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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A new lease of life

The Govt reconstitutes NITI Aayog, inducts union ministers and NDA allies to enhance strategic planning

In a significant move to bolster its policy-making prowess, the Indian Government has reconstituted the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. This reconstitution includes 15 Union Ministers and notable allies from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), marking a strategic shift in the country's planning and development framework. This underscores the Government's commitment to integrating diverse ministerial insights into the policy-making process. These ministers come from various portfolios, ensuring that a broad spectrum of expertise and perspectives is brought to the table. This comprehensive approach aims to address multifaceted national challenges more effectively. The reconstitution also sees the induction of key NDA allies, signalling a collaborative effort to drive the nation's development agenda. By involving NDA allies, the Government aims to foster a more inclusive and cooperative environment within the Aayog. Among the notable ministers included are Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Home

Minister Amit Shah, and Defense Minister Rajnath Singh. Their presence is anticipated to significantly influence the economic, internal security, and defence policies of the country. The inclusion of ministers from portfolios such as Health, Education, and Rural Development indicates a holistic approach to addressing India's development needs.

This reconstitution is seen as a strategic shift from the traditional Planning Commission model to a more dynamic and inclusive NITI Aayog framework. It reflects the government's intention to leverage the collective wisdom of its senior ministers and allies to drive forward its vision of a 'New India'. The Aayog's reconstituted aims to facilitate better coordination between the central and state governments, ensuring that policies are effectively implemented at the grassroots level. One of the primary goals of this reconstitution is to enhance the implementation of policies. The government hopes to streamline the execution of key initiatives and programs. This is expected to result in more efficient policy delivery and improved outcomes on the ground. NITI Aayog was established on January 1, 2015, as a replacement for the Planning Commission. Its primary purpose is to promote cooperative federalism by involving state governments in the policymaking process. However gradually it lost its importance. The Indian government has increasingly favoured a centralised approach, leading to reduced involvement of states in planning and decision-making processes, undermining NITI Aayog's role. It lacks financial powers and direct allocation of funds, limiting its influence on actual policy implementation. Besides, there has been a tendency to prioritize immediate economic and political goals over long-term strategic planning, diminishing NITI Aayog's relevance in sustainable development. As the NITI Aayog embarks on this new phase, there is a sense of optimism about its potential to drive substantial progress. It is anticipated that the Government's latest move will lead to more robust policy frameworks.



# Parliament: Duty over disruption

The opposition can leverage parliament debates to engage with their constituencies but they often waste this opportunity by walkouts and protests



PRAFULL GORADIA

It is difficult to understand, especially since parliamentarians, appeared to overlook an essential of their vocation. That is, that the legislature usually does not take much time. The rest of the session is the opportunity for the opposition to demonstrate their talent and commitment through television. The ruling party or parties do not need the legislature except to have bills passed and enacted into law. If there are no laws that need to be passed urgently, the government and ruling party can do without the legislature virtually for an entire year. Of course, there remains the presenting and passing of the Budget, which can be legitimized only by the legislature, particularly the Lok Sabha. What has been stated hitherto has been well demonstrated by the state assemblies in India. They pass the odd bill once in a while, and the annual budget is the other essential item of business during the year. Most state legislative assemblies meet for three or four days at a time. Otherwise, for the few times they have to statutorily meet, each session is seldom for more than three or four days. However, the members of the legislative assemblies (MLAs) draw their pay and perks for the entire term of the legislative body.

This applies to Parliament too, although it has the budget, monsoon and winter sessions, which are long enough. In short, to restate, most of the time the legislatures can work for the benefit of the opposition members, who can display their skills, knowledge, familiarity and touch with their constituencies. With the advent of full-time coverage by television channels—Sansad TV being a prominent one—a great advantage has fallen into the hands of the Opposition. This is a boon for them; it is a free and constant medium to, as it were, communicate with their constituencies. This institution was introduced around the time I was in Parliament. Back then, most Members who spoke made full



use of the television channels by speaking for as long as possible. During the question hour between 11 am and 12 pm, only five or six questions and their answers could be completed, instead of all twenty. The reason was that those who had asked the questions spent as long a time as possible over asking their supplementary question, which was a privilege to the Member(s). The ruling party/parties have a better opportunity of exposure than opposition parties generally get. Yet, the opposition mindlessly throws away a lot of the session time by walking out, protesting otherwise, compelling the Speaker to adjourn the House for several hours or even the rest of the day. July 2 was another example when the Prime Minister rose to thank the President for her inaugural speech. For well over two hours, groups of opposition members took turns shouting slogans in an attempt to drown the Prime Minister's address to Parliament, or perhaps even to prevent him from speaking. Little do they realize that most television channels were telecasting his speech live, duly cutting out the sloganeering.



