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MONEY 10 HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS DECLINE DUE TO RISING HOME, AUTO, PERSONAL LOANS

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CSK AIM TO CONTINUE ASCENT TO TOP THREE 12 SPORTS

ED stonewall for Kejriwal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has sought 'relief' from the Supreme Court to enable him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, faced opposition from the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is probing the AAP leader's role in a multi-crore excise policy. In a fresh affidavit filed on Thursday in the apex court, the ED opposed interim bail for Kejriwal, stating that the right to campaign for elections was "not fundamental" and that no political leader has ever been granted interim bail for campaigning, even if they are not contesting polls.

The move comes a day before the Supreme Court is set to hear Kejriwal's interim bail plea in the case on Friday. Sources also said the ED is preparing to file a chargesheet in the liquor scam in which Kejriwal has been named as the kingpin.

Interestingly, the ED said such an approach would incentivise every criminal to become a politician and being in campaign mode throughout the year while committing rampant offences and violations of laws in the country.

"Around 123 elections have taken place in the past three years and if interim bail is granted for election campaigning then no politician could be arrested



File Photo: PTI

and kept in judicial custody since elections take place all year round," the ED said. It said there are numerous examples where politicians contested elections in judicial custody and some have even won but were never granted interim bail on this ground.

"It is relevant to note that the right to campaign for an election is neither a fundamental right nor a constitutional right and not even a legal right," the agency said. It said to its knowledge, "no political leader has been

granted interim bail for campaigning even though he is not the contesting candidate. Even a contesting candidate is not granted interim bail if he is in custody for his own campaigning".

"In light of the above, any special concession in favour of the arrestee enlarging him on interim bail for campaigning in general election would, in the humble submission of the respondent, amount to anathema to the rule of law and equality and create a precedent which would permit all

unscrupulous politicians to commit crimes, avoid investigation under the garb of one election or the other be it municipal election, or panchayat election or Assembly election or general election and thereafter upon being arrested, seek interim bail to campaign for one election or the other thereby creating two separate classes in the count viz. ordinary people who are bound by the rule of law as well as the laws of the country and politicians who can seek exemption from the laws in

the hope of securing interim bail to campaign for elections. In this regard, it may be noted that in the past five years, 123 elections have been held in various states in India," it said. The ED said in a federal structure, no set of election is more significant than another and therefore, every politician at every level would argue that if he is not let out on interim bail, he would suffer irreversible consequences.

"Under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act alone presently there are many politicians who are in judicial custody and their cases are examined by competent courts upholding their custody.

"There must be several political leaders in judicial custody throughout the country in non-PMLA offences.

"There is no reason why a special prayer for a special treatment by the petitioner be acceded to".

"Grant of interim bail merely for political campaigning would militate against and will be discriminatory to the rule of equality as work/business/profession or activity of every citizen is equally important to him or her. It would not be possible to hold that work of a small farmer or a small trader is any less important than political campaigning of a political leader who admittedly is not contesting.



File Photo: PTI

Testing times ahead for BJP in Haryana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Just a few days ahead of the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Haryana, the BJP-led Nayab Singh Saini Government has been trying to keep its flock together, while there has been a demand for a floor test by JJP leader Dushyant Chautala, who not very long ago was a partner with the BJP in the Manohar Lal Khattar Government. While Dushyant wrote to Governor Bandaru Dattatreya seeking a floor-test for the present Haryana Government to prove its majority on the floor of the House, the Congress, which had earlier demanded the imposition of President's rule and early Assembly elections in the State, also sought time from the Governor for a meeting with a party delegation. This comes days after three Independent MLAs withdrew support from the

BJP Government, extending support to the Congress. However, Saini maintained that his Government is not in trouble. He told reporters in Karnal that his Government won a confidence vote in March and "if it comes to seeking the trust vote, I will do it again when the time comes".

The BJP currently has 40 MLAs in the Assembly, shy of the majority mark of 45 in the now 88-member House. Technically, the BJP Government has the support of 43 MLAs (including Independents) now, though it claimed on Tuesday that four JJP MLAs too may offer "tactical assistance to the Government if needed", taking its strength to 47.

The JJP had pulled out of the BJP coalition Government in March 2024. Of the JJP's 10 MLAs, at least six have distanced themselves from Chautala.

Russia says US poking nose into India affairs

PTI ■ MOSCOW

The US has not yet provided any reliable evidence of the involvement of Indian citizens in the murder plot of a Khalistani terrorist in that country, Russia has said, as it accused Washington of meddling in India's domestic affairs and the ongoing elections.

In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta with working with an Indian Government employee in the foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Pannun, wanted in India on terror charges, holds dual citizenship of the US and Canada. He has been designated as a terrorist by the Union Home Ministry under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, when asked to respond to a report by The Washington Post claiming that India is trying to adopt the policies as Russia and Saudi Arabia, said, "According to the information we have, Washington has not yet provided any reliable evidence of the involvement of Indian citizens in the preparation of the murder of a certain GS Pannun.

In Jharsuguda Man shoots wife, daughter, kills self



Traumatised over loss in online gambling

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

A man allegedly shot his wife and daughter dead before committing suicide in Lakhampur of Jharsuguda on Thursday after being traumatised over debts incurred from online gambling.

The three bullet-riddled bodies were found in a car, leading to a police investigation.

The cops during probe cracked the mystery surrounding the incident, which initially was suspected to be murders. Police investigation revealed that the horrific incident was a case of murder and suicide linked to loans and online gambling. Jharsuguda SP Parmar Smit

Parshottamdas said the incident was fallout of debt burden resulting from online gaming. The deceased were identified as Sujit Ray, his wife Khusbu and daughter Arpita of Kali Nagar under the Orient police station.

The SP said, "Phone records revealed that Sujit had taken loans from locals and was engaged in online gambling activities. He was under severe stress due to debt burden. The bodies of his wife and daughter were blindfolded when they were recovered. Our investigation found that after losing money, Sujit took this extreme step. After shooting his wife and daughter dead, Sujit shot himself." Northern Range IGP Himanshu Lal warned people against betting and said they should not put their hard-earned money in gambling as it would ultimately destroy their family life.

Naven releases party manifesto

BJD to spend Rs 1L cr on Yuva Budget in 10 yrs

Odisha to be No. 1 State in a decade

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Thursday released its manifesto for the 2024 elections.

Announcing the manifesto in a video release, Chief Minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik said the BJD government has brought transformative changes in the State during its 24-year tenure.

"Today's Odisha is a modern Odisha, but it continues to remain rooted to its glorious culture and traditions," he said.

Despite being ravaged by successive natural disasters, Odisha has come out of its status of a backward and poor State to emerge as a fast-de-



veloping State.

"The manifesto has laid foundation-stone for a golden era of the State. We have prepared the roadmap in the manifesto to make Odisha number one state in the country within next 10 years," he said.

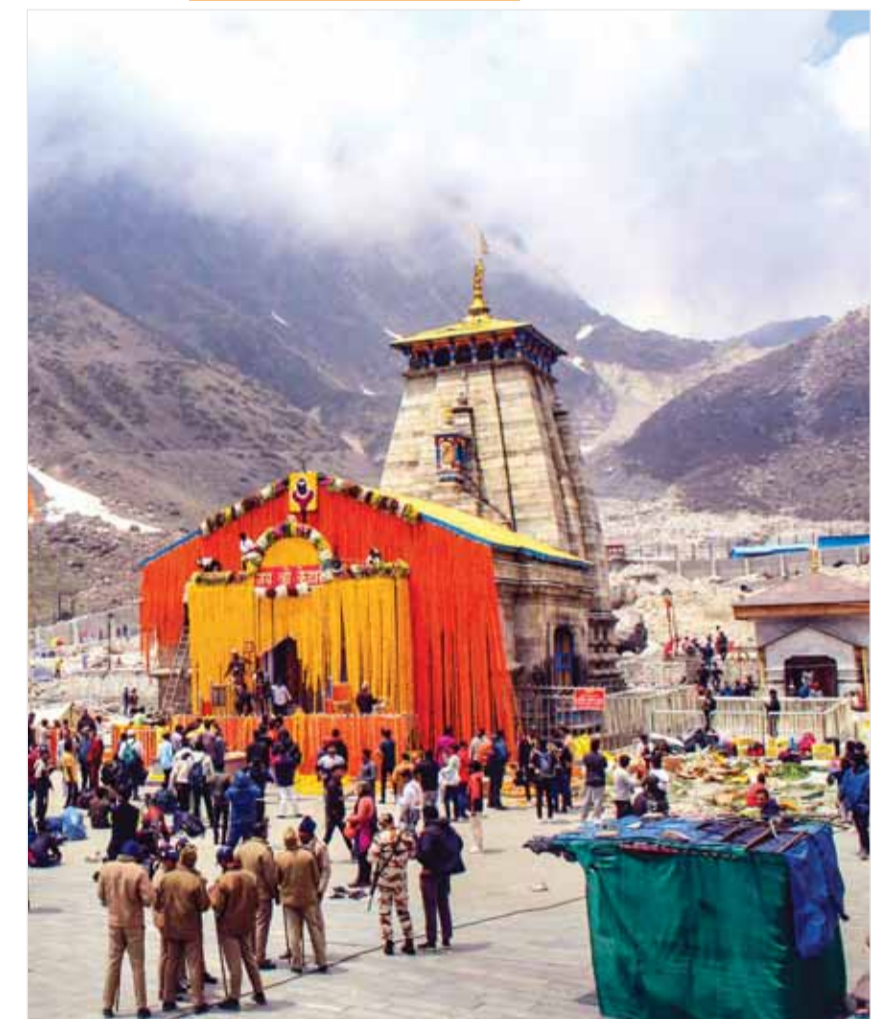
Patnaik said that since the youths would play a pivotal role in development of the State, this manifesto is mostly meant for them and their future. "We will bring a separate budget for the youths, called

"Yuva Budget". It will be first such budget of any State in the country," he added.

The BJD also promised 100 units of free electricity and Rs 25,000 as marriage assistance.

As per the manifesto, the government will spend around Rs 1 lakh crore under the Yuva Budget in next 10 years. Besides, the BJD promised annual Nua O scholarship of Rs 14,000 for girls and Rs 12,000 for boys. Around 2 lakh government jobs will be created.

HOLY DAYS AHEAD



Kedarnath temple being decorated ahead of its opening for the 'Char Dham Yatra', in Rudrapurayag PTI

Deadlock over, Air India Express will take to the skies again

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After two and a half days of stalemate, Air India Express and the crew reached a middle ground on Thursday, putting an end to the suffering of hundreds of flyers.

The Air India Express cabin crew has decided to withdraw strike and join back for duty after the airline assured to look into all the issues raised by the cabin crew.

Besides, the airline has agreed to withdraw the termination letters issued to 25 cabin crew and the management will review the cases as per service regulations, they added. The Tata Group-owned airline has cancelled more than 170 flights since Tuesday night after the cabin crew started

reporting sick to protest against the alleged mismanagement at the airline.

Following the cancellation of several flights and the inconvenience to passengers, the Government had to get involved. At the request of the Regional Labour Commissioner Ashok Perumalla, a meeting was held on Thursday between Air India Express Union and the airline CEO to reach a solution. Apparently, after the meeting, a middle ground has been reached and the strike will end, much to the relief of the travellers.

