



Ranjan Dimri

BJP holds mega gathering of saints to celebrate Samvat 2081

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Sunday here organised the celebration on the occasion of auspicious Hindu New Year, Samvat 2081 presided by Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva at the I.G.I. Stadium. Thousands of Delhiites attended the programme organised by the temple cell of the party. Renowned singer Hansraj Raghuvanshi enthralled the audience with his bhajans. Saints and mahants, along with Delhi BJP president Sachdeva, Organisation Secretary Pavan Rana, Temple Cell Coordinator Karnail Singh, and bhajan singer Anuradha Poddar, lit the ceremonial lamp and inaugurated the event. In the presence of Kathavachak Sant Sudhanshu and many revered Saints and Mahamandleshwars, revered Swami Gyananand Maharaj blessed the large gathering.

Presentations by renowned poetess Smt. Anamika Ambar and dance dramas based on Ramayana captivated the audience. Union Minister Piyush Goyal, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Delhi Lok Sabha Election In-charge Om Prakash Dhankhar, Sachdeva, and Temple Cell Coordinator Karnail Singh addressed the gathering. Special clips made by the party's social media department on the inauguration of Shri Ram Temple resonated the stadium with chants of "Jai Shri Ram." All seven parliamentary candidates of the party, Manoj Tiwari, Ramveer Singh Bidhuri, Bansuri Swaraj, Kamaljeet Sehrawat, Harsh Malhotra, Yogendra Chandoliya and Praveen Khandelwal, greeted the people from the stage. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Dhami congratulated the Delhi



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BJP for celebrating Hindu New Year on such a large scale and said that it is my privilege to be invited on such an occasion where so many eminent personalities are present. He described all the saints and sages present as the guardians of Sanatan culture and said that this Hindu New Year celebration is special in many ways as we have the presence of so many scholars here and by reciting the collective Hanuman Chalisa, we all have attained spiritual peace. "It is the BJP government that brought back Lord Rama to his palatial house in Ayodhya. Recent elections in Uttarakhand were peaceful and I am sure that the BJP will all five seats in the state by huge margins," he said. In his address at the event, the Uttarakhand chief minister said Kedarnath had witnessed a massive tragedy, but it was PM Narendra Modi who personal-

ly monitored the situation and now Kedarnath is again welcoming devotees. "Work on ropeways in Kedarnath and Hemkund Sahib is almost complete while an elevated road from Delhi to Dehradun is being built. Once completed, it will take only two and a half hours to reach Dehradun," Dhami said. Goyal said that I have just come from Mumbai and I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Delhi President Virendra Sachdeva and his entire team. Today is a very auspicious day because Mahavir Jayanti was celebrated with great pomp in Mumbai and looking at the atmosphere in Delhi today, we can say that the whole country has become Ramayana. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked to enhance India's culture, faith, and heritage along with India's development. It is a matter of

pride that the country has entered an era, which is making India prosperous and developed India. About the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi, Goyal said, "The party is very sure that all the seven Lok Sabha seats of Delhi will be won by the BJP only." Delhi BJP Lok Sabha Election In-charge Om Prakash Dhankhar said that today the presence of saints in the stadium and the presence of so many great mahants, we can now say that we have seen the direct manifestation of God. Sachdeva said the congregation of saints has happened, and now it can be said that just as there is Ram devotee's rule in the center, there should also be a Ram devotee's rule in Delhi. In the last 10 years, we have seen our nation change, and we have seen that our culture, our traditions, which were under attack, have been protected by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Maximum temperature settles at 36.8 degree Celsius in city

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Sunday recorded the maximum temperature of 36.8 degree Celsius, a notch below the maximum. People in the national capital might experience some relief as light splashes of rain for the next two days with strong winds are expected. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday said that the temperature in Delhi is expected to remain around 38 degrees Celsius in the coming 2-3 days. IMD data showed Palam recorded the max temperature of 37.1 degree Celsius; Lodhi Road 37.2 degree Celsius; Ridge 37.9 degree Celsius; Ay Nagar 37.4 degree Celsius and Rajgat 35 degree Celsius on Sunday. However, experts suggest that this is just the start of the season and one might be prepared for experiencing heatwaves in the coming days which will be comparatively more than the last season. Scientist and Head of Regional Weather Forecasting Centre Dr Kuldeep Srivastava said that Sunday's



weather, the maximum temperature being 33 degrees Celsius, is comparatively less than the previous day. He attributes 'strong winds' as a factor for the drop in degree. "The maximum temperature on Sunday which is 33 degrees Celsius is comparatively less than that of Saturday due to the presence of strong winds,

which probably would be present for the next few days too." Giving the general public a sigh of relief from the scorching heat in the foreseeable future, he predicted that there might be drizzles for the next few days. "Delhi NCR region might experience drizzles with cloudy weather for the next two days," he said, adding that this is just

the start of the season and temperature is expected to rise further. By April 24 he predicts that the temperature will go as high as 40 degrees Celsius. "We should understand that the season has just begun and the temperature will go higher. By April 24, the maximum temperature to be recorded will be around 40

degrees Celsius. Any permanent relief from the scorching sun is not expected until 10 to 15 July," he added. These conditions will persist on Delhi-NCR. These weather conditions would be the same for the whole of North India barring the hilly regions. However, despite the heat, he said, humidity this year will be less than the previous year of 2023 due to no western disturbance as such affecting the region. Delhi on Sunday recorded a minimum temperature of 24 degrees Celsius, a notch above the season's average according to the India Meteorological Department. The humidity level in the city was 52 per cent at 8.30 am. The weather office predicted strong surface winds during the daytime with mainly clear skies and said the maximum temperature was likely to settle around 38 degrees Celsius. The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi was recorded in the "moderate" category with a reading of 150 at 9 am, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

AAP protests outside Tihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP staged a protest outside Asia's biggest prison Tihar on Sunday to show their anger against the BJP Government's alleged failure to provide insulin to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, currently lodged in the jail in the alleged excise policy linked money laundering scam, shouting 'Give insulin to Arvind Kejriwal' and 'Don't play with the life of Arvind Kejriwal' slogans. Carrying insulin, senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Atishi, alongside MLA Sanjeev Jha and party Spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar, led the demonstration, accompanied by other prominent leaders and activists and demanded that insulin be given to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is suffering from diabetes. Scores of party workers carrying placards saying 'Kejriwal ko insulin do' sang 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram' outside the jail. Tensions escalated as supporters attempted to deliver insulin injections and jail officials refused to accept the med-



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ication, sparking outrage among protesters. Atishi condemned the officials' actions, accusing the BJP of endangering Kejriwal's life by withholding vital treatment. "This is not a protest. The people of Delhi are worried about the health of Chief Minister Kejriwal who is diabetic. They have sent insulin for him," she said. Atishi alleged there is a "conspiracy" to harm Kejriwal. Amid the Tihar jail stating that the CM had stopped taking insulin months before being lodged in the jail in a report to the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena,

Atishi said, "The Tihar jail administration should send its report to the Delhi government, but it is sending it to the I.G. It is clear from these incidents that at present the Tihar jail administration is working completely under the I.G, as per his orders." Further, the Minister said, "After so long, the Tihar administration wrote a letter to AIIMS on Saturday that they need a specialist doctor for diabetes. It means that for so long, the Tihar administration has been lying to the court that Shri Arvind Kejriwal is being medically monitored."

