

Opposition welcomes SC order granting interim bail to Kejriwal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders on Friday welcomed the interim bail given to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Supreme Court, saying the "fight to save democracy" will now be with more intensity. Congress leader Pawan Khara hoped former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren also gets due justice. "We welcome the intervention by the Supreme Court in granting bail to Arvind Kejriwal... We also hope that the prime minister gets enough time after June 4, when he becomes the former prime minister of India, to introspect sitting in Sabarmati Ashram the kind of politics he has indulged in," he said.

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee also welcomed the Supreme Court order, saying "I am very happy to see that Shri Arvind Kejriwal has got interim bail. It will be very helpful in the context of the current elections." Sharad Pawar, who heads the NCP (SP), said the country remains steadfast in the pursuit of democracy. "I welcome the interim bail order granted to the chief minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal by the SC. India remains steadfast in the pursuit of democracy," Pawar wrote on X. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi called it a "big win" for Kejriwal. "And big win for Arvind Kejriwal as SC steps in to grant him interim bail. The bid to silence the



opposition by BJP is backfiring on them. We Won't be silenced, won't bend, won't give in come what may. Bharat is watching, India is winning! Jai Hind!" she wrote on X. Another Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray said justice and relief to Kejriwal against the "dictatorial regime" in the country was a huge sign of winds of change. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said they will now fight the battle to save democracy with more intensity. In a post on X, he said, "Thanks to the Supreme Court... Now we will fight the battle to save democracy with more intensity... Arvind Kejriwal is not a person but a thought... And now will take this thought forward with greater momentum."

The AAP leaders in Punjab also hailed the Supreme Court decision to grant interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, saying truth always triumphs. Punjab Cabinet Minister Chetan Singh Jauramajra thanked the apex court for granting interim bail to the AAP supremo. "Truth always triumphs," said Jauramajra. Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said he was grateful to the top court for upholding justice. "Today's interim bail order for Arvind Kejriwal by Hon'ble Supreme Court reaffirms the honesty and integrity of the AAP. Grateful to the judiciary for upholding justice. Arvind Ji's presence among us will give all of us energy and vigour to fight

and win," said Cheema in a post on X. Another minister Balbir Singh said with Kejriwal getting interim bail, a wave of happiness has spread among party workers. "Millions of prayers have been answered. I thank the Supreme Court," said Singh as he accused the BJP of trying to suppress the truth. "But the truth has won," the health minister said. Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court granted interim bail to Kejriwal till June 1 to campaign in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The Delhi chief minister was arrested in a case relating to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Jaishankar slams Canada for backing Khalistanis

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

By allowing political space to Khalistani separatist elements, the Canadian government is sending a message that its vote bank is "more powerful" than its rule of law, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said. In an exclusive interview to PTI late Thursday, Jaishankar said India respects and practices freedom of speech, but that does not equate with freedom to threaten foreign diplomats, extend support to separatism or allow political space to elements advocating violence. The external affairs minister also wondered how people with dubious backgrounds are being allowed to enter and live in Canada, referring to Khalistani supporters among the Sikh migrants from Punjab. "In any rules-based society, you would imagine that you would check people's background, how they came, what passport they carried etc," he said. "If you have people whose presence there is itself on very dubious documents, what does it say about you? It actually says that your vote bank is more



powerful than your rule of law," the minister said. The Indian diaspora in Canada is about 1.8 million strong and there are another one million Non Resident Indians residing in the country. The Indian diaspora, mostly of Sikh ethnicity, is considered an influential bloc in Canada's politics. Ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. New Delhi rejected Trudeau's

charges as "absurd". India has been maintaining that the main issue has been that of Canada giving space to pro-Khalistani elements operating from Canadian soil with impunity. "It is not so much a question of running out of options. What we have seen to our regret has been the direction of Canadian politics where separatists and extremist forces, many of whom openly advocate violence, have been given political space in that country," Jaishankar said. "And there are people in positions of prominence today in Canadian politics who actual-

ly espouse that kind of separatism and extremism," he said. His remarks came in response to a question on how India plans to deal with challenges emanating from Canada and whether the options for New Delhi are running out. "We cannot for the good relations overlook that," he said during the freewheeling interview at PTI's headquarters. Jaishankar said Canada's response to India's concerns has been that it has freedom of speech. "Whenever we have taken this up with the Canadians... It is not a new issue... It has been going on almost for 10 years and they keep saying, oh 'we have freedom of speech.'" "We also have freedom of speech in our country. But freedom of speech does not mean freedom to threaten foreign diplomats, freedom of speech does not mean the kind of positions and the kind of activities which people in Canada are doing which does harm to our country because of its support for separatism," Jaishankar said. "And freedom of speech does not mean this kind of space which is also given to people of