THE OPPOSITION MINDLESSLY THROWS AWAY A LOT OF THE SESSION TIME BY WALKING OUT, PROTESTING OTHERWISE, COMPELLING THE SPEAKER TO ADJOURN THE HOUSE FOR SEVERAL HOURS OR EVEN THE REST OF THE DAY

The only people who could hear the PM's speech being disturbed by slogans were the Members of the Lok Sabha. All that the slogan-shouting Members gained was a reputation of being wasters, as members who cost the taxpayer a lot, merely to put in negative effort to try and prevent the Prime Minister from being heard. Each session and day of Parliament cost several crores of rupees. Each Member of Parliament costs several lakh rupees a year to serve the country and its people, and not to prevent Parliament from functioning. There are many better ways of protesting, such as, such as wearing black bends on one's sleeves, sometimes wearing black caps, or sometimes, dressed fully in black. Members can also refuse to take their seats for the entire day, instead, occupying the adjacent aisles for the duration of the session, as a mark of protest, but let the work go on. This would assure all the people, including their constituents that they are spending money on the functioning of Parliament with its thousands of employees constructively and in the interests of the nation. They should realize that the

British departed from India long ago, and such negative activities have no place in our country anymore. Let it be borne in mind that being elected to Parliament (or the state legislative assemblies) is a national duty more than the privilege it has come to be mistakenly understood. What we have witnessed over the two days of July 2 and 3 portends ill for the institution of democracy, which everyone, from the opposition parties to the media and academia, not to forget their cheerleaders overseas, keeps shouting is "under threat in India". But where is the real threat to democracy coming from? This needs to be clearly understood. No democracy can be threatened because its electorate gives a clear mandate for stable governance for a developed economy and a better future. It is the cavalier fashion in which certain parties—and political families living in a sense of entitlement—treat Parliament and its protocols and rules that are emerging as the real threat to democracy. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

### PICTALK



Shia mourners participate in the 9th Muharram procession, on boats, at Dal Lake, in Srinagar

PTI

## Defying the Western pressure, India prioritises national interests



K S TOMAR

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Moscow highlights significant gains for India on strategic, economic, and diplomatic fronts, despite Western reservations

Despite a concerted campaign by the US and Western countries to isolate Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, several nations, including India, have prioritized their national interests. This has allowed President Putin to bolster Russia's economy, with India's \$65 billion worth of crude oil imports playing a crucial role in mitigating the impact of US-imposed sanctions. India maintains close strategic ties with the United States, yet it has become the second-largest importer of Russian crude oil after China. This alignment with Russia serves as a counterbalance to US influence. In recognition of this support, President Putin awarded Prime Minister Modi the Order of St. Andrew. The US, as expected, reacted by urging India to ensure that any resolution to the Ukraine conflict respects the UN charter and Ukraine's territorial integrity. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller emphasised the importance of these principles in international engagements with



Russia. In this context, experts view Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow through multiple lenses, highlighting significant gains for India on strategic, economic, and diplomatic fronts: India's geopolitical strategy significantly revolves around balancing China's rising influence. Strengthening ties with Russia serves as a counterbalance to China's aggressive posturing in the region. The visit underscored mutual interests in ensuring a multipolar world order, acting as a strategic buffer against unilateral actions by any major power, including China.

### Strategic Gains:

A key highlight of Modi's visit was the reinforcement of India-Russia defense ties. Historically, Russia has been one of India's most reliable defense partners. Discussions around the S-400 missile defense system and potential future collaborations in defense technology were central to the visit, enhancing India's military capabilities and contributing to regional stability. Western sanctions against Russia have led it to seek stronger ties with non-Western countries, including India. Both India and Russia advocate for a multipolar world order, balancing US influence. Modi's visit reflects India's independent foreign policy, maintaining strong ties with both the US and Russia. Energy security is a cornerstone of India's economic policy, and Russia plays a critical role with its vast oil and natural gas reserves. Modi's visit focused on long-term supply agreements, investments in energy infrastructure, and collaboration in nuclear energy projects, ensuring a stable and diver-

sified energy supply for India. Boosting bilateral trade and investment was another focal point. Despite historical ties, trade volumes between India and Russia have not reached their full potential. The visit aimed to address this by exploring new trade avenues in sectors like pharmaceuticals, information technology, and agriculture, promising long-term benefits for both economies. Modi's visit signifies a reaffirmation of traditional alliances. Reinforcing ties with Russia offers India a more balanced foreign policy amidst the US's increasingly transactional approach. The visit likely included discussions on expanding cooperation in space exploration and nuclear technology, fostering innovations that benefit both nations. Cybersecurity is crucial in the digital age. Modi's visit likely explored collaboration in these fields, ensuring both nations can safeguard their digital infrastructures and harness economic benefits. (Writer is a political analyst; views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### RBI'S NEW GUIDELINES FOR BANKS

Madam — According to a report, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has mandated that banks cannot label borrowers as frauds without giving them a hearing. Banks must now issue a 21-day show-cause notice before classifying an account as fraudulent. This decision follows a Supreme Court order. The RBI has instructed banks to develop a fraud risk management policy, approved by at least three board members, including one full-time director and two independent or non-executive directors, to ensure compliance with the principles of natural justice. Additionally, banks are required to update their Early Warning Signal (EWS) systems within six months, integrating data analytics to detect unusual patterns. The RBI has set a threshold of Rs. 1 crore for reporting frauds to the state police, with private banks also reporting to the Serious Fraud Investigation Office and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, while public sector banks report frauds above Rs. 6 crore to the CBI, as usual. In consortium lending, if separate offenses are committed, each member may file separate complaints; otherwise, one member can file a complaint with support from the others. In summary, the new RBI rule mandating a 21-day notice before classifying borrowers as frauds enhances borrowers' rights by allowing them to present their cases and defend against allegations, ensuring fair treatment. This rule will improve transparency, foster trust between borrowers and financial institutions, strengthen governance through board-approved risk management policies, and regulate and streamline the processes of borrowing and lending. Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### THE PLIGHT OF GIG WORKERS