South Asian University to enhance capabilities to introduce AI in curriculum

SAMAR PANDEY/RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

With growing demand for Artificial Intelligence studies across the globe, the prestigious New Delhi based South Asian University (SAU) are working to enhance the capabilities to introduce AI, along with agriculture, health and manufacturing sector related course curriculum. Newly appointed SAU President Prof K K Aggarwal said these are some of the areas which are of interest to all the SAARC countries. "So my effort is to think and plan those courses which are not the routine courses like other universities are doing," Aggarwal said who will be heading the institution for the next five years. Previously, Prof Aggarwal was the Chairman of the National Board of Accreditation (NAB) in addition to being the Founder-Vice Chancellor of the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (IP University), New Delhi. In an interaction with "The Pioneer" on range of acade-

mic issues, Aggarwal shared insights into his vision for the institution and the future plans of South Asian University. With a distinguished career spanning decades in academia and leadership roles, Prof Aggarwal brings a wealth of experience and expertise to his current position. As the driving force behind one of the premier educational institutions in South Asia, his perspectives are highly anticipated by educators, policymakers, and students. Aggarwal said, as far as the operation of the university is concerned, the funding is shared by all the countries and it is a proportion which has been decided. For example, India pays about 57%, Pakistan 13%, Afghanistan 3.83%, Bangladesh 8.20% etc. As far as students are concerned, we are supposed to take 50% from India, 40% from SAARC countries and 10% from outside SAARC countries, ensuring a diverse student body. They also have faculty members from foreign countries to some

extent. "We have in the teachers as well as non-teachers but less but maybe gradually we have to make it a little more," he added. The university offers post-graduate and doctoral programs in various disciplines that include Economics, Computer Science, Biotechnology, Mathematics, Sociology, International Relations and Law. Prof Aggarwal said, in future he was considering to add some course which is of common interest to all the SAARC countries, like disaster management, Cyclone warning system because Bangladesh is sea surrounded, Maldives is completely sea, India has big coastal line, Sri Lanka is completely sea. That will be of great interest to these countries. Addressing the visa measures of foreign students, Prof Aggarwal said that our job is to give admissions to the students and after that they'll automatically get study visas. "The only thing which I have suggested here is that whenever getting a visa is becoming



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a little more difficult, we will admit more students, so that even if a few succeed, we are able to get some. The placement of this university has been pretty good. PhD students are working almost everywhere in the world and scholarships are very liberal in this university. All PhD students get substantial 25,000 rupees per month. In addition to tuition-fee waiver and hostel-fee waiver they will get free tuition, free hos-

tel. As of now the university has 600 community students in staff residences and they have plans to build 10 hostels of 500 capacities each. Prof KK Aggarwal has already instructed that the hostel should be the next priority. He also acknowledged Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to connect youth towards development. There has been no country in the world which has been developed without the involve-

ment of the youth. Whatever may be the kind of development because youth gives us few very distinct advantages, one is the numbers, we have large numbers and second is the energy of them which we call a demographic advantage that we have the largest percentage of youth in the world. PM Modi is perfectly right when he has seen this and is working on this, he added. University is also doing press Conferences to attract the students of SAARC countries, Prof Aggarwal did the conference for admissions and invited all the correspondents from SAARC countries and they already have 30% students from SAARC countries. The other reasons for which students are taking admissions in this university is the lowest fee structure and better infrastructure, faculty members and courses like PhD are zero fees. The only thing is the university's awareness is little low and they've been working on this and have written to the chairman of UGC of all the countries to

promote. In phase one the university has a huge sports ground, swimming pool, guest house and a huge library for students, the convention center is very state of the art. Second phase is yet to come with many more other facilities for the betterment of the students, said Prof Aggarwal. We need people to work with the students of other countries and 50% students from other countries are always there whenever you are studying here, you are working with students from eight countries. That's one very unique thing, he said. As a professional technocrat Prof KK Aggarwal said that without technology nothing can work and therefore we have to make sure all of our students are technology aware. Fortunately, the youth today is already quite well aware. Technology must be used in the betterment of our society and for our agriculture. Professor KK Aggarwal's passion for advancing education and fostering regional coop-

eration shone through. His unwavering commitment to excellence serves as an inspiration for the entire academic community. With his visionary leadership, South Asian University is poised to continue its journey towards becoming a beacon of knowledge. Apart from his contributions in the academic field, Prof. Aggarwal has made a very strong impact in the industrial world. The industry has widely consulted him, most notable being his contribution towards the Reliability Analysis for PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) of the Indian Space Mission. He has also delivered lectures and conducted programmes in several leading industrial organisations in India and overseas. He was declared as the Man of the Decade, Man of the Century and Man of the Millennium by American Bibliographical Institute, USA. He was also awarded the Delhi Ratan by the All India Conference of Intellectuals.

Tirthankaras teachings on non violence gained new relevance: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said here teachings of Indian Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance at a time when “many countries are getting into wars” and , asserted that India is making a place for itself as “Vishva Bandhu in a divided world.” Addressing the 2,550th Bhagwan Mahaveer Nirvan Mahotsav, he also said India is now projecting the principles of truth and non-violence on the global fora as a solution to the problems in the world, and its cultural image is playing a big role in it as well. The Prime Minister also released a commemorative stamp and a coin on the occasion and thanked the Jain community for their blessings. He said his Government put emphasis on promoting her-

itage as well as material development when it came to power in 2014 at a time when the country was engulfed in despair, a swipe at the previous UPA dispensation. He cited his Government's promotion of Indian heritage like yoga and Ayurveda, asserting that the country's new generation now believes that self-pride is its identity. Modi praised the dance drama ‘Vartaman Mein Vardhaman’ that was showcased on the occasion and said the dedication of the youth towards the values of Bhagwan Mahaveer is a sign of the nation moving forward in the right direction. Modi also bowed before the Jain saints present at the event and conveyed his best wishes to all on the auspicious occasion of Mahaveer Jayanti on Sunday. In his address, he said the “teachings of our Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance in the time when, globally, many



countries are getting into wars”. Tirthankaras are gurus or preachers of Jainism. Modi recalled the philosophies such as Anekantavada and Syadvada that teach people to look at all the aspects and embrace the views of others too. Today, humanity is expecting peace from India in these times of conflict, he said. The “new role” of this “New India”

is being credited to India's growing capabilities and foreign policy. “But, I want to tell you that the our cultural image has a big role in it,” he said. “Today we put forward the principles of truth and non-violence with full confidence on the global fora. We tell the world that the solution to global problems is found in the ancient Indian culture and tradition. This is why India is making a place for itself as ‘Vishva Bandhu’ in a divided world”, the prime minister added. He mentioned India's initiatives such as Mission LiFE for combating climate change and the vision of ‘One Earth One Family and One Future’ along with a roadmap of One World-One Sun-One Grid and International Solar Alliance. During his address, Modi also paid tributes to Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Maharaj who passed away in February and

recalled his recent meeting with him, saying “his blessings are still guiding us”. Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, he said a big festival of democracy is happening “and, the country believes from here a new journey into future will also begin”. The prime minister also suggested to the audience that they should use their franchise early in the day and added in a lighter vein that saints have links to lotus, a flower often used in holy events which also is the BJP's poll symbol. “We are celebrating Bhagwan Mahaveer's Nirvan Diwas even after 2500 years and I'm sure that the nation will continue to celebrate his values for thousands of years to come”, he said. He asked people to follow the teachings of Bhagwan Mahaveer as revival of those values is the demand of the time. The prime minister said

that Jainism is the path of ‘jin’ or the victorious. The event is a rare occasion and is happening at the beginning of ‘Amrit Kaal’, Modi said, adding the country is working to make centenary year of freedom a “golden centenary”. The Prime Minister underlined that the idea of ‘Amrit Kaal’ is not merely a resolution but India's spiritual inspiration. “For India, modernity is its body, spirituality is its soul. If spirituality is removed from modernity, anarchy is born,” he said. Modi said India is emerging from the period of corruption and despair as more than 25 crore Indians have come out of poverty. Union ministers of state for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal and Meenakshi Lekhi were also present on the occasion among other dignitaries and saints from the Jain community.

