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Make Modi PM again to rid nation of terrorism and Naxalism: Shah

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What is CHILDHOOD dementia?

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QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Harish Rao should tell us what is the secret pact between them. The dramas of Revanth and Harish are meant to create an Eknath Shinde. I am getting the doubt that Harish may become the Shinde. Revanth brought Harish's name on to the screen and they played a game. I am ready to resign if Revanth Reddy implements the six guarantees fully

- Alleti Maheshwar Reddy, BJLP leader P4

DON'T MISS...

'Students should be trained as...'

Bharat Scouts & Guides State Chief Commissioner and School Education Commissioner, S Suresh Kumar, has emphasised that scouts should strive towards comprehensive development to serve the country and state with a sense of duty towards national integration. On Saturday, Commissioner S Suresh Kumar supervised the 'Rajya Puraskar Testing Camp', a Scouts residential camp held at the BSG Andhra Pradesh Regional Training Centre in Tadikonda, Guntur. The camp was conducted...

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IAF helicopter roped in to...

An IAF helicopter was pressed into service to extinguish the raging forest fires in Uttarakhand's Nainital district on Saturday, a day after the flames reached the High Court Colony in the Pines area. The blaze came dangerously close to the houses in the colony and an Army cantonment around five kilometres away from the Pines, prompting the response by authorities. The Indian Air Force said a Mi-17 V5 helicopter was deployed to assist in the firefighting operations. "With a forest fire building up in vicinity of an Air Force..."

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Instagram, YouTube biggest...

Adult US TikTok users spend an average of 54 minutes on the app on any given day, more than Instagram, Snapchat or YouTube, according to research firm eMarketer. If TikTok were to disappear, those platforms — along with younger, smaller emerging rivals — would be scrambling for those valuable minutes of people's attention. But with an actual ban still likely years away, it's not clear what app will be the biggest beneficiary. Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, may see more advertisers amid...

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Myopia is at epidemic levels...

Myopia, or the need for corrected vision to focus or see objects at a distance, has become a lot more common in recent decades. Some even consider myopia, also known as nearsightedness, an epidemic. Optometry researchers estimate that about half of the global population will need corrective lenses to offset myopia by 2050 if current rates continue — up from 23% in 2000 and less than 10% in some countries. The associated health care costs are huge. In the United States alone, spending on corrective lenses, eye tests and related expenses may be as high as US\$7.2 billion a year. What explains the rapid growth in myopia? I'm a vision scientist who has studied visual perception and perceptual defects. To answer that question, first let's...

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OBTUSE ANGLE



CM unveils Navaratna Plus manifesto

Says YSRCP don't make empty promises

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, on Saturday released YSRCP's election manifesto for next month's general elections. The manifesto promises the enhancement of financial assistance under Amma Vodi from Rs 15,000 to Rs 17,000 per year, zero-interest loans for self-help groups up to Rs 3 lakh, increase of social security pension to Rs 3,500 per month in the last two instalments, and enhancement of Rythu Bharosa amount from Rs 13,500 to Rs 16,000.

"We adhere to the three-capital decision under which the administration would be started from Visakhapatnam after we win the elections. The Legislative Capital will be Amaravati and the Judicial Capital, Kurnool," CM Jagan said. Addressing a media conference on Saturday, the Chief Minister affirmed the continuation of schemes like YSR Cheyutha, YSR Kapu Nestham, Shadi Tofa, housing scheme and Arogyasri. The CM said that the manifesto would be a Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita for him and vowed to implement it to the fullest.

CM Jagan claimed that the past 58 months will be etched forever in our country's history as over 99 per cent of the manifesto promises have been successfully implemented by YSRCP. He said over the past five years, over 99 per cent of the Navaratna Plus schemes were executed. The YSRCP government has deposited Rs 2.68 lakh crore directly into beneficiaries' accounts through DBT (direct benefit transfer) and Rs 1.78 lakh crore through non-DBT methods, said the CM.

"We've allocated Rs 26,067 crore for the Amma Vodi scheme, Rs 4,275 crore for Jaganna Vasathi



HIGHLIGHTS OF YSRCP MANIFESTO

- Pensions will be increased to Rs 3,500 in two instalments (Rs 250 in January 2028 and Rs 250 in January 2029). Andhra Pradesh is the only State in the country that provides pensions to 66 lakh people.
- There will be no change in schemes like Amma Vodi, Vidya Kanuka and YSR Cheyutha for women.
- YSR Cheyutha scheme will be continued, will provide Rs 75,000 in four instalments.
- Amma Vodi scheme amount will be increased to Rs 17,000 while Rs 15,000 will be given to mothers.

Deevena, Rs 12,609 crore to the Jaganna Vidya Deevena, and Rs 34,378 crore for YSR Rythu Bharosa," the CM claimed. Despite the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic and revenue losses that happened thereafter, the government never made any excuses and meticulously executed the manifesto with a smile. "We can't

compete with Chandrababu's fraudulent promises, but we can show our commitment to the people. This government is different from the previous one -- we don't make empty promises. We deliver, and that's our legacy," Jagan asserted.

- There will be a special focus on medicine in the next five years, with the expansion of the Arogyasri scheme cover (medical cover already increased to Rs 25 lakh).
- YSR Kapu Nestam scheme will continue for four instalment of Rs 60,000
- EBC Nestam amount will continue and will be increased to 60,000 in four phases.
- YSR Rythu Bharosa amount has been hiked from Rs 13,500 to Rs 16,000. Rythu Bharosa scheme will also be extended to tenant farmers.
- Rs 50,000 will be given in five instalments under Matsyakara Bharosa scheme.
- Rs 3 lakh interest-free loan under YSR Sunna Vaddi scheme.
- Interest rates will be reduced for those buying autos/taxis, Rs 50,000 for autos and taxis over the next five years.
- Vahana Mitra amount will be increased from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh over the next 5 years.
- Rs 24,000 per annum for five years for handloom weavers.

Transformative blueprint for AP's future: Botsa

Stresses government's efforts to uplift marginalised communities

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana has lauded Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's 'bold manifesto', describing it as a significant milestone for Andhra Pradesh's future. Speaking to the media people on Saturday, Satyanarayana emphasised the transformative potential of the manifesto, which outlines nine pivotal promises. "These commitments," he asserted, "pave the way for comprehensive change, with a renewed focus on social welfare, economic empowerment, and inclusive growth."

