

India set to export BrahMos missiles to Philippines: Modi

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

During his election rally in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that India is set to export BrahMos missiles to the Philippines. He said, "Now we are also exporting BrahMos missiles. The first batch of this missile is going to the Philippines today. I congratulate all my countrymen on this." India is set to deliver the first batch of BrahMos super-sonic cruise missiles to the Philippines on Friday. This comes two years after inking a \$375 million deal to supply the weapon systems with the Southeast Asian country, India on April 19 delivered BrahMos super-sonic cruise missiles to the Philippines. The two countries had signed a deal worth

\$375 million in 2022. An Indian Air Force's C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft landed at Clark Airbase in the Philippines today morning with the first batch of Made-in-India BrahMos missiles. In January 2022, India sealed a deal with the Philippines to supply three batteries of the missile. This was the first export of the BrahMos missile by India. A few other countries including Argentina have also shown interest in procuring BrahMos missiles from India. BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd, an India-Russian joint venture, produces super-sonic cruise missiles that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms. BrahMos missile flies at a speed of 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound. Modi today addressed a huge

public meeting organized in Damoh, Madhya Pradesh on Friday and appealed to the people of Madhya Pradesh to vote with a huge majority in every seat of the state this time. State BJP President and Khajuraho Lok Sabha candidate Mr. Vishnu Dutt Sharma and Damoh Lok Sabha candidate Mr. Rahul Lodhi and other senior leaders were present on the stage in the program. Modi underlined the important achievements of the BJP government in the last 10 years and once again formed the Bharatiya Janata Party government with a huge majority in the country and fiercely targeted the Indian alliance and the Congress, accusing them of being anti-Sanatan and corrupt. The Prime Minister said that

the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are not just to elect MPs, but to ensure the future of the country's future generations. This election is to make India a big power in the world in the coming 5 years. When there is an atmosphere of war in the world, it is necessary to have a strong government in India working on a war footing. Only the Bharatiya Janata Party government with absolute majority can do this work. In the last 10 years, the country has seen that a stable government can work efficiently even in adverse circumstances. There was an outcry in the whole world during the Corona period, but the strong BJP government of the country brought Indians back to the country safely from all over the world. The BJP government

provided free ration to crores of Indians and also administered vaccine doses to protect against Corona. Today there is such a strong and stable government in the country, which neither fears anyone nor bows down before anyone. Bharatiya Janata Party, working on the principle of Nation First, has taken many important decisions in the interest of the country. The BJP government provided free ration to crores of Indians and also administered vaccine doses to protect them from Corona. Today there is such a strong and stable government in the country, which neither fears anyone nor bows down before anyone. Bharatiya Janata Party, working on the principle of Nation First, has taken many important decisions in the interest of the country.



People stand in a queue to cast their votes during the first phase of voting for Lok Sabha election, in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh on Friday. Pioneer photo

Tube well digging banned in Bhopal till June 30

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Bhopal district administration has banned the tube well mining (boring) till June 30. Now people will not be able to dig new tube wells. The order has been implemented with immediate effect. In view of the falling groundwater level, Collector Kaushlendra Vikram Singh has taken this decision. Under Section 6 (1) of the Madhya Pradesh Drinking Water Preservation Act, a ban has been imposed on mining of non-government and private tube wells in the entire district till June 30, 2024. Collector Singh said, tube wells and boring machines will neither enter nor mine tube wells in the district without the permission of the concerned SDM.