Steel cutting ceremony of Cadet Training Ship held at TN shipyard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Steel Cutting ceremony of the third Cadet Training Ship (Yard-18005) was held at L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, Tamil Nadu on Saturday. The ceremony was presided by Defence Secretary Girdhar Aramane in the presence of Arun Ramchandani, Executive Vice President, L&T Precision Engineering & System, navy said here. Giving details, officials said the contract for indigenous design and construction of three Cadet Training Ships was concluded between MoD and M/s L&T in March 2023. These Cadet Training Ships will be utilised for training officer cadets at sea after their basic training ashore. These ships



will also extend training facility to cadets from friendly foreign countries. These ships are likely to be delivered to the Indian Navy commencing Sep 2026. This is yet another significant milestone in Indian Navy's pursuit towards indigenous shipbuilding and is in consonance with Government of India's vision of ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ and ‘Make in India’ initiative.

Connecting Sikkim to railway network gets major boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), which will connect Sikkim to the railway network for the first time, has got a major boost with the completion of an 855-metre-long emergency exit tunnel. A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway (NH)-10, along the Teesta river, and according to officials, mining through its soft and loose soil was the most challenging part of the whole project as there was a high risk that it might cave in, snapping Sikkim's road connectivity with the rest of the country. “NH-10 is the only road network that connects Sikkim with other parts of the country. It was a huge challenge for us to mine a tunnel 18 metres below the highway, because the soil is very soft and loose, just like the river sand bed (fine to coarse-grained), with



alternate bands of pebble, cobble and boulders,” an official from Ircon International, which is constructing the project, said. “Mining for only that 20-metre distance, which is the width of NH-10 including the impact areas on both sides along the highway, has been the most challenging moment of the project so far. We completed it successfully, without causing a single millimetre of deformation to the highway,” he added. Railway officials said they used the secant-piling method, rarely used in tunnel mining. After getting it proof-checked by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ircon officials prepared a case study, explaining the ingenu-

ity of the mining work. The study says, “To provide fool-proof safety to NH-10, it was suggested to prepare a secant pile wall. Secant piles are designed by constructing reinforced concrete piles that interlock with each other and are reinforced with steel rebar. Typically, primary piles are cast in situ, leaving space in between them, and this is followed by secondary piles cut into the primary piles to form a continuous wall of piles.” The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), covering a total length of 44.96 km between Sivok in West Bengal and Rangpo in Sikkim, has 14 tunnels, 22 bridges (13 major, nine minor) and five railway stations — Sivok, Riyang, Teesta Bazar, Melli and Rangpo. The Indian Railway has set a new deadline of August 2025 to finish the SRRP with the rest of the country through the rail network for the first time.

Researchers identify abnormal accumulation of proteins in cells that cause Alzheimer's



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Researchers from Tokyo Metropolitan University have identified how proteins collect abnormally in neurons, a feature of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. They used fruit flies to show that depletion of mitochondria in axons can directly lead to protein accumulation. At the same time, significantly high amounts of a protein called eIF2 β were found. Restoring the levels to normal led to a recovery in protein recycling. Such findings promise new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases. Every cell in our bodies is a busy factory, where proteins are constantly being produced and disassembled. Any changes or lapses in either the production or recycling phases can lead to serious illnesses. Neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), for example, are known to be accompanied by an abnormal build-up of proteins in neurons. However, the trigger behind this accumulation remains unknown. A team led by Associate Professor Kanae Ando of Tokyo Metropolitan University have been trying to determine the causes of abnormal protein build-up by studying Drosophila fruit flies, a commonly studied model organism that has many key similarities with human physiology. They focused on the presence of mitochondria in axons, the long tendril-like appendages that stretch out of neurons and form the neces-

Take action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants: Health Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Alarmed at the kidney transplant racket which was busted in Jaipur, where a Bangladeshi national was found to have undergone a kidney removal procedure under suspicious financial arrangements, the Union health ministry has directed all states and Union Territories (UTs) to investigate violations and take necessary action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants. The recent case of the organ trafficking racket, involving Bangladeshi nationals, in Haryana and Rajasthan, seemed like a warning bell for the authorities, calling for urgency to address illegal organ trafficking and ensuring ethical transplant practices across the country. Dr Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), Union Health Ministry in a letter to the States and authorities emphasized the need for regular collection and sharing of transplant data, including cases involving foreign nationals, with the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) on a monthly basis. He highlighted a surge in organ transplants involving foreigners and stressed the importance of monitoring such cases. The letter, issued on April 10, instructed the appropriate state authorities to investigate transplant cases involving foreign nationals and take action in



case of any violations of the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994. This includes suspension of registration for hospitals engaged in illegal activities. “Investigate any violation of the

THOTA, 1994 and rules thereunder and take appropriate action including suspension of registration for performing Organ Transplant, of the hospitals involved in illegal activities,” the letter said. Furthermore, the ministry mandated the generation of a unique NOTTO-ID for both donors and recipients in all transplant cases, ensuring compliance with allocation protocols and timely identification. Regular inspections of registered transplant hospitals were also recommended to monitor activities and ensure quality transplantation. “It should be ensured that a unique NOTTO-ID for both donor and recipient is generated by the hospital from

NOTTO website (Notto.Mohfw.Gov.In), in all cases of organ transplant, whether from a living donor or deceased donor,” the letter said. Despite previous requests, complete transplant data, especially regarding foreign cases, has not been consistently shared with NOTTO. The health ministry urged states and UTs to submit an action-taken report on these instructions within 15 days. A senior official from the Ministry said “the involvement of foreign nationals in these cases adds another layer of complexity, necessitating enhanced monitoring and regulation to prevent exploitation and uphold ethical standards in organ transplantation.”

INDIA coalition Government will return country to higher growth trajectory, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has caused an “unprecedented decline” in worker wages adjusted for price rise and said that an INDIA coalition Government will return the country to a higher growth trajectory. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said multiple data sources, including the Modi government's own official statistics, are unanimous in showing the simple fact that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago. A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages, he said in a statement. “Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Between 2014 and 2023, real wages for labourers have stagnated, with clear declines in real wages in Modi-II,” he said. Ramesh also pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics said that under former prime minister Manmohan Singh, real



wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8 per cent each year. “Under PM Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by -1.3 per cent each year,” he said. “Periodic Labour Force Survey Series (Government Data): Average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers,” he said in a statement. Citing Center for Labour Research and Action Data, Ramesh said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022. Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's poorest, he pointed out. “Stagnant wages underpin the economy's poor performance under PM Modi: Real wages for India's people have stagnated since the PM came to office,” the Congress leader said in the statement. “Stagnant real wages have dragged down consumption growth as revealed by the NSSO's Consumption Expenditure Survey which showed a decline in rural consumption for the first time in almost 50 years (and which the Modi Sarkar tried to suppress),” he said. With slowing consumption growth and deepening fear, the private sector no longer has an incentive to invest in the economy, Ramesh argued. “Investment in India has dropped to historic low levels,

