

Rahul insulting Indian maharajas for sake of appeasement politics: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of insulting India's rajahs and maharajas, but remaining silent on the atrocities committed by nawabs, nizams, sultans and badshahs for the sake of appeasement politics. Addressing back-to-back rallies in Belagavi, Sirsi, Davangere and Hosapete, he also continued his attack against the Congress on the "inheritance tax" issue and targeted the party's government in Karnataka on law and order, corruption and development issues.

"The BJP is working on increasing the assets of the people, but Congress's shehzada (referring to Rahul Gandhi) and his sister (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra), both are announcing that if they come to power, they will do an 'X-ray' of the country," Modi said. "They will X-ray your property, bank lockers, lands, vehicles, also 'streedhan' and ornaments of women, gold, the 'mangalsutra'. These people will raid every house and capture your assets. After capturing, they are talking about redistributing it, they want it to give it to their loved vote bank... Will you allow this loot to happen?" he asked. "I want to warn the Congress," Modi said.

"Let go of this intention. Until Modi is alive, I will not allow it..." Modi said. "Congress has ensured the writing of our history and our freedom struggle with an eye on appeasement and vote bank. Even today, the Congress's shehzada (prince) is carrying forward that sin. You might have heard Congress's shehzada's recent statement -- he says Bharath's rajahs and



maharajas were atyachari (oppressive)." "He (Gandhi) has accused them (rajahs and maharajas) of usurping the lands and properties of people and poor... Congress's shehzada has insulted great personalities like Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Kittur Rani Chennamma, whose administration and patriotism inspires us even today," the prime minister said. Recalling the contribution of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family, and saying they are respected across the country even today, Modi added, "The Congress's shehzada's statements were intentional, aimed at vote-bank politics and appeasement." "Shahzada spoke ill about rajahs and maharajas, but the shehzada's mouth was locked regarding the 'atyachar' that nawabs, nizams, sultans and badshahs committed in India's history. His mouth was shut on them, but on rajahs and maharajas he speaks ill and insults them," he said. Alleging that Gandhi cannot remember Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's oppressions, Modi said, "He (Aurangzeb) made a number of our temples impure and destroyed them. Congress is happily making alliances with parties that praise Aurangzeb... They don't remember people who destroyed our religious places, indulged in

killing, killing of cows. They don't remember the nawab, who played a role in the partition of India." He recalled the contributions of the Raja of Banaras in setting up Banaras Hindu University, and Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar in the reconstruction of temples. "The Congress's shehzada doesn't remember the contributions of rajahs and maharajas. For the sake of the vote bank, he shows the guts to speak against rajahs and maharajas, but doesn't have the courage to speak against nawabs, sultans and badshahs," he said, adding that Congress's "appeasement mindset" has come out in the open before the country, and that it reflects in their manifesto. Since the time Congress came to power in Karnataka, the law and order in the entire state has worsened. Citing the recent murder of Hubballi student Neha Hiremath on her college premises, which created a "sensation" in the country, he claimed that despite the family seeking action, Congress government gave priority to appeasement. Even when there was a bomb blast in a Bengaluru's cafe, the Congress government did not take it seriously initially; they even termed it a cylinder blast initially. "Why are you —

Congress — lying to the people of the country. If you can't, leave and go home," Modi said. The Congress, for the sake of votes, is taking the support of the banned PFI — the anti-national organisation that supported terrorism, he claimed. "To win one seat in Wayanad, are you surrendering to them? BJP has banned PFI and has put its leaders behind bars," he said. Stating that those who turned down the invitation for the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be rejected by the people in Lok Sabha elections, Modi attacked the Congress and its allies. A decision on building the Ram temple should have been taken the very next day of the country's independence, he said. He also alleged that the "same forces" tried till the last minute to ensure that the Ram temple was not built and had approached the court on the last day as well. Moreover, Modi claimed that the INDIA bloc has come up with a "formula" under which the parties in the opposition alliance will get the PM's post for one year each, in case they come to power. "With such a system, the good of the country cannot be expected," he said, as he urged the people not to waste their vote.

RSS has always been in favour of reservation, says RSS chief Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD/NEW DELHI

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday asserted the organisation has always been supportive of reservation, and advocated for its implementation as long as "discrimination exists," comments that came in the wake of a viral video claiming the Sangh was against the quota system.

The remarks also assume significance as the Opposition, especially the Congress has mounted an attack against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the ruling BJP at the Centre, accusing them of being opposed to reservation. Speaking at the inauguration of Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra here, Bhagwat referred to the video in circulation and said it falsely claims the RSS was opposed to reservation. The video shows him as holding a meeting, he said but claimed it never happened. "RSS has been supporting reservations as per the Constitution since the time it came."

"The Sangh says that reservation should continue till the time people, to those whom it is given, feel they need it; or, it is given due to social reasons till discrimination exists," he added. With the help of technology and Artificial Intelligence, what did not happen can also be shown (as to have happened), he said. Bhagwat's pro-reservation statement also comes in the backdrop of the Congress alleging that BJP and RSS are against the quota system. In his response to Bhagwat's remarks on the matter, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed though the RSS is now saying it was not against reservation, it had earlier spoken



about opposing the quota system. Addressing a campaign rally at Daman and Diu on Sunday, Rahul said the Bhagwat "makes a statement that RSS is not against reservation." "It was he (Mohan Bhagwat) who had made a statement that he was opposed to reservation. Those who are against the reservation (policy) are joining their party (BJP). They welcome all those who are against reservation, and then he (Bhagwat) says he is not against reservation," Gandhi alleged. Incidentally, in a sharp attack on the RSS, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had earlier said that when the organisation was founded in 1925, it had decided to announce the nation as a "Hindu country" and to scrap the reservations in 100 years, i.e by 2025. Meanwhile, Bhagwat said good as well as bad things circulate on social media and it is not the quality of social media but that of the person who is using it, he said. It is the selfishness of the person to circulate among people such made-up things and generate a controversy, but "we are not concerned with it" ("us se hamara koi sambandh nahi hai"), he said. Such things happen during the ongoing election environment, he opined.

Central Government delegation on three days visit to Bangladesh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Central Government delegation is on a three-day visit to Bangladesh beginning Sunday to further boost bilateral ties on governance matters, according to an official statement. The visit is being undertaken on the invitation of the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration and will focus on the mid-career capacity building programs in field administration for Bangladesh civil servants, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry on Sunday. "V Srinivas, Secretary of Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) will lead a four-member delegation to Bangladesh from April 28-30, 2024 for bilateral discussions regarding renewal of memorandum of understanding (MoU) between National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) India and Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration for the period 2024-2029," it said. The NCGG and the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration have collaborated for conducting capacity building programs for Bangladesh civil servants since 2014. Under the bilateral col-

laboration, 71 capacity building programmes were held and 2,600 Bangladesh civil servants have visited the NCGG since 2014, the statement said. "The Bangladesh government has emphasised on the utility of these training programmes and conveyed interest in renewal of the MoU between NCGG and the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration under which these training programmes are being organised for the next five years when it expires in 2025," it added. During the three-day visit, Secretary Srinivas will hold bilateral meetings with Minister of Public Administration, Senior Secretary Ministry of Public Administration, Director General of the Civil Services Administration Academy, Director General of the Public Administration Training Centre, Director General Governance Innovation Unit in the Prime Minister's Office and the Additional Secretary Career Planning and Training Wing of Ministry of Public Administration. Srinivas will address the participants of the law and administration courses and faculty of Bangladesh Civil Services Administration Academy on "Institutionalization of SMART Governance to Enhance Public Service Delivery", the statement added.

PM is indifferent to people of Karnataka: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is indulging in "fear mongering" as he is "desperate" after facing a "washout" in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions for the Prime Minister ahead of his rallies in Karnataka.

"After the Phase II washout, a desperate PM is on a spree of Karnataka rallies today. Instead of lying and fear mongering, these are the questions he should answer," Ramesh said, listing his posers.

"Why have BJP MPs performed so poorly as the people's representatives? After a 7-month delay, why has the Centre released less than 20% of drought relief funds? Why is the Centre holding up the Upper Bhadra and Mahadayi projects?" the Congress leader said on X.

Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh asked where have BJP MPs been while the Modi government has been "unleashing its vengeance" on Karnataka. Citing the latest data from the Parliamentary Research



Service (PRS), Ramesh claimed that the BJP MPs from Karnataka have shown a blatant disregard for their responsibilities, and displayed lack of commitment to serving their constituents. "While the national average attendance in Parliament was 79%, the average of the 28 Karnataka MPs was even lower at 71%. The review revealed that 26 of these MPs never raised Karnataka's concerns - the release of MGNREGA funds, drought and flood relief assistance, and the Centre's denial of additional allocations of rice for PDS," he said. Analysing the transcripts of all debates, PRS found that very few MPs even tried to initiate policies or programmes to

address their constituencies' issues, Ramesh said. "Three MPs did not ask a single question in five years, and five MPs did not participate in a single debate. While most MPs were criticised for neglecting the state, seven MPs only focused on the RSS-BJP's unconstitutional agendas in their constituencies," he alleged. "Perhaps the most damning finding was that 14 of the 28 were directly or indirectly involved in abetting communal violence in their localities. Will PM Modi apologise for fostering these ineffectual MPs on the people of Karnataka? Or was this his design all along to elect non-performing BJP MPs so that he can ignore the voice

of Karnataka?" he said. Ramesh also said it has been more than seven months since the Karnataka government sought more than Rs 18,000 crore of relief from the Centre as per disaster relief rules. Karnataka is reeling under an acute drought situation, with 223 out of 236 talukas facing drought conditions and 196 taluks being categorised as severely hit, he noted. As early as September 2023, the Karnataka government had approached the Modi government to release funds of Rs 18,171 crore for drought relief, he said. "The rules of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, state that the Centre must take a final decision on the release of funds within one month of receiving the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) report. For Karnataka, this period expired in December 2023. Last month, the Finance Minister made the excuse that her hands are tied since the Model Code of Conduct came into force," he said. "After being forced to the Supreme Court by the Karnataka Government, the Centre has finally sanctioned funds but only a mere Rs 3,498 crore. This is less than

20% of the total amount requested," he said. Why is PM Modi so "indifferent" to the people of Karnataka, Ramesh asked. "In last year's Union Budget, the Modi government had proudly announced a Rs 5,300 crore grant for the Upper Bhadra Project. More than a year later, state Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda has revealed that not a 'single paisa' of this grant has been released," Ramesh said. During his assembly election campaign, Prime Minister Modi had also claimed to resolve long-standing issues with the Mahadayi-Kalasa Banduri Nala Project but earlier this year, clearance for the project has been deferred by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, he said. "These projects are crucial to expanding drinking water and irrigation access in a state that has been reeling under a severe drought. Why has the Modi Government neglected these essential infrastructure projects? What vendetta does the PM have against the people of Karnataka?" Ramesh said and asked the prime minister to break his "silence" on these issues.

CDS Chauhan concludes comprehensive visit to France

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan concluded a comprehensive visit to France starting April 21, which has reaffirmed the continued long-standing strategic partnership between India and France, and further reinforcing the bilateral Defence Cooperation between the two nations, defence ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details here, officials said the interactions of CDS with Patrick Pailloux, Director of Civil and Military Cabinet of the Minister of French Armed Forces, and Lt General Vincent Giraud, Chief of Military Cabinet of Minister of the Armed Forces at the apex level and also with his counterpart, General Thierry Burkhard (CEMA) have enabled exchange of views on areas of common interests and mutual security concerns. Deliberations at France's Directorate General of Armament for enhancing the exchange of high-end dual-use technologies followed by inter-



actions with the top leadership of the French Defence industry, including Dassault, Safran and Naval Groups, and Thales Alenia Space, towards futuristic capacity building of the Indian Armed Forces, would provide an impetus to indigenisation. The exchanges at the French Land Forces Command (CFT), the French Space Command (CDE), and the School of Military Studies (Ecole Militaire), while providing India's point of view on security challenges, have also provided opportunities for

enhancing defence collaboration in space, modernisation initiatives and also augmenting bilateral training between both nations. The CDS also paid tributes at the War Memorials of Neuve-Chapelle and Villers-Guislain, to the extraordinary bravery of soldiers of the Indian Expeditionary Force who fought on the Western Front during the First World War, towards enhancing peace and tranquility in the region. These memorials stand testimony to the long-standing Indo-French relationship.

2.4 billion workers at risk of heat exposure: ILO report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ram Dayal (45), a seasoned plumber, found himself battling the scorching heat of a summer day while repairing a burst pipe on a roadside in the national capital. Despite his experience, the relentless heat left him feeling lightheaded and fatigued, prompting him to prioritise his safety by taking breaks in the shade to avoid heat exhaustion.

Ram Dayal's case is reflection of the challenges faced by millions of workers worldwide, as highlighted in a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The report reveals that a staggering 2.4 billion workers, constituting 70% of the global workforce, are at heightened risk of heat exposure due to climate change. This alarming trend has sharply increased since 2000, with dire consequences such as heat-related illnesses claiming



nearly 19,000 lives annually and causing chronic health issues for millions. The hazards posed by climate change extend beyond heat exposure, impacting workers across various sectors. From agriculture and construction to fishing and transport, outdoor workers face elevated risks of heat-related illnesses like heatstroke. Moreover, indoor workers are not immune, facing risks from sources of heat or poor ventilation.

The report, 'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate', describes a "cocktail of hazards," including increased exposure to harmful ultraviolet radiation, worsened air pollution, and heightened risks of vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue fever. These factors contribute to a range of health problems, spanning from cancer and heart disease to respiratory ailments and mental health issues.

Increase in ocean surface temperatures to have far reaching consequences

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A significant increase in surface temperatures within the ocean, ranging from 1.4 to 3 degrees Celsius between 2020 and 2100 is expected to have far-reaching consequences, including pushing the Indian Ocean into a state of near-permanent heatwaves. This will intensify cyclones, affect the monsoon, and lead to a rise in sea levels, a new study led by Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) has flagged concerns. It showed that marine heatwaves (periods of abnormally high ocean temperatures) are projected to increase from 20 days per year (during 1970-2000) to 220-250 days per year, pushing the tropical Indian Ocean into a basin-wide near-permanent heatwave state by the end of the 21st century. Marine heat waves cause habi-



tat destruction due to coral bleaching, seagrass destruction, and loss of kelp forests, affecting the fisheries sector adversely. They also lead to the rapid intensification of cyclones. The rapid warming in the Indian Ocean is not limited to the surface. The heat content of the Indian Ocean, from the surface to a depth of 2,000 meters, is currently increasing

at the rate of 4.5 zetta-joules per decade and is predicted to increase at a rate of 16-22 zetta-joules per decade in the future, the study titled "Future projection for the tropical Indian Ocean" said. "The future increase in heat content is comparable to adding the energy equivalent of one Hiroshima atomic bomb detonation every second, all day, every day, for a

decade," Koll said. The maximum warming will occur in the northwestern Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea, while there will be reduced warming off the Sumatra and Java coasts. Amid the accelerated ocean warming, the seasonal cycle of surface temperatures is projected to shift, which could increase extreme weather events over the Indo-Pacific region. Sea surface temperatures above 28 degrees Celsius are generally conducive to deep convection and cyclogenesis. Heavy rainfall events and extremely severe cyclones have already increased since the 1950s and are projected to increase further with increasing ocean temperatures, the authors said. The increased ocean heat could also lead to a rise in sea level. Thermal expansion of water contributes to more than half of the sea level rise in the Indian Ocean, which is larger than the contribution from glacier and sea-ice melt-

ing. The Indian Ocean Dipole, a phenomenon that affects the monsoon and cyclone formation, is also predicted to change. The frequency of extreme dipole events is predicted to increase by 66 per cent whereas the frequency of moderate events is to decrease by 52 per cent by the end of the 21st century. The authors of the study predicted that ocean acidification will intensify, with surface pH decreasing from a pH above 8.1 to below 7.7 by the end of the century. Surface chlorophyll and net primary productivity are also predicted to decline. Bordered by 40 countries, and home to a third of the global population, changes to climate in the Indian Ocean region have major societal and economic impacts. Currently, the Indian Ocean and its surrounding countries stand out globally as the region with the highest risk of natural hazards, with coastal communities vulnerable to weather and climate extremes.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Orange hills

Nainital is just one example of ongoing forest fires damaging the fragile ecosystem in Uttarakhand

Historically, Uttarakhand is somehow a little more prone than other hill States in India to the scourge of frequent forest fires, especially in summers. Otherwise famous for its breathtaking beauty and lush greenery, the State has of late again experienced a series of jungle blazes: To give an idea of the seriousness of the situation, more than 500 have been reported since January and one almost every hour in the past 24 hours. The latest incident has struck perilously close to the inhabited areas in Nainital, gutting 108 ha of forest land and sounding alarm bells for the residents and authorities alike. With the situation worsening, the Army and IAF have been pressed into action to aid containment efforts. These fires, often man-made to clear dead vegetation or fuelled by natural friction amid dry vegetation and exacerbated by strong winds, pose a significant threat to the fragile ecosystem. Despite concerted containment efforts, the inferno has spread its tendrils closer to human population. The IAF helicopters equipped



with water-spraying capabilities are deployed to douse the flames, offering a crucial advantage in reaching inaccessible terrain. Additionally, Army personnel are working on ground to create firebreaks and prevent further spread. As for the bright side of this challenge, the wildfires have brought out the best in humans — cooperating with authorities and fighting it together. Amid the suffocating chaos and burning uncertainty, the spirit of community resilience has shone brightly. Local residents, alongside volunteers and NGOs, have rallied together to support firefighting efforts and offer assistance to those affected.