Machines passing through public roads will be exempted. Collector Singh said, the concerned SDM and police officers have the right to seize such boring machines which enter restricted places in the district illegally, or attempt to mine or bore tube wells, and register an FIR in the concerned police station area. will be. According to the order, there is a provision to punish the violation with a fine of Rs 2,000 or imprisonment up to two years or both. This order will not apply to tube well excavation done under government schemes. Tube well mining work can be done under the work plan by PHE. There will be no need for permission in this. Ground water sources are being over-exploited for

agricultural and commercial purposes in Bhopal district. Due to this, the water level of drinking water sources and tube wells is falling rapidly. Keeping in view the situation of drinking water crisis in the entire district in the coming summer due to falling ground water level, it is necessary to impose a ban on digging of new private tube wells for purposes other than drinking water in the entire district under the Madhya Pradesh Drinking Water Preservation Act 1986. The Collector said, after examining the situation of drinking water crisis, it was revealed that if a ban is not imposed on mining of private tube wells in the district, then a situation of serious drinking water crisis may arise in the district during summers.

Temperature crosses 40 degree in 19 cities of Madhya Pradesh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Amidst the scorching heat in Madhya Pradesh, there was a period of thunderstorm and rain on Friday. The day temperature crossed 40 degrees in 19 cities of the state including Khandwa and Malajkhand while, it rained in Shajapur in the evening. The weather also changed in Ujjain, Agar, Rajgarh, Guna and Vidisha. Malajkhand and Khandwa remained the hottest. The temperature here remained at 42 degrees. According to the Meteorological Department, Western Disturbance is becoming active in the next two days. Which will have an impact in the state. Due to this, Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur,

the mercury also crossed 41 degrees in Jabalpur, Narmadapuram, Shivpuri, Khajuraho, Khargone, Satna, Damoh and Rewa

Narsinghpur, Guna, Sagar, Umaria and Naugaon recorded temperatures of 40 degrees or more. It is expected to rain for the next 3 days from April 21. Met has issued alert of stormy winds and thunder storms in Dhar, Ujjain, Indore, Agar-Malwa, Rajgarh, Guna, Asok Nagar districts. According to the Meteorological Department, Western Disturbance is becoming active in the next two days. Which will have an impact in the state. Due to this, Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur,

Ratlam, Khajuraho and Narmadapuram. In the next two days rainfall would be witnessed in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Barwani, Khargone, Burhanpur, Khandwa, Harda, Dewas, Sehore, Vidisha, Raisen, Narmadapuram, Betul, Pandhurna, Chhindwara, Narsinghpur, Sagar, Damoh, Katni, Mandla, Balaghat and Dindori districts. Many rainfall records were broken in April. About two and a half inches of rain fell in Bhopal. At the same time, a record has also been made that it rained for 11 consecutive days in April. There has been continuous rain in the state from April 7 to April 17. Now the state will get drenched again from April 21.

Garg appointed Chief Advisor to Agrawal Mahasabha



STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Agrawal Mahasabha State President D.P. Goyal has appointed Senior social worker and Chairman of Shree Ram Advertising Agency Sunil Garg as the Chief Advisor to the Mahasabha. His tenure will last till Garg's presidential term. Goyal has urged all the members of the Mahasabha that if they have any important social problem, they should contact Sunil Garg.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Vijay Sankalp Rally ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Damoh, Madhya Pradesh on Friday. Pioneer photo

Workshop on ISN Evidence Synthesis and Meta-Analysis

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A two-day workshop on ISN evidence synthesis and meta-analysis was inaugurated today by Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, who emphasized the paramount importance of evidence-based medicine in the current medical landscape. In his address, Prof Singh underscored the critical role of systematic reviews and meta-analysis in advancing medical research and clinical practice. "Systematic reviews and meta-analysis offer a structured approach to distill and synthesize disparate research findings, empowering healthcare professionals to deliver optimal patient care grounded in the best available evidence" he added. Prof Singh also highlighted the commitment of the research cell at AIIMS



Bhopal to promote rigorous research in this domain, recognizing it as pivotal for enhancing healthcare outcomes. She stressed the imperative for healthcare professionals to leverage these methodologies effectively in their practice, aligning with contemporary medical advancements. Prior to the inauguration, Prof. (Dr) Shikha Malik, in her welcoming address, unveiled plans for new courses to be initiated soon within the pediatric department. She expressed gratitude for the unwavering support and motivation provided by Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh, which will catalyze increased research activities within the institution. The workshop is organized by department of Pediatrics, AIIMS Bhopal in association with International Society of Nephrology. In the ever-evolving landscape of medicine, evidence synthesis and meta-analysis have emerged as indispensable tools for healthcare professionals seeking to navigate the vast expanse of medical literature and distill rigorous evidence to inform clinical decision-making. Delegates from different parts of the country including AIIMS Bhopal and various medical colleges across the state are participating, reflecting a collective commitment to advancing medical research and practice.

