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EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES:

MTI Hub's Engagement at Key Cultural and Art Events in Manipur

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Report on Manipur Technology Innovation Hub's Visit to Key Events

Date of Visit: 23rd December 2024

Manipur Technology Innovation Hub (MTI Hub) visited three prominent events in Imphal on 23rd December 2024. The visit aimed to interact with stall members, understand their challenges, and explore collaborative opportunities to enhance innovation, entrepreneurship, and community engagement in Manipur. Below are the list of events visited:

The 31st Imphal Book Fair, 2024

State Handloom Expo (Hathkargha Mela)

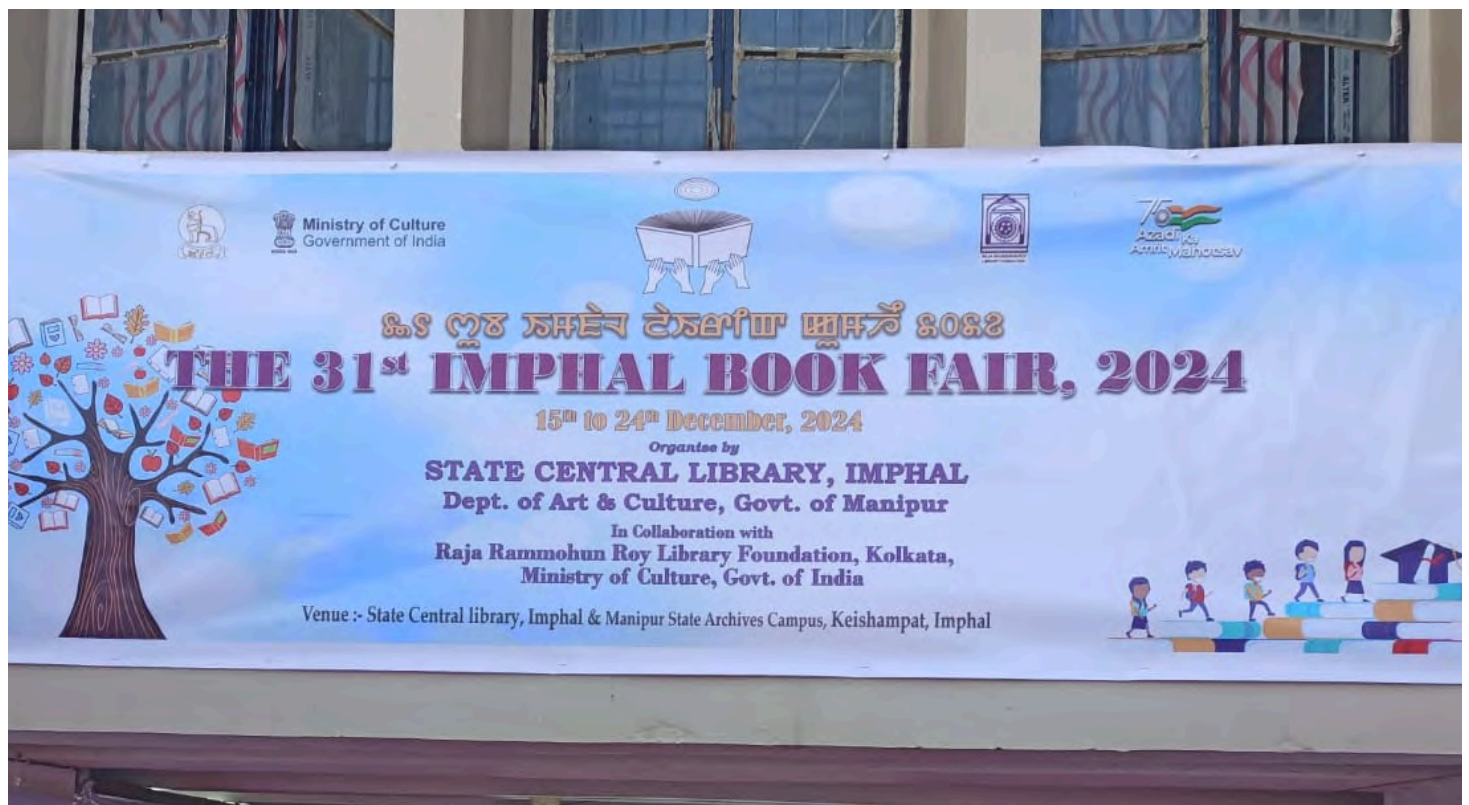
Arts Society Manipur Golden Jubilee Art Fair

