

**OPINION 6**  
GENDER RIGHTS AND  
REALITY: BRIDGING THE GAP

**WORLD 8**  
BRITISH AUTHORITIES STILL ON  
ALERT FOR FURTHER UNREST

**MONEY 10**  
SENSEX  
BOUNCES BACK

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## SISODIA WALKS TO FREEDOM

## Government alert on India Bangladesh front

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Friday night was released from jail after 530 days as the Supreme Court granted him bail earlier in the day in the excise policy scam case saying he is entitled to a "speedy trial" and that returning him to a trial court would be like making him "play snakes and ladders". A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice KV Viswanathan also said keeping the AAP leader in jail for an "unlimited time", without a trial, is in violation of his fundamental rights. Listing the conditions for his bail, the top court directed Sisodia to furnish a bail bond of ₹10 lakh with two sureties, surrender his passport and not make any attempt to either influence witnesses or tamper with evidence. Besides, he will have to report to the investigating officer every Monday and Thursday between 10 and 11 am.

"We find that, on account of a long period of incarceration running to around 17 months and the trial having not commenced, the appellant (Sisodia) has been deprived of his right to speedy trial," the bench said. The apex court had reserved its order in the case on August 6. Minutes after the bail order, celebrations broke out at the AAP office as well as



AAP leader Manish Sisodia waves to supporters after being released from Tihar jail following his bail granted by the Supreme Court in the corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, in New Delhi, on Friday. PTI

residence of Sisodia. Hours later, Special Judge Kavari Baweja accepted the bail bonds and surety bonds submitted by the advocates representing Sisodia. The AAP hailed the SC

decision as "victory of truth" and added that it hoped that other jailed leaders of the party "will also get justice." The AAP further said the order is a "tight slap" on the dictatorship of the BJP-led

Centre but rued that the relief came after a year's delay.

Sisodia, who was wearing a maroon shirt, greeted the party workers and leaders, who showered rose petals on him as he walked out of the jail around 6.50 pm.

Addressing the supporters and media after his release, Sisodia expressed his deep gratitude towards Dr BR Ambedkar, saying, "Ever since this order came in the morning, every inch of my skin has been feeling indebted to Babasaheb. I don't understand how I will pay off this debt to Babasaheb."

"We have brought this legal battle to its logical end through the Constitution. I thank you all for being with me," Sisodia said and added that he had many of admirers but their numbers have increased in the last 17 months. "Not only me but every Delhi resident, and children of the country were with me emotionally in jail. I thank the SC from the bottom of my heart for using the power of Constitution to give a hard slap to the dictatorship in the country," he said. The AAP leader said it was an emotional moment for everyone and hoped that the power of Constitution and democracy will pave the way for release of Kejriwal. He raised the slogan, "Bhramsthaachaar ka ek hi kaal, Kejriwal, Kejriwal."

Holding aloft flags and cheering loudly, crowds of AAP supporters waited to welcome Sisodia as he stepped out of jail. Senior AAP leaders Sanjay Singh, Atishi, and Saurabh Bharadwaj were present outside Tihar to receive Sisodia. Sisodia is a founding member of the AAP and a close confidant of party chief Kejriwal. The bail to Sisodia is a shot in the arm for the beleaguered party, which is gearing up to contest the Haryana Assembly polls and the Delhi elections in the next few months. His release comes as a big win for the AAP. This is because of the three big AAP leaders who were arrested in the liquor policy case, just Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal remains behind bars.

Sisodia's release also comes as the AAP struggles to govern Delhi and counter Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena. According to experts, Sisodia will have to wait to join the Delhi Cabinet as there are several issues that need to be dealt with since the Chief Minister himself is in jail. "For Sisodia to be inducted in his Council of Ministers, Kejriwal needs to send his recommendation to the Lieutenant Governor from Tihar Jail, which seems difficult currently," experts said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Narendra Modi Government on Friday constituted a high-level committee, headed by a top Border Security Force (BSF) official, to monitor the situation along the Indo-Bangladesh border in view of the ongoing state of affairs in the neighbouring country, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said.

He said the committee would be in touch with counterpart authorities in Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of Indian nationals, Hindus and other minority communities living there. "In the wake of the ongoing situation in Bangladesh, the Modi Government has constituted a committee to monitor the current situation on the Indo-Bangladesh Border (IBB). The committee will maintain communication channels with their counterpart authorities in Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of Indian nationals, Hindus, and other minority communities living there. The committee will be headed by the ADG (Additional Director General), Border Security Force, Eastern Command," Shah said in a social media post. Apart from the BSF ADG, the four other members of the



FILE PHOTO

## Hundreds clamour to cross the border

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ GEDE/NADIA

Abdul Hakiq Rumel, Farshatulla Khan, Apurba Sarkar, Mrinal Deb Roy, Achintya Biswas may be from different religions but they share the same ill-fate and nationality. These Bangladeshi nationals are stranded in the no-man's land at various entry points of the Indo-Bangla border of Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar district, Fulbari in

Jalpaiguri district, Hili in Dinajpur and Gede in Nadia district.

"We are returning to the mango orchards or paddy fields in the night and returning to this place during the day time as we fear for our lives... many of our friends and relatives are missing... some have been killed and their houses looted, women raped by the members of BNP and Jamaat," said one of them at Gede border.

committee are the BSF's Inspector General of Police (IGP) for the South Bengal frontier, the IGP for the Tripura frontier, member (planning and development) of the Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI), and secretary of the LPAI. The BSF has increased vigil along the borders adjoining Bangladesh.

## Monsoon chokes and inundates Delhi

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Commuters had a tough time reaching their respective destinations due to traffic congestions choking arterial junctions of the national Capital caused by flooding of roads and water-logging following heavy rain on Friday evening. The adjoining regions of Noida and Ghaziabad were also lashed by the downpour and experienced similar situation. Delhiites fumed and fretted as the rain brought the city to a screeching halt with traffic snarls extending to miles thanks to the heavy water-logging and blocking of roads by fallen trees uprooted by the rain.

## Centre expands CAA for more inclusivity



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has expanded the ambit of the rules issued under the citizenship law Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) through which Indian nationality will be given to persecuted minorities coming from Afghanistan,

Bangladesh or Pakistan. The Union Home Ministry announced that "any document" issued by the Central or State Governments or quasi-judicial body in India proving that either of the parents, grandparents or great-grandparents is or had been a citizen of one of the three countries will be acceptable. The clarification of the Home Ministry came after many applicants seeking Indian nationality under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 were reported to be facing difficulties due to a particular clause of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024.



