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EC questions Modi, Rahul's poll conduct

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance for the first time of a model code conduct violation complaint against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Election Commission has issued notice to BJP national president JP Nadda and sought his response by April 29. The commission has also served a notice to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, asking him to respond to the complaints filed by the BJP against him and the main Opposition party's senior leader Rahul Gandhi regarding their remarks. Both the BJP and the Congress had raised allegations of causing hatred and division based on religion, caste, community, or language. This is the first time that notices were issued to party presidents for violation of model code of conduct by star campaigners, this election. Notably, this marks a departure from the past, where notices of alleged MCC violations were served directly to the candidate or star campaigner concerned. Even during the ongoing campaign for the Lok Sabha election 2024, all MCC notices served by the EC have been issued directly to party leaders, including Dilip Ghosh of the BJP, Congress leaders Randeep Surjewala and Supriya Shrinete, and AAP leader Atishi. The EC notices to the two-party presidents did not directly name either Modi,



BJP supporters during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election campaign rally for Lok Sabha polls, in Agra, on Thursday PTI

Rahul or Kharge, but the representations received by it were attached to the respective letters and they contained details of allegations against the three leaders. In the notice sent to Nadda, the EC sought his response by Monday to the complaints filed by the Congress, CPI, CPI (ML) and civil society groups regarding the remarks made by Modi on April 21 in Banswara 21 where he dubbed Muslims as infiltrators and alleged that the party will redistribute country's resources among the community.

Stage set for Phase II LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid heat waves in most parts of the country, voters will have to brave the searing heat when they step out to exercise their franchise in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Second phase of Lok Sabha polls will be a litmus test of sorts for the Narendra Modi Government as over 8.08 crore people are set to cast their vote. The key issues facing the BJP are whether it will be able to end its electoral drought in Kerala. Will a spike in political temperature following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sharp attack on the Congress boost turnout? Will controversy over heritage bill work in favour of BJP? Will controversy over Muslim being given reservation in SCs, STs and OBCs quota help BJP's voters? Will voting in Manipur violence free? Will the consecration of Ram Temple have an impact on voting trends on BJP's southern sojourn? These are some of the questions weighing on people's minds as 88 Lok Sabha seats go to the polls on Friday. After Friday's phase, polling will be over in Kerala, Rajasthan, and Tripura. As many as 1,202 candidates, including prominent faces such as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad, Shashi Tharoor and Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar from Thiruvanthapuram, Ramayan serial actor Arun Govil from Meerut, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh (Cong) from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency, former Karnataka chief minister HD Kumaraswamy (JDS)

STARS IN FRAY

Table with 3 columns: CONSTITUENCY, CANDIDATES, PARTY. Lists candidates for various constituencies like Wayanad, Thiruvanthapuram, Bangalore Rural, etc.

from Mandya will try their electoral luck in the second phase while BJP's OM Birla from Kota, Hema Malini from Mathura, and Gajendra Singh Sekhawat from Jodhpur seeking a hat-trick of wins from their respective constituencies.

All eyes on North East

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

After observing less enthusiasm in the first phase of polls in some of the North East constituencies, the Election Commission, local administration and political parties in the fray have coordinated for an encouraging second phase of Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Several constituencies in the sensitive areas including Manipur and Tripura will witness polling. Parts of Manipur saw violence in the first phase of polling on April 19 as militants' miscreants fired at a polling booth in the State causing panic and disturbances. In Manipur, tensions between the Kuki-Zo tribes and Meiteis have been lingering for 11 months since clashes broke out between the two communities over a cataclysmic disagreements on land, resources, political representation, and affirmative action policies. Meanwhile, all necessary measures have been taken to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections in the Tripura East parliamentary constituency that will go to polls in the second and final phase on Friday.



More over, arms and ammunition were recovered on Wednesday in a joint operation of the Indian Army and Manipur Police in the violence-hit state's Imphal East district. In Manipur, tensions between the Kuki-Zo tribes and Meiteis have been lingering for 11 months since clashes broke out between the two communities over a cataclysmic disagreements on land, resources, political representation, and affirmative action policies. Meanwhile, all necessary measures have been taken to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections in the Tripura East parliamentary constituency that will go to polls in the second and final phase on Friday.

Kerala ready for election battle

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

As the countdown for Friday's polling for Lok Sabha election from Kerala is in full progress, candidates and party managers spent the penultimate day devising new strategies to ensure maximum votes in their kitties and to embarrass the rivals. Though the day was peaceful as no untoward incidents getting reported from anywhere in the State, the inspection wing of

the Election Commission seized deadly weapons like iron rods, machetes, knives and swords from the campaign vehicle of K Radhakrishnan, the CPI(M) candidate contesting from Alathur early Thursday morning. But Radhakrishnan, a Minister in Pinarayi Vijayan's government, claimed that they were gadgets for removing the flex boards and posters which have been put up as part of campaigning.

K Muraleedharan, the Congress candidate at Thrissur said his party could organise public meetings in support of Hamas soldiers fighting against Israel. "We do not have a military of our own and whatever military is there is under the command of Prime Minister Modi. Had we been ruling India, situation would have

been different," said Muraleedharan who has taken a vow that he would not allow the BJP candidates anywhere in the State to come to the third place. Shobha Surendran, the BJP candidate at Alappuzha, made a startling disclosure on Thursday that a prominent CPI(M) leader was in touch with BJP leadership to crossover to the Hindutva

party but he called off the move following death threats from the Marxists. Though she refused to divulge the name of the "leader", K Sudhakaran, the Congress candidate contesting from Kannur declared that E P Jayarajan, the LDF convenor, who is cut up with the CPI(M) leadership was the one who was about to jump fence. Jayarajan was upset over the CPI(M) leadership ignoring his claims

to the post of Kerala secretary and electing M V Govindan, a lower primary school drill master for the post. Elsewhere in the State, pollsters and observers took stock of the intensity of the campaign and most of them were unanimous in their view of a UDF sweep. P Rajan, author and former senior editor of Mathrubhumi said that the Congress-led UDF has a discernible advantage.

Electoral showdown in North Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The fates of 47 candidates, including two sitting BJP MPs — Sukanta Majumdar the State BJP president, his Darjeeling counterpart Raju Bista — will be decided even as three North Bengal constituencies of Darjeeling, Balurghat and Raiganj go to second phase polling on Friday. In order to conduct free, fair and peaceful polling the Election Commission of India has deployed 272 companies of Central forces out of which 111 would be posted at Raiganj, once a Congress stronghold sending the then Union Minister PR Dasmunshi to Parliament. Usually considered to be a violence-prone district, Raiganj has 418 sensitive booths most of which are around Goalkpokhar, Chakulia and Dalkhola bordering Bihar. The area witnessed massive violence in last year's panchayat elections when two persons were killed in political clashes. BJP has fielded Kartick Paul replacing former



Union Minister and sitting MP Debashree Chowdhury — who has been shifted to Kolkata South seat — from Raiganj. Paul is facing Trinamool Congress' Krishna Kalyani — who has a dubious record of shuttling between the TMC and the BJP — and comparatively stronger Congress candidate Ali Imran Ramz backed by the Left. A former MLA Ramz joined the Congress from his old party Forward Bloc. There are twenty candidates including one woman in Raiganj.

Congress, BJP clash in Karnataka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress and BJP will lock horns on the electoral battleground again for the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka that go to polls on Friday. It's going to be a straight fight between the ruling Congress and the BJP-JD(S) combine unlike the Assembly elections in May last year which witnessed a triangular contest among the three parties. The State has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The second phase of polling in the remaining 14 seats is on May seven. A total of 247 candidates — 226 men and 21 women — are in the fray for the first phase in most of the

southern and coastal districts. More than 2.88 crore voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in 30,602 polling stations where polling will take place between 7 am to 6 pm. While the Congress is contesting in all 14 seats, BJP has fielded nominees in 11 and its alliance partner JD(S), which joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in three — Hassan, Mandya and Kolar. Besides the three, segments where elections will be held on Friday are: Udupi-Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Mysore, ChamaraJanagar, Bangalore

Rural, Bangalore North, Bangalore Central, Bangalore South and Chikkaballapur. Having scored a thumping victory in the Assembly elections, the Congress now appears determined to put up a strong show. Karnataka is the most important State for the BJP in south India as it's only here that it had held power in the past. In fact, out of the total 30,602 polling stations in the first phase, 19,701 will be webcast, and 1,370 covered via CCTVs. Chikkaballapur has a maximum number of 29 candidates, followed by 24 in Bangalore Central, and Dakshina Kannada has the least number — nine.