Jaro Education announces collaboration with CEC IIT Roorkee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Leading higher Edtech firm, Jaro Education, has announced a transformative collaboration with the Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee (CEC IITR), underscoring a shared commitment to inspiring excellence in a technology-driven world. “This collaboration signifies a significant moment in technical education, combining Jaro Education's expertise in business intelligence, marketing, and technology infrastructure with IIT Roorkee's unparalleled academic excellence,” the company said in a statement. Renowned for its excellence in higher technological education, engineering, and research, IIT Roorkee has long been regarded as a beacon of innovation and academic prowess. Consistently ranked among the world's top technological institutions, IIT Roorkee boasts a rich history of shaping the country's technical landscape. Through this strategic alliance, Jaro Education aims to leverage IIT Roorkee's esteemed faculty and cutting-edge curriculum to offer new-age and holistic technical courses. “CEC IIT Roorkee is proud and excited to announce a collaborative effort with Jaro Education,” said Coordinator of Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee. “This exciting new program leverages the strengths of both institutions to equip learners with the skills they need to flourish in today's technology-driven world. It aligns perfectly with CEC's commitment to providing learners with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of our professions,” the institute said in a statement. “We are excited to begin on this journey with top Institute like IIT Roorkee. This partnership presents an extraordinary opportunity to equip working professionals with cutting-edge skills tailored to the dynamic demands of today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. We empower individuals to not just survive, but thrive in the face of relentless disruption,” said CEO at Jaro Education, Ranjita Raman.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

New beginnings

The CJI hopes new criminal justice laws will expedite cases lingering on for long years

Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud has lauded the enactment of new criminal justice laws, hailing it as a watershed moment for the nation's judicial organ. The judiciary plays a pivotal role in shaping the legal landscape and the CJI's endorsement of the new laws underscores the profound impact these legislative reforms are poised to have on the Indian society. The recent amendments to criminal justice laws mark a paradigm shift in how the legal system approaches crime, punishment and rehabilitation. With a focus on expediting trials, enhancing victim protection and ensuring fair treatment to all parties involved, these laws signify a departure from archaic colonial practices towards a more equitable and efficient framework. One of the key aspects of the new laws is the emphasis on expeditious trials. Delayed justice has long been a concern in India, with cases hanging in courts for years. At times, individuals awaiting trial may spend more time in jail than they would have if found guilty and sentenced.



This situation can extend for years, if not decades. As of December 2022, 4,34,302 prisoners in Indian jails were under trial, which is 75.8 per cent of the total prison population.

The new criminal laws set out to correct this. By streamlining procedures and introducing stringent timelines for trials, the amendments aim to address this issue and ensure that justice is swift and accessible to all. Moreover, the heightened emphasis on victim protection programmes is a crucial development. Victims of crime often find themselves marginalised within the legal process, facing intimidation, harassment and prolonged trauma. The new laws incorporate provisions to safeguard their rights, providing them with legal support, counselling services and other forms of assistance to navigate the judicial system with dignity and resilience.

Furthermore, the reforms underscore the principle of equality before the law by ensuring fair treatment to all individuals, irrespective of their social status or background. By promoting transparency, accountability and due processes, the amendments seek to instill public confidence in the legal system. The CJI has rightly emphasised the transformative potential of these legislative changes, highlighting their role in fostering a more just and equitable society. However, while the enactment of these laws represents a significant milestone, their success ultimately hinges on their implementation. Effective enforcement, adequate resource allocation and ongoing monitoring are imperative to ensure that the intended objectives are achieved in practice. Nonetheless, a beginning has been made to correct the existing anomalies. Moreover, the journey towards a more equitable criminal justice system is an ongoing process that requires continuous evaluation and refinement. As societal dynamics evolve and new challenges emerge, it is essential to remain adaptive and responsive, constantly seeking ways to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of the legal framework.

PICTALK



Students celebrate their success after the declaration of Uttar Pradesh Board 10th and 12th class results, in Noida

Iran-Israel: On the brink of war or hype



NISHIKANT OJHA

Iran's attack and Israel's retaliation threaten to reshape the established rules of engagement and have the potential to destabilise the region

Iran launched a significant assault on Israel during the night of April 13-14, deploying 300 drones and missiles from its territory towards Israeli territories, including Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the southern Negev. This bold action marks an unprecedented event since Israel's founding in 1948.

The attack on Israel by Iran was a direct response to an airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, on April 1, which Iran accuses Israel of carrying out. This assault resulted in the deaths of sixteen individuals, including two Revolutionary Guards generals. Iran's drone and missile assault on Israel, lasting several hours, has reshaped the established rules of engagement between the two nations and heightened tensions in the West Asia, potentially paving the way for a broader conflict with destabilising effects on the region. The strike on Damascus was viewed as a significant Israeli action against Iranian interests in Syria, surpassing previous incidents. Iran had been issuing warnings of retaliatory actions against Israel following an earlier airstrike that destroyed Iran's consulate in Syria, which was seen as a breach of diplomatic conventions.

Iran justified its actions by citing Article 51 of the UN Charter, following the Israeli attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus. The drone attack was interpreted as a message from Tehran to Tel Aviv. Despite refraining from officially declaring it as an "Act of War," Tehran's response aimed to prevent being dragged into a larger conflict while signalling a readiness to retaliate more forcefully to maintain regional deterrence. The targeted strikes on Israel aimed to re-establish Iranian deterrence and highlight a shift in Tehran's approach to risk. By setting new red lines in the conflict with Israel, Iran made it clear that it would take action if Israel's actions against Iran and its allies persisted. While some may perceive the attack as a failure due to Israel's successful interception of Iranian drones and missiles, a more severe strike using precision-guided ballistic missiles could have inflicted



greater harm on Israel with less time to react.

In simpler terms, if Iran truly intended to harm Israel, they would have kept their plans secret and employed more powerful weapons to catch Israel off guard. By providing advance notice and employing less effective tactics, it seems like Iran was issuing a warning rather than seeking to inflict serious damage. It's akin to saying, "If you cross the line, there will be serious consequences in the future."

In a similar fashion, Israel also retaliated with quadcopter strikes with little damage to Iran. A warning for warning if you like.

Regarding India's stance, which maintains strategic relationships with both Iran and Israel, it finds itself walking a diplomatic tightrope due to its ties with both nations. India has a longstanding partnership with Iran, with Tehran being a major supplier of crude oil despite challenges from Western sanctions. The Chabahar Port serves as a crucial gateway for Indian goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia, given Pakistan's restrictions on land transit. India also has robust defence and security ties with Israel, which supported India during the Kargil War and is a leading supplier of military equipment. Trade between India and Israel has grown to approximately \$7.5 billion.



THE GAZA CONFLICT IS IMPACTING BOTH BIDEN'S AND TRUMP'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS. BIDEN FACES CHALLENGES WITH VOTERS SYMPATHETIC TO PALESTINIANS, WHO HAVE EXPRESSED DISCONTENT WITH HIS GAZA POLICY BY VOTING 'UNCOMMITTED' IN DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES

During Italy's presidency of the G7, leaders are expected to jointly urge Israel to show restraint following an unprecedented attack by Iran over the weekend, which involved numerous drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles aimed at the Jewish State.

The United States, Britain and several European Union nations have proposed expanding existing sanctions against Iran due to its involvement in Russia's conflict in Ukraine, with a focus on restricting drone and missile transfers to Iran.

The dividing line isn't merely between Iran and Israel or Ukraine and Russia; rather, it lies within the emerging power dynamics of these two central regions.

