origin's only operational launch site. The company is in the early stages of building a second launchpad at Cape Canaveral, but it will not be ready soon enough to avoid serious delays. Pivoting to other NASA or SpaceX launchpads temporarily is not an option either, as the launch facilities must be customized to the particular rocket being launched.

Problems for Artemis

While the explosion will no doubt affect Blue Origin greatly, perhaps the most significant implications will be for NASA and its Artemis program.

The Blue Moon lander mission that was supposed to have been launched this fall would have carried several NASA payloads to help pave the way for future crewed and uncrewed missions to the Moon's surface.

A more direct impact may be seen in NASA's Artemis III mission. In the agency's revised lunar exploration plans, Artemis III is scheduled to launch no earlier than late 2027. While flying in Earth orbit, it will test out the lunar landing systems along with the Orion crew vehicle.

NASA has granted contracts for these landing systems to both SpaceX and Blue Origin. While the agency originally meant to use a modified version of SpaceX's Starship on these first Moon missions, delays in that program have given Blue Origin an opportunity to catch up via its Blue Moon lander.

Blue Origin's inability to launch Blue Moon anytime soon is likely to put the company out of

the running for Artemis III. This setback means that Artemis III, and NASA's entire lunar exploration program, is likely to be dependent on SpaceX for the time being.

While SpaceX had a relatively successful test of its new version of Starship just last week — on May 22, 2026 — it will still need to make significant progress to have a Starship landing system ready to go in only a year. If SpaceX cannot get Starship ready in time, NASA may ultimately need to delay Artemis III until 2028.

Accidents happen — Blue Origin's New Glenn is not the first rocket to explode, nor will it be the last. In a time when you can see rockets launch nearly every day, this incident serves as a reminder of how hard space exploration is and that successful missions are not something to be taken for granted. (The Conversation)

[By Wendy Whitman Cobb, Air University, Australia]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 31, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Full Moon on your solar return chart and will give wonderful benefits. You will attain the objectives of a long-term plan that you have made in the past. The outline of some auspicious work will be drawn out. Your fortunes will rise, so also your income. Your business too will flourish and prosper. You will face all problems with confidence without any fear. Your talent and capability will come to the fore. You will get lot of mental peace. You will also spend quality time with your family and make best use of your mental capacity. You will also plan to get married to a person of your choice. You will get the desired results. Children will focus on their studies. You will be interested in playing games and sports.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You will become very popular. People will begin recognizing you and your hard work will start giving good results. Your bosses will also acknowledge your contribution towards your organization. And you could get promoted too. You will also have financial gains, and you will spend money on yourself. Your personality will bloom and your name and fame will spread far and wide. Students will work hard and get good results for their efforts. You will share amazing bonding with your mate/spouse. And will pay attention to their needs. You will also care for your family. And pay attention to your needs. Be careful in personal matters. Someone's words may hurt you like thorns. And you could get upset. Even then you need to control your tongue. It is just a passing phase.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) The week will be spent in a happy mood. You could get interested in a person and fall in love. It is beginning of a wonderful period of bliss and joy. Both of you will enjoy each other's company. But do not make any matter a prestige issue with your mate. He/she loves you a lot and cares for you too. Work will proceed at a normal pace. You will get support of your colleagues. You will keep on working hard and get wonderful results. You can also attend a marriage function too. You will have financial gains. You will also manage to keep everyone happy. You will take interest in spiritualism and matters connected to religion. Your health will improve. Your elders will keep blessing you.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) These are good days. You will make profits in business. New job opportunities will be there for you, and you need to grab them. You will be happy and cheerful throughout the week. You will also have a wonderful time with your spouse/partner. It is a very good time for love and romance. If you want to tell your family about your marriage plan it is an ideal time to do so. You will also have monetary gains. But keep your budget under control. You will also plan to buy a new vehicle or house. You will also interact a lot with people on one-to-one basis. And exchange your thoughts with them. In the process, lot of misconceptions will get removed. You will also take part in various activities. And your name and fame will rise. You will also have new plans in business, and they will get executed too.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is a pleasant week. You will make lot of money with your hard work. You will also keep your family members happy and will plan to spend some time with your spouse/partner. You will be in the mood to relax for some time to come. Your personality will improve. You will have new ideas. Life looks amazing again to you. You can also fall in love with an unknown person all of a sudden. You will be able to defeat your opponents with ease. The obstacles that you were facing in marriage or engagement of your brother/sister will get removed. You can also get a job/business offer. You will do noble deeds, and your name and fame will spread far and wide. You will get respect and reverence in society. You will speak less and listen more.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is time to give time to your family now. You need to listen to the problems of your family members. They need your support and guidance. You will prove to be a good friend. But you need also to keep control over yourself and not impose your views. You will also have financial gains. You will also be able to influence people and will be sociable too. It is a good time from all angles. Your strong personality will be impressive, and your boss will support you fully. As a parent, you will be aware of your children's needs. You will be aware of who and what is important in your life. You will avoid being egoistic and will be able to complete your work with the cooperation of others. The placement of Jupiter and Saturn will yield important results for you.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) All your worries will be over. Your seniors will adopt a helpful attitude towards you. Even your family members and friends will give you lots of support. You will enjoy your marital life and have amazing bonds with your partner.