In the email notice of termination it sent to the affected employees, the airline added that the widespread sick leave "violated the Air



Air India and other planes parked at the airport in Mumbai on Thursday. Air India Express on Thursday cancelled 85 flights or around 23 per cent of the total daily capacity as the disruptions due to the cabin crew shortage continue. Air India will operate services on 20 of its routes to minimise inconvenience to passengers PTI

India Express Limited Employees' Service Rules as are applicable" in addition to breaching the relevant laws.

The emailed statement followed Air India Express CEO Aloke Singh's announcement that the

airline was curtailing flight services until May 13 as a result of the cabin crew crisis. A section of the cabin crew

has alleged mismanagement and lack of equality in the treatment of staff. A conciliation process is happening under the Industrial Disputes Act after a union representing a section of the Air India Express cabin crew had filed a complaint before the labour department last year.

Room sharing, lack of proper support, revised salary structure and alleged differential treatment of experienced crew members of Air India Express are among the issues being flagged by the striking cabin crew.

On Wednesday, the Civil Aviation Ministry sought a report from Air India Express on the cancellation of flights and also asked the airline to resolve the issues

promptly. Discontent has been brewing among a section of staff at Air India Express since the start of the process to merge AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with itself. Regardless of the actions taken by Air India Express, such as the dismissal of employees who went on mass leave without notice, it is ultimately the passengers who bear the brunt.

The situation with Air India Express is even more dire, as many passengers are finding out about flight cancellations only after completing security checks.

Soon after 30 crew members were sacked for staging mass sick leave, the Air India Express on Thursday announced that the airline

has cancelled 85 flights as flight operations were disrupted by shortage of cabin crew members.

"We will be operating 283 flights today. We have mobilised all resources and Air India will support us by operating on 20 of our routes. However, 85 of our flights stand cancelled and we urge our guests booked to fly with us to check if their flight is affected by the disruption before heading to the airport," said the airline in the statement.

In case their flight is cancelled or delayed beyond three hours, the Air India Express said the passengers may opt for a full refund or reschedule to a later date without any fees.

We will build airport in Paradip: Gadkari 'In democracy nobody can split a party'

PNS ■ PURI
Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday announced plans for a new airport in Paradip at a cost of Rs 200 crore and road connectivity improvements for Puri district's Krushnprasad people. He was addressing Vijay Sankalp Samaveshs at Krushnprasad under the Puri Lok Sabha constituency and the Brahmagiri Assembly segment.



Upasana Mohapatra, Patra and Mohapatra are

Striking a chord with the people, Gadkari started his address in Odia and said he visited Puri and sought blessings of Lord Jagannath for the betterment of the country and making India the third largest economy in the world. Referring to the perennial communication problem of Krushnprasad people, he said he would do something for them and they should also do something for him by casting their votes for party candidates, Sambit Patra and

contesting the elections from the Puri Lok Sabha seat and Brahmagiri Assembly seat, respectively. "I am declaring today that we are constructing a road from Tangi to Digha. Due to Chilika lake and the wetland, there is a missing link between Gopalpur and Satapada. Due to this missing link, people are still using boats. Between NH-516 A and NH-316 A, a road will be constructed. An order has been given to prepare its DPR," he said.

Dharmendra replies to Pandian's accusation

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
A day after BJD leader VK Pandian told the media that the BJP is framing a strategy to split the regional party after the elections, BJD Sambalpur Lok Sabha candidate Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday remarked that in a democracy, nobody splits a party. "If you lie to people, they



would break you," he said. Pradhan asked the BJD, "Our Prime Minister candidate is Narendra Modi. Can you tell us your PM candidate? Youths are going outside Odisha as migrant labourers because they are not getting jobs here? Naveen Patnaik's Assembly

constituency Hinjli does not have a cold storage." Under Modi's guarantee, Odisha would become the number one State if the BJP is given a chance. Those who ruled Odisha for 24 years, why aren't they giving a response to the BJP's questions on basic issues, Pradhan asked. Pointing at the privilege of CM, he said a person born with a silver spoon in mouth won't understand the pain of the poor. Modi is from a poor family; he would provide welfare for the underprivileged. In the last ten years, Odisha has received Rs 18 lakh crore from the Centre. He added, "Democracy in the State and nation is too strong. Sambalpur is the major centre of Odisha politics; the seat will determine State politics. Whatever Sambalpur determines, Odisha will repeat and Sambalpur is with Modi." "Those who are contesting in a democracy should not be disappointed. All should fight to win because if all fight, more people will vote and democracy will be stronger. More people should vote for a strong democracy. It is their biggest right," added Pradhan.

Attack on doc in Jaleswar OMSA demands arrest of all accused soon

PNS ■ BALESWAR
The OMSA (Odisha Medical Service Association), besides strongly condemning the attack on one of their colleagues posted at Jaleswar, on Friday demanded immediate arrest of the culprits including the key accused. Dr Dillip Patra and attendants posted at GK Bhattar Hospital were attacked by a mob following the death of a minor who was admitted after consuming poison. The mob allegedly thrashed Patra and others alleging negligence on their part in treating the patient. OMSA joint secretary Dr Sanjib Pradhan said that the 15-year-old patient was admitted in a critical state and

BJP to unlock Puri Ratna Bhandar if elected to power

Also, reopen 4 doors of shrine
SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA ■ PURI
The BJP in its poll manifesto has announced to unlock the Ratna Bhandar (treasure trove) of the Jagannath Temple in Puri after coming to power. The party declared to reopen the rest three doors of the shrine to ensure hassle-free to-and-fro movements of public devotees. Raising the issues of Jagannath Temple as core agendas in its manifesto ahead of the simultaneous Assembly and Parliament elections, the party also declared to investigate the missing keys of the Ratna Bhandar and reestablish mutts and monasteries that had been evicted or razed for the sake of newly built Parikrama Marg around the shrine. BJP State spokesperson



Urmila Mohapatra put forth explicitly the 14-point people-friendly agendas besides achievements of the Modi Government in the last 10 years in the manifesto at a Press meet here. It was presided over by Dr Debendra Tarei, where Puri MLA candidate Jayant Sarangi, district women's wing president Jyoti Mohapatra, youth wing leader Jayant Das, Snehasisi Das and Umakant Nayak were present. Sarangi told that the BJP Government will unlock the Ratna Bhandar for inventory of the gold ornaments and jewelries and also reinvestigate its keys which have gone missing mysteriously from the treasury. "We will unlock the door of the Ratna Bhandar for counting of gold and diamond ornaments of the Lords and investigate the missing keys of it. We will also reopen the rest three doors of the temple to avoid a rush during entry and exit of devotees," said Sarangi. Asked whether he believes that some of the invaluable have gone missing from the treasure trove, Sarangi told after recounting, it will be clear. Besides, the BJP stated

BJP promulgated national day for tribals: Rajnath

Appeals to people to vote for BJP for dev
BADAL TAH ■ RAYAGADA
The BJP government at the Centre promulgated a national day for tribals named as "Janajatiya Gourav Diwas" in memory of great tribal leader Bhagawan Birsa Munda, said Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressing a huge gathering at Barijohla in Rayagada district on Wednesday. On the other hand, the "anti-tribal" BJD government in Odisha took steps to amend a pro-tribal law named Odisha Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (By Scheduled Tribes) Regulation, 1956 (OSATIP), he said. Singh further said former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had once said that if he sent 100 paise from Delhi, only 15 paise reached the people. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi took on this challenge and established the trinity of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile banking, ensuring that 100 out of 100 paise now reach



the people's pocket directly. No one ever imagined that India would have a Prime Minister who would provide free rations to 80 crore people. Today, no one in the country dies from hunger. He urged people to support the BJP Lok Sabha candidates for a decisive victory. "Modi government makes promises in the manifesto and keeps those by strict adherence. In the next five years, every person will have a pucca house. No family will be without access to piped drinking water and every home will have an LPG gas cylinder," he added. Modi has extended Ayushman Bharat benefits to everyone although the extent of its reach to the public in Odisha is uncertain due to the BJD government. If a BJP government is in power in Odisha, everyone eligible for an Ayushman Bharat card would receive it. Regardless of income, caste or religion, Ayushman Bharat benefits will cover medical expenses up to Rs 5 lakh for any family member up to the age of 70, after the BJP government takes office in Odisha in June, said Singh.

Consumer court slaps Rs 60K fine on SpiceJet



For inconvenience to passenger
PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA
The district consumer court in Jharsuguda has directed the SpiceJet to pay a compensation of Rs 60,000 to a passenger for the inconvenience caused due to irregularities in the airline's operations and poor service. The District Consumer Grievances Redressal Forum gave the order while hearing a case filed by former Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Jharsuguda Nirmal Mohapatra alleging flaws in the airline's services. Mohapatra had filed the case after his RTI petition revealed the irregularities. According to sources, Mohapatra had booked tickets in the SpiceJet for a family trip to Assam in November 2021. While returning, they boarded a flight from Bagdogra and arrived in Kolkata at 9.30 pm instead of 6.30 pm as it was diverted to Guwahati without any prior information to pick a passenger who was left behind. He missed his train to Jharsuguda because of the delay and had to hire a taxi. His wife and son also fell ill due to the long journey. The court on Wednesday ordered a Rs 50,000=compensation for the inconvenience caused to the passenger due to faulty coordination and Rs 10,000 for the cost incurred by the applicant in filing the case.

BJD, BJP, Cong field turncoats for K'pada Assembly seat

Despite groundswell of resentment among original workers
RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA
The Kendrapada Assembly constituency is ready to witness an interesting battle among three turncoats. In order to get ticket to contest the ensuing elections, they switched sides as the chances in their parental party were slim. While former MLA of Kendrapada Sipra Mallick and Zilla Parishad president Gitanjali Sethi jumped to Congress and BJP respectively by saying goodbye to the BJD as they were denied ticket, former Minister and veteran Congress leader Ganeswar Behera recently jettisoned his old link with Congress and joined BJD while at the same time, he got the ticket from the BJD too. According to poll observers, it is going to be a straight fight between the BJD and Congress this time. Sipra and Ganeswar are known as old rivals in Kendrapada politics. In 1995, Ganeswar (Congress) had defeated Janata Dal candidate Sipra with a margin vote of 12,148 to become the MLA of Pattamundai, while in 2009, Sipra, who contested on BJD ticket, had defeated Ganeswar from Congress in Kendrapada Assembly seat. Sipra had won with a margin of 15,931 votes. In BJP, some workers are reportedly unhappy after the saffron party gave ticket to the new entrant, Gitanjali Sethi leaving ticket aspirants like Kalpana Mallick, Sunakar Behera, Abhimanyu Gochhayat in the lurch. The surprise move of the top brass in BJP left many party workers at the grassroots level dejected. However, BJP candidate Gitanjali stated that this time the voters are determined to vote for BJP in the ensuing polls. "Earlier, Kendrapada was not connected by rail. The BJP Government at the Centre connected the coastal district with railway lines. Now, both passenger and goods trains are running in the district. I am confident that the BJP will grab the Kendrapada seat," she stated. The BJD roped in Ganeswar given his popularity as a mass leader, hoping that the party can easily win the seat. Several BJD workers and leaders of Kendrapada Assembly constituency though were not happy with the decision, especially those who were the potential aspirants the internal feud in the party was settled later. Now all BJD leaders and supporters are working unitedly to ensure Ganeswar's victory, stated election coordinator of Kendrapada district BJD Rajesh Das. On the contrary, Sipra claimed that the BJD is now a divided house in Kendrapada after it decided to field Ganeswar from the seat. Voters are disappointed with both BJD and BJP. This time, they will vote for the Congress.