From food and shelter to lending a helping hand in evacuation efforts, the collective response has underscored the strength of solidarity in the face of adversity. However, these forest fires carry grave environmental implications. The loss of precious flora and fauna, coupled with the release of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate future fire outbreaks. Strengthening forest management practices, implementing early warning systems and fostering community awareness are paramount in safeguarding the region's biodiversity and mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires. It is about time that a comprehensive policy was framed to fight the wildfire menace. The Uttarakhand Government must draw from the US experiences in California, where such fires are frequent but they manage them rather well and swiftly with an early warning system, besides a mechanism for controlled burns. As the battle against the Nainital forest fire rages on, it serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of our natural ecosystems as also the resilience of the human spirit. With the combined efforts of authorities, armed forces and local communities, there is hope that the flames will soon be extinguished. However, the aftermath of this crisis should serve as a catalyst for concerted action towards building a more resilient and sustainable future for Uttarakhand and beyond.

PICTALK



'Veerakumars' gather to participate in the the Karaga festival at Sri Dharmarajana Swamy Temple, in Bengaluru

Pakistan paying for its misplaced priorities



BHOPINDER SINGH

Ambassador Asif Durrani acknowledges the Pak Government's shortcomings in handling the Afghanistan situation and underscores a reality check for Islamabad's foreign policy

Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan, Ambassador Asif Durrani, conceded the grave reality of the Pakistani Government's abject failure in Afghanistan. Speaking at a conference titled, "Pakistan in the Emerging Geopolitical Landscape", the diplomat accepted that the ensuing price of the flared tensions along the Durand Line far exceeded the human and financial cost of all the wars with India, put together!

Cold and frightening statistics like the loss of over 80,000 lives in the so-called 'War on Terror' which Islamabad joined in 2001 (including 8000 security personnel) and an estimated economic loss of \$150 billion—the reality check of what ought to worry Pakistan, i.e., between its traditional enemy across the Line-of-Control, or the one across the Durand Line—couldn't have been clearer. To make matters worse for Islamabad, it isn't even close to the end of its miseries as the deadly attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have shot up by 65% and the accompanying suicide attacks by 500%! In such a scenario to persist with India as the 'enemy number 1' is not only to suffer from an acute sense of Ostrich syndrome, but also to refuse the hard lessons of Karma i.e., what goes around, comes around.

The fixation with India owes itself to the wounds of the partition and the desperate need of various institutions to have an 'enemy' to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the citizenry e.g., clergy, military, politicians etc., as also, as to defend the flawed 'two-nation theory' that ostensibly rationalises Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 exposed the hollowness and amorality of a nation created in the name of religion - the current equation with Afghanistan further exposes the untenability of a relationship based on co-religionism. That religion can never be the basis of nationhood or indeed ensure a 'brotherly relation' (as insincerely claimed) with a neighbour, is further proved. At the end of the day, what matters is, 'intent' or neat. Over time, intent has an



inevitable way of revealing itself that cannot be suppressed by homilies of co-religionism. As the speech by Ambassador Durrani accepted, "After the withdrawal of NATO forces, it was hoped that peace in Afghanistan would bring peace to the region. However, such expectations were short-lived". Anyone with a modicum of understanding about history (especially about Afghanistan, the home to many 'Great Games') ought to have known that to 'control' the narrative in Afghanistan was not just impossible and impractical, but also counter-productive. The worst-kept secret of nurturing a desire to have 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan could not be hidden even from its creation, the Afghan Taliban. While the Afghans had accepted the support and infrastructure afforded by Pakistani regimes of all hues and shades since the late 1970's — to expect the proud Afghan (even a Pak-created Taliban) to toe Islamabad's line blindly was an affront to the cultural-civilisational identity of an Afghan. Not only did the Taliban Government bolt out from the shackles of controls, 'advisories' and condescending platitudes from Islamabad, but it knowingly harboured and supported its ideological offshoot i.e., the Pak-facing Tehreek-e-Taliban

THE PROJECT OF DEMONISING INDIA BY THE PAKISTANIS HAS FAILED SPECTACULARLY AMONGST THE CONSERVATIVE AFGHANS, AS EVEN THEY HARBOUR A RATHER WARM PERCEPTION OF THE INDIANS, AS OPPOSED TO THAT OF THE PAKISTANIS

Pakistan (TTP) fighters, who attack Pakistan with impunity and deadly consequences. A grim observation of the situation suggests that the attacks on Pakistan are not just a phenomenon afflicting disaffected Pakistani folks across the Afghan side, but that the "worrying aspect is the participation of Afghan nationals in these attacks". Basically, either as genuinely motivated or even as trained mercenaries, Afghan nationals are attacking Pakistan! The project of demonising India by the Pakistanis has failed spectacularly amongst the conservative Afghans, as even they harbour a rather warm perception of the Indians, as opposed to that of the Pakistanis. At the end of the day, the difference in sovereign intent emanating from Islamabad, versus those emanating from Delhi, has surfaced. Beyond certain constraints mandated by their self-invested image, ideology and inert conservatism, the language used by the Taliban Government officials bears a stark contrast, from the one that was imagined when the US/NATO forces abandoned Kabul and the Taliban stormed into Kabul. Today, given the 'dark' investments made by the Pakistani State it finds itself in an awkward and inextricable position. Try hard as it might, the

Pakistanis are struggling to undo and trace back the steps that it took to create the prevailing environment, infrastructure and instinct in the region. As Ambassador Durrani lamented, "Afghanistan has become a permanent fixture in Pakistan's regional paradigm for over four decades". Therefore, all support or otherwise to Pakistan is seen from the lens of Afghanistan. Ironically, Pakistani complaints about the situation with Afghanistan fall on deaf ears as the global community attributes much of what went wrong with the Afghan storyline, to the Pakistanis themselves. In some sense, it is a 'cry wolf' situation for the Pakistanis and there simply aren't too many takers or sympathisers of the Pakistani woes. A deeper introspection would reveal the rot in the thinking of the Pakistani system set in 1947 when it thought that religion was to be its trump card. History is instructive, that religion can never be a basis of Statehood for any moral and sustainable nation. Both Bangladesh and Afghanistan discredit the 'two-nation theory' (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SC UPHOLDS EVMs

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea", published on April 27, this is my response. The Supreme Court has rightly reaffirmed its faith in the working of EVMs and refused the return of ballot papers. They seem to be satisfied with several safeguards and stringent checks which have been an integral part of EVM functioning. It is also a welcome move by the court that they have now given number 2 and 3 placed candidates an option to check and verify 5 per cent microchips per assembly segment so that they remain fully satisfied. One additional burden the Election Commission has to make is to also store symbol loading units for 45 days in addition to EVMs. Now hopefully this EVM issue should be closed for good and the opposition must create a narrative which resonates with the voters. The ruling party has given a lot of opportunities to the opposition where the former could have been put on the mat but the latter failed to do so. There are still 5 phases to go in the current elections and the opposition would do better to channel their energy in the right direction and highlight BJP's negative points than keep crying over EVMs.

Bal Govind | Noida

JAMMU ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Stage set for phase II LS Polls", published on April 25, this is my response. The second phase of the Lok Sabha elections is completed now. The EVMs had made it captured the fate of Jammu as well. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are specifically annoyed with the governance of J&K as a Union Territory. The bigger mandate of J&K so disclosed appears to be extremely annoying with the BJP the people want to topple the UT administration to put in place proper Statehood.