Madam — This letter addresses the plight of gig workers in our country. Gig workers are a pitiable lot. Regardless of the weather, they must fulfill their cus-

### Defeating global warming



A well-defined quadrilateral encompassing solar, wind, green hydrogen, and nuclear clean energies as its four vertices is essential to effectively combat global warming and related weather catastrophes, which lead to loss of lives, assets, and properties. 'Well-defined' means urgently establishing both global and national annual

targets for each of the four clean energy sources. What percentage should be allocated to solar energy? What percentage should be allocated to nuclear energy? And similarly, for wind and green hydrogen? Currently, the world lacks direction, resulting in slow progress towards achieving 100% clean energy and 0% carbon emissions. The "greater capacity" and "economic power" of nuclear energy, compared to the other three clean energies, cannot be ignored. Increasing the capacity of existing nuclear reactors is more economical than constructing new ones. It would be much better and safer if all nations signed a pact to use nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes, such as generating clean energy and electricity, rather than for making bombs, weapons, and war paraphernalia. PV Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

tomers' demands. I used to wonder how much they earn by zipping and zapping on their bikes, risking their lives in India's urban jungle. My curiosity was answered when I saw a delivery boy working on a rainy day. The bags on his bike were covered with a plastic sheet, but he was drenched to the bone. Since then, I have made it a point to order via the "Cash on Delivery" mode, so that I can tip gig workers generously. Surprisingly, most of the time my tip is politely declined ("Arre sir, yeh to humara kaam hai") or accepted with reluctant embarrassment. Avinash Godbole | Dewas

### STRENGTHENING INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS

Madam — In the neighboring country of Nepal, which borders India to the east, west, and south, KP Sharma Oli's appointment as Prime Minister was met with congratulations from PM Modi. India and Nepal have shared a deep bilateral relationship since early days, but the abolition of the monarchy in

2008 introduced challenges. Enhancing trade, investment, and infrastructure development can provide mutual economic benefits. Joint ventures in hydropower projects and tourism can foster economic interdependence. Promoting cultural and educational exchanges can strengthen people-to-people connections, building a stronger foundation for bilateral ties. Short-sighted and selfish politicians sought to please China, which exploited the situation. The Modi government must provide aid to Nepal and invigorate the relationship more than ever before, ensuring that Nepal does not feel the need to turn towards China, which would harm India's interests. India must infuse new energy into its relationship with Nepal, ensuring that both nations work together for mutual growth and regional stability. Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

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### FIRST COLUMN TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

Accepting events as they happen brings a great sense of calmness



RAVI VALLURI

Aeons ago in ancient China lived an old farmer who worked on his land for several years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, a group of neighbours came to commiserate with him. "Such misfortune," the agitated group of villagers reacted. "Maybe," the farmer replied nonchalantly. A few days later the horse returned, accompanied by three wild horses. Another group of villagers approached the house of the agriculturist to sympathise. "Maybe," replied the aged farmer.

The following day, the farmer's son tried to mount one of the untamed horses and was thrown off. The strapping youngster broke his leg. The overwrought neighbours once again queued up to offer their sympathies at this misadventure. "Maybe," was the desultory answer yet again. A few days later some military personnel swooped on the village to draft young men. Looking at the incapacitated stripling, he was disqualified from being recruited. The exuberant neighbours congratulated the old grazier on the turn of events. "Maybe," was the laconic reply yet again. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has succinctly elucidated the significance of the aphorism, 'to accept people and situations as they are' in his teachings.

#### The 4 Ds of Abnormal Behaviour

Abnormal behaviour can be construed as behaviour that is disturbing (socially unacceptable), distressing, maladaptive (or self-defeating) and often the result of distorted thoughts (cognitions) as per Wikipedia. There are four strains in this abnormal behaviour. These are deviance, dysfunction, distress, and danger. Deviant behaviour is usually different, extreme, and unusual and could even include bizarre behavioural patterns. The second in the series is distressing behaviour.

People who are related to such individuals feel unpleasant and unsettled in their presence. Dysfunctional behaviour discommodates the patient to such an extent that it acts as a deterrent in his day-to-day functioning and behaviour and interferes with his range of activities. Five specific patterns of anxiety disorders fall into this category. The first is termed General Anxiety Disorder. This is a prolonged, vague, quite inexplicable fear having no objective basis, accompanied by hypervigilance, and attached motor tension of the brain. Next is what in quotidian parlance



is called panic disorder. These are none other than perpetual and frequent anxiety attacks which are accompanied by psychological symptoms such as breathlessness, palpitations, a trembling feeling, dizziness and even a sense of total loss of control over the self.