You will have monetary gains. Your work will get lot of praise, and this will make you become enthusiastic. There will be spring in your steps. You will be in a hurry to finish off your work. But you need to exercise lot of caution. Your meeting with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you. You will also take proper care of your health and diet. You will also plan your future. If you control your extravagance, you will be able to save good amount and invest.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) Your actions will bring happiness, and people will come close to you. You will be trustworthy and people will believe in your words. But you will face tough competition from your competitors. The objectives that you have planned for your future and career will be achieved. You will be lucky in love and romance. There will be success and big changes in your daily activities. Your elders will bless you. And your children will listen to you. Students will get success in competitive exams. There will be family get-togethers and reunions. You will brilliantly carry out all your responsibilities and duties. You will also be busy with financial matters. And will be able to balance your family life and professional life.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) The stars are in your favor. You may fall in love with someone and will have a wonderful time. People will also remain in your favor, and you will get a very good response from them. You will also be able to complete your tasks with ease. Your financial position will be good. And your bosses and peers will help you a lot. You will get attracted to religion and spiritualism in a big way. Your health will also improve. You will be busy with business activities. Some people may conspire against you but will be unable to harm you in any way. Due to the blessings and grace of God you will be able to overcome all hurdles. You will also find new opportunities in your work. Don't trust easily in love and money matters. Someone may betray you. Even your money can get struck.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) A chance meeting with an influential person will open the doors of success for you. Your financial condition will keep getting better. You will also pay lot of attention to improve your personality. You will become more easy going. As a result, your relations will improve. You should also pay attention to even the little requirements of your family and house. Students will get success in competitive exams and interviews. You need to show foresight otherwise your almost complete tasks will get struck due to your overexcitement and haste. Your office-related matters will also get solved. Your government related work will get done with ease.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) All the tasks that you think will be completed with ease. You will get full cooperation from your colleagues. Your zest and zeal remain unmatched, and you will be committed. Both of you will come closer. You will also meet an influential politician or officer. You will have financial gains. And you will buy something new for your house. Avoid any hot exchange of words with a close person. You will face a sudden problem at your workplace but will be able to overcome it with tact and wisdom. Read all legal documents carefully before signing it. You will help people a lot and will completely devote yourself to a task, but the result will be in your favor.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will be busy with your business/professional activities. A lot is at stake for you, but you will rise to the challenge. Your romantic life is going to be fascinating, and you will enjoy amazing bonding with your mate. You will have belief in your abilities and there will be an increase in your self-confidence. You will interact with people on one-to-one basis. With the help of your self-confidence and capabilities you continue to shine in your work field. Avoid taking any emotional decision in a hurry. Your doubts and misunderstandings will get resolved. Your enemies and opponents will obviously be a cause of stress for you but will be unable to harm you in any way.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will have success in professional activities. Even politicians and media people will shine. You will also plan for higher education of your children. You will have favorable atmosphere at your workplace. Your entire focus will be on your targets. In between, you will also get time to spend with your family. You will enjoy joy and warmth in family relations. You will also finalize a business deal. You will also get interested in listening to music and songs and watching movies in free time. Your health will be perfect. The chances of monetary gains are obvious, but you need to check your rising expenses. Elders will bless you. And you will look after your parents well.