Akhilesh Yadav enters LS poll arena

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

After a prolonged period of Aspeculation and internal discord, Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav has taken a decisive step by filing his nomination from the Kannauj parliamentary constituency. This move signifies a concerted effort to reclaim the political stronghold lost to the BJP in the previous election, driven primarily by intense pressure from party workers and local leaders dissatisfied with the initial candidate, Tej Pratap Yadav, due to his perceived lack of grassroots connectivity. The decision to field Akhilesh Yadav himself was prompted by a series of events that underscored the growing unrest within the party regarding the choice of candidate for the pivotal Kannauj constituency. Initially, Tej Pratap Yadav, scion of the SP legacy as the grandson of Mulayam Singh Yadav and nephew of



grassroots connectivity. The decision to field Akhilesh Yadav himself was prompted by a series of events that underscored the growing unrest within the party regarding the choice of candidate for the pivotal Kannauj constituency. Initially, Tej Pratap Yadav, scion of the SP legacy as the grandson of Mulayam Singh Yadav and nephew of

Akhilesh, was nominated for the seat on April 22. However, his scheduled visit to Kannauj on April 23 was abruptly cancelled amidst internal opposition, signalling discord within the party ranks. Concerns were raised over Tej Pratap's lack of familiarity with the local populace, which could potentially weaken the party's position in the region. The workers then requested Akhilesh to contest the election. Local journalist Sateyendra Yadav, highlight the deep-rooted connection between the workers in Kannauj and Akhilesh, viewing him as their natural leader.

Delhi LG in the dock

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/NEW DELHI

Ahead of the second phase of voting on Friday, the Congress on Thursday asked the Election Commission to take action against Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for visiting various Church leaders in Kerala ahead of the Lok Sabha election, in violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Recently, West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose had called off his proposed visit to Cooch Behar heeding the advice of the EC. Leader of the Opposition in

the Kerala Legislative Assembly VD Satheesan VD Satheesan claimed that Saxena, who is on a two-day visit to Kerala, requested an audience with the heads of the Syro Malabar Church, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Cardinal George Allencherry and others. He also met bishops of the Believers' Church. The Believers' Church, which is a Pentecostal church, has come out in support of the BJP. Satheesan on Thursday urged the EC to take action against the LG for allegedly visiting heads of churches in the southern State. He claimed that the LG is

CBI files first FIR in Sandeshkhali case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered the first case in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali related to the land grab and sexual assault allegations against five influential people there, officials said on Thursday. The case pertains to a land dispute where women of the victim's family had to allegedly face sexual assault from influential people in the area, they said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has not yet disclosed the identity of



the five accused and the victims. The Calcutta High Court on April 10 had ordered a court-monitored CBI investigation into allegations of crimes

against women and land grabbing in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, saying an "impartial inquiry" was required in the interest of justice and fair play. The CBI had circulated an email ID for people to make complaints in such cases in which a large number of complaints were received. The agency had dispatched a team to Sandeshkhali to ascertain allegations and proceed with the registration of cases where allegations could be prima facie verified.











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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Patrimonial dispute

It may be time to debate a tax on inheritance in India, but it will not be a walk in the park

The informal proposal in the Congress quarters of an inheritance tax has garnered attention and curiosity across India. While the party has distanced itself from these remarks, originally made by Indian Overseas Congress chairperson Sam Pitroda, the Statement has given another stick to the BJP to beat the Congress with. As to the viability of implementing a tax system akin to America's, delving into the issue requires a comprehensive examination of various factors, including economic, social and political. The US has long embraced the concept of taxing inheritance, albeit with its own complexities and controversies. The rationale behind such a tax is multilayered. One, it aims to address wealth inequality by ensuring that accumulated wealth is not perpetually passed down generations without contributing to public good. Two, it serves as a source of revenue for the Government, aiding in funding public services and initiatives. However, the implementation of an inheritance tax in India would face unique challenges. One of the primary concerns is the prevalence of informal economies and undocumented wealth, which could potentially evade taxation. Additionally, India's cultural and social fabric places a significant emphasis on familial ties and inheritance practices, making the introduction of such a tax a sensitive issue. Moreover, the Indian taxation system already comprises various levies, including income tax, capital gains tax and wealth tax (though repealed in 2015), which may complicate the addition of an inheritance tax. There are also concerns about the practicality of administering such a tax, given the diverse nature



of assets and prevailing inheritance structures. However, proponents argue that implementing an inheritance tax could serve as a tool for promoting economic mobility and reducing wealth concentration among a select few. By imposing a tax on large inheritances, the Government could potentially redistribute wealth more equitably and generate revenue to fund social welfare programmes. To effectively assess the feasibility of an inheritance tax in India, policymakers would need to engage in extensive consultations with stakeholders, including economists, tax experts, legal professionals and the public. Additionally, careful consideration has to be given to designing a tax framework that minimises loopholes and ensures compliance while addressing concerns related to family businesses, agricultural land and other sensitive assets. Any decision to introduce an inheritance tax should be accompanied by measures to enhance tax transparency, improve enforcement mechanisms and bolster efforts to combat tax evasion and avoidance. In conclusion, while the idea of taxing inheritance in India draws parallels with the US model, its implementation would necessitate a nuanced approach tailored to the nation's unique socio-economic context.

### PICTALK



Tibetan monks during special prayers for the long life of the 11th Panchen Lama on his birthday, in Shimla

# The marginalisation of disabled in politics



VAMIKA GUPTA

Despite 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, the *divyang* community struggles to find representation in mainstream politics

In the vast landscape of Indian democracy, where diversity should thrive, the voices and needs of individuals with disabilities often echo in silence. Despite India accounting for 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, making up 2.28 per cent of the population as per Census 2011, the disabled community has been unable to find its place in mainstream politics. With the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024 looming large and around the corner, a stark reality emerges: out of the 543 seats, not even one is occupied by a person with a disability. This absence speaks volumes, reflecting a systemic failure to acknowledge the rights and contributions of over 2.68 crore disabled individuals.



As the countdown to the elections intensifies, this leads us to critical questions. Why do the demands of persons with disabilities find little or no place in the manifestos of the political parties? Why do the exit polls overlook this significant demographic, pushing them to the sidelines of the demographic discourse? Can we truly celebrate the biggest festival of democracy with one of the significant sections of the population lagging behind?

A vicious cycle of exclusion persists when it comes to the political representation of persons with disabilities. Political parties often overlook people with disabilities, considering them a marginalised group who do not vote and are "incompetent" and "incapable" of creating any electoral impact. Professor Anita Ghai poignantly observes this disparity as "to be disabled is to be disabled by society." Too often, persons with disabilities are portrayed solely as objects of inspiration, highlighting their perceived "achievements" in crawling, reaching a polling booth and overcoming all the adversities. While these stories may momentarily touch hearts, they ultimately reinforce stereotypes, further excluding the disabled community from active participation in the electoral process. Moreover, the physical barriers

encountered at the polling stations compound the challenges faced by disabled voters, stripping away their dignity and agency. Lack of accessibility of polling stations and booths, absence of information, as well as inadequate capacity building of staff to support persons with disabilities, often make it difficult for disabled people to exercise their political rights.

For instance, during the Karnataka Assembly Elections held in 2023, when Anitha (38) arrived at the polling center, having traveled 20 km on her three-wheeled mobility bike, she was unable to make her way to the polling booth. There were no wheelchairs stocked at the facility. She says "The ramp was too narrow and could only accommodate a two-wheeler. It could not fit my three-wheeled assisted bike. The only person to ask for help was the security guard, who shrugged it off and told me to 'manage' like the other voters with disabilities, who were forced to crawl up the ramp, to the booth to cast their vote." Anitha's experience serves as a reminder of the systemic neglect that plagues our electoral infrastructure.



AS WE MARK 75 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE, THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CIVIL AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS OF THE STATE MUST BE RESPECTED AND HONOURED

The challenges multiply for those with lesser known and lesser visible disabilities, such as those with blood disorders and intellectual and developmental disability. For example, the absence of sign language interpreters during political campaigns renders crucial information inaccessible, further alienating persons with speech and hearing impairments. In a democratic process that is built on inclusivity and fairness, these barriers erode the dignity of its disabled citizens, which it promised to uphold.