Collector imposes fine of Rs 2 lakh each on 16 pvt schools in Ujjain

PNS ■ UJJAIN

Ujjain district Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh has taken major action against 16 private schools of the district for violating orders under Section 144 issued by the Madhya Pradesh Government Education Department and school operations. A fine of Rs 2 lakh each has been imposed on these 16 private schools. The directors/ principals of private schools will deposit the amount through challan in the treasury within seven days and ensure that the receipt is given to the office of the District Education Officer. Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh has issued orders, under which, as per the instructions of the Collector, surprise inspection of private schools was conducted by the flying squads formed. During inspection, various shortcomings were found in private schools. On the basis of the report presented by the flying squad, a show cause notice letter was issued to the directors/principals of private schools through the District Education Officer, in response to which the directors/principals of private schools were presented.

The response submitted was reviewed/examined by the District Committee. Since the response after testing was not found completely satisfactory, the District Committee has imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh each on the directors/principals of 16 private schools in the district. Among the private schools on which a penalty of Rs 2 lakh each has been imposed on Gyan Sagar Academy Dewas Road Ujjain, Gyan Global Academy Chintaman Road Ujjain, St. Mary's Convent H. S School Dewas Road, Christ Jyoti Convent School Malanwasa, Nirmala Convent Haase School Prem Nagar Dewas Road, St. Paul Convent High School Panchkroshi Marg Agar Road, Oxford Junior College Ujjain, St. Thomas School Panwasa Maxi Road, Carmel Convent Chakkamed Tehsil Ghatiya, St. Thomas Haase School Badnagar, Master Mind International School Tarana, Dinah Convent School Tarana, Jeendatta Institute of Education Narayana Tehsil Mahidpur, MPS Academy Mahidpur, Imperial International School Khachrod and St. Martin's School Badnagar.

Models United Nations best way

Indore: Models United Nations is the best way to understand the activities of the United Nations. India's opinion is now given due importance on any issue in the United Nations, said Indore Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the three-day Prestige Model United Nations organized by Prestige Institute of Management and Research here on Friday. Bhargava said there are many programmes to understand the UN, but the Kashmir issue is the most important to understand the United Nations. Describing the abrogation of Article 370 from Kashmir as a significant event, he said that the biggest change that came after its abrogation was the freedom to hoist the tricolor anywhere in Kashmir, which could not have been imagined before 2019. Social worker Mala Singh Thakur said that India not only talks about 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' but also practices it. While every country considers other countries as business, India considers every country as a family, she said, asking students to work towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as set by the United Nations. Senior advocate Pankaj Wadhavani also expressed his views on this occasion.

Tiger movement witnessed in front of Jagran Lake City University

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Tiger movement has been witnessed outside the gate of Jagran Lake City University located in Chandanpura, Bhopal. The video of Tiger roaming was made by people traveling in cars. The tiger crossing the road went towards the forest within some time. After Tiger's movement, Bagh Mitra has also accused the department of negligence. Tiger friend Rashid Noor said, there are many tigers in Chandanpura. Despite this, wedding parties are organized in club-restaurants here, which is not good for wild animals including tigers. There is also a complaint regarding this. So that, the animal club-restaurant is closed. Forest department officials say that this tiger is the offspring of T-123. The four cubs of this tigress have now become adults and are creating their own territory. Their movement has been seen in the past also. Search has been going on for four days in search of

Tiger friend Rashid Noor said, there are many tigers in Chandanpura. Despite this, wedding parties are organized in club-restaurants here

leopard in Bhoj (Open) University campus, but it has not been seen. In such a situation, there is a possibility that he went towards the forest from the path behind the campus. Despite this, as a precaution, families living on campus have been advised to stay in their homes. In such a situation, they are not leaving the house in the dark. Let us tell you that leopard movement was seen in the campus on Monday night. He was roaming around the staff quarters. After this the leopard was not seen.



Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and BJP candidate from Vidisha constituency Shivraj Singh Chouhan files his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha election, in Raisen, Madhya Pradesh on Friday. Pioneer photo

Poster, painting competition organised at IGRMS

Bhopal: The cleanliness fortnight at the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalay (IGRMS) witnessed a significant event on Friday as a Poster/Painting Competition highlighting the importance of swachhta (cleanliness) and health was organized at 10:00 AM in the Sangrahalay premises. A total of 16 students representing 4 different schools participated in the competition, showing

their creativity and understanding of the themes of cleanliness and its impact on health. The competition aimed to raise awareness among the youth about the crucial link between cleanliness and overall well-being, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a clean environment for personal and public health. Participants were encouraged to express their ideas and perspectives through their

artwork, depicting various aspects of cleanliness, hygiene practices, and their significance in promoting good health. The event provided a platform for young minds to creatively engage with the concept of swachhta and its broader implications on individual and community health, fostering a sense of responsibility towards maintaining cleanliness in their surroundings.

Glimpses from Bastar Lok Sabha constituency



1. Elderly women after casting vote in the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency on Friday.



2. Helicopters were used to ferry the polling team to remote and difficult terrains.



3. A view of a 'Sangawari' (all women personnel polling booth) at Degalras in Dantewada region of Bastar.



4. Polling team submitting EVMs after the end of polling.

Cong, BJP both claim victory in Bastar battle

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Both the Congress and Chhattisgarh's ruling BJP claimed victory after the Bastar Lok Sabha seat went to the polls at the start of staggered parliamentary elections in India.

Finance Minister O.P. Choudhary told reporters that the process of wiping out the Congress had begun with Bastar.

"The people of Bastar have voted for ballot rather than bullet," Choudhary said, in an obvious reference to Bastar's reputation as a bastion of Maoists who called for an election boycott.

Choudhary said that before elimination of Naxalism, the Congress



would have to be ended. People of Bastar have supported the development plank of the BJP, he added.

The Congress said the people of Bastar had voted for them.

PCC chief Deepak Baij said there was tremendous anger against the Modi

government and the people are fed up with its incomplete promises.

Asserting that there was anti incumbency against the Modi government, Baij said a wave of change was witnessed in Bastar.

The BJP government fans communal hatred and

"The people of Bastar have voted for ballot rather than bullet," Choudhary said, in an obvious reference to Bastar's reputation as a bastion of Maoists who called for an election boycott.

has exploited youths and farmers. That was why the Congress has a better chance to succeed in the Lok Sabha polls, he said.

Voting held for first time in Maoist-hub Chandameta

STAFF REPORTER ■ JAGDALPUR

Polling took place on Friday for the first time after independence in 1947 in the once Maoist stronghold of Chandameta village in elections for the Bastar Lok Sabha seat in Chhattisgarh.

Once a Red bastion, Chandameta was previously known as an impregnable fortress of the Maoists.

The voting took place amid a tight security cover.

As many as 325 persons including 163 men and 162 women voters were eligible to exercise their franchise in the village between 7 am and 3 pm.

Chandameta village was among 102 villages for which officers had set up polling



booths for the first time in the general elections in the Batsar Lok Sabha seat. A voting turnout of 63.41 percent was recorded in Bastar.