Highlighting the manifesto's significance, Minister Satyanarayana reiterated YSRCP's dedication to prioritising development and welfare of the people. He likened the manifesto to sacred texts such as the Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita, emphasising its role as a guiding principle for the party. Drawing a comparison with the previous government's performance, Satyanarayana outlined the accomplishments of YSRCP, including the successful implementation of various welfare schemes benefiting millions of citizens. He assured voters of the party's commitment to fulfilling its promises, citing past achievements as

evidence of their dedication. The Minister also underscored the government's efforts to uplift marginalised communities, including SC, ST, BC, and minority women. Initiatives such as financial assistance, educational support, and increased pension for grandparents and widows were highlighted as means to alleviate financial burdens. Addressing concerns regarding the state capital, Satyanarayana affirmed the government's commitment to administrative decentralisation. Plans were detailed to develop Visakhapatnam as the executive capital, Amaravati as the legislative capital, and Kurnool as the judicial capital, ensuring equitable development across regions.

Refuting allegations of economic mismanagement, Satyanarayana emphasised prudent fiscal policies under the YSRCP government. Efforts to enhance GDP, increase per capita income, and invest in human development were highlighted as evidence of the government's commitment to fiscal discipline. The Minister urged voters to support the YSRCP symbol and stressed the importance of the manifesto in safeguarding the interests of the populace.

He encouraged every household to familiarise themselves with the manifesto.

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'Chandrababu considers manifesto as a joke'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and Machilipatnam MLA Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) has said that the Opposition alliance of TDP, BJP and JSP is once again getting ready to cheat the people of Andhra Pradesh through false promises in the name of Super 6 and Super 10.

Speaking at the YSRCP central office in Tadepalli on Saturday, Nani said that in 2014, TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu gave people false promises and came into power. Jagan Mohan Reddy has imple-



mented the promises given in 2019 and the promises given now will also be strictly implemented.

Addressing the media at Srikakulam, Minister Dharmana Prasada Rao said that the manifesto

will be considered as Bhagavad Gita, Quran and Bible by YSRCP. He said that they have implemented 99 per cent of the promises made to the people in the manifesto in 2019. He criticised Chandrababu for considering the manifesto as a joke. The Opposition alliance said 20 lakh jobs will be given, but they did not even provide 20,000 jobs during the period 2014 to 2019. To come to power in 2014, Chandrababu gave false promises that women's loans will be waived off. He cheated the women who believed him and voted for TDP, said Dharmana.

BJP wants 'snatch away' reservation, says Rahul Gandhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday claimed that it is clear from the statements of BJP leaders that their objective is to destroy democracy by changing the Constitution and "snatch away" the reservation of Dalits, backward classes and tribals.

Gandhi asserted that as long as the Congress is there, no power in the world can take away reservation from the deprived people. In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "It is now clear from the statements of BJP leaders and those close to Narendra Modi that their objective is -- destroying the democracy of the country by changing the Constitution. To snatch away the reservation of Dalits, backward classes and tribals and end their participation in running the country."

Women surge in Vizag politics

Despite lacking prior political affiliations, they have earned reputation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a notable trend, numerous women have secured victories in legislative assemblies within Visakhapatnam district, marking a significant shift in the political landscape. Despite lacking prior political affiliations, these women have earned commendable reputation as public representatives. However, their journey has been riddled with challenges, with many unable to secure re-election and several facing defeat in subsequent attempts.

The narrative of female representation in parliamentary roles dates back to 1989 when Uma Gajapathiraju, the spouse of Pusapati Ananda Gajapati Raju, the ruler of Vizianagaram in pres-

ent day Andhra Pradesh, clinched victory from the Visakhapatnam parliamentary seat under the Congress banner. Though her tenure was short-lived, it set a precedent. Daggubati Purandeshwari followed suit in 2009, securing the Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha seat and later serving as a Union Minister, bolstering the reputation of women parliamentarians. In subsequent elections, names like Kothapalli Geetha and Dr. Bhisetti Satyavathy, among others, were added to the roster, emphasising the growing presence of women in parliamentary domains.

Transitioning to Assembly elections, the journey has been equally eventful.

'Can Indian space agency find water on moon?'

PNS ■ BENGALURU

When Indian Space Research Organisation chairman S Somanath threw the floor open for questions over Instagram on Saturday, not only did people want to know about next Chandrayaan, asteroid missions and space stations, but also if ISRO can find water and if ISRO can teach 10-year-olds to build nano satellite. But with only an hour earmarked for #asksomanathisro, Somanath could only answer a fraction of the questions posted by aspiring scientists and space enthusiasts. Questions on water on the moon and nano-satellite classes for 10-year-olds have to wait till next session.

Space enthusiasts' poser to ISRO chief Somanath

The session on April 27, between 6pm and 7pm, was attended by nearly 1,500 people. Somanath chose questions aimed to encourage students and enthusiasts to pursue careers in science and technology, even geology, emphasising that ISRO offers diverse opportunities beyond just astronaut roles. Answering a question on whether it would be possible for humans to build a fully sustainable space colony, ISRO chief said it is not likely in the near future. "There are huge technical challenges to create a planet like earth

elsewhere. It also requires huge investment, so in the immediate future I don't see it happening," said Somanath. Somanath also talked about how ISRO is actively working on sample return missions, where spacecraft



collect samples from celestial bodies (such as the Moon or asteroids) and bring them to Earth for analysis. Answering a question which wondered whether ISRO's collaboration with NASA to jointly build a satellite equipped with advanced fea-

tures such as large reflectors and high antennas for clear data transmission for US\$ 1 billion is expensive, Somanath said considering what the ISRO is getting in return, the cost is justified.

Continued on Page 2

'Don't be afraid to commit mistakes' is Chef Massimo Bottura's mantra, that is how his iconic dish came to life, writes Gyaneshwar Dayal

'OOPS! I DROPPED THE LEMON TART'



The renowned Chef Massimo Bottura was in New Delhi once again with the culinary marvel, Osteria Francescana. Twice rated as The World's Best Restaurant by The World's 50 Best, Chef Bottura's culinary masterpiece returned to The Leela Palace New Delhi for a second consecutive year. This unparalleled partnership between The Leela Palace New Delhi, Culinary Culture, and the culinary virtuoso himself was an unforgettable gastronomic experience. Massimo Bottura is a renowned Italian chef and owner of Osteria Francescana, a three-Michelin-star restaurant in Modena, Italy. He is not just a culinary maestro but also a passionate philanthropist, earning international acclaim for his dedication to social and environmental causes. As a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the founder of the non-profit organization 'Food for Soul', Bottura advocates for sustainability and the reduction of food waste, aligning perfectly with The Leela's eco-conscious ethos. For the uninitiated, Chef Bottura is one of the top chefs in the world and people wait to eat at his restaurant Osteria Francescana for at least three months. Some say you need to be prepared because the restaurant is fully booked for four months. Osteria Francescana was ranked the #1 restaurant in the world in 2018. The menu includes dishes like Modena's borlenghi, polenta with eel and saba, Aula on tempura, and Tortellini in cream of Parmigiano Reggiano. The chef brought his restaurant to Delhi for Rs 55,555 + taxes per person. Under Chef Bottura's guidance, Osteria Francescana has captivated global palates with its innovative approach to Italian cuisine. He is known for reinventing the Italian dishes. The restaurant has consistently secured its position among the world's best, offering a sensory journey unlike any other. Iconic dishes such as 'Oops! I Dropped the Lemon Tart', 'The Crunchy Part of the Lasagne', and 'Psychedelic