## ISIS terrorist caught by Delhi Police

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell has averted a possible terrorist attack in the National Capital ahead of the Independence Day on August 15 by arresting a most wanted terrorist — a member of the Pune module of the ISIS, carrying a reward of ₹3 lakh.

The accused has been identified as Rizwan Abdul Haji Ali who was on the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) most wanted list and the probe agency had announced a reward for information leading to his arrest following his escape from the custody of the Pune Police since July 2023. According to a senior police officer, Rizwan was planning an attack ahead of I-Day as he and his associates were doing recce of many VIP areas of Delhi.

## For freedom fighters' families CM announces 'Kutumba Yojana'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Friday said families of freedom fighters of Odisha would soon receive pension under a scheme named 'Kutumba Yojana'.

Speaking at an event on the August Kranti Day, which marks the anniversary of the



Quit India Movement, the CM said that his government is considering this longstanding demand and would initiate steps to frame the modalities for the same.

Families of the freedom fighter would soon be identified as a step towards implementing the scheme, he added.

## Rains to continue in State till I-Day

SRC alerts DMs of 10 dists of possible floods

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as heavy rains continue to lash several parts of Odisha for the last couple of days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday said the State would witness rainfall till the Independence Day, August 15. The Regional Office of the IMD here issued a Yellow warn-

ing for some places in north Odisha on August 9, 10, 13, 14 and 15.

On Saturday, heavy rainfall is likely in Sundargarh and Jharsuguda districts.

According to the IMD's extended weather outlook, fairly widespread scattered rain or thundershower with isolated heavy rains may occur in Odisha till August 22. The overall rainfall activity is likely to remain above normal to normal during this period. Meanwhile, with 5.78 lakh cusecs of water flowing in the

Mahanadi at Mundali, the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) on Friday instructed the Collectors of 10 districts to remain alert.

"Special attention should be given to people residing in low-lying areas of Sambalpur, Subarnapur, Nayagarh, Angul, Boudh, Puri, Khordha, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapada. Entry to the submerged or submersible, roads culverts, bridges to be restricted. Any untoward incident to be reported immediately," the SRC said.

The Water Resources Department reported a significant increase in flow of water in the Mahanadi at Mundali on Friday morning.

Six more sluice gates were opened at the Hirakud Dam to release more floodwater following rains in the upper catchment areas of the Mahanadi. Currently, floodwater was being released through 14 gates. The water level of the dam stood at 612.25 feet at 6 am against its water-holding capacity of 630 feet.

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# Probe underway into Pandian's chopper rides

Stern action to be taken if norms violated: Minister  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Transport Minister Bibhuti Bhusan Jena on Friday informed that an investigation into the expenditures on VK Pandian's whirlwind tours across Odisha using helicopters is underway and stern action would soon be taken if any violation of norms is found. There are rules as to who can use helicopters and appropriate action would definitely be taken if any violation is found in the investigation, said Minister Jena. Jena further said Chief Minister Mohan Majhi has so far met thousands of people, but no money has been spent for



the purpose. Whoever it may be, if any officer is found to have misused the government exchequer, the Mohan Majhi government would definitely take action against him. "Now, the people of Odisha are asking this question about his (Pandian's) tours as they have seen how he was roaming around Odisha in chopper from February 2020 to December 2023. They (people) are unable to digest it. Our government is committed to zero corruption and we can't accept misuse of public money," added Jena.

# Rasananda wins Handloom Award



For saree with info on Odisha's GI products  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Rasananda Meher of Sonepur has been felicitated with the National Handloom Award by Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar at New Delhi for weaving a unique Sambalpuri Bandha saree. The award, which is instituted by the Union Ministry of Textiles, was conferred on

the weaver for his contribution to the handloom sector. He was honoured for weaving a Sambalpuri Bandha (ikat or tie and dye) saree which has motifs and information on the 17 GI-tagged products of Odisha. According to reports, researcher Anita Sabat helped the weaver with the idea. Weaver Prafulla Meher had also provided guidance to Rasananda. In 2015, his son Biswanath Meher had won the first National Handloom Award for his Maa saree.

# Panel formed to probe various aspects of StartUp Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR  
The Mohan Majhi government has formed a three-member committee headed by Director of Industries to inquire into various aspects of StartUp Odisha.

The other two members are Additional Secretary/ Joint Secretary, Finance Department and Additional Secretary/ Joint Secretary, Public Enterprises Department, an official notification issued by the MSME Department said. The committee will look into financial grant of startups within and outside the State, fund distribution/grant to different private institutions stating them as incubator, output of project management consultants, contribution of NPS and EPF of project officials and use of office space by MNCs. It has been asked to submit its report by August 21.

Last month, the government had restricted the financial powers of the Startup Odisha authorities after MSME Minister Gokulananda Mallik visited O-Hub, the State's maiden centralised incubation centre amid allegations of irregularities and negligence. This saw a cap of Rs 1 crore and Rs 10 crore on financial power of executive chairman and board of directors respectively. "The department, which is 100-per cent shareholder of Startup Odisha, however, has the full power for sanctioning and incurring expenditure of any type, including schematic, non-schematic, recurring, non-recurring, revenue and capital," the notification said. Startup Odisha was launched in 2016 by the then Naveen Patnaik-led BJD government to support 5,000 startups in the State by 2025.

# 'Promoting Wellness' prog at RD Varsity



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Rama Devi Women's University concluded a five-day (August 5-9) intensive and interactive workshop titled 'Promoting Wellness'. It was a collaborative initiative led by Vice-Chancellor Professor Aparajita Chowdhury organised by the university's Counselling and Wellness Centre, Internal Quality Assurance Cell and Theosophical Order of Service. It was conducted by the Manam Foundation, a not-for-profit mental health

organisation based in Odisha working in the area of mental health. The objective of the workshop was to interact with over 200 faculty members and non-teaching employees and generate awareness on mental, emotional and psychological issues while dealing with students and in their respective professional and personal areas. The sessions were driven with an activity-based interaction with innovative techniques by Somya Mohapatra, Chief Therapeutic Counsellor, Manam Foundation.

# Srikant demands edu reservation for backward classes

LALIT MOHAN MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

Former Union Minister and Congress leader Srikant Jena on Friday raised the issue of non-implementation of statutory reservation system for the reserved category social groups in Odisha especially in the higher education system. He told the media that in a letter written by him on Thursday to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, he has demanded implementation of reservation system from the current educational year and conducting of a "caste-census" in the State immediately to know the socio-educational and economic status of the State's population.