Further, the lack of concrete and official data exacerbates the situation. Without accurate statistics on the number of disabled voters who cast their votes and their representation in positions of power, policy formulation becomes a shot in the dark. The reliance on outdated figures, such as considering only 7 kinds of disabilities as against 21 as per the amended Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) 2016, further compounds the problem. This dearth of information results in a lack of targeted policies and inadequate budget allocations for persons with disabilities. Yet, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for trans-

formation. The need is for persons with disabilities to be considered a part of the mainstream discourse around development. It is time to shift from a tokenistic approach to disability towards a more rights-based approach. Significantly, we need to move away from the traditional approach of treating disabled persons as mere beneficiaries and recipients of pensions and assistive devices.

As we mark 75 years of independence, the fundamental rights of persons with disability to participate in the civil and political systems of the State must be respected and honoured. This necessitates that persons with disabilities hold a seat at the table, with them being key stakeholders in designing and developing all policies and programs developed for them. Integration of the needs of the disabled community across all facets of governance is the need of the hour. I believe that it is only then that we can truly realise the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' and propel India towards its aspiration of a \$ 5 trillion economy.

(The writer is Program Officer-Advocacy, NCPEDP; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DISRESPECT BY HIGH COMMAND

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Churn in Congress over Delhi candidates", published on April 25, this is my response. The recent resignation of Raj Kumar Chauhan, a stalwart in Delhi politics and a prominent Dalit leader, from the Congress party highlights a deepening discontent within its ranks. Chauhan's departure, fuelled by allegations of disrespect from the party high command, sheds light on internal rifts over ticket distribution and outsider nominations. The incident underscores a broader issue of party unity and inclusivity, especially ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The rejection of 'outsider' candidates and the clash between grassroots leaders and central leadership reflect a disconnect that could harm the party's electoral prospects. Chauhan's decades-long dedication to the Congress, coupled with his grievances, poses a significant challenge to the party's leadership. His departure, along with the protests against nominations like Udit Raj's, signals a need for introspection and reconciliation within the Delhi Congress. Ultimately, the party must address these grievances transparently to uphold its integrity and regain the trust of its members and constituents alike.

Aysha Singh | Jaipur

### CORRUPTION, A PERVERSIVE REALITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Determining the limits of corruption, the Indian way", published on April 25, this is my response. Corruption, an omnipresent spectre, haunts every facet of Indian society, transcending the boundaries of public and private sectors. While Governmental and political malfeasance often grab the headlines, corruption manifests in myriad forms, from petty bribery to workplace coercion. The notion that only monetary exchanges define corruption overlooks systemic injustices and abuses of power. The oath-bound duty of public officials to serve the populace is marred by arrogance

### India's democracy dilemma



Apropos the news article, "The democratic status of India under scanner", published on April 25, this is my response. The V-Dem Institute's report labeling India as an "electoral autocracy" raises eyebrows, suggesting a skewed perspective on its democratic landscape. While global indices like the EIU Democracy Index provide a framework,

their methodology and accuracy have been questioned. Civil liberties, a cornerstone of democracy, show a worrying decline in India, impacting its global rankings and sovereignty. The World Happiness Report highlights India's struggle, exacerbated by the pandemic, influencing its happiness index. Moreover, the RSF's Press Freedom Index depicts a concerning picture, placing India unfavorably alongside Pakistan and Afghanistan. The methodology critique underscores the importance of robust research methodologies. As India faces scrutiny, it's imperative to introspect and perhaps develop indigenous indices aligned with its realities. Decolonising the democracy index could offer a more accurate reflection of India's democratic journey amidst global assessments.

Anand Rajan | Chennai

and apathy, fostering a culture where exploitation thrives unchecked. Despite legislative efforts, corruption persists unabated, prompting introspection on the efficacy of legal remedies. Is corruption an indelible part of our collective psyche, entrenched beyond legislative constraints? The normalisation of corrupt practices challenges societal morality, blurring the lines between acceptance and condemnation. As scandals unveil the deep-seated roots of corruption, it beckons a reevaluation of societal norms and ethical compasses. The lament of a disillusioned officer underscores a sobering reality: corruption knows no bounds, yet its normalisation is a limit we dare not accept.

Nikhil Desai | Pune

### NAVIGATING WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Nurture workplace safety and inclusivity", published on April 25, this is my response. The modern workplace is a dynamic ecosystem, mirroring Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where foundational

elements must be addressed before reaching higher goals. With a diverse workforce spanning multiple generations, including X-Gens to Generation Alpha, it's imperative to adapt policies and practices accordingly. Pay parity, safe workplaces and respectful environments are crucial pillars, alongside diversity and inclusion initiatives. Flexibility, accessibility and appreciation further enhance employee well-being and engagement. Training and development programs ensure continuous growth and inclusivity. By prioritising accessibility and accommodation, organisations demonstrate their commitment to equality. In this evolving landscape, fostering a culture of support and appreciation is key to nurturing talent and achieving collective success. As we navigate these workplace dynamics, it's essential to embrace change and prioritise the well-being of all employees.

Pooja Menon | Kochi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Why do Indians excel abroad and fail back home?

Emphasis on fostering creativity, innovation and risk-taking is pivotal for the nation to become a global hub for knowledge creation



RADHIKA SHRIVASTAVA

Indians have undeniably left a lasting impression across various global arenas, spanning technology, entrepreneurship, academia and healthcare. However, a perplexing paradox persists - why do Indians excel overseas while encountering unique obstacles within their homeland? This compelling question warrants immediate attention and a thorough exploration of the multifaceted challenges at hand. **Deciphering the Enigma: Indian Excellence Abroad and Domestic Hurdles** The disparity between Indian achievements on the international stage and the hurdles faced domestically primarily stems from deficiencies in the public education system. The insightful narrative of "Why Indians Succeed Everywhere Except in India," as presented by EW, adeptly dissects this paradox, attributing it to the lamentable State of public education - an observation that holds true. **The Interplay of Education, Governance and Economic**



### Development

The nexus between the quality of education and the overall health of political, socio-economic and law and order systems is profound. A robust education system forms the cornerstone for an informed citizenry, competent leadership and a flourishing economy. Recognising education as a catalyst for effective governance and economic prosperity, it is imperative to prioritise education within national development strategies. **Challenges in Primary and Secondary Education** The current State of primary and secondary education reflects the trajectory of our nation's future. ASER surveys reveal a stark reality - a significant portion of our youth lacks even basic

skills expected at their grade levels. This systemic failure jeopardises the very foundation of our future, necessitating a discerning response to address underlying issues. **Higher Education: Quality and Employability Crisis** Graduation should ideally open doors to a world of opportunities. However, India grapples with the challenge of higher education - the mismatch between degrees and employability. It is crucial to question whether higher education institutions adequately prepare graduates for the dynamic job market, reflecting the systemic challenges faced by graduates and the subsequent brain drain. **The Brain Drain Predicament: Retaining India's Brightest Minds** While India boasts exporting talent worldwide, there's a sobering reality - a loss of intellectual capital that could otherwise fuel national growth. Understanding the migration patterns of Indian graduates to foreign shores challenges the convention-

al narrative of brain drain. Yet, it's vital to acknowledge the diaspora's positive contributions as a bridge between India and the global economy. **A Call to Action for Change** Viewing the emigration of skilled individuals as a loss for India underscores the urgency for comprehensive strategies to reverse brain drain, attract exceptional talent back home and invest in research and development. A paradigm shift in higher education is imperative, emphasising creativity, innovation and risk-taking to foster a globally competitive India. Restoring the spirit of private enterprise and nurturing a dynamic academic and industrial environment is crucial for sustained growth. As we navigate the complexities of reform, the vision outlined in this analysis serves as a beacon toward a more prosperous, innovative and globally competitive India. (The author is a Managing Director, FIIB; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE ESSENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It is awareness of the environment, thoughts, feelings and sensations



RAVI VALLURI

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves. What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow, the Enlightened One, Buddha was to say.

In our lexicon today subjects and topics like physics, metaphysics, an elevated State, consciousness, life coaches and mind, apart from iconic names of Stephen Hawking, Jim Holt, and Carl Sagan among others are all banded quite recklessly without deep study. This is perhaps done under pressure to keep up with Jones or to display our awareness about certain issues of topical interests without proper research.

Recently my jaw dropped when confronted with some basic facts and facets of our universe. Through my elementary study of physics and geography, I was aware that we live on Planet Earth, which is an integral part of a Solar System; though I was in the dark and not fully aware that each star in the galaxy has its own solar systems like ours. I was certainly an ignoramus on these riveting concepts. Apparently, several of these stars and their respective solar systems do not exist anymore and have disappeared forever in the sands of time or are perhaps gravitating towards a black hole. It dawned on me as to how ignorant I was despite my readings on the subject.