No moral high ground for India or the US



Apropos the editorial, "All is well", published on April 27, this is my response. Neither the US nor India can claim to be on the moral high ground to point an accusing finger at each other. The regularly occurring deaths of Indian students in the US are as much a blot on that nation as are the deaths of hundreds of innocent Manipuris in the State of Manipur. India's response to the allegations made by the USA has been rather dismissive because we all know the truth about Manipur. The US apart, even the Opposition parties of India had raised a quarrel over the situation in Manipur and rightly so. Therefore, for India to say that the US report is "deeply biased" and reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities" is to turn a blind eye to the facts. Both countries need to introspect and take measures to set their own house in order instead of indulging in a provocative blame game.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

The hope of Congress restoration is high along with the National Conference & PDP party compared to the Bhartiya Janta Party. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are anxiously waiting for this very moment. Hope the design will be fulfilled soon and very soon Jammu and Kashmir will enjoy complete Statehood like other Indian States.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Madam — In every domain, women are enchanting their presence. The inclusion of women in the decision-making process is their fundamental right and it is also pivotal for sustainable development. If women have significant representation, We will attain legal parity in economic opportunities and also unleash the benefits and economic progressions linked with this assortment. Also, they will influence voter's opinions, mobilise support and actively participate in the electoral process. A

paradigm shift of the Government's strong focus on women-led development, going beyond women-centric, represents a key pillar of India's progress. The Government is promoting women's empowerment by implementing a host of schemes, like, Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojana, Women Scientists Scheme, PM Mudra Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and many more. On top of that The Women's Reservation Bill passed by the parliament, gave women a significant voice in the Lok Sabha and State assemblies. In 2024, the launch of the Alliance for Global Good-Equity and Equality, focus on investing in women with the theme for International Women's Day 2024 - "Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress", shows that Indian leadership is now gaining global recognition for women's empowerment.

Apurva Garg | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Political parties must prioritise environmental preservation

Political leadership must prioritise sustainability and combating plastic pollution to safeguard ecosystems and human health



BIJU DHARAMPALAN

It's election time in India and various political parties vie for their space in the hearts of the public. Even when political parties give multiple offers, including providing sustainable living in their manifestos, there is no concrete measure to tackle issues affecting our planet. Even for the few who speak about the environment, the vision is for the future, not immediate. What we want is a manifesto that speaks about protecting our planet the moment it comes to power. Every political party stresses developmental politics. But what is the use of development if our planet's status is in a dilemma? The climate is changing; glaciers and the water table are receding and water scarcity is severe in parts of the country. We haven't devised a concrete step in managing our garbage, even in our capital city. Is it a lack of scientific knowledge? We have one CSIR lab exclusively working on the environment and many other research institutions working on similar lines. Still, we fail in this? Is it a lack of political will? Nobody knows the actual reason behind this. Every



part of the planet suffers from anthropogenic activities during this Anthropocene period. In the electioneering process, political parties also create lots of garbage containing lots of plastic materials. During elections, political parties often use a variety of promotional materials such as banners, posters, flyers and flags, many of which are made of plastic or contain plastic components. Political rallies, public events and gatherings organised by political parties often generate significant amounts of waste, including plastic cups, plates and other disposable items. Improper waste management practices at these events can result in plastic litter ending up in the environment. Why can't the Government ban plastic from its production source? After manufacturing and selling to the vendors, for namesake, the official makes some per-

iodic visits and fines poor vendors. It's like keeping sweets near a diabetic patient and telling him not to touch them. Plastic pollution has significantly threatened ecosystems, wildlife and human health worldwide. Plastic pollution in oceans is a well-documented problem with devastating effects on marine life. Sea turtles, whales, seabirds and fish often mistake plastic debris for food or become entangled in plastic waste, leading to injury or death. Additionally, plastic fragments, known as microplastics, are ingested by smaller organisms and can bioaccumulate up the food chain, posing risks to human health. Coral reefs, often called the "rainforests of the sea," are highly sensitive ecosystems that provide habitat for numerous marine species. Plastic pollution can smother coral reefs, blocking sunlight and inhibiting coral growth. Chemicals released by plastic degradation can also harm coral health, contributing to reef degradation and loss. Political parties can influence public opinion and behaviour through messaging

and advocacy efforts. Parties that prioritise environmental issues and promote sustainable practices can help raise awareness about the harms of plastic pollution and encourage individuals and communities to take action. They should teach their followers to follow clean environmental practices in their party functions and their daily lives. In India, political parties have the power to shape policies and promote initiatives that influence people's attitudes and behaviours toward plastics. So, they should take responsibility. We don't have decades to wait for the results. Already, the global temperature has reached its threshold. Any further increase may cause unforeseen consequences on the life on this planet. We need a political mindset to change our attitude towards plastics and the environment immediately. It will be good if we always remember that we don't have a 'planet B' to sustain humanity. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE CRISIS OF SELF-IDENTITY

Discovering the self brings change, peace and liberation



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, almost every country in the world has been putting in hard efforts to make a Better World that is free from all kinds of fear and insecurities and is safe for all. However, in this whole exercise, we must not forget the fact that the breakthrough in man's efforts to bring change comes only when he knows his real identity. The present world crisis, which is generally known as the crisis of values, is in fact, a deep crisis of self-identity. This crisis of values also has resulted from the loss of the knowledge of the real identity of the self. While man has discovered many 'lost continents' or land masses on the globe, this continent of the self has yet to be discovered or rediscovered by all of us. Thus man has first to be made aware of the truth that he has, in him, a certain potential of divine qualities or a core of human values and that these qualities or values, within him, have gone deep down in the sea of the Subconscious and the Unconscious Mind and have now to be brought again to the surface, into the light and have to be used as the keyboard for actions. Man has also to be given a realisation of the truth that, with the cremation or burial of the dead body, man's all deeds good or bad done by him during his lifetime, or the abilities and qualities acquired by him over some time, are not all lost.

Neither does man's good actions go unrewarded forever nor does he go unpunished for his bad actions. Unless and until man realises that, in truth, he is an eternal being, a soul or a being-of-light and that so are other beings, his outlook and his attitude towards all others does not undergo a total change. When, however, he realises his real identity, he takes a new 'mental and spiritual birth' so to say and then an improvement in his self and his relationships with others takes place automat-



ically and naturally even as day follows night. So, we may adopt whatever strategy we think is suitable for a particular country or a group of people but let us keep in mind that, sooner or later, we have to give to all those who come in touch with us the knowledge of the real identity of self, for without this knowledge, there is no going nearer to our goal of a better world.

Today we all identify ourselves with the body that we have acquired because we are unaware of the immortal entity called 'soul' which resides within us and functions through our body. This ignorance about the existence of the soul thus results in 'body-consciousness' or a worldly approach towards life, as a result of which throughout our life we struggle to improve our condition of life without understanding the fact as to why the physical and mental conditions and environments of two individuals differ widely right from the time of their birth. We get baffled by human sufferings & untimely deaths on a mass scale caused by natural calamities, terrorism, violence and wars due to which we constantly fear for our death all the time.

In this whole merry-go-round, we fail to realise that unless these basic aspects of life are rightly understood, the body-conscious approach is bound to be there. Considering one's physical existence as the 'be all and end all' of everything results in man's adopting wrong values in life which in turn leads to his committing wrong acts and consequently causes suffering to him. No wonder, despite striving hard, he is unable to avoid sorrow and suffering in life. Hence to live a peaceful, contented, happy and liberated life, proper knowledge of one's real self i.e. the soul, its functioning and its role in the world drama is a 'must'.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist; views are personal)

Market-oriented gig skill sets under focus



DINESH SOOD

As the job landscape evolves, the focus is now on fostering market-driven skill sets to meet the demands of a changing workforce



In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving job market, employers are not just interested in hiring candidates with degrees from prestigious institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), they now prioritise hiring candidates with specific skill sets.

Despite the widespread recognition of IITs for academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities, recent worrisome reports have revealed that they are not delivering as per their ranking and perception. Every year among thousands of students who dream to get admission in IIT's, only 20-25 per cent of them remain lucky charm to clear the JEE (Joint Entrance Exam) advanced process to get admission while pursuing their academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities every year they look forward to the placement season with an eye on big-ticket jobs.

However, The 2024 placement season is described as "lacklustre" by IIT students. This is a worrying situation in IIT-Bombay, which is ranked third among engineering institutes in India by NIRF. According to the Global IIT Alumni Support Group, nearly 36% of students were unable to secure jobs for the 2024 placements. Although IIT-Bombay contested this report, stating that only 6.1% of students remained unplaced, the situation is still concerning.