Cod Not Flame Grilled' will grace the special menus offered during the event. Bottura is a philosopher in his own right. He is passionate about making mistakes. That's right that is how his world-famous iconic dish 'Oops! I dropped the lemon tarts and came to life. Chef Bottura's culinary philosophy, is deeply rooted in embracing mistakes and turning them into culinary masterpieces. Bottura shared a story in his interactive session in Leela, about the creation of a dish that symbolises embracing imperfections. It originated when Francescana's sous chef Taka Kondo accidentally dropped a lemon tart. Feeling distraught, Kondo's perfectionist tendencies clashed with his mistake. Bottura intervened, reframing the mishap as a metaphor for the fusion of sweet and savoury, breaking boundaries. Bottura emphasised the importance of leaving room

for poetry in daily life, allowing for imagination and creativity to flourish. "If you don't make mistakes, don't dream big, you end up nowhere, won't learn a damn thing," he quips. This ethos of embracing imperfection and transforming it into something extraordinary resonates throughout his culinary creations. Chef Bottura hosted an interactive session, engaging in a conversation with Vir Sanghvi, India's foremost food expert, offering insights into his culinary journey and philosophy. During the conversation, they had a difference of opinions but agreed on two things. Italians like Indians are mama's boys and both love their food. Sanghvi remarked, "Massimo Bottura transcends the role of a chef; he serves as a global inspiration, leveraging his influence to bring about positive changes worldwide.

Mr. Anupam Dasgupta, General Manager of The Leela Palace New Delhi, expressed his enthusiasm for this unique culinary collaboration. He stated, "It is our privilege to host Chef Massimo once more at The Leela Palace New Delhi. We eagerly anticipate the epicurean delight that Chef Massimo will curate for the pop-up dinners." Speaking with anticipation about his return to India, Chef Massimo Bottura expressed his excitement, saying, "Namaste, India! I am delighted to return to your beautiful country. In New Delhi, we are working with Culinary Culture and The Leela Palace. I love India - the food and the people - and can't wait to be back and give you all a big Italian hug!" Indeed, chef Massimo Bottura is just not a chef he is a philosopher and a package you could talk to and take lessons for your kitchen and life. Chef is all for dreaming big and how creativity and dreaming big means a lot in life. His mantra: Dream big, it costs nothing and don't be afraid to make mistakes if you don't mistakes you will never learn anything new. Just a trivia here, any guesses what Massimo Bottura was most excited about in the evening. It was his breakfast with the underprivileged children he had invited for breakfast the next morning. So the world waits for Massimo Bottura's dinner and he for a simple breakfast with children of lesser God who give him all the inspiration he needs for his next masterpiece



Standing Alone, and How



MKT impressed with its high-quality ingredients, well-informed and well-attired servers, excellent preparations, and comfortable interiors. It not only stands out among standalone restaurants but also outshines many star hotels with its overall offerings, says **PAWAN SONI**

MKT at Chanakya stands out among Delhi's standalone, multi-cuisine restaurants with its delightful offerings. This spacious 144-seater, adorned with well-lit interiors, caters perfectly to both small and large groups, boasting several live kitchens that serve a variety of popular cuisines from around the globe.

While this was not my first visit to MKT, it was my first experience with their new menu. The shift towards modern Indian cuisine, complemented by a diverse Asian selection, came at the expense of the Mexican live kitchen.

Our culinary journey began with a tender coconut and poached lobster soup. While the lobster soup met expectations, the vegetarian tender coconut soup exceeded them. It offered a delightful tanginess, coupled with glass noodles, snow peas, broccoli, and chili-fried garlic. The sashimi platter, featuring salmon, tuna, yellowtail, scallops, and prawns, was remarkably fresh, accompanied by freshly grated wasabi. However, the standout dish of the day was the salmon belly. Though the three skewers at ₹1335 may seem pricey, this cut is a rarity in the city. Grilled on a robotayaki with a mildly sweet miso marinade, the salmon belly was incredibly tender and flavorful, justifying its price for the exceptional preparation. Once you have experienced this, you will never look back at the dry salmon tikka available at many other restaurants. A server-recommended starter, the Kimball mushroom, was a delightful mix of enoki, shimeji, king oyster, and shitake mushrooms tossed in Kimball sauce. This carb-free dish not only excelled in healthfulness but also in taste.

While our appetizers were satisfying, we also sampled two dishes from their Indian menu - Quinoa mutton seekh and Champaran mutton for the mains.



The mutton seekh was tender and flavourful, served with smoked lehsun chutney and khameeri roti, a refreshing departure from the ubiquitous mint chutney. The Champaran mutton was a pleasant surprise, as this rustic Bihar preparation with onions, mustard oil, and whole garlic showcased one of the best qualities of mutton. Our chef revealed that they prepare a small batch every day in a traditional handi, ensuring authenticity and quality.

Our meal concluded with homemade ice cream, which was delightful and could have been enhanced further with the addition of mango chunks. Overall, MKT impressed with its high-quality ingredients, well-informed and well-attired servers, excellent preparations, and comfortable interiors. It not only stands out among standalone restaurants but also outshines many star hotels with its overall offerings.

FACT SHEET

MKT, Lower Ground Floor, The Chanakya Mall, Yashwant Place Community Centre, New Delhi
Phone: 83769 86799 | Cuisine: Global
Rating: Food: 4.5/5 | Drinks: 4.25/5 | Service: 4.5/5 | Ambience: 4.25/5 | Overall: 4.5/5

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REVIVING KASHMIRI PANDIT CUISINE

A culinary journey through Kashmir

CHEF RAHUL WALI, through his expertise and dedication brings forth a unique culinary experience that celebrates the distinct identity of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine. **DIVYA BHATIA** had the chance to taste his lip-smacking delicacies