The Gaza conflict is impacting both Biden and Trump's political prospects. Biden faces challenges with voters sympathetic to Palestinians, who have expressed discontent with his Gaza policy by voting "uncommitted" in Democratic primaries, potentially leading to decreased voter turnout in the upcoming presidential election. Biden's stance on the conflict puts him in a difficult position, balancing support for Netanyahu to maintain pro-Israeli voter support while avoiding alienating progressive Democrats. If Trump returns to office, it could disrupt Western grand strategy, especially concerning support for

Netanyahu's Gaza approach and relations with European allies. The impact of the recent hostilities on the U.S. president's approach remains uncertain. Israel has shown mixed reactions, reopening a Gaza crossing and participating in ceasefire negotiations while also indicating intentions to invade areas like Rafah. Biden's success in brokering a peace deal would align with his grand strategy, but achieving a temporary ceasefire is just the initial step in a complex process. Prolonged conflict in the West Asia could significantly complicate broader Western geopolitical goals. Iran is one of the most heavily armed States in the area, boasting a sizable standing army of around 5,80,000 personnel and possessing an estimated stockpile of 3,000 ballistic missiles, as indicated by Western assessments. Despite this military capability, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has emphasized in the past six months during the Gaza conflict that Iran seeks to avoid being drawn into a broader confrontation. So, Iran is not willing to go to war, but it also remains prepared for any kind of conflict if provoked.

(The writer is an eminent expert on counter-terrorism in West Asia and advisor to cyber and aerospace Security; Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Political manoeuvrings



Proposes the news article, "Rahul Gandhi holds on to Wayanad despite speculation", published on April 20, this is my response. The dynamics of political alliances and rivalries in Kerala reveal a complex web of strategies and ambitions. Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from Wayanad underscores the importance of securing a stronghold in the region, amidst shifting

allegiances and ideological battles. The CPI(M)'s resentment towards the Congress, softened by tactical considerations, reflects the pragmatic nature of politics. While public posturing may suggest discord, behind the scenes, strategic alliances are being nurtured to counter a common adversary—the BJP.

A K Antony's nuanced silence on CPI(M) candidates speaks volumes about the intricate history of alliances and betrayals in Kerala politics. His past affiliations highlight the fluidity of loyalties, where former foes become temporary allies in pursuit of power. As Kerala gears up for future elections, the blurred lines between secularism and opportunism will continue to shape the political landscape, reminding us that in politics, alliances are often forged in the crucible of expediency.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

Digitalisation, accelerated by the pandemic, offers opportunities for wider access and skill development. The changing course preferences reflect a demand for interdisciplinary learning and industry-relevant skills.

EdTech's rise democratises education but requires addressing digital disparities. Ensuring quality amidst diversification necessitates robust regulatory frameworks. The push for internationalisation promises to enrich educational practices and boost the economy. As India navigates these changes, smart scaling is imperative, ensuring not just expansion but also excellence and inclusivity. This journey towards a globally competitive education system holds the promise of empowering every student for a brighter tomorrow.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

BURDENS AND LIBERATION

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Mind, the key to Hidden Fortune", published on April 20, this is my response. The story of the woman and her son, burdened by past debts and future anxieties, resonates deeply with the human struggle for liber-

ation. Theirs is a narrative of hidden treasures, not just of material wealth but of profound lessons on the nature of existence. In their quest to protect their riches from creditors, they unwittingly ensnared themselves in a cycle of fear and secrecy, failing to embrace the present moment. The tragedy of their lives underscores a universal truth: true freedom lies in being untethered from the shackles of past regrets and future uncertainties.

Through the lens of Buddhist wisdom, the narrative acquires a timeless relevance. The Zen Master's insight into the nature of the mind echoes the imperative of being anchored in the present. Similarly, the young monk's realisation that he is already where he seeks to be symbolises the attainment of true happiness through mindfulness. In essence, the story serves as a poignant reminder that true wealth lies not in external possessions but in the liberation of the mind from the constraints of time.

Rohan Desai | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

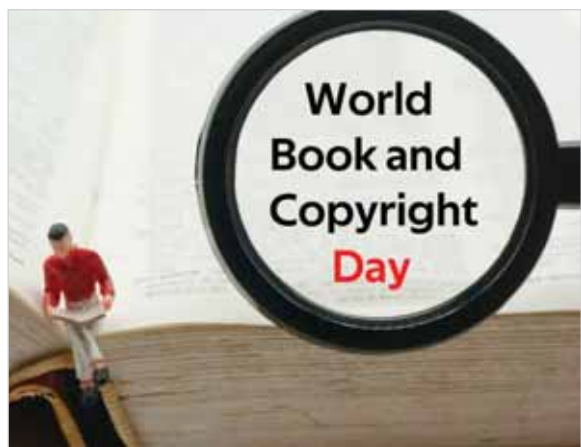
Celebrating World Book and Copyright Day

From serving as conduits of wisdom and imagination to safeguarding cultural heritage, books play a vital role in shaping our collective consciousness



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

Books have long served as companions to humanity, bridging the present with the past and future through a rich tapestry of historical narratives and fiction. Each book, a product of its time, reflects the sociocultural nuances prevalent in the society of its era. They serve as invaluable archives, documenting the thoughts, experiences and ideas of past generations, offering us a well-spring of wisdom to draw from and learn. By delving into literature spanning different epochs, we glean insights into the beliefs, values and perspectives of our predecessors, acting as conduits for the transmission of ideas across generations and cultures. Moreover, books kindle the flames of imagination, inspiring us to envision and strive for the seemingly impossible. As repositories of knowledge, wisdom and creativity, books provide solace in solitude and guidance in uncertainty. A singularly remarkable tome possesses the power to transport us to distant realms, broadening our horizons and fueling our imaginations. They serve as windows to diverse societies and cultures,



offering immersive experiences that transcend geographical boundaries. Whether through captivating novels or enlightening travelogues, books possess the remarkable ability to transport us to unexplored territories, fostering empathy and understanding. In the realm of creativity and innovation, books serve as catalysts, igniting the flames of imagination and propelling us towards new frontiers. They enable us to visualise and conceptualise in ways that transcend the limitations of our physical reality. Moreover, in the preservation of cultural heritage, books play an indispensable role, in safeguarding languages, traditions and values for posterity. By recording historical events, traditions and societal norms, they provide invaluable insights into the tapestry of human civilization, ensuring that our cultural legacy endures through the ages. Yet, as we navigate the digital age, the landscape of literature undergoes profound transformations. The advent of e-books and interactive digital formats ushers in new possibilities, offering enhanced reading experiences enriched with augmented reality, virtu-

al reality and artificial intelligence. However, amidst this digital revolution, the sanctity of copyright laws faces unprecedented challenges. Rampant piracy and unauthorised distribution of digital copies undermine the rights of authors and publishers, necessitating renewed efforts to uphold intellectual property rights.

Hence, on April 23rd, World Book and Copyright Day, under the auspices of UNESCO, serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring power of books and the imperative to uphold copyright laws. This year's theme, "Read Your Way," encourages individuals to celebrate the joy of reading while fostering awareness about the importance of respecting intellectual property rights. As we commemorate this day, let us reaffirm our commitment to preserving the legacy of literature and honouring the contributions of literary luminaries past and present.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)

FIRST COLUMN

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF FOMO

In the age of social media, the Fear Of Missing Out has become rampant



SHAINY SHARMA

Ever found individuals befuddling when they see photos or updates from parties, gatherings, or events they were not invited to or witness their colleagues or peers receiving accolades, promotions or career advancements... Well such situations may evoke FOMO in individuals who feel stagnant or unproductive in comparison. "FOMO," or the Fear of Missing Out, arises from a perceived discrepancy between one's own experiences and the experiences of others. Whether online or offline, the fear of missing out can exert a powerful influence on individuals' emotions, behaviours and decision-making processes, thereby highlighting the need for self-awareness and coping mechanisms to navigate the pressures of modern life. Now a days it is a prevalent phenomenon among Generation Z (Gen Z) and other demographics. It can be a double-edged sword, driving ambition while fostering anxiety. There is no denying the fact that Gen Z have grown up in a digital age which is characterized by constant connectivity and instant access to information promoting products, experiences and lifestyles that appear glamorous and desirable. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X and Facebook have become integral part of their daily lives, shaping their perceptions, behaviours and social interactions in profound ways. Various studies and research too have consistently shown a strong association between social media usage and FOMO among this generation, the consequences of which extends beyond mere discomfort and impact mental health, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Individuals plagued by FOMO due to the constant exposure to curated content and the pressure to maintain a certain online image may experience increased stress, anxiety, depression and feeling of loneliness as they constantly compare their lives to others' highlight reels.