The Global IIT Alumni Support Group data shows that nearly 30-40% of IIT students are still unplaced in the top-ranked 8 older IITs like Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur and others, while around 50-60% of students are still unplaced in the 15 newer IITs like BHU (Varanasi), Ropar and others.

The unemployment crisis in India is par-



NEARLY 83 PER CENT OF THOSE UNEMPLOYED IN INDIA ARE YOUNG AND AMONG THESE UNEMPLOYED YOUNG INDIANS, NEARLY 66 PER CENT ARE EDUCATED

ticularly acute among educated youth. The cost of an engineering degree remains at Rs 8-10 lakh, yet the placement rate remains around 30%. Furthermore, there is an influx of MBA degree holders entering the market, even though the demand has dropped by 55% this year. This raises the question of the value of a college/university degree.

Being highly educated is no guarantee of employment in India, as the International Labor Organisation (ILO) report reveals. Nearly 83% of those unemployed in India are young and among these unemployed young Indians, nearly 66% are educated. According to the ILO report, the "youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher." On the other hand, those without university degrees or even school dropouts have a higher employment rate.

Several highly educated youths set an example by adopting odd entrepreneurship and proudly titled it MBA's Chaiwalas and Chatwalas.

Despite the promise of creating 100 million jobs through the flagship "Make in India" initiative, the expected job creation did not materialise in the last 10 years. Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, has emphasised the need to make the workforce more employable and create jobs. Every year, around 7-8 million young

Indians enter the workforce, but many remain unemployed.

It is a proven fact that our youth with higher education degrees are not well-skilled. One of the main reasons why skills are more important than higher degrees is because they are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills needed to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. On the other hand, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, may be able to hit the ground running. It is essential to note that having relevant skills is more crucial than having higher degrees since skills are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills required to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. Conversely, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, can hit the ground running and perform exceptionally well. For example, gig skill courses like digital marketing and beauty-wellness are available for around Rs 30 to 50 thousand and have a placement scope of over 90 per cent.

A gig economy offers a shot: The gig economy in India is vibrant, skill-driven and bucking the unemployed youths. According to a report by gig work platform Taskmo (which has over 7,50,000 gig workers registered) youth participation in the gig economy

has increased an astounding eightfold between 2019 and 2022, with most of the young people coming from Tier-I and Tier-II cities. In 2022, a projection report by Niti Aayog on the gig economy predicted a higher demand for skilled gig workers in the future. Areas such as digital marketing, social media management, logistics, healthcare and beauty-wellness will be in high demand, reflecting the diverse needs of employers and the evolution of the job market. The gig workforce is expected to expand to 23.5 million by 2029-30, from 7.7 million in 2021-22.

It's fascinating to see that a professionally trained gig worker, such as a hairdresser, can earn more than an MBA or IITan's. Jawed Habib, a hair stylist expert entrepreneur, is an excellent example of this. With his global exposure, he's inspiring young people to envision beauty wellness as a profession of the future. It's important to note that having a higher degree is no longer the only way to get hired or advance in a career. Employers are increasingly looking for candidates with specific skills that are directly applicable to the job and can help the company succeed. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on market-driven gig skill sets.

(The writer is a co-founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), network member of India International Skill Centres; views expressed are personal.)

Taiwan urges for stronger global health governance

Taiwan advocates for global health governance, urging inclusion and collaboration to ensure human rights

Despite not being a WHO member State, Taiwan emphasises the importance of contributing insights into pandemic management and learning from international best practices. Taiwan's proactive approach to pandemic response underscores its commitment to global health. Advocating for amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and inclusion in the pandemic agreement, Taiwan seeks to collaborate on monitoring, reporting and exchanging vital health data to enhance global health security. Additionally, Taiwan champions universal health coverage and humanitarian efforts to uphold the fundamental human right to health worldwide. The three years of



HSUEH JUI-YUAN

the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a terrible loss of life and exacerbated health inequalities. The global economy slumped and, worldwide, people's lives were affected. This experience demonstrated that the present global health governance framework is not effective in responding to threats to global health. Although COVID-19 is no longer labelled a public health emergency of international

concern (PHEIC) and trade and economic activity globally have returned to normal, the World Health Organisation (WHO) cautions against the threat of a Disease X pandemic. Therefore, countries across the globe must unite to bolster health governance.

WHO and many countries began reviewing response strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Weaknesses in the International Health Regulations (2005) as concerns managing this crisis were revealed. As a result, changes are afoot. Proposed revisions include enhanced surveillance, reporting and information sharing; improved response readiness; and revised criteria for declaring PHEICs. At the same time, there is vigorous debate around a new

pandemic agreement, which aims to craft a robust global pandemic governance framework grounded in accountability, transparency and equity. It may be approved at the 77th World Health Assembly.

As Taiwan is not a WHO member State, it cannot directly influence revisions to the International Health Regulations (2005) or the drafting of the pandemic agreement. Nevertheless, we remain greatly concerned about the content of and developments regarding these central documents.

We are eager to contribute our insights into pandemic management and learn from international best practices. Taiwan was the nation that initially identified the epidemic risk and promptly executed adap-

tive measures. Taiwan also proactively shared vital information with global partners and garnered public trust through a commitment to openness. We strongly endorse the passage and implementation of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and the pandemic agreement. We call on WHO to include Taiwan as a signatory to these documents.

We urge WHO to support Taiwan's inclusion in overseeing global health. Taiwan remains committed to participating based on the principles of professionalism, pragmatism and making contributions. Taiwan seeks to cooperate with WHO to remedy geographic gaps in global health security and to con-

struct a comprehensive global health framework.

The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All has found that at least 140 countries recognise health as a fundamental human right in their constitutions. Despite this, many nations have not passed and implemented laws to ensure that their citizens have access to healthcare services. Taiwan has worked hard to reach universal health coverage and has consistently improved the quality of health care over the past few decades in line with WHO recommendations.

Taiwan has effectively integrated and allocated social welfare resources to enhance primary and oral health care for all, implement mental health programs and

strengthen the social safety net. Taiwan has put in place an agile and resilient healthcare system able to combat both communicable and non-communicable diseases. We are improving health for all individuals throughout their entire lives.

The theme for World Health Day 2024 is "My health, my right." This is a way to advocate for every individual, everywhere, to have access to quality health services, education and information, as well as to enjoy safe drinking water, clean air, good nutrition, quality housing, decent working and environmental conditions and freedom from discrimination. Through a public-private partnership, Taiwan has been contributing to global efforts to realise the

right to health in collaboration with partner countries and international organisations.

Taiwan should be included, as a matter of pragmatism, in the World Health Assembly and all WHO meetings, activities and mechanisms, particularly those concerned with the WHO pandemic agreement. This would better empower Taiwan to collaborate with global partners to uphold the fundamental human right to health stipulated in the WHO Constitution and the vision of leaving no one behind espoused in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

(The author is Minister of Health and Welfare Republic of China (Taiwan); views are personal)

FIU notifies fresh money laundering, terror financing reporting alerts for capital markets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A fresh set of 'alert indicators' have been issued by India's financial intelligence unit (FIU) for capital markets, insurance companies, online payment gateway intermediaries and crypto currency service providers for effective checking of suspicious transactions in their channels as part of the anti-money laundering and counter-terror financing regime. These new guidelines have been issued under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) during the 2022-23 financial year and published in a recently released report that has been accessed by PTI.

This is part of the anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) regime followed by the country as part of which financial institutions and intermediaries are mandated to share suspicious transaction reports (STRs) with the FIU which subsequently analyses them



and shares them for action with various investigative and intelligence agencies. FIU proactively engages with the financial sector regulators and reporting entities to understand emerging risks and to undertake immediate mitigating measures, the charter for the federal financial data mining agency says. In the case of capital markets, these supplemental guidelines have led to "a strategic shift in the manner in which FIU received information with respect to securities market transactions," the report said. These 'alert indicators' will address "emerging risks" in the market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) — stock exchanges and depositories— like synchronised and manipulative trade practices, order spoofing, mis-utilisation of client funds by the stock brokers, suspicious off-market transactions etc. In light of the growing trading volumes, the role the MIIs becomes "cardinal" in making the AML/CFT architecture more robust, it said.

