

vs THEIR UNDAUNTED SPIRIT

City hawkers show courage & unity amid pandemic despite govt trying to queer their pitch

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

vember 19, 2020, will always be remembered as an impor tant day for the Meghalaya and Greater Shillong Pro gressive Hawkers and Street Vendors Association (MGSPHSVA). It was on this day that the organisation inaugu rated a free tuition programme for children of hawkers to help them prepare for their board examinations.

After the state government an nounced that board examinations will take place early next year, preparations for the exams became an important concern for the parents. Even in a normal school year, students invariably take tuitions to get the extra edge as they look to getting a good start to their academic life With the enforced lockdown of educational institutions, this has become who can then act as nodes to a larger more difficult for the students from chain that encompasses the entire city lower income family, like the hawkers. who depend almost exclusively on les-

school and that was exacerbating their by NHM officials to enable them to the members of MGSPHSVA, with the other hawkers. Dates were fixed and the day. The state health officials who were workshop. As a follow-up to the trainsupport of Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR), association began to work in earnest to supposed to supervise the whole operadecided to start free tuitions for their prepare for the workshop. children. Four teachers were identified. two of whom had parents who were/ tion (IEC), materials were prepared. still are hawkers. This was a good ex- For this they took the help of local artample of hawkers taking an active role ists for creating the graphics for the in tackling the problems plaguing the messages. Power points were prepared local community. And this was not the based on the material and a roster of

Covid-19 disrupted lives to a great exing. Invitations were sent and the dates tent around the world and the repercus- finalised. But as the date grew closer, sions were felt here as well. One of the they received a shocking notification. biggest problems that one faced initially The state authorities ordered the workwas in terms of getting the message out shop to be put on hold until further regarding the ways in which the virus notice. In effect, it meant that the workcan be contained, i.e., prevention. With-shop was being cancelled. out a vaccine, extended lockdown was the only viable solution to help check receiving end of the state apparatus' the spread of the virus but this also dispendent for criminalising their presrupted the functioning of the economy, ence in the local economy, though the And with the economy in doldrums, law is on the side of the hawkers. Undue lower income groups are the most afharassment and confiscation of wares fected. The government did an admi- were a chronic problem faced by the rable job in getting the information on hawkers. There was a particular story Covid-19 out but it was not a substitute of a family of hawkers that sounds eefor a physical training. With that in rily disturbing and hard to believe that mind they called for civil society groups it happened in a city like Shillong that for support to conduct the workshop on has a small-town temperament. When-

MGSPHSVA is one of the biggest the mother, the young daughter would workers' associations in Shillong hav-clutch on to the *jainsem* of her mother ing well over 1,000 members. This was crying, "The police are coming to take an important opportunity to get the away our wares. information out to their own members

The hawkers have always been at the receiving end penchant for criminalising stock was confiscated by the police. their presence in the local sume that the vegetables taken away from the Kongs (most of the vegetable supervised the raid. Upon reaching "Dear wife, see I brought you free vegour children. We will all enjoy the din-

It is not difficult to imagine it at all. This notice for delay was nothing but a tactic on the part of the state authoriand beyond, MGSPHSVA applied to the National Health Mission (NHM) for the project. They were shortlisted, called Online classes were not being able for an interview and were finally seto replicate the teaching procedures in lected. About 10 hawkers were trained preparations, the association decided to the message was getting through and difficulties. It was at this moment that conduct the training to their peer, i.e., The training began on the scheduled formation. All in all, it was a successful

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Information Education Communica

speakers was determined for the train-

The hawkers have always been at the

ever a new person would approach

Heart-breaking as the story maybe,

this was a common feature for the tion stayed away for the first few days. uted pamphlets in and around the city Act (which being made under the Conhawkers. As mentioned earlier, one of The training, however, went on. After the teachers who were going to take a few days, realising the futility of the the tuitions had a mother who still whole situation, the health officials dene cleared his board examinations with were impressed by the detailed nature distinction was the day his mother's of the preparation and the amenable nature of the participants. The workshop went on for 10 days (October 12-16 never returned. It is not difficult to as- and October 19-23) and was attended by The workshop gave a detailed presentation on the various ways in which

short videos were utilised to impress home, he must have called to his wife, upon the participants about the do's and don'ts when it comes to prevention. etables. Cook a good stew for me and Washing of hands, wearing of masks and avoiding necessary contact were tressed. The use of hand sanitisers not just for the sellers but also for the buyers was an important message. Some of the participants had masks but were ties to prevent giving legitimacy to MG- not wearing them properly. But when SPHSVA though they had gone through they were shown the correct way of proper channels. Realising the ploy wearing masks, they promptly adjusted

regarding Covid-19 and measures were current List gives it primacy over any taken to stop or control its spread. Hawkers have been fighting for the

right to take part in the local economy which is their legal right. The 2014 Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vendit abundantly clear that hawkers have the right to do their business. It has also laid down proper modalities of how that can be achieved. The previous state govbeen carried home by the officer who Covid-19 can spread. Posters as well as ernment, instead of implementing the at ways to contributing to the local com-