To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO on Gen Z, it becomes utmost important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences. Now this can include multiple practices such as practicing mindfulness or journaling that promote gratitude and positive thinking. Setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can help alleviate feelings of FOMO by emphasizing authenticity, empathy and acceptance. Not only this but practicing the art of Digital Detox will allow individuals to reconnect with themselves and prioritize meaningful offline interactions and relationships. This will result in emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity when it comes to social connections and encourage face-to-face communication, genuine conversations and shared experiences with their friends and loved ones. Also, encouraging them to engage in activities such as sports, art, music or dance will not only provide opportunities for personal growth and development but also reduces dependence on social media for validation and self-worth. Practicing such activities will encourage the Generation Z to seek support from trusted friends, family members or mental health professionals if they're struggling with feelings of FOMO or its effects on their well-being. Remember, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) raises stress hormones, inflammation and dysregulates an individual's nervous system. One needs to learn to self-love and be protective of their time and energy. In the hyper connected world, it does take courage to be with own thoughts so, try to be one...

(The write is an educator; views are personal)

With power freebies, debt comes calling



UTTAM GUPTA

The core dilemma persists: How to prevent debt while ensuring universal electricity access? This issue entails policy intricacies and power sector reforms



In an interview, Union Power Minister RK Singh revealed he has been telling States that electricity is not free. "If any State wants to give free power to any category of people, they can go ahead and do so, but you have to pay for it".

Singh's exhortation to the States assumes significance in the backdrop of a spate of announcements by the latter to give free electricity to certain consumers which affect the viability of power distribution companies or discoms (they buy power from generating companies or genscos and supply to the consumers). He argues "like any other commodity, generation and distribution of electricity involves cost and if a State is to provide it for free to a section of consumers, it also needs to have finances to pay the gensco. If the gensco isn't paid, electricity will not be produced in the first place".

But, there can't be any compromise on the generation of electricity as any shortfall could lead to a stoppage of economic activity. To meet the surge in demand (due to the impending summer), the Union Government has invoked the provisions of the Electricity Act (2003) under Section 11 asking gas-based genscos and thermal plants based on imported coal to increase generation even if it entails extra cost. That is the reaction to meeting incremental demand. How could it tolerate massive cuts in generation inevitable when genscos are not paid? So, States must ensure that they are paid.

When pressurized, the concerned States borrow money to pay the genscos resulting in a debt trap. For instance, in the first two years of the AAP Government, Punjab borrowed as much as Rs 47,000 crore adding to the already high debt of the State. How can the States avoid debt trap? The Electricity Act (2003) and the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Power require the discoms to fix the charge (or tariff) on electricity supplied to consumers in a manner such that the average revenue realization (ARR) from its sale is equal to the average cost of supply (it includes the cost of purchase, transmission and distribution), or ACS. The discoms are

free to decide the modalities of how this is to be ensured subject to approval by the concerned State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs).

Ideally, the discoms should charge from 'all' consumers a tariff equal to the total cost of supply say Rs 'X' crore divided by the number of units. But, they don't follow this principle. They charge less from certain consumers especially households (HHs) and farmers.



CURRENTLY, ALMOST 95 PER CENT OF POWER CONSUMERS IN PUNJAB AVAIL OF SUBSIDIES, A MAJOR PORTION OF WHICH ISN'T EVEN REIMBURSED TO DISCOMS

For instance, in Delhi, the tariff applicable to HHs consuming 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is about half of the ACS. Including a plethora of levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit. For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit.

These under-recoveries are cross-subsidized by charging more from industries and business establishments for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 16 per unit. The low tariff charged from the target consumers (read: HHs consuming up to 400 units a month) is nothing but a freebie given by political parties. But, it goes unnoticed as the State exchequer doesn't have to pay for these under-recoveries. The industries that are made to foot the bill can't even murmur as discom being the sole supplier of electricity, they have no other option.

But, political parties don't want the target HHs to even pay this small tariff. In Delhi, the AAP Government tells discoms not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units. Likewise, in Punjab, consumption of up to 300 units a month by an HH is free. This extra under-recovery of Rs 4.3 per unit in Delhi (applicable tariff Rs 3 per unit plus 44.6 per cent levies) has to be reimbursed by the State to the dis-

com. But, most States don't reimburse or do it partially and after considerable delay. This leads to losses of discoms.

The availability of free power also drives people to manipulate their reported consumption. For instance, in Punjab, an HH consuming 900 units a month, gets three meters installed to keep consumption of each under 300 units thereby ensuring zero bills. Reportedly, more than 100,000 meters have been bifurcated or trifurcated enabling even high-end consumers to avail of the free bonanza. As for farmers who are eligible for free power in the State, they report even consumption for running multiple ACs in their homes under farming head thereby avoiding any payment.

As a consequence, currently, almost over 95 per cent of power consumers in Punjab avail of subsidies, a major portion of which isn't even reimbursed to discoms. Discoms' losses also increase due to AT&C (aggregate technical and commercial) losses - a sophisticated nomenclature for power theft. According to Singh, AT&C's losses used to be high at 27 per cent. In Punjab, reportedly, an overwhelming share of electricity that leaves the generating stations/power dispatch centres remains unaccounted for.

The discoms have funded these losses by borrowings from banks and other financial institutions (FIs) apart from keeping bills pending. At the end of FY 2021-22, their total debt was Rs 620,000 crore. In June 2022, they owed about Rs 1,40,000 crore to Gencos and transmission companies (transcos).

The Center has taken several measures to force discoms to clear their dues. The late payment surcharge (LPS) Rules, implemented in 2022 made it mandatory for discoms to clear their legacy dues as existing on June 3, 2022, in a time-bound manner in 12 EMIs with the

benefit of non-applicability of the LPS after its implementation date. The rules are also provided for time-bound clearance of current dues failing, which will attract a power supply cut. This has resulted in legacy dues decreasing from Rs 1,40,000 crore in June 2022 to around Rs 70,000 crore in July 2023 and further down to Rs 40,000 crore currently.

Under the 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) launched in July 2021, the Centre has undertaken a massive investment of Rs 300,000 crore to improve the reliability and quality of the power supply and enhance the efficiency of discoms. It has compulsory pre-paid and smart metering components to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 250 million households. As a result, AT&C losses decreased from 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 to 13.5 per cent during 2022-23.

However, according to the Minister, today power pilferage is 15 per cent. On this much electricity, discoms get 'nil' revenue. On a much larger percentage of power used by target HHs and farmers, the States promise to pay on their behalf. But, they don't pay in full and whatever payment comes, it is delayed. Even for making payments, the States borrow money. And, the vicious cycle continues.