Though the MIIs have been sending suspicious transaction reports (STRs) to the FIU for years now, the report said there was a lack of alert indicators "specific to them" and this left a lot of scope for improvement in their reporting quality, the report said. The supplemental guidelines

they were the first point of contact for a client to access the capital markets. For stock exchanges, the fresh alert indicators mandate they consider cases where there is suspicion of mis-utilisation of client funds by the stockbrokers such as frauds and also analyse cases where "serious anomalies" from the perspective of money laundering and terrorism financing are observed during the course of inspections and audit of stock brokers, the report said. In the case of depositories, the new alert indicators for generating STRs require them to deal with identification of suspicious off-market transfer, a way of transferring shares directly between two accounts without the involvement of an exchange platform. A similar working group, that included insurance regulator IRDAI, went into issues related to the insurance sector during 2022-23 fiscal and the revised guidelines laid "special stress" for generating alerts in cases of frauds experienced by the insurance firms and analyse these from the AML/CFT perspective and furnish reports to FIU in suitable cases, the report said. In the case of online payment gateways, a working group comprising banking regulator RBI, National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) "extensively" studied the business model of these technology-enabled financial services firms as these "new-age" players pose challenges in respect of transparency of the parties involved in transactions facilitated by them and the relative speed with which such transactions are completed, leading to emergence of AML/CFT risks. The agency also issued alert indicators for virtual digital asset (VDA) or crypto currency service providers ranging from directions to register with the FIU to carrying out "enhanced due diligence to implementation of travel rule." The travel rule requires crypto currency service providers to share sender and recipient data with each other during transactions.

In the case of credit rating agencies (CRAs), the new guidelines will ensure timely reporting of STRs by them to FIU and help in identifying serious corporate frauds having AML/CFT implications in the early stages and ensure timely action by law enforcement agencies based on such financial intelligence preventing siphoning of funds by delinquent issuers, it said. A similar set of alert indicators were issued to debenture trustees and they were directed to call for "periodic reports" from issuers of debentures and take appropriate action in the interest of the debenture holders as soon as any breach of trust deed or law comes to their notice even as the FIU said these violations may have implications from the AML/CFT perspective. The FIU has also shared the new alert indicator guidelines for STR reporting with real estate agents categorised as designated non-financial businesses and professions (DNFBP) under PMLA.

Banks may have to slowdown loan growth in FY25: S&P

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian banks' credit growth, profitability and asset quality would remain robust in current fiscal reflecting strong economic growth, but they may be compelled to slow down their loan growth as deposits are not growing at a similar pace, S&P Global Ratings has said. In the Asia-Pacific 2Q 2024 Banking Update, S&P Global Ratings Director SSEA Nikita Anand said the agency expects the sector's strong credit growth to moderate to 14 per cent in FY25, from 16 per cent in FY24, if deposit growth, especially retail deposits, remain tepid. Anand said there is a deterioration in loan-to-deposit ratio is every bank, with loan growth being 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth. "We expect banks to bring down their loan growth in FY25 and bring it in line with deposit growth. If banks do not do that, they would be paying higher to get wholesale funding, which will impact profitability," she said at a recent webinar of S&P Global Ratings.



Generally, loan growth has been led by private sector banks which see around 17-18 per cent growth, public sector banks on the other hand see loan growth in the range of 12-14 per cent. Anand said Indian banks can support loan growth of as high as 15-20 per cent over three years without need for raising capital. The loan growth is 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth of the banking sector. "For India, we expect credit

Need to be watchful about steel imports, says TV Narendran



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As steel imports continue to surge, Tata Steel CEO T V Narendran has said there is a need to be watchful about the situation. The comment comes at a time when India has reported a 38 per cent surge in steel imports to 8.319 million tonnes, becoming a net importer of the commodity during the 2023-24 financial year. Speaking to PTI, the industry executive said, "It would be a pity if the situation continues in the long run. We have to be watchful about imports." As long as it is unfair imports, the government needs to deal with it, Narendran said without elaborating further. Steel consumption is expected to grow 8-10 per cent in the ongoing 2024-25

RCAP lenders urge Hinduja Group arm to stick to resolution plan deadline

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Concerned over slow progress, the lenders of debt-ridden Reliance Capital (RCAP) have asked the Hinduja Group arm, IndusInd International Holdings Ltd, to expedite the process of obtaining necessary regulatory approvals and stick to the resolution plan deadline of May 27. In a meeting held in Mumbai on Friday with the senior officials of IndusInd International Holdings' (IIHL), the lenders of RCAP said the company has to make a payment of Rs 9,650 crore to them by the said date, a source said. It is to be noted that the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) Mumbai, while approving the resolution plan on February 27, directed the IIHL to implement the resolution plan within 90 days i.e. May 27. As per the approved resolution plan, IIHL has to make an upfront payment of Rs 9,650 crore to the RCAP lenders. According to the sources, the lenders expressed concerns over the slow progress towards the implementation of RCAP resolution plan, as



IIHL is yet to receive the crucial IRDAI approval on the resolution plan. The IRDAI has raised multiple queries and concerns over the proposed corporate structure for the transfer of RCAP's insurance businesses to IIHL, and the company is yet to address those concerns. IRDAI approval is crucial for the transfer of insurance businesses of Reliance Capital i.e. Reliance General Insurance and Reliance Nippon Life Insurance, to the IIHL. The RBI approval on transfer of RCAP business to IIHL also ends on May 17. The approval granted on November 17 was valid for a period of only six months. In case, IIHL fails to complete the resolution process within the timeline, it will have to give reasons of the same to the RBI while reapplying for fresh approval.

The NCLT on February 27, 2024, approved Hinduja Group firm IIHL's Rs 9,650-crore resolution plan for Reliance Capital. In November 2021, the Reserve Bank superseded the board of Reliance Capital on governance issues and payment defaults by the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group company. The central bank had appointed Nageswara Rao Y as the administrator, who invited bids in February 2022 to take over the company. Reliance Capital had a debt of over Rs 40,000 crore, and four applicants had initially bid with resolution plans. However, the committee of creditors rejected all four plans for lower bid values and a challenge mechanism was initiated in which IIHL and Torrent Investments participated.

Boult IPO likely next year: Co founder Varun

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian consumer tech brand Boult plans to go public next year, with a revenue benchmark of Rs 1,000 crore in FY25, as it expands into international markets and new categories, according to its co-founder Varun Gupta. In an exclusive interview with PTI, Gupta spoke in detail about his vision to make the Indian company global, listing out the homegrown brand, and his ambitious targets for this fiscal year. "We are not focusing on IPO this year, our primary focus is to foray into offline markets, international geographies, and new categories, but possibly in the next year," he said. The young entrepreneur said the company has set an internal touchstone for itself before it goes public. "... We have an internal benchmark, when we hit a Rs 1,000 crore revenue, that's when we want to go for an IPO. Technically, we're eligible to go for an IPO today because we're profitable and comfortably over Rs 500 crore. But we have an internal milestone of Rs 1,000 crore, and that is when we will consider ourselves eligible for that (IPO)," Gupta said. He further said the bootstrapped brand expects to close the financial year 2023-24 at a touchdown of Rs 650-700 crore. "In FY25, we're looking at a Rs 1,000 crore target, a very reasonable target because of our foray into new categories, because of our growing

ITPCL debt restructuring: NCLAT rejects SBI objection on liquidation value provided by PNB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Appellate tribunal NCLAT has rejected SBI's pleas opposing the liquidation value of ITPCL provided by the debt-ridden firm's lead banker PNB and said the country's largest lender cannot "wriggle out" the debt restructuring process of the IL&FS group's thermal power company. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has dismissed all three applications moved by SBI and said it does "not find any error in fixing the liquidation value as of 30.09.2018" of IL&FS Tamil Nadu Power Company Ltd (ITPCL). The appellate tribunal observed that as per the RBI circular, an Inter-Creditor Agreement has been entered



between the lenders. Moreover, over 90 per cent lenders by value and 75 per cent by numbers have already approved ITPCL restructuring plan. The lenders of ITPCL "with the requisite majority have already taken a decision to approve restructuring plan, the SBI, who is also one of the lenders, cannot be permitted to wriggle out of the terms of the ITPCL restructuring plan". "... As per decision taken by the majority, prescribed in Clause 10 of the RBI Circular, the Restructuring Plan and the Liquidation Value taken therein is binding on the Applicant (SBI)," said NCLAT in its order passed earlier this month. The RBI Circular mandates that Inter-Creditor Agreement

calculate and provide liquidation value as on the date of execution of the Master Restructuring Agreement and to stay further distribution of fund and payout as per the approved restructuring plan. However, SBI's plea was rejected by a two-member NCLAT bench which said: "The Liquidation Value as on 30.09.2018 is as per order dated 12.03.2020 where this Tribunal has accepted 15.10.2018 as the cut-off, we do not find any error in fixing the Liquidation Value as on 30.09.2018." PNB has appointed two firms and both had submitted two different valuations of Rs 4,580.03 crore and Rs 6,188.66 crore, following which it has appointed a third valuer as per the rule and regulations.