'Fit Rajnandgaon, Fit Voters' held for voter awareness



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAJNANDGAON

A variety of fitness activities were held in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon district on Friday under the theme 'Fit Rajnandgaon, Fit Voters' to inspire the electorate ahead of the April 26 Lok Sabha elections.

Rajnandgaon will see polling along with Kanker and Mahasamund in the second phase of the general elections.

This was organized under the SVEEP programme with the help of AYUSH and Agriculture departments.

People of all age groups fiercely competed in bushball, theraband, hurdle jump, zumba, musical dance, aerobics and other activities.

Officials of the AYUSH department distributed health drinks and those of the Agriculture department distributed fruits to the participants.

Rs 30L ex-gratia for dead trooper, Rs 15L to injured



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Election Commission in Chhattisgarh sanctioned ex-gratia compensation of Rs 30 lakh to a CRPF trooper killed and Rs 15 lakh to an injured

CRPF personnel during the Lok Sabha elections in Bastar on Friday.

A total of Rs 30 lakh will be provided to the kin of Constable Devendra Kumar who was critically injured by an Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL) shell explosion near the Galgam polling station.

He succumbed to his injuries while being transported to Raipur.

CRPF Assistant Commandant Manu H.C. was injured by an IED in the Chihka area of Bijapur district. He was airlifted to Raipur and is undergoing treatment. He will be provided a compensation of Rs 15 lakh.

Polling was conducted for the first phase of the general elections in the Naxalite-affected Bastar constituency.

Role of diet & exercise in managing diabetes

AGENCIES ■

After the food habits of incarcerated Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal stirred up a debate as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) revealed the details of his high glycaemic index diet this week, the lifestyle disease, which results from a combination of genetic and lifestyle factors, is a complex one and diet -- along with daily exercise -- plays a key role in its management.

A proper healthy and nutritional diet can help aptly manage the incurable condition, which if ignored, can affect nearly all organs.

Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to multiple complications ranging from kidney problems -- failure, dialysis, and transplantation, to blindness, amputation, heart attacks, strokes, dementia, nerve problems, and gangrene.

The condition can also affect sexual health and cause infertility, among others.

What is diabetes? The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines diabetes as a chronic disease that occurs either when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin (blood glucose regulating hormone), or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces.

Both raised glucose levels, called hyperglycaemia, and low glucose levels, called hypoglycaemia, can lead to serious damage to many of the body's systems, especially the nerves and blood vessels.

Globally, diabetes affects



more than 50 crore people, according to a study published in the journal The Lancet. It projects the number to more than double to 130 crore people in the next three decades.

In India, a whopping 10.1 crore people suffer from diabetes, while 13.6 crore are pre-diabetic, reveals data from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

According to top diabetologist Dr V. Mohan, chairman of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, "diet, high calories, weight, increase in obesity are the major drivers, and there is a small genetic factor, which makes Indians a little bit more prone".

He also blames rising consumption of junk food -- known to be rich in salt and sugar --, no exercise, disturbed sleep patterns, rising pollution levels, adulteration of food, and their contamination with pesticides behind the diabetes epidemic in the country.

Diet management in

significantly lower the risk of premature death among people with diabetes.

Dr Sudhir Kumar, a neurologist at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, says "carbohydrate restriction" is key.

"This can be achieved by avoiding or restricting sugar, jaggery, honey, etc. Sugar-sweetened beverages (soft drinks, packed fruit juices) and sweets should be avoided," he said while stressing the need to minimise "intake of rice, roti, idli, dosa, potatoes, and fruits".

Can diabetic patients eat fruits, and drink tea, and coffee?

The concern has been that fruits contain sugar. However, most fruits have low to medium GI, compared to other carbohydrate-containing foods like white or wholemeal bread.

Acclaimed celebrity nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar says that "when it comes to local, seasonal fruits, the truth invariably lies beyond the fear of calories, sugar, and weight gain".

She also vouches for mangoes, known to be rich in antioxidants, fibre as well as Vitamin C, over "green tea, oats, pills" for better nutrients.