So how does this lead us to the quintessential term of consciousness? Simply put consciousness is a State when humans are aware of and responsive to their environment. This is inclusive of both prevailing internal and external conditions. An individual blessed with an efficacious and robust thought process becomes aware and responsive to various occurrences which are taking place both within and without.



Consciousness is an individual's State of awareness of their environment, thoughts, feelings, or sensations; and in order to experience consciousness, one must be both awake and aware. Arjuna, the ace archer slumped and his fabled Gandiva fell to the ground as his mind was gripped with doubts and fear as the spectre of battling his cousins, his Gurus and above all the patriarch Bhishma coloured the mind and Sisyphian thought process engulfed his persona.

This was when Lord Krishna unleashed his Vishwarup Darshan and rendered the song celestial Bhagavad Gita which revealed his true self and raised the consciousness in Arjuna who took up the cudgels once again. King Janaka the father of Sita was a Jnani Purush. He was a highly knowledgeable and enlightened person and was referred to as a Raj Rishi. One day in his court he fell asleep and dreamt that Mithila his kingdom was stricken by severe and dreaded drought conditions.

The suzerain visualised an eagle swooping down and plucking a piece of bread/chappati from the hands of an impoverished peasant. This shocked the king and he woke up from a State of slumber to receive sage Ashtavakra who was to reveal the gospel of truth, which is popularly referred to as Ashtavakra Gita. Janaka then realised his true self and the consciousness was ignited. Buddha for years continued with his spiritual practices and was perennially haunted by Mara (evil/ fiendish forces) while cogitating, until on one full moon night pristine truth dawned on him and he went into deep silence.

Consciousness in Buddhism refers to life force, mind and discernment. Consciousness is the State when the human mind is verily awakened and assumes the form of a pure and pristine child brimming with enthusiasm, joy and curiosity. This is an experiential State of mind and consciousness.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

## Neglect spurs industry exodus in Punjab



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

The Punjab Government has not only lacked an industrial policy for a long time, but there has been a continuous deterioration in the infrastructure required for industries

After independence till the year 2011-12, Punjab was considered to be one of the rich and prosperous States of India. In the year 2000-01, the per capita income of Punjab was not only the highest in the country, but it was also 9 per cent more than the second richest State, namely, Haryana. But in the year 2012-13, the per capita income of Punjab slipped to the second position and today Punjab has reached the 10th position in terms of per capita income among the States with a population of more than 1 crore and the 19th position among all the States, and has now become the second slowest growing States in the country.

In the year 2011-12, when Punjab's per capita income was the highest in the country, the share of agriculture was 24 per cent, that of industries 28.4 per cent and that of services 47.6 per cent. But by the year 2022-23, the share of agriculture had increased to 28.94 per cent, while the share of industries and services was reduced to 25.51 per cent and 45.91 per cent respectively. It can be assumed that the industry and service sector have shrunk in Punjab. While talking about its neighbouring State Haryana, the share of industries in GDP in Haryana has increased from 25.90 per cent to 28 per cent between the years 2011-12 and 2021-22. The share of industries in Gujarat has increased from 36 per cent to 43 per cent during the same period, and in Tamil Nadu from 27.9 per cent to 33 per cent.

It can be understood that during this period, deindustrialisation has taken place in Punjab. Although Punjab is famous in the world for its population migrating to different parts of the world, since the beginning, after independence, a large number of Punjabi people migrated to the USA, Canada, Europe and many other countries. Punjab benefited a lot from these migrant Punjabis. The money sent to Punjab by the migrant Punjabis from abroad was greatly beneficial for the development of agriculture and industries. A wave of industrial development was seen in Punjab for a long time.

But for quite some time now it has been observed that not only has the industrial development of Punjab come to a halt, but a large number of industries have now started migrating out of Punjab. Industries of Punjab have now started shifting to its neighbouring States like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan etc. as well as to distant States like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat etc. Punjab was especially known for its engineering industry, but many engineering companies have now shifted to the user States of their products. On the other hand, Jalandhar was considered a big centre for sports products, and many sports industries there, have now shifted to Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. It is being observed that textile and garment industries have shifted to Madhya Pradesh, the bicycle industry to Chennai and China, knitwear industry to Africa, Southeast Asia and Madhya Pradesh.

**Anti-industry policies of Punjab Government**  
The agriculture sector in Punjab has been considered very important from an economic point of view. It is worth noting that although only 28.94 per cent of the total GDP in Punjab comes from agriculture, more than 65 per cent of its population depends directly on agriculture. A sad part of Indian democracy is its populist policies. In Punjab, these populist policies have



PUNJABIS ARE GOOD ENTREPRENEURS, WHICH MAKES PUNJAB EXCEL IN INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT. BUT TODAY, PUNJAB IS LAGGING BEHIND IN COMPETITION WITH THOSE STATES WHERE LOGISTICS COSTS ARE LOW AND WHERE THERE HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

worked to adversely affect the economic development of Punjab. Punjab, that is, the region of five rivers, has been very rich in terms of water. However in Punjab, due to the ease of groundwater extraction, a large number of tube wells were installed. To please farmers, the Punjab Government started the scheme of giving free electricity for agriculture. In such a situation, excessive exploitation of water started. Due to this, many districts of Punjab have now become dark zones, that is, where the availability of groundwater has depleted excessively.

However, the Punjab Government's policy of giving free electricity to agriculture has not only affected the availability of groundwater but has also affected the industries there. The Punjab Government has put most of the burden of free electricity for agriculture on industries and businesses. Due to this electricity has become very expensive for industries, causing a huge disadvantage to the Punjab industry vis a vis their counterparts elsewhere. This has seriously affected the viability of industries. They have no option left but to move out of Punjab to other States and even to foreign countries. Environmental laws in Punjab are such that it is almost impossible to comply with them. In such a situation, industries have no choice but to shut down their units or move to other States. Not only this, industries and businesses in Punjab also have to pay high water cess, due to which industries have to face losses.

**Conditions becoming difficult**  
One of the reasons for rapid indus-

trial and economic development in States like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh etc. is infrastructure development and other facilities, which leads to a reduction in their logistics cost. It is well known that Punjabis are good entrepreneurs, which made Punjab excel in industrial and commercial development. But today Punjab is lagging behind in competition with those States where logistics cost is low and where there has been significant progress in infrastructure. It is worth noting that the condition of infrastructure in Punjab has become much worse in recent years.

Not only this, the implementation of the GST system has also affected the industries of Punjab. Earlier, indirect taxes were levied at a low rate by the Punjab Government, but after the implementation of the GST system, the possibility of State-specific fiscal incentives is very limited, due to which the competitive power of the industries of Punjab has now become much lower than other States.

**Obstacles for new and old industries**  
If someone wants to set up a new industry in Punjab, then not only environmental but also other types of clearances are highly difficult. Not only this, allotment of land for industries is also very difficult and is also plagued by corruption. The financial sector in Punjab has also been seriously affected, because most of the agricultural loans of Punjab have turned bad and due to this, NPAs in Punjab are also very high.

Not only this, the continuously dete-

riorating law and order situation in Punjab is wreaking havoc on the industries.

**Half-hearted efforts**  
The distance from the sea and the high logistics cost of exports are also one of the reasons why Punjab's industries have to send goods through a long route. Earlier, goods could be sent through Pakistan, but now since that route is closed, goods can be sent overseas only through Mumbai port. To deal with this situation, an air cargo facility was started in Amritsar, but there was a lack of complementary efforts. Due to the lack of backward linkages of air cargo with industries, only 20 per cent of the air cargo facility is being used presently. While other State Governments are offering various incentives to attract industries, the Punjab Government has not only lacked an industrial policy for a long time but there has been a continuous deterioration in the infrastructure required for industries. There is also a lack of research and development activities.

Due to the lack of industrial development, Punjab is continuously lagging behind economically, but the biggest concern is that the Punjab administration has no thought or policy initiatives on this subject. In such a situation, if this trend is not stopped, Punjab can lag far behind in economic development, which will be neither good for Punjab nor for the country.