It won't end unless discoms are unshackled from State controls and given the freedom to decide their pricing and distribution policies. If, States want certain HHs and farmers to get power free, let them give the money directly to them. This reform will also pave the way for the deregulation of electricity distribution, more options for consumers to source their needs and a reduction in tariffs.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Govt schemes are transforming lives in rural Rajasthan

Loyara village serves as a microcosm of resilience and progress, fuelled by education and community empowerment

We typically receive our ration between the 1st and 3rd of each month. If it's ever delayed, my grandchildren inquire why we haven't received it from the ration dealer. The younger generation in my household is quite aware. They've made sure that all the necessary ration-related documents are in order, ensuring a seamless supply. Also, my pension now arrives punctually. Thanks to various Government schemes, these youngsters are reaping benefits. They educate themselves about these schemes and then proactively apply for them at the Panchayat office," shares 76-year-old Amba Bai, residing in Loyara village within



MOHAN LAL GAMETI

Udaipur district, Rajasthan. Situated just 8 km from Udaipur, this village falls within the Badgaon tehsil. With a population of approximately 2500, the majority belong to the Scheduled Tribe community. Alongside the OBC Dangi community, there are various other castes. The village reflects the influence of its proximity to Udaipur city,

evident in the transition of most houses to concrete structures. However, economically, the village still grapples with challenges. While individuals from OBC and general castes are involved in agriculture, trade, and animal husbandry, the majority of male members from the Scheduled Tribes work as labourers in marble factories surrounding Udaipur city. Some also engage in daily wage labour. Meanwhile, women in these households contribute to the family's income by working as domestic helpers in affluent homes within the city. Economically, Loyara village may face challenges, but socially and educationally, it has seen significant

development. Consequently, awareness about Government schemes has risen among the villagers, leading to increased benefits. The younger generation in the village has embraced education, with even Scheduled Tribe boys and girls pursuing studies up to the 12th grade. This educational advancement has also fostered greater awareness within the community. For instance, the Public Distribution System (PDS), part of the Food Security scheme, has been embraced in the village. Shiv Lal, aged 45, attests to this positive change. Despite working in a marble factory in Bengaluru after completing his 12th grade, he remains well-informed about



Government schemes benefiting his family and the village. He recalls, "In the past, the ration dealer would often deny us ration with flimsy excuses. But now, thanks to education and awareness, such actions are no longer tolerated. Whenever we face ration shortages, we raise our concerns and seek information from the Panchayat office. Even in my absence,

my children handle these matters diligently, ensuring the timely arrival of our ration."

Taru Bai, a respected elder at 70, sheds light on the changing face of education and Government support in Loyara village. "Back in my day, girls rarely pursued education," she recalls. "But now, over half of the girls in our community are completing high school, and they're bringing back valuable information about Government programs. Their schooling has even helped smooth out the process for my pension, as they handle all the paperwork."

Looking back, Taru Bai remembers, "We used to hear about Government schemes, but getting clear

information was a challenge, even after asking around at the Panchayat. But things are different now; the younger generation knows exactly how to navigate these programs and fill out the necessary forms."

However, amidst these educational strides, economic challenges persist. "The majority of the Scheduled Tribe families in the village are economically very weak. Most families do not have enough money to start a business, nor do they have enough land to do farming or vegetable production. Although the new generation has started studying, only a few people from this community are in Government jobs. But I think as the trend of educa-

tion and awareness has increased among children, they will also soon start getting recruited in Government jobs."

In the same village, there is also the family of Mangi Lal and Tulsiram, who are deprived of the benefits of the PDS. Last year, the ration status of Mangi Lal's family which consists of seven members, was changed from BPL to APL. As a result, they stopped receiving ration. Similarly, Tulsiram mentions that due to missing documents, their family is unable to access ration benefits. For this, they've been in constant communication with the e-Mitra.

(The author is a social worker from Rajasthan; views are personal)



BRAIN WELLNESS



The Centre has set up a 'National Task Force on Brain Health', to address the rising concerns surrounding neurological disorders in India. ARCHANA JYOTI speaks to its Chairman and Director of IHBAS, DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA, unveiling the task force's healthcare impact

In low- and middle-income countries, 43 per cent of children under the age of five face challenges in reaching their developmental potential due to factors like extreme poverty and growth stunting. This not only results in financial losses but also predicts a 26 per cent reduction in annual earnings during adulthood. Against such disturbing background, the Government's top think tank Niti Aayog's has come forward to set up the high-level panel to formulate policies for primary, secondary, and tertiary level hospitals in the country. Spearheaded by Dr RK Dhamija who is also the Director of the Delhi-based Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Services (IHBAS), the task force has nine members.



DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA
Chairman, National Task Force on Brain Health and Director IHBAS, Delhi

delivery in India, from Aayushman Arogya Mandirs to District Hospitals and tertiary institutions.

How do you envision it making an impact?

As I said, the increasing prevalence of neurological disorders and the disparities in healthcare access across different segments of society were significant motivating factors in the establishment of this central task force. The government recognized the urgent need for a coordinated effort to tackle these issues comprehensively. Through the task force, we aim to recommend actionable steps to strengthen the healthcare system, improve early diagnosis and treatment, and promote neurological health through preventive measures.

Can you elaborate on some of the specific challenges or gaps in brain healthcare that the task force aims to address?

Certainly. One major challenge is the unequal distribution of healthcare resources, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This leads to disparities in access to specialized care and diagnostic facilities for neurological conditions. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness about neurological disorders among the general population, which often results in delayed diagnosis and treatment. The task force will work towards bridging these gaps by recommending strategies to improve healthcare infrastructure, raise awareness, and enhance the capacity of healthcare providers. Here I would like to mention that

Tips to Boost Your Brain

DR JAMES E. GALVIN, a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine in his study points out

- Yoga can help you relax. It has been found that people who did two weeks of Yoga Nidra—a specific type of yoga that incorporates meditation and mindfulness—had improvements in sleep quality, attention, and memory.
- Good nutrition is key for brain health. The Alzheimer's association recommends a diet that includes more veggies and lean meats with fewer fatty and processed foods. Galvin cites a study published in Frontiers in Nutrition which found foods high in fat can negatively impact the brain.
- Regular exercise can also help your brain.
- Staying socially engaged can protect the brain. Chronic isolation can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.
- Sleep is also vital for overall brain health. According to Johns Hopkins, a healthy amount of sleep promotes "brain plasticity" or the brain's ability to adapt to input.



IHBAS we have set up Neuro-palliative Care OPD services to identify and cater to the evolving needs of patients and caregivers with aim to improve their quality of life, enhance well-being and overall psychosocial functioning through holistic multidisciplinary approach. What are some of the key priorities or focus areas for the task force particularly in the coming months? Your brain allows you to think, feel, communicate, move, coordinate, remember, make decisions, and live a productive life. That's why keeping it healthy is so important and that's what will be our panel's priority. We will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of brain healthcare in India, including an analysis of existing policies, infrastructure, and resources. Based on this assessment, we will develop a set of action, give recommendations to address the identified gaps and challenges. The panel has to submit report by July 15, 2024.

Brain health is the state of brain functioning across cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, behavioural and motor domains, allowing a person to realize their full potential over the life course, irrespective of the presence or absence of disorders.

How do you see the task force contributing to the broader goal of improving brain healthcare in India? Our ultimate aim is to create a more inclusive and effective healthcare system that meets the needs of all individuals affected by neurological disorders. Through

collaboration with government agencies, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, we aim to build a more resilient and responsive healthcare system that prioritizes brain health for all. Neurological disorders rank as the leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) globally, resulting in approximately 9 million deaths annually. The prevalence of neurological disorders underscores their significant impact, with 1 in 3 individuals expected to experience such conditions during their lifetime. These disorders rank as the foremost cause of disability and the second leading cause of death globally. The WHO's position paper launched on August 9, 2022, provides a detailed framework for understanding brain health and the importance of optimizing brain health for all.

What is the status of brain health in India vis a vis world?

In India, as in many parts of the world, issues related to brain health present significant challenges that require urgent attention. While specific data on the status of brain health in India compared to the rest of the world may vary, neurological disorders are increasingly recognized as a major public health concern in India. Conditions such as stroke, epilepsy, headache disorders, Parkinson's disease, and dementia impose a substantial burden on individuals, families, and healthcare systems. Moreover, disparities in healthcare access and infrastructure are pervasive in India, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Limited availability of specialized professionals, diagnostic facilities, and trained healthcare paramedics pose significant challenges for individuals seeking diagnosis and treatment.