Next in the line of mental disorders are phobias. Humans have irrational phobias such as Acrophobia (fear of heights), Glossophobia (fear of addressing an audience), Claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), and Aviophobia (fear of flying). In such situations, a human being is preoccupied with a wide range of thoughts, which are normally irrational. Last, but not less distressing — on this ill-fated checklist is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These individuals suffer repeated and recurrent nightmares, flashbacks, impaired concentration, and emotional numbing which invariably follows traumatic or stressful events. Our country is plagued by three major issues namely, addictions, women's issues, and psychological disorders. Generally, citizens approach tantriks, babas, and quacks hoping for a miraculous cure. It is paramount to meet a qualified medical practitioner. The first step to recovery is medication under the expert guidance of a doctor. Next, after a period of treatment, it would be prudent to contact self-help groups, which sustain the treatment. For instance, undergoing the Happiness Course of the Art of Living, where one learns the Sudarshan Kriya breathing technique which harmonises the body and thought. "No matter how hard the past, you can always begin again," said Gautama Buddha.

(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)

# Focus on employment, innovation and skill



DINESH SOOD

### The Union Budget 2024 must factor in rising unemployment and need for innovation for boosting the economy and sustaining economic growth



The upcoming Union Budget on July 23 will shed light on initiatives that may reshape economic priorities under the Modi3.0 government. Amid various expectations and commitments, the government's focus on skills, employment, and innovation emerges as a key strategy in addressing current challenges and shaping future opportunities. The decision to rename the Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development to include livelihood emphasizes a shift to provide employable skills to the most vulnerable 67 per cent of the country's underprivileged population.

Placing skill development ahead of employment underscores a proactive approach to addressing the issue of a shortage of skilled workforce, especially in the health & wellness, manufacturing, and technology sectors. This not only recognizes the immediate need for a trained workforce but also positions skill development as a key driver for sustainable employment generation. As the Budget approaches, stakeholders across sectors eagerly await concrete measures that go beyond mere promises and lead to tangible outcomes. The effectiveness of these initiatives in translating into job creation, technological innovation, and sustainable economic growth will be carefully scrutinized. The government's steadfast commitment to enhancing skills holds the promise of unleashing India's potential as a global economic powerhouse in the years ahead.

The rebranding and revitalization of the 15-year-old National Skill Development Mission (NSDM) as the Skill India Mission under PM Narendra Modi has sparked concerns about the effectiveness of the ambitious Skill India program. This program has received support from two governments over 15 years — first the UPA and then the NDA. India is in the midst of an urgent unemployment crisis due to an employment



SKILL INDIA WAS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT UNSKILLED YOUNG PEOPLE AND EQUIP THEM FOR THE JOB MARKET, BUT UNEMPLOYMENT RATES REMAIN HIGH

deficit. Issues such as the delayed implementation of PMKVY 3.0 and lack of placement support are exacerbating this problem. The latest data underlines the severity of India's unemployment crisis, making it crucial to prioritize employment generation to confront the challenges facing the Indian economy, especially with a significant number of young people entering the working age each month.

In July 2015, PM Modi stated that "Skill India aims to build self-confidence among the underprivileged, rather than just providing jobs". However, nearly a decade later, the youth's interest in the program seems to be waning. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has implemented strict attendance monitoring and centralized student information. Unfortunately, this has led to a decline in student retention, with many dropping out due to the rigid attendance requirements. Skill India was designed to attract unskilled young people and equip them for the job market, but unemployment rates remain high. Data from the International Labour Organization reveals that the proportion of educated unemployed individuals has risen sharply from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2023. Established in 2014, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship absorbed the NSDC and other programs to train 300 million people by 2024. Despite partnering with various organizations and raising awareness, the programs have not been as effective as envisioned. Experts argue that even traditional degrees do not guarantee employment, and the education system is outdated and not job-focused. Only a small percentage

of candidates certified by the PMKVY program have found jobs, indicating a fundamental challenge with the current skilling initiatives. Boosting skilling programs and industry partnerships is an urgent necessity to create ongoing skilling avenues and improve employability for school dropouts, and unskilled, or semi-skilled workers who need to secure a livelihood.

Although the announcement of setting up 75 skilling e-labs for simulated learning in the 2022-23 Union Budget is a positive move, we must recognize that our problem is far-reaching. API-based trusted skill credentials and discovery layers to find relevant jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities won't suffice beyond a certain point, necessitating an urgent need to skill the masses and empower the country's youths. We must acknowledge that over 40% of Indians aged 15 to 24 are neither in education, employment, or training, which is significantly higher than the South Asian (30%) and global (24%) averages. Indian firms report substantial skill shortages compared to other countries, and they assess only about 46% of graduates as employable.

The majority of students lack the necessary skills, and the skills they do possess are not aligned with the needs of their employers. Every year, more than 12 million young people in India become employable, yet we are unable to absorb them into the workforce. Many of these individuals hold higher education degrees, but they lack the necessary employable skills. The India Skills Report (ISR) 2024 highlights that only 50.3% of graduates from higher educational institutions are deemed employable. A skill gap study conducted

by the NSDC during 2010-14 indicates that by 2025, India will need nearly 109.7 million additional skilled workers across various sectors. While the government's interventions in promoting skill development are commendable, more needs to be done to bridge the skill gaps. Wish List: In the 2024-25 Union Budget, it is crucial to prioritize upskilling initiatives for gig workers, due to the eight-fold increase in young people's participation in the gig economy from 2019 to 2023, the majority of these youth come from Tier-I and Tier-II cities and rural areas.