(The writer is a professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi, views are personal)

## Bihar's educational reforms cock a snook at private players

Bihar Government's bold education initiatives combat global capital's influence on marginalised, writes Keyoor Pathak

The failure of the Bihar Government on countless fronts in the last few decades cannot be dismissed, and an exclusive example of the failure can be perceived in the law made without any proper preparation and study against liquor. Apart from this, there are many issues where the Government has demonstrated its substantial weakness such as rural migration, agriculture et cetera. However, there are some steps taken by the Government that must be appreciated without any political prejudices, this is the initiative on the subject of education in the State. Today, when the market is bent on taking over education completely in almost the entire India, the effort of the State to patronise education on such a

large scale can be considered a very bold step. In a way, this is a counter by the State to global capital. When the educational institutions are coming out of the hands of the Government and going into the hands of the corporates, the work done by the Bihar Government on the education system is in a way like the return of the welfare State. Such efforts must be made on health services too. However, in recent years, its big beginning can be seen in Delhi where it was claimed that Government school education has been taken to a prestigious level, and this claim should not be denied. But through education reforms in Bihar, the State is again visible in its public-concerning role, albeit partially, only in a few

subjects. Bihar is one of the poorest States in the country, and social and economic inequality is also at its peak. Then in such a situation, the model of economic development of putting education in the open market will push marginalised people even further to the margins.

It has always been a crying question of how much space will be left for the rights of education of the marginalised sections while in most of the private schools are functioning like money making industries. And it should be understood that private schools do not flourish because of their quality, rather the failure of the Government schools gives them an opportunity to spread their footing. Unfortunately, Government schools have



been continuously neglected by the State for decades. And all this did not happen spontaneously, rather there was a well-planned conspiracy of the Global Capital behind it that firstly let the Government schools be destroyed and then the private schools would automatically get legitimacy. In a way, the society has given up all its expectations from Government schools, they have accepted that children

have no future in Government schools. Consequently, social psychology developed which did not take the availability of quality education as a serious question. If it had been taken, there would have been pressure on the Governments and they would have worked on the facilities and quality education in the Government schools, but this rarely happened. The Bihar Government again made Government schools a part of the election manifestos of political parties. We saw some of the work that the Government has done to improve the education system. For example, there was a severe shortage of teachers in schools for a long time, to fulfil teachers were recruited on a large scale. The appointment of more than one lakh teachers is

enough to show the seriousness of the Government's vision on education. Undoubtedly a large part of the budget would have been spent on this. If we talk about infrastructure, the schools of Bihar had turned into ruins. It was difficult to say which building would collapse and when. Children were often forced to sit in the open field or in the veranda. But to fix all these things the Government allocated a huge amount. Allotment of the books, dresses and bags and water bottles for children along with other materials not only attracts them towards schools but also reduces the financial burden for the parents, especially for those who are barely able to earn their living by doing farm labour. For urban elites

these things might be futile but for the rural people this is not affordable by their own income.

We all had seen children carrying books in their hands or in dusted polythene or in torn cloth (jholas), but now they had beautiful bags in their hands and instead of torn half-naked clothes on their bodies, uniforms were shining on them. It was well known fact how little attention they paid to the children.

The Government has strictly forced the teachers to be responsible for their duties towards children, which was not an easy task, years of Government negligence had made them indolent. Some other small and big efforts can be seen there to control the deep-rooted corruption in the

education system. A pertinent aspect which perhaps sought for more attention that is 'Mid-Day Meal'. This should be allowed to continue in a smoother manner and at the local level merely, any interference by any external agency is likely to lead to many other complications. Amidst all these achievements, the biggest problem visible is, how to continue this reform in the future, because there still seems to be a lack of proper mechanism for this; and in the absence of a mechanism all efforts and achievement may be proven futile.

(The author is Post-Doctorate from CSD, Hyderabad and Assistant Professor in Department of Sociology, University of Allahabad; views are personal)

USP

BIS Raids Spurious ISI Marked Precast Concrete Paving Block Unit

A team consisting of Sh. Ajay Maurya, Joint Director, Sh. Saurabh Verma, Asst Director and Sh. Milan Kumar, SO under the guidance of Sh. Vishal Tomer,

Director and Head from Chandigarh Branch Office, Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS), conducted an Enforcement raid i.e. Search and Seizure operation at M/s United Traders, Mateshwari Marble, Balachaur, Chandigarh Jalandhar Expressway, GarhiKanungaon, Distt. SBS Nagar, Punjab on 23-04-2024 to check misuse of ISI mark on Precast Concrete Paving Block. During the raid, approximately 15000 Precast Concrete Paving Blocks and approx. 1700 moulds with spurious ISI mark were seized and sealed.

LOST NOTICE I Samsher Singh S/o Gurnam Singh R/o Andana Teh-Moonak (Sangrur) declare that Ankush Singla S/o Pala Ram resident of Khanauri (Sangrur) sold a plot to Ramvati wife Rajesh Kumar resident of Village Naiwala (Patiala) From whom I had previously purchased. The old registry document of the said plot is No. 2020-21/126/1/171, dated 29 June 2020 which is lost. Whose SR No. 462653/2024 is registered at Thana Khanuri. If anyone finds this missing registry, please send it to the above address within 7 days.

NOTICE OF LOSS OF SHARE Company Name: ESCORTS KURBITA LIMITED Registered Address: 15/5, Mathura Road, Faridabad, Haryana, 121003

PUBLIC NOTICE ICICI Bank

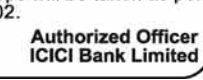
Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Shal Tower, 3rd floor, Plot No-23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Guarantor, Property Address of Secured Asset, Date of Notice Sent/Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Contains details for multiple borrowers including Love Miglani, Vidhi Gujrani, and others.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Guarantor, Property Address of Secured Asset, Date of Notice Sent/Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Contains details for multiple borrowers including Chetan Sharma, Harjinder Singh, and others.

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. Date: April 26, 2024 Place: Punjab







# Markets extend gains

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rising for the fifth straight session, equity benchmark Sensex rallied nearly 500 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark while the Nifty closed above the 22,550 level on Thursday, driven by heavy buying in banking, financial and metal stocks. Recovering after a sell-off in early trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44. During the day, it surged 718.31 points or 0.97 per cent to 74,571.25. The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35. From the Sensex basket, Axis Bank jumped 6 per cent after the company reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 7,599 crore during the March 2024 quarter. State Bank of India, NTPC, Nestle, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel, ITC, Mahindra & Mahindra and HCL Technologies were among



the other major gainers. Kotak Mahindra Bank tanked 10.85 per cent after the RBI barred the company from onboarding customers online and issuing credit cards. Cracking down on repeated non-compliance with IT norms, the RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding new customers through its online and

mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards with immediate effect after the regulator found "serious deficiencies" in the lender's IT risk management. Hindustan Unilever, Titan, Bajaj Finance, Maruti and Asian Paints were the other laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled lower while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.06 per cent to USD 88.07 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,511.74 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark rose 114.49 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 73,852.94 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty advanced 34.40 points or 0.15 per cent to 22,402.40.

# Resilient economy, price stability to support India promising growth story: FinMin report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Resilient growth, price stability and steady external sector outlook continue to support India's promising economic performance amid uncertain global conditions, a Finance Ministry report said on Thursday. Overall, India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, with positive assessments of the growth outlook for the current financial year for India by international organisations and the RBI, the Monthly Economic Review for March said. The IMF, in its April 2024 World Economic Outlook (WEO), has revised upwards its estimate of India's real GDP growth for FY24 to 7.8 per cent from 6.7 per cent in its January 2024 update and 6.3 per cent in its October 2023 WEO. The report said the global economic growth landscape is seeing a gradual resurgence, marked by fading fears of recession and rebounding growth in major economies. Geopolitical tensions remain a concern, but notwithstanding recent developments, risk perceptions have softened, offering a potential upside for growth, it said.



Talking about global economic growth recovery, the report said it is underway in major economies, although disparities persist. "While the leading indicators signal increased economic activity and geopolitical tensions have eased slightly, recent conflicts continue to pose risks. Despite the global challenges, India stands out with its strong economic performance, highlighting broad-based

growth across sectors and asserting its pivotal role in supporting the global growth trajectory," it said. Global slowdown led to a moderation in India's merchandise exports and imports, it said adding that the slowing of trade has resulted in the merchandise trade deficit narrowing in FY2023-24, as exports have shown a smaller contraction than imports. However, the non-petroleum and non-gems & jewellery merchandise exports have shown resilience with a sustained uptick in the last few months, growing at 3 per cent in FY24. Services exports expanded at the fastest pace in FY24, supported by rising software exports and business services exports. Owing to these developments, it said, India's current account deficit improved in the first nine months of 2023-24 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. India's capital inflows saw a significant turnaround in 2023-24, and its foreign exchange reserves reached an all-time high in March 2024, sufficient to cover 11 months of projected imports and more than 100 per cent of total external debt.