But can the same be applied to a person with diabetes? Contrary to popular myth, mangoes do not have a high glycaemic index. According to Rujuta, "mangoes are not only safe for diabetics, but they are also, in fact, recommended for people with diabetes because of their rich profile of nutrients. They are rich in phytonutrients, antioxidants, and fibre".

Showers likely in Chhattisgarh

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

There may be some respite from the scorching heat stinging most parts of Chhattisgarh as the India Meteorology Department (IMD) predicted thunderstorm, light showers and gusty wind in some parts of the state on Saturday.

On Friday, the weather was dry in the state. A heat wave was recorded in one or two places in Raipur and Bastar.

The maximum temperature was 44.8 degrees Celsius at ARG Dongargarh in Rajnandgaon. The maximum temperature in Raipur was 42.8 degrees Celsius, which was one degree more than normal. The Raipur centre of IMD had predicted that the weather will change in the state from Saturday. This will push down the



maximum temperature in the coming days. Along with Raipur, the weather remained dry across the state

on Friday. The maximum temperature of Raipur was 3 degrees more than normal

and the minimum temperature was 25.7 degrees, which was 1 degree more than normal.



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 them 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 woodlock. 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.

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

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

Vehicle carrying EVM sinks in Assam river

PTI ■ NORTH LAKHIMPUR (ASSAM)
An SUV carrying an electronic voting machine partially sank into a river after water level rose suddenly washing away a mechanised boat that was ferrying the vehicle in Assam's Lakhimpur constituency on Friday, officials said. The driver and the polling officer of the vehicle managed to get out before water gushed into the vehicle, an official said. It was on its way to Amarapur area in Sadiya to replace an EVM after a technical glitch was detected in it as polling

commenced in the morning, the official said. A quick response team stationed at Sadiya dispatched the SUV with the EVM, accompanied by the driver and an official. "As the vehicle was being carried by a mechanised boat across the Deopani river, its water level and current suddenly increased. The boat sank under the force of the water, and the vehicle also partially sank," the official said. "A State Disaster Response Force team was called in to pull the vehicle out of the water. The EVM, meant for replacement, was damaged in the accident," he added. 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. 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 Khowding. 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.

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



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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.

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 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.

Rishab Vashisht | Bhopal

INSIGHTS ON INDIAN JEWELRY

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.

Ishaan Shukhi | Ludhiana

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)



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

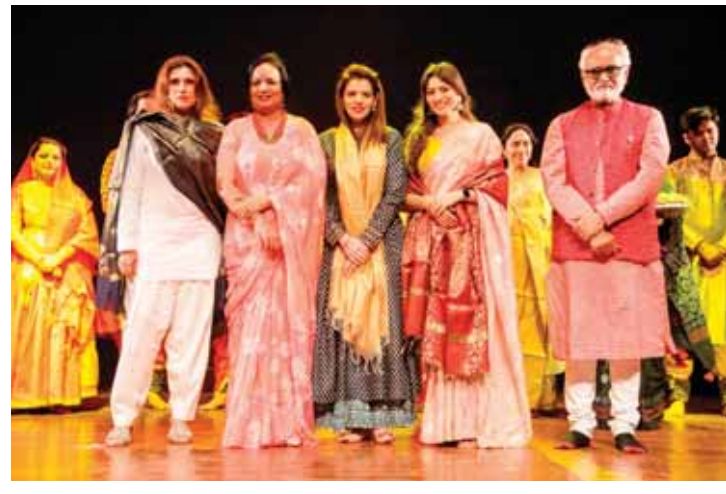
Renowned classical dancer Shovana Narayan, a Padmashree awardee celebrated for her mesmerising performances, once again captivated audiences with her scintillating dance production "Ram Aagman." Held on the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri, this spectacle, presented at the Kamani Auditorium in 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.