The 31st Imphal Book Fair, 2024

Introduction

The 31st Imphal Book Fair 2024, held from December 15 to December 24 at the State Central Library, Imphal, stood as a symbol of resilience, hope, and the enduring power of knowledge. Despite the ongoing unrest in Manipur, the event highlighted the community's unwavering commitment to literature, culture, and intellectual growth. Organized by the State Central Library, Imphal, under the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Manipur, in collaboration with the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, Kolkata, and the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the book fair brought together readers, authors, publishers, and families to celebrate the written word.

The fair's theme transcended mere book sales, acting as a cultural and intellectual hub to uplift individuals and communities during trying times. This report delves into the details of the event, capturing its activities, challenges, visitor feedback, and the lessons it offered.



Event Details

No. of Stalls	:	72
Venue	:	State Central Library, Imphal
Duration	:	10 days (December 15–24, 2024)
Organizer	:	State Central Library, Imphal Department of Art and Culture, Government of Manipur <i>In collaboration with</i> Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, Kolkata Ministry of Culture, Government of India

Key Highlights of the Fair

Programs and Activities

The fair offered a diverse range of activities aimed at engaging people across all age groups and interests:

- **Book Release Functions:** Unveiling new literary works by local and national authors.
- **Career Counseling Sessions:** Guiding students and job seekers on career planning.
- **Meet the Folk Artists:** Showcasing Manipuri culture through performances and discussions.
- **Painting Competitions and Quizzes:** Engaging young minds in creative and intellectual pursuits.
- **Reader/Author/Publisher Interactions:** Encouraging dialogue and collaboration within the literary community.

Programs and Activities

- A total of 72 book stalls, including 21 local publishers and 11 publishers from outside the state, were set up.
 - Books of various genres, from motivational literature to academic textbooks, were available with a 15% discount.
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Visitor Experiences and Feedback

Challenges Faced by Publishers

Many publishers noted that the unrest in Manipur significantly impacted the fair's success. The prevailing financial difficulties, coupled with a decline in visitor turnout compared to previous years, led to lower sales on most days except weekends.

Pirated Books Issue:

Mr. Beeshantam Yumnam, proprietor of Books and Coffee, Singjamei, expressed concerns about the availability of pirated books being sold at significantly reduced prices (60–70% cheaper). These practices undermined genuine publishers, affecting their sales and discouraging authors from producing new works.

Despite these challenges, Mr. Beeshantam highlighted the transformative power of reading, stating, *“Once a reader starts reading, it opens the door to a lifelong journey of exploration and growth.”*

Cultural and Educational Insights

Promoting Manipuri Literature:

Dr. Y. Kunjabihari, former General Secretary of the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, emphasized the role of the book fair in promoting local literature, history, and culture. However, he noted that the venue felt congested and the ongoing conflict had affected sales.

Dr. Kunjabihari suggested:

- Publishing Manipuri literature, including royal chronicles, in Meetei Mayek script to make it accessible to the younger generation.
 - Organizing book fairs more frequently (two or three times a year) to amplify their impact.
 - Reducing stall fees and increasing discounts to attract more participants and buyers.
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Encouraging Reading Habits Among Youth:

- Dr. Kunjabihari appealed to parents and young readers to reduce their dependency on mobile devices and develop the habit of reading books. He stressed the imaginative and intellectual benefits of reading, which far surpass those of visual media.

Youthful Joy and Discovery

First-Time Visitors:

- Students like H. Lanchenbi, a Class XI student, were thrilled by the variety of books on display. She purchased thought-provoking and motivational books, expressing hope for more publications in the Meetei Mayek script to explore Manipuri literature further.

Children's Delight:

- Five-year-old Baby Tahenbi Leishangthem from Wangkhei Thangjam Leikai shared her joy in visiting the fair with her family. Her parents purchased a comic book, a drawing book, and a pencil box for her, making the visit both educational and enjoyable.