Sanjay Bhalla assumes charge as CoP of Indian Navy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Sanjay Bhalla on Friday here assumed charge as Chief of Personnel (CoP) of Indian Navy. He was commissioned in the Indian Navy in 1989. In a career spanning 35 years, he has held a number of specialist, staff and operational appointments, both afloat and ashore, navy said. After completing his Specialisation Course in Communication and Electronic Warfare, Bhalla served as a specialist onboard several frontline warships. He subsequently had the privilege of holding challenging, fulfilling and eventful Commands at sea, which include, INS Nishank, INS Taragiri, INS Beas and the coveted appointment of Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet (FOCEF). During his tenure as FOCEF, he was the Officer in Tactical Command for the prestigious President's Fleet Review (PFR - 22) and the Sea Phase of



Indian Navy's flagship multinational exercise MILAN - 22, that witnessed an unprecedented participation from friendly foreign countries. Ashore, he has held important staff appointments at the Naval Headquarters including Assistant Chief of Personnel (Human Resource Development); headed Officers training at Naval Academy, and has held a diplomatic assignment overseas. Prior to assuming charge as the COP, he was the Chief

of Staff of the Western Naval Command. An alumnus of Royal College of Defence Studies, London, Naval War College and Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, his educational accomplishments include M Phil (Defence & Strategic Studies), Masters in International Security and Strategic Studies from the Kings College, London, M.Sc (Defence & Strategic Studies), Madras University and M.Sc (Telecom) from CUSAT.

Nearly 12 per cent Indian kids have not received double dose vaccination for measles: Research

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."

ICMAI seeks inclusion of Cost Accountants as auditors within Cooperative Societies Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICMAI) has sought inclusion of Cost Accountants as auditors within specific sections of the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002. The proposal aims at enhancing the effectiveness of cooperative societies in India. In response to this proposal, Dr Ashish Kumar Bhutani, Secretary Cooperation, assured the ICMAI delegation of giving thorough consideration to their proposal. Additionally, he also expressed his willingness to explore collaborative initiatives between



the Ministry and the Institute, indicating openness to cooperation and partnership in this endeavor.

This assurance from Dr Bhutani came during an event where he unveiled the inaugural edition of the Quarterly

Journal of the Cooperative Development Board (CDB) of the ICMAI. The event, organized by ICMAI in col-

laboration with the National Council for Cooperative Training (NCCT), also saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two entities. Dr Bhutani commended the collaborative efforts of ICMAI and NCCT, recognizing them as proactive think tanks and valuable knowledge repositories. He, along with Mohan Kumar Mishra, Secretary of NCCT, signed the first copy of the journal, highlighting the commitment of both organizations to the growth and development of the cooperative sector in India. During the event, ICMAI and NCCT officials briefed Dr. Bhutani on their strategic roadmap, which encompassed

four key pillars aimed at supporting the government's efforts in advancing the cooperative sector. According to the ICMAI officials, it is advocating for Cost Accountants to be recognized as auditors under two specific sections of the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002. These are Section 72(1) under which Cost Accountants could potentially be appointed as auditors for such societies, allowing them to conduct audits and assess the financial performance and compliance of these organizations while Section 77(1) may relate to the appointment of special auditors for specific purposes or circumstances, such as investigations or special reports.

NGO moves SC asking EC to upload LS voter turnout data on website

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An NGO has moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Election Commission (ECI) to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data in "absolute figures" on its website within 48 hours of conclusion of polling for each phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has filed an interim application in its 2019 PIL seeking directions to the poll panel that "scanned legible copies of Form 17C Part-I (Account of Votes Recorded)" of all polling stations be uploaded immediately after the polls. "Direct the Election Commission to provide tabulated polling station-wise data in absolute figures of the number of votes polled as recorded in Form 17C Part-I after each phase of polling in the on-going 2024 Lok Sabha elections and also a tabulation of constituency-wise figures of voter turnout in absolute numbers in the on-going 2024 Lok Sabha elections," the NGO said. It said the plea was filed to ensure that the democratic process is not subverted by electoral irregu-



larities. "The voter turnout data for the first two phases of the ongoing 2024 Lok Sabha elections published by ECI on April 30 has been published after 11 days of the first phase of polling held on April 19 and 4 days after second phase of polling held on April 26. "The data as published by the ECI in its press release dated April 30, 2024 shows a sharp increase (by about 5-6%) as compared to the initial percentages announced by ECI as of 7 pm on the day of polling," the plea said. The petition said the "inordinate" delay in the release of final voter turnout data, coupled with the unusually high revision of over 5 per cent in the poll panel's press note of April 30, 2024 has raised con-