Gitanjali Sethi
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Sipra Mallick
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Relevance of RTE for upliftment of disadvantaged kids

Recently, the private schools of Odisha were asked to take appropriate and immediate steps for the admission of students under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota as per RTE norms. According to the notification of the School and Mass Education (SME) department, a total of 17,235 students have been selected in the first round of the lottery system for enrolment to 25 per cent of seats reserved for the EWS categories in private schools. The department has also opened a helpline number for the extension of support to the students seeking enrolment in the reserved seats under the RTE Act. Earlier, the department of SME sought applications from the EWS categories for the admission of students to 41,333 reserved seats under the EWS



SITAKANTA TRIPATHY
quota in 3,331 private Odia and English medium schools for the 2024-25 academic session. A separate portal named 'Paradarshi' has been facilitating this process of application and admission. In the first phase of the selection process, a total number of 30,423 applications were received under RTE through this portal between February 22 and March 20. Out of these applications, 17,235 students were selected through a lottery system. Now it is questionable whether these students will be admitted to different schools as allotted by the department. Though it has been earlier announced that the students will be enrolled to the private schools allotted to them free of cost and any fee charged for their enrolment will invite appropriate legal action, still the reality is different. Alleging irregularities and discrepancies in free admission of students under EWS quota, a parents' association under the banner of 'The Odisha Abhivhabak Mahasangh' had earlier gheraoed the office of the Odisha School Education Programme Authority (OSEPA) and demanded a

probe into the reduced number of seats in some of the private schools for enrolment of the students under the RTE norms. It is pertinent to mention that, private schools must reserve twenty-five per cent of their seats for children belonging to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) from the neighbourhood under section 12 (1)(c) of the RTE Act. Out of these, ten per cent of the seats are reserved for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students, ten per cent for children from BPL families and five per cent for children without a home. Now the questions arise about implications and relevance of the act. As Government schools face closures or mergers due to declining enrolment, it raises questions about the rel-

evance of reserving seats in private schools. If parents opt out of Government schools, it suggests dissatisfaction with their quality of education. Additionally, the preference for English medium schools underscores the need for the Government to explore alternatives to Odia medium schools, potentially by expanding English medium options to meet parental demand. However, it is also crucial to understand that the medium of language is not the only factor which makes private schools more appealing and attractive. There are various other factors such as adequate infrastructure, experienced faculty members, better management and administration, exposure to a plethora of opportunities, beyond academics, etc.

Hence, Odia medium schools or Government schools need to match educational standards by focusing on curriculum enhancement, teacher training, and infrastructure development. This entails updating teaching materials to align with modern educational practices, ensuring teachers are adequately trained in effective teaching methods, and investing in facilities conducive to learning. By prioritizing these areas, Odia medium schools can provide quality education that meets the expectations of parents and students, thereby increasing enrolment and relevance in the education landscape. Further, the provision highlights free education till fourteen years, but those parents who are incapable and unable to pay the school fees after 14 years or after 9th class, how would they pay the fees after that period? If the parents withdraw their children from the respective schools after the 9th class, that may bring mental trauma to their children. Besides, there is a chance of developing an inferiority complex among the EWS students while sitting together in the same class with other students who are paying the fees. There are complaints regarding reimbursement of the funds to the schools by the Government for taking admission for the students under the EWS category. So there are chances of neglecting the EWS students by the schools. Mostly, the students who are taking admissions under RTE are found to be in the OBC list which puts the questions on the application of the act for the SCs and STs. It is also very difficult to justify the homelessness of the parents as most of them are migrants. So, the criteria for homelessness need to be redefined. The house owners of the students are also reluctant to give them any proof of residence. There are also complaints that, instead of parents, the brokers are taking the lead roles in admitting the children to different private schools. Looking at the loopholes of the act, it is high time for the State machinery to make appropriate amendments in the act and at the same time rejuvenate the Government schools. The Corporate Social Responsibility activities of the private schools need to be scrutinized at regular intervals. (Email: tripathysk1947@gmail.com; Mob: 9778764394)

Thunderstorms in State for another 5 days

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Jajpur districts on Friday. The IMD further predicted that some parts of coastal Odisha along with the twin cities of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar would also witness nor'wester-triggered rainfall during the period. These places would experience heavy to very heavy rainfall and gusty wind of 40 to 50 km per hour under the influence of nor'wester. Though some parts of coastal Odisha would not witness gusty wind, they may experience heavy rainfall during the period. The situation is likely to prevail for the next four to five days, said the weather office.

India, Maldives ties based on mutual interests: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Development of India-Maldives ties is based on "mutual interests" and "reciprocal sensitivity", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said here on Thursday during his talks with his Maldivian counterpart Moosa Zameer. These remarks came in the backdrop of strained ties between the two countries after President Mohamed Muizzu insisted on withdrawal of Indian military personnel operating three military platforms in the island nation. Zameer is New Delhi in the first high-level trip from Male after the Maldives' pro-China president Muizzu assumed office six months ago. "As close and proximate neighbours, the development of our ties is obviously based on mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity," Jaishankar said in his opening remarks in his meeting with Zameer. "As far as India is concerned, these are articulated in terms of our Neighbourhood First policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) vision. I hope that our meeting today will enable us to strengthen the convergence



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Maldives Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer at a meeting in New Delhi

of our perspectives in various domains," he said. The ties between the two countries came under severe strain in view of Muizzu insisting on withdrawal of Indian military personnel operating three military platforms in the island nation. India has already withdrawn most of its military personnel.

Muizzu had set May 10 as the deadline for withdrawal of the Indian military troops from his country. Nearly 50 personnel have returned. In all more than 85 Indian personnel were deployed in Maldives. "India has been a key provider of development assistance to the Maldives. Our projects

have benefited the people of your country; contributed to the quality of life. They range from infrastructure projects and social initiatives to medical evacuation and health facilities," Jaishankar said. "We have also extended financial support on favourable terms in the past.

India has been a First Responder on numerous occasions for Maldives," he said. "Our cooperation has also enhanced the security and well-being of your country through shared activities, equipment provisioning, capacity building and training," Jaishankar added.

BJP expresses concern over rise in Muslim population

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday expressed concern over the pace of increase in Muslim population in the country and wondered its impact on the reservation provided to SCs, STs and OBCs, claiming the Congress is "hell bent" on providing quota to the minority community if voted to power.

The ruling party's reaction came after a recent working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) said the share of the Hindu population decreased by 7.82 per cent between 1950 and 2015 in India, while that of Muslims increased by 43.15 per cent, suggesting that there is a conducive environment in the country to foster diversity. The paper titled 'Share of Religious Minorities: A Cross-Country Analysis (1950-2015)' further said the share of Jains in the population of India decreased from 0.45 per cent in 1950 to 0.36 per cent in 2015. The report comes ahead of the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

"It's a very well-known fact, which has been in the public domain for around a decade. If you see the 1951 census, Hindus were having 88 per cent population and Muslims 9.5 per cent. In the 2011 census, Hindus (population) reduced to 79.8 percent from



80 percent while Muslims' percentage went up by more than 14.5," BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said.

"But, the question arises that if by this pace the population is increasing and Congress is hell bent upon giving reservation to the Muslims on the basis of population, they will cut the share of the SCs, STs and the OBCs," he added. Trivedi said the Congress, if voted to power will, then keep on "changing" the share of reservation in future with increase in the Muslim population, "which is more likely because they (Muslims) are having possibility of multiple marriages". Muslims share in the reservation will keep on increasing also because of "conversion and infiltration because they are having a secular cover from them (the Congress)," he added. "So this is a bigger question and a bigger challenge which they (Congress) have to

answer," the BJP spokesperson said. Senior BJP leader and Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the EAC-PM's report raises many questions because one particular community is "increasing its population in a manner where demography of India is being altered, changed".

"This leads to some questions that need to be asked and answered," he said, adding "How much of growth in Muslim community is being caused by illegal immigration and conversion?" he asked.

"What is the impact of this significant increase in the minority community's (Muslims) population on the rights and opportunities (available) for the other minority communities? There are Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians. Is there any crowding out of these minority communities as a consequence of this (rise in Muslim population)?" Chandrasekhar asked.

He alleged that some political parties including the Congress are making "huge attempt to alter the Constitution and bring religion based reservation".

"So, what will be the consequence when you have the Muslim community increasing its population so rapidly, from 9 per cent to 14.5 per cent and there are political forces that want to give them reservation," he said.

Defence Secretary urges firms to support border areas development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Thursday here emphasised on the need to achieve self-reliance in every field to deal with future challenges and urged infrastructure firms to contribute in Government's effort towards development of border areas. He made these assertions while inaugurating a national symposium and industry meet on 'Emerging Technologies in Infrastructure Development' organized by the Defence Research and Development

Organisation (DRDO). The two-day event, with the participation from the Armed Forces, academia, industry and DRDO, aims to foster dialogue, exchange knowledge and explore innovative approaches to address the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies in infrastructure development in line with the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. In his address, the Defence Secretary emphasised on the need to achieve self-reliance in every field to deal with future challenges. He stated that India is a country with a significant

percentage of young population, and self-reliance will ensure gainful employment to them. Underlining the importance of achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence, Aramane asserted that there is no trusted trend in geopolitics, and India cannot depend on other countries for its security and safeguarding national interests. He stressed that self-reliance will help the country take giant strides on the path of becoming a developed nation by 2047. Highlighting the emphasis being laid by the Government on infrastructure development along the borders, the Defence



Secretary exhorted the infrastructure firms to contribute in further strengthening the apparatus. He added that while the Armed Forces personnel are

being provided with latest weapons and equipment, the private sector should contribute in bolstering the infrastructure set-up in the border areas. He referred to the Vibrant Villages Programme which aims to motivate people to stay in their native locations in border areas, and urged the firms to set up a separate section, within their respective organisations, which focuses on development in far-flung areas. Aramane stated that the DRDO is extending support to the private sector in Research and Development, and

together they can come up with new innovations to build faster and better in the times to come. He called upon the industry to walk hand-in-hand with the government, and focus more on the mass production of quality products in a time-bound manner. He also urged the industry to collaborate with the academia to enhance the skills of the workforce, which can help realise a technology into a product. Speaking on the occasion, DRDO chief Samir V Kamat emphasised on the importance of infrastructure in the development of a nation. He

stated that India is witnessing a phenomenal growth in the field of technical infrastructure, which is required to maintain the country's strategic deterrence. The DRDO Chairman added that technology is evolving rapidly, and the necessity of sustainable infrastructure and green infrastructure is now becoming a part of technical domain. The Defence Secretary also inaugurated the industry-partner exhibition, organised on the sidelines of the event, showcasing latest technologies and products developed by the various industry partners.