# AI offers remarkable opportunity for India: Qualcomm India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India, with its growth engines roaring, is the "place to be", Qualcomm India President Savi Soin has said, adding that the country has a "remarkable opportunity" with hybrid Artificial Intelligence (AI). The San Diego, California-headquartered chip designer is working with OEMs as well as operators in India to help bring entry-level 5G smartphone that would push new frontiers in affordability. "India is the place to be... Look at every sector, there is growth in every sector in India and that is just to serve the Indian consumers... You can imagine what is happening in phones with what OEMs are doing here... Not just build for India market but also for exports," Soin said in an interview to PTI. The India growth story is compelling, and the country with its strength and scale has



a "remarkable opportunity" with hybrid AI. Hybrid AI is device and cloud working together, splitting AI computation as needed, to offer enhanced experiences and optimum use of resources. "I wouldn't want to be in any place else but India in terms of

Qualcomm sees India as a "crucial" hub for talent, but also an opportunity "to do more". Qualcomm opened its first India office in 1996 in New Delhi, and its engineering development centres in Bengaluru and Hyderabad came up in 2004. The company's engineering presence in the country has now expanded to include Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Noida, with offices in Gurgaon, and Mumbai. The development centres operate as a part of Qualcomm's global research and development engine. In fact, India is the largest base outside of San Diego for Qualcomm's research and development. The development and R&D teams work very closely with Qualcomm's headquarters to customise solutions and applications for India across mobile, Internet of Things (IoT), auto, and connectivity. The Bangalore Development

Centre is host to a 5G Innovation lab, which has supported several Indian customers and startups on 5G solutions and product development journeys. "...We are working with all the two-wheeler OEMs in India and been able to provide them digital transformation... The experience they are looking for, in terms of connected platforms on two-wheelers and doing the similar thing for digital cockpit in four-wheelers... "We are also looking at what we can do in terms of consumer devices, be PC or phones. We are super excited about what India has to offer," Soin said. Describing Reliance Jio as a strategic partner for Qualcomm, Soin said, "We have been working with them on fixed wireless and on their initial 4G devices as well." "Lot of initiatives we have undergoing with Jio, they are very strategic partners for us.

We are proving tech know how and expertise... While we bring these technologies there is a lot of innovations that Jio is bringing to us as well. This is a two-way partnership," he elaborated. The company is lining up a new chipset that would enable the launch of 5G smartphone, in the price point of sub-USD 100. Qualcomm is working with all operators in India to help bring an entry-level 5G smartphone and believes that such technology should be available to the masses. Soin said the company is working not just with one but multiple partners to ensure its success, and reach. "We are enabling all OEMs, that we work with, to bring these devices into India. We will be working with all the operators in India and channels partners to bring these devices at affordable prices that India has not seen before. That is what we are most excited about," he said.

"The main driver of the YoY (year-on-year) rise of services exports in Q4 2023 was the ample growth of international travel receipts. In the post-COVID-19 recovery, travel receipts increased by 70 per cent in Asia (YoY)," the report said. Commenting on India's services exports, an industry expert said that the export of IT and IT-enabled services and travel is going strong. Business services like engineering, architecture, legal and accounting services and research and management consulting services stand to benefit from leveraging the opportunities presented by the government initiatives. India's service exports have historically been concentrated in North America and Europe, but there is also significant potential for growth in emerging markets, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

# India services exports grow 11.4 per cent in 2023: UNCTAD report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's services exports jumped 11.4 per cent to USD 345 billion in 2023 despite global economic uncertainties, while China's shipments from the sector contracted by 10.1 per cent to USD 381 billion, according to a UNCTAD report. Sectors that contribute to India's services export growth include travel, transport, medical and hospitality. With an 8.9 per cent annual rise in current dollar value terms, the world services exports surpassed USD 7.9 trillion in 2023, a quarterly bulletin of UNCTAD said. The leading exporters among developing economies include India, China, Singapore, Türkiye, Thailand, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia, it added. India's services imports, however, dipped marginally by 0.4 per cent to USD 248 billion last year.

# Ministry working on infrastructure needs to achieve \$1 trillion goods exports target by 2030: Official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry has initiated an exercise to identify required infrastructure needs, potential sectors, and clusters which would help the country achieve the USD 1 trillion merchandise exports target by 2030, a senior government official said on Thursday. Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Anant Swarup said that the Asian Development Bank has been requested to conduct a study in this regard. If the country is targeting USD 1 trillion of exports by 2030, there is a likelihood of about USD 1.5 trillion of imports, so "do we have enough capacity" to cater to USD 2.5 trillion of EXIM (export and import) trade, he said. So that is the target on which the department is working, he said. "The ADB is doing a study for us because what is more important is from where the USD 1 trillion of exports is going to come from; which are those sectors and clusters



Imports too dipped to USD 677.24 billion in the last fiscal. He also said that the government is also focusing on ways to push India's integration into the global supply chains (GVCs) as at present about 70 per cent of the global trade is happening through these chains. For this, there is a need to increase manufacturing. He added that generally exports and imports move in tandem. China's exports stood at about USD 3.5 trillion and imports are at USD 3.2 trillion. Speaking at the event, Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said that further infrastructure push is required at ports and airports to increase India's exports. Sarangi said that to handle USD 2.5 trillion of exports and imports, India needs to create a lot of infrastructure. As per rough calculations, "we need to create an infrastructure which will support an additional 2,000 million tonnes of goods movement in the ports.

from where this USD 1 trillion of exports is going to come from. That is very critical for us. "Because unless we know about the clusters, and ports or airports from where this USD 1 trillion of exports and USD 1.5 trillion of imports is going to happen, we would not be able to do a baseline study to identify the gaps which exist and then enhance our infrastructure capabilities," Swarup said. He was speaking at a CII conference on resilient export logistics for trade and connectivity. India's merchandise exports dipped by 3.11 per cent to USD 437 billion in 2023-24.

# HUDCO celebrates its 54th Foundation Day

ABHI SINGHAL ■ NEW DELHI

Housing and Urban Development Corporation Limited (HUDCO), a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), celebrated its 54th Foundation Day on Thursday. The Navratna CPSE has been adding more efforts for the creation of sustainable and resilient infrastructure in line with Government of India Vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. The Public Financial Institution celebrated their Foundation Day at India Habitat Centre and the celebrations were graced by the board of Directors of HUDCO including Sanjay Kulshrestha, Chairman & Managing Director, M Nagaraj, Director of Corporate Planning, Kuldip Narayan, Director and more senior members. HUDCO with its mandate of providing long term financial assistance to Housing and Urban Infrastructure sectors has operated through its Pan-India network of 21 Regional Offices, 11 Development Offices and a Corporate Office



and Research and Training Institute (HSMI) in Delhi. The CPSE also released many Hindi and English publications namely Shelter - HSMI's biannual publication on policy issues, Darpan - an inhouse magazine, Johar and more. For many years HUDCO has supported the State Government in the development of Affordable Housing Schemes for Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and Low Income Group (LIG) segments and social infrastructure projects all over the country. HUDCO is also one of the Central Nodal Agency for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

# ITC plans to open more hotels overseas: CMD Puri

PTI ■ COLOMBO

India's diversified entity ITC plans to open more hotels overseas with neighbouring countries and the Middle East as primary target markets after opening of its first international property here, company Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri said on Thursday. The company's arm ITC Hotels, which had opened 22 new properties in the last 24 months, plans to add another 70 hotels in the next five years in India as part of expansion plans in the hospitality sector. Besides the hotels business, the company will look for opportunities to expand the presence of FMCG and other verticals in new overseas markets as well. "We are open to exploring opportunities that come about. I think we have strong credentials in hospitality which we can take outside India now. Very clearly at the moment the focus is on proximal markets, be it for hospitality, be it for FMCG..." Puri said here at a press conference after the opening

of the 352-room luxury property, ITC Ratnadipa here. He said as the company explores and understands a place for a particular business, it may look at it as a market for other verticals as well. Citing the example of Nepal, Puri said, "We started with other businesses and are now looking at hospitality (there). Here (in Sri Lanka) we have started with hospitality...As we explore and understand the place, we will look at possibilities in some of our other sectors as well." On overseas expansion of the hospitality business, while the company's focus is more on 'proximal markets', he said, "We are open to it if there are some interesting opportunities beyond it. We will certainly be interested in pursuing that." When asked if ITC is looking at the Middle East as a market for the hospitality business, he said it is a vibrant economy right now with terrific growth plans and "if opportunity comes our way then we will certainly explore that".