SEBC population avails only 11.25% reservation in jobs and no reservation in higher education. He stated that due to non-implementation of the reservation policy, 5,100 SC-ST students and 7,000 OBC/SEBC students have been deprived of medical education facility in last few years. There is no reservation for OBC/SEBC students in degree colleges and State universities too. Out of total 2,525 medical seats, there are 1,684 seats after fulfilling NEET and Deemed Universities' seats. Out of this, the SC-ST students get 337 seats due to 20% reservation criteria while they are eligible to get 653 seats as

per 38.75% criteria. They lose 316 seats every year due to faulty reservation policy in the State. Similarly, the OBC/SEBCs are fully deprived of reservation. Jena, who is a proponent of social justice and reservation for SC, ST, OBC/SEBCs in Odisha, is also a top running contender for the PCC president post.

# In Bargarh Drunk driver hits divider; 19 hurt as bus overturns

PNS ■ BARGARH

At least 19 passengers had a close shave and escaped with minor injuries after a bus ferrying them overturned in the Bargali area in Bargarh district late on Thursday night. The mishap occurred while the private bus was en route to Damanjodi in Koraput district. While no exact reason for the mishap was ascertained immediately, passengers claimed that the driver was drunk and rammed the vehicle into the road divider after losing control. All the injured were rescued and admitted to the District



Headquarters Hospital (DHH). The condition of one of the injured passengers worsened, following which he was referred to the Burla-based VSS Institute of Medical Sciences And Research (VIMSAR). Police registered a case and launched a probe into the incident while the driver was currently absconding.

# Major success under FRA Odisha recognises 3 Habitat Rights for PVTGs

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has become a leading State in the country to accord Habitat Rights to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) under the Forest Rights Act (FRA). With the recognition of Habitat Rights of Juangs in Keonjhar district on August 7 by the District Level Committee (DLC), Odisha has become a forerunner with three Habitat Rights recognised for the PVTGs, the maximum in India. Earlier on August 6, the Habitat Rights of Juang community of Jajpur district had been approved by

the respective DLC. Paudi Bhuyan of Deogarh district was the first PVTG community in the State to receive Habitat Rights title on March 7, 2024. While Habitat Rights of Paudi Bhuyan have been recognised over 32 villages under Barkote block, Habitat Rights of Juangs in Jajpur district have been recognised covering 13 villages under Sukinda block and Habitat Rights for Juangs in Keonjhar district have been recognised covering 134 villages across four blocks. The Juangs of Keonjhar will become the sixth such

title awarded in India under the category along with the Juangs of Jajpur, Paudi Bhuyans of Deogarh in Odisha and Bharia PVTG in Madhya Pradesh and Kamar PVTG and Baiga PVTG in Chhattisgarh, having legal title and rights over their forest habitats. Minister ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Nityananda Gond, expressing his happiness over the development, said, "Our pro-people government is always there to see overall development of the tribal communities and especially the

PVTGs and with this Habitat Rights recognition this will be more defined and concrete." Commissioner-cum-Secretary ST, SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Department Roopa Roshan Sahoo said, "The Habitat Rights for three PVTG communities are a remarkable achievement and we would be planning for more as a major chunk of our State's population (around 23%) are tribals. Our efforts will be more focused on the welfare of these communities and especially for the PVTGs across the State."

# Vig nabs JE for taking bribe from contractor

PNS ■ JAGATSingHPUR

A Junior Engineer (JE) and another person were apprehended by the Vigilance police for alleged acceptance of a bribe of Rs 25,000 from a contractor in Jagatsinghpur district on Friday. The JE, identified as Smruti Ranjan Nayak and posted in Nauگان block of the district, and Babina Das, a private person, were caught during acceptance of the bribe from the contractor for handing over of a cheque for clearing his final pending bill. As per the direction of Nayak, the private person was allegedly accepting the bribe



amount from the complainant in the former's presence. Vigilance officials nabbed both the accused and the entire bribe money was recovered from their possession and seized. Following the trap, simultaneous searches were conducted at two locations of Nayak from disproportionate assets angle. In this connection, a case was registered and investigation was in progress.

# KISS students enter Guinness Records

Render National Anthem in largest single group  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) here has achieved another milestone after 13,944 KISS students entered the Guinness Book of World Records by rendering the Indian National Anthem as the largest single group. They collaborated with three-time Grammy Award winner Ricky Kej to create a monumental version of the anthem, which would be officially released on the eve of Independence Day on August 14. Guinness World Records officials announced the



record-breaking feat on Friday in New Delhi. The National Anthem would feature Ricky Kej, who directed the music in collaboration with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The group performance also includes flute maestro Hari Prasad Chaurasia, sarod

maestros Aman and Ayaan Ali Khan, and santoor maestro Rahul Sharma, among many other renowned artists. Expressing his happiness over this achievement, KIIT and KISS founder Dr Achyuta Samanta said this is not just a proud moment for KISS but also for Odisha and India.

# Advisory issued against exploitation of child artists in TV, Jatra

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Raising concerns over the safety of children engaged in entertainment industry, the Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSPCPR) has issued an advisory, instructing all district Collectors to prevent any kind of exploitation through effective implementation of various existing rules and regulations related to their rights. While hiring a child artist, TV or film producers and Jatra party owners are required to obtain permission from the Collector of the district where the activity will take place. They have to provide the Dis-

trict Magistrate with an undertaking in Form C (as per the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017), a list of child participants, parental or guardian consent and the name of the person responsible for the child's safety and security. "For live shows, there must be an announcement specifying that all necessary measures are taken to ensure no child was abused, neglected, or exploited during the performance or shooting. There should be a disclaimer to be displayed at the beginning of films, each episode of TV serials, reality shows, or content on social media platforms,"

reads a letter issued by OSCPCR Chairperson Mandakini Kar. It further said the Collectors may instruct the District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) to inspect the workplace and issue a permit, valid for six months only, to the producers, Jatra party or theatre owners. A DCPU also has to submit the list of child artists engaged in such shows to the Child Welfare Committee and the Labour Inspector of the district. The commission has instructed that no child or adolescent should be cast in a role or situation that is inappropriate for their age, maturity,

emotional or psychological development or that may distress or embarrass them. Infants under three months old may not participate in shows except for programmes promoting breastfeeding or immunisation. "Minors, especially those under six years old, must not be exposed to harmful lighting or irritating or contaminated cosmetics. Producers and Jatra party owners must ensure that children/adolescents receive adequate and nutritious food and water during the shooting and live performance," added the advisory. The commission has

strictly instructed that no child shall work more than five hours a day and no more than three hours without a break. All production units and Jatra parties have been asked to develop guidelines for dealing with children/adolescents on set. These guidelines should include general principles, procedures for obtaining parental consent, best practices, staff protocols for engagement and a child/adolescent protection policy. The Collectors have been instructed to submit the compliance report on the advisory at the earliest.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Reaching out