While the government is working to make employable skills more accessible through public-private partnerships, there is a need to facilitate and incentivize the establishment of more skill development universities to steer the youth, especially undergraduates towards skills. This will help align the skill courses with global standards and significantly enhance the youth's skills, contributing to the nation's workforce development. I strongly urge a significant budget allocation to provide employable skills, particularly to school dropouts on a priority basis. This will not only empower them but also significantly contribute to the growth of the Indian economy, aiming to reach \$7 trillion by 2030 and position India as the world's third-largest economy.

(The writer is Co-Founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres.; Views expressed are personal)

# Kerala: Beyond the well-crafted image of a tidy, literate State

### Behind its progressive facades lies a struggle with industrial stagnation, healthcare shortcomings, and a surprising reliance on superstition

The assumption among the people outside Kerala is that it is the most literate, intelligent and hygienic State in the country. The ruling CPI(M) leaves no stone unturned to portray it as the land of people with a scientific temper and is the numero uno in all spheres of life. There are no countries in the world where you will not find expatriate Malayalees. S.K Pottekkadu, the best travel writer the State has produced in the last 150 years has written articulately about the Keralites whom he met in South Africa and Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) even in the days when there were no diplomatic ties between India and these countries. The modern-day reality of Kerala is entirely different and far from



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

what is projected by the CPI(M). Malayalees are leaving en masse from Kerala to Europe, Australia, the USA, Canada, Latin America, Africa and of course the West Asian countries in search of livelihood and for higher studies. There are no major industries worth their names in the State other than some public sector companies like FACT, Cochin Refineries and Cochin Shipyard. Industrialists and entrepreneurs have translo-

cated their enterprises to neighbouring States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The claim by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his minister of health Veena George that the State is a role model in health care and well-being for the rest of the country and the world is a great joke. The chief minister boards the first available flight to the USA whenever he is afflicted with the common cold. Recently, a four-year-old girl was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode for the removal of her sixth finger.

However, the doctor who performed the surgery operated on her tongue while leaving the finger untouched. Though her parents alerted the hospi-

tal authorities, the initial reaction was denial of the faux pas by the latter.

Remember, the Kozhikode Medical College and Hospital is a most sought-after institution by prospective medical students! This is not an isolated incident as such things happen quite regularly in the State's government hospitals. The doctors have their justification for such mistakes. Most of them say they are overworked and underpaid. When they work under pressure, such errors are bound to happen, claim the doctors! The aim of this column is not to embarrass the doctors or their minister of health who was a mere news reader in one of the many TV news channels that have mushroomed in the State over the last two decades.

The recent controversy about sorcerers digging out (or mining?) copper plates, miniature artefacts and bones of some birds like hens or ducks from the residence and office of K Sudhakaran MP who is president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee is an issue that shows the large scale obscurantism prevailing among the descendants of Jawaharlal Nehru, the wholesale dealer of scientific temper. According to sources close to Sudhakaran, the sorcery was the handiwork of people in the party itself who wanted to see the KPCC chief remain in bed for the rest of his life.

There are black magicians across Kerala who have the "expertise" to neutralize one's enemies or help you to become a minister or even chief min-

ister! This is not an exaggerated statement as this writer himself has spoken to a sorcerer who was into this kind of business for decades.

When Oommen Chandi was the chief minister (2011-2016), there was this Congress leader who felt left out during the formation of the UDF Government. When his efforts to become a minister failed, he approached a sorcerer from Malabar who offered the former to make him a minister and that too with a plum portfolio by performing puja. The sorcerer said that witchcraft had to be done and it would cost the politician Rs 12 lakh and the latter accepted the proposal with glee. The magician rang up this writer and said that the puja would begin the next morning

and the politician would become the minister in three months. Presto, in three months, the politician was sworn in as a minister with a coveted portfolio! The story did not end there. The sorcerer was not paid the promised money and he had to warn the politician that he had the know-how to get the minister dismissed from the government.

Last heard, the politician (nay, minister) hushed up the issue by paying half the amount he had agreed to pay earlier. Politicians cheating the electorate is quite common but hoodwinking even wizards and warlocks is new information. Sorcery and black magic are not confined to Kerala. They are a global phenomenon with even our Dravidian politi-

cians who swear by rationalism seeking guidance from astrologers, wizards and sorcerers for survival.

Some of the countries that played in the World Cup football championship in the 1970s and 1980s used to have an official sorcerer for the team. His mission is to perform witchcraft near the rival team's goalposts to ensure that the ball enters the post without failure! If you feel that sorcery is restricted to politics, business and sports, you are mistaken, Sir. There are many instances of it being used by scientific researchers in the US and Russia. Wait for another occasion.