Effective Defence industry ecosystem taking shape in country, says Army Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pandey said an effective defence-industry ecosystem is taking shape in the country and veterans with their field experience are "ideally suited" for incorporation into indigenous research and manufacturing of technological solutions required by the force. In his address at the Army Welfare Placement Organisation (AWPO) Summit 2024 held at the Manekshaw Centre here on Wednesday, he said the Army's responsibility towards its veterans remains a "sacred commitment". The aim of the summit was to bring

together different stakeholders on a common platform, to narrow down the gap between enterprise requirements, veteran competencies and the pursuits of AWPO. "While the demand for skilled and experienced workforce exists at the industry end, at the same time, a human resource pool of veterans with adequate experience and unique skill sets is also available, after they exit from active service each year. "The endeavour is to synergise the two as well as strengthen the linkages that can facilitate veteran absorption into not only the industry but also PSUs and quasi-government organisations," the Army chief said. He said the veterans with their field



experience and insights into operational conditions, logistics of the systems and weapon platforms "are ideally suited for incorporation into indigenous research, development, innovation and manufacturing of

technological solutions required by the Indian Army". They also bring to the table, leadership qualities, and a very sound understanding of the human element and can contribute towards ergonomics and user interface design, aspects which are critical to produce user-friendly equipment, General Pandey said. He emphasised the invaluable contributions of veterans to the nation's prosperity. The Army chief said services to the nation by the veterans "do not end" when they bid farewell to military life, instead it transitions into "a new chapter" or second innings of commitment to society and nation building.

He underscored that the Army has undertaken the process of holistic skill certification, as per the core competency of each individual, in collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. He also mentioned initiatives such as 'Project KAUSHALVEER' that help serve personnel in acquiring certification for skill sets according to the established industry standards. General Pandey praised the "Veer Nari", who he said also bring with them unparalleled determination and resilience. He urged the entrepreneurs to integrate them too as part of their initiatives on human capital intake.



National Archives acquires private paper collection of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's rich repository of archival records received a significant enhancement on Thursday as the National Archives of India (NAI) acquired freedom fighter Rafi Ahmad Kidwai's private paper collection comprising original correspondences between Kidwai and other eminent leaders such as Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, and PD Tandon. These documents hold historical importance and provide a unique perspective on the deliberations, decisions, and collaborations that shaped India's journey towards independence and its early years as a sovereign nation. NAI Director General (DG) Arun Singhal told The Pioneer that the family of the late leader had approached them a month ago, seeking to preserve the documents that were contained in three big boxes. After examining the documents, they were found to be historically significant, and now they will be scanned and made available on the abhilekh portal for public viewing, free of cost, he said. Singhal further said that various historical documents including correspondence and circulars related to leaders like Gandhi, Subash Chandra Bose and other freedom fighters have been preserved in the

portal and if anyone wishes to download them, they have to pay a nominal amount. Access to these primary sources benefit researchers, historians, and the public alike, deepening their understanding of India's past and its journey towards progress and development. The papers related to Rafi Ahmad Kidwai were handed over to Singhal by late leader's family members led by Faiz Ahmad Kidwai who happens to be Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Tazeen Kidwai, daughter of late Hussain Kamil Kidwai, youngest brother of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Sarah Manaal Kidwai.

Now the NAI has ensured that valuable historical materials are safeguarded for future generations and made accessible for research and study about the personality who has left an indelible mark on India's history. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, born on February 18, 1894, in Masauli, Uttar Pradesh, hailed from a middle-class zamindar family. His political journey began with his involvement in the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement, leading to imprisonment. Known for his vivacity, brilliance, and charm, Kidwai dedicated himself to India's independence and fought against communalism and superstitions.

India, UK review strategic ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and United Kingdom on Thursday here reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral strategic ties during talks with visiting British National Security Advisor (NSA) Tim Barrow and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval. Barrow also held extensive talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. Jaishankar and Barrow discussed various bilateral, regional and global issues. "Good to meet UK NSA Tim Barrow today in Delhi. Discussed a range of regional and global issues of importance. Also reviewed the progress in our bilateral ties," Jaishankar said on X. It is understood that Jaishankar and Barrow delved into the overall situation in West Asia. Barrow is on a two-day visit to India. Talks between Doval and Barrow reportedly focused on Technology and Security Initiative, a major bilateral mechanism aimed at enhancing collaboration in critical and emerging technologies between India



and the UK. The two NSAs also deliberated on bilateral issues of mutual interest and exchanged views on regional and global matters. Barrow arrived in India on a two-day visit to participate in a high-level dialogue led by the NSAs of both countries, which aims to deepen cooperation on various fronts, including security, technology, and regional affairs. This visit is also expected to strengthen and further broaden the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. In 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his then-British counterpart Boris Johnson agreed to the India-UK 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' and India-UK Roadmap 2030 to steer cooperation for the next 30 years.

Nearly 12 per cent of eligible Indian children missed measles vaccine: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 12 per cent of eligible children in India have not received any recommended double-dose vaccination for measles, highlighting a significant gap in measles vaccination coverage among the beneficiaries. This deficiency is particularly pronounced in northeastern States like Nagaland, where the share of zero-dose cases is as high as 26 per cent. In contrast, Tamil Nadu was found to report the lowest at 4.6 per cent. Researchers from the Union Health Ministry and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Varanasi investigated previously overlooked critical aspects of measles vaccination, focusing on zero-doses, partially vaccinated, and those fully immunised. They analysed data of over 43,000 children aged 2-3 years, collected through the National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5). The team found that close to 30 per cent of the eligible children have received only one measles-containing vaccine (MCV1), while about 60 per cent have been fully immunised (MCV2). The findings are published in the journal Vaccine. In 2017, India adopted the National Strategic Plan for Achieving and Sustaining Measles and Rubella Elimination. The researchers acknowledged that disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risk



of measles in vulnerable populations. While immunisation programmes were eventually resumed in a phased manner, measles zero-dose children pose a significant obstacle to achieving goals of eliminating the acute and highly contagious viral disease, the researchers said. Occurring primarily in children, symptoms can include high fever, cough, runny nose and a rash all over the body. Being vaccinated is the best way to avoid getting sick and spreading the disease, according to the World Health Organization. The analysis also revealed huge inter-district variations, according to the researchers. They found that in Uttar Pradesh, while Prayagraj and Banda districts were found to have about 34 per cent and 32 per cent of these cases, respectively, Hapur and Etawah have 2.6 per cent and 2.1 per cent of zero-dose cases. The researchers said Arunachal Pradesh

was another such example, where the West Siang district had the greatest share with almost 50 per cent of eligible children receiving no dose of the vaccination, while the Lower Dibang Valley district had only 2.8 per cent of such cases. Socio-demographic factors were analysed to influence the measles vaccination status of children, with those born later in the family being less likely to have received no dose. Low levels of wealth and mother's education too were found to increase the odds of children not receiving any dose of the vaccination. "Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in measles transmission, with individuals from lower socioeconomic classes experiencing higher attack rates resulting in outbreaks," the authors wrote. The findings underscored the need for tailored strategies, especially within districts displaying close to 10 per cent variability in zero-dose cases, the researchers said. "The identification of a notable percentage (11.5 per cent) of children receiving zero-doses signals a concerning gap in immunisation coverage," the authors wrote and pointed out that, this "highlights the importance of last mile effort and application of big push theory in terms of more frequent rounds of campaigns mode vaccine delivery for the target of 95 per cent vaccine coverage for population-level immunity."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Air turbulence

Air India Express cabin crew's moody 'sick leave' hits operations, leaves fliers high and dry

In the realm of air travel, few situations are as frustrating as flight cancellations. The anticipation of reaching a destination is replaced by uncertainty and inconvenience. Such was the case recently when Air India Express, the low-cost subsidiary of Air India, found itself in a crisis, leading to a wave of flight cancellations. The flag carrier of India has long been grappling with financial woes and operational challenges. Despite various restructuring efforts, the airline has struggled to stay afloat in a fiercely competitive industry. The latest crisis began when over 300 senior cabin crew members of Express flights reported sick at the last minute, resulting in the cancellation of more than 90 flights since Tuesday night, leaving airports in disarray and passengers seething with frustration. Of course, Air India has now lent a helping hand to its subsidiary, deciding to operate 20 flights against 74 Express cancellations on Thursday, and sacking 30 crew members over "sick leave". The root cause of this crisis stems from longstanding grievances articulated by Air India Express Employees Union (AIXEU). They have voiced concerns about unfair treatment, citing instances where internal job postings were filled with external candidates, bypassing qualified internal staff. The owners, on their part, do not recognise AIXEU. The Regional Labour Commissioner in New Delhi has also criticised the management for alleged violations of labour laws, highlighting a lack of responsible decision-making. Adding to the turbulence is Air India's ongoing financial struggles and operational challenges.

Air India Express, despite its parent company's losses, remained profitable. In 2021, it was sold to the Tata Group, which merged it with AirAsia India. It aimed to capture the budget aviation market with a focus on non-trunk routes and ancillary services. It is the only profitable airline in the Tata Group's aviation stable — AirAsia India, Vistara and Air India — incurred a combined loss of Rs 15,530 crores. The fallout from these cancellations has been significant, with passengers expressing their frustration on social media platforms. Long queues, missed connections and inadequate communication have characterised the scenes at airports. In response, Air India Express has issued apologies and promises of improved services, but the damage to passenger trust has been done. The Indian aviation sector has huge potential but the issues of mismanagement are galore. The Govt must proactively ensure that the fliers are not taken for a ride and the airlines also do not incur losses. Besides, the pandemic years were very traumatic for the industry and it is slowly recovering. The Govt must resolve the crisis before it snowballs into a crisis and takes down the whole sector. Looking ahead, the fate of Air India and its subsidiaries remains uncertain. Only time will tell whether Air India Express and its counterparts can rise above the chaos and emerge with flying colours.