cerns and public suspicion regarding the correctness of the said data. The non-release of absolute number of votes polled, coupled with the "unreasonable delay" in release of votes polled data, has led to apprehensions in the mind of the electorate about the sharp increase between initial data and data released on April 30, it said. "These apprehensions must be addressed and put to rest. That in order to uphold the voter's confidence it is necessary that the ECI be directed to disclose on its website scanned legible copies of Form 17C Part-I (Account of Votes Recorded) of all polling stations which contains the authenticated figures for votes polled, within 48 hours of the close of polling," it said.

Inter Services Organisations Act notified through gazette notification: Defence Ministry



The Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Act has been notified through a gazette notification to be enforced with effect from Friday, defence ministry said. In order to bolster effective command, control and efficient functioning of Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs), the bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament during the Monsoon Session of 2023. The Bill received the assent of the President on August 15, 2023, officials said. The Act empowers Commanders-in-Chief and Officers-in-Command of ISOs to exercise control over Service personnel, serving under them, for effective maintenance of discipline and administration, without disturbing the unique service conditions of each individual Service. With the notification, the Act will empower the Heads of ISOs and pave the way for expeditious disposal of cases, avoid multiple proceedings and will be a step towards greater integration and jointness among the Armed Forces personnel.

Coast Guard inks MoU with Hindalco

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Hindalco Industries has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here for the manufacturing and supply of indigenous marine-grade aluminium to Indian public and private shipyards for the construction of ships. Giving details here on Friday, defence ministry officials said the MOU inked on Thursday will also provide benefits such as quarterly pricing, priority in supplies and turnover discount. The ICG fleet is presently operating 67 ships with aluminium hull with capability of operating in shallow waters. To further boost coastal security, it has planned to induct more such vessels where the indigenously manufactured marine-grade aluminium will be utilised. The MoU was signed by Deputy Director General (Material & Maintenance), ICG IG HK Sharma and CEO, Downstream Aluminium Business, Hindalco Niles Koul in the presence of senior officials of the ICG.



FIRST COLUMN

TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL PERSON

He dares to defy convention and breathe life into audacious ideas



RAVI VALLURI

There is a part of us that will not let us be content until we become all that we are capable of being. Life is not about resting on our past achievements and laurels and residing in our comfort zone. It is an adventure from being ordinary to extraordinary. One's current situation may be good, but if a greater opportunity presents itself, one must be open to expanding. This does not mean you are to run away or violate your integrity.

Muscles stay strong and flexible only by use and stretching and so does our mind. The challenge is the way of the universe and showing us the path that the bigger we assume that form and shape. We should bless our dreams and our desires to identify the opportunity that is lurking as there would be several chances arising around the corner. We need the courage and humility to ask the Universe to provide such opportunities, leave behind all our limitations and step forward to live life as magnificent and gigantic as ordained by the Universe. Successful people stretch their hands and take up responsibility which empowers them to enter uncharted territories. This increases the level of their prana/chi, attention span and nature of work, adding a new dimension to the personality. Successful people are never straight-jacketed in their approach and revel in taking risks. Only risk-takers become game-changers.

Rahul Bajaj's sons Rajiv and Sanjiv embarked upon a fascinating idea to salvage the scrap of the decommissioned INS Vikrant to manufacture scooters. It was an innovative idea, utilizing scrap in a novel manner. While the bottom line of the exercise may be to generate profit, the unattainable thought is audacious. Therefore, successful entrepreneurs never kill an idea. An ingenious idea can be a platform for a radical discovery.



An awesome idea is breathtaking and amazing, stunning and awe-inspiring. When the idea germinates, something stupendous takes place. Think big and do not listen to people who tell you it can't be done. "Life is too short to think small", writes Tim Ferriss. The Universe listens to our deepest thoughts. If the thought is positive, we are blessed with positive results.

The cardinal principle in life is to ensure that we receive and circulate only positive thoughts. We should ensure that we are surrounded by efficacious people. Keep shouldering responsibility and ensure that we possess a YES MIND. Successful enterprises ensure that their workforce performs in harmony and synergy while working in teams. The Universe believes in the Laws of Attraction, the Laws of Abundance, the Laws of Gratefulness and the Laws of Spiralling Effect. All this gets transformed into what Darren Hardy calls the Compound Effect. Next, we ought to always feel blessed and have faith that a superior power is guiding us in our endeavours. There is a superior intelligence that is always creating wonderful opportunities for us and these should be grabbed and seized with humility.