Kashmir is known for its scenic beauty but what people often miss on a trip to Kashmir is its Kashmiri Pandit cuisine which is a rich in flavors, influenced by the cultural heritage and geographical diversity of the Kashmir Valley. Renowned for its exquisite blend of aromatic spices and traditional cooking techniques, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine is a true reflection of the region's history and culinary prowess. Staple ingredients such as rice, yogurt, and vegetables form the foundation of many dishes, which are often infused with an array of spices like fennel, cardamom, and saffron, lending a unique and complex flavor profile. Signature dishes such as Rogan Josh, Yakhni, and Dum Aloo are cherished for their rich textures and vibrant taste. Moreover, the cuisine also features a variety of delectable vegetarian options, including Nadru Yakhni (lotus stem in yogurt gravy) and Haq Saag (collard greens cooked with spices). With its emphasis on fresh ingredients and intricate preparation methods, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine continues to captivate palates worldwide, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Recently, I had the opportunity to indulge in Koshur Wuriabal, a culinary extravaganza celebrating the exquisite flavors of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, at The Roseate House. Often overshadowed by the renowned Wazwan, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine boasts a distinct identity, tracing its origins back to 326 BCE, long before the arrival of Wazwan in the 16th century. Contrary to common perception, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine stands apart with its unique flavors and traditions. There are very few chefs who



understand traditional Kashmiri Pandit cooking, but Chef Rahul Wali stands as a beacon of tradition in this culinary landscape where authenticity is often diluted by modern interpretations. With a deep understanding of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, Chef Rahul introduced us to age-old recipes and forgotten culinary practices, offering a rare opportunity to savor the true essence of Kashmiri Pandit's gastronomy. Chef Rahul Wali talked about his journey and passion. Excerpts: **Could you share your journey as a Chef?** I was born in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, and spent my formative years in Mumbai and Pune. My culinary journey began after completing my Bachelor's in Hotel Management from Pune. I garnered extensive experience across various renowned brands in India and abroad, eventually pursuing an advanced Graduate Degree in Gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu, Adelaide Australia. In recent years, I've been dedicated to reviving and promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine through pop-ups, festivals,



and collaborations with hotels and restaurants. **What inspired you to focus on promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine?** The inspiration stems from a dual purpose - preserving our culinary heritage and introducing the richness of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine to a broader audience. This cuisine, dating back to centuries, holds a distinct place in culinary history, characterized by unique flavors and techniques. Unfortunately, it has remained relatively obscure compared to the more widely known Kashmiri cuisine. I aim to change that by bringing it to the forefront and showcasing its diversity and depth. **How would you differentiate Kashmiri Pandit cuisine from other regional cuisines?** Kashmiri Pandit cuisine is distinctive in several aspects. Firstly, it predates the more commonly known Kashmiri cuisine, tracing its roots back to ancient times. Secondly, unlike many other Indian cuisines, it refrains from using onion, garlic, or tomatoes in its preparation. The focus is on a handful of traditional spices, meticulously blended

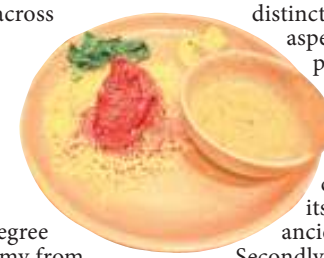
to create nuanced flavors. Additionally, the cooking method involves patience and slow cooking, preserving the authenticity of the dishes.

What challenges do you face in promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine outside its native region?

While the reception has been overwhelmingly positive, there are challenges, particularly in sourcing authentic ingredients. Additionally, there's a misconception that Kashmiri cuisine is solely suited for colder climates, which isn't entirely accurate. Educating people about the versatility and richness of our cuisine is an ongoing effort, requiring collaboration and support from various stakeholders.

How do you ensure an authentic culinary experience for guests during food festivals and pop-ups?

Authenticity is paramount, although it's essential to acknowledge that complete replication may not always be feasible, especially in diverse culinary landscapes. However, I strive to maintain the essence and integrity of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine while adapting to local ingredients and preferences. Each dish is crafted with care and respect for tradition, ensuring that guests experience the true flavors of Kashmir.



"I've spent days in cinemas answering questions from the audience, in interviews, travelling abroad, and all they do is thank me nicely"
— George Lopez



CHRONICLE OF BIHAR, BEYOND ELECTIONS

In his travels across cities and hamlets of Bihar, DEEPAK KUMAR JHA discovers that the local populace loves to have extensive discourses on politics and engage in conversations where the rhetoric of caste is quite pronounced and audible

Still considered as some of the most backward districts of Bihar — Madhepura, Purnea, Saharsa, Supaul — the *Dehati* (rural) thatched structures until a few years ago have all metamorphosed into brick and mortar dwellings amidst lush green mango orchards, banana plants, and corns in the backyard. However, the basic problems of health and education are galore. In every election for the past five decades, people of this region have been promised 'upliftment' by various political parties and leaders in the fray but ultimately the caste die is caste-ridden, preventing their holistic development. Migration, which started in large numbers almost three decades ago when Bihar was in the stranglehold of 'Jungle Raj', continues unabated even under the much hyped 'Sahasnan Raj'. "Sitting chief minister Nitish Kumar rode over former CM Lalu Yadav's Raj and people overwhelmingly voted for him going beyond caste and religion, but things are different now. The JDU leader seems to have run out of ideas after a good two terms. His last alliance with Tejaswi Yadav's RJD kindled some hope on the employment front. But such people-oriented development seems to have taken a backseat while caste and religion-ridden politics is back in vogue on the pattern of ticket distribution," says Pushpendra Kumar, former professor and chairperson of the Patna Centre of the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) who is now working full time as a researcher of Bihar's society and polity. Partly, *Bijli*, *Sadak* and *Paani* (BSP) are visibly translating into votes but what remains invisible, not only in the Dehati areas but even in towns and cities, are negligible secondary, higher education facilities topped by the lack of healthcare facilities. Amidst these deficiencies the irony is that a plethora of coaching institutes of engineering, medical, and Government jobs across prominent towns and cities like Patna, Muzaffarpur and Bhagalpur have come up and there is a mushrooming of private medical clinics and diagnostics centres in the principle districts of Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Gaya and Ara-Chapra. Come election time, there is 'Chah (not Chai) Par Charcha' across cities or hamlets where people love to have extensive discourses over Modi, Nitish, Rahul, Tejaswi or even Obama and Biden. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of caste is loud and audible in the