Indian startup to develop electric air taxi prototype by March 2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chennai-based startup ePlane Company expects to develop a certifiable prototype of a flying electric taxi by March next year as it works on ways to alleviate urban congestion. Incubated out of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, the company also aims to initially commercialise its drones that can carry a payload of 2-6 kilograms in the coming months, according to a

senior executive. The ePlane Company's Founder and CEO Satya Chakravarthy said it is developing an eVTOL (electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing) aircraft and to begin with, it will be a three or four-seater plane which can be converted into an air ambulance. "By March next year is when we expect to develop the first certifiable prototype. It will take another couple of years to get the certification from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)," Chakravarthy told PTI. As per the startup's website, an ePlane will take only 14 minutes to reach a place that will take 60 minutes by a personal vehicle. The company's vision is to alleviate congestion in urban spaces with eVTOLs. Besides, The ePlane company is developing drones, which are expected to be commercialised in the coming months. Initially, it plans to come out with a basic category and then an enhanced category of drones.

CII launches corporate governance charter for startups

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII on Sunday announced it has launched a charter for startups that enlist voluntary recommendations on corporate governance keeping in view unique nuances to govern startups. The Corporate Governance Charter also prescribes guidelines appropriate for startups based on the specific stages of their life cycle. "This charter is designed for entities incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013 only, and therefore the term 'Startup'. However, entities which are in the nature of sole proprietorship, limited liability partnership, partnerships may adopt similar structures/structures/guidelines for corporate governance within their organisation," the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated. The purpose of this charter is to help startups become responsible corporate citizens and also enable them to share it with their stakeholders to establish themselves as being well-governed, it said.

TYPES OF MICROTIA



MICROTIA CHALLENGES

Microtia, a congenital condition involving underdeveloped or absent outer ears, poses significant challenges for kids and families. ARCHANA JYOTI explores the medical, psychological, and societal aspects of the disorder

Microtia affects one out of every 3,000 newborns. It happens when the ear or ears do not fully develop during the first trimester of pregnancy; as a result, the kid is born without any ear or with ears that are small or underdeveloped. Although microtia is identified at birth, the condition's cause is not fully understood. It can cause facial difficulties, and hearing impairments in newborns.

unfairly labeled as "imbecile" or "stupid." Consequently, there's a significant demand for corrective surgeries in Western countries to address these deformities and mitigate associated social stigma. In India, microtia, characterized by varying degrees of underdevelopment or absence of the external ear, presents another significant challenge. Unilateral involvement is common, and the severity ranges from minor defects to total absence (anotia). The intricate anatomy of the ear, with its complex cartilage structure and close adherence to the skin, complicates reconstruction efforts.

techniques offer surgeons options for achieving optimal outcomes based on individual patient needs and anatomical considerations. Overall, ear reconstruction for congenital deformities requires a nuanced understanding of anatomy, meticulous surgical technique, and a tailored approach to each patient's unique circumstances.



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Congenital ear deformities indeed present a unique set of challenges, both anatomically and socially. The incidence rate of 1 in 3000 live births, excluding prominent ear deformity, highlights the importance of understanding and addressing these conditions. While in India, there may be less stigma attached to some particular related deformities like 'Bat ear', the situation differs in Western countries, where societal perceptions can be harsher. Prominent ear deformity, often colloquially referred to as "Bat ear", stands out as the most common among congenital ear anomalies. This prominence can lead to social challenges, with children sometimes being

Ear reconstruction for microtia typically involves a staged approach. The first stage involves creating a 3D cartilaginous framework, often sourced from autogenous rib cartilage (typically from the 6th to 9th ribs). The optimal age for this procedure is usually between 7 to 10 years when rib cartilage is soft and more moldable. Alternatively, some surgeons opt for ready-made frameworks composed of inert materials like Medpore or silicone. Careful dissection is essential during rib cartilage harvesting due to the proximity of vital thoracic structures. In the second stage of reconstruction, typically performed around six months after the initial procedure, the framework is lifted from the back and skin grafted. Subsequent stages may involve further refinement and correction, such as lobular correction. Various techniques, such as the Brent, Nagata, and Fermin techniques, have been developed to address the complexities of ear reconstruction. These



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Microtia is a birth deformity. The ear develops by six developing points and whenever there is some problem in development of these points it results in ear defects. Ear anomalies have a wide spectrum ranging from complete absence of external ear to minor deformities. It is not very uncommon in India. Hearing takes place by two mechanisms, one is through the bone around the ear and another is through the internal ear. Whenever the internal ear is affected or it is not developed, then the person hears through bone conduction. In cases of bilateral microtia, the development of the internal ear is affected which results in loss of hearing and development of the patient. But not so in cases of unilateral microtia. Microtia is also synchronous in some patients and they have other facial deformities as well.

Parents of Microtia Kid Navigate Journey with Love

As the parents of a girl child with microtia, our journey has been filled with conflicting emotions and difficult decisions. On one hand, we want nothing more than to ensure the best possible outcome for my child—to give her every opportunity to thrive, to overcome any obstacles she may face, and to live a happy, fulfilling life. But on the other hand, we're faced with the harsh reality of our child's condition—the likely surgeries, the therapies, the financial burdens, and the emotional toll it will take on our family. We're forced to grapple with questions of risk and uncertainty, wondering if the benefits of treatment outweigh the potential drawbacks and if we're making the right choices for our child's future.

As my daughter grew older, she's ten years old now, and became more aware of her differences, she began to ask questions of her own. Why do I look different? Why do people stare at me? Will I ever be like everyone else? And as much as we tried to reassure her and provide answers, we couldn't help but wonder if we were doing enough to help her feel accepted and loved just the way she is. But amidst all the questions, one thing will remain constant: No matter how difficult the road ahead may be, we'll stand by her side every step of the way, offering support, encouragement, and unconditional acceptance, no matter what. (Agony of a parent of a child with Microtia disorder)



DR SONAM RATHI
Consultant, ENT Apollomedics Super Speciality Hospitals, Lucknow, UP

Microtia can affect hearing- if the canal is narrow or completely blocked- conductive hearing loss. Also, sensorineural hearing loss is associated with malformation/deformity of the inner or middle ear. It can also be due to factors during pregnancy in the mother like consuming alcohol or some medication for acne such as Isotretinoin or due to malfunction of thyroid hormone. Some Genetic abnormalities & syndromes such as Treacher Collins, Trisomy 13,18,21, Klippel Feil syndrome, TORCH infection, Rh incompatibility, radiation, and even Gestational Diabetes are also responsible. Yes, most of these are correct. Requiring multistage pinna reconstruction using rib cartilage or artificial prosthetic materials, formation of the ear canal, or simply an artificial pinna prosthesis if the patient wants just a cosmetic correction. A Graduated Approach is needed including Pinnoplasty - Otoplasty, Incisionless otoplasty, Nonsurgicand al Otoplasty, along with correction of hearing loss if any. Cost ranges from a few thousand for a prosthesis to 3-4 lakhs for multistage pinna reconstruction.

Reconstruction in microtia is a multi-stage procedure. It takes three to four stages, a duration of one to one and a half years to complete all these stages. Usually, the procedure is started at the age of nine to ten years and by that age adult size of the ear is achieved. In cases of unilateral microtia, we take the image of a normal ear and accordingly, the size and shape of the ear are reconstructed. Patients who do not prefer multistage procedures are given the option of osteo-integrated artificial ear implants for reconstruction. In a private hospital setup, a patient has to pay for treatment procedures. But in a government hospital, it is free of cost.

Microtia is not preventable it is a congenital anomaly and happens in the first three months of pregnancy. It is very difficult to diagnose by ultrasound during pregnancy as the ear is such a small structure. Ear deformities from birth broadly include those affecting the outer ear/pinna & Ear canal-like altered shape or absence of pinna- Anotia/microtia/macrotia/Bat ear/Cup ear/Cryptotia /Coloboma/Stahl's ear/Satyr ear/Darwin's Tubercle/ Preauricular skin tags and sinus or atresia or stenosis of the ear canal. It can involve the middle part of the ear or inner ear- which is not visible but causes hearing loss.