Whenever the issue of Ayodhya, the Gyan Vapi temple (Varanasi) or the Krishna Janmabhoomi (Mathura) comes up, my mind travels to Lahore and the Gurudwara Shaheed Gunj at the Naulakha Bazar locality of your splendid city. The ownership of the place was disputed by the local Muslims who claimed that the place had originally been a mosque. It had been converted into a gurudwara by the local Sikhs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When opportune in the 19th century, the people of the city, led by some Muslim Leaguers, went to court over this. They did not win their case for the re-conversion of the gurudwara into a mosque. Legal counsel argued that an appeal could be filed if necessary, right up to the Privy Council. However, the then premier of Punjab Sir Sikanandar Hayat Khan advised against any further action as it might open a Pandora's Box across the subcontinent, which was then undivided. Sikanandar Hayat also advised against any further litigation. Any use of the argument of adverse possession might cause the return of many of the temples that had come into Muslim possession. What was then perhaps overlooked was that a Hindu temple is a residence of the divine and not merely a prayer hall. The pratimas (icons) are the first step in the quest for spirituality. Ultimately, spirituality can be

An open letter to Shehbaz Sharif

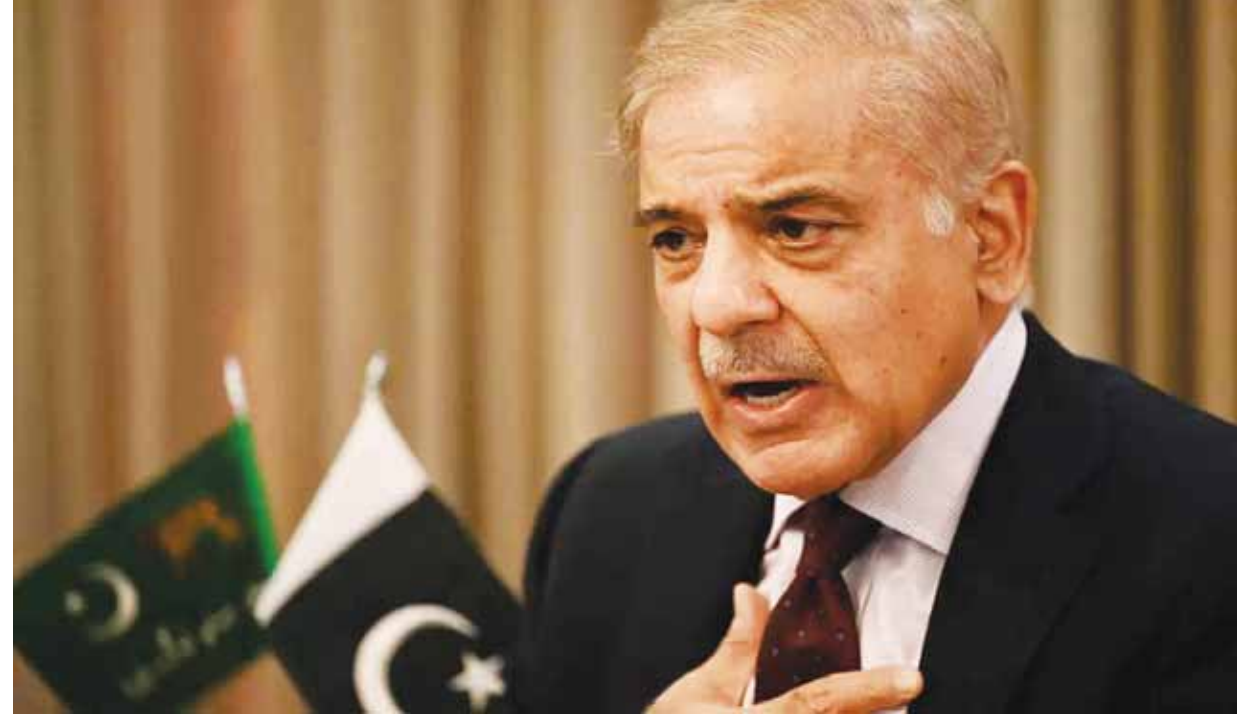
We tolerated terrorist violence for many years but when we could no longer tolerate it, we went to Parliament to do away with Article 370. But we did not resort to violence



PRAFULL GORADIA

Dear Vazir-e-Azam Shehbaz Sharif Sahab, I have taken the privilege of writing to the Prime Minister of our neighbouring country, which, till 76 years ago, was part of us, but separated in acrimonious circumstances. I'm sure that you're aware, as a lot of in India are, that this separation and the aftermath it gave rise to continues to not only cast its shadow over the subcontinent but also torment relations between various communities. This open letter to you is a humble attempt, not to hark back to the events of those decades and apportion blame, but to address the contentiousness of modern-day issues that continue to trail in their wake.

Whenever the issue of Ayodhya, the Gyan Vapi temple (Varanasi) or the Krishna Janmabhoomi (Mathura) comes up, my mind travels to Lahore and the Gurudwara Shaheed Gunj at the Naulakha Bazar locality of your splendid city. The ownership of the place was disputed by the local Muslims who claimed that the place had originally been a mosque. It had been converted into a gurudwara by the local Sikhs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When opportune in the 19th century, the people of the city, led by some Muslim Leaguers, went to court over this. They did not win their case for the re-conversion of the gurudwara into a mosque. Legal counsel argued that an appeal could be filed if necessary, right up to the Privy Council. However, the then premier of Punjab Sir Sikanandar Hayat Khan advised against any further action as it might open a Pandora's Box across the subcontinent, which was then undivided. Sikanandar Hayat also advised against any further litigation. Any use of the argument of adverse possession might cause the return of many of the temples that had come into Muslim possession. What was then perhaps overlooked was that a Hindu temple is a residence of the divine and not merely a prayer hall. The pratimas (icons) are the first step in the quest for spirituality. Ultimately, spirituality can be



active by having a darshan of the avatar of the divine. In Sikhism, they do not have an icon nor the scope of spirituality in the same way as in a Hindu temple. Prophet Moses, the founding prophet of Judaism, the first of the three Semitic religions—also called Religions of the Book—known in Islam as Hazrat Moosa, had expressly forbidden any idol worship by the second of his Ten Commandments; "Thou shalt not make any graven image of thy lord the god". Your faith has rigidly adhered to this particular Commandment. However, it does pain me no end to state that you have carried this adherence way too far. In your country, over 75 temples have been desecrated or pulled down after independence in 1947, a sordid trend that is continuing. From my Urdu teacher who was a scholar, I have learnt that it is your bounden duty as a momin (believer) to desecrate butts (idols) installed by kafirs (infidels). But for the sake of friendly relations between us two neighbours, your people should desist from such desecrations. I am saying this after

POLITICAL LEADERS OF YOUR GENERATION MIGHT STILL FIND COMFORT IN THE NOTION THAT INDIANS ARE A PEACEFUL AND DORMANT LOT AND THEREFORE WON'T REACT MUCH. THAT MIGHT INDEED HAVE BEEN THE CASE A COUPLE OF DECADES AGO, BUT IT IS NO LONGER SO

accepting the fact that Islam detests parasti (idol worship) and insists on majahab parasti (adherence to the faith) alone. But we live in a world where adherents of other religions too have equal rights to profess and practice their faith, without hurting others. I appeal to you to care for our sentiments and not target the temples and idols that still survive. Political leaders of your generation might still find comfort in the notion that Indians are a peaceful, and also dormant, lot and therefore won't react much. That might indeed have been the case till a couple of decades ago but is no longer so. India and Indians are changing. Real change in our civilizational journey was heralded in December 1992, of which I was fortunate to be a humble part. In India, we have begun a movement to restore the temples that were casualties of the medieval age. I shall shortly be writing to Madam Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of our eastern neighbouring country. Dozens of temples continue to be desecrated in her country every year. You would agree that good neigh-

bours do not hurt each other. Kindly, remember that there are thousands upon thousands of mosques built upon the ruins of ancient temples. So far, we have preferred to approach the courts of law and minimize unilateral action. I appeal to you to also eschew violence. In Kashmir too, over 130 temples were attacked and desecrated even as India continued to hold control over the state's territory. I am aware that Pakistan took great umbrage when we abrogated Article 370, but it is my wonder that we had to do so? We tolerated terrorist violence for many years, but when we could tolerate it no longer, we went to Parliament to do away with Article 370. But you would certainly appreciate that we did not resort to violence even on this issue. Our Muslim compatriots are cooperating to a moderate degree, even in the state of Kashmir. This is a trend which we hope continues. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Political manoeuvring



Propos the news article, "Modi, Lalu in a tug of war on Muslim quota," published on May 8, this is my response. The recent political discourse surrounding reservations in India has taken a contentious turn, with various parties embroiled in a heated debate over extending reservation benefits to Muslims. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vehemently opposed such a

move, labelling it as a ploy to undermine existing quotas for SC, ST, and OBC communities. The BJP accuses its rivals of attempting to appease a specific vote bank by advocating for Muslim reservations while disregarding the principles of social and educational backwardness outlined in the Constitution and the Mandal Commission report. Conversely, opposition figures argue that denying reservations to Muslims would be unjust and tantamount to disenfranchisement. Amidst these exchanges, accusations of conspiracy and attempts to manipulate voter sentiments loom large. The charged rhetoric underscores the high stakes of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, where competing visions of governance, identity, and social justice are at play. As citizens, it's imperative to critically engage with these debates and hold our leaders accountable for their promises and policies.

Kiara Sharma | Mumbai

a mere whisper against the cacophony of electoral fervor. Expenditure limits crumble under the weight of unchecked spending, leaving us disillusioned with the integrity of the process. The impact of elections extends beyond just voting, as they can turn schools into battlegrounds, with political theatre taking centre stage and the future suffering while the eloquence of our founding luminaries seems lost amidst the mudslinging and vitriol of contemporary discourse. Yet, amidst the chaos, there is a glimmer of hope embodied by figures like APJ Abdul Kalam, whose legacy reminds us of the transformative power of leadership rooted in humility and service.

Arya Kapoor | Kolkata

BEGGING IS AN EPIDEMIC

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Benevolent hearts: Dynamics of begging and household donations," published on May 8, this is my response. Begging has been ingrained in the roots of Indian society for ages. This sickening culture has become a fashion, a compulsion, a profes-

sion and even a kind of recreation in our country. Beggars in India easily outnumber their ilk in other big countries. To the Westerners, India is a land of mendicants. Beggars are found everywhere—on roads, crossings, footpaths, etc. But their favourite hangouts are bathing ghats, temples, religious fairs, railway stations, trains and bus stands. It is a real nuisance to be confronted by street beggars in all places. Like the Almighty, they seem to be omnipresent. You are waiting for a bus or walking down a road with your friend, and beggars suddenly appear from nowhere and start an endless volley of supplications until you give them a few coins out of sheer disgust and helplessness. The monstrous practice of begging cannot be eradicated from our society because millions are living 'below the poverty line', yearning for a morsel of food. Unfortunately very little has been done by our past and present governments to obliterate the social illness of begging.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

PICTALK



Students perform during the celebration of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary, in Nadia

Enigma of copyright in the digital world

Policy makers face the formidable challenge of revising copyright laws effectively to tackle the complexities presented by AI