conversation of the locals, sitting on machans (bamboo cane cots), a fact that still dominates the entry and exit of these villages. The women folk have to volunteer to supply the motley crowd with tea doses. "Din bhar mein kum se kum 50 cup chai banta hai. Inko koi kaam nahi, din bhar sirf rajneeti ki baat kartey hain. Unka bhi time katata hai." (More than 50 cups of tea are made for them every day. They have no other work so they spend their idle time talking about politics) observes Neelam Devi, a villager of Satarwar in the Saharsa district of Bihar. The elderly male folks gather as early as 5 am and hang around till 8 am and then come back by 3 pm, remain until dusk at their machans, finding some time to revive the agriculturists in them. Evening chats are conducted within the precincts of temples every 100 yards with the smoke of incense sticks — one for spiritual rites and the other from mosquito repellants — emanating, providing a mixed essence in the clean atmosphere, resplendent with the aroma of cattle and cow dung heaps. And during the wedding season and *Janeu* rituals (thread ceremony), almost every household performs functions and celebrations in its neighbourhood as everybody looks forward to welcoming either an election contestant or any of his/her representative preferably the dominant caste of that village or town. This reporter, who was covering the Lok Sabha 2024 elections in the Supaul area, got the divine opportunity to feast on chaste *dehati* flavours sitting on a *gamcha* (cotton scarf) rolled over the raw mud field. The serve was obviously *puri*, salads, *papad*, *aloo-parwal*, tomato chutney, *dal-bhaat* (cooked rice) which has now been replaced by Pulao alongside new *Shaheri* add-ons like *paneer* based *subji* and mixed-veg. Sweet delicacies, what they call *Sukha Mitha* (*gulab jamun*) and *Gila Meetha* (*rasgulla*), *Boondiya* (besan cooked sweet), and lot of curd, is a must to earn the tag of best *Bhoj*. However, elderly people regret the fact that in recent times the city culture is dominating as huge decibels DJs loaded on tractors is a must during celebrations. Further down to a visit to another village Bara in Saharsa, the author halted and then became part of the discussion over a patient, identified as Nepali Jha, being transported from Sadar Hospital to Patna in a serious condition. The patient was transported to Patna in an ambulance accompanied

by at least a dozen villagers who, en route, were simultaneously making attempts to establish 'contacts' so that the patient could be admitted at Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) in the State's Capital city. Despite their efforts the IGIMS turned down the patient and he was somehow 'accommodated' at Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH). All this while, the villagers accompanying the patient kept insisting with the hospital attendants that the patient be taken to IGIMS, but in vain. When this journalist witnessed their attempts turning futile and one of them claimed to even approach a sitting MP in Bihar, this reporter of *The Pioneer* volunteered to help using bureaucratic contacts in the administration for admission of the patient at IGIMS. The 'mission' was successful and the IGIMS agreed but by that time the patient had to be put on a ventilator back at PMCH and moving him in that critical condition was not feasible. In this grim milieu tea was offered and unfortunately the news about the patient's demise simply vanished from media attention. Although the villagers profusely thanked this reporter, they were equally troubled about their local leaders and MPs who were not of any help in their moment of crisis and used foul language to curse their apathy. "The need for better medical facilities is a must. While several elderly people have moved out of the villages to bigger cities to stay with their children, those who are fond of villages are left in the lurch. Several people have died due to lack of even basic medical facilities in backward areas like in Madhepura, Purnea, Madhepura, and here," said Gyan Mishra, a local villager. While the people in the districts of eastern Bihar struggled for a decade to get a sanction for an AIIMS at Saharsa, considered to be most backward, they are now annoyed with both the Central and State Governments as the project has been moved to neighbouring Darbhanga, considered to be prosperous. The Darbhanga AIIMS was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year but soon the project got mired in controversy over the tug of war between the neighbouring districts. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. Last year a group of 20 parliamentarians led by Madhepura MP Dinesh Yadav, cutting across party lines launched an intensive campaign for the construction of an AIIMS in Saharsa, and even met Union Health



minister Mansukh Mandviya and handed over a letter of their demand. The letter mentioned that the number of patients suffering from cancer, kidney, heart, liver and other such life-threatening ailments has been quite high in the north-eastern region, comprising Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul, Khagaria, Purnea, Katihar, Araria and Kishanganj districts. The letter stated that the Saharsa district magistrate (DM) had communicated to the State Government about the availability of 217.74 acres of land for the construction of an AIIMS, but the State Government announced the allocation of land for the AIIMS in Darbhanga. MPs from Siwan, Nalanda, Karakat, Gaya, Valmikinagar, Gopalganj and Jehanabad had also signed the letter despite knowing that the people from their regions will not be visiting Saharsa for their treatment. But, when we talk about Bihar, it would be incomplete without the world famed and internationally acclaimed Madhubani paintings which have received several Padma awards. Another delight for the people of Bihar is the folklores of various languages, including charting numbers of Bhojpuri. Most of the popular artists who dominate all rituals including the mega festival of *Chhath*, is Sharda Sinha, who too has been bestowed with a Padma award. Most common regional languages spoken in Bihar include Angika, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Maithili, Magadhi Prakrit, Hindi as well as Urdu amongst other dialects. Currently, Bhojpuri singers have carved a niche for themselves on both social and political platforms and some of them have even become Parliamentarians or are in the current fray to be one. Therefore the raw, rustic lyrics of traditional songs have now been tuned discreetly among the youth on occasions as several of them are tagged as 'juhar'. They have been duly banned by the State Government. In one's travels across Mithilanchal, one is struck by the public emotion when people get talking about Madhubani

paintings, *paan* (beetle), *makhana*, *maach* (fish) and *litti-chokha*. Seema Roy, Mithila Painting artist said earlier the paintings were done by women with vegetable dyes on the walls. "Now it is done on paper. The paintings normally depict village scenes, human and animal forms, gods and goddesses," Seema said. "Through your platform let me share the most significant tradition of Bihar, particularly Mithila, as you have already been apprised by its arts and crafts. An unnecessary fish-mutton issue has been derived in the ensuing political campaign by top leaders and we heard the new age media platforms, including social, discuss a lot on this subject. Let me be very clear, be it any day of the week, any festival like

Durga Puja (we do not call it *Navratri* in Bihar), *Saraswati Puja*, *Mahashivratri*, or *Sawan* or any given Hindu auspicious day, we essentially cook and relish on (*maach*) fish. Mithilanchal is famous as we say *pug-pug* (every step) is fond of *paan*, *makhana*, *maach*, *pokhar* (pond)," opines a delighted Birender Thakur, a retired school teacher and villager in Bavangaon in Supaul. He also narrated a poem in the local language which had all the auspicious occasions where it mentioned the serving of non-vegetarian food, particularly fish. His companion, Nand Kishore Jha, who was part of the discourse, was quick to add that in Bihar non-vegetarian dishes only mean fish and mutton and not chicken or eggs. Although now eggs and chicken delicacies have made their way in the bylanes, *chowks*, and bazaars the elderly people do not appreciate the invasion. Bihar is also famous for its stone pottery, white metal statuettes, bamboo artifacts, wooden toys and leather goods. Several villages around Vaishali are into making of toys. Sikki Work is done by weaving a humble blade of grass into a beautiful basket and mats while Lac bangles are also made in Muzaffarpur. Bihar's rich traditional and culture legacy must not be drowned by the political din around.

IN EVERY ELECTION FOR THE PAST FIVE DECADES, PEOPLE OF BACKWARD REGIONS HAVE BEEN PROMISED UPLIFTMENT BY VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEADERS BUT ULTIMATELY THE DIE IS CAST IN FAVOUR OF CASTE, PREVENTING THE STATE'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT.