> The training began on the scheduled day. The state health officials who were supposed to supervise the whole operation stayed away for the first few days. After a few days, realising the futility of the situation, the health officials decided to attend the programme

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state laws), brought out its own law tha

created a lot of confusion leading to the

sufferings of the hawkers. The current

the same path. The attempt to stall the

Hawkers have been bearing the brunt

local entitled elites. However, instead of

becoming recalcitrant, they have looked

unity. The workshop on Covid-19 and

the free tuitions are an example of the

indomitable spirit of this marginalised

section of the society who has been a

symbol of the oppression wrought upor

the working class of the state. The so-

ciety needs the examples being put for

other marginalised groups. And only

when that happens can a just society

emerge from the morass in which the

ward by MGSPHSVA to filtrate to the





Tura-based musicians of Fame The Band

Continued from Page 1

Jeffrey Laloo of The Evening Club says other states have alowed live music and shows and not only affected artistes but also er. One reason is that after the "we hope that the same will hap-

"We have to wait and watch. Our lace is designed for live music. The equipment here are for that, and that is our USP. We have plans which will incorporate entertainnent and which is not live music- a saviour. pased and which will ensure social distancing. We will also maintain Club is also mulling live streaming

Laloo is of the view that live music can be started following certain Mikado Lounge, which is known Lyndem of Cryptographik. or its DJ nights, is also going slow. ounge, says the absence of live of Fame The Band is cautious. we need to take the lead... No matnusic and DJ performances has "Things are going to be a lot slow-ter what, for a true artiste, nothing

Changing rhythms technicians and other people as- pandemic, many event managesociated with the ancillary section. ment firms would rush to hold mu-The local music industry has sical events but there would not be

artistes. But social media has been supply will be more but demand "Artistes have been using the inlisteners throughout the pandemic up and there are even a few under-

will be less," he says. Senior musician Lou Majaw, who ternet to stay connected with their prefers to call himself a performing artiste, says that's life. "Life is its music culture during festivals his out soon," says Laloo, who is via online live streams. I'm not not all about walking on the plains and for promoting tourism. At the sure when exactly things will stabiand there are undulations too. lise here but new music is coming Whether there's pandemic or any-make the best of the virtual platthing else, we have to accept the form, feels Lyndem. ground live rap cyphers starting to change. Everyone, and not only the happen again in Shillong. I think musicians, is suffering. Unlike the but with the help of the internet rotocols, like restricting people these events are a good sign that salaried employees, performing ar- and social media, making music om going to the dance floor. "But the music scene (more particular-tistes have no money if there is no and pushing it to your followers this pandemic is such that you ly, the independent rap scene) here performance. There is no help from is not as impossible as it sounds

And yet one has to survive not only through creativity but also by meeting the basic needs of life. For young music makers in Shillong incentives for artistes even in the pre-Covid days, it is a challenge been weakened by the viral attack much crowd as people would still but if "you are true to yourself and and this may have a long-term debe anxious, and also, they wouldn't the art you are embracing", then it bilitating impact on it, feel many have enough money to spend. So becomes easier to overcome the

hurdles, believes Majaw. The government too needs to pay heed to the problems of local musicians as the state cashes in on

is starting to stabilise again," says any quarter, not even from the government, and things are going out not as easy as live gigs and mer-While Lyndem is hopeful about of hand. But instead of wasting our chandise but we'll get through riyanka Banerjee, partner at the the future, a few like Marak time and energy on complaining, this," he keeps the hope floating.

The North East India Archive, an audio-visual archiving initiative by the Department of Mass Media at St Anthony's College, took on board 32 creative youths to document the pandemic. In the process, Khlam stories of distress, survival and sustainable measures were unearthed and presented in the form of essays, paintings, photography and audio-visuals. Sunday Chimes, in collaboration with NE Archive, will publish one presentation from Archive Khlam every week to draw a holistic picture of the pandemic. This is the second edition of pandemic stories, this time narrated by people from Garo Hills villages

Cautious hope for life & living

while the world is at a standmmon folk from Meghalaya where there is an existing difference in our approach of rural and urban access to freedom and comfort. The question is, would we understand it better if we experience both?