JOURNEY WITHIN Conquering Procrastination

Spiritual and Meditation Guru, **DR ARCHIKA SUDHANSHU**, suggests ways to how to overcome procrastination. **Understanding the Problem:** Procrastination can be caused by fear of failure, perfectionism, lack of motivation, or poor time management skills. Finding what triggers your procrastination is important. Awareness is the first step towards change. Divide work into smaller and manageable tasks: Large and challenging tasks often become the focal point of procrastination. It is important to break them down into smaller, more manageable tasks. The initial hurdle is often the hardest to overcome, but once you get into the flow, you might be surprised at how much you can accomplish. Convince yourself to work on the task for just 25 minutes before taking a break, so it doesn't feel like an endless uphill struggle. Additionally, set up small rewards for completing tasks or reaching milestones. This positive reinforcement helps your brain associate productivity with satisfaction. **Work on SMART Goal:** SMART means Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. It offers individuals a structured approach to defining objectives. By following these principles, individuals create a clear roadmap that outlines exactly what needs to be accomplished, how progress will be tracked, and when goals will be achieved. **Avoid distractions:** Minimize distractions by silencing your phone, working in a quiet area, and using website blockers. A cluttered environment can drain mental energy, so keep your workplace clean to promote a calm and focused environment. **Plan your day:** Allocate specific time slots in your calendar for work focused on individual tasks rather than relying solely on willpower to manage your schedule. **Practice Self-Compassion:** We all experience procrastination sometimes. Be gentle with yourself, accept it, create a plan to progress, and



DR ARCHIKA SUDHANSHU
Spiritual and Meditation Guru

regain momentum. Reflect on past accomplishments tackling difficult tasks. Often, in moments of uncertainty, we overlook our history of overcoming challenges. **Daily positive affirmations:** Daily positive affirmations such as "progress, not perfection" and "one day, one step at a time" can aid in conquering procrastination. The fear of imperfection often hinders action, leading to procrastination. Embrace mistakes as opportunities for growth without fear of failure. Always think positive: Shift focus from potential threats to exciting possibilities. Have confidence in your ability to overcome challenges. Use meditation techniques to recognize and address negative emotions that may trigger procrastination. **Cultivate a growth mindset:** Nurture a growth mindset, embracing the belief that skills and abilities can evolve through dedication and practice. By perceiving tasks as chances for personal development rather than mere obstacles, we are more inclined to face them directly. Surround yourself with productive and positive people. **Stay consistent and don't compare your progress to others:** Visualize your daily progress to stay motivated. Consistent, effective planning enhances motivation. Focus on your own journey and celebrate your victory. Trust in your self-worth and maintain positive self-talk. **Exercise Regularly:** Engage in physical activities like short walks, light workouts, or yoga to boost focus, energy, and overall health. Although procrastination may seem terrifying, it can be overcome by fostering a growth mindset.

FROM THE DOCTOR'S DIARY

- ### The perils of Sugar
- Refined sugar on your skin is called aging
 - Refined sugar in your teeth is called cavities
 - Refined sugar in your eyes is called glaucoma
 - Refined sugar in your sleep is called insomnia
 - Refined sugar in your blood is called diabetes
 - Refined sugar in a baby's brain is called ADHD
 - Excess refined sugar in your system is called cancer
 - Refined sugar in an adults brain is called dementia and Alzheimer

Mindful eating is healthy eating

SHARMILA CHAND explores mindful eating with a dish prepared by **CHEF MANISH MEHROTRA**, Culinary Director – Indian Accent, emphasizing its focus on nurturing a healthier relationship with food. It's not about dieting but rather savoring each bite, embracing nutrients, happiness, and fulfillment in every meal, she says

Holistic Wellness is a very broad term that denotes mental, physical, and emotional well-being, including every single molecule of our body. 'Mindful Eating' is one significant aspect of Holistic Wellbeing. You embark on a healthy culinary journey through the awareness of the right ingredients, the kind of herbs and spices used, and of course, the style of cooking. Hence, it's not about dieting or depriving yourself; it's about building a healthier relationship with food and enjoying every bite. Take it slow and let your meals be a source of nutrients, happiness, and fulfillment.

KOLHAPURI CHICKEN SALAD, AVOCADO KOSHIMBIR

- INGREDIENTS For Chicken**
- Chicken breast 100 gms
 - Salt to taste
 - Kolhapuri masala 1 tsp
 - Olive oil 2 tsp
 - Ginger, finely chopped ½ tsp
 - Garlic, finely chopped ½ tsp
 - Green chilies, finely chopped ½ tsp
 - Fresh cream 1 tbsp
 - Masala gravy (see p. 176) 1 tsp
 - For Avocado Koshimbir
 - Onion, diced 2 tsp
 - Tomatoes, deseeded and diced 2 tsp
 - Seedless cucumber, diced 2 tsp
 - Avocado, diced 1 tbsp
 - Coriander leaves, chopped ½ tsp
 - Lime juice ½ tsp
 - Chaat masala ½ tsp
 - Tamarind chutney 1 tsp
 - Green chutney 1 tsp
 - Crushed roasted peanuts 2 tsp
- TO SERVE**
- Sunflower seeds, roasted as garnish
 - Coriander leaves as garnish
 - Edible flowers as garnish

- METHOD**
- Prepare Chicken**
- ◆ Cut chicken breast into thin, long slices. Marinate with salt, half the quantity of Kolhapuri masala, and olive oil for at least an hour.
 - ◆ Heat a non-stick pan, without oil. When it is hot, place the marinated chicken on the pan and cook. Do not overcook; the chicken should still be juicy in the center when done. Keep aside to cool.
 - ◆ When the chicken has cooled, shred it into juliennes.
 - ◆ Heat oil in a pan. Sauté chopped ginger, garlic, and green chilies. Add masala

- gravy and the remaining Kolhapuri masala. Sauté well. Add fresh cream. Cook the masalas in the cream till the mixture is semi-dry. Add shredded chicken and toss well till coated.
- ◆ Prepare Avocado Koshimbir:
- ◆ In a mixing bowl, add diced onions, tomatoes, cucumber, avocado, and coriander. Mix well. Sprinkle lime juice, chaat masala, tamarind chutney, and green chutney. Toss well. Finish with crushed peanuts.

SERVE

Mold avocado koshimbir on the center of a plate. Arrange shredded chicken salad on top. Garnish with roasted sunflower seeds (optional), coriander leaves and edible flowers. The sunflower seeds add extra crunch to the salad.

(Sharmila Chand is an Author and Freelance Journalist. She writes on Food, Travel, Art, Holistic Wellness, and Lifestyle)



ORAL HEALTH Diet, Mint, Ginger Impact

Oral health isn't just about brushing and flossing your teeth. Your dietary choices are also extremely important. The starchy or sugary foods we love are also loved by the bacteria in your mouth that can cause gum disease. Keeping your teeth healthy long-term is still difficult. This means maintaining a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, protein-rich foods, calcium-rich foods, and whole grains for a healthy smile as well as a healthy body. Always aim for a balanced diet. It is the most important key to staying healthy and young. Incorporating natural foods should be your goal so that you can reduce your consumption of processed foods. Taking care of your oral health also has a big impact on your overall health. So one important thing you need to keep in mind is that whatever you eat comes out of your mouth. Hence, bacteria can also travel from your mouth to other parts of your body and this puts you at risk of many diseases. Mint can significantly benefit your oral health due to its antiseptic properties. This is why it is such a popular

Dental health isn't just about brushing and flossing—it's heavily influenced by what you eat, **RAJDEEP JOSHI** says as he explains how natural foods like mint and ginger play a role in combating bacteria and strengthening teeth



- MINT & GINGER HEALTHY DRINK**
- INGREDIENTS**
- 8/10 mint leaves
 - 2 tsp fresh ginger juice
 - 1/2 tsp coriander
 - 1/4 tsp Chaat Masala
 - 1 tsp lemon juice
 - 1/2 tsp fennel powder
 - 2 1/2 tsp jaggery
- (Jaggery is a natural sweetener and has many health benefits, replacing your regular sugar with jaggery can be very beneficial. is.)
- 3 cup water
 - Salt to taste
- How to make the recipe**
- In a mixing bowl add mint leaves, fennel powder, chaat masala, jaggery, ginger paste, lemon juice, salt, and a little water. Grind in a food processor or mixer grinder to a paste. Take the paste in a mixing bowl, add 3 cups of water, and mix well. Refrigerate the water for 2 hours (it is optional) and serve the healthy drink.
- (The author is a Nutrition Coach)