### PM Modi congratulates Muhammad Yunus, expresses concerns over the plight of minorities in Bangladesh

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reached out to Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Laureate from Bangladesh, to congratulate him on heading the interim government of Bangladesh. PM Modi took to X, to express concerns over the situation of Hindus and other Minorities in Bangladesh amidst the ongoing political turmoil. Muhammad Yunus, on his part has emphasised his commitment to restore law and order. Meanwhile, the Indian government, through various channels has reiterated its concerns about the situation of minorities for regional stability. Hundreds of people trying to cross over to India but have been sent back by the Border Security Force. The situation in Bangladesh is rather fluid as the students, the initial protesters have been overshadowed by the rogue elements who are taking advantage of the situation and indulging in looting and arson while attacking minorities to garner popular support. Slowly but surely the political tension has also exacerbated communal tensions within Bangladesh. The Hindu minority, which makes up about 8-10% of the population are worst hit. Recent reports have indicated a surge in attacks on Hindu temples, businesses, and homes, triggering fear and insecurity within the community.



Prime Minister Modi's outreach to Yunus can be seen as a calculated move to engage with a respected figure in Bangladesh who has international credibility and influence. By engaging with Yunus, Modi may be signalling India's support for democratic values and human rights in Bangladesh, while also voicing concerns about the security and well-being of the Hindu community. India is at the moment in a quandary. It has all along supported Sheikh Hasina and continues to do so but things have changed drastically. Sheikh Hasina is now unpopular while her opponents are all powerful. She may be called to join the investigation against her which may put India in dilemma. The silver lining is that Yunus is now in command, and he is widely regarded as an honorable man with an impeccable track record, even though he is an outsider in the corridors of power. He is India's best bet as China and Pakistan who have allegedly supported the movement to oust Hasina would like to subvert Indo Bangladesh relationship. He could be persuaded to be neutral. The political instability and potential for communal violence could lead to a refugee crisis, with many Hindus and other minorities seeking asylum in India. This could complicate India's domestic political landscape, especially in the bordering states of West Bengal and Assam. Meanwhile, the trade with Bangladesh has already nose-dived and the refugee crisis is growing. Bangladesh is a key partner in maintaining security in the Bay of Bengal region. This is a time for serious diplomacy. Prime Minister Modi would do well to engage with Muhammad Yunus at the earliest opportunity. While Twitter diplomacy is a good starting point, it needs to be followed up with direct engagement. A lot is at stake for India in Bangladesh's future direction.

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### PICTALK



Military aircrafts during the multinational air exercise 'Tarang Shakti 2024', in Sullur

# Gender rights and reality: Bridging the gap



GURDEEP KAUR

### Gender equality in India remains a distant dream, as deep-rooted gender norms continue to impede the nation's progress towards women emancipation

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right but a crucial component of a peaceful, cohesive, and sustainable world. It demands equal opportunities, treatment, and access to resources for all individuals, regardless of gender. Historically, women have faced discrimination on multiple fronts, from limited educational opportunities to restricted participation in decision-making processes. However, after years of struggle, women today have made significant strides, becoming prominent members of the workforce and key decision-makers in various fields. This progress aligns with the goals set by 193 countries that signed the Beijing Platform for Action, the most comprehensive global plan to eliminate systemic barriers and achieve women's human rights across social, economic, political, and environmental domains.



men, have the right to make decisions about their personal and professional lives. However, these constitutional rights do not always translate into practice, especially in rural areas, where customary and religious laws often override legal protections. In rural India, where a significant percentage of the population resides, gender equality remains elusive. Here, rigid customary practices contribute to a skewed sex ratio, early marriages, and limited educational opportunities for women. Women are often married off at a young age, without receiving proper education or being informed about their rights. Even when they are aware of their rights, they frequently lack access to opportunities for personal and professional growth. Legislation like the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act has helped improve the sex ratio in India, but the harsh reality remains that many women face discrimination in basic survival needs. In many families, women and girls eat last and least, while boys and men are given nutritionally rich diets. Women who cook for their families often do not cook for themselves, and from a young age, they are conditioned to prioritize the needs and preferences of men. The average age at which an Indian woman

ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF PERSONAL FREEDOM IS THE ABILITY TO EXERCISE CONTROL OVER ONE'S BODY AND SEXUALITY. SADLY, THE RIGHT TO MAKE CHOICES ABOUT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, WHETHER OR WHEN TO HAVE A CHILD, AND THE USE OF CONTRACEPTION IS STILL DENIED TO MANY WOMEN IN INDIA

has her first child is 22 years, but in rural areas, this age is often much lower, with many girls married off before they turn 18. These young women are not physically or mentally prepared to handle the responsibilities of marriage and family life, making them vulnerable to physical, sexual, and verbal abuse for perceived failures in their duties. In urban households, gender stereotypes are beginning to shift, with men taking on more household chores. However, they are not held to the same standards of diligence and regularity as women. Most women, regardless of age, class, caste, or community, remain vulnerable to domestic violence for reasons as trivial as poorly prepared meals or wearing a dress of their choice—issues that men rarely face. One of the most fundamental aspects of personal freedom is the ability to exercise control over one's body and sexuality. Sadly, the right to make choices about intimate relationships, whether or when to have a child, and the use of contraception is still denied to many women in India. According to a survey, a significant percentage of women aged 18-49 have experienced forced sex or sexual abuse at least once in their lives. This gendered expression of power has severe consequences for the mental

and emotional well-being of women, who are often reluctant to share their ordeals. Despite advancements in healthcare, many Indian women do not enjoy the right to health. In conservative settings, cultural norms discourage men from addressing the health needs of their female family members, and women themselves often do not recognize or report health issues. The presence of male doctors in rural areas further restricts women from undergoing necessary examinations and checkups. The literacy gap between men and women in India remains significant, particularly in rural areas where deeply entrenched gender norms discourage girls from pursuing education. Girls are often pushed into work at a much earlier age than boys, with little or no control over their earnings. Even in urban settings, working women are often not financially independent, either bearing the burden of family expenses or having no say in how their money is spent. Achieving gender equality in India requires a fundamental shift in attitudes among both men and women. Only through such changes can the goal of true gender equality be realized. (The writer is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, DU; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A COURT IS A COURT