# SRM IST hosts Conference on Occupational Therapy



KATTANKULATHUR: In his presidential address at the inauguration of the National Conference on Autism, 2024, on Wednesday, Dr P Sathyanarayanan, Pro Chancellor (Academics), SRM Institute of Science and Technology, said SRM College of Occupational Therapy, since its inception in 1996, had provided treatment to more than 5,000 people through the occupational therapy programme. He said that people with autism had to travel to different places to have access to services and avail treatment from doctors and therapists. With a view to providing all such services under a single roof, they had established the occupational therapy centre at SRM IST in Kattankulathur. PNS

# Tech Mahindra Q4 net profit tanks 41 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT services company Tech Mahindra on Thursday reported about 41 per cent year-on-year fall in its consolidated net profit to Rs 661 crore for the quarter ended March 2024. The net profit in the year-ago period was Rs 1,117.7 crore. For Q4FY24, the Tech Mahindra's revenue dropped by 6.2 per cent to Rs 12,871 crore. During the full fiscal FY24, the consolidated net profit tanked 51.2 per cent year-on-year to Rs 2,358 crore. The revenue during FY24 at Rs 51,996 crore, translated to a decline of 2.4 per cent over the previous fiscal. Tech Mahindra CEO Mohit Joshi said, "As we step into FY25, we look forward to improvement in clients spending, which fuels

our optimism for a better revenue performance ahead." He said that FY24 posed its fair share of challenges for the IT services sector. "...Yet, amidst the global economic uncertainties, we continue to observe a notable push towards digital adoption," Joshi said. The company's total headcount stood at 1,45,455 in Q4FY24, down 795 on a sequential basis. The board recommended final dividend of Rs 28 per equity share (face value of Rs 5 each) for the financial year ended March 31, 2024. The Final Dividend, if approved, will be paid on or before, August 9, 2024. This dividend is in addition to interim dividend of Rs 12 per equity share paid by the company in November, 2023.

# Indian housing market outlook bullish: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Consumers sentiments in India's housing market remain positive despite a rise in prices, according to realty portal Magicbricks. On Thursday, Magicbricks released a report 'Housing Sentiment Index' based on the survey of over 4,500 customers across 11 cities. "Despite inflationary pressures, the Housing Sentiment Index (HSI) across India remains robust with strong buyer confidence," it said in a statement. The survey revealed a positive market outlook for the Indian residential real estate sector with an overall HSI of 149. Magicbricks said the HSI is



derived from an online survey capturing the responses of 4,500 high intent homebuyers across the top 11 cities of India, spanning various income brackets and budget preferences. The HSI score ranges from 0 to 200, with 100 representing

neutral. Indicating an expectation of market stability in the short to medium term. A score of 200 reflects a bullish sentiment while a score of 0 indicated a bearish sentiment. "Currently, the pan-India HSI stands at 149, signalling the optimistic outlook of

prospective homebuyers," the report said. Ahmedabad emerged as the frontrunner with the highest HSI of 163, closely followed by Kolkata (160), Gurugram (157), and Hyderabad (156), propelled by enhanced infrastructure and upcoming new real estate projects. "The current scenario of India's real estate sector reflects the most promising conditions witnessed in the past decade, instilling confidence among homebuyers and investors nationwide. Its also noteworthy that the demand is consistently surpassing available supply, showing encouraging signs of swift absorption when new

inventory enters the market," Sudhir Pai, CEO of Magicbricks, said. The report also identified that mid-age professionals (24-35 age group) demonstrated the highest HSI (154). Furthermore, consumers with an annual income of Rs 10-20 lakh displayed strongest aspirations for home buying, with HSI of 156. According to the statement, Magicbricks has monthly website traffic exceeding 2 crore and an active base of over 15 lakh property listings. It has become a full stack service provider for all real estate needs, with services, including home loans, interiors, movers and packers, and expert advice.

# PRESERVING A RICH LEGACY FOR A GLORIOUS FUTURE

World Dance Day is not just a celebration but a promise for the future, a future where Indian classical dance continues to inspire, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



**R**enowned Bharatanatyam dancer, vocalist, and Padma Shri awardee, Geeta Chandran, is a bridge between tradition and contemporary sensibilities. Leading the esteemed Natya Vriksha organisation, her dedication to Indian classical dance extends far beyond captivating performances. Led by the visionary Chandran, her organisation took centre stage in Delhi for World Dance Day, offering a stunning display last week on April 20th and 21st at the India International Centre, co-hosted by the Ministry of Culture. Chandran's talent for blending tradition with contemporary flair was on full display, captivating attendees from all walks of life. The heart of the celebration beat with the youthful energy of the Young Dancers' Festival, promising a bright future for Indian classical dance. The opening was a soulful Bharatanatyam performance by Vaishnavi Srinivasan and Nivedha Harish, disciples of Guru Smt Roja Kannan. Their dance, choreographed by Guru Adyar K Lakshmanan, set a magical tone for the evening. Divya Goswami, a disciple of the late Guru Shri Munnalal Shukla, followed with her mesmerising Kathak performance. Beyond technical skill, the event offered a glimpse into Indian culture through the expressive movements of young artists. Each gesture was filled with passion, captivating the audience,

showcasing Chandran's instinct to identify exceptional talent. On this platform, Natya Vriksha not only celebrated established artists but also empowered emerging dancers, providing them a space to shine. The Bharatanatyam performances were a visual feast, with elaborate costumes, jewellery, and makeup enhancing the storytelling. The audience responded with thunderous applause, appreciating the dedication and skill of the dancers. Chandran's vision for Natya Vriksha extends far beyond the stage. Her organisation serves as a nurturing ground for budding artists. They create a sense of community and collaboration within the Indian classical dance scene, encouraging a sense of shared passion and heritage. Chandran's unwavering commitment to preserving this rich cultural heritage is evident not only in her captivating performances but also in her dedication to empower the next generation of dancers. World Dance Day, under her watchful eye, was more than just a celebration; it was a promise for a vibrant future. A future where Indian classical dance continues to enthral audiences for

generations to come, with young artists carrying the torch forward, with their unique interpretations to keep this ancient art form alive. It's a promise of preserving tradition while embracing innovation, ensuring that the rich tapestry of Indian classical dance continues to inspire and mesmerize. Natya Vriksha's efforts continue to flourish and captivate audiences around the world. Geeta Chandran's Natya Vriksha supports new artists, creating a community within the Indian classical dance scene. Her dedication to preserving this cultural heritage is seen in her performances and her focus on empowering the next generation. World Dance Day is not just a celebration but a promise for the future. It's a future where Indian classical dance continues to inspire, with young artists adding their own styles and keeping the art form alive. It's about preserving tradition while embracing new ideas, ensuring that Indian classical dance remains captivating and inspiring. Photo: Pankaj Kumar



Voices of women compels us to participate in a world where incredible women artists are striving for a more inclusive and vibrant art world, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

## PAINTED WHISPERS OF STORIES UNTOLD

**I**magine a space where each wall whispers a story, a world that is painted not on spatial maps but on timeless canvases. This is the essence of the 'Voices of Women,' an art exhibition recently presented by Art Garde in a vibrant celebration of contemporary art by women artists. It was a testament to the flourishing creativity of these artists, each with a unique voice yearning to be heard. It was indeed a captivating display curated by Teesta Bhandare, where we were invited into the vibrant world of young and contemporary women artists.



Sambhar Lakes,' painted in oil, depict her emotional connection to the places she has been to and experienced. Her artwork is the essence of these locations, conveying their beauty and ecological significance. Astha Patel's works, including 'Trepies Dancing Around Falling Bauhineas,' 'Celocias' and a Wild Avian,' and 'Butterscotch Light and Wild Fields,' are inspired by her environment and daily experiences. Her paintings often feature Bohemian flowers and birds, illuminated by moonlight, creating a sense of magic and tranquility. One of the paintings represents a place near Vadodara, in Gujarat, which highlights the ever-changing landscape and the constant presence of jungle babblers. These paintings evoke a sense of wonder and appreciation for the beauty nature has in store. Tanushree Sarkar's works explore themes of emotional intimacy and human connection. Her painting, 'Skin is Red - Half Women Half Dream,' done in oil, portrays bold and intimate moments, inviting us viewers to reflect on the complexity of human relationships. Another one, 'A Whirlwind Ahead,' depicts two figures intertwining with each other and nature, symbolizing harmony and the building of a shared future. Sarkar's art challenges conventional notions of beauty and encourages viewers to embrace their own unique bodies and identities. 'The Power of Braille' by Vijaya Chauhan, inspired by her experiences with visually