A triumphant individual hinges his belief on the thought that the Divine will take care of everything and by simply reposing faith in that Superior Power. Successful People work on these principles where the football swerves like a parabola and enters the net and we are numbened, giving a standing ovation. That is the miracle performed. Choose to call it the power of the Almighty or the architecture of the Universe. But this works on the premise of the power of positive thinking and becoming successful.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Precision agriculture: Key to food security



PARAG ACHARYA

The future of Indian agriculture hinges on a blend of tradition and innovation. Precision agriculture offers a crucial pathway to sustainably feed 1.7 billion people

India's population is projected to reach approximately 1.7 billion by 2050. It would be a significant challenge for Indian agriculture to meet the food demands of such a vast population amidst the emerging challenges of climate change. Additionally, the sector faces issues such as an ageing farmer population. Younger generations are increasingly veering away from taking over the family agricultural farm, choosing other, more lucrative and less labour-intensive career paths over agriculture. To address these challenges, the adoption of modern farming techniques like precision farming and digital smart agriculture becomes imperative to ensure sustainable food production and the future prosperity of Indian agriculture.

A recent parliamentary panel has emphasized the importance of promoting agricultural mechanization, particularly for small and marginal farmers and has advocated for the integration of tiny robots and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Indian farm operations to address the challenges posed by fragmented land holdings. Furthermore, the panel recommended the establishment of a 'National Institute of Agricultural Robotics and Artificial Intelligence' to ensure that India remains at the forefront of agricultural development both domestically and internationally. On August 23, 2022, regarding Farm Mechanization, the Secretary of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education revealed that India's mechanisation level stands at 47 per cent, trailing China (59.5 per cent), Brazil (75 per cent) and the US (95 per cent). The level of mechanisation varies greatly by region inside India too. Northern States boast higher rates (70-80 per cent), driven by fertile land, labour decline and State backing. Southern and eastern States lag (35-45 per cent) due to fragmented land holdings. North-eastern States struggle due to terrain, equipment costs and socio-economic factors.

Certainly, agriculture has evolved steadily from a traditional, labour-intensive model to a sophisticated, technology-driven system. Key milestones include the establishment of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). The development of high-yielding, cost-effective, disease/pest-resistant and climate-resilient varieties and technologies across crops, horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries sciences by ICAR has significantly bolstered production and productivity. However, while acknowledging these strides, it's imperative to recognize that the pace of progress must match the urgency of our times.

Throughout history, people have always sought easier, faster and more efficient ways to get things done. This pursuit has sparked a technological revolution that merges age-old farming practices with cutting-edge innovations like the Internet of Things (IoT) known as Ag-IoT. It is a huge change in farming that could shake up how we grow, manage and protect our food. Its solutions are not merely about efficiency; they are about empowering farmers to achieve greater time efficiency, productivity and precision in their daily tasks. It's like having a super smart assistant that can take care of land, animals, crops and farms without needing humans to do everything. People also call it precision agriculture, smart agriculture, or digital agriculture.



THE INTERNET OF THINGS IS A HUGE CHANGE IN FARMING THAT COULD SHAKE UP HOW WE GROW, MANAGE AND PROTECT OUR FOOD. ITS SOLUTIONS ARE NOT MERELY ABOUT EFFICIENCY; THEY ARE ABOUT EMPOWERING FARMERS TO ACHIEVE GREATER TIME EFFICIENCY, PRODUCTIVITY AND PRECISION IN THEIR DAILY TASKS

It is like a big step forward in farming because it uses data to make decisions, making everything more efficient and productive. Through Ag-IoT, the very pulse of plant and animal needs can be sensed. The farmers can keep an eye on the soil all the time, control watering systems from afar and even check on the health of their animals without being right there. It's super handy because it can predict how much crops will grow accurately. In every aspect, Ag-IoT stands poised to revolutionize the landscape of crop management, insect and pest surveillance, food warehousing, livestock care, disease monitoring, dairy operations, supply chain logistics and beyond.

The evolution of drone technology has opened up boundless possibilities in the realm of crop assessment and monitoring. One such pioneering initiative, the NaMo Drone Didi Initiative, stands as a beacon of empowerment for rural women. In a momentous gesture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally handed over 1000 drones to 1000 Nammo Drone Didis across 10 locations nationwide at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in Pusa, New Delhi. These drones will help them do things like check on crops, spray fertilizers and plant seeds. Prime Minister Modi's announcement of the 'Drone Didi' yojana 2023-24 further underscores the Government's dedication to leveraging technology for the betterment of society. Significant financial allocations during 2020-21 and 2021-22, by the Indian Government including INR 1756.3 crores and INR 2422.7 crores respectively to States for the integration of cutting-edge technologies

like drones, artificial intelligence, blockchain, remote sensing and GIS into agriculture and INR 7302.50 crores and INR 7908.18 crores were made in the same periods to ICAR for R&D, further demonstrate the Government's dedication to modernizing agriculture.