Madam — The special feature of Indian judiciary is the relative non-interference in its functioning from either the executive or the legislature. Also, the hierarchical system of judiciary has ensured that no litigant goes unsatisfied with a particular court's verdict. The Supreme Court has time and again reiterated that no court in the country is above another. Besides, the SC has made it clear that although its judgments are binding on every court in India under Article 141 of the Constitution, the High Courts are in no way inferior to it because the former's administrative control is independent of the top court. SC has consistently refused to direct High Courts to clear cases in a time bound manner for the same reason. Justice Abhay Oka of the SC, during the course of a hearing, had succinctly remarked that "a court is a court". Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, in 2022, had decried the tendency to refer to the district courts as subordinate judiciary because there was no definition of the word "subordinate" although the world is frequently used in the Constitution.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

### VINESH PHOGAT HAS BEEN WRONGED

Madam— In an unfortunate turn of events, Vinesh was disqualified from a crucial Olympic match due to a minor weight discrepancy, sparking outrage and disappointment across the nation. This incident, which resulted in the loss of a potential medal for India, raises serious questions about the handling and management of the situation by the coaches and officials. Vinesh Phogat, who had successfully won three bouts in a single day, found herself disqualified just 24 hours after her semi-final victory. The controversy stems from the fact that it is highly improbable for an experienced athlete like Vinesh to gain 100 grams of weight in such a short period, leading many to suspect foul play. This suspicion casts a shadow over the transparency and fairness of the Olympic Games, prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi

### Economics should not be politicised



This refers to the editorial "Finance Minister yields" (Aug 8). Facing a backlash from the people, Members within NDA and the Opposition over changes to the property transaction taxation, the Finance Minister has given some concession to home owners, by way of two options. The tax payers can now choose to calculate their tax on long term capital gains either at 12.5% without indexation under the new scheme or at 20% with indexation under the old scheme. This is akin to income tax options. She

also stated in her speech on reduction in the income tax on annual income of Rs. 15 lakh. But the budget is not only taxes, it deals with development of the people as well as the country. People are burdened with high GST rates and fuel prices, no relief in them as they have cascading effect on overall inflation, which affects the poor most. On one hand government provides free ration & electricity to poor, on the other hand they are burdened with high taxes which nullify the former. FM did not mention about decreasing the fiscal deficit, decreasing the borrowings, increasing foreign investment in the country, boosting employment generation, rationalizing the freebies & subsidies that are affecting economy etc. which are equally important components of a budget. Development of the country should be the high priority in the budget and it should not be compromised by keeping people happy.

Dr O Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

to urge the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President, P.T. Usha, to explore every possible avenue to ensure that justice is served for Vinesh. There is also a need to investigate whether Vinesh was unknowingly given a weight-gain substance during the 24 hours between the semi-final and the final weigh-in, as a similar incident reportedly happened to another wrestler from a different country. These concerns raise serious questions about the integrity and transparency of the Olympic Games' management. While human error is possible in such a vast sporting event, the circumstances surrounding Vinesh Phogat's disqualification do not appear to fall into the category of innocent mistakes. If it is determined that Vinesh was wronged, India should strongly consider appealing the decision.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

### BANGLADESH: A WARNING FOR INDIA

Madam — Bangladesh, which had seemed politically stable for the past 15 years under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, is now showing signs of distress. Hasina's extended

tenure, while initially successful, has led to growing concerns about her increasingly autocratic behavior. This shift has resulted in the imprisonment of political opponents and numerous legal battles against figures like Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who gained significant popularity for his work with Grameen Bank. Could similar public discontent emerge in India? The government's actions, particularly over the past two terms, have shown tendencies toward authoritarianism. This has been evident in the public backlash against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), prolonged farmer protests against agricultural reforms, and discontent among youth over the Agniveer recruitment scheme. Rising inflation, unemployment, and corruption, coupled with selective legal actions against opposition members, contribute to a growing sense of frustration.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

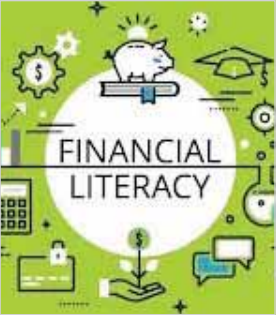
# The role of technology in driving financial literacy



YUVRAJ A THAKKAR

### With the power to democratise financial literacy, it can bring people from every stratum of society onto a level playing field

Financial literacy is no longer just a useful skill. It is now essential knowledge required to traverse the modern economic landscape. Studies have shown financially literate individuals can use their money wisely to plan for a secure future. Today, technology is an important enabler of access to resources required to cultivate financial literacy, democratise the sector, and empower people to improve their lives. However, despite the increasing penetration of the Internet and technology, a 2021 survey found only 27% of Indians are financially literate. Furthermore, only 16.7% of students have a general understanding of finances. With India projected to become one of, if not the leading, global economies by 2030, our society must be educated on the best practices for handling funds and making smart financial decisions. Online platforms such as YouTube, Skillshare, Udemy, and others are invaluable tools in the pursuit of



knowledge. YouTube has tutorials and explanations for practically every subject under the sun. Not only does it boast a vast catalogue, but everything on the site is free to access. This is a critical requirement in India where the common man is looking to save as much money as possible. Channels such as Khan Academy are great starting points for everyone's financial literacy journey. It's not just about breaking down complex information. While the concepts should be easy to understand, the modules must also be presented engagingly to retain the person's interest. No one enjoys being lectured with a barrage of informa-

tion in a boring manner. Social media and digital channels have also made it easier for educators and financial experts to share information. Instagram, TikTok, and X are now filled with financial gurus offering their opinions on the latest economic trends, up-and-coming investment opportunities, and the state of the global economy. Keep in mind that advice from such channels shouldn't be taken at face value. But they do offer a macro perspective of the economy and break down complex information into easily digestible pieces. Advancing technology also allows financial institutions such as banks and NBFCs to offer financial literacy directly to their customers. Bank apps can utilise push notifications, pop-ups, bank representatives, and even AI avatars to offer pertinent and timely advice. NBFCs can leverage subscription services to reach out to their customers via messengers to advise them on how to manage funds effectively. Artificial intelligence is going to significant-

ly improve access to and delivery of financial literacy. With just a smartphone, one can access tools such as ChatGPT to help answer common questions regarding finances. While it should not be used to gain investment advice, the current models of AI tools can offer practical knowledge regarding financial literacy and point the curious reader towards additional sources to gain more knowledge. It's no wonder that AI in BFSI is expected to hit a whopping \$100 billion by 2032. Technology is a powerful tool in the hands of those with an understanding of how to use it. With the power to democratise financial literacy, it can bring people from every stratum of society onto a level playing field. However, as technology evolves, so must we to enjoy the benefits of its advancement. This is a crucial step not just for society but also for our personal and financial well-being. (The writer is a MD at StoxBox; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### DO NOT LET SKY BE YOUR LIMIT