impaired friends, is an artist's courageous exploration of the Braille text. This thought-provoking work challenges societal norms, highlighting alternative notions of sight and communication. By using Braille as a point of departure, Chauhan demonstrates the beauty and power of alternative forms of expression, reminding us that sight is not the only way to experience and understand the world. 'Voices of Women' had more to it than mere aesthetics. It contained a powerful challenge to stereotypes perpetuated of yore, when a female artist was confined to the realm of the decorative. Here, even as Tanushree Sarkar explores themes of body consciousness and sexuality Vijaya Chauhan's works redefine our very perspective on what sight symbolises. The exhibition did not simply present diverse representations of women artists, it also broke the stereotypes and shackles on the art women create. It was a platform for young collectors to discover and acquire art that resonates with the common onlooker, making art accessible and meaningful to a wider audience. Malavika Rajnarayan, Ekta Singha, Maitreyi Desai, and Sareena Khemka, among others also scripted their unique perspectives on their canvas, enriching the exhibition with some exceptional artwork. The exhibition brought forth and celebrated the creativity and resilience of women artists, challenging traditional notions of art and beauty. In a conversation with a Curator Teesta Bhandare highlighted the importance of diversity in representation, stating that the exhibition aims to show the wide range of styles and themes women artists can explore. She also emphasized the challenge of educating people about the value of art as a cultural investment, urging visitors to see art as an integral part of their cultural identity.

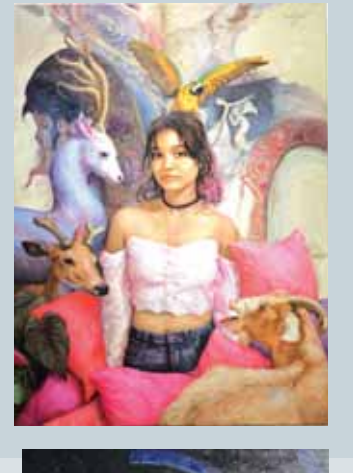
## Creative submission to the senses

BY **SAKSHI PRIYA**

**E**very artist has an impressive narrative to tell, recently brought forth in an exhibition, 'Evoke, Ignite, Awaken, Stir,' by the Art Exchange Project which featured not only professional artists but also individuals from diverse backgrounds who pursue art as a passion. In a world growing distant from art, it is difficult to track the journey of each artist and the challenges faced. Appreciation from people and sparse turnouts at art shows pose an ongoing challenge for artists. However, art encapsulates the ability to shine through this opacity. Curated by Aarti Patel, the exhibition featured 16 artists from Delhi, Haryana, and Rajasthan, each art piece a pouring out of the artist's inner core. The show provided a platform to the uninitiated to step on the canvas and chart their individual journeys of seeking meaning in every piece of art. The exercise was truly exhilarating for every artist showcased. Sixteen artists, each with their own unique story, some well-known, others only starting out, all sharing the common love and passion for creativity. Artist Ritu Chopra's work left a lasting memory on the onlooker, an artist whose works resonate with her felt physical experiences. Chopra relentlessly pursued new forms highlighting the freshness of a raw artist. Her love for trees, for example, is evident in her series where the tree symbolises the real sage, the silent spectators to life, emitting knowledge and enlightenment. Chopra's paintings have ensured that her spirit



lives on, much after life, a poignant reminder that artists never die, their work an immortal and vibrant legacy for generations to come. Kavita Lomror's cityscapes, using reflective glass, are abuzz with the energy of city life, a sharp contrast to Chopra's serene landscapes. While Lomror captures the rush, complexity, and rhythm of urban life, Indraneel Ghose's photographs serve as a magic window to his winter wonderland, an escape from the searing heat of Delhi, a world of frosty mornings and misty landscapes. Madhav Bhardwaj, views art as a medium to express the depth of human emotions, his personal release inviting the outsider to connect with one's inner self. Bhardwaj's hope is that his paintings evoke serenity and ease, and inspire others to remain undefeated, as a beacon of hope. His



series, 'A Stroll with Blooms,' is all about an all-encompassing positivity. Reena Chopra's work is a testimony to the free-flowing forms in life that speak of a journey and a destination that no one knows about. Life is a river that we float on and the sooner

we realise we have no control and surrender to the flow, the better the journey will be. Sushil Thakur's 'The Matrix' series was truly stunning. Artist Harsh Jalendra's oil paintings, like 'Falling' and 'Bitter Sweet,' were incredibly realistic, almost in motion. A fusion of intertwined styles, his work was a walk through dreams and reality, through a colourful spectrum of emotions. 'The Change of Perspective' truly altered the way art is perceived. Artists Khushboo Kalyanwala and Sarka Chandra explored the cyclical movement of celestial bodies. Sujata Khanna, Tushar Nath, and Winnie Singh, contributed uniquely to the exhibition, creating a magical experience for all. The overall display of creativity was mesmerizing for people who invest their time in art. Aarti Uppal Singla, the artist and Curator who made it all happen, spoke of a community reborn. Here, art was not just for a privileged few; it was for everyone. Her dream to ignite the creative spark even in silent onlookers contains the power to bring people together. Evoke was not just another art show. It was a journey where tired eyes rediscovered the joy of colour, where doubts melted away in the face of imagination, when strangers became soulmates, all on an artistic discovery creating an invisible bond. Exhibitions like these are a vibrant testimony to the human spirit and its unending search for beauty, a celebration of the transformative power of art that can evoke, ignite, awaken, and stir long after the final curtain are down. Photo: Pankaj Kumar

### Raj Arjun, what was the biggest challenge in portraying your character in Razakar?

**E**very character gives me a challenge, and every character elevates me. That's what is exciting in this journey. I am in this field because I am always bored by monotonous routines, and I need challenges in my life. If you don't get challenges, you get bored, so I need challenges in my characters. That's why the excitement was there from the moment I was offered the role of Kasim Rizvi. He has a lot of complexity; he is a brutal man, Hitler-like, and a tough character. I thought I could justify it because of my thought process, and that's how I started. **Razakar deals with a dark period in Indian history. Did portraying a character from that time impact you in any way?** It does impact you for each and every character, whatever you

## A Journey through Darkness

Delving into a turbulent period of Indian history, *Razakar* brings a complex narrative to life. In a conversation with **SAKSHI PRIYA**, the film's cast sheds light on their experiences portraying characters from a dark chapter in Indian history

play. If it is intense and requires you to be deeply in the role, it does leave an impression on you. It is not impossible to get out of that, but it gives you pain and trauma. It is hard to get involved in another character afterward, as it is hard to come out. Then, we fight with the emptiness of our own space because for a long process, we involve ourselves in a particular character, and then there is nothing after that. Neither are we actors nor that character at that particular time. So, you feel totally empty. This takes you on a different emotional ride, which can sometimes bring you down



because a particular character is very intense. He is so brutal, he is thinking of his own Islamic state, and everything, and then, cut, the process is over. Now, that mindset you are left with for the last five months, and now there is nothing. You are not allowed to go beyond that. You start thinking about how you will move to the next character. That always gives you pain, but at the same time, there is happiness also. The mixed emotions are what we have to deal with. That's why we are actors, and that's why we are artists. **There is often debate surrounding historical**

**portrayals in movies. How do you feel about the responsibility of actors in portraying such events accurately?** For every role I am offered, if I have been called, I feel that without them giving me the responsibility, I take it upon myself because I feel if they have called me, they know I am a good actor, and I have to serve the purpose. I have to justify the role with my honesty and my craft, by not showing that I am overacting. They have to see the character, not Raj Arjun the actor. That is my forte. People call me that because I start looking like the character. So,

I do feel the responsibility so much that I get involved with my production house, my people, director, makeup artist, as a family member. I will go beyond everything because for me, my film, my character, and my story are my God. **How did working alongside your fellow cast members enhance your understanding of the film's themes?** They are so lovable, and they are great. If you see love outside and around you, you will find love. If you throw hatred through your eyes, you will find hatred. In the work zone, I don't find anybody who is jealous of me or not giving me good vibes because I am so engrossed in my work that I don't have time to look up and see what others are thinking. If I start thinking about others, it would be a criminal waste of my time, and I don't believe in that kind of thinking. Sometimes, when you

talk to actors, when you do the scene, you get the energy. Over here, as I said, if you are good, everybody is good. In any case, they all work here, so we will all be good people, good energy around. That's why commercially, where this project will reach, I am not worried about that. That should be my concern because I am a part of this film, and I should think that my producer should benefit. But it is not in my hands. But what can I do? I can just support this film. That's why all this good energy works together, and here is a good product out of that good energy. Photo: Pankaj Kumar