Photos: Deepak Kumar Jha

ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION FEDERALISM AT RISK OR UNITY FORTIFIED?

PRIYOTOSH SHARMA and **CHANDRIMA DUTTA** address this question posed by sceptics on whether the consolidation of electoral cycles could lead to a domination of the political narrative by parties and candidates vying for power and potentially undermine the essence of democracy by overshadowing the voices and choices of individual citizens

In India's democratic landscape, elections have long stood as pillars supporting our diverse linguistic tapestry and regional pride for over seven decades now. Stating Amartya Sen, individuals can hold singular affiliations while valuing their multifaceted identities. But a pressing question arises: If one Nation, one Election were to happen, would national unity overshadow regional loyalties? Sceptics have raised concerns that the consolidation of electoral cycles as a question of national importance could lead to a domination of the political narrative by parties and candidates vying for power. The emphasis may shift away from citizen engagement and democratic participation towards partisan interests and power struggles. This could potentially undermine the essence of democracy by overshadowing the voices and choices of individual citizens.

It's noteworthy that the proposal of One Nation and One Election is not a recent development. As far back as September 1982, the Election Commission of India recommended simultaneous elections to both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Additionally, the Law Commission of India's Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections in August 2018 further explored this idea. Given this historical context, one might wonder why the ruling party suddenly embraced this proposal in their manifesto ahead of the 2024 general election. The sudden appropriation of the One Nation and One Election proposal by the ruling party likely reflects a strategic move to prioritise electoral reform and streamline governance processes. However, such a significant shift in policy approach raises questions about the underlying motivations and potential implications.

India's governance model hinges on representative democracy, where elections serve as the bedrock of our political system. Campaigning, a pivotal aspect of elections, comes with substantial costs. A case in point is the staggering expenditure seen between February and May 2019, where Google and Facebook collectively reported political online advertising spending amounting to ₹58.67 crore. Notably, while Google declared 12,276 advertisements worth ₹29.3 crore, Facebook's India Ad Library disclosed a significantly higher volume of individual advertisements, totaling 132,419 and valued at ₹29.28 crore. Yet,



amidst this financial discourse, we often overlook the ripple effects of reducing the frequency of elections. Such a move could inadvertently disrupt sectors that thrive on heightened electoral activity, notably advertising, hospitality, and transportation. In light of this, it becomes imperative to carefully consider the implications of "One Nation, One Election" on federalism, regional dynamics, and political stability. For instance, the recent issue in Manipur over regional disparities highlights the potential risks and challenges associated with synchronising elections across different levels of government. As such, thorough deliberation and stakeholder engagement are essential in the electoral reform process to ensure that any changes uphold democratic principles and address the diverse needs of the

respective states. The ongoing debates outside of parliament surrounding One Nation and One Election are fueled by contrasting perspectives. Proponents argue that synchronising elections would bolster national unity by aligning electoral cycles and directing political discourse towards pressing national issues. At least for a brief period of time this narrative of one nation, one election, would appeal to the imagination of the public, as it would come on a platter of "national interest". However, sceptics raise concerns that this unity could merely be a facade concealing broader political agendas. Another significant issue that may raise eyebrows among the opposition is the prospect of diminished accountability if elections are held every five years.

THE ONGOING DEBATES OUTSIDE OF PARLIAMENT SURROUNDING ONE NATION AND ONE ELECTION ARE FUELED BY CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES. PROPONENTS ARGUE THAT SYNCHRONISING ELECTIONS WOULD BOLSTER NATIONAL UNITY BY ALIGNING ELECTORAL CYCLES AND DIRECTING POLITICAL DISCOURSE TOWARDS PRESSING NATIONAL ISSUES. AT LEAST FOR A BRIEF PERIOD OF TIME THIS NARRATIVE OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION, WOULD APPEAL TO THE IMAGINATION OF THE PUBLIC, AS IT WOULD COME ON A PLATTER OF "NATIONAL INTEREST"

This could spark doubts regarding the government's responsiveness to pressing concerns, such as notably fluctuations in oil prices, sharp fluctuations in food prices and hikes in gas cylinder costs paralyse citizen's every potential to remove a party from power through electoral process at least in state legislative elections. In navigating India's vibrant democratic landscape, it's crucial to recognize the unique context and complexities inherent to our nation. While other countries like Belgium or Japan may offer valuable insights, it's imperative not to blindly emulate their electoral models. Instead, decisions regarding electoral reforms must stem from a grassroots consensus, voting behaviour tailored to India's diverse socio-political fabric. The denizens of the streets and the

daily wage earners exhibit scant enthusiasm for engaging with political rhetoric; rather, their electoral participation hinges largely upon aligning themselves with the party that they could benefit financially from, thereby rendering the manipulation of their sentiments a feasible endeavour. Nevertheless, this one election holds the potential to wield considerable influence, particularly in terms of cost saving, especially where the prospect of bifurcating public sentiment during concurrent elections remains plausible.

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Education a must for the Panchayati Raj System to flourish

By **Vikash Kumar**

Panchayati systems are considered to be the fundamental pillar of local administration because it provides rural people with direct participation in the country's democratic process. The provision of local self-government has been in India since ancient times. In Indian democracy, since Independence, Panchayati systems were given their due importance for which different models were adopted. Mahatma Gandhi's ideology regarding the Panchayati Raj system was that the village panchayats should be made solid and self-sufficient so that they conduct all administrative activities at the village level. This is why the makers of the Indian Constitution had added separate provisions for this. India is the largest democratic country in the world, with about 90 crore voters registered, according to the Election Commission's 2019 list. According to the 'Rural Connection Network,' there are

2,39,000 Gram Panchayats all over the country, which are a State subject mentioned in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. The responsibility for their management, financial system, election, and arrangement of the structure rests on the State Government. The governance system of India works at three levels in which the third level is local self-government (the Panchayati system). Article 40 of the Indian Constitution contains provisions related to it, which was not an enforceable procedure. The states were not in favour of giving constitutional status to the panchayat systems, saying it violated the federal system. This is why Rajiv Gandhi's 64th Amendment (1989) and VP Singh's constitutional effort (June 1, 1990) failed. Constitutional status was accorded to Panchayats in 1992 and 1993 by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao worked tirelessly on. The responsibility of conducting their elections rests with the State Election Commission, provided by



Article 243 (K) of the Indian Constitution. Some states have announced their election because of the Constitution; their tenure is for five years, which is provided by Article 243 (E) of the Indian Constitution, but the purpose for which the concept of Panchayati systems was implemented is today helpless in achieving its original objective. Voters and elected officials engage in conversations, yet the conversation does not begin since communication throughout an election is frequently devoid of substance.