People often say that in this digital world, nothing remains secret. Even personal details can be accessed through the Internet. The quantum of information on the Internet is so vast that, despite the security measures, it is not cent per cent foolproof. In such a scenario, one must critically examine copyright's relevance in the digital world. Copyright rules and laws traditionally protect every creation or innovation, so the original creator retains credit for their work and is aptly rewarded through monetary benefits. When an author creates a book, they automatically own the copyright. This gives them the exclusive right to reproduce, distribute, perform, and display the book and create derivative works based on it. In most countries, copyright protection for a book typically lasts for the author's lifetime plus 50-70 years. During this time, others generally cannot reproduce or distribute the book without the author's permission unless their use falls under a specific exception, such as fair use or fair dealing. Within the realm of music,



this signifies that the individual responsible for creating a song, the writer of the lyrics, the composer, or the performer, possesses the sole entitlement to utilise, disseminate, and capitalise on that song. In India, organisations such as the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) and Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) administer the rights of copyright owners and collect royalties on their behalf for the public performance and broadcast of songs. Copyright also extends to research works, protecting and monetising one's creations through patents. Unfortunately, journal publishers own the copyright for research publications. The publishers amass massive amounts through subscriptions and advertisements without providing any monetary benefit to the authors. Most of the reputed journals

do peer reviews free of cost, take processing charges from authors, and get subscription fees and advertisements as revenue. What does the poor researcher get? A mental satisfaction of getting published in a high-impact journal? In a way, it's not fair. A few magazines, of course, practice giving honorariums to the authors. Despite having stringent copyright rules and regulations, its efficacy is questionable in the rapidly evolving digital age landscape. The widespread availability of digital content and the simplicity of sharing information on the Internet have presented unprecedented difficulties and intricacies for existing copyright rules. Today, one can easily copy content from online resources without crediting the original creator. Content available on social media sites, including photographs, is widely reproduced. Identifying the original content creator, be it literary or artistic works, is often difficult. Even stringent protective measures like user authentication mechanisms such as passwords, multi-factor authentication (MFA),

and role-based access controls (RBAC) to restrict access to authorised individuals or groups and watermarking techniques often fail to prevent the infringement of copyrights. The advent of AI in digital platforms has complicated the situation. As AI systems become more sophisticated, their ability to create, replicate, and modify content raises intricate legal questions regarding ownership and authorship. Though AI can do any role, it lacks the human touch in its creation that connects human minds. While individuals are accountable for creating and instructing these algorithms, the AI system autonomously produces the outcome, erasing the distinction between human and machine authorship. The current necessity lies in incorporating ethical, cultural, and economic considerations while crafting a new policy that effectively balances the rights of creators and AI developers. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

EVOLUTION OF MONETARY POLICY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Evolution of Monetary Policymaking in India," published on May 8, this is my response. The journey of India's monetary policy from its inception to the present day is a saga of adaptation and evolution. From the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India to the modern era of inflation targeting, each phase has been marked by its unique challenges and responses. The nationalisation of banks in 1969 marked a pivotal moment, transitioning monetary policy towards a more centralised, planned approach. However, external shocks like the oil crises of the 1970s tested the resilience of this system, necessitating revisions and reforms. The introduction of the Multiple Indicator Approach in 1998 reflected a shift towards a more holistic understanding of economic dynamics. Yet, the global financial crisis of 2008 exposed vulnerabilities, prompting a recalibration towards inflation targeting. While inflation targeting has its merits, recent disruptions such as demonetization and the pandemic have highlighted its limitations in addressing supply-side pressures. As the landscape of inflation evolves, a nuanced and comprehensive policy framework is imperative, one that combines the principles of inflation targeting with proactive measures to mitigate supply-side disruptions. In essence, the history of India's monetary policy underscores the need for continual adaptation in the face of evolving economic realities. Vihann Reddy | Bengaluru

REFLECTIONS ON ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Elected leaders need to rethink," published on May 8, this is my response. Election times unveil a complex tapestry of our democracy, woven with threads of hope, disappointment, and societal reflection. As citizens, we witness the ritual dance of power, where promises collide with reality, and ideals meet the harsh edges of pragmatism. The model code of conduct, ostensibly a guardian of fair play, often feels like



FIRST COLUMN

EU-CHINA RELATIONS AT A CROSSROADS

Xi embarks on a strategic journey across Europe, a move laden with symbolism



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Geo-political adjustments are getting done, bilaterally and plurilateral, even as the world's largest democracies are busy calming their domestic constituencies, where a key rallying agenda is China. The two largest democracies, India and the US, both of whom have their own set of issues with China, are in the middle of some of the most competitive election processes, ever seen across the globe. Meanwhile, the EU, or at least many of its member countries, not to mention US allies such as Australia are carefully recalibrating the entangled web of engagement with China.

It is by no coincidence that Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, was on a strategic three-nation tour of Europe, earlier this week. This tri-nation tour, during which the Chinese premier, also met the European Union president Ursula Von der Leyen, comes after a gap of almost 5 years and is also a time when many European nations have been blaming China for pushing highly subsidised electric vehicles into their markets, making several European auto factories redundant. The Europeans also wanted to focus on China playing a larger role in stabilising its "friends without limits" Russia, in the war against Ukraine, pushing up fuel-aided inflation across the region. The Europeans in the plain speak, they are known for, outlined clearly in the president's press statement, "the first topic where we exchanged views on was the geopolitical situation. We especially discussed Ukraine and the conflicts in the Middle East. We agree that Europe and China have a shared interest in peace and security. We count on China to use all its influence on Russia to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. President Xi has played an important role in de-escalating Russia's irresponsible nuclear threats, and I



am confident that President Xi will continue to do so against the backdrop of the ongoing nuclear threats by Russia. We have also discussed China's commitment not to provide any lethal equipment to Russia. More effort is needed to curtail the delivery of dual-use goods to Russia that find their way to the battlefield. And given the existential nature of the threats stemming from this war for both Ukraine and Europe, this does affect the EU-China relations. "The message from the EU to China was, don't help Russia in its unjust war on European soil, or else the bilateral relation would be in trouble. No surprises, Ukraine and the Middle East didn't feature, till the bottom three paragraphs of the press statement issued by the Chinese team, post the trilateral meeting.

Also no surprises with the language which read "On the Ukraine crisis, President Xi pointed out that China, France and the EU all wish to see an early ceasefire and return of peace in Europe, and support political settlement of the crisis. China has been working vigorously to facilitate talks for peace. China's objective and just position and its constructive role have been widely recognized by the international community. China is ready to stay in communication with relevant parties." The other significant element of these conversations was traded, as all parties involved are feeling the constraints of escalating fuel costs, the volatile geo-political environment and, the post-Covid, supply chain mismatch. The EU provided sharp pointers on Chinese subsidised products, free and fair access to each other's markets and supply chain resiliency in their conversations. A defensive China maintained that the two sides have extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation in green and digital transition. It is necessary that they properly address economic and trade frictions through dialogue and consultation, and accommodate each other's legitimate concerns." China has started making, the right moves to woo back some of its largest market partners, at a time when India and the US, the other key stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific theatre, are busy with their elections. India will get over elections in about a month, and an agile nimble China policy outlook awaits.

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

Economic progress in India: A reality check

Despite notable achievements, economic progress falters due to the neglect of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Public Sector Undertakings and agricultural reforms



ATUL SEHGAL



India has come a long way since 2014 in the matter of various indices and parameters of economic development. Consider this. India has increased her per capita income through this decade from USD 1560 to USD 2500, a 60 per cent increase. It has purportedly lifted 400 million persons out of poverty during the decade. Its foreign exchange kitty has increased from USD 322 billion to USD 640 billion during the same period. These are impressive figures. Large figures are always impressive, but they need to be checked, compared and corroborated to be sanctified. Consider this now. The per capita income of India increased from USD 600 to USD 1560 for the period from 2004 to 2014 which is a bigger increase of 160 percent. Its foreign exchange reserves increased from USD 107 billion to USD 322 billion between 2004 and 2014. Whereas the surge from 2004 to 2014 was 200 per cent, it was only 100 per cent in the next decade.

The above comparative figures talk aloud about India's poor economic development in the last decade. This is not an overall performance report on the current NDA government. This government has many unprecedented achievements to its credit. But on the economic front, it doesn't seem to have delivered. Why has the NDA not been able to deliver on the economic front? There are several reasons.

Neglect of MSMEs: The micro, small and medium enterprises sector in the country did not receive the attention due to it. This sector is the main source of employment generation. Imports from China continued to swell and many manufacturers closed down their factories to become traders and distributors. Poor implementation of the Make in India programme: The Make in India was a well-conceived ambitious programme



THE GOVERNMENT DID WELL TO BLUEPRINT REFORMS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR—THOSE RELATED TO MSP AND PROCUREMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE. BUT THE GOVERNMENT FAILED TO IMPLEMENT IT BY CAPITULATING IN FRONT OF FAKE PROTESTERS MASQUERADING AS FARMERS

to boost indigenous manufacturing. The scheme had its points of deficiency but regrettably, the major driving points of the grandiose scheme remained largely on paper and were never implemented properly. The result—share of manufacturing in the economy continues to stagnate at 14 percent.

Absence of bureaucratic reforms: Our obsolete, corruption-ridden colonial bureaucratic system had never delivered earlier and cried for reforms. But the reforms did not come. The result was a failure of key developmental programmes like the 100 Smart Cities Programme. The government did a remarkable job of establishing GST and promulgating the IBC. This enabled a clean-up of banks and a sharp decline in their NPAs. However, the failure of the government to increase the ease of doing business by cutting down on bureaucratic red tape is a big reason behind the continuing lack of a suitable ecosphere for business and big investment.

Failure to implement Agricultural Reforms: The government did well to blueprint reforms in the agricultural sector—those related to MSP and procurement of agricultural produce. But the government failed to implement the same by capitulating in front of fake protesters masquerading as farmers.

Neglect of PSUs: The government paid very little attention to the state and central PSUs which account for 15 per cent of the total economic activities in the country. It kept on harping on the absence of the need for the government to be in business. This

was an impractical approach to handling the Indian economy and failed to tap the big PSUs in which so much of public money had been invested.

Failure to bring about judicial reforms: Justice in this country continues to be delayed, denied and derailed. Despite big talks to the contrary, the government did nothing in the direction of judicial reforms. This was and remains a big dampener to FDI and even domestic investment in new business.

Notwithstanding the above, we must bear in mind that most of the previous governments had left deep pits in our economy that needed to be filled to prepare the ground for the rapid holistic development of the country. The UPA government, between 2004 and 2014 did produce better numbers for FE reserves and economic growth rate but the money generating that investment and growth was preponderantly from the huge proportion of parallel-black money economy out of the overall economy. Money was meagrely flowing for the critical sectors of defence and infrastructure and even for some important socialistic schemes. Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0 changed this by bringing economic discipline and curbing corruption and economic malfeasance. It brought GST and IBC and did the clean-up of Banks by bringing down drastically the NPAs. It severely dented the black money economy.

These were the pits filled by the Modi government that have prepared fertile soil for the fast-track economic progress of the country now. Given the above, it is imper-

ative and is also expected that the Modi government, if returned to power, will take the undermentioned steps to boost real progress on the economic front. Economic progress is the foundation of the overall progress of a country. Progress on other fronts like defence, foreign affairs, etc. has been significant but sustainable multifaceted development can only be achieved on the foundation of a strong and healthy economic bottom line.

The country needs drastic institutional and bureaucratic reforms. It needs urgent implementation of the farming sector reforms which were shelved after so much drum beating. The education sector calls for a thorough overhaul to replace the colonial Macaulay established system with an indigenous system in tune with the nation's ethos and tradition.

Sloganeering and political gamesmanship need to be replaced by serious, earnest and committed steps for boosting investment, trade, manufacturing and exports. India has a huge potential for becoming an economic powerhouse in quick time but we need to go about building our economy with due seriousness and dedication, rising above narrow interests of caste, class, political affiliations and last but not least, political expediency. It is very much hoped that Modi 3.0, with a two-thirds majority, will usher in the much-needed administrative, bureaucratic and judicial reforms for the speedy economic progress of the country.