Family Bonding and Recreation

One parent highlighted how the fair provided a safe space for family outings amidst Manipur's turmoil. The event offered mental recreation, boosted academic focus, and ignited curiosity among children. He suggested:

- Organizing children-oriented programs to make the fair more engaging.
- Hosting the event in a more spacious venue to accommodate larger crowds comfortably.

Economic Impact and Sales Trends

Peak Sales:

- Weekends saw the highest visitor turnout, with some stalls earning over ₹1 lakh per day.
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Low Sales:

- On weekdays, the average sales per stall dropped below ₹1 lakh, reflecting the financial strain faced by the local population.

Suggestions for Future Editions

Improved Venue and Infrastructure:

- Select a larger, more accessible venue to enhance the experience for visitors and stall owners.

Expanded Discounts and Subsidies:

- Offer greater discounts for students and subsidized stall fees for local publishers.

Children-Focused Activities:

- Include storytelling sessions, puppet shows, and interactive workshops for kids.

Peace and Cultural Themes:

- Highlight literature promoting coexistence and unity.

More Frequent Fairs:

- Organize biannual fairs to sustain the momentum and encourage continuous engagement.

Conclusion

The 31st Imphal Book Fair 2024 stood as a beacon of hope and intellectual growth amidst challenging times in Manipur. It reinforced the transformative power of books in shaping minds, promoting culture, and fostering resilience. While challenges like low turnout and the prevalence of pirated books persisted, the event's success in uniting communities and inspiring individuals cannot be overlooked.

As the fair evolves, incorporating suggestions from participants and visitors will ensure its continued relevance and impact, solidifying its role as a cornerstone of Manipur's cultural and intellectual landscape.



The State Handloom Expo (Hathkargha Mela) 2024

Introduction

The State Handloom Expo (Hathkargha Mela) 2024, organized by the Manipur Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd (MH&HDCL) and sponsored by the Development Commissioner (Handloom) of the Ministry of Textiles, commenced on 10th of December, 2024. Held at the Manipur State Film Development Society (MSFDS), Palace Compound, this 14-day event showcased the craftsmanship, resilience, and economic potential of the handloom and handicraft industry in Manipur.

The Manipur Technology Innovation Hub (MTI HUB) participated in this significant event to explore collaborative opportunities, understand the industry's challenges, and support the innovation-driven growth of local handloom businesses.



Event Details

No. of Stalls	:	60
Venue	:	Manipur State Film Development Society, Wangkhei, Imphal East, Manipur
Duration	:	14 days (December 10–23, 2024)
Organizer	:	The Manipur Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd (MH&HDCL) and sponsored by the Development Commissioner (Handloom)

Key Highlights of the Expo

Event Overview

The inaugural ceremony witnessed the presence of key dignitaries, including:

- Th. Basanta, General Manager (Administration), MH&HDCL
- Priyadarshi Daripa, Deputy Director of Weaver Service Centre, Porompat
- RK Sharda, State Awardee (Handloom)

The event also highlighted the launch preparations for the Chief Minister's Yam Scheme, aimed at empowering weavers through subsidies, financial support, and capacity-building initiatives.

Chief Minister's Yam Scheme

The scheme is designed to provide financial relief and enhance productivity among weavers through:

Subsidies on Yarn Purchases:

- 30% subsidy for cotton yarn (15% from the State Government, 15% from the Ministry of Textiles) via Direct Benefit Transfer.
- 20% subsidy for synthetic single and double-ply fiber.

Weaver Support Programs:

- Distribution of weaver identity cards and yarn passbooks for beneficiaries.
 - Government-sponsored insurance schemes to support financial security for weavers.
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MUDRA Loan Initiative

- Approximately 2,800 weavers have applied for MUDRA loans to promote entrepreneurship in the handloom sector.
- The Government aims to disburse loans to 500 weavers initially, encouraging small-scale businesses.

Statistics on Weavers in Manipur

- The National Handloom Census 2021 identified around 2,11,000 weavers in Manipur.
- However, only 15,000–20,000 weavers are enrolled in government insurance schemes.

Insights and Observations from MTI HUB's Visit

Promoting Handloom Innovation

MTI HUB identified a strong alignment between its innovation-driven mission and the handloom sector's potential for growth. With over 2,11,000 weavers in the state, the sector provides an untapped resource for technology integration and business innovation.