Additionally, there are no discussions going on between the candidate and the voter. Prominent political party leaders attend these polls in order to tally their victories. The news certainly delighted the voters when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose too had to raise local issues like loans, housing commissions, what issues do you have with the water and roads, he had asked earlier. In these elections, health and education are burning issues. The headman often remains indifferent, even as voters focus

on the state of primary schools along with other local issues. Because of lack of knowledge or education, the candidates' intentions and professional experiences are also not scrutinised during these elections. While the Panchayati system has helped local bodies, only a portion of the projects are intended to serve the villagers. Under such circumstances, every voter ought to select the candidate who best reflects the desires of the people, not the 'sole' candidate who offers casteism, religion, regionalism, and self-interest. This process

can only proceed if there is evidence of improvement at the local level. Voters ought to cast their ballots voluntarily and with diligence in order to support local institutions' credibility and enabling the competent leader's directives to be carried out over a period of five years, both of which encourage advancement. Today, the Panchayati Raj system exists in almost the whole country, but in reality, self-reliance today is far from what was envisioned at the time of its implementation. A provision for reservations was made in the Panchayati system under Article 243A. However, women have been unable to take full advantage of it, so have the lower classes, because even today, voting in rural areas is inspired by several biased undercurrents. Only when the Panchayati system becomes solid and self-reliant will India's democracy be strengthened. The process of reforms can start from the village itself. Women have become sarpanches but they do not run the administration; their husbands step in. A person belonging to the SC/ST category becomes a

sarpanch, but only a handful of wealthy people run the administration. Even today, many states need to transfer their subjects to the Panchayati system. In Panchayat elections deceit and force are openly used. The person who has access to the top of the administration is the one who occupies critical positions, a reason why the purpose for which it was created has not been fulfilled. The Government allots crores of funds to the development of villages but the benefits instead are spent on things remote from a village or its voters. To this date, the Panchayati system is entirely self-sufficient and those whose dreams could not be realised. In the present circumstances, the Government should make Panchayati Raj self-reliant for which education is the most significant step ahead. Awareness is only possible with education because that alone can make citizens and voters politically aware. (Views expressed are personal. Author is President of the Indian Research Scholars Association and can be contacted at sagarvikash829@gmail.com)

IT'S 30 YEARS SINCE APARTHEID ENDED

South Africa's celebrations are set against growing discontent

PNS ■ PRETORIA

South Africa marked 30 years since the end of apartheid and the birth of its democracy with a ceremony in the capital Saturday that included a 21-gun salute and the waving of the nation's multicoloured flag.

But any sense of celebration on the momentous anniversary was set against a growing discontent with the current government.

President Cyril Ramaphosa presided over the gathering in a huge white tent in the gardens of the government buildings in Pretoria as head of state.

He also spoke as the leader of the African National Congress party, which was widely credited with liberating South Africa's Black majority from the racist system of oppression that made the country a pariah for nearly a half-century.

The ANC has been in power ever since the first democratic, all-race election of April 27, 1994, the vote that officially ended apartheid.

But this Freedom Day holiday marking that day fell amid a poignant backdrop: Analysts and polls predict that the waning popularity of the party



The president, who stood in front of a banner emblazoned with the word "Freedom," also recognised the major problems South Africa still has three decades later with vast poverty and inequality, issues that will be central yet again when millions vote on May 29. Ramaphosa conceded there had been "setbacks."

once led by Nelson Mandela is likely to see it lose its parliamentary majority for the first time as a new generation of South Africans make their voices heard

in what might be the most important election since 1994 next month. "Few days in the life of our nation can compare to that day, when freedom was born," Ramaphosa said in

a speech centered on the nostalgia of 1994, when Black people were allowed to vote for the first time, the once-banned ANC swept to power, and Mandela became the country's first Black president. "South Africa changed forever. It signalled a new chapter in the history of our nation, a moment that resonated across Africa and across the world."

"On that day, the dignity of all the people of South Africa was restored," Ramaphosa said.

The president, who stood in front of a banner emblazoned with the word "Freedom," also recognised the major problems South Africa still has three decades later with vast poverty and inequality, issues that will be central yet again when millions vote on May 29. Ramaphosa conceded there had been "setbacks."

The 1994 election changed South Africa from a country where Black and other nonwhite people were denied most basic freedoms, not just the right to vote. Laws controlled where they lived, where they were allowed to go on any given day, and what jobs they could have. After apartheid fell, a constitution was adopted guaranteeing the rights of all South Africans no matter their race,

religion, gender or sexuality.

But that hasn't significantly improved the lives of millions, with South Africa's Black majority that make up more than 80 per cent of the population of 62 million still overwhelmingly affected by severe poverty.

The official unemployment rate is 32 per cent, the highest in the world, and more than 60 per cent for young people between the ages of 15 and 24. More than 16 million South Africans — 25 per cent of the country — rely on monthly welfare grants for survival.

South Africa is still the most unequal country in the world in terms of wealth distribution, according to the World Bank, with race a key factor. While the damage of apartheid remains difficult to undo, the ANC is increasingly being blamed for South Africa's current problems.

In the week leading up to the anniversary, countless South Africans were asked what 30 years of freedom from apartheid meant to them. The dominant response was that while 1994 was a landmark moment, it's now overshadowed by the joblessness, violence, corruption and near-collapse of basic services like electricity and water that plagues South Africa in 2024.



Teen loses life trying to save brother from fire

PNS ■ DEORIA

A 14-year-old boy died and his 8-year-old brother suffered burn injuries after four huts in a village here caught fire, police said on Saturday.

Laxman Prasad (14) and his brother Bharat Prasad were sleeping in one of the huts when the fire broke out in the Siswa village. While Laxman managed to get Bharat out of the burning hut, he, himself got trapped and died on the spot, Circle Officer

(CO) Aditya Kumar Gautam said.

He said that the incident occurred on Friday afternoon when four huts caught fire which led to the explosion of gas cylinders.

Bharat was rushed to a hospital and is said to be in stable condition, he said.

The reason behind the fire is yet to be ascertained. The body was sent for post-mortem and further investigation is underway, he added.



A tornado strikes the southern China metropolis of Guangzhou

PNS ■ BEIJING

A tornado sent debris swirling into the air in southern China's Guangzhou city during a severe rain and hail storm on Saturday, Chinese media said. There were no immediate reports on the extent of damage or any injuries. The China Meteorological Administration said the tornado hit about 3 p.m. in Baiyun district in Guangzhou, a sprawling metropolis and manufacturing centre near Hong Kong. Videos posted online showed a darkened sky in the mid-afternoon and the debris swirling

upward. Tornado warnings were issued for other parts of Guangzhou and there were unconfirmed reports that a second tornado appeared to have hit another district in the city later in the afternoon, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Guangzhou during an official visit to China earlier this month. The city, formerly known as Canton, also recently held the Canton Fair, a major export and import exhibition that draws buyers from around the world.