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





# Hyderabad

**The past week of Bigg Boss OTT3 saw the eviction of tarot card reader Munisha Khatwani. In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, she speaks of her eviction, contestants being image-conscious and also discusses the incident between Armaan Malik and Vishal**

## LAVANYA GUDELLI: **Aspire to inspire, before you expire**



goals. Her father's unwavering support and sacrifices were crucial, despite his lack of formal education. She navigated numerous challenges, from finding college notifications in newspapers to securing admission to an MTC women's college. "I didn't even know it was a women's college when I joined," she laughed, recalling her surprise at finding herself among 200 girls.

Despite insecurities and feelings of inferiority, Lavanya persevered. She switched from engineering to BSc Electronics in correspondence and completed her degree. "When you're passionate about something and you're genuine, you get second chances," she affirmed, her words resonating with a profound truth. Lavanya's first exposure to social work came through an internship with the

Youth Empowerment Foundation. Her zeal for social service and leadership skills quickly shone through.

In July 2018, Lavanya conceptualised 'Be The Change Foundation', inspired by the Gandhian quote, "Be the change that you want to see in the world." Without social media influence or the ability to travel extensively, she gathered over 200 volunteers through a WhatsApp group for their first event, a massive food distribution on Independence Day. "That was the first ever offline event I have done in a big range," she said proudly, her eyes shining with the memory.



Her journey, throughout has had its own challenges. Health issues, including a bout of facial paralysis and personal struggles did not deter her. "Despite the challenges, I got my first award in Ravindra Bharati in 2018, followed by the National Youth Icon Award in 2019," she recounted, her voice filled with pride.

Lavanya did face criticism from her parents, who initially did not understand her dedication towards social service. "They told me, 'You are not a crorepati to go and donate things. First, make money.' But money can't make you a rich person. It's your passion and dedication," she asserted with conviction.

Be The Change Foundation focuses on various initiatives, with menstrual hygiene and health being a significant area of impact. Lavanya reflected on the success of their event, 'She Inspires' conferences, which acknowledge and celebrate women from diverse backgrounds. "We have done four years of complete She Inspires conferences. This August 15, we are completing six years successfully for Be The Change," she announced.

Focusing primarily on menstrual hygiene and health, especially in slum areas, she explained, "We give free pads and have our associate partners. We tied up with non-profit brands only." The impact of this initiative is significant, reaching over 10,000 women, both directly and indirectly.

Her personal passion extends beyond physical health to mental health. "Many people are suffering with a lot of trauma, a lot of disappointment and a lot of suicidal thoughts," she noted.

To address these issues, she actively engages with various communities. "I go to colleges, schools, orphan homes and curate events. I deliver talks on why we should see life in a positive light," she explained. Lavanya's role as a guest speaker on YouTube and other platforms further amplifies her message of hope and resilience.

Lavanya's journey underscores passion and the profound impact of individual determination. "We have to do something before we expire. Always aspire to inspire," she concluded, her words a powerful reminder of the impact one individual can have on the world.

**LAVANYA GUDELLI, THROUGH HER BE THE CHANGE FOUNDATION, HAS BEEN WORKING TOWARDS SEVERAL INITIATIVES FOR THE LESS FORTUNATE. SHE TALKS TO THE PIONEER ABOUT HER PASSION FOR THE SOCIAL CAUSE AND MOTIVE BEHIND HER FOUNDATION**

AARTI SREENATH

Lavanya Gudelli, a radiant example of hope and fortitude, shared her inspiring journey and the profound motivations that shaped her into the dynamic community leader she is today. As the founder of Be The Change Foundation, her story is a testament to perseverance, passion and the indomitable human spirit.

"The motivation started when I was studying in the 6th grade in my village," Lavanya began with her voice filled with nostalgia. Her true inspiration came from none other than Mother Teresa. She recalled how she was always inclined to give back to the community, even as a young, reserved and introverted child. "Children can get addicted to video games or bad things, but if tuned in the right way, they can create wonders," she emphasised, highlighting the importance of guiding youth towards positive endeavours.

Her spirituality played a significant role in her early life. Missionary books deeply influenced her values and outlook on life. "I am always a giver," she said with conviction. "I don't read missionary books now, but at the time, I used to." Despite the lack of resources and support, her inherent drive to serve others never wavered.

Her educational journey was marked by significant challenges. She was an engineering student in computer science but couldn't complete it due to some personal and financial struggles. "We were four kids and my father, was an auto driver, while my mother worked as a maid. I'm the only graduate from my entire bloodline," she explained.

Despite all of the setbacks, she never lost sight of her



## 'Entering BB house without strategies went against me'

TEJAL SINHA

Rightly termed India's most controversial show, *Bigg Boss* stands out to be true to it. The ongoing *Bigg Boss OTT 3* has certainly been around multiple controversies. Just as the format brings in—also comes the weekly eviction.

The past week saw the exit of Tarot card reader Munisha Khatwani and also the season's first rule break—violence by YouTuber Armaan Malik.

As we get into a chat with the former contestant, though she felt she had the potential to hang in there at the house for more time, she has no regrets about getting out of the house either. "My journey has been very interesting. The show has been memorable for me, especially with all the personal equations that I have made with Lovekesh and Vishal. The best relationship I formed is very clear to everybody; it's with Love, Vishal and everybody knows they are brothers to me and these are the only true relationships I could form in the house."