Technological strides like RFID tags (radio frequency identification) and systems like NLIS (National Livestock Identification Scheme) and INAPH (Information Network for Animal Productivity & Health) have propelled Precision Dairy Farming.

With swift electronic scanning and data integration, farmers can efficiently manage cow health, productivity and records, marking a significant shift in the dairy industry towards precision and efficiency. Meanwhile, in the aquaculture industry, companies like Aquaconnect and Shrimpbbox are leveraging technology to revolutionise shrimp farming. Aquaconnect employs artificial intelligence and satellite sensing technologies to monitor farm performance and provide advice to shrimp and fish farmers, predominantly small to medium-scale operations. Shrimpbbox, on the other hand, specializes in shrimp farming in colder climates and landlocked areas, boasting impressive productivity with minimal water usage and without antibiotics. Cropin Technology, based in Bengaluru, has developed Aksara, an open-source microlanguage model tailored for climate-smart farming.

In India, the World Economic Forum's AI for Agriculture Innovation (AI4AI) initiative, led by C4IR India, is revolutionizing farm-

ing through AI. The 'Saagu Baagu' pilot in Telangana's Khammam district, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Digital Green, exemplifies this success. With over 7,000 farmers benefiting, chilli yields surged by 21 per cent, pesticide use decreased by 9 per cent, fertilizer usage dropped by 5 per cent and unit prices improved by 8 per cent. Consequently, farmers doubled their earnings, with incomes rising by over INR 66,000 per acre per crop cycle. Overall, AI interventions at 175 farms in India have boosted crop yields by 30 per cent, as per the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

In conclusion, the future of Indian agriculture hinges on a blend of tradition and innovation. With a burgeoning population and dwindling resources, precision agriculture offers a crucial pathway to sustainably feed 1.7 billion people. If established, the 'National Institute of Agricultural Robotics and Artificial Intelligence' would catapult Indian agriculture into unprecedented realms of excellence. The benefits of farm mechanization must permeate every corner of our nation, bridging divides and fostering inclusivity. We cannot afford to overlook those who are marginalized by the digital divide, particularly our small-scale farmers. As we look towards the future, let us remain committed to nurturing a vibrant, tech-enabled agrarian ecosystem that empowers farmers, preserves natural resources and ensures food security for generations to come.

(The writer is a scientist, at Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar; their views are personal)

Revisiting Rohith Vemula's death after eight years

As the dust settles, revelations by the Telangana Police shed new light on Vemula's untimely death

Rohith Vemula (26), a PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad was found dead in his hostel room on 17 January 2016. Had he lived for another fortnight, he would have celebrated his 27th birthday on January 30. But he was called back by the Maker as it is said that He prefers the favourite ones to join Him ahead of others.

The untimely demise of Vemula opened a Pandora's Box all over India. Opposition parties led by the Congress staged a nationwide protest and agitation blaming the Narendra Modi Government at the Centre for the death of this young man. The CPI(M)'s frontal organization SFI called for education bundh the next day and



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

demanding the resignation of Smriti Irani, the then union minister for human resources development and Bandaru Dattatreya, a minister of State from the council of ministers blaming the duo for the death of Rohith Vemula. Poets affiliated with the CPI(M) and other Left organizations wrote poems and short stories based on the life and times of Vemula. The fact that Vemula belonged to the Harijan com-

munity added to their ire and this was discernible from the power of the words with which they blamed the "communal and fascist" Government at the Centre. Many articles and features that appeared in regional newspapers and satellite TV channels blamed the doorstep of Smriti Irani for Rohith Vemula's suicide. A major political outfit promoted by the all-powerful minority community had declared a solatium of Rs 25 lakh to the family of Vemula within days of his unfortunate death. Though it is more than eight years since he bade farewell to this world, his mother or brother has not been given the promised amount. When Radhika, the mother of Rohith

Vemula contacted the leadership of the said party, they feigned ignorance about the amount and the matter was given a silent burial. More than eight years after the suicide of Vemula, the Telangana Police which was entrusted with the probe of finding out matters that led Vemula to resort to the extreme measure concluded that Rohith Vemula was neither a member of the Harijan community nor any Other Backward Community (OBC) student as he had claimed. The fear that the university was likely to detect the truth behind his caste status which would put an end to his political aspirations had made him take the drastic step, said the police report. The unanswered question in



the whole episode is why the investigating officers failed to track the phone calls made by Vemula during the last few days of his life. This would have thrown more light on the reasons behind the suicide of the research scholar. Many of his colleagues attribute a failed love affair as the cause behind his suicide.