Climate change may cause biodiversity decline: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change could become the main driver of biodiversity decline by the mid-century, new research has found.

Studying changes in land-use patterns and their impacts on biodiversity, an international team of researchers found that biodiversity around the world could have declined by 2-11 per cent.

"By including all world regions in our model, we were able to fill many blind spots and address criticism of other approach-

es working with fragmented and potentially biased data," said Henrique Pereira, research group head at the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv), and the first author of the study published in the journal 'Science'.

Examining how biodiversity and ecosystems might evolve in the future, the researchers found that the combined effects of land-use change and climate change lead to biodiversity loss across all global regions, regardless of emissions scenario.

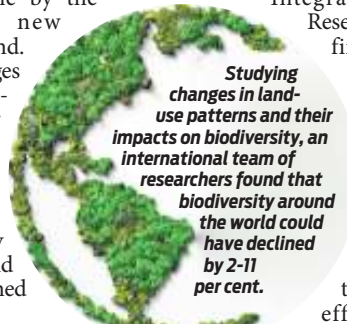
"We found that climate change poses an imminent threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services. While land-use change has histor-

ically been a significant factor, our findings indicate that climate change could overtake it as the primary driver of biodiversity loss by mid-

century," explained study co-author, David Leclère, a researcher at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Austria.

The researchers called for a "truly integrated approach" considering varied sustainability aspects to reduce conflicts between policies and safeguard biodiversity in the coming decades.

"For instance, while bio-energy deployment is still a critical element of the majority of climate stabilisation scenarios, it also poses a threat to species habitats," said IIASA Biodiversity and Natural Resources Program Director Petr Havlik, one of the study co-authors. The findings suggested that conservation and restoration efforts should be prioritised globally as necessary natural climate solutions, the authors said.



What is childhood dementia?

HOW COULD NEW RESEARCH HELP?

PNS ■ ADELAIDE

"Childhood" and "dementia" are two words we wish we didn't have to use together. But sadly, around 1,400 Australian children and young people live with currently untreatable childhood dementia.

Broadly speaking, childhood dementia is caused by any one of more than 100 rare genetic disorders. Although the causes differ from dementia acquired later in life, the progressive nature of the illness is the same.

Half of infants and children diagnosed with childhood dementia will not reach their tenth birthday, and most will die before turning 18.

Yet this devastating condition has lacked awareness, and importantly, the research attention needed to work towards treatments and a cure.

More about the causes Most types of childhood dementia are caused by mutations (or mistakes) in our DNA. These mistakes lead to a range of rare genetic disorders, which in turn cause childhood dementia.

Two-thirds of childhood dementia disorders are caused by "inborn errors of metabolism". This means the metabolic pathways involved in the breakdown of carbohydrates, lipids, fatty acids and proteins in the body fail.

As a result, nerve pathways fail to function, neurons (nerve cells that send messages around the body) die, and progressive cognitive decline occurs.

What happens to children with childhood dementia?

Most children initially appear unaffected. But after a period of apparently normal development, children with childhood dementia progressively lose all previously acquired skills and abilities, such as talking, walking, learning, remembering and reasoning.

Childhood dementia also leads to significant changes in behaviour, such as aggression and hyperactivity. Severe sleep disturbance is common and vision and hearing can also be affected. Many children have seizures.

The age when symptoms start can vary, depending partly on the particular genetic disorder causing the dementia, but the average is around two years old. The symptoms are caused by significant, progressive brain damage.

Are there any treatments available?

Childhood dementia treatments currently under evaluation or approved are for a very limited number of disorders, and are only available in some parts of the world. These include gene replacement, gene-modified cell therapy and protein or enzyme replacement therapy.

Enzyme replacement therapy is available in Australia for one form of childhood dementia. These therapies attempt to "fix" the problems causing the disease, and have shown promising results.

Other experimental therapies include ones that target faulty protein production or reduce inflammation in the brain.

Research attention is lacking

Death rates for Australian children with cancer nearly halved between 1997 and 2017 thanks to research that has enabled the development of multiple treatments. But over recent decades, nothing has changed for children with dementia.

In 2017-2023, research for childhood cancer received over four times more funding per patient compared to funding for childhood dementia. This is despite childhood dementia causing a similar number of deaths each year as childhood cancer.

Myopia is at epidemic levels and the problem begins in childhood

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Myopia, or the need for corrected vision to focus or see objects at a distance, has become a lot more common in recent decades. Some even consider myopia, also known as near-sightedness, an epidemic.

Optometry researchers estimate that about half of the global population will need corrective lenses to offset myopia by 2050 if current rates continue — up from 23% in 2000 and less than 10% in some countries.

The associated health care costs are huge. In the United States alone, spending on corrective lenses, eye tests and

the chicks' eyes and are adjusted to affect how much they see. Just like in humans, if visual input is distorted, a chick's eyes grow too large, resulting in myopia. And it's progressive. Blur leads to eye growth, which causes more blur, which makes the eye grow even larger, and so on.

Two recent studies featuring extensive surveys of children and their parents provide strong support for the idea that an important driver of the uptick in myopia is that people are spending more time focusing on objects immediately in front of our eyes, whether a screen, a book or a drawing pad. The more time we spend focusing on something within arm's length of our faces, dubbed "near work," the greater the odds of

that this unnatural eye growth can be interrupted by sunlight.

A 2022 study, for example, found that myopia rates were more than four times greater for children who didn't spend much time outdoors — say, once or twice a week — compared with those who were outside daily. At the same time, kids who spent more than three hours a day while not at school reading or looking at a screen close-up were four times more likely to have myopia than those who spent an hour or less doing so.

In another paper, from 2012, researchers conducted a meta-analysis of seven studies that compared duration of time spent outdoors with myopia

effects and argued for much more time outdoors and changes in early-age schooling to reduce myopia prevalence.

What's driving the epidemic That still doesn't explain why it's on the rise so rapidly. Globally, a big part of this is due to the rapid development and industrial-

ization of countries in East Asia over the last 50 years. Around that time, young people began spending more time in classrooms reading and focusing on other objects very close to their eyes and less time outdoors.

This is also what researchers observed in the North American Arctic after World War II, when schooling was mandated for Indigenous people.

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having myopia.

So as much as people might blame new technologies like smartphones and too much "screen time" for hurting our eyes, the truth is even activities as valuable as reading a good book can affect your eyesight.

Outside light keeps myopia at bay. Other research has shown

incidence. They also found that more time spent outdoors was associated with lower myopia incidence and progression. The odds of developing myopia dropped by 2% for each hour spent outside per week.

Other researchers have reported similar

More about the causes Most types of childhood dementia are caused by mutations (or mistakes) in our DNA. These mistakes lead to a range of rare genetic disorders, which in turn cause childhood dementia.