Stay resilient in the face of adversity, and you'll find that there's no limit to what you can achieve



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

In the realm of corporate success, there is a fundamental truth: the sky is not your limit, but merely the starting point. With a powerful drive and unwavering determination, ambition propels you to surpass all perceived boundaries. Just like a high-performance engine, achieving your dreams requires proper focus and direction. Today, we all have unique goals and dreams, both in our personal lives and careers. Nevertheless, the journey from having a vision to making it a reality can be challenging and draining. It calls for unwavering dedication, relentless effort, and occasionally, the need to ignore those who doubt you. In our business environment, having a strong drive and steadfast determination is not just a cliché, but a crucial factor in setting ambitious goals and relentlessly striving for excellence. We must connect these grand aspirations to careful planning, unwavering commitment, and consistent hard work. Only then will the aspiration reveal its magic. Many times, the biggest obstacles we face are a result of the actions of others.

There will always be those who view our dreams as unattainable or doubt our abilities. It's crucial to remember that our potentials are not defined by external voices. Throughout history, countless individuals have faced ridicule and scepticism, only to prove their doubters wrong ultimately. The proper environment can truly make a difference in our pursuit of success. It is an environment that fosters growth by providing opportunities to use our skills and allow-



ing for energetic and unwelcome ambition, which drives change and advancement. Surround yourself with mentors and peers who share your vision and are there to support you on your journey. Embrace growth opportunities and always value the feedback of others to refine your approach. Equally crucial is the art of expressing our goals. Make sure to communicate your goals and progress with both supervisors and colleagues. It's important to keep everyone in the loop and stay motivated.

When you openly express your aspirations and the steps you're taking to achieve them, not only do you attract valuable encouragement, but you also establish a sense of personal responsibility. However, the true basis of ambition stems from the constant trust within oneself. It is important to have a strong belief in your abilities and to acknowledge the unique qualities that you bring to the table. Recognising and celebrating the small victories along your journey to greater success is crucial. Embrace challenges as chances to grow and learn.

Stay resilient in the face of setbacks. Ambition is a potent force. When properly harnessed, it has the potential to unlock remarkable outcomes. Despite facing obstacles and encountering negativity, you will always choose to embrace a positive mindset. And getting encouragement from prominent individuals will help you hugely achieve your goals.

After all, everyone deserves a chance to shine. So set the bar high, work, and let the ambition catapult you to new heights. The sky is not the limit in the corporate world; it is just the beginning of your journey toward success.

*(The author is a freelance writer and a motivator; views are personal)*

# Bangladesh: Uncertainty and chaos grip the nation



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

As the nation grapples with a rising wave of Islamist extremism and escalating violence, the future of its democracy and regional stability hangs in the balance



The turmoil in Bangladesh, which led to Sheikh Hasina's resignation as prime minister and departure to India, raises two questions.

Why could she not prevent it? What lies ahead for Bangladesh and India? She should have reached out to the students-trying to win over the bulk of them who are moderates, and isolating the Islamist fundamentalist extremists--before their Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement (ADSM), had snowballed. She could have argued that her government did away with 30 per cent reservation for the descendants of the freedom fighters of the 1971 liberation war in 2018, which was their demand to start with. Bangladesh's High Court restored it following a petition by several descendants. Indeed, her government had appealed to the Supreme Court against the High Court's order.

In fact, the appellate division of the Supreme Court had, on July 21, 2024, ordered the allocation of 93% of government jobs on the basis of merit, reserving five per cent for freedom fighters and their descendants, and one per cent each for tribes, the differentially abled and sexual minorities. There could have been two reasons for the agitation continuing even after that. First, the rancour created by the government's harsh response to the agitation, which had led to a large number of deaths of students and others, was too great for the students to call a halt. They now wanted Sheikh Hasina's resignation. Second, Islamist terrorist organisations like Ansar al-Islam, linked to Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), as well as the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJE) and its students' wing, Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (BICS), closely tied to them, had joined the movement and tried to steer it to serve their own agenda--ousting Hasina and the Awami League Government, and installing a fundamentalist Islamist and pathologically anti-India dispensation in its place.

Sheikh Hasina knew all this, and should also have known the convulsive impact students' movement has in Bangladesh on at least four occasions. The first was the language



STUDENTS ALSO PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE AGAINST PAKISTAN'S COLONIAL RULE, WHICH EXPLAINS THE PAKISTAN ARMY'S SAVAGE ATTACKS ON THE CAMPUS AND HOSTELS OF DHAKA AND OTHER UNIVERSITIES ON THE NIGHT OF ITS NOTORIOUS CRACKDOWN

movement which demanded that Bengali along with Urdu, and not the latter alone, should become Pakistan's official language, and not Urdu alone, which Pakistan's ruling establishment, based in West Pakistan, wanted. Defying police repression, the movement peaked on February, 21, 1952, when there was a country-wide general strike. Police firing led to the deaths of four students, whose names--Rafiq, Barkat, Jabbar and Salam--shine prominently in Bangladesh's martyrs' pantheon. The movement continued to swell and compelled Pakistan's acceptance of both Bengali and Urdu as the country's official language. Again, students were at the forefront of the movement against General Ayub Khan's coup in 1958 and establishment of a military dictatorship, whose character could not be disguised by the fraudulent representative government introduced on March 23, 1962.

Students also played a prominent role in the liberation struggle against Pakistan's colonial rule, which explains the Pakistan Army's savage attacks on the campus and hostels of Dhaka and other universities on the night of its notorious crackdown, codenamed Operation Searchlight, killing hundreds of students, on the night of March 25, 1971. Finally, there was the massive Shahbag Square movement in Dhaka (February-May 2013) demanding death penalty to the war criminals of 1971. The government agreed to move the International Crimes Tribunal, set up by an amendment in 2009 to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, to investigate and prosecute personnel of the Pakistan Army and Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams, accused of committing genocide during the 1971 liberation war.

Given all this, Hasina should have

tried to diffuse the latest movement at the beginning. Be that as it may, what now in Bangladesh? What should India do now? Things do not look good. Hindu temples, including the emblematic Dhakeshwari temple, from which Dhaka derives its name, have been attacked and vandalised. Hindus shops, business establishments and homes, have been attacked, a Hindu municipal councillor aligned with the Awami League, has been killed. Many have been injured. Women have been assaulted. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statues have been pulled down and/or vandalised. Awami League ministers, leaders and activists are under attack, as are many of their homes and establishments. In Khulna, three persons, including an Awami League functionary, Mohsin Reza, have been lynched. Film producer Selim Khan, who made a movie on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's life, has been murdered along with his son, Shanto Khan. A hotel owned by an Awami League politician was set ablaze, causing 24 deaths, in Jashore. The house of Mashrafe Mortaza, Awami League MP and former Bangladesh test cricketer, has been destroyed.