Months before he committed suicide, Vemula had led a demonstration under the auspices of the Ambedkar Students Association on the University Campus to protest the death penalty awarded to Yakub Memon, one of the prime accused in the Mumbai serial blasts of 1993 which claimed 260 lives. There were reports that the soft-spoken Vemula and his friends had bashed up a member of the rival union and the victim needed hospitalisation. Moreover, there were charges against the University of Hyderabad for non-payment of a monthly scholarship of Rs 25,000 to Vemula though the university authorities denied the allegation. Rohith Vemula was neither the first Harijan student in the

University of Hyderabad or any other universities in India who have committed suicide. Rajini Anand, an engineering college student in Kerala had jumped to death in 2004 following the callous approach of the ruling Congress-led Government in the State towards her plea for financial assistance to pay college fees. Sometime last year, a CPI(M) member of Rajya Sabha asked the Government of India to furnish the number of Harijan students who had committed suicide in the country since 2014. The MP's innuendo was that no Harijan students had committed suicide in the country before the swearing-in of Modi as Prime Minister. The kind of fire from the

opposition faced by Smriti Irani was unprecedented and strange. The Rohith Vemula affair cost her the office of the HRD ministry and she was relegated to minister of textiles Opposition party leaders have all the right to criticize the Government and ministers for errors and omissions. But it should be restricted to the carelessness and irresponsibility of the concerned minister. For eight years, this young lady was crucified by her political rivals. Had they taken a little bit of time and gone through the releases issued by the Government of India, they would not have dared to throw mud at Smriti.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)



ON BOARD THE DILLI-AWADH EXPRESS

There is little to complain if the ancient gastronomic delights from the bustling streets of Dilli 6 intersect with the regal fare of Lucknow's Awadhi Chowk, right in the heart of modern Delhi. It is a rare symphony, says **SHOBORI GANGULI**

For ages, food critics and connoisseurs have engaged in passionate discourses on how the royal Mughlai cuisine of Dilli stands out in sharp contrast to its regal Awadhi counterpart in Lucknow, a debate that rages on. While both define North India's rich culinary heritage and both spill out of the ancient quarters of royal kitchens to occupy modern-day street food outlets of these two historic cities, it takes a magician to synchronise the two.

With Chapter 4 of Farage: Northern Meanders, Chef Anuj Kapoor, Director of Culinary at Radisson Blu Hotel in Greater Noida, delivers this impossible magic of harmony with precision. From the bustling chaos of Old Delhi's streets to the serene ambience of Awadh's royal courts, Chef Kapoor employs his nostalgia of childhood and college years spent in Lucknow and his enviable professional experience in Old Delhi's Mughlai lanes and bylanes to curate an innovative six-course meal, meticulous attention paid to each spice and ingredient.

The meal started off with a fiery welcome shot of *Tikha Mango*, the salt and chili rimmed glass of *aam panna* a welcome relief in Delhi's sizzling May heat. The *Amuse Bouche* gently opened the gates to *Dilli 6 ki Nagori, Methde Aloo, Kachalu*, a delectable offering of a *golgappa* sized *puri* with filling. A real taste of Delhi is incomplete without some wholesome *Chaats*. So Chef Kapoor had a platter ready with *Kulle ki Chaat* served with a not-too-sour *Kanji* with a jalapeno and *Ram Laddoo* skewer.

The *Nakkhas Masala Panko Soft Shell Crab Aragula* and *Orange* was a



CHEF ANUJ KAPOOR

tantalising appetizer on offer. Unfortunately, for Delhi, seafood meanders its way into kitchens through freezers, compromising its freshness. While the taste of the crab and the crispiness of the batter worked well on the palate, it is my personal observation that deep fried Indian food, North to South, East to West, is difficult to master in large kitchens. They tend to get fried and re-fried, leaving that slight hint of used oil. These are best left to home kitchens or road side eateries. The vegetarian option of *Ambi, Hari Mirch Ganderi Paneer Tinka* may perhaps have been a better choice. That said, the Entrée opened the floodgates of gastronomic indulgence. The *Gosh ki Galawat* served atop a *Biscooti Roti* that Chef Kapoor had quite obviously paid personal attention to, was an amazingly innovative combination. The taste lingered on long after the meal was over. For the vegetarians there was, of

course, the *Chakundar ki Galawat*.