Key insights included:

- The need to digitize the handloom supply chain for greater efficiency and market access.
- Exploring eco-friendly dyeing technologies and sustainable yarn production techniques.

Challenges Faced by the Sector

During interactions with stakeholders, MTI HUB noted several challenges:

Low Awareness of Government Schemes: Many weavers are unaware of existing insurance and subsidy programs.

Lack of Market Access: Small-scale weavers struggle to access national and international markets.

Limited Financial Support: While initiatives like MUDRA loans are promising, the process of application and disbursement needs streamlining.

Collaborative Opportunities

MTI HUB emphasized the role of technology and innovation in addressing these challenges:

- Partnering with local startups to develop e-commerce platforms for weavers.
- Creating a mentorship program to educate weavers about accessing subsidies, loans, and insurance.
- Hosting workshops to teach weavers about modern marketing techniques and branding strategies.

Insights and Observations from MTI HUB's Visit

MTI HUB's team interacted with various participants, including weavers, buyers, and policymakers, to gain insights into the expo's impact:

Weaver's Voice:

- Many weavers expressed excitement about the CM's Yam Scheme, viewing it as a game-changer for reducing production costs.
- However, some shared concerns about the accessibility of loans and subsidies, citing the need for easier application processes.

Buyers' Feedback:

- Buyers appreciated the diversity of handloom products on display, ranging from traditional shawls to modern accessories.
 - Many buyers suggested more initiatives to promote Manipuri handloom items on national and global platforms.
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Economic and Social Significance of the Expo

The Hathkargha Mela not only supports the economic livelihood of weavers but also fosters cultural pride and social cohesion:

- **Economic Impact:** Subsidies and loans can enhance production capacity, helping weavers scale their businesses.
- **Cultural Preservation:** The expo serves as a platform to preserve and promote Manipuri weaving traditions.
- **Community Building:** The event brings together diverse stakeholders, fostering collaboration and shared purpose.

Recommendations by MTI HUB

Based on the visit, MTI HUB proposed several recommendations to enhance the growth of the handloom sector:

Technology Integration:

- Develop mobile apps for real-time updates on subsidy programs and loans.
- Introduce AI-driven tools to match weavers with buyers based on product preferences.

Capacity Building Programs:

- Organize workshops on sustainable weaving practices and financial literacy.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to train young weavers in design and entrepreneurship.

Market Expansion:

- Establish partnerships with e-commerce platforms to promote Manipuri handloom products globally.
 - Introduce branding campaigns to showcase the uniqueness of Manipuri handlooms.
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Policy Support:

- Advocate for reduced bureaucratic hurdles in accessing government schemes.
- Encourage collaboration between startups and government bodies to drive innovation in the sector.

Conclusion

The State Handloom Expo 2024 highlighted the resilience and creativity of Manipur's handloom sector. MTI HUB's participation in the event underscored the potential for innovation and technology to address existing challenges and unlock new opportunities.

By supporting initiatives like the CM's Yam Scheme and fostering collaborations between weavers, startups, and policymakers, MTI HUB aims to contribute to the sustainable growth of this vital sector. The Hathkargha Mela serves not only as a celebration of craftsmanship but also as a beacon of hope for a brighter, more inclusive future.







Golden Jubilee Art Fair, 2024

Introduction

The Golden Jubilee Arts Fair 2024, organized by the Art Society Manipur, marked a significant milestone in celebrating five decades of artistic excellence in the state. The five-day event commenced on [date of the MTI HUB visit] at the City Convention Centre, Palace Compound, showcasing the creativity and talent of local artists.

The Manipur Technology Innovation Hub (MTI HUB) attended the fair as part of its mission to support innovation across diverse fields, including art and culture. The visit provided insights into the challenges faced by the art community, explored opportunities for collaboration, and celebrated the vibrant creative ecosystem of Manipur.



Event Details

No. of Stalls	:	10
Venue	:	City Convention Centre, Imphal
Duration	:	5 days (December 23–27, 2024)
Organizer	:	Art Society Manipur

Event Overview

Key Dignitaries

The opening function was graced by:

- M Joy, Commissioner (Art & Culture), as the Chief Guest.
- Ksh Jugindro, Vice President of Art Society Manipur, as the President.