Due to lack of awareness and understanding of neurological disorders among the general population in India, patients are diagnosed late. Also, inadequate treatment, and social stigma further add the burden on affected individuals and their families. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, limited education, and inadequate access to healthcare services contribute to the burden of neurological disorders in India.

TAILORED SUNSCREEN Matched to Your Skin Type

Majority of dermatologists focus on the important role sunscreen plays in protecting our skin from the harmful UV radiation. But sunscreen selection can be daunting with the plethora of options available in the market. DR ATULA GUPTA, senior dermatologist, says and suggests the ideal sunscreen for each skin type to ensure effective protection

THE TWO SUNSCREENS: PHYSICAL VS. CHEMICAL

Physical Sunscreens (Mineral Sunscreens): Physical sunscreens contain minerals like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. They act as a physical barrier that reflects and scatters UVA and UVB rays. Physical sunscreens offer broad-spectrum protection and are generally well-tolerated even on sensitive skin. But they can leave a white cast on the skin, especially with higher concentrations of minerals. **Chemical Sunscreens:** These sunscreens use organic compounds like oxybenzone, avobenzone, and octinoxate. They absorb UV radiation, converting it into heat that is then released from the skin. Chemical sunscreens are lightweight and cosmetically elegant, offering a clear, non-greasy feel. But some people may experience irritation due to certain chemical ingredients.



DR ATULA GUPTA

SUNSCREEN SELECTION FOR SKIN TYPE

Normal Skin: Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Look for lightweight, non-greasy formulas and sunscreens with added antioxidants for extra skin nourishment.

Dry Skin: Choose fragrance-free, moisturizing sunscreens. Lotions or creams containing hyaluronic acid or ceramides can provide added hydration. Seek sunscreens labelled as "hydrating" or "moisturizing" for more benefit.

Oily Skin: Look for oil-free, non-comedogenic (won't clog pores) sunscreens. Lotions with a matte finish or lightweight gels are ideal for oily skin. Gel-based or matte-finish sunscreens control the extrashine. Ingredients like niacinamide or zinc oxide can also help regulate oil production.

Sensitive Skin: The gentlest option for sensitive skin are mineral based sunscreens. Opt for fragrance-free products with calming ingredients like aloe vera or colloidal oatmeal. Opt for hypoallergenic sunscreens to minimize irritation. Perform a patch test before full application to ensure safety.

Combination Skin: Sunscreens labelled for combination skin often have a balanced, lightweight formula. Gel-creams or lotions can provide protection without excess

oiliness. Consider lightweight, gel-based sunscreens that provide hydration without greasiness. Choose products that balance oil production in the T-zone while moisturizing drier areas. Sunscreens labelled as "for all skin types" or "balancing" are often suitable.

Aging/Mature Skin: Opt for sunscreens with added anti-aging ingredients like peptides or retinoids. Broad-spectrum sunscreens with SPF 30 or higher help prevent premature aging. Look for formulations targeting fine lines, wrinkles, and age spots for holistic care.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting a sunscreen, factors beyond skin type should be considered:

Sun Protection Factor (SPF): This rating indicates protection against UVB rays, the primary cause of sunburn. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends an SPF of 30 for daily use, with higher SPFs needed for extended sun exposure or people with fairer skin.

Broad-Spectrum Protection: Ensure the sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays. UVA rays penetrate deeper into the skin and contribute to premature aging and skin cancer.

Water Resistance: For activities involving water or sweat, choose a water-resistant sunscreen. Reapplication is crucial after swimming or excessive sweating. Remember, regardless of your skin type, reapply sunscreen every two hours, especially when outdoors or after swimming or sweating.

Additionally, complement your sunscreen with other sun protection measures such as wearing protective clothing, seeking shade, and avoiding peak sun hours.

Consult with your dermatologist to address any specific skin concerns. With the right sunscreen regimen, you can safeguard your skin against sun damage and maintain a healthy, radiant complexion for years to come.



10,000 STEPS FOR BETTER HEALTH

Walking 10,000 steps a day has emerged as a widely acknowledged benchmark for daily physical activity, endorsed by health professionals worldwide. Neuro and Spine Surgeon, DR VIKAS KUMAR, at Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Ranchi, Jharkhand, underscores the significance of this goal. Let's delve into the key benefits, as guided by Dr Kumar

- The capacity of the lungs increases
- Mood improves (increases serotonin and dopamine - good hormones).
- Improvement in the venous system.
- Enhances immune function.
- Speeds up digestion.
- Works against disabilities in old age (strengthens joints).
- Helps in weight loss.
- Improves heart health.
- Reduces the risk of stroke.
- Corrects diabetes (forms new insulin receptors).
- Reduces blood pressure



NUTRITIOUS DELIGHT

Chef RAJIV KUMAR MALHOTRA, known for his culinary expertise at Habitat World, India Habitat Centre, shares with SHARMILA CHAND the essence of summer embodied in their latest creation: the Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad. The delectable blend has the wholesome goodness of kodo millet intertwined with the sweet succulence of fresh mango, creating a symphony of taste and health in every delightful bite

RECIPE

Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad

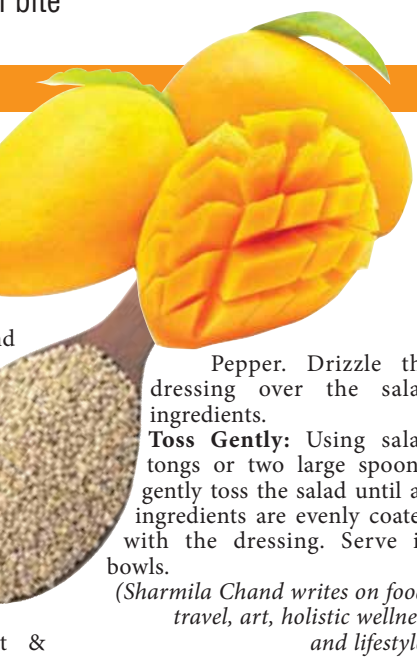
- Ingredients:**
- 40g Kodo millet
 - 1 ripe Mango
 - 30gm Pomegranate Seeds
 - 15g Bell Pepper (any color), diced
 - 15g Rocket Lettuce
 - 10g Peeled Almonds
 - 10g Raisins
 - 150g Corn Kernels
 - 15g Hung Curd/Feta Cheese
- For the dressing:**
- 5ml Olive Oil
 - 2ml Lemon Juice
 - 1gm Fennel Seed Powder
 - Salt & Pepper to taste



METHOD

Cook Kodo Millet: Rinse the kodo millet under cold water. In a pot, add 1 part kodo millet to 2 parts water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20-25 minutes, or until the millet is tender and the water is absorbed. Once cooked, let it cool & squeeze extra water. **Prepare Ingredients:** Peel the mango and dice it into bite-sized pieces. Dice the bell pepper into small pieces. Wash the rocket

lettuce in cold water & tear it into bite-sized pieces. **Assemble Salad:** In a large bowl, combine the cooked and cooled kodo millet, diced mango, pomegranate seeds, corn diced bell pepper, torn rocket lettuce, sliced almonds, and raisins. **Prepare Dressing:** In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, and fennel seed powder until well combined. Season with Salt &



Pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the salad ingredients. **Toss Gently:** Using salad tongs or two large spoons, gently toss the salad until all ingredients are evenly coated with the dressing. Serve in bowls. (Sharmila Chand writes on food, travel, art, holistic wellness and lifestyle)