This was followed by the main course in which Chef Kapoor refined and redefined the decadent *Nalli Nihari* to a level of sophistication difficult to match. The *Chowk ka Nalli Nihari Wellington* indeed transported one to an epicurean heaven. A clear winner, this masterpiece blended the iconic Wellington-style pastry with the refined flavours of pulled *Nalli Nihari* mutton. This innovative dish symbolised Chef Kapoor's unique gift of framing culinary history in a contemporary context. There was *Jumbo Prawn Khorma* on offer alongside the vegetarian *Aminabad Masala Portobello, Gucchi, Qar-e-Pukhtan*.



Chef Kapoor has a signature inaugural, informal talk before laying out the table for his patrons. At the beginning of each Farage, he talks about the inspiration informing the menu, of how Dilli 6 is better known for its vegetarian fare considering the Old City has a fair share of vegetarian traders and merchants, and similar such priceless nuggets of culinary history. I left the venue with the taste of an extremely flavourful and aromatic *Chowk ki Gilouri*, transporting me to the bylanes of Lucknow that I remember only too well.

FACTSHEET

Farage Chapter 4: Northern Meanders
Venue: *Satin, Radisson Blu, Greater Noida*
Date: *May 10th & May 11th, 2024*

Padharo Mhare Desh



The ongoing Rangeelo Rajasthan food festival at the Crowne Plaza in Delhi takes its guests on an exotic culinary odyssey, writes **SHOBORI GANGULI**

Rajasthan never ceases to inspire. Be it the food, the clothes, the colours, the mesmerizing deserts, the people, its music, this region's appeal is immortal and forever irresistible. Little wonder then that the majestic Rangeelo Rajasthan food festival at Crowne Plaza's Infinity in the heart of Delhi has drawn well-deserved attention.

Showcasing Rajasthan's regal culinary heritage, *Panch Rang Panch Nagar* is the leitmotif of the festival that draws inspiration from the diverse palates and cuisines of the five towns of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Udaipur, and Bikaner. We are told that the chefs engaged in this epic effort have journeyed to the royal kitchens spread across Rajasthan to collate secret recipes and traditions while bringing in local cooks to ensure the authenticity of regional flavours.

In order to remain faithful to the festival's thematic emphasis, the venue has been draped in the architectural hues of the five chosen cities, where guests can effortlessly surrender to the rustic charm and authenticity of village-style piping hot *Jowar, Bajra* and *Bejar rotis* prepared by local women, travelling straight out of their earthen *chulhas* to the plate.

Playing the perfect host, Executive Chef Roushan Sharma is quick to bring in some local starters like the *kachodi kadhi* and *samosa kadhi*, the crispy fried goodies gently crushed into a warm bowl of silk smooth gravy. This came with a sharp and tangy garlic and *kutty mirch* chutney and fiery *Mirchi ke Tapore*. Clearly, Ghee is the real star of a traditional Rajasthani food

spread so there was no dearth of this cooking medium in the dishes that arrived at the table.

Sharing his experience of travelling to Rajasthan for the curation of the festival's menu, Chef Sharma says, "Our culinary expedition to Rajasthan was a blend of royalty and authenticity. Spending a day with Thakur Kunal Singh Sa graciously unravelled the secrets of royal recipes, while our interactions with local villagers added depth to our



culinary pool that has its origins in the arid and resource-starved agrarian ecosystem of the region for centuries. Indeed, each element of the menu was an eye-opening vehicle of transport to Rajasthan's culinary heartland.

Now, a bit about the décor. Painstakingly set up to recreate the rustic charm and village-style dining experience of *Padharo Mhare Desh* one could opt to dine under the stars (not recommended in this May heat) or enjoy the interiors with live folk performances, including vibrant *Kathputli* puppetry and a spirited *Ghoda Gadi*. The venue has even recreated the vibrant energy of a traditional *Rangrez Bazaar*, complete with stalls offering local handicrafts and entertainment.

Pankaj Gupta, the Area General Manager, underscored the significance of such an experience amid the dynamic culinary landscape today: "In a world where dining options abound, we believe in offering our guests more than just a meal. The Rangeelo Rajasthan Food Extravaganza is not merely a culinary event; it's a journey of discovery and delight, where every dish and every performance tell a story of Rajasthan's rich heritage and culture." And indeed, it does.

FACT SHEET

Venue: *Infinity, Crowne Plaza Delhi*
Date: *May 3rd to May 12th, 2024*
Time: *7:00 PM to 11:00 PM*
Price: *Rs 2599 plus taxes per person*
Contact: *8860605588, 8860634435*

What's cooking this weekend!