While many would initially be skeptical about getting into the show, the former actress wasn't really skeptical but rather excited. "Since there was a lot of back and forth in my process, I was finalised pretty late. I got to know that I was entering the *Bigg Boss* house at the very last moment. So yeah, I was excited to get in, though I should have been skeptical (she giggles)."

The fights, the friendship breaks, the backstabs and all the negativity around have been pretty evident for the avid viewers of the show. In fact, Munisha too felt that living with the negativity and politics in the house was the most challenging and difficult part of the show. She believes that she could survive with less food, fewer facilities, or even with no communication, but the negativity and politics just got to her.

"Entering the house with no strategies went against me," says Khatwani, who is, however, proud of the fact that she was stuck with Lovekesh and Vishal till the very end. But again,

"Being honest and introverted doesn't turn out well because I think you need to play differently as you enter the house and I feel I am not capable of that."

However, being spiritual did help her out in the best way possible.

She does feel that with her background in tarot reading, she found out the true aura of her fellow contestants, which turned out to be difficult for her to vibe with them. "I could see that most of them are not authentic."

A lot of people, she says, in the house are image-conscious.

Further in this chat, we also went on to discuss the incident of Armaan slapping Vishal, to which she shares that she does not support any such action. Like most people, she says she too opposes violence. The incident further led to Armaan Malik being nominated for the entire season. However, looking at the other side of the coin, without being objective, she said, "If we look at it from the standpoint of a husband and wife, I believe anyone could have done the same thing and would lose their temper. I'm not saying that's appropriate, but when it comes to their spouse or family, individuals occasionally over-react or get quite protective. I still find it unacceptable."

Going ahead and discussing the issue, she does highlight that, regretfully, because Payal did not use the exact same words, the problem got worse. She shares, "According to what I know about Vishal, he is a kind man with no bad intentions. He has strong family values and comes from a respectable household. The fact that he wasn't given the chance to present his side of the story is unfair. He ought to have been given an opportunity to defend himself, but everyone was free to condemn and boycott him. But by then, everyone had come to their own opinions."

As we head towards the end of the chat, she cordially concludes, saying, "I don't know about Wildcard, but I would surely want to go up on the weekend and speak to Vishal and Love. I am definitely rooting for them and all the wishes to them."

**In recent years, detoxification or 'detox' diets have surged in popularity, touted as a quick fix to eliminate toxins from the body, promote overall health, and assist with weight loss. But do these diets live up to the hype?**

### Understanding detox diets

Detox diets are short-term dietary interventions designed to cleanse the body. They often involve a period of fasting, followed by a strict diet of fruits, vegetables, juices and water. Proponents claim that detox diets can help with weight loss, enhance the function of the liver, kidneys and colon and improve overall health.

### Science behind detox diets

Despite their popularity, the scientific evidence supporting detox diets is limited and of low quality. Studies on detox diets often have significant design flaws, including small sample sizes, lack of control groups and short durations. Consequently, their findings are not robust enough to draw definitive conclusions.

A 2015 review of National Centre for Biotechnology Information concluded that there is no compelling research to support the use of detox diets for weight management or toxin elimination. Similarly, in 2017 the report highlights, while detox diets, particularly those involving juicing, can lead to initial weight loss due to a severe calorie deficit, this weight loss is usually not sustainable. Once individuals resume their regular eating patterns, they often regain the lost weight.

### Potential benefits

While the evidence for detox diets is not strong, some people may experi-

ence temporary benefits. The initial weight loss, for instance, can be motivating. Additionally, detox diets typically eliminate processed foods, refined sugars, and unhealthy fats, leading to a more nutrient-dense intake. This shift can result in a temporary improvement

in energy levels and mood, likely due to increased consumption of vitamins and minerals.

### Potential risks

However, detox diets are not without risks. The severe calorie restriction can

lead to nutrient deficiencies, fatigue, dizziness and low blood sugar levels. Moreover, detox diets can disrupt the balance of gut bacteria, leading to digestive issues. For individuals with underlying health conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, detox diets can be particularly dangerous and should be approached with caution.

### Long-term impact

One of the critical criticisms of detox diets is the lack of evidence regarding their long-term effects. No studies have assessed the prolonged impact of detoxification programs on health, weight, or toxin levels. This gap in research raises concerns about the potential for negative consequences that may arise from repeated use of detox diets.

### Healthy alternatives

Rather than resorting to extreme detox diets, adopting a balanced, sustainable approach to nutrition and health is advisable. Consuming a diet rich in whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats, can

naturally support the body's detoxification processes. Regular physical activity, adequate hydration and sufficient sleep are also crucial for maintaining overall health and well-being.

### Conclusion

While the allure of detox diets is understandable, the current evidence does not support their effectiveness for long-term weight management or detoxification. A balanced, nutrient-rich diet and a healthy lifestyle remain the most effective ways to promote overall health and well-being. Before embarking on any detox diet, it's essential to consult with a healthcare professional to ensure it is safe and appropriate for your individual health needs.