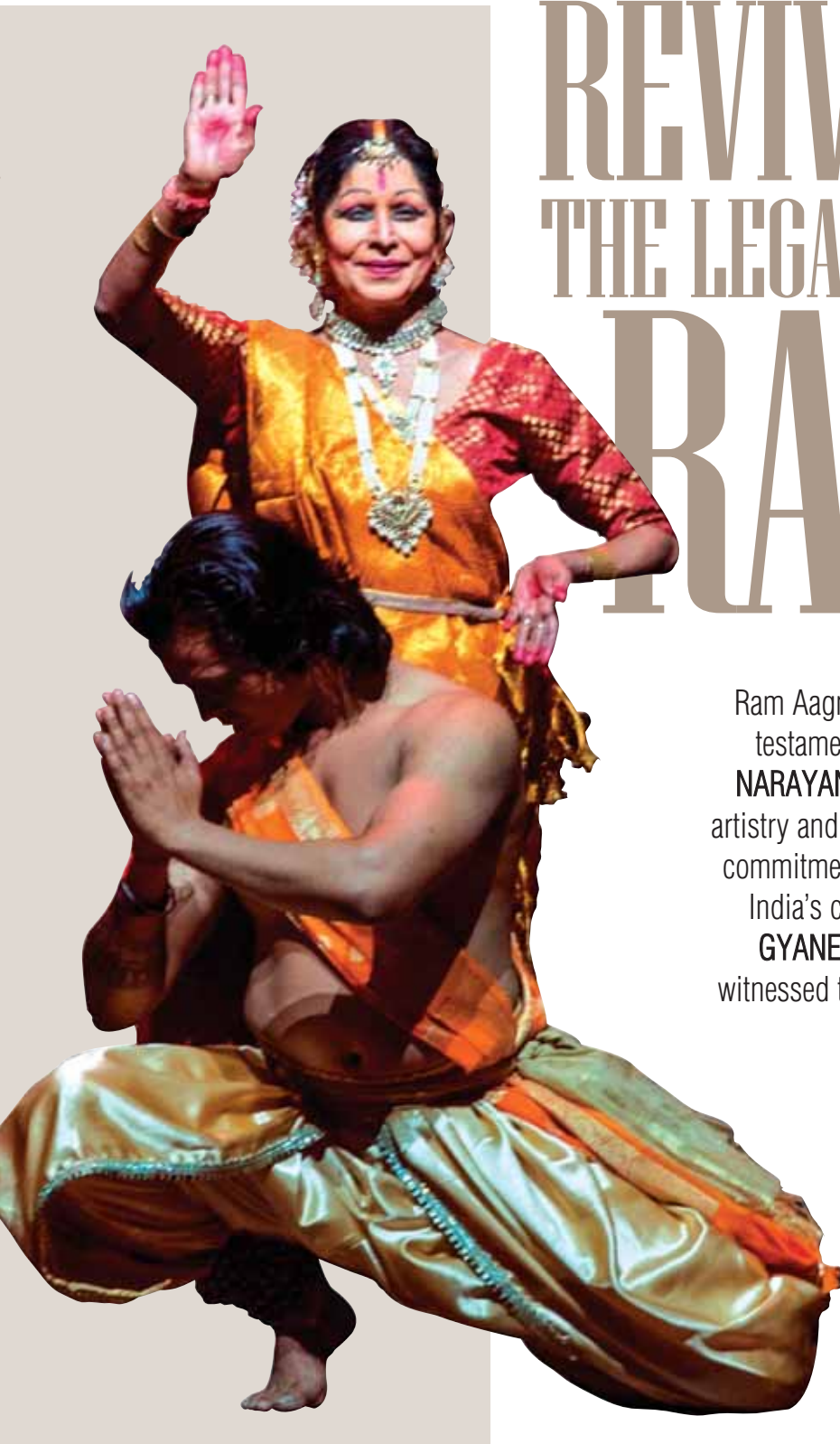
One of the distinctive elements of "Ram Aagman" was its homage to Goddess



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.