These are just a few instances indicating the kind of open season that has been declared on the minorities, supporters of the Awami League and civil society elements opposed to Islamist fundamentalists. The question is whether things will improve or become worse. Much would depend on whether the interim government, headed by Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus, is able to establish order, or whether supporters of the BJE, BICS and Ansar al-Islam, who are behind the current violence along with sections of Begum Khaleda Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), are contained or allowed to escalate their campaign of vio-

lence and terror.

Yunus is neither a fundamentalist nor known for his pathological hatred for India. The backgrounds of some of his colleagues, however, raise questions. The Army's role is of critical importance. The report that it is being purged of those perceived to be pro-Sheikh Hasina, should worry those who want a peaceful, democratic and tolerant Bangladesh. Looking beyond the interim government, of critical importance is how free and fair are the parliamentary elections, that would have to be held now that Bangladesh's national parliament has been dissolved.

New Delhi is rightly watchful. The BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government ruling Bangladesh from 2001 to 2006, was pathologically hostile to India and actively sheltered and armed the secessionist groups active in the north-eastern parts of this country. A hostile Bangladesh, engaged in a repeat performance, is not what New Delhi wants.

Meanwhile, External Affairs' Minister, S. Jaishankar, has said that he does not rule out the machinations of a foreign hand behind the Bangladesh developments. Given his official position, he has to be circumspect with his words. But it is prima facie clear that Pakistan's ISI, and perhaps even China, have been involved.

Pakistan, which is having serious problems with the Taliban which it had once wet-nursed, and China, which has its troubles with Islamists, should remember William S. Baring-Gould's limerick, "There was a young lady of Rigal/ Who went for a ride on a tiger/ They returned from the ride/ With the lady inside/ And a smile on the face of the tiger."

*(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)*

# Integrative health approaches for mental wellbeing

The road to mental well being doesn't have to be paved with pills alone; sometimes, it is as simple as finding our breath and practicing Yoga

There is enough scientific evidence to validate that the mind, body, and soul are interconnected on a subtle level. This connection influences our thoughts and emotions, hence, our physical reality and our physical state impact our mental health and processes.



ISHAN SHIVANAND

True health is signified by a harmonious balance between mind and body. Even a minor imbalance can lead to a range of issues, from physical illnesses and mental health challenges to a sense of unfulfillment with oneself and life. As per the WHO, nearly 80% of mental health cases arise in low- and middle-income countries. Conditions like depression and anxiety affect approximately 9% of the world's pop-

ulation and account for over 10% of years lived with disabilities.

### The Drawbacks of Traditional Approaches

Pharmaceutical treatments have long been a cornerstone of mental healthcare, aiding in the management of severe cases and stabilisation. These targeted therapies address specific disease mechanisms based on biomarkers, leading to more personalised treat-

ment. Medical technology advancements enhance the efficacy of these treatments and improve patient outcomes. However, the reliance on medication alone often overlooks the holistic nature of mental well-being.

### Embracing Integrative Health Approaches

Integrative health approaches, particularly those rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems such as yogic modalities, offer a promising complement to traditional pharmaceutical treatments.

A combination of breathwork and meditative protocols helps individuals penetrate a heightened state of non-judgemental awareness. They enable a physiological state of rest and digestion or relaxation, which is opposite to the flight-or-flight

stress response. This interruption in the stress response helps foster a sense of balance and union between the mind and body.

Yogic practices are also underpinned by a few principles: The human body is a holistic entity comprising various interrelated dimensions inseparable from one another. The health or illness of any one dimension affects the others. Secondly, every individual's needs are unique and must be approached with tailored practices that acknowledge this individuality.

Yogic modalities empower individuals: to be their healers, actively engaging in their journey toward health, and fostering autonomy. Also, the quality and state of an individual's mind are crucial to heal-



ing. A positive mind-state accelerates healing, while a negative mind-state can prolong it.

### The Science Behind the Practice:

A consistent yogic practice has been shown to alleviate depression, leading to significant increases in serotonin levels and decreases in monoamine oxidase, an enzyme that breaks down neurotransmitters and cortisol. Yoga-based interventions also

help manage depressive disorders, stress, and anxiety by inhibiting the sympathetic area of the hypothalamus. This inhibition optimizes the body's responses to stressful stimuli and restores autonomic regulatory reflex mechanisms associated with stress. Moreover, yogic practices inhibit areas responsible for fear, aggressiveness, and rage, while stimulating the pleasure centres in the brain, resulting in a state of bliss and reduced anxiety. Regular practitioners of yoga and meditation experience lower heart rates, respiratory rates, blood pressure, and cardiac output.

**Broader Health Benefits:** Beyond mental well-being, yogic protocols improve cardiorespiratory performance, psychological profiles, and

plasma melatonin levels. It significantly reduces systolic and diastolic blood pressure, mean arterial pressure, and orthostatic tolerance. Yoga also enhances cardiovascular efficiency and homeostatic control, leading to better autonomic balance, respiratory performance, and overall well-being. Studies have shown that yoga-based lifestyle modifications can even aid in the regression of coronary lesions and improve myocardial perfusion in patients with coronary artery disease (CAD).

**Integrating Yoga into Modern Healthcare:** An integrated approach to mental health care leverages insights from traditional Indian knowledge systems, combining pharmaceutical treatments with non-pharmaceutical medita-

tive practices. This synergy not only addresses the immediate symptoms but also promotes long-term recovery and well-being. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, it's crucial to embrace the wisdom of ancient practices. By integrating yoga and other non-invasive approaches into our mental health toolkit, we can achieve a balanced state where the mind and body work in harmony. The road to mental well-being doesn't have to be paved with pills alone; sometimes, it's as simple as finding our breath and grounding ourselves in practices that connect us to our core.