(The author is a management consultant; views are personal)

India and Armenia strengthen defence ties amidst regional instability

As the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis looms, the growing Indo-Armenia partnership emerges as a vital defence against destabilising forces

In recent years, the strategic partnership between India and Armenia has undergone a remarkable transformation—fired by their shared commitment to fortify defence capabilities and confront regional security challenges head-on. Against the backdrop of Armenia's enduring struggle with Azerbaijan and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan's advantages, the precipitating connection between Armenia and India stands for recognition. Armenia's proximity to India and both agreeing to diversify their strategic alignment, deserves special attention on the global stage.

Military Cooperation: Armenia's imperative to diversify its security alliances and bolster its military capabilities,



PADMALOCHAN DASH

particularly amidst the enduring conflict with Azerbaijan, is evident through heightened defense spending and collaborations with nations such as India and France. India's involvement with Armenia's military not only strengthens its defensive capabilities but also serves to counterbalance external-internal influences like Turkey and Pakistan in the South Asian region. The expanding Indo-Armenian

partnership encompasses various facets, including the exchange of weaponry, joint military exercises, and strategic consultations, all aimed at enhancing defense readiness and security in their respective regions.

Advanced Weaponry and Joint Exercises: The acquisition of state-of-the-art weaponry highlights the growing defense cooperation between India and Armenia. Reports indicate ongoing provision of military hardware from India to Armenia, including multiple-launch rocket systems, anti-tank missiles, and radar systems. Additionally, joint military exercises and training programs are underway to enhance preparedness and interoperability between their

armed forces. These collaborative efforts facilitate the exchange of expertise and tactics, fostering effective coordination for potential future operations, from joint exercises to intelligence sharing, both nations are committed to showcasing their military capabilities and strengthening their strategic partnership.

Geopolitical Determinations: Armenia's pivotal role in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) offers India diversified trade routes and enhanced access to Eurasian markets, bolstering strategic interests in economic resilience and geopolitical balancing. Conversely, India's military support for Armenia underscores its commitment to preserving regional peace and countering aggressive

manoeuvres by the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis. Through the realisation of mutual interests, India and Armenia can reshape security dynamics in the South Caucasus region by challenging the dominance of larger geopolitical actors and their support for rogue powers.

Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan Axis: The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis poses a substantial threat to regional stability, with Turkey's unwavering support for Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict then raising concerns about potential escalations. The longstanding military partnership between Turkey and Pakistan, characterised by defence production, joint training exercises, and high-level military dialogues, under-

scores their concerted efforts to advance mutual geopolitical goals and exert influence in the regions. This axis represents a significant challenge to the security and stability of the South Caucasus and South Asian regions, as that axis seeks to consolidate its power and undermine the influence of other regional stakeholders. Responses and Ongoing Efforts: In response to the burgeoning influence of the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis, India's steadfast support for Armenia signifies a resolute stance against their aggressive manoeuvres in the region. Aimed at preserving a delicate balance of power, India and Armenia are all set to intensify their collaboration to address these threats.

While Turkey's stance on

Kashmir validates the burgeoning Indo-Armenia defence cooperation, the nexus between Turkey's involvement in the Kashmir issue and Pakistan's alignment with Azerbaijan's agenda cannot be seen as a mere happenstance, rather a meticulously orchestrated strategy with far-reaching intention. In this backdrop, the urgent need for a meticulously planned multilateral defence partnership underscored. This becomes essential to counter the unholy Turkey-Pakistan-Azerbaijan axis thereby ensuring stability in both the Caucasus and South Asian regions.

The Promising Prospects: The emerging strategic cooperation between India and Armenia holds immense promise for enhancing region-

al security and advancing shared interests. Both nations are poised to deepen their partnership and address prevailing challenges through concerted efforts in military collaboration and strategic alignments. India's steadfast support for Armenia underscores its dedication to maintaining peace and stability in the Caucasus region. With far-reaching implications for global geopolitical outcomes, the Indo-Armenia partnership has the potential to redefine the regional balance of power and contribute significantly to the stability and prosperity of both the Caucasus and South Asian regions.

(The writer is working with an Independent Think Tank, views are personal)

BHUBANESWAR | FRIDAY | MAY 10, 2024

Putin accuses West of fueling global conflicts

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia on Thursday wrapped itself in patriotic pageantry for Victory Day, as President Vladimir Putin celebrated the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II by hailing his forces fighting in Ukraine and blasting the West for fueling conflicts around the world.



Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces Oleg Salyukov, left, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, centre, and Russian President Vladimir Putin leave Red Square, walk, after the Victory Day military parade in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, May 9, 2024, marking the 79th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Even though few veterans of what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War are still alive 79 years after Berlin fell to the Red Army, the victory remains the most important and widely revered symbol of Russia's prowess and a key element of national identity. Putin has turned Victory Day — the country's most important secular holiday — into a pillar of his nearly quarter-century in power and a justification of his military action in Ukraine. Two days after beginning his fifth term in office, he led the festivities across Russia that recall the nation's wartime sacrifice.

“Victory Day unites all generations,” Putin said in a speech in Red Square that came on the coldest May 9 in decades amid some snow flurries. “We are going forward relying on our centuries-old traditions and feel confident that together we will ensure a free and secure future of Russia.”

“Every family is honoring its heroes, looking at pictures with dear faces and remembering their relatives and how they fought,” he said. Putin, 71, talks frequently about his family history, sharing memories of his father, who fought on the front during the Nazi siege of the city and was badly wounded.

Taliban sound warning to journalists, experts

AP ■ KABUL

The Taliban on Thursday warned journalists and experts against working with Afghanistan International TV. It's the first time they have told people not to cooperate with a specific outlet.

day (Wednesday), it was decided that participating in discussions and facilitating the broadcast of this media outlet in public places is prohibited,” added Ghofran. He didn't give further details, including what would happen to those who cooperated with the station.

without Borders ranked the country 178 out of 180. It ranked 152 last year. RSF said that three radio reporters were arrested in April for broadcasting music and receiving calls from female listeners during shows.

Japanese aircraft makes emergency landing after glitch

Tokyo (AP): A Japanese defence aircraft carrying eight people made an emergency landing at a commercial airport in central Japan on Thursday after a cockpit window inadvertently slid open during its training flight, officials said. No damage or injuries were reported.

Spanish court shelve tax probe against Shakira

Madrid (AP): A Spanish investigative magistrate on Thursday provisionally shelved the latest probe into an alleged case of tax fraud by pop star Shakira following recommendations by prosecutors. The Colombian singer had been under investigation for the alleged evasion of 6.7 million Euros (USD 7.2 million) in taxes on her 2018 income via an offshore company. She denied wrongdoing.

IS group claims bombing in Afghanistan

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a bombing in Afghanistan's northeast that killed police officers who were part of an anti-poppy crop campaign. A motorcycle was booby-trapped and exploded, targeting a Taliban patrol in Faizabad town in Badakhshan province, killing and wounding 12 members of the patrol as well as destroying a four-wheel drive vehicle, the group said in a statement late Wednesday.



out of the country's drug cultivation industry and imposed a formal ban in April 2022, dealing a heavy blow to hundreds of thousands of farmers and day laborers who relied on proceeds from the crop to survive. Opium cultivation crashed by 95% after the ban, a report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said last November. Protests are rare in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, but there was a backlash in Badakhshan last week in response to the poppy eradication campaign. It prompted a high-ranking delegation led by the chief of military staff Fasihudin Fitrat to visit the region and negotiate with protesters. Protests erupted last Friday after a man was shot and killed by the Taliban for resisting poppy eradication attempts in Darayum district. Another was killed on Saturday during a protest in Argo district.

Pak leadership vows not to allow May 9 'executors' to get away

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Pakistan's top civil and military leadership Thursday strongly condemned the unprecedented violence by the supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on May 9 last year and vowed not to allow its “executors” to get away with their acts which were aimed at establishing an “individual's dictatorship”.

Termed May 9 (Black Day) as one of the “darkest days in our national history”, the Inter-Services Public Relations - the media wing of the army - said that the politically motivated and brainwashed miscreants in an act of rebellion deliberately resorted to violence against state institutions and vandalised sacred symbols of the state and the sites belonging to national heritage.

Information Minister Atta Tarar said there was evidence about who was involved in the May 9 acts, emphasising that these need to be brought to justice. The violence was also condemned by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz who emphasized “bringing the plotters to justice was necessary”.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said that the accountability of the perpetrators and conspirators of the May 9 violence would be taken to its logical conclusion because the characters behind the violence were known to everybody. Information Minister Atta Tarar said there was evidence about who was involved in the May 9 acts, emphasising that these need to be brought to justice.

everyone”. Meanwhile, Imran Khan refused to apologise for the May 9 riots, a day after the military ruled out dialogue with his party unless they tendered a public apology over the unprecedented violence. Khan, who spoke to the media after the court proceedings in the 190 million pounds Al Qadir corruption case at Adiala jail on Wednesday, said that he was ready to face an inquiry into the sit-in that his Pakistan Tehreek-Insaf party staged in 2014.

A heavy contingent of police was deployed outside the residence of Imran Khan in Lahore and his party offices across Punjab province to prevent any protest by the party on the first anniversary of the May 9 violence. PTI Secretary-General Omar Ayub Khan said the government launched a crackdown against his party workers to stop them from taking to the streets but they would hold demonstrations. “Regardless of the crackdown, peaceful rallies and protests will be held all across Pakistan in the morning (of May 9),” he said.

Prez pins Sri Lanka's economic stability on IMF programme

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday told lawmakers that there was no “alternative path” to economic recovery for the island nation other than the IMF-prescribed reform plans. Sri Lanka has been facing the worst economic crisis, leading to a sharp rise in the prices of essential commodities, including fuel, since its independence from the British in 1948.

Parliament. The president said the budget deficit had surged to over 10-12 per cent, resulting in an increase of interest rate to 30 per cent. He added that there were insufficient funds to import food and essential goods even for a week and the “majority of the population found themselves on the streets with some enduring lengthy queues for necessities”.

Yoon rejects S Korean opp calls for probe against wife, top officials

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's president on Thursday dismissed calls for independent investigations into allegations involving his wife and top officials, drawing quick, strong rebukes from his political rivals.

alleged involvement in a stock price manipulation scheme and the release of spy camera footage showing her receiving a luxury bag from a Korean American pastor. In a news conference marking his two years in office, Yoon said he apologizes for what he calls “my wife's unwise behavior” in accepting the Christian Dior bag but refused to elaborate because the scandal is under investigation by prosecutors. Yoon described the demand for a new, special investigation on Kim's shares price allegation as a political offensive, as Kim wasn't charged or convicted from investigations that began when the Democratic Party was in power. Yoon already in January

had vetoed a bill calling for the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate his wife's stock price allegation. During Thursday's conference, Yoon also made it clear that he opposes another Democratic Party-led push for a special investigation into suspicions surrounding the death of a marine who drowned during a search for flood victims in 2023. Yoon called the marine's death heartbreaking, but stressed that police and an anti-corruption investigation agency have already been examining the case. Yoon said he would approve a new independent investigation if police and the anti-corruption investigation agency fail to address public suspicions over the case.