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We can begin by understanding our privileges, dating back to almost 50 de cades with our State's birth the progress has been phenomenal. While you and I sit here, contemplating the level of progressiveness, the reality of us sharing the same grounds with the very sweat-drenched agriculturally dominated folks proves our diverse culture Our forefathers and their thirst for a better future and a content life pushed us here. One of the most interesting an cestral characteristics our forefathers had comes from the very roots instilled in music. The ancient musical instruments found in Khasi, Jaintia and the Garo ancestry still cohabit in our modern era. We can witness our laid-back attitude and love for arts and culture stemming from our roots. Fast-forwarding to our current state, we find a lifestyle of curiosity and chit-chats in a café

Literacy has shaped our knowledge and curiosity. However, with development, our need for relaxation too has increased. The modern and rural lifestyle is not black and white. Perhaps, there can be a comprehensible grey area, where we stand and know the differences and similarities produced from

Growing local <u>business in urban</u>

To begin with, 2020 is the year of the inevitable advancement of the under

After the government-mandated lockdown throughout the state, we have witnessed a hike in local entrepreneurs. In these trying times, while restriction of goods and crisis in income is consuming the state, people also took to finding alternate means to earn as well. A few lists of womenfolk that took to this trend include but are not limited to: 1. The first group that came under my radar had the means to market and

draw consumers via the internet and technology in general. 2. The second group, however, has done sole marketing with word of mouth. Usually, this type of business is either done at the ease of their own

home, or on similar grounds. Business changes in rural

I visited the outskirts of Tura town, the residential area of the village folk in Buripara, West Garo Hills. I interacted fresh areca nut and betel leaf that they

They mentioned that they spent most ed by agriculture. Hence, the govern-

major impact in some areas.

messy, filled with juicy se-

through all times. The Aw-

asthis of Aamnagri are the

who bumble through their

lives encountering miss-

ing jewels and stolen eggs,

deaths foretold, averted and

a suspected suicide with no

quintessential Indian family

crets and sticking together Awasthis

body. The mysteries are solved by the inquisitiv

minds of young Lakshmi and Guddu and the saf-

fron-clad Guruji. Shubha Sharma's second novel,

Awasthis sailing through life and its quirks.

reading for the time and events of US politics.

fter forming a coalition of

Ahuman resistance against

the enemy invasion, Dalinar

Kholin and his Knights Radiant

have spent a year fighting a pro-

tracted, brutal war. Neither side

has gained an advantage. This

is an eagerly awaited sequel to

the NYT bestselling Oathbringer

from a popular fantasy writer a

the top of his game.

Rhythm of War by Brandon Sanderson

published by Niyogi Books, tells the story of the

A Promised Land by Barack Obama

The book by former US

■ president Barack Obama

is a deeply personal account

of history in the making. In

this first volume of his presi-

dential memoirs, Obama

tells the story of a young

man searching for his iden

tity to leader of a democratic

ountry. The compelling na

cal aspirations to the pivota

Iowa caucus victory is worth

Aamnagri



An enthusiastic fourth standard student mentioned he would appreciate if the world came up with a vaccine soon. There are more similarities in us all

where a requirement for mobile devices Albert Einstein, "The important thing succeeding generation, supporting and had pushed the family to economic turis not to stop questioning. Curiosity has building a wider perspective. bulence. Most of the parents do not have its reason for existing. One cannot help of their time in the fields and surround- a stable income enough to budget newly but be in awe when he contemplates the made demands for this literary requiremysteries of eternity, of life, of the marment-imposed restrictions on transporment. The dependence on the monetary velous structure of reality. It is enough if you're staying at home, how has tation and goods supply did not have a gain from selling their farm vegetables if one tries merely to comprehend a your daily life changed from before? and cattle came about as an option to little of this mystery every day." We are The local folks shared a local jackfruit purchase technology for such immediafter all, bound by the same drive that from their farm and we partook in conate circumstances. All in all, their simmakes us question what is so different

From baby boomers

Let us explore the very first generation from our context, covering retired and independent personas to residents ive field where the current flexibil-

Reviewing the interaction

To the retired personnel, staying at

to Generation X still working their days off. People from standard student mentioned he would this generation are mostly occupied appreciate it if the world came up with with government services and private a vaccine soon. Interestingly enough, businesses. There are very few in the there are more similarities in us all, to partake in online class lessons. How- ple living has hints of curiosity, which ity and work from home subsist. They derstand the workings of a child's world and listened to their commentary over a ever, there had been cases in other areas surfaces in their conversation. To quote particularly carved a platform for the and learn a few things whilst doing so.