In the end, the best approach to detoxification is one that supports your body's natural processes, rather than relying on quick fixes or extreme dietary interventions.

(The author, Sanchi Tiwari, is a nutritionist, at Lord's Mark Biotech.)



# what's brewing?

The IIFA Utsavam global celebrations began in Hyderabad with a lavish Official India Press Conference, setting off unparalleled levels of anticipation. The much-awaited two-day event, which is expected to honour the lively cinematic luminaries of the Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada film industries and commemorate the triumphs of South Indian cinema, was put in motion by the IIFA Utsavam Official India Press Conference.

**Akshara Haasan**  
**Malashree and Aradhana**  
**Raashii Khanna**  
**Sreeleela**  
**Pragya Jaiswal**  
**Simran**

Sobé Décor celebrated the first anniversary of its Hyderabad outlet. As a part of the celebration, live music was held at the outlet. This celebration was attended by award-winning architects and elite customers, along with the founder Nivedita Jegadeesh and partner Malvika Nishant, and co-hosted by Aanchal Bansal.

**Malvika Rao**  
**Aanchal**  
**Anika**  
**Nivedita Jegadeesh**  
**Kirty and Anuja**  
**Shikha**  
**Vineeta**  
**Komal, Madhulika and Ritika**

PARTY  
Photos by - SV Chary

At a press conference at SOBHA Neopolis, Filmfare announced the 69th SOBHA Filmfare Awards South 2024 in collaboration with Kamar Film Factory. The greatest in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam movies are honoured at this event. At the press conference where officials introduced the iconic black lady with Kamar Film Factory, a special surprise was organised. Actors Rukmini Vasanth and Malavika Mohanan, as well as Jitesh Pillai, Editor-in-Chief of Filmfare and Sumeet Chunchare, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, SOBHA Limited, Kamar D, Kamar Film Factory, unbosomed the award.

Hyderabad will host the premiere of Srila Chatterjee's well-known Affordable Art India, which will include an intriguing and varied selection of artwork from all throughout the nation. A wide range of artistic expressions, from traditional vintage items to new contemporary pieces, will be showcased in Affordable Art India.

The top ed-tech platform in India, Physics Wallah (PW), has seen a notable rise in the number of female students enrolling in its upskilling courses through PW Skills. The percentage of female participants increased from 20% in 2023 to 35% in 2024. This increase is ascribed to increasing awareness of the caliber of education offered and the beneficial effects that upskilling courses have on students' professional advancement.

## FUN

**ARCHIE**

JUGHEAD! WHAT ARE YOU THINKING PLAYING HULA-HOOP IN THE HALL?  
I'M NOT PLAYING!  
I'M JUST TRYING TO AVOID CATCHING ANYONE'S COLD!

**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

HEY, MOM, CAN WE GO OUT FOR HAMBURGERS TONIGHT?  
NOT TONIGHT, DEAR.  
AN, MOM! WHY NOT?  
BECAUSE I'M ALREADY FIXING SOMETHING FOR DINNER.  
YEAH, I KNOW.

**GARFIELD**

LOOK AT THIS  
A THANK YOU NOTE FROM THE GUY WHO OWNS THE PIZZA PARLOR  
SENT FROM HIS VILLA IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE!  
THE VILLA THAT GARFIELD BUILT

**REALITY CHECK**

LULU SAID THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS IS TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT-

**SPEED BUMP**

I KNOW, DEAR, IT'S NOT EASY BEING THE MIDDLE CHILD.

**CROSSWORD**

	1	2	3	4	5
6					
7					
8		9		10	11
12					
13					
14	15	16	17	18	
19					

**NANCY**

JIGGLING IT A LITTLE HELPS!

**SUDOKU**

8	1	2	5	3				
9	5			6				1
3		1						8
							6	
5	6	1	8				9	
7								
1				5			8	
9			2		3	7		
			9	7	1	2	6	

**Yesterday's solution**

6	1	7	5	2	4	3	9	8
4	5	3	7	8	9	1	2	6
2	8	9	3	6	1	4	5	7
7	2	1	6	4	3	5	8	9
5	3	6	1	9	8	7	4	2
9	4	8	2	7	5	6	1	3
3	6	4	8	1	2	9	7	5
8	9	5	4	3	7	2	6	1
1	7	2	9	5	6	8	3	4

**Rules**

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

**ACROSS**

- A railway engine
- Wear these on fingers
- An orchestra conductor's stick
- Glass buildings for growing plants
- Small cities
- Nairobi is the capital of this country in Africa
- In the middle of lots of people

**DOWN**

- The middle of the day
- Things to play with
- A wartime explosive
- Birthday present
- A day of the week
- Opposite of dulcet
- The colour of grass
- Make smile or laugh
- Timid
- This lives in soil
- Cold winter flakes
- He wears a crown
- Require

**SOLUTION**

H	I	G	H	E	R	C	O	K
O	R	D	E	R	E	R	E	T
R	E	A	M	E	R	E	T	
N	O	E	A	N	A	L		
C	U	N	U	S	A	L		
T	H	E	L	E	K			
T	U	N	N	E	L			
L	O	R	E					
R	A	T	E					
H	A	I	L	E				

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆





