

53.56 per cent voter turnout reported in U'khand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Polling was held in a peaceful manner in all the five Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttarakhand on Friday. Barring a couple of incidents where the polling was disturbed for some time the voting was held peacefully in the State.

The State reported a total 53.56 per cent voter turnout in the five LS constituencies after the end of the polling at 5 PM. The figure is likely to be revised as data of many polling booths will be added to it later. However, experts believe that the revised voter turnout figure is likely to remain at 55-57 per cent which is much less than the 61.50 per cent turnout reported in the LS elections of 2019. The tentative data of EC shows that 59.36 per cent turnout was reported in Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar constituency, 59.01 per cent in Haridwar, 44.43 per cent in Almora, 51.01 per cent in



Tehri and 48.79 per cent in Garhwal constituency.

The polling started at 7 AM on a high note in all the 11,729 polling stations in the State. At many polling stations people were seen standing in queues in the early part of the day to cast their vote. The complaints of malfunctioning of the

malfunctioning was reported during the mock voting trials conducted before the start of the voting process. The faulty EVMs were replaced by authorities where necessary. In the first two hours, 10.54 per cent voters exercised their franchise which increased to 24.83 per cent till 11 AM. Till 1 PM 37.33 voter turnout was reported that was higher than the 36 per cent turnout till the time

After 1 PM the enthusiasm of voters of the State became subdued and at many places the polling stations appeared deserted. At 3 PM 45.62 per cent turnout was reported by the authorities. In the evening also the polling failed to pick up pace.

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were reported in many polling stations. The additional chief electoral officer (ACEO) Vijay Kumar Jogdande said that complaints of malfunctioning of 35 Control Units (CUs) were reported by officials while 40 Ballot Units (BUs) reportedly malfunctioned in different parts of the State. He said that

Low voter turnout makes political parties, candidates anxious

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The low voter turnout in Uttarakhand has dashed the hopes of the Election Commission which had taken a target of 75 per cent voter turnout for the Lok Sabha elections-2024.

The less than expected turnout has also baffled the political parties which have now started the micro level analysis of the voter turnout. The data of the EC shows that barring Champawat district, the voting percentage in all the districts of the State has decreased in comparison to the LS elections of 2019.

In Uttarkashi 52.3 per cent turnout was reported which is much less than 60.43 per cent reported in 2019. Similarly 49.36 and 54.02 per cent turnout was reported in Chamoli and Rudrapur districts respectively. In Tehri district only 40.93 per cent

turnout was reported this time as compared to 48.55 per cent in 2019. In Dehradun district 53.78 per cent turnout was reported which is less than the 59.78 per cent turnout reported in 2019. In Haridwar district 61.34 per cent turnout was reported which is 10 per cent less than 2019. In Pauri district 46.42 per cent turnout was reported.

The turnout in Pithoragarh and Bageshwar was 52.01 and 57.19 per cent respectively. The data further shows that Almora reported only 40.87 per cent turnout while 47.81 per cent turnout was reported here in 2019. In Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar districts 56.02 and 61.5 per cent voter turnout was reported on Friday while in 2019, 63.15 and 67.77 per cent turnout respectively was reported in these districts.

Fate of 55 candidates in 5 LS constituencies sealed in EVMs

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With the end of voting, the fate of 55 candidates in the fray in all the five Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttarakhand was sealed in the EVMs on Friday. The counting of the votes will be held on June 4 and till then the EVMs will be kept under strict vigil in the counting centres. In Tehri LS constituency 11 candidates are in the fray. However there is a direct battle between Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah of BJP and Jot Singh Gunsola of Congress in the constituency. Independent candidate Bobby Panwar tried to make the contest three cornered in Tehri.

Godiyal of Congress party. In Haridwar LS constituency, BJP has fielded former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat while Virendra Singh Rawat who is son of former CM Harish Rawat is contesting on Congress party ticket. In Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar constituency, the Union minister of State Ajay Bhatt is seeking election for the second consecutive term. He is chal-



In Garhwal LS constituency the national media in charge of BJP Anil Baluni is locked in an interesting battle with Ganesh

lenged by Prakash Joshi of Congress party. In Almora Ajay Tamta of BJP and Pradeep Tamta of Congress party are in the fray.

People of Uttarakhand voted for strong government: Dhama

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama exercised his franchise at Nagra Terai polling station in his native Khatima town of Udham Singh Nagar district on Friday morning. Like an ordinary citizen the CM waited for his turn to vote while standing in a queue. After casting his vote CM Dhama ate a sweet (Jalebi) to

their homes to vote. He requested that the youth, especially first time voters, give their contribution in shaping the future of the nation by exercising the power of vote. The CM said that there is enthusiasm among the people. He expressed confidence that a strong and stable government will be formed after



give the message of 'Pehle Matdan Fir Jalpan'. Dhama appealed to people to participate in the festival of democracy by coming out of

the elections. Later in the day the CM visited many polling stations in Khatima where he met the BJP workers and encouraged them.

Police act against two for disturbing voting process

Old man breaks EVM, demands ballot paper for voting

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police took action against two people in two separate districts for disturbing the voting process in the Lok Sabha election on Friday. In the Jwalapur area of Haridwar district, a senior citizen broke the electronic voting machine (EVM) when his demand to cast his vote by ballot paper was not met. According to the offi-

nel on site brought him outside. The man continued to shout loudly that the voting should have been conducted through ballot papers. The police detained him for interrogation, the officials added. Besides this, the police also took a young man into custody from the Kunda area in Udham Singh Nagar district for upload-



cial, when the man entered booth number 126 of polling station Jwalapur Inter College in the afternoon, he reportedly sought to cast his vote through a ballot paper. The officials there told him that it was not possible and requested him to cast his vote by EVM while assuring that his vote will remain undisclosed and secure till the vote counting. However, the man continued his demand and vented his anger by picking up the EVM and throwing it on the floor, officials said. This created chaos at the booth after which the police person-

ing a video in which he showed the EVM inside the polling booth. He also showed himself casting his vote from inside the polling booth against the law. His video soon went viral on social media and the police soon started receiving complaints about him. Taking cognizance of the post, the police brought the man to the police station to inquire. The Udham Singh Nagar senior superintendent of police Manjunath TC said that the video was soon deleted from Facebook and the police will take further action as per the rules.

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बच्चों को उत्कृष्ट शिक्षा दे रहा सेंट जॉन्स स्कूल

सेंट जॉन्स स्कूल की शुरुआत श्रीमती एच.सी. द्वारा वर्ष 1982 में एक प्लेस्कूल के रूप में की गई थी। थॉमस और सुश्री जेई डेकुन्हा। वर्ष 1989 में इसे श्रीमती ई.थॉमस और श्री एस.ए.थॉमस द्वारा अधिग्रहित कर लिया गया, जिन्होंने कक्षा 8 तक अतिरिक्त कक्षाएं जोड़ी। अब यह श्रीमती विनीता रावत के रूप में वर्तमान प्राचार्य के साथ एक प्रतिष्ठान है। इस विद्यालय का वातावरण नन्हे मुन्हे बच्चों के लिए नगर में विशेष स्थान रखता है। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित सेंट जॉन्स स्कूल बेहतर ढंग से बच्चों के बहुमुखी विकास में जुटा हुआ है। अनिवार्य विषयों के अलावा अतिरिक्त विषय भी चला रहा है। जिसके चलते इस विद्यालय के प्रति नगर में लोगों का विश्वास गहरता जा रहा है। कक्षा आठवीं तक संचालित की जा रही है।

नगर का अग्रणी स्कूल सनवाल

उत्कृष्ट शिक्षा व कुशल प्रबंधन के चलते यह विद्यालय कक्षा 12वीं तक जा पहुंचा है। वर्ष 1952 में सनवाल स्कूल की स्थापना एंजेलिना ग्रेस सनवाल द्वारा की गई थी। लिहजजा सनवाल स्कूल अपने उद्देश्य की पूर्ति करता हुआ 71 साल का सफर तय करने में न केवल कामयाब हुआ है, बल्कि हजारों बच्चों का भविष्य संवारने में अपनी महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभा चुका है। सीबीएससी बोर्ड से संबद्ध सनवाल स्कूल अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित किया जा रहा है। वर्तमान में प्रबंध निदेशक गौरव सनवाल विद्यालय का कुशल प्रबंधन का दायित्व निभा रहे हैं, जबकि ए इमेन्युअल प्रधानाचार्य के पद पर बेहतर शिक्षण कार्य रही हैं। वह कहती हैं कि विद्यालय को आगे ले जाने के लिए प्रतिबद्ध हैं और आधुनिक शिक्षा के साथ बच्चों का भविष्य संवारने हेतु दायित्व निभा रही हैं।

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सफलता का पथ पर अग्रसर सेंट जेवियर

सेंट जेवियर्स स्कूल नगर के उन स्कूलों में है, जिसे ऐतिहासिक स्कूलों के समकक्ष्य शिक्षा देनी है, जो करीब डेढ़ सौ सालों से शिक्षा जगत में मजबूत रतन के रूप में खड़े हैं। मगर गौर करने वाली बात यह है कि सेंट जेवियर्स शिक्षा के सन्नी मापदंड के साथ निरंतर प्रगति के पथ पर अग्रसर है। लिहजजा सफलता के बल पर यह शिक्षण संस्थान 32 साल का सफर तय कर चुका है। विद्यालय प्रधानाचार्य नईम अली खान का कहना है कि गुरुकुल रूपी इस विद्यालय को आगे ले जाने में अपना दायित्व निभा रहे हैं। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से विद्यालय का संचालन किया जाता है। कक्षा एक से बारहवीं तक आवासीय व दिवसीय विद्यालय है। जिसमें खानपान समेत आधुनिक रहन सहन व तमाम अत्याधुनिक सुविधाएं उपलब्ध हैं।

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बच्चों के बहुमुखी विकास को लेकर अमेरिकन किड्स विद्यालय समर्पित रूप से अपना दायित्व निर्वहन कर रहा है। बच्चों के बौद्धिक व शारारिक विकास के लिए प्रत्येक सुविधाएं विद्यालय में उपलब्ध हैं, जबकि अनुमवी शिक्षकों द्वारा बच्चों का पठन पाठन कार्य किया जाता है। जिसके चलते यह विद्यालय निरंतर विकास के पथ पर अग्रसर है। प्रधानाचार्य दीपा शिष्ट के नेतृत्व में विद्यालय का संचालन किया जा रहा है। उनका कहना है कि बच्चों के प्रति अधिक स्नेह के कारण नन्हे मुन्ने बच्चों का भविष्य संवारने में कई वर्षों से समर्पित रूप से अपनी जिम्मेदारी निभा रही हैं।

FUTURISTIC WORLD CLASS SCHOOLING IN NAINITAL

Modi takes dig at Rahul, Akhilesh

PM says film of do shehzade already rejected by people

PTI ■ AMROHA (UP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a veiled dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday, saying the shooting of the film 'do shehzade ki jodi' is on but it has already been rejected by people.

"Every time these people seek votes from the people of Uttar Pradesh, they carry a basket of dynasty, corruption and appeasement. They do not leave any chance to attack our faith," Modi said, addressing a rally here.

In a veiled attack on Gandhi and Yadav, he said, "The shooting of the film 'do shehzade ki jodi' (a pair of princes) is going on. But their film has already been rejected by people."

Hitting out at Danish Ali, the Congress candidate from Amroha, Modi alleged that he has objections in saying "Bharat Mata ki jai".

"Will a person, who cannot accept Bharat Mata ki jai, look

good in the Indian Parliament? Should such a person be allowed entry into the Indian Parliament?" he asked the gathering.

Slamming the opposition, the prime minister said, "The SP and the Congress declined the invitation for the Ram temple's consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. People hankering for vote banks refused the invitation for the ceremony. Instead, look at those who fought the Babri Masjid case in the Supreme Court but still participated in the consecration ceremony after losing the case."

Iqbal Ansari, a litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, attended the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple on January 22. "They are not satisfied even after refusing the invitation, so they abuse the Ram temple and Sanatan Dharma. The SP, for its vote bank, calls Ram bhakts 'pakhandi' (hypocrites). Those in the INDIA opposition bloc hate Sanatan Dharma," Modi said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a public meeting for the Lok Sabha elections, at Gajraula in Amroha, on Friday

The prime minister alleged that when he went under the sea to offer prayers in Gujarat's Dwarka, where Lord Krishna had gone from Amroha, "the prince of the Congress said there is nothing to pray under the sea. They are rejecting our faith only for their vote banks".

Hitting out at Akhilesh Yadav as well as Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav, Modi said, "Those in Bihar, who say they are Yaduvanshi, in Uttar Pradesh, the leader

who takes the benefits of being Yaduvanshi, I want to ask them, how can they sit with a party that insults Lord Krishna? How can you have an agreement with them?"

He criticised the Congress, SP and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) governments in Uttar Pradesh in the past for allegedly ignoring farmers and said those growing sugarcane were given Rs 500 crore annually during the SP's rule, whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government gave Rs 1,500 crore to them.

Blaming vote-bank politics for communal riots, Modi said, "This vote-bank politics burnt western Uttar Pradesh in the fire of riots. The people of Uttar Pradesh can never forget that era of Goonda Raj. People had to migrate and leave their houses behind."

"In several western Uttar Pradesh neighbourhoods, posters with 'makan bikau hai' (house for sale) written on those were put up. But, Yogiji (Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) got rid of criminals for your safety. We must ensure that these forces are not strengthened again in any manner."

The Prime Minister accused the previous governments of cheating the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities in the name of social justice, and said he is working towards achieving the dream of social reformers Jyotiba Phule, B R Ambedkar and Chaudhary Charan Singh.

"The previous governments have only cheated the people of the SC, ST and OBC communities in the name of social justice. Modi is working day and night to achieve the social justice dream of Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar and (former prime minister) Chaudhary Charan Singh," he said. The prime minister addressed the rally as polling was underway in eight western Uttar Pradesh constituencies in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls. Amroha will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. The prime minister began his speech with an appeal to people to vote.

"I appeal to everyone to exercise their right to vote given by the Constitution," he said while emphasising that youngsters should especially go out and vote to secure their future and that of the country.



People not excited about polls, claims farmer leader Naresh Tikait

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)

Farmer leader Naresh Tikait on Friday expressed skepticism about the BJP's claim of the NDA crossing the 400-mark and claimed "there is no excitement among people" about the polls.

"If they are saying 400, then what is the need for them to contest elections? It is special that they can perceive this in advance. Do they have any astrologer who has predicted that this is going to happen?" said Tikait, national president of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) while speaking to 'PTI Videos'.

Polling in eight Lok Sabha constituencies of western Uttar Pradesh, including Muzaffarnagar, are underway on Friday in the first phase. "People express their feelings through their votes. However, the voting is slow, and it will be like this till evening. There is no excitement among people, they are disillusioned now. Also, elections are being held in several phases... Elections should be held in a single

phase and the results should be declared on the third day and (new government's) oath-taking in the next four-five days," he suggested.

"There is an Emergency-like situation in the country. These are the talks among the public," Tikait further said. "People of this area don't like slavery. There might be some region, state or seat that likes slavery. People are opposing slavery by not casting their votes."

"The era of booth capturing has passed... Everyone is complaining about the machine, then why are the polls not being conducted through ballot papers? 90-95 per cent people are against the machine (EVM). It is a machine and can be tempered with," Tikait claimed.

Talking about payment to sugarcane farmers, Tikait said, "They show the payment as a favour. Are they giving it for free? Have we not given it for our sugarcane produce? The farmers today are feeling cheated and feel they have lost everything. Farmers are sad."

Close to 55 per cent polling recorded in 12 LS seats in Rajasthan

PTI ■ JAIPUR

A voter turnout of close to 55 per cent was recorded in 12 parliamentary constituencies of Rajasthan where polling was held in the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Friday.

The election authorities said 54.97 per cent of the electorate cast their votes. The final figures would be released later.

The highest voter turnout of 62.93 per cent was recorded in the Ganganagar Lok Sabha seat while Jhunjhunu saw the lowest turnout of 47.98 per cent, it said. Jaipur recorded a poll percentage of 61.23. The voting percentage in Bikaner was 52.53, Churu 61.05, Sikar 55.06, Jaipur Rural 54.44, Alwar 55.82, Dausa 49.57, Bharatpur 50.97 and Nagaur 56.89.

As many as 114 candidates are in the fray in the first phase of polling that began at 7 am in the state and ended at 6 pm. There are 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan and the remaining 13 will go to poll in the second phase on April 26.

Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot and other leaders cast their votes in the initial hours. Mishra and his wife Satyawati Mishra cast their votes at a polling booth in C Scheme.

"Voting is not only a constitutional right but also the duty of every citizen of India. This strengthens democracy," the governor said later.

The chief minister exercised his franchise at a polling



station of Patnik Jagatpura and expressed confidence that the NDA will win over 400 seats across the country in this general election. He said people of the state were voting for 'guarantees' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On the other hand, Pilot said people want change and this election was going to be for change in the country. "The BJP had a long tenure of 10 years. Now people are bored and I am convinced that the Congress will win more seats than the BJP in Rajasthan. We will win across the country and the INDIA bloc will get a majority," he told reporters after casting

his vote. Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari also cast her vote in this phase.

Former BJP state president Satish Poonia cast his vote at a polling booth in Rani Sati Nagar in Jaipur during the day.

Elderly citizens and some newly married couples were also seen at the polling booths.

Shivani, a resident of Dampura village in Dholpur district, reached her polling booth before entering the wedlock. Dressed in bridal attire, she also took a selfie at a 'selfie point' after casting her vote.

In Jaipur, a 95-year-old retired naval officer reached a polling station with his family members to vote. He said although he could have chosen the 'voting from home' option, he preferred to cast his vote at a polling station.

Newlywed Rohit and Sonia Chaudhary went to a polling station in Jaipur's Purani Basti to cast their votes. They got married on Thursday night. Rajasthan Director General of Police Utkal Ranjan Sahoo said tight security arrangements have been made for free, fair and peaceful voting. The Rajasthan Police, along with companies of the Central Armed Forces and Home Guard personnel, has been deployed to maintain peace and law and order.

According to Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta, a total of 2.54 crore people are eligible to vote in the first phase and around 23,000 polling booths have been set up in this phase.

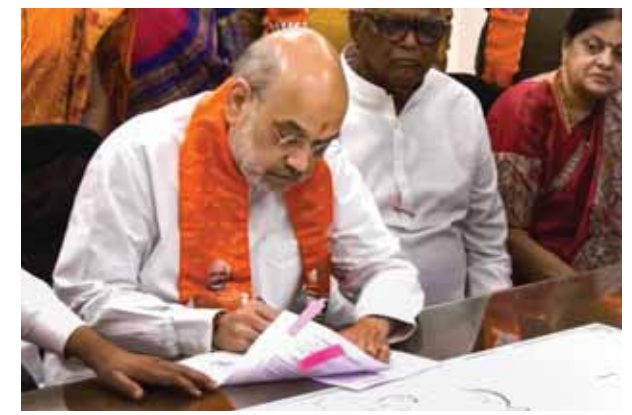
Shah files nomination from Gandhinagar LS seat

Says election is all about giving Modi third term

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday submitted his nomination papers for the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat from where he is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and said the general election is all about giving a third term to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Shah was accompanied by Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel when he submitted the nomination papers to Gandhinagar collector and district election officer M K Dave in the state capital at exactly 12.39 pm, considered as 'Vijay Muhurat'. Talking to reporters, Shah said this general election is all about giving a third term to



Union Home Minister and BJP candidate Amit Shah files his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha elections, in Gandhinagar, on Friday

foundation for 'Viksit Bharat', he said.

Thanking the BJP for renominating him from the seat once represented by stalwarts Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani, Shah said the seat holds significance also because PM Modi is a registered voter from here. "I have been associated with this seat for the last 30 years. Before becoming an MP, I was an MLA from assembly segments that fall under this seat. Thanks to your love, I rose from a humble booth worker to becoming a member of parliament now. People of Gandhinagar gave me their blessings whenever I sought their votes," he said.

Developmental works of more than Rs 22,000 crore were undertaken in the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat in the last five years, he said. Shah, a former BJP president, won from the Gandhinagar constituency by a margin of more than 5 lakh votes in the 2019 general elections.

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

Polling picked up momentum in Puducherry through the morning as the union territory gets set to elect their lone representative to the Lok Sabha, on Friday.

A visit to some of the polling stations in the rural areas brought to the fore a mixed picture of voter turnout, which was mediocre in some places and high in others.

Kothandapani (89) along with his 86-year-old wife Krishnammal turned up at a booth in the Veerampattinam coastal village in Ariyankuppam Assembly constituency to cast their votes. Kothandapani is the grandfather of the AIADMK

Polling picks up in Puducherry, 89 years old comes out to vote

contestant G. Tamizhvendan, family sources told media at the booth. Voters turned up before commencement of the polls at most of the booths, official sources said. In one of the polling stations in Mudaliarpattinam constituency, the VVPAT developed some snags and there was a delay of 45 minutes in the commencement of polling. Official sources said that as soon as the VVPAT developed technical snags, the engineers of BEL were called to rectify the defects. Pink booths were the center of attraction. The green environment at a booth housed on the premises of the more-than-century-old VOC Government Boys school in the town added to the lustre of the arrangements. The elections department distributed gruel, nutritious cereals and millets and also buttermilk to the voters, sources said. Volunteers were deployed to help aged and disabled voters to approach the booth without difficulties. Police also took care of the senior citizens and helped them get into the booth to cast their votes. Puducherry recorded 28.10 percent polling till 11 a.m.

There are 26 aspirants in the fray in this seat. The BJP nominee and Home Minister of Puducherry A Namassivayam and the Congress president and sitting member of Lok Sabha VVaithilingam are locking horns in the poll battle.

Long queues outside polling booths in Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Long queues were seen outside booths since the morning as polling was underway for five constituencies in Assam in the first phase on Friday. Polling began at 7 am in Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and

Kaziranga seats, and 86.5 lakh voters are eligible to vote. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of the BJP and Congress's deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi were among those who cast their votes in the first hour. There were apprehensions that the weather might play a spoilsport with the entire Upper Assam remaining cloudy, but gradually the sky cleared up. "It is really a good sign that people are coming out in such a large number. People's spontaneous participation will strengthen democracy," Sonowal, the BJP candidate of Dibrugarh, said after casting his vote at a polling booth in Laxminath Bezbarua Bhawan in Khowkiding. People are happy under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and that is why they are coming out in large numbers, he claimed. Gogoi voted at a polling booth in Devi Charan Barua Higher Secondary School in Jorhat town.

PM Modi so that he can make India a developed country by 2047.

The Union minister said Modi's third term will be crucial because his first two terms went into correcting the mistakes made by the previous Congress-led UPA government.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Theatre of the absurd

The ever-falling state of polity touches a new low, trivialising life for political gains

In the realm of politics, where governance and public welfare should reign supreme, a disturbing trend has emerged — the trivialisation of human life for the sake of political benefits. Recent events surrounding Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal exemplify this worrying trend, where his health crisis has become a point of one-upmanship and is being used to serve narrow political narratives rather than addressing the genuine concerns of his health. The case took a curious turn when the Enforcement Directorate (ED) claimed that Kejriwal intentionally indulged in a high-sugar diet to fabricate grounds for bail. Kejriwal's colleague Atishi has countered this assertion, alleging a conspiracy to deny the jailed Chief Minister access to essential insulin and home-cooked food, potentially putting his life at risk. Both claims, while patently opposite, underscore a distressing reality — the callous politicisation of a health crisis. In the theatre of politics, where power dynamics often overshadows ethical considerations, the sanctity of human life seems to have been direly neglected. The focus has shifted from genuine concern for an individual's well-being to exploiting their vulnerabilities for partisan gains. Such a narrative not only reflects poorly on the integrity of political discourse but also raises profound questions about the moral compass of those entrusted with governance.



The ED's assertion of Kejriwal deliberately manipulating his health for legal advantage is a damning indictment of the extent to which political opponents are willing to go to discredit their adversaries. It underscores a culture where the personal struggles of individuals are weaponised for political advantage. Conversely, Atishi's allegations of a plot to endanger Kejriwal's life highlight the dangerous consequences of unchecked political rhetoric. Accusations of attempted murder, if unsubstantiated, not only sow seeds of distrust but also trivialise the gravity of such heinous crimes. At its core, the Kejriwal saga underscores a broader crisis within the polity — the prioritisation of political expediency over human dignity. In the relentless pursuit of power and influence, the inherent value of human life is often sacrificed at the altar of partisan interests. This erosion of empathy and decency not only corrodes the fabric of democracy but also threatens the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. Without delving into the merits of the case or passing judgment on who is truthful, Kejriwal, like everyone else, must be given the best treatment at the moment, even if the illness is self-inflicted. To reclaim the integrity of polity, it is imperative for political actors to realign their priorities with the values of compassion, integrity and accountability. The welfare of individuals should never be subjugated to the exigencies of political gamesmanship. Instead, leaders must demonstrate a commitment to upholding the dignity and wellbeing of every citizen, irrespective of their political affiliations. The Kejriwal saga serves as a sobering reminder of the perils of allowing politics to trump humanity.

Atishi's allegations of a plot to endanger Kejriwal's life highlight the dangerous consequences of unchecked political rhetoric. Accusations of attempted murder, if unsubstantiated, not only sow seeds of distrust but also trivialise the gravity of such heinous crimes. At its core, the Kejriwal saga underscores a broader crisis within the polity — the prioritisation of political expediency over human dignity. In the relentless pursuit of power and influence, the inherent value of human life is often sacrificed at the altar of partisan interests. This erosion of empathy and decency not only corrodes the fabric of democracy but also threatens the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. Without delving into the merits of the case or passing judgment on who is truthful, Kejriwal, like everyone else, must be given the best treatment at the moment, even if the illness is self-inflicted. To reclaim the integrity of polity, it is imperative for political actors to realign their priorities with the values of compassion, integrity and accountability. The welfare of individuals should never be subjugated to the exigencies of political gamesmanship. Instead, leaders must demonstrate a commitment to upholding the dignity and wellbeing of every citizen, irrespective of their political affiliations. The Kejriwal saga serves as a sobering reminder of the perils of allowing politics to trump humanity.

PICTALK



School students with their faces and hands painted as part of voter awareness campaign pose for photos, in Jammu PTI

Transformative trends in India's higher education

The surge in EdTech presents opportunities for democratising education but also highlights challenges such as the digital divide and ensuring quality

India's higher education landscape is undergoing a transformative shift. With initiatives like the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, skill development programs by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the encouragement of 100 per cent FDI in education, the landscape is ripe for innovation and investment. Additionally, UGC's push for setting up international campuses in India and the Ministry of Education's focus on global learning is reshaping our educational framework. The market size of the Indian higher education system was estimated at around \$40 billion in 2023, growing at a CAGR of 15 per cent. With over 1,200 universities, 49,400 colleges and 12,600 stand-alone institutions, India hosts one of the largest higher education ecosystems in the world. Catering to more than 50 million students — a number expected to grow substantially in the next five years — these institutions are crucial in achieving an enhanced Gross Enrollment Ratio and improving the skill set of our future workforce.



Amidst this expansion, the post-pandemic era has seen a significant influx of digitalisation in learning, with universities offering online programs and various platforms providing a broad spectrum of courses online. Considering our current infrastructure and the expected demand, it is essential for the country to further explore online learning and skill development opportunities. Aligning these opportunities with the next 10-year growth plan is crucial for preparing a skilled workforce that enhances graduate employability. However, the selection of courses among students has also seen a paradigm shift. India is moving beyond tra-

ditional domains like engineering, medicine and management. Today, students are increasingly drawn to interdisciplinary programs and new-age courses that promise quicker skill acquisition and certification. There is a significant opportunity for institutions to expand their offerings in these certification/degree courses where students can learn new skills in less duration. The surge in EdTech has been transformative and represents a key area ripe for investment and innovation. By providing everything from career guidance to student counselling digitally, these platforms have democratised access to education, ensuring that students from all regions have better career opportunities. Yet, realising the full potential of these advancements requires overcoming significant challenges. Addressing the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to technology and improving internet connectivity, especially in underserved areas, are critical. Moreover, as the field rapidly diversifies, strengthening quality assurance and adapting accredita-

tion and regulatory frameworks are essential to maintaining standards and credibility. These bodies must adapt to the changing dynamics of higher education to uphold academic integrity and student outcomes. The Ministry of Education's current focus on the internationalization of higher education in India is set to have profound effects, not only on educational practices but also on the broader economy and society. This strategic emphasis will enable transnational education and student/faculty exchanges, thereby building a globally competent workforce and fostering knowledge exchange between nations. As we look ahead, the future of higher education in India is not just about scaling up but also about smart scaling. By embracing these trends and addressing inherent challenges, we can ensure that the sector not only expands but also elevates, providing every student with a world-class education and global opportunities. (The writer is the founder and director of OneStep Global; views are personal)



ARITRA GHOSHAL

Aung San Suu Kyi: Prison or house arrest?



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Concerns over Suu Kyi's whereabouts as the junta stares at defeat

The news website, *The Irrawaddy*, cites "informed sources in Naypyitaw and Yangon" as saying that Aung San Suu Kyi (78), the emblem of the Myanmar's struggle for democracy and Win Mint (72), incarcerated president of the country's democratically-elected Government ousted by the coup on February 1, 2021, remain in prison. This, indeed, is likely to be the case given the high level of credibility that the website enjoys. It would be instructive to read what it has to say in this connection. The ball, so to say, was set rolling late on the afternoon of April 16 when a pro-regime media outlet said that both had been moved to a new location. It was followed by the regime's spokesman, Major-General Zaw Min Tun telling the Burmese services of VOA and the BBC: "Not only Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Myint but also some [other] older prisoners were given necessary care since the weather is extremely hot." However, he did not say that Suu Kyi had been moved to a new location. When media outlets pressed him for further information, he did not provide any details. Despite this and the absence of any photographic or other evidence showing their having been moved to house arrest, both local and international and news agencies carried stories saying that it was the case.

That this is not so is further suggested by Aung San Suu Kyi's son, Kim Aris, who told Kay Burley of Sky News during a breakfast interview, "They are saying house arrest. She only has one house and she's not there." Given the utterly unsavoury reputations that the junta and news outlets which act as its mouthpieces enjoy, the confusion may, in all likelihood, have been deliberately created by both acting in tandem. If this, indeed, is the case, what purpose was sought to have been achieved? The most plausible answer would be that it was to show that the junta cared. Why suddenly? It has been known for some time that Aung San Suu Kyi was very ill in prison and the junta was



not providing her the kind of medical attention she needed. It has also been speculated that the junta could murder her in prison and claim that she had died of old age or other natural causes. Whatever it is, it would serve the generals well to create the impression that it was not their fault if something untoward happened to her. The other reason could be differences within the junta, a section of which wants to do a deal with her to end the civil war they are losing and another would hear nothing of it. The Sit-Tat (which and not Tatmadaw, is the real name for Myanmar Army), is now facing defeat at a none-to-distant future. It has been suffering one major reverse after another since the opposition Three Brotherhood Alliance (henceforth Alliance) launched its current offensive, codenamed Operation 1027, on October 27, 2023. The latest, the loss of Myawaddy, an important border town, on April 11, 2024, to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Karen National Army, is clearly the most devastating blow suffered by



THE JUNTA IS REPORTEDLY PREPARING TO LAUNCH A COUNTER OFFENSIVE. WHETHER IT MATERIALISES AND, IF IT DOES, WITH WHAT SUCCESS, REMAINS TO BE SEEN

the junta since the Alliance's current offensive began. A key trading hub close to the eastern end of Myanmar's border with Thailand—the total value of imports and exports passing through it has been valued at \$ 1 billion in 2023—it is also regarded as Myanmar's opening to South-East Asian countries. The Junta is reportedly preparing to launch a counter offensive. Whether it materialises and, if it does, with what success, remains to be seen. But even if it is successful and the Sit-Tat is able to retain the town after regaining it, the event is unlikely to be a turning point in the civil war which is going overwhelming in favour of the Alliance—comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), active in the Kokang Special Region of northern Shan State, the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in the Shan State and the Arakan Army (AA), based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part. Acting in close cooperation with opposition National Unity Government's military arm, the People's Defence Force

(PDF) and other ethnic armies like the KNLA and KLA. At the time of writing, the AA has brought almost the entire Rakhine State under its control. By early April, it had captured some 170 junta camps and posts, several larger bases, battalion headquarters and training facilities. It seized the important town of Paletwa on January 15, 2024. Kyaukphyu, where China is developing a port and a special economic zone spread over 1,600 hectares, is about to fall. The AA is pressing hard on Sittwe, an important port town, after seizing control of the small towns around it and cutting off access to it through road and waterways. India shifted its staff from its consulate there to Yangon earlier in April, 2024. Initially, one had thought that the Junta's ouster, even though inevitable, would take a long time to come about. It now seems that it would be defenestrated much sooner than one had thought. India must bear this in mind. (The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BJP'S STRATEGIC MANIFESTO

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A Vision for India's Global Leadership", published on April 19, this is my response. The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) manifesto signals a shift towards a policy-centric approach, departing from traditional electoral strategies. By highlighting achievements and projecting a vision for India's future, it aims to secure votes based on governance rather than populist promises. The absence of significant Pakistan-centric rhetoric suggests a nuanced understanding of foreign policy priorities, focusing instead on global engagement and regional stability. Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on "Neighbour First" and "Act East" policies reflects a proactive stance in regional diplomacy, enhancing India's influence and fostering solidarity among neighbouring nations. The manifesto's commitment to global advocacy for the Global South underscores India's aspirations for a leadership role in international affairs. However, challenges persist, particularly in integrating India into global supply chains and enhancing the rupee's acceptability. Yet, the manifesto's articulation of strategic goals and pledges for collaboration within the Indo-Pacific region portrays a coherent vision for India's role in the evolving geopolitical landscape. Sneha Gupta | Delhi

OTT LANGUAGE DEBATE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "How justified is abusive language on OTT?", published on April 19, this is my response. India's OTT platforms have reshaped entertainment, offering diverse content but facing criticism for excessive profanity. The Supreme Court's recent ruling defends free speech, sparking debates on cultural integrity. Profanity may enhance realism yet risks societal norms, especially impacting youth. While OTT isn't solely responsible, it amplifies existing trends. Education reforms emphasise cultural values, conflicting with profanity's normalisation.

Political quagmire



Apropos the news article, "Corruption and political defections: A telltale sign of democratic decay", published on April 19, this is my response. The article delves into the unsettling reality of political manoeuvring, where corruption probes seem to act as a revolving door for politicians, raising questions about the integrity of the system. It draws a

sharp contrast between the flawed current State of affairs and the ideal governance system envisioned in ancient scriptures like Manusmriti. The Manusmriti's principles, though controversial, present a compelling blueprint for a more righteous governance model, emphasising a party-less system, voter recall rights and alignment with moral principles. The chasm between this ideal and the existing political landscape is vast, highlighting the urgent need for reform. While achieving perfection may be a distant goal, even partial adoption of Manusmriti's principles could yield significant improvements, reducing electoral malpractice, corruption and divisive politics. As the nation awaits potential reforms under the Modi Government, India, with its rich spiritual heritage, can transcend its current challenges and emerge as a global exemplar of moral governance. Ishaan Shukhi | Ludhiana

INSIGHTS ON INDIAN JEWELLERY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Heritage Indian jewellery dazzles the world", published on April 19, this is my response. Dr Alka Raghuvanshi's posthumously published masterpiece, "Rendezvous with Traditional Indian Jewellery," transcends the boundaries of a mere book. It's a heartfelt journey delving into the soul of India's cultural heritage, where artistry intertwines with pro-

found symbolism. The meticulous attention to detail reveals a rich tapestry of craftsmanship, history and significance. The book's thematic chapters unravel the evolution and diversity of Indian jewellery, from the majestic influences of the Mughal era to the intricate designs of South India. It showcases stunning visuals and explores the deep symbolism ingrained in each piece, reflecting social, religious and cultural narratives. Moreover, it sheds light on the craftsmanship and techniques passed down through generations, preserving the essence of traditional jewellery-making. Regional variations highlight the unique aesthetics across India, celebrating its diverse cultural tapestry. This book is a captivating ode to India's cherished art form, offering insights for enthusiasts, historians and admirers alike, encapsulating the beauty and legacy of Indian jewellery. Lavanya Sharma | Lucknow

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FIRST COLUMN

MIND, THE KEY TO HIDDEN FORTUNE

True wealth lies not in material possessions but in the freedom of mind



RAVI VALLURI

Once upon a time lived a woman. She was struck with an unexpected tragedy as her husband passed away untimely. The lady was now left with only one son and precious jewellery. Since she was hounded by creditors to repay the debts accrued by her husband, she conjured a trick to hide the wealth. In sheer desperation to keep the jewellery safe from creditors, the lady wrapped the precious wealth in a piece of cloth and hid it under a tree. The mother and son lived in an impoverished State. Her mind was always disturbed by the fact that she did not share this piece of vital information with her only son. As it turned out, she carried this secret to the grave. Consequently, the son inherited plenty of debt, a barren hut and a cot. The son had to work hard for sustenance and to repay the ever-rising liabilities. He toiled hard to survive and regretted his misfortune. 'Property is not the sacred right. When a rich man becomes poor it is a misfortune, it is not a moral evil. When a poor man becomes destitute, it is a moral evil, teeming with consequences and is injurious to society and morality,' opined Lord Acton. Indeed, the impoverishment of the poor is heart-wrenching. One day while cutting the branches of a tree, he stumbled upon the jewellery. Dumbfounded and stupefied, the strapping youngster hid the bijouterie in a pit he dug in the hut, petrified that the creditors would appropriate the wealth. He too committed the cardinal mistake of not sharing the secret with his wife and carried it to his grave. The mother and son were not mindful and wakeful enough to be in the Present Moment and remained prisoners of their past and future.



Two Buddhist monks were once discussing a flag flapping in the wind. While one felt it was the wind moving, the other conjectured it was the flag fluttering. The imbroglio could not be resolved and they sought the intervention of a Zen Master. The master impassively said, 'It is the MIND that moves, neither the flag nor the wind.' Humans need freedom from their past and future to be in the present. And being in the NOW or present is true enlightenment and mindfulness. The past is full of sorrows and regrets while the future brims with anxieties and worries and humans are caged in that mindset, thereby postponing their happiness quotient. To appreciate true happiness and joy, the human mind should not vacillate between the past and the future but remain in the PRESENT. A young monk was once travelling in pursuit of happiness and truth. During his travels, he encountered a massive river that he could not cross. A short while later, he saw a senior monk on the other side of the river. He hailed him and sought assistance to cross the river to reach the other side. The senior monk pondered and replied, 'You are already on the other side'. This fact can be appreciated only when the mind is centred. Breathing techniques such as Sudarshan Kriya, Pranayama, Yoga, Meditation and Vipassana all help in dissolving the mind so that it becomes centred. 'True happiness is not possible without freedom. We have to learn the habit of being free. We do not allow our past, the future, our projects, or our fear to get hold of us. We are free. Every step is free. Every step is nourishment. Every step is healing. Every step is joy,' says Thich Nhat Hanh.

(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)

Human-elephant conflict: The way out

To ensure the protection of these majestic creatures, it is imperative to revisit and revise legislative frameworks with a focus on ecological sustainability



BKP SINHA



ARVIND JHA

India's rich biodiversity includes a significant population of Asian elephants, which are not only an integral part of the country's wildlife heritage but also hold cultural and religious significance. However, the increasing instances of human-elephant conflict (HEC) have become a pressing concern for both conservationists and those living near elephant habitats. The root causes of HEC are multifaceted, primarily stemming from habitat loss and fragmentation due to human activities. As India's population expands, so does the need for land for agricultural and developmental activities. This expansion often leads to encroachment into elephant territories, resulting in the destruction or fragmentation of their natural habitats. Consequently, elephants are forced to venture closer to human habitations in search of food and space. Mining activities, in particular, lead to deforestation and habitat degradation, disrupting elephant migratory routes and undermining the scope and health of elephant habitats. Similarly, urbanisation and infrastructure development often intersect with elephant corridors, pushing these gentle giants into unfamiliar and potentially dangerous territories. Climate change is another significant factor in this conflict. Changes in climate patterns can affect the availability and distribution of food and water sources in elephant habitats. Extreme weather events like droughts, floods and high temperatures can force elephants to migrate in search of these resources, often bringing them into conflict with humans. The current State of HEC in India is alarming. Over 500 humans are killed annually in encounters with elephants and more than 100 elephants lose their lives due to human-related activities, including poaching for ivory, poisoning, electrocution and collisions with trains. Train collisions are the second-highest cause of unnatural elephant deaths in the country, following accidental electrocution. Over the past decade, train collisions have claimed the lives of more than 200 elephants.

As mega-herbivores, elephants consume up to 150 kilograms of forage and drink up to 190 litres of water per day. This necessitates a large foraging area, typically spanning 100-1,000 km² for a family herd, to provide a diverse diet of grasses, shrubs and fruits. However, navigating large areas to find sufficient food and water becomes a challenge when these areas overlap with human activities. This often results in crop raiding, property damage, and, in some tragic instances, human casualties. These incidents, unfortunately, lead to retaliatory actions from humans that can be fatal for these majestic creatures, further intensifying their fear and mistrust of humans. Farmers, particularly those with limited resources struggle to cope with crop losses. This hardship breeds resentment towards elephants, undermining conservation efforts and trapping both humans and elephants in a cycle of violence. Since 2019, there have been over 1500 human fatalities reported due to elephant attacks. In 2023-24 alone, Odisha reported 149 elephant deaths due to HEC. Mineral-rich districts like Dhenkanal, Angul, Keonjhar and Sundargarh have been hit the hardest, with Dhenkanal alone witnessing 130 elephants and 227 human deaths over the last decade. In August 2023, three elephants were electrocuted at the Rani Tea Estate near Guwahati due to low-hanging high-voltage



WESTERN MAHARASHTRA, A REGION NOT TRADITIONALLY KNOWN FOR ELEPHANT HABITATION, SAW A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN 2002 WHEN ELEPHANTS MIGRATED FROM KARNATAKA. THIS MOVEMENT WAS LARGELY ATTRIBUTED TO THEIR DISPLACEMENT FROM THE DANDELI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, A PLACE THEY HAD INHABITED COMFORTABLY UNTIL 1990

wires. This was not an isolated incident; back in October 2021, sagging power lines near the Dihing-Patkai National Park claimed the lives of another three elephants. The situation worsened in October 2022, when within a single week, 11 elephants across Assam lost their lives to human-related hazards including electrocution, crop poisoning and train collisions. Western Maharashtra, a region not traditionally known for elephant habitation, saw a significant change in 2002 when elephants migrated from Karnataka. This movement was largely attributed to their displacement from the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, a place they had inhabited comfortably until 1990. The construction of the Kali hydro-electric project is believed to have been the catalyst for their relocation to the districts of Kolhapur and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, leading to notable incidents of crop raiding. A similar pattern emerged in 2022 when a herd of 22 elephants trekked from Chhattisgarh to Maharashtra, settling in the lush forests along the Wain-Ganga, Pranrita and Dina river basins. This migration has been linked to increased human encroachment, the construction of two canals in Odisha and mining disturbances in their traditional corridors. The Wayanad region, a vital watershed for Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, is currently facing a multitude of environmental challenges such as deforestation, irresponsible tourism and unscientific development. Such activities are posing a significant threat to the ecological balance of the region, endangering the lives of both humans and wildlife. Wayanad plays a critical role in maintaining regional biodiversity. However, ongoing habitat degradation in this region could potentially intensify the water crisis in the Kaveri basin and escalate the HEC, which has tragically led to 41 fatalities already. Similarly, in the northeastern States of Assam and West Bengal, expanding tea plantations and human settlements have encroached on elephants' traditional grounds, leading to frequent HEC incidents. Addressing HEC requires a multi-

pronged approach that balances the needs of wildlife conservation with the socio-economic realities of human populations living near elephant habitats. This includes securing and restoring elephant corridors to ensure safe passage for elephants between different habitats, thereby reducing the likelihood of them entering human-dominated landscapes. Recognising this need, the Indian Government has launched an ambitious initiative known as Project Elephant. This program focuses on enhancing elephant habitats by creating a network of reserves, corridors and protected areas. To address the common issue of crop raiding in human-elephant interactions, the project employs innovative technologies such as early warning systems and elephant-proof barriers. It also implements various strategies like durable and solar-powered electric fences and biological deterrents including bio-fencing with cacti, beehive fences and chilli smoke to deter elephants. Enhancing the natural food supply within forests is another essential strategy for preventing elephants from entering human territories. This involves improving water conservation, regenerating forests by replanting and nurturing native trees and plants, implementing fire protection and removing invasive species. Programs focused on ecotourism and livelihood diversification not only engage local communities in conservation but also provide them with sustainable economic alternatives. Success stories from the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape underscore the effectiveness of community-led conservation endeavours, strategic land-use planning, trans-border collaboration and habitat restoration in diminishing conflict incidents. Kerala has also taken a bold initiative to relocate people from forest regions and reforest agricultural lands, despite the central Government's refusal to fund this Rs. 620 crore project. The State's declaration of HEC as a State-specific disaster and the involvement of the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority in

conflict management, are significant steps towards addressing this complex issue. Statutory support is fundamental in the conservation efforts addressing the HEC. Elephants, listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List, are protected under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Recent amendments to the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 have raised concerns regarding their impact on elephant reserves and corridors, particularly within the 100 km strip of India's boundary where the majority of these reserves and corridors are located. These changes could potentially worsen the fragmentation and degradation of these vital habitats, thereby intensifying the HEC. The Forest Rights Act of 2006, while well-intentioned in empowering forest-dwelling communities, has also had unintended consequences. Its implementation has sometimes resulted in further encroachments and habitat fragmentation, which can force elephants to venture into new areas in search of refuge and resources, increasing the likelihood and severity of conflicts. Post-project monitoring, particularly in the mining industry, is often insufficient, leading to a neglect of wildlife protection measures that were stipulated during the project's approval. This oversight can result in significant harm to elephant populations and their habitats, undermining conservation efforts. As we move forward, let us remember that our fates are intertwined with those of the elephants and all wildlife. Their survival is our survival. Their well-being reflects the health of our planet and their continued existence enriches our world in ways that cannot be quantified. It's high time we recognise our role and act responsibly, ensuring a future where humans and wildlife coexist harmoniously, each playing their part in maintaining the balance of our shared ecosystem.

(The writers are former principal chief conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)

Rahul Gandhi holds on to Wayanad despite speculation

The decision comes as a strategic move, influenced by a variety of factors, including local dynamics and broader political alliances in Kerala

Even as the Indian National Congress was burning midnight oil about the Lok Sabha constituency from where Rahul Gandhi would contest this time, The Pioneer has reported that the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan would not leave Wayanad from where he was elected with a mammoth majority of four lakh votes in the 2019 edition of the General Election. The report was prepared after speaking to a cross-section of the electorate in the Wayanad constituency who were unanimous in their opinion that Rahul Gandhi should contest from Wayanad itself. Those who reacted to the queries posed to them included hardcore CPI(M) members and activists who



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

made it known that Rahul should register a much bigger majority than that of the 2019 poll because the opponent happened to be Annie Raja of the CPI and K Surendran of the BJP. Annie, the spouse of D Raja, CPI's national general secretary, had rubbed Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the wrong way and the CPI(M) cadres consider it as a cardinal sin.

Raja too had publicly questioned the capability of Vijayan and this made the CPI(M) activists furious. Had the Congress or BJP leaders criticized Vijayan, they would not have bothered but the CPI had crossed the Lakshman Rekha (it could be Stalinist Rekha since the comrades do not accept Ramayana). The CPI(M) comrades would certainly teach Annie Raja a lesson or two in the art of politics. The truth is that the CPI(M) leaders wanted Rahul Gandhi to contest from Wayanad so that the CPI would lose one seat for sure. The decision to field Surendran, the Kerala State president of the BJP, was made much later. Surendran himself knows that he would

lose by a big margin but he has to kowtow the party line. The information coming out of the BJP office is that he may be given a gubernatorial position even if he loses the security deposit. There are no suitable candidates in Kerala BJP to challenge the supremacy of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. The question being asked by Wayanad voters is that how many people remember the names of the 2019 challengers to Rahul Gandhi. What is interesting is that the animosity between the CPI(M) and Congress has come down drastically with Gandhi filing the nomination from Wayanad. Though the Congress leaders lambast the CPI(M), it is just a façade to convince the hardcore mem-

bers of these parties that there is no alliance between them. But what the people of the State see in TV channels and newspapers is the video images and pictures of the Sitaram Yechury and D Raja hugging and kissing Rahul Gandhi while in Tripura former CPI(M) Chief Minister Manik Sarkar openly campaigning for the Congress party's candidates. Kerala is the only State where they act as if they are rivals and enemies. By the next election, one can see the Congress and the CPI(M) fighting it together in Kerala against the BJP-led front (provided the Hindutva party leadership throws out all the rotten eggs from its basket). There is no difference between the Congress and

the CPI(M) as of date. Political pundits have been asking both parties to officially legalize the ties so that the entire secular parties could be arrayed under the flag of the Congress across the country against the "communal and fascist" forces. The secular parties include the Muslim League! In Marxist parlance, they say that whoever aligns with the CPI(M) is secular while the BJP is "communal and fascist". The CPI(M) does not have any issues in accepting the former NDA constituents as allies once they call off the marriage of convenience with the BJP. Telugu Desam of Andhra Pradesh, BJD of Orissa, BSP and JD(U) are some of the major political outfits whose secularist cre-

dentials depend on their ties with the BJP. The press meeting addressed by A K Antony, the Bheeshma Pitamah of the Congress on 9 April 2024 at Thiruvananthapuram was an indicator of how political marriages take place in Kerala. While Antony was cursing his son Anil Antony who is contesting from Pathanamthitta as a BJP candidate and asking the electorate to ensure the defeat of his son, he was waxing eloquence on Anto Antony, the Congress candidate who is pitted against Anil. The former defence minister lambasted the BJP as anti-nationalists, communalists and dictators. But what stood out was his silence on the CPI(M) candi-

dates. Antony's ties with the CPI(M) are infamous as he had sailed with the Marxists for almost two years during 1980-1983. The CPI(M) and the Congress-led by Antony fought the 1980 general election together and ruled Kerala for almost two years. The Congress faction was pushed out of the LDF by the CPI(M) which demolished the offices of the Congress across the State with the police looking the other way. It is not without any reason political pundits say that politics make strange persons into bedfellows. Do we need more proof than A K Antony? (The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

Envoy says US determined to monitor North Korean nukes

AP ■ SEOUL

The United States and its allies are discussing options "both inside and outside the UN system" to create a new mechanism for monitoring North Korea over its nuclear weapons programme...



Linda Thomas-Greenfield said it was clear that Russia and China, which abstained from voting on the UN resolution vetoed by Moscow, will continue to try to block international efforts to maintain monitoring of UN sanctions against North Korea...

sions in the Middle East. When asked about the Palestinian Authority's request to have full UN membership, she said a UN resolution in support of that request would not contribute to finding a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

against rivals. The United States, South Korea and Japan have responded by expanding their combined military exercises and sharpening their nuclear deterrence strategies built around strategic US assets.

Ukraine claims it shot down Russian strategic bomber

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's air force claimed Friday it shot down a Russian strategic bomber, but Moscow officials said the plane crashed in a sparsely populated area due to a malfunction after a combat mission.

EU official von der Leyen visits Finland-Russia border to assess security situation

AP ■ COPENHAGEN



The head of the European Union's executive branch said on Friday that Finland's decision to close its border crossings with Russia over a surge in migrants was a security matter for the whole 27-member bloc to consider.

after visiting the border in Lappeenranta with Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo. "We should be more Finnish when it comes to security," von der Leyen and Orpo flew in a Finnish helicopter over the landscape of forests and towns on the border.

More people evacuated after dramatic eruption of Indonesian volcano

AP ■ MANADO

More people living near an erupting volcano on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island were evacuated on Friday due to the dangers of spreading ash, falling rocks, hot volcanic clouds and the possibility of a tsunami.

team from the local authorities is still combing the villages surrounding the volcano and evacuating the residents to safer areas by boat.

IMF MD says China has to define growth strategies for the future

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Observing that China has the benefit of a particular set of policies over the last decades for its export-oriented growth, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has said that the time has come for Beijing to look at domestic sources for growth, opening up more opportunities for the market.

The IMF sees three important opportunities for China, she said. Number one, to shift the economy more towards domestic consumption. It is actually in line with what China is aspiring to, the dual circulation economy.

affects consumer confidence. So clearing up the problems in the sector more resolutely would certainly help China," she said.

and deflation risks coming down," he said. China provides wide-ranging support to priority sectors. This includes preferential access to credit research funds and incentives for certain firms, particularly in the areas of strategic manufacturing and science and technology.

Teenager charged with terror in stabbings of bishop and priest at Sydney church

Sydney (AP): A 16-year-old boy accused of stabbing two Christian clerics during a Sydney church service has been charged by police with terrorism offenses.

shown no signs of being radicalised. The 16-year-old's lawyer, Greg Scragg, said the boy had a "long history of behaviour" consistent with a mental illness or intellectual disability.

US ambassador to UN visits Nagasaki A-bomb museum

AP ■ TOKYO

The American envoy to the United Nations called Friday for countries armed with atomic weapons to pursue nuclear disarmament as she visited the atomic bomb museum in Nagasaki, Japan.



US Ambassador to United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, left, and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, right, shake hands during a meeting on Friday

weapons," she added, standing in front of colourful hanging origami cranes, a symbol of peace. The United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, destroying the city and killing 140,000 people.

ly half-century of aggression in Asia. Nagasaki Gov. Kengo Oishi said in a statement that he believed Thomas-Greenfield's visit and her first-person experience at the museum "will be a strong message in promoting momentum of nuclear disarmament for the international society at a time the world faces a severe environment surrounding atomic weapons."

Five Japanese escape unhurt in Karachi suicide bombing

PTI ■ KARACHI/PESHAWAR

Five Japanese nationals had a lucky escape when their vehicle was targeted by militants in a suicide attack here in Pakistan's Sindh province on Friday, police said.

security guards killed one terrorist while another blew himself up in an attempt to get close to the van, the official said. "All five Japanese nationals are safe," DIG Shaikh said. "No one has claimed responsibility so far," the DIG said, adding that the vehicle carrying the Japanese nationals was bullet-proof.

child, were killed in the attack. The killers fled from the scene before police from Drabon Police Station rushed to the area. Chief Minister of the province Ali Amin Gandapur strongly condemned the attack and directed the police to arrest the attackers.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY MARINE DEPARTMENT. No. MD/ACCTS/W/R-18/2023-415 Date: 16.04.2024. e-Tender Call Notice (e-TCN) No. MD/ACCTS/W/R-18/2023/16 dttd: 07/02/2024

RITES LIMITED (A Govt. Of India Enterprise) Shikhar, Plot No. 1, Sector-29, Gurgaon - 122001. Engagement of manpower on contract: VC No., Post, No. of Vacancies

India standout performer amidst sluggish global growth: IEA Secretary

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Despite a challenging global scenario, India's economy has shown robust growth over the past year backed by sustained consumption and investment demand, a top Indian official told members of a World Bank committee here.

The GDP growth estimate for the fiscal, which has been revised upwards from 7.3 per cent to 7.6 per cent in the second advance estimates, highlights the enduring strength and resilience of the Indian economy, India's Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth said while addressing the Development Committee meeting here on Thursday.

"India grew above 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters of FY24, reaffirming its position as a standout performer amidst sluggish global growth trends," Seth said.

He said that similar sentiments have been echoed by various agencies who have revised India's fiscal 24 growth



estimate closer to 8 per cent. India's proactive stance on reform and investment in sustainable growth avenues sets a benchmark for emerging economies.

The Indian delegation at the annual Spring Meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank is being represented at the official level this time. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is not attending the annual gathering of global financial leaders due to the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

Seth told the Development Committee that India's thrust on capex continued to crowd in private investment resulting in enhanced Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) at constant prices registering a growth above 10 per cent in FY24.

India's inflation outlook appears positive with headline and core inflation trending downwards, indicating a broad-based moderation in price pressures, he said.

Seth said that on the external front, the narrowing

also saw continued strong growth in services, led by non-contact-intensive services sectors.

Emphasising that India has the highest digital transactions globally with a share of 46 per cent of global real-time transactions in 2022, Seth noted that the monthly transactions for March 2024 stood at 13.44 billion totalling an amount of INR 19.78 trillion.

The volume of UPI online transactions witnessed a 54 per cent YoY growth in Q3 FY24, which can be attributed to convenience, security, increased financial flexibility, and avenues in ease of spending for consumers, he said.

"Today this increased mobile connectivity and its linkage with the bank accounts has become an integral part of India's inclusive economic growth story with consumers, small traders, vendors, and vulnerable populations from the lowest rung of the society, being the key beneficiaries," he said.

Stock markets stage strong rebound

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets rebounded from early lows to close higher on Friday, snapping the four-day losing streak on heavy value buying in banking and auto shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 599.34 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 73,088.33. The index opened lower and tanked further 672.53 points or 0.92 per cent to hit a low of 71,816.46 in early trade. However, the index rebounded in the second half on value-buying in banking shares.

The NSE Nifty jumped 151.15 points or 0.69 per cent to close at 22,147. The broader index dropped to a low of 21,777.65 in early trade before paring its losses to end in the green.

From the Sensex basket, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Maruti, Wipro, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank and ITC were the major gainers. Nestle India, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors and Infosys were among the laggards.

Infosys declined nearly 1 per cent after the company's revenue growth guidance for FY25 failed to meet market expectations.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled in the negative territory. European markets were trading in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.55 per cent to USD 87.62 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,260.33 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"Despite global weakness, Indian markets staged a strong recovery driven by large-cap stocks, buoyed by the expectation of limited prospects



of escalation following Israel's action against Iran. However, fragility persists with elevated oil prices, posing inflation risks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

"Nifty reversed a four-day losing streak to end higher," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.39 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.04 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex jumped 1.02 per cent and metal climbed 0.85 per cent. Financial services (0.83 per cent), consumer durables (0.78 per cent) and commodities (0.54 per cent) also gained. IT, telecommunication, utilities, realty and tech were among the laggards.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark declined 1,156.57 points or 1.55 per cent and the Nifty dipped 372.4 points or 1.65 per cent. Meanwhile, the 2024 Lok Sabha polls kicked off on Friday with the beginning of polling for the first phase. The BSE benchmark tanked 454.69 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,488.99 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty declined 152.05 points or 0.69 per cent to 21,995.85.



Nestle shares continue to decline; mcap erodes by ₹10,610.55 crore in two days

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Nestle India continued to decline on Friday, ending the day over 1 per cent lower, amid reports that the global FMCG major sold infant milk products with more sugar content in less developed countries.

The stock declined 3.53 per cent to Rs 2,375.75 during the day on the BSE. It later ended at Rs 2,437.10 a share, down 1.04 per cent.

On the NSE, shares of the company dipped 2.13 per cent to Rs 2,410 during the day. The stock ended at Rs 2,430 apiece, reflecting a decline of 1.32 per cent.

On Thursday, shares of Nestle India had declined over 3 per cent.

In two days, the company's market capitalisation (mcap) got eroded by Rs 10,610.55 crore to Rs 2,34,974.74 crore.

Nestle India on Thursday said it has reduced added sugar on baby food products in India by up to 30 per cent, depending on variants, over the past five years, amid reports that the global FMCG major sold products with more sugar content in less developed

Strong growth momentum provides RBI policy space to focus on price stability: Das

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The strong growth momentum and the GDP projections for 2024-25 give the RBI a policy space to unwaveringly focus on price stability, Governor Shaktikanta Das stressed while voting for a status quo in the interest rate earlier this month.

The Reserve Bank had maintained status-quo on the benchmark lending rate (repo) at 6.5 per cent since February 2023 on concerns over inflation after the three-day meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) earlier this month.



The central bank on Friday released the minutes of the meeting.

"The gains in disinflation achieved over last two years have to be preserved and taken forward towards aligning the headline inflation to the 4 per cent target on a durable basis," he said, according to the minutes.

Five of the six MPC members had voted for the status quo in the policy rate.

MPC member Jayanth R Varma, however, had advocated a reduction in the repo rate by 25 basis points as "high interest rates entail a growth sacrifice".



Gold jumps ₹400 to breach ₹74k mark, silver hits fresh peak

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver prices soared to fresh record high levels on Friday with the precious metal breaching Rs 74,000 per 10 grams mark here on bullish global trends.

According to HDFC Securities, gold price jumped Rs 400 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 74,100 per 10 grams in Delhi. It had closed at Rs 73,700 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Similarly, silver prices rose by Rs 100 to hit a new peak of Rs 86,600 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at a record high of Rs 74,100 per 10 grams, up by Rs 400 amid a positive trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,390 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close.

Gold in the global market surged near a record high in the Asian trading hours on Friday, following reports that Israel had struck targets on Iranian soil, days after Iran had launched an attack on Israel in retaliation for a raid on its consulate in Syria.

This has increased the possibility of a larger regional conflict that would support higher gold prices.

Additionally, silver was quoted higher at USD 28.29 per ounce. In the previous close, it had finished at USD 28.25 per ounce.

According to market analysts, a string of reports, including US inflation data which has remained hotter than forecast this year, have pushed the top US Federal Reserve officials to say recently they could hold interest rates high for a while.

That's a letdown after the Fed earlier had signalled three cuts to interest rates could be possible this year. But Fed officials have been adamant they want to be sure inflation is heading down toward their 2 per cent target before lowering the Fed's main interest rate from its highest level since 2001.

"Gold prices are expected to react to news developments related to both geopolitical tensions and updates on interest rates from the Federal Reserve," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

BUSINESS BRIEF



VITEEE-2024 KICKS OFF AT VIT AP UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

The Vellore Institute of Technology Engineering Entrance Examination (VITEEE)-2024 has officially begun today at the VIT-AP campus in Amaravati. The computer-based entrance exam, conducted annually, aims to facilitate admissions to B.Tech programs offered at VIT's campuses in Vellore, Chennai, Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), and Bhopal. Sharing his insights on VITEEE 2024 Dr. S.V. Kota Reddy -Vice-Chancellor highlighted that the entrance examination will continue at various exam centres until April 30, 2024. Candidates hailing from 125 cities across the nation and 6 cities abroad will participate in the online entrance examination. The results are tentatively set to be available on May 3, 2024, on www.vit.ac.in. Dr. Jagadish Chandra, Registrar, said that the examination is conducted in three sessions daily, from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m., and 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

INDUSTRY, ACADEMIA MEET AND EXHIBITION TODAY

The Department of Architecture, Zakir Husain College of Engineering and Technology (ZH CET), Aligarh Muslim University is organising an Industry-Academia Meet and Exhibition on April 20, 2024, to bring together the professionals, academicians and students for interaction and exchange of ideas. AMU Vice Chancellor is the chief patron and Prof Mirza Salim Beg, Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Technology and Prof MM Sufyan Beg, Principal, ZH CET are the co-patrons. The talks will be focused on the present scenario in building design and construction practices and the eminent speakers are Prof Manoj Mathur, SPA, New Delhi; Prof Rajat Ray, Ex-Dean, Guru Govind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi; Dr. Arun Kapur, Amity School of Architecture, Lucknow and also Honorary Architect, Gunjan and Associates, Lucknow; Architect Gaurav Gupta, De:Cape Studio, Lucknow; Architect Manish Kr Sahai, Sahai Architects, Aligarh; Architect Hemlata Singh, White Fox Designs LLP, New Delhi and Architect Udit Gaurav, Green Building Consultant, Greater Noida.

HDFC AMC Q4 profit soars 44 pc to ₹541 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

HDFC Asset Management Company (AMC) on Friday reported a 44 per cent jump in profit after tax at Rs 541.1 crore in three months ended March 2024.

In comparison, the company posted a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 376.1 crore in the year-ago period, the fund house said in a regulatory filing to the stock exchanges.

The firm's total income surged by 33 per cent Year-on-Year (YoY) to Rs 851 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 637.8 crore in the January-March quarter of the financial year 2022-23 (FY23).

Additionally, the company's expenses grew 18 per cent YoY to Rs 172 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2024.

The company's average asset under management (AAUM) stood at Rs 6.13 lakh crore as of March 2024 as against Rs 4.5 lakh crore a year earlier.

For the full financial year 2023-24 (FY24), the fund house's PAT surged by 37 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,946 crore and total income rose 27 per cent YoY to Rs 3,162.5 crore.

HDFC AMC is an investment manager for HDFC Mutual Fund, one of the leading mutual funds in the country. Shares of HDFC AMC settled 1.73 per cent lower at Rs 3,707.15 apiece on the BSE.

Hyundai Motor India rolls out Grameen Mahotsav

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Auto-maker Hyundai Motor India has expanded its 'Grameen Mahotsav' initiative to 16 new locations across the country, after the success of its inaugural event held in Gujarat this month. The 'Grameen Mahotsav' initiative aims to further strengthen HMIL's connection to rural India with specially curated events and product displays including live music, folk dance, and regional talent shows among others.

It also serves as a platform for Hyundai to delve into the vast potential of rural markets. By closely engaging with communities and discerning market trends, HMIL aims to not only cater to evolving aspirations but also identify and welcome new customers, Hyundai Motor India said in a statement on Friday.

The inaugural 'Grameen Mahotsav' event was held successfully in Mahemdavad, Gujarat. Now, Hyundai Motor India looks forward to extending its reach and impact across rural landscapes.

"Our sustained efforts towards bolstering rural connect are bearing great fruits and Hyundai Motor India has witnessed a remarkable growth in rural markets in the financial year 2023-24. We sold 1.15 lakh vehicles in rural India last year, a growth of 11 per cent over 2022-23," Hyundai Motor India Ltd. COO Tarun Garg said. "We are confident

Air India cancels Dubai flights

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India on Friday said it has cancelled flights to and from Dubai due to continued operational disruptions at the airport in the Gulf city. Passengers of Air India who have booked the flights for travel till April 21 will be offered a one-time waiver on rescheduling and full refunds for cancellation.

An Air India spokesperson said the airline has cancelled the flights to and from Dubai due to continued operational disruptions at the Dubai airport. "We are doing our best to get affected customers on their way by re-accommodating them on flights as soon as operations resume," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Dubai airport operations have been hit by unprecedented rains and floods.

Infosys shares decline nearly 1 per cent after Q4 earnings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Infosys on Friday ended nearly 1 per cent lower after the company's revenue growth guidance for FY25 failed to meet market expectations.

The stock fell 2.87 per cent to Rs 1,379.70 during the day on the BSE. It finally ended at Rs 1,411.60 apiece, lower by 0.63 per cent.

On the NSE, it declined 2.85 per cent to Rs 1,378.75 in intra-day trade. Shares of the company ended at Rs 1,411.95 each, down 0.51 per cent.

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) declined by Rs 3,655.37 crore to Rs 5,85,936.45 crore.

In volume terms, 8.65 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 206.04 lakh shares on the NSE during the day.

IT company Infosys on Thursday said its consolidated profit jumped 30 per cent to Rs 7,969 crore in the March 2024 quarter. The company posted a profit of Rs 6,128

crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing.

The consolidated revenue of Infosys during the quarter increased 1.3 per cent to Rs 37,923 crore from Rs 37,441 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

The company expects a revenue growth of 1-3 per cent in constant currency for FY25 and an operating margin of 20-22 per cent. The growth projection is lower compared to the outlook of between 4 per cent and 7 per cent for FY24.

"Infosys guided for 1-3 per cent constant currency revenue growth for FY25, missing expectations," as per a report by JM Financial Institutional Securities.

CAG signs pact with SAI Bulgaria to enhance international collaboration

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has signed an agreement with SAI Bulgaria, the Bulgarian National Audit Office, in Sofia, in a bid to foster international cooperation. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), inked by the two Supreme audit institutions, aims to enhance collaboration and the exchange of expertise in the field of auditing between the two nations, the CAG said in a statement.

Through the MoU, a platform will be established for the exchange of knowledge and experience amongst auditing professionals and technical teams through collaboration in training programs, and mutual assistance in conducting audits, it said.

Girish Chandra Murmu, the CAG of India, expressed confidence in the partnership and said the MoU will further strengthen bilateral cooperation.

"We look forward to working closely with you and assure you of our support and commitment to energize our capacity development initiatives and exchange of knowledge and information between our SAIs," he said.

The MoU signing ceremony was attended by Goritsa Grancharova - Kozhарева, Acting President of the Bulgarian National Audit Office.

Murmu further highlighted the broader implications of the MoU, stating it will also help cementing the ties that already exist between the two nations.



REVIVING THE LEGACY OF RAM

Ram Aagman stands as a testament to **SHOVANA NARAYAN'S** unparalleled artistry and her unwavering commitment to preserving India's cultural heritage. **GYANESHWAR DAYAL** witnessed the performance

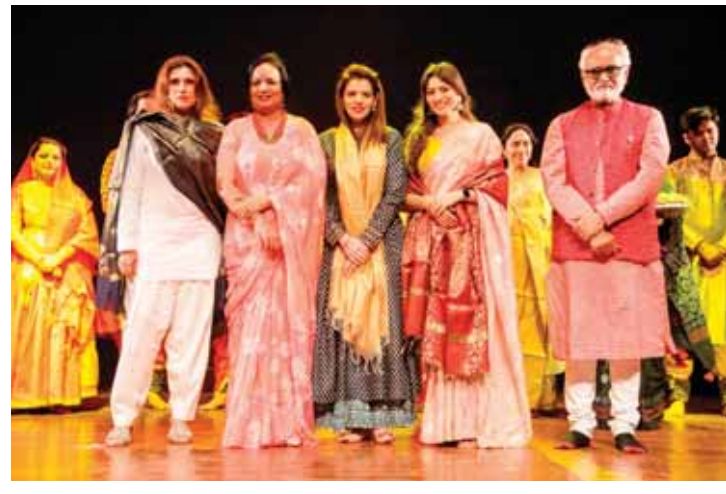
Renowned classical dancer Shovana Narayan, a Padmashree awardee celebrated for her mesmerising performances, once again captivated audiences with her scintillating dance production "Ram Aagman." Held on the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri, this spectacle, presented at the Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi, was a testament to Narayan's dedication to preserving and promoting Indian classical dance forms.

'Ram Aagman,' choreographed and directed by Narayan herself along with Lalita Narayan, delved into the timeless tale of Lord Ram, from his birth to Sita's disappearance into the earth. With a team of 19 skilled dancers from her repertory ASAVARI, Narayan masterfully brought to life lesser-known incidents from Ram's life, offering a fresh perspective on the epic narrative. The event was graced by esteemed personalities such as Sangita Saxena, Meenakshi Lekhi, Dr Sachchidanand Joshi, and Dr Sandhya Purecha, among others. Their presence underscored the significance of Narayan's contribution to the cultural landscape of India.

'Ram Aagman' was not just a dance performance; it was a rich tapestry of cultural exploration. Through insightful talks by Lady Kishwar Desai and Dr. Alka Pande, the production seamlessly integrated cultural geography and visual arts, shedding light on the influence of Sri Ram's journey in Punjab and the profound symbolism present in hand-held paintings depicting his darshan.