*(The writer is mental health researcher and the founder of Yoga of Immortals (YOI) meditative program; views are personal)*



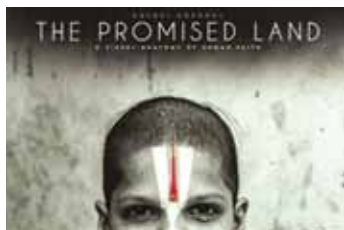








# A POWERFUL PORTRAIT OF FAITH THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY



**The Promised Land: A Visual Anatomy of Human Faith by Aashvi Agarwal and Kounteya Sinha offers a profound exploration of Ayodhya's spiritual heritage, capturing the raw emotions and devotion of millions in striking black-and-white photography, writes SAKSHI PRIYA**

At just 14 years old, Aashvi Agarwal from Kolkata has created something truly remarkable. Her collection of over 350 black-and-white photos goes beyond simple documentation, offering deep emotional insight into the city's visitors. Under the mentorship of Kounteya Sinha, a renowned journalist and photographer, her work captures the essence of Ayodhya with both historical depth and artistic flair. This coffee table book provides a unique perspective on the profound spiritual connection that draws millions to Ayodhya, a city imbued with cultural and religious significance. Agarwal's ability to depict the essence of Ayodhya's spiritual landscape is particularly noteworthy. Her images reveal the intense faith that envelops the city, especially in the wake of the Ram Mandir's inauguration. One can almost feel the reverence and awe emanating from the crowds of pilgrims captured in her lens. The monochrome format highlights the intricate details and emotions, making each image a powerful window into the heart of the city's devotion. Her use of light and shadow brings out the nuances of human expressions, highlighting moments of personal connection with the divine.



The book skillfully balances the grandeur of Ayodhya's architecture with the intimate stories of the individuals who visit. For instance, the images of devotees gathered at the Ganga ghats, their silhouettes etched against the flowing river, symbolise the eternal journey of faith. Another poignant photograph of a mother and child in the temple's soft glow captures the intimate bond between the sacred and the everyday. While the book focuses on the spiritual essence of Ayodhya, it consciously avoids delving into political or religious controversies. Instead, Agarwal's lens is focused on the human element - the pilgrims, priests and children who bring life to the city. This approach makes the book accessible and engaging to a diverse audience, inviting viewers from all walks of life to appreciate its universal themes of faith and humanity. Uma Nair, one of India's top art curators and critics, describes the book as "historic and unparalleled," commending Agarwal for capturing the essence of faith without political bias or personal agenda. Nair's praise

of the book as a "masterclass in storytelling and documentation" highlights its significance in the visual art world. Her contribution to the preface further enriches the book with her insightful perspective on its artistic and cultural value. Kounteya Sinha's influence as a mentor is evident in the disciplined yet expressive composition of the photographs. His guidance has helped shape Agarwal's natural talent into a sophisticated artistic voice, capable of conveying complex narratives through a single frame. The result is a collection of images that are not only beautiful but also deeply meaningful. *The Promised Land: A Visual Anatomy of Human Faith* is more than just a coffee table book. It is a profound exploration of faith, culture and the human spirit, captured through the lens of a young photographer with an extraordinary gift. Aashvi Agarwal's debut work is a monument to her talent and a powerful reminder of the enduring power of visual art to touch the human soul. **Self - Published Price - 4500**

# A POIGNANT PORTRAIT OF SRINAGAR'S BEAUTY AND STRUGGLE

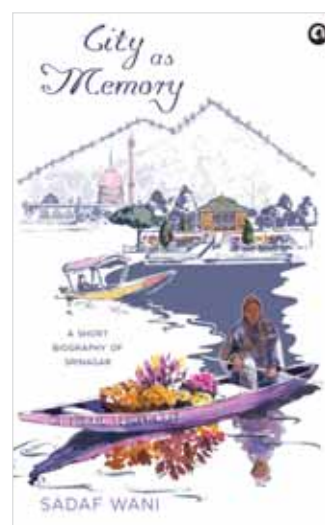
Sadaf Wani's *City as Memory* is a heartfelt exploration of Srinagar, where breathtaking beauty and deep-rooted pain exist side by side. Wani shares her personal experiences, creating a vivid picture of a city that is both fascinating and deeply scarred

## TEAM VIVA

Sadaf Wani's *City as Memory - A Short Biography Of Srinagar* offers a deeply personal and insightful look into Srinagar, Kashmir - a city where breathtaking landscapes are often overshadowed by ongoing conflict. Wani blends personal stories with historical context to present a nuanced portrait of Srinagar, revealing how its natural beauty is entwined with its troubled past. The book begins by delving into Srinagar's rich historical backdrop. Founded in 250 BCE by the Buddhist king Ashoka, the city's history is marked by conquest and foreign rule. Wani uses this historical context to set the stage for understanding Srinagar's contemporary struggles. Her childhood memories from the mid-1990s, a period of waning insurgency and increasing militarisation, illustrate how historical forces



have shaped the city. The beautiful gardens and serene lakes of Srinagar are persistently overshadowed by the heavy presence of military forces, which are a constant reminder of the city's ongoing issues. As Wani transitions to her teenage years in the early 2000s, the focus shifts to a time of intensified violence and civilian unrest. Her personal experiences during this period offer a close-up view of life in a conflict zone. The contrast between the picturesque Dal Lake and the



harsh realities of military checkpoints becomes a powerful symbol of Srinagar's contradictions. Wani's descriptions of restricted access to public spaces and tourist sites shed light on the psychological and emotional impact of living under constant surveillance. This juxtaposition highlights the deep scars left by ongoing conflict on both the city and its people. Wani's writing seamlessly weaves personal memories with broader historical and political analysis. Her stories reveal how conflict influences both individual identities and public spaces, providing a thoughtful

commentary on how political strife shapes a city's character. The contrast between Srinagar's scenic beauty and its troubled reality underscores the city's profound contradictions. Through vivid descriptions and reflective insights, Wani captures a place that is both enchanting and beleaguered. The cover of the book, illustrated by Zainab Tambawalla, truly brings Srinagar to life. It features a charming cityscape with a mosque, majestic mountains and a serene lake dotted with traditional boats. A delightful "Flower Man" in a shikara adds a touch of local character. The illustration's gentle, watercolor-like style creates a warm, nostalgic feeling, while the subtle barbed wire design hints at the region's complicated past. This artwork beautifully complements Wani's story, offering a vivid, heartfelt glimpse into Srinagar's captivating blend of beauty and struggle.

recounting of events; it's a profound exploration of Srinagar's complex character. Sadaf Wani's portrayal offers readers a deeper understanding of how beauty and conflict coexist, shaping the lives of its inhabitants. This book is a significant addition to the literature on Kashmir, providing both personal and political perspectives on a city at the crossroads of history and identity. Adding this book to your bookshelf is not just a literary choice but a way to appreciate the intricate relationship between place and memory. Wani's work is a must-read for anyone interested in the interplay between historical and valuable perspectives that will resonate long after the last page is turned. **Publisher - Aleph Book Company (Rs 399)**