House rejects Greene's effort to remove Speaker Johnson

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Hardline Rep Marjorie Taylor Greene tried and failed in sudden action Wednesday to oust Speaker Mike Johnson, her long-shot effort swiftly and resoundingly rejected by Democrats and Republicans tired of the political chaos. One of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in Congress, Greene stood on the House floor and read a long list of “transgressions” she said Johnson had committed as speaker. Colleagues booed in protest. Greene of Georgia criticized Johnson's leadership as “pathetic, weak and unacceptable”.

to vacate the speaker from his office, the Republican Majority Leader Steve Scalise countered by calling first for a vote to table it. An overwhelming majority, 359-43, kept Johnson in his job, for now. It's the second time in a matter of months that Republicans have tried to oust their own speaker, an unheard of level of party turmoil with a move rarely seen in U.S. history. As Greene pressed ahead despite pushback from Republicans at the highest levels, GOP lawmakers filtered towards Johnson, giving him pats on the back and grasping his shoulder to assure him of their support. “We need steady hands at the wheel,” Johnson said after-

ward. “The country desperately needs a functioning Congress.” The Georgia Republican had vowed she would force a vote on the motion to vacate the Republican speaker if he dared to advance a foreign aid package with funds for Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly approved late last month and signed into law. But in recent days it seemed her effort had cooled, as she and Johnson met repeatedly for a potential resolution. Johnson of Louisiana marched on, saying he had been willing to take the risk, believing it was important for the US to back Ukraine against Russia's invasion and explaining he wanted to be on the “right side of history.”

BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT

(Admission Branch)
Admission Notice for PPMET (Basic B.Sc. Nursing) Course, session 2024

Online applications are invited alongwith requisite fee for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course in all the Govt./University constitute/Private colleges of Punjab through University website from 09.05.2024 to 23.05.2024. Prospectus for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course will be available on university website from 09.05.2024. The Entrance Test (PPMET - 2024) for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course will be conducted on 05.06.2024

Note:- Any Notification/Corrigendum/Amendment by Govt. of Punjab will be followed. For Prospectus/fee details/schedule/online counseling/details & updates visit us at: www.bfhs.ac.in.

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Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

THE ENCHANTING TAPESTRY OF INDIAN CULTURE

The Kendra Dance Festival mesmerised audiences with its captivating blend of dance and storytelling, showcasing India's rich heritage. From spiritual explorations to mythological tales, each performance left a lasting impression, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Step into a world where art transcends boundaries and narratives come alive through graceful movements. The Kendra Dance Festival 2024, hosted at the prestigious Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi, was a mesmerising journey through the rich tapestry of Indian culture. Over three enchanting evenings from May 3 to May 5, 2024, this festival promised and delivered an unforgettable exploration of Indian culture through the captivating art of dance drama.

Each night unfolded a unique dance drama, transporting audiences to a different realm. The festival opened with *Parikrama*, a production that transcended the boundaries of entertainment to delve deep into the human psyche. Through a harmonious blend of direction, choreography, lighting, costumes and production *Parikrama* entranced the audience. The choreography, a brilliant fusion of movements mainly derived from the Chhau dance form, drew a standing ovation, highlighting the dedication and skill of the performers. Principal performer artist Shivam Sahni, essaying the challenging role of Atma, spoke of the difficulty in portraying a non-being showcasing the depth and complexity of the production.

The visionary direction of Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh transformed the



stage into a realm of spiritual exploration. The production beautifully depicted the cyclical nature of existence, from birth to liberation, drawing from the profound concepts of Indian philosophy. The audience was taken on a journey from the potentiality symbolised by *Hiranyagarbh* to the manifestation of the soul as *Atma*, exploring the soul's struggle against the senses and its quest for liberation, ultimately achieving *Moksha*. The innovative use of lighting and sound coupled with a thoughtful script added layers of depth to the performance making it a profound theatrical experience.

The second night brought the epic *Mahabharata* to life with *Karna*. This captivating dance drama delved into the complexities of human existence through the lens of the enigmatic Karna. We stood witness to his struggles and triumphs, his unwavering ideals, and the timeless questions of morality and righteousness that his life embodied. The choreography, expressive and evocative, brought Karna's life to vibrant life on stage, evoking both sympathy and admiration from the audience. The performance was a visual masterpiece, with every detail from the expressive dance to the exquisite costumes contributing to its exceptional excellence. The unwavering support from the audience filling every seat in the auditorium further solidified the importance of celebrating and preserving Indian culture.

The final evening culminated with *Meera*, in vibrant portrayal of renowned saint

poetess. This dance drama, titled after its central figure, delved into her life and legacy. Meera's poetry bursting with vibrancy and effervescence resonated with audiences carrying messages of liberation and inner awakening. The performance challenged societal norms and redefined Meera's image offering an introspective exploration of the struggles faced by women. Drawing inspiration from Rajasthani dance styles, the choreography beautifully captured Meera's enduring influence. The Kendra Dance Festival's success was solidified by the audience's profound engagement with the performances evident in the thunderous applause and heartfelt comments such as "heaven for the eyes" and "a soulful performance."

Throughout the festival, the commitment of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra to preserve and promote India's rich cultural heritage was evident. Their tireless efforts in organising this exceptional dance festival have not only enriched our lives but also provided a platform for these alluring stories to be shared with the world. The choreography for all three performances by Shashidharan Nair, combined with Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh's visionary direction, created an alluring experience that celebrated the timeless beauty of Indian culture. As Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh aptly stated, "The Kendra Dance Festival's productions are not just performances; they are reflections of our cultural essence and timeless wisdom." The Dance Festival was

a testament to the power of artistic expression and a celebration of the enduring relevance of Indian culture in today's world. It was an unforgettable journey that left a lasting impression on all who were fortunate enough to witness its magic. The deepest appreciation is reserved for Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh for her visionary leadership and unparalleled artistic direction. Under her guidance, the Kendra Dance Festival has transcended mere entertainment to become a transformative and unforgettable experience showcasing the profound beauty and depth of Indian culture to audiences worldwide.

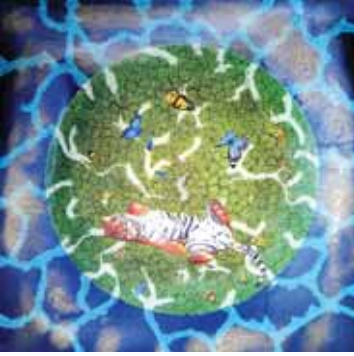
The three-day celebration of dance was an enduring and compelling experience where storytelling, acting, dance, drama, and music converged to create an unforgettable spectacle. The festival beautifully showcased the rich tapestry of Indian history and mythology weaving together narratives that resonated with audiences and left a lasting impression. The performances were a testament to the cultural heritage of India offering a glimpse into its vibrant traditions and timeless stories. This festival was a celebration of artistic excellence and a tribute to the depth and beauty of Indian culture. This festival wasn't just a celebration of dance; it was a celebration of heritage, a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and a glimpse into the soul of India.



A Journey through Creativity and Appreciation

SAKSHI PRIYA explores the world through the eyes of master artists and emerging talents whose works redefine the boundaries of creativity

Embark on an alluring journey into the vibrant world of art with *Detente: A Haven of Artistic Rhapsody*, an exhibition that celebrates the spirit of creativity and cultural diversity. This exhibition showcase of modern and contemporary Indian and international art invites spectators to explore a variety of artistic themes and narratives, each piece offering a unique perspective on evolution, culture, and society. Stepping into the gallery feels like entering an enchanted world where each painting tells a captivating story, inviting viewers on a journey of emotions and creativity. The exhibition, featuring works by renowned master artists such as MF Hussain, SH Raza, GR Santosh, Satish Gujral, Manu Parekh, B Prabha, Anjali Ela Menon, Ajay Samir, Anup Kumar Chand, Ashok Bhowmick, alongside contributions from contemporary and participating artists like M Narayan, Bahaar Dhawan Rohatgi, Sanuj Birla, Aditee Garg and more, is a testament to the richness and diversity of contemporary Indian and international art. The artwork demands to be seen and appreciated by all, showcasing the exquisite talent of each artist. Visitors stand before the paintings, interpreting and admiring the work in their unique way, captivated by the details, patterns,



and colours. This experience highlights the immense value and appreciation for art in today's world. The gallery itself feels like a journey through memory lane which continues to resonate even after they are no longer with us. Their art speaks volumes, as the saying goes, "an artist's work always stays with us." Artists like SH Raza, GR Santosh, MF Husain, B Prabha, and Satish Gujral demonstrate their mastery through their paintings, with each piece reflecting their profound skill and artistic vision. The walls of the gallery

exude a mesmerising aura, showcasing the true worth and beauty of these artworks. M. Narayan's artwork, with its focus on equestrian aesthetics, captures the power and speed of horses through expressionist strokes and dynamic lines. His paintings convey the thrilling energy and elegant beauty of horses and polo players, drawing viewers into a world of vivid colours and bold strokes. Satish Gujral's canvas delves into the depths of history, channelling an expressionist grandeur of gesture and space. Bahaar Dhawan Rohatgi's art invokes a sense of calmness with abstract explorations

that blend various mediums. Her pieces unlock the immensity within her artistic journey, revealing layers of emotion and dreams through intricate brushstrokes. Manu Parekh's work echoes the rich tradition of Indian folk art fused with modernist sensibilities. His paintings evoke a rousing provocation known for their vibrant and dynamic composition that captures the essence of painting. Aditee Garg's sculptures are praised for their cultural resonance and narrative depth with graceful curves that become

performative in nature. Her work invites viewers to join in transporting them to the realm of magnificent creatures through intricate narratives and expansive spaces. The artwork of Anup Kumar Chand is described as a tribute to the majesty of nature, particularly awe-inspiring tigers. His paintings create a world of fantasy shapes where colours seamlessly blend with the background resulting in a harmonious visual symphony. Sanuj Birla's exceptional painting is noted for its excellence in art, creating dreamy visions inspired by movies and comic books holding a special place in everyone's heart. Each artist's work is celebrated for its uniqueness and ability to evoke a range of emotions and interpretations making the exhibition a truly immersive and inspiring experience for all visitors. The exhibition is not just about showcasing art; it is about honouring the legacy of artists and the impact of their work. It is a celebration of power, grace, and beauty. As visitors immerse themselves in this artistic journey, they

are transported to a world where time slows down and the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur. The gallery becomes a testimony to the immersive experience that art can offer, where every piece evokes a beautiful sense of emotion and reality. Sumer Raj Chadha, the founder of Gallery West End reflects on his appreciation for art, nurtured over the years by his grandmother, Santosh Raj Chadha, a passionate art collector. He says, "This exhibit is a tribute to a true art aficionado and a fervent connoisseur of beauty, our vanguard, late Santosh Raj Chadha, my beloved grandmother. She sowed the seed of love for art and has been a custodian of creative curiosity in our family." Chadha's dedication has transformed this exhibition into a platform for artists to showcase their talent and connect with enthusiasts. His commitment to honoring artistic legacies and encouraging creativity shines in every aspect of this remarkable exhibition. 'Detente: A Haven of Artistic Rhapsody' is more than just an art exhibition; it is an incredible source of inspiration and an immersive journey into the artistic vision of modern and contemporary artists. It is a place where art speaks to everyone, inviting them to delve into realms of exploration, connection, and inspiration.



Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