Narayan's choreography skillfully portrayed the myriad emotions stirred by Lord Ram's arrival, from the joyous anticipation of his devotees to the impact on his family and subjects. Her commitment to social messaging was evident as she unearthed new dimensions of the Ram Katha, resonating with audiences on both intellectual and emotional levels.

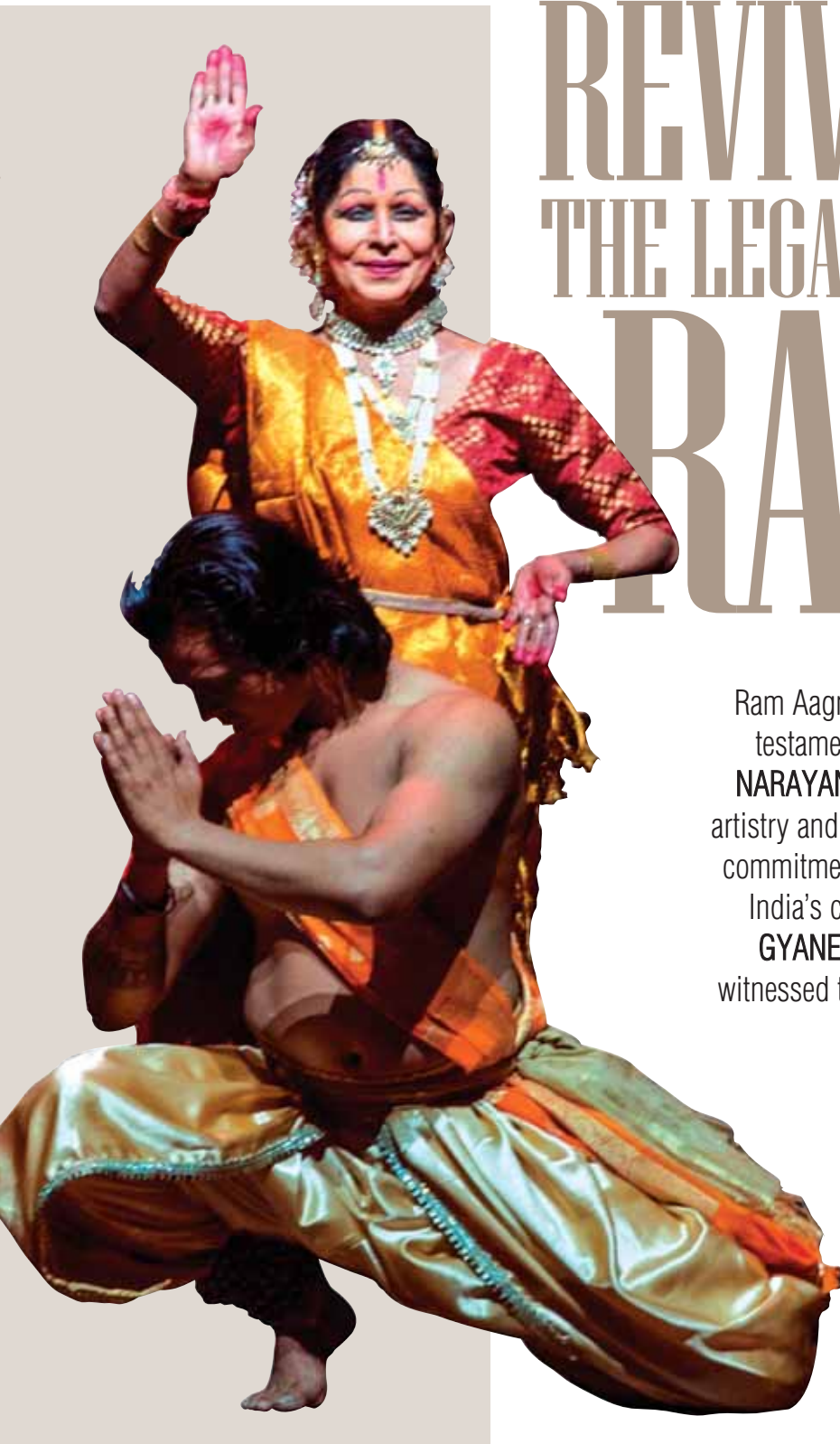
One of the distinctive elements of "Ram Aagman" was its homage to Goddess



Durga, emphasizing the celebration of divine femininity and her pivotal role in the universe. Narayan's reverence for tradition, coupled with her innovative approach, breathed new life into this timeless tale, making it relevant for contemporary audiences. The success of 'Ram Aagman' owes much to the collective efforts of the talented team behind the scenes. From the soul-stirring music composed by Pt. Jwala Prasad, Pt. Madho Prasad, and Dinesh Parihar to the meticulous lighting by Milind Srivastava, every aspect contributed to the immersive experience. Narayan's dedication to her art form is evident in every aspect of "Ram

Aagman." Through her evocative choreography and profound storytelling, she continues to inspire audiences and keep the rich heritage of Indian classical dance alive. As she eloquently puts it, "The absence or the presence of 'Ramatva' became evident through various emotions portrayed, offering food for thought to the audiences."

'Ram Aagman' stands as a testament to Shovana Narayan's unparalleled artistry and her unwavering commitment to preserving India's cultural heritage. With each graceful movement, she not only honours the legacy of Lord Ram but also enriches the cultural tapestry of our nation.



Tradition, Transformation, Empowerment

Poonam Dhillon returns in *Ek Kori Prem Katha* alongside newcomer Khanak Budhiraja, a film that tackles the sensitive subject of the Kori tradition. In this conversation with **SAKSHI PRIYA** the film's cast dwells on the gravity of sensitive social issues and the challenge of questioning outdated traditions.

Poonam Dhillon, can you elaborate on the journey your character undertakes in the film?

In *Ek Kori Prem Katha*, my character embodies the acceptance of the Kori tradition, deeply rooted in her family, village, and society, which she embraces without a question. The story progresses with a newlywed girl who enters a family, deeply in love with the son. Initially happy with the union, tensions arise in the family when the daughter-in-law refuses to participate in the Kori tradition, leading to shock and hostility where my character begins to gauge the unjust nature of the tradition and the need to refuse the perpetuation of such practices. This marks a transformation in my character, as she starts to support her daughter-in-law in opposing the Kori tradition. Together, they stand up against this outdated tradition in their powerful journey of change and empowerment. The film narrates my character's journey as she challenges outdated traditions for the greater good of evolving our cultural norms.

How did you prepare to play a character with a different perspective than your own?

Well, every time I play a character, it is different, and 99 per cent of the time she is not the real me. So, I always start with the physical attributes of the character, how she dresses, talks and walks, and slip into the role from the director's, and the writer's, point of view.

How did you feel working with Raj Babbar in this film? Working with Raj Babbar after so many years felt really good. Today, I feel our communication is much better. As an actor and a person, he is great, and at this stage in life it feels good to talk to him. I must admit, I didn't even have his phone but now we are far more comfortable and enjoy working together.

Were there any humorous moments during the shoot? Our shooting location was actually quite funny, or perhaps the set itself was, I'm not entirely sure, but I think we had our funny and sad moments. We were told that we would be shooting in a *haveli*, (a large bungalow) but when we reached the location we were surprised because in villages, they refer to old houses as *haveli*. In our minds the visual of a *haveli* is more like a grand palace, like in Rajasthan. In reality what we faced was actually humorous.

How did you handle the challenges of outdoor shoots?

Outdoor shoots come with their own set of challenges and difficulties. If we think everything should be according to our expectations and perfect that is impossible. Undue expectations

make you unhappy which disturbs the whole unit. So, one adapts and adjusts.

Khanak Budhiraja, what drew you to the role of Sabhayata, the challenges you faced in bringing her story to life, given the gravity of the film's subject?

I am an introvert and feminine by nature and I am not a sportsperson. So playing Sabhayata was a very challenging task. Like Poonam said, 99 per cent of the time you do not find a role which you relate to, thereby the challenges. Apart from learning how to ride a bus and drive a bike, my character had to be bold on-screen. In our society we still fight shy of issues like virginity. I am happy that at the outset of my career, I could play such a role.

Khanak, as a newcomer, what did you learn while filming?

I think filming everyday on the sets is in itself a learning process. We prepare ourselves for something which is poles apart from the scenes we actually shoot. As my first film, I was nervous, wondering about the surprise element in every scene. It took time, but I got used to it.

Khanak, your character fights against a regressive tradition. How did you prepare for the role of Sabhayata?

I researched, and met two victims in Rajasthan, although they were initially not forthcoming about their experiences. I did manage a conversation with one of them. It is unfortunate to see that girls continue to bear such atrocities in a society which speaks of gender inequality. Our film is about the change that is unfolding.

Is there an artist in this industry who influences you? I think Priyanka Chopra and Parineeti Chopra who was my senior in school. I am really inspired by both of them. Their journey is truly motivational. I will try my best to keep moving ahead.

Chinmay Purohit (Director), what do you hope the audience will take away from this film?

I hope the audience will understand the depth of the subject and plot, and they will take away the learning that we should not treat women like we do and what needs to be done.



Sculpting Novel Ideas

Inspired by Beethoven and her Indian roots, Niyamat Mehta, all of 23, has already carved a niche in art history, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Sculptor Niyamat Mehta is making waves in the art world with sculptures that blend traditional techniques and contemporary themes. Inspired by Beethoven and her Indian roots, her work resonates with deep historical and cultural significance. At the Venice Biennale, she became the youngest artist to showcase her talent, drawing global acclaim. Her first solo exhibit, *Meraki*, featured 27 sculptures inviting viewers to contemplate their own journeys.

At a tender age of 23, Niyamat has already etched her name in the annals of art history, hailed by *Firenze Yes Please* as the 'Emerging Artist to Invest In 2023'. Her artistic journey began at the prestigious Venice Biennale, where she became the youngest artist to exhibit at the renowned Palazzo Albrizzi, sharing space with luminaries like Anish Kapoor, Simone Leigh, and Célestin Faustin.

Niyamat's journey is a testament to the harmonious blend of diverse influences and traditions. Being the youngest artist at the Venice Biennale was not just a milestone but a transformative moment that shaped her artistic vision. Exhibiting at Palazzo Albrizzi was both encouraging and overwhelming, with the rich history and heritage of the venue enhancing her experience. The sculptor draws inspiration from Beethoven's 'String Quartets' that unveils a deep connection between music and visual art. Niyamat listens to Western classical while sculpting to stay in the creative flow and translate intangible energy into tangible texture in her sculptures. This is a systematic process that begins with clarifying what she wants to create and why. Her Indian heritage is a fundamental part of her identity, influencing her sculptures and artistic vision.



Niyamat believes that the diversity of preferences, dislikes, and opinions across various regions enriches the world, making her work inherently fascinating. When collaborating with collectors, she strives to find a balance between her artistic vision and their desires, creating something meaningful together. Mehta's training in "drawing in space" and the sight-size method is not just a technical foundation but the essence of her artistic expression. She views these techniques as languages that serve as alphabets of her craft.

Her meticulous nature extends to her creative process,



where she approaches sculptures as "landscapes," seeking diverse topography within different areas of the piece. Bridging artistic cultures, Niyamat incorporates traditional techniques in her contemporary work seamlessly. She believes that every creation must possess both technical excellence and artistic allure, a philosophy instilled in her during her training at the Florence Academy of Art. This blend of vibrant Western techniques and Indian heritage is evident in her sculptures like *Atman* and *Amor Fati*.

The young sculptor operates from her private studio, Atelier Della Firenze, located in New Delhi. Her studio is more than just a workspace; it is a sanctuary. With an atmosphere akin to heaven, it provides the perfect backdrop for her masterpieces. Here, not only does she sculpt, she also imparts her knowledge through masterclasses, nurturing a new generation of sculptors. Niyamat's sculptures are a testament to her creativity and attention to detail. Her sculptures, particularly the Dali series, are inspired by artists like Salvador Dali and

Auguste Rodin. Drawing from their styles, she strives to compose something unique of her own, blending surrealism and romanticism to create sculptures rich in expressions and emotions. Her recent solo exhibition, *Meraki*, showcased 27 sculptures that invited viewers to contemplate their own journeys. The title means putting your soul into your work which reflects the philosophy Niyamat abides by. She believes every sculpture of hers embodies a piece of her, an expression of herself. This guiding principle is evident in every sculpture she presents, imbuing them with a soulful essence.

Looking ahead, Niyamat aims to persist with commissioned work, hold solo exhibitions, and ensure that her sculptures find their way into the collections of art collectors who truly value her artistry. She wants the next generation of sculptors to approach this career without fear, embrace commissioned work, participate in exhibitions, and serve as their own most discerning critics. Niyamat is a shining example of talent and passion, notwithstanding an artist's age. Her exhibitions are not just displays of art but experiences that transcend words. Each sculpture tells a story, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in her world of creativity. A hidden artist with immense talent, the world deserves to know and appreciate her work. In a world where creativity knows no bounds, Niyamat Mehta stands out as a beacon of artistic excellence, her sculptures showcasing her talent, passion, and dedication.



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अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित यह विद्यालय नगर के विद्यालयों में खास स्थान रखता है। देश के विभिन्न प्रांतों की छात्राएं इस विद्यालय में शिक्षा लेती हैं। यह विद्यालय आवासीय के साथ दिवसीय है, जो शिक्षा के तमाम मापदंडों को पूर्ण करता है और कई दशकों से शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में अपना दायित्व निभा रहा है। हजारों छात्राएं इस विद्यालय से अध्ययन कर अपना भविष्य संवार चुकी हैं। यह विद्यालय तमाम सुख सुविधाओं से सुसज्जित है। अनुभवी शिक्षिकाएं बच्चों की मनोस्थिति को समझते हुए, उन्हें शिक्षा देती हैं। विद्यालय में बच्चों के शारीरिक विकास के लिए खेलकूद की समस्त सुविधाएं उपलब्ध हैं। तमाम सुविधाओं से सुसज्जित यह विद्यालय निरंतर प्रगति के पथ पर अग्रसर है और बोर्ड परीक्षा में शत प्रतिशत रिजल्ट देता आ रहा है। विद्यालय का संचालन कर रही प्रधानाचार्य अनुष्का साह कहती हैं कि यह विद्यालय भविष्य में भी अपना दायित्व बखूबी निभाता रहेगा। प्रबंधक विनय साह के निर्देशन में विद्यालय निरंतर प्रगति की ओर अग्रसर है।

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SCHOOLS IN NAINITAL : IN QUEST OF MULTIFACETED EXCELLENCE



Afzal Hussain Fauji Nainital

The peer, so to say. Truth to tell, there is hardly any state in India from where students do not come to receive education here. Not just students from India but those from foreign countries also study in these schools, given their fame as institutions which offer comprehensive education and nurturing environment. It hardly needs mentioning that many of the Nainital-based schools are more than 150 years old. Over the years, the ranking of the schools here has been included in the top-notch ten schools at the national level- a glorious tradition that continues undimmed till date.

It is thus no wonder that adorned with state of the art facilities, consummate faculty, comprehensive curriculum and a string of co-curricular activities, these schools beckon students from across the world. What is

more, these institutions continue to churn out students who later occupy prime posts in key services across the world. Dozens of renowned actors who stand tall in the world of cinema have received education in Nainital. Further, the alumni of these institutions keep holding top positions in all the three branches of the Indian Army. Plus, a number of politicians, academicians, literatures and business leaders proudly recall their days in Nainital and their loved alma mater.

These schools affiliated to multiple boards, including ICSE and CBSE, are shaping the future of the children. Most of the schools are run in English medium and the quality of living of the residential schools is truly of the global standard.

शेरवुड कालेज की देश में अलग पहचान

शेरवुड कालेज शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में इस विद्यालय का नाम देश के नामचिन विद्यालयों में शामिल है। यह विद्यालय बच्चों का भविष्य संवारता हुआ आ रहा है। विद्यालय पूर्ण रूप से आवासीय है जिसमें बच्चों के भोजन व रहने तथा अन्य समस्त सुविधाएँ विद्यालय में मौजूद हैं।

पठन-पाठन कार्य अनुभवी शिक्षकों द्वारा किया जाता है। बच्चों के बेहतर भविष्य बनाने के लिये वह सभी सुविधाएँ विद्यालय में मौजूद हैं जो वर्तमान में जरूरत के हिसाब से आवश्यक होती हैं। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से यह विद्यालय कक्षा 3 से लेकर कक्षा 12वाँ तक संचालित किया जाता है। वर्तमान में प्रधानाचार्य अमनदीप संधू विद्यालय का संचालन कर रहे हैं। अमन दीप शन्धु कुशलता पूर्वक विद्यालय का संचालन कर रहे हैं।

छात्राओं की विशेष पहचान बनाने में इतिहास रचा है ऑलसेंट्स कालेज ने

ऑलसेंट्स कालेज का गौरवमय इतिहास ब्रिटिश काल से रहा है। इस विद्यालय से हजारों बच्चे शिक्षा प्राप्त कर देश-विदेश में अपना भविष्य संवार चुके हैं। इस विद्यालय में वैश्विक स्तर पर शिक्षा प्रदान की जाती है। वर्तमान में प्रधानाचार्य किशन जर्मनाया कुशलतापूर्वक इस विद्यालय का संचालन कर रही हैं। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित इस विद्यालय की स्थापना 1869 में हुई थी तब से लेकर आज तक यह विद्यालय निरंतर प्रगति की ओर अग्रसर है। देश विदेश के बच्चे इस विद्यालय में अध्ययन करने आते हैं। इस विद्यालय से पढ़कर कई ऐसी हस्तियाँ हैं जो देश और दुनिया में अपना नाम रोशन कर रही हैं। इस विद्यालय में शिक्षा प्राप्त कर कई छात्राएं विश्व स्तर पर कीर्तिमान स्थापित कर चुकी हैं। श्रीमती किशन जर्मनाया कहती हैं कि शिक्षा के मापदंड को ध्यान में रखकर वह गुणवत्ता युक्त शिक्षा प्रदान कर रही हैं जिसे भविष्य में भी जारी रखेंगी।

एकोर्न स्कूल बना नन्हे मुन्ने बच्चों की पहली पसंद

कक्षा पांचवी तक अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित यह विद्यालय नगर में नन्हे मुन्ने बच्चों की पहली पसंद बन गया है। स्कूल का वातावरण बच्चों को खूब भाता है। पढ़ाई का स्तर उच्च स्तरीय है। अनुभवी शिक्षिकाएं बच्चों की मनोस्थिति को समझते हुए, उन्हें शिक्षा देती हैं। विद्यालय में बच्चों के शारीरिक विकास के लिए खेलकूद की समस्त सुविधाएं उपलब्ध हैं। तमाम सुविधाओं से सुसज्जित यह विद्यालय निरंतर प्रगति के पथ पर अग्रसर है। विद्यालय का संचालन कर रही प्रधानाचार्य आशा आर्या कहती हैं कि उनका जीवन बच्चों का भविष्य संवारने के लिए समर्पित है।

बोर्डिंग स्कूल की मिशाल बना पाईन क्रस्ट

पाईन क्रस्ट स्कूल ने शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में एक अनूठी शुरुआत की है। यह विद्यालय बच्चों के भविष्य को उज्ज्वल बनाने एवं सर्वांगीण विकास हेतु प्रयासरत है। यह विद्यालय आवासीय है जिसमें बच्चों के भोजन व रहने तथा अन्य समस्त सुविधाएँ विद्यालय में मौजूद हैं।

पठन-पाठन कार्य अनुभवी शिक्षकों द्वारा किया जा रहा है। बच्चों के बेहतर भविष्य बनाने के लिये वह सभी सुविधाएँ विद्यालय में मौजूद हैं जो वर्तमान में जरूरत के हिसाब से आवश्यक होती हैं। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से यह विद्यालय कक्षा नर्सरी से लेकर कक्षा 8वाँ तक संचालित किया रहा है। प्रबन्धक संतोश कुमार विद्यालय का संचालन कर रहे हैं।

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विशाप शॉ इंटर कॉलेज उत्तराखंड बोर्ड से सम्बद्ध अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित नगर के अग्रणी विद्यालयों में स्थान रखता है और अनुभवी शिक्षकों द्वारा बच्चों का भविष्य संवारने में जुटा हुआ है। विद्यालय प्रबंधन की विशेषता है कि बेहद कम शुल्क में बच्चों को उत्कृष्ट शिक्षा प्रदान कर, शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में अपना दायित्व बखूबी निभाता आ रहा है। सल्लोताल क्षेत्र में शील के समीप विद्यालय का वातावरण शिक्षा के माकूल है। विद्यालय प्रबंधक नीलम दानी कहती हैं कि उनका प्रयास विद्यार्थियों को उत्तम शिक्षा प्रदान कर बेहतर भविष्य बनाना है। भविष्य में भी उनका प्रयास जारी रहेगा। प्रधानाचार्य वीना मैसी कहती हैं कि वह वैश्विक शिक्षा को ध्यान में रखते हुए आधुनिक शिक्षा प्रदान करने में जुटी हुई हैं।

देश के अग्रणी स्कूलों में सुमार विडला विद्या मंदिर

देश में विडला विद्या मंदिर अग्रणी पब्लिक स्कूलों में अपना अलग नाम व मुकाम हासिल किया है। जिसके फलस्वरूप यह विद्यालय अपना एक अलग स्थान कायम किए हुए है। सीबीएसई से संबद्ध यह विद्यालय पूर्ण रूप से आवासीय है। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित नगर के सर्वाधिक ऊँचाई वाले नैसर्गिक वातावरण में स्थित है। यह विद्यालय प्रधानाचार्य अनिल शर्मा के कुशल नेतृत्व में संचालित किया जा रहा है। देश-विदेश के कई हिस्सों से सैकड़ों की संख्या में छात्र वर्तमान में अध्ययनरत हैं। श्री शर्मा कहते हैं कि वर्तमान परिवेश को ध्यान में रखकर बच्चों का भविष्य उज्ज्वल बनाने के साथ उन्हें एक अच्छा इंसान बनाने का प्रयास रहता है। जिसे ध्यान में रखकर विद्यालय में अनिवार्य विषयों के अलावा तमाम प्रतिस्पर्धाओं में भी छात्रों को निपुण बनाया जाता है। विद्यालय का इतिहास है कि बोर्ड परिक्षाफल शत-प्रतिशत रहा है। जिसे भविष्य में भी कायम रखा जायेगा।

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छात्राओं के लिये खोले लॉन्गव्यू पब्लिक स्कूल ने द्वार

लॉन्गव्यू पब्लिक स्कूल ने छात्राओं को भी इस सत्र से प्रवेश देना शुरू कर दिया है। निःसंदेह इस स्कूल ने अल्प समय में सफलता की सीढ़ियाँ तय कर शिक्षा की दिशा में नवीन आयाम स्थापित करने का सफल प्रयास किया है। जिसका प्रतिफल है कि विद्यालय में दी जा रही उत्कृष्ट शिक्षा व कुशल संचालन को लेकर देश की कई संस्थाओं द्वारा सम्मानित किया जा चुका है। जिसके परिणामस्वरूप यह विद्यालय नगर व राज्य में अपना प्रमुख स्थान हासिल करने में कामयाब हुआ है। अंग्रेजी माध्यम से संचालित लॉन्गव्यू पब्लिक स्कूल दसवीं कक्षा तक विद्यालय का संचालन कर रहा है। विद्यालय में आधुनिक शिक्षा के साथ भावी शिक्षा को ध्यान में रखते हुए पठन पाठन कार्य किया जाता है। प्रधानाचार्य बीसी त्रिपाठी कहते हैं कि वैश्विक शिक्षा को ध्यान में रखते हुए विद्यालय का संचालन कर रहे हैं। जिसका लाभ विद्यार्थियों को मिलता है। जिसके बल पर विद्यालय प्रगति की ओर निरंतर अग्रसर है।