Art Society Manipur: A Legacy of Art

The Art Society Manipur, established in 1972 and registered in 1973, has played a pivotal role in nurturing the art community of the state. Despite financial constraints, the society successfully organized this fair for the first time in years, with the participation of young and talented artists.

Exhibitions and Highlights

Stalls and Artwork on Display

The fair featured 10 stalls showcasing diverse works of art, including paintings, handcrafted wood, and bamboo items.

Price Range:

- Paintings: ₹5,000–₹50,000
 - Handcrafted items: Starting from ₹150
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Focus on Young Talent

The fair spotlighted emerging artists, providing them with a platform to exhibit their creativity and gain recognition. This initiative reflects the society's commitment to fostering artistic growth and bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

Insights and Observations from MTI HUB's Visit

Promoting Art as an Innovative Industry

MTI HUB recognized the potential of the art sector as an integral part of innovation and entrepreneurship. The event underscored the need to integrate technology and business models to enhance the visibility and market reach of local artists.

Key observations included:

- The growing interest in affordable handcrafted items, such as bamboo and woodwork.
- The potential for digital platforms to connect local artists with global audiences.

Challenges Faced by the Art Community

Through interactions with artists and organizers, MTI HUB identified several challenges:

- **Financial Constraints:** The Art Society struggled to organize the fair due to limited funding, a common issue for many local art initiatives.
 - **Market Access:** Artists often lack the resources and platforms to promote and sell their work beyond the local market.
 - **Limited Resources for Skill Development:** Opportunities for training and mentorship in contemporary art forms are minimal.
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Opportunities for Collaboration

MTI HUB explored avenues to support the art community:

- Partnering with startups to create e-commerce platforms dedicated to promoting Manipuri art.
- Organizing capacity-building workshops on marketing, pricing, and the use of technology in art creation.
- Encouraging collaborations between artists and entrepreneurs to develop innovative products that blend art and functionality.

Feedback from Participants

Artists' Perspectives

- Artists expressed gratitude for the opportunity to exhibit their work, noting the fair as a rare platform for recognition.
- Many highlighted the need for regular art fairs and better financial support to sustain their creative pursuits.

Visitors' Experiences

- Visitors appreciated the diverse range of artwork and affordable prices, which made the fair accessible to a wider audience.
- Some suggested the inclusion of live art demonstrations and workshops to make the event more engaging.

Economic and Cultural Impact

The Golden Jubilee Art Fair played a crucial role in promoting the cultural and economic value of art in Manipur:

- **Economic Impact:** The fair created a marketplace for artists, with price points catering to a variety of buyers.
 - **Cultural Preservation:** By featuring traditional bamboo and woodwork alongside contemporary paintings, the fair highlighted the state's rich cultural heritage.
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- **Inspiration for Young Artists:** The event inspired young talents to pursue art as a viable career path.

Recommendations by MTI HUB

Based on the visit, MTI HUB proposed several recommendations to support the art community in Manipur:

Digital Transformation:

- Develop an online marketplace to showcase and sell Manipuri art globally.
- Use social media to promote the work of local artists and the Art Society.

Capacity-Building Initiatives:

- Organize skill development programs focusing on modern art techniques and digital tools.
- Provide training on financial literacy and business strategies for artists.

Regular Events and Funding:

- Advocate for biannual art fairs to provide consistent opportunities for artists.
- Collaborate with corporate sponsors and government agencies to secure funding.

Integration of Art and Technology:

- Encourage artists to explore digital art forms and interactive installations.
- Promote the use of 3D printing and virtual reality in art creation and exhibitions.

Conclusion

The Golden Jubilee Art Fair 2024 was a testament to the resilience and creativity of Manipur's art community. MTI HUB's visit highlighted the transformative potential of art in driving cultural, economic, and social growth. By fostering collaboration between artists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers, and by leveraging technology to overcome existing challenges, the art sector can become a thriving part of Manipur's innovation ecosystem. Events like this fair not only celebrate artistic excellence but also inspire future generations to embrace creativity as a means of expression and empowerment.