COORDINATOR: DR AMANDA C

Humanity amid crisis

quit her job in an auditing mpany in Mumbai and came back to her hometown, Tura, because of "health reasons" during the pandemic. She started work as freelancer but that too has been affected because of the pandemic 'closing the freedom of movement

home circumstances which gradually "Other than physical travel, the nline existence of internet helped The third group of people that I came sort through the issues to a certain across mentioned that they would still extent... I saw the opportunity given travel back and forth from their worko me in the midst of the situation. space. They spoke about needing to pelieved that art should be made, and unwind as the day and the week comes this moment of pain, suffering, happy to an end. They also mentioned how the situation also gives rise to a separate level of stress and worry at times. A government servant and a wife Mrs Arengh, has also reported a significant workers, who shared their like-mindedpeople," she adds.

Chimes, Momin talks about her interactions with people from all walks of life and belonging to various age My desire was to provide an outlook groups, their experiences, pandemof an expecting mother in these trying c-induced hindrances and coping times. With the opportunity of close contact with a relative, this experience

Is the current scenario of our state mentally draining given your cur-

Strains on a pregnant mother

was both understood and shared.

nomes were filled with more sounds

and activities. As they spoke about their

normal routine, they mentioned the

ncrease in active participation in out-

door to indoor homely tasks. Whereas,

the daily work schedule has been com-

promised. Many of the working parents

and grandparents hoped for a stay at

rent situation? Since there are back and forth constant visits to the health centre, the idea gave a very fresh view on the situaof our state dealing with issues concerning healthcare itself was astoundingly fearful and as per her approach she took cautious steps. I was told of her worries in having no way out, where visiting a

nospital was a fear yet obligatory task. Children and their impression

Now let us focus on interactions pertaining to the youngest generation mentioned, the school children. There were not that many differences in their experiences and most were either on the same page or somewhat similar to each other.

What would you want the world to know during this time?

This was a very subjective approach to understanding what was going on with their little imagination. The children moreover believed that one day everything will be back to how it was efore. In other words, there was hope but waiting was involved. Their innocent frustration was the wait to reach the next chapter. An enthusiastic fourth

(Excerpts from the essay 'The Nuance Effect of The Pandemic In Rural And Urban Garo Hills'; for full text, log in to https://www.meghalayacv19archive.in/)

> AUTHOR: RUBY TENGCHINA TONGPER

ness and change should be captured The NE Archive project did exactly this, hence I saw myself being part of t." said the 28-year-old scholar. "This roject helped me grow as a writer, while sharing the experiences of the In an interview with Sunday

nechanisms. Excerpts:

What kind of groundwork did you nave to do for your essay? took time to visit the localities i own and interact with people of all ages. I also had to travel away from the town into the outskirts and inter act with the folks residing there. This

How can the different impacts of pandemic on different social strata be tackled?

The pandemic has been an eve-oper er, pushing citizens from all backround to put a little more effort into little effort is directed at the more privileged. For the poverty-stricken munity, it is more than just an effort, and it is not only an incon venience when their daily wage is ompromised. We did witness com ssion, where the community came ogether to help the worst-hit. The lependence on funds from the gov nment can only take you so far Hence, I believe the foundation lies

> vaking our humanity. How was your experience in work ing with NE Archive?

in the societal grounds and simply in

The two months creating the projec and collaborating with NE Archive was truly a fresh experience. It acted as a silver lining and a voice, con trasting to the current situation. One can only hope to have further rich ex-



expedition were intriguing and the adventure

breath-taking. I remained a silent follower

sans the vagaries of the journey. But I was

transported back to the present every time

she narrated the tales of women, their love

and marriage, their right to choose and reject

Biblio-File **Spellbinding story** The Awasthis of Aamnagri by Shubha Sarma of a young wizard ${f F}$ amilies are like the sweet mangoes of Aamnagri —

Roald Dahl's Minpins may have been real for little Billy but for an adult, they are a fragment of a child's wild imagination. But the truth is, "Those who don't believe in magic will nev-

er find it." Nayaab Suhel found magic because she loves to live in her world of wild imaginations. The 13-year-old author of Flamingo In Vamprickle Land

chools were shut and the children

Spent most of their time at home

with family. The youngsters take time

to visit their grandparents in their lo-

cality using a motorcycle as a means to

go about or even walking. Family gath-

erings and meeting close-by relatives

casually are very normal and it happens

even on weekdays. While away and not

severely jumbled in the chaos, educa-

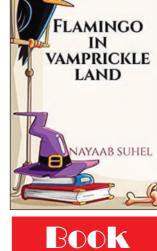
tion somehow does not act as a prior-

ity during these times, and children in

barely utters a word in front of strangers but her mind works like a witch's spell that gives birth to stories from the magic lands where wizards travel by air balloons and there is solution to all problems. So when Flamingo and her sister, Calera, realise that they do not have money to pay at Vamy's Vampo restaurant in Vamprickle land, the owner comes up with a unique solution Those who cannot pay may