Why the sustained heatwave in India, Pakistan is so dangerous

India and Pakistan are no strangers to heat. This time of year is the worst, as heat peaks before the monsoon brings cooler conditions from June.

But this year's heat is something else. Intense, sustained heat began in mid-April. Daily maximum temperatures have topped 46°C in many locations; with some areas running around 5-8°C above seasonal norms.

The unrelenting heat has driven record demand for electricity in India as people turn on air conditioners — and worsened drought conditions affecting more than a million square kilometres across both countries.

When extreme heat combines with humidity, it can be lethal. Human bodies cannot cool themselves easily in these conditions. The heatwave has claimed at least 37 lives in India and 10 in Pakistan. These figures are likely to be a major underestimate, as heat-related deaths are systematically undercounted in India.

Why is it so hot?

It's usually a hot wait for the monsoon. But several factors can line up to make a bad season much worse.

One reason it's been so bad this year is due to persistent high-pressure weather systems. When these systems sit in place, they make heatwaves more likely by suppressing cloud formation and reducing the chance of cooling rain.

This year, strong high-pressure systems have lingered over parts of India and Pakistan, trapping hot air near the surface and allowing temperatures to build over many days.

With less rain, there's more heat at ground level and soils dry out. Drier soils make things worse, because less heat is used up evaporating moisture in the soil and more goes into heating the land. High pressure systems can often hang around for many days, allowing extreme heat to build up.

It's often worst in cities, as concrete and asphalt absorb heat

during the day and release it slowly overnight. This means cities stay hotter overnight, boosting health risks for people without access to cooling.

Behind these immediate reasons is the big one: climate change. As the world gets steadily hotter, heatwaves get worse and worse.

Estimates from World Weather Attribution suggest the first big heatwave from 15-29 April 2026 was made about three times more likely and about 1°C hotter due to climate change.

At current global levels of global warming (~1.4°C), this means the subcontinent faces similar events about once every five years. At present, we're tracking towards 2.6°C of warming by 2100. At that level of heat, heatwaves like this would hit every 2-3 years and be 2.2°C hotter.

Humidity makes heat much more lethal

The number on a thermometer is only part of the danger.

Many parts of India and Pakistan are intensely humid. When sustained extreme heat arrives, humidity acts to intensify the threat to health. Humidity levels are worsening in parts of the region.

That's because it's harder to cool down naturally in humid conditions. Human bodies use sweating as the main method of cooling. When these beads of warm water evaporate off the skin, heat is carried away.

Humid air makes sweating a much less effective method of cooling. When the air already holds a lot of moisture, it takes longer for sweat to evaporate. The body can keep getting hotter even as it sweats.

This is why scientists are increasingly concerned about lethal humidity — when heat and humidity combine to rapidly sicken or kill.

Dying like this is deeply unpleasant. It begins with the core body temperature rising. People sweat more to try to shed the heat, but sweating doesn't work

well. If there's no reprieve, the body temperature can keep rising past 40°C and heatstroke can set in, damaging the brain and other vital organs.

This can be fatal without rapid cooling and urgent care.

To gauge the combined danger of heat and humidity, scientists use measures such as the wet-bulb temperature. This reflects how much cooling is possible through sweating.

It used to be thought the limit for human survival was a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C.

But new research shows heat and humidity can be lethal across a range of temperature and humidity combinations. For example, for older people who are outdoors, 35°C and 90% humidity is as deadly as 45°C and 30% humidity.

These levels have already been reached during heatwaves in Southern Asia in recent years. For instance, even healthy 18-35 year olds are at risk of dying with humidity of 40% and temperatures of 45°C.

It's likely some areas of the subcontinent have hit those limits at times during this intense period of heat. But we can't say for sure, as most weather bulletins give air temperatures rather than wet-bulb temperature.

When could relief come?

When the monsoon arrives, it usually brings cooler conditions. Cloud cover and widespread rainfall help lower daytime temperatures, though humidity often stays high. The monsoon usually arrives in early June in southern India and covers the whole country by mid-July. In Pakistan, the monsoon typically arrives later, usually beginning in early July. The monsoon often lasts till September.

Relief can't come too soon for the region.

Unfortunately, it won't be the last threat. But as climate change ramps up, extreme heat and humidity will hit these nations more often — and more severely. (The Conversation)