Lucknow meets Hyderabad at Westin



The Westin Gurgaon is hosting a 10-day culinary pop up, with Kangan from The Westin Mumbai Garden City from May 17th till May 26th, 2024. Showcasing Kangan's convergence of the regal flavours of Lucknow and the fiery essence of Hyderabad, Guest Chef Mohammad Shaheed Qureshi from Kangan and Multi Property Executive Chef Amit Dash would be at the helm of this pop-up. The pop-up promises a gastronomic journey celebrating Lucknowi and Hyderabadi flavours. Kangan is a contemporary interpretation of rustic Indian flavours mainly from the North-West Frontier region of Peshawar. Being showcased at The Westin's all-day dining restaurant, Seasonal Tastes, the pop-up menu at Kangan explores progressive ideas in Indian cuisine while maintaining the traditional culinary integrity of signature dishes.

From traditional kebabs to rich *biryanis*, the spread brings out many undiscovered facets with its unique use of time tested ingredients transformed by eclectic combinations and modern presentations. For instance, the *Sikanderi Raan, Banno kebabs, Khaliyas, Kormas, Niharis, and Gacche Gosht ki Biryani*. Chef Dash says, "Hosting pop-up events has transformed our business, boosting revenue and enhancing guest experiences. Diversifying our offerings and

collaborating with renowned restaurants have attracted new audiences, bolstering our position in the hospitality industry," adding that "Experimentation with cuisines, chefs, and concepts has showcased our adaptability and innovation, keeping us ahead of trends and reinforcing our reputation. From a business perspective, these pop-ups have allowed us to expand our offerings which aligns with the exploratory culinary demands of our patrons. This strategic approach has led to increased profitability and recognition, highlighting the importance of collaboration and innovation in hospitality."

Venue: *Seasonal Tastes, The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi*
Date: *May 17th - May, 2024, for dinner buffet everyday; Sunday brunches on 18th and 25th May 25th respectively.*



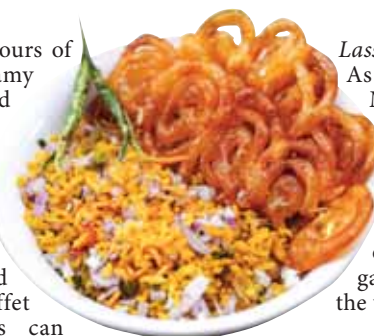
Chef Mohammad Shaheed Qureshi

Indori Zyaka at Crowne Plaza, New Delhi

Edesia, the renowned global cuisine restaurant at Crowne Plaza New Delhi will showcase an unprecedented culinary extravaganza through the exquisite flavours of Malwa Cuisine from Indore. This unprecedented food festival promises to unravel the hidden treasures of Indore's culinary heritage, offering a delectable array of dishes. From May 10th to May 19th, 2024, guests are invited to indulge in an unparalleled dining experience as Edesia unveils a plethora of culinary delights, carefully curated to exemplify the essence of Indore's gastronomy. On offer will be an assortment of mouthwatering delicacies, including the iconic *Poha Jalebi*, irresistible *Indori Shikanji, flavourful Bhutte ki Kees*, comforting *Sabudana Khichdi*, crispy Baked *Samosa*, savoury *Moong Dal Bhajiyas*, and the quintessential *Pani Puri* served with six unique types of water. Other highlights include *Chole Tikki*, succulent *Kadak Nath*, aromatic *Khassi ka Meat*, fragrant *Subz Methi Pulao*, hearty *Sev Tamatar ki Subji*, decadent *Mawa Bati*, traditional *Lancha*, and baked *Kalakand*. The culinary journey will conclude on a sweet note,



with the divine flavours of *Aam Ras*, creamy *Shrikhand*, and wholesome *Dal Bafra*. To complement this gastronomic odyssey, beverages have been meticulously crafted to elevate the buffet experience. Guests can quench their thirst with a variety of invigorating drinks, including the revitalizing *Shikanji*, the tangy *Ananas ki Panna*, the unique *Anti Soda*, the classic



Lassi, and the refreshing *Kairi Pana*. As Shuvendu Banerjee, General Manager of Crowne Plaza puts it, "This festival is a celebration of culinary diversity and a testament to our commitment to offering unparalleled dining experiences. We invite food enthusiasts to join us on this gastronomic journey as we explore the vibrant flavours of Indore."

Venue: *Edesia at Crowne Plaza, New Delhi Okhla.*
Date: *May 10th - 19th, 2024*
Time: *7:00 PM - 11:00 PM*
Price: *Rs 2,799 plus taxes*