There is more magic in the book that one can imagine as the two young wizards embark on a journey to participate in a wizardry contest. How about Gobbo, the goblin, who has the blessings to scratch his head and get all he wishes to? There is also a ride on Striponia Dog, a wonderland creature that may be a genetic miscalculation of a crazy medic or a young author's mischievous

Nayaab, who is a student of BSF Senior Secondary School in Shillong, is an avid reader



ager would know how to tackle hunger. "Hicory, Ficory, Flock and Flow/Hunger Hunger Off You Go." She would not mind world tricks. Flamingo too has live bats hanging from the ceiling of Mr Vampire Flipping's little readers spell-bound.

Mr Vampire is none other than the Head of the Wizard

Book: Flamingo In The food at old Mr Vampire's Vamprickle Land; Author: residence is as fascinating as Nayaab Suhel; Publisher: the man himself. Flamingo, Xpress Publishing; Pages: 50; the wiz kid, is no less interest

magnifying glasses with a spell

with her magic wand. Every adult at one point in their childhood has had closed his or her eyes and imagined that the world had become a

Childhood is all about discoveries, eccentric imaginations and amazement. But as we grow up, the intrinsic quali

ties of that crucial phase of life change under the spell of reality. So a children's book imagined and written by a 13-yearold girl will be more genuine and pure than a story told by an adult author because a par of the young author's mind and soul dwells inside Flamingo. Both dream of and dwell in the same magic land. Nayaab is a painter and short-story writer too and contributes regularly to local

news dailies. For the book, she has chosen Freepik for illus-The author's debut book re-

minds one of Harry Potter and his wizard friends who won hearts with their out-of-the the talent and charm to hold

The woman reigns no more

16-year-old girl was gang raped by a group of about four men this year in West Garo Hills but the rapists are absconding. In the same district, a teenaged girl was sexually assaulted by her father who had earlier raped his elder daughter and impregnated her. A 13-year-old girl from a border village in East Khasi Hills was repeatedly raped by several men, including a legislator and a professor, in a guest house in

the city that was owned by another legislator's family. These are glimpses of decadence of a society that once took pride in its integrity and righteousness. But these do not affect me anymore because what is norm does not make an impact on us. These incidents happen within the bounds of matriliny and the numbers in the state police department's website — 293 cases of crime against women and 280 cases of various sexual crime against children last vear — are testimony to the diabolical transformation of this society that French author Gabrielle Bertrand did

not foresee. Or else, her book. Secret Lands Where Women Reign, would have had another nomenclature. Based on an expedition of a research team led by Bertrand in the early fifties, the book gives an insight into the lives, believes and superstitions of the tribes inhabiting the Brahmaputra Valley and the foothills of the Himalayas in Assam. Among them were Garos, Khasis and Jaintias. The author was not only enamoured by the surreal rituals and age-old stories of their being but was equally enthralled by the role of women in these

northeastern tribal societies. I followed in the footsteps of Bertrand and her team to time-travel into the hostile

and their social supremacy, only to draw a comparison between the two faces of the same society separated by over five decades. "'Among the Machi tribe there is another custom which they call shadila. A girl who is thinking of proposing cooks a plate of highly seasoned rice and gets her sister or some other relation to take it to the man of her choice in the nokpanthe'... But the code of honour is very strict on one point; there must be no indecencies. If the man violates that tradition he is severely punished by the whole clan,' wrote the author. There was no policing and women's modesty was protected by the clan following traditional

A young Garo girl (the fiancée)

barely gets justice despite her onstitutional rights, is stark In Khasi Hills too, women enjoyed equality in marriage and divorce. "... divorce is generally a matter of mutual agreement...," Bertrand wrote. Unlike modern times, no man can leave a woman without pay-

The contrast with modern

time, where a woman victim

ing an indemnity to her. But the book, which is not easily available in the market now, is not all about women's rights and their social status. The book gives a vivid description of the rites and rituals of the tribes, their animist ways of life and the social fabric within a clan and among different clans. The anecdotes are not only helpful in knowing the demography of the particular region but also identifying and understanding the trans-

formations in the tribal societies.