

Centre to hold simultaneous elections with three new bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre is likely to bring three bills, including two to amend the Constitution, to put in place its plan to hold simultaneous elections. One of the proposed Constitution amendment bills, that deals with aligning the local bodies elections to that of the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, will require an endorsement from at least 50 per cent of the states. Moving ahead with its 'one nation, one election' plan, the government earlier this month accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee for holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies in a phased manner after a countrywide consensus-building exercise. The proposed first constitutional amendment bill would deal with making provisions for holding Lok Sabha and state legislative assembly elections together. Citing recommendations of the high-level committee, sources said the proposed bill would seek to amend Article 82A by adding sub-clause (1) relating to the 'appointed date'. It will also seek to insert sub-clause (2) to Article 82A relating to the end of terms



of the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies together. It also proposes to amend Article 83(2) and insert new sub-clauses (3) and (4) relating to the duration and dissolution of the Lok Sabha. It also has provisions related to the dissolution of the legislative assemblies and amending Article 327 to insert the term 'simultaneous elections'. This bill will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the states, the

recommendation said. The proposed second Constitutional amendment bill will require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies as it will deal with matters relating to state affairs. It will seek to amend constitutional provisions relating to the preparation of electoral rolls by the Election Commission (EC) in consultation with State Election Commissions (SECs) for elections to local

Constitutionally, the EC and SECs are separate bodies. The EC holds elections to the post of the President, the Vice President, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, state assemblies and state legislative councils while the SECs are mandated to conduct polls to local bodies such as municipalities and panchayats. The proposed second Constitution amendment bill will also create provisions to hold simultaneous elections to municipalities and panchayats, along with

elections to Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies by inserting a new Article 324A. The third bill will be an ordinary one to amend provisions in three laws dealing with Union territories having legislative assemblies — Puducherry, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir — to align the terms of these Houses with other legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha as proposed in the first constitutional amendment bill. The statutes it proposes to

amend are the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act-1991, the Government of Union Territories Act-1963 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act-2019. The proposed bill will be an ordinary legislation not requiring a change in the Constitution and will also not need ratification by the states. The high-level committee had proposed amendments to three Articles, insertion of 12 new sub-clauses in the existing articles and tweaking three laws related to Union Territories having legislative assemblies. The total number of amendments and new insertions stands at 18. In its report submitted to the government in March, just before the general election was announced, the panel recommended implementing "one nation, one election" in two phases. It suggested simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies in the first phase and elections for local bodies like panchayats and municipal bodies within 100 days of the general election in the second phase. It also recommended a common electoral roll, which would need coordination between the Election Commission and State Election Commissions.



Union Minister and BJP National President JP Nadda, and others listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme, in New Delhi, Sunday. Photo by: RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

'Mann Ki Baat' showcases positive developments: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Sunday that his monthly radio broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat' has shown that people like positive developments and inspiring and encouraging stories. Speaking in the latest episode of the radio programme in which he touches about social issues and highlights people's efforts for a cause in different parts of the country, he noted that the broadcast is completing 10 years. Describing it as an "emotional" episode, he said the programme has become a unique platform that celebrates the spirit of India and showcases collective strength of the nation. He also thanked the media for taking its message to people. Modi said there is generally a perception that people don't pay attention if the content is not spicy or negative. However, 'Mann Ki Baat' has shown that they are eager for positive information. People like

positive things, inspiring examples and encouraging stories, he noted. Modi said the 'Make in India' programme is completing its 10 years, asserting that export is rising in every sector and the rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a testimony to its success. It has helped local manufacturers a lot, he added. He urged people to buy 'Made in India' products in the coming festival season. Referring to his recent visit to the US, Modi said the return of nearly 300 antiquities to India is being widely talked about. When people start taking pride in their heritage, the world also respects their sentiments, he said, asserting that a large number of ancient artefacts has been returned to India by different countries in the last 10 years of his government. In the programme, he highlighted the success of the 'Swachh Bharat' mission, lauding it as a great tribute to Mahatma Gandhi who put special emphasis on cleanliness all his life.



Himalayan research project to analyse sediment impact

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As climate change intensifies hazards such as landslides, avalanches, and glacial floods in high mountain regions including Himalayas, a team of researchers from India, Canada and UK is set to conduct a study to understand the long-term impacts of sediment moved by these disasters on communities and river systems including Ganges river. The team, including experts from IIT Roorkee and the Dehradun-based Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, will start research at a 150 km stretch of the Ganges River impacted by the 2021 disaster in Chamoli nestled in Himalayan region in Uttarakhand. Triggered by a rock and ice avalanche, this catastrophic event caused a devastating debris flood, resulting in over 200 fatalities and significant damage to two hydropower stations including Tapovan Vishnu Gad Hydropower. The landslide also temporarily created a dam in the Rishiganga valley, which eventually breached. The £1 million research SUPERSLUG project, led by researchers from the University of Plymouth, will centered around the 2021 disaster and focus on understanding how massive sediment flows—termed "sediment slugs"—affect river systems over time, often impacting areas far from the original disaster site. Utilising advanced monitoring technologies such as drones, satellite imagery, seismic sensors, and "smart cobbles," the team will gather data on sediment transport and landscape changes. This information will help create a digital twin of the river system, offering insights for disaster management and resource sustainability. Dr. Matt Westoby, the project lead and Associate Professor

of Physical Geography at the University of Plymouth, emphasised the urgency of this research which is backed by an £840,000 grant from the Natural Environment Research Council. He noted that while the immediate impacts of disasters are clear, the long-term consequences often remain unexplored. "High mountain regions like the Himalayas are among the most hazardous on the planet. The effects of climate change are likely to exacerbate these hazards, leading to increased landslide activity and landscape instability," he said. "We urgently need to understand the legacy impacts of sediment flows on river catchments and the communities that depend on them for water and livelihoods." The project will engage directly with local communities and authorities to ensure that findings are practical and beneficial for disaster preparedness and hydropower operations. Collaborating institutions also include Exeter, Hull, Leeds, Newcastle, Staffordshire, and the University of Calgary. Professor Tom Coulthard from the University of Hull highlighted the importance of understanding sediment movement. "Often it's the sheer volume of sediment, rather than just floodwaters, that causes significant damage during these multi-hazard events. Understanding how long sediment slugs persist in the system is crucial for predicting their impacts and managing future disasters." In a nut-shell, as per the statement from the University of Hull, this three-year initiative aims to fill critical knowledge gaps regarding the long-term effects of sediment slugs on ecosystems and communities, ultimately enhancing disaster resilience in vulnerable regions.

CITU protests FSNL disinvestment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) on Sunday protested on Government's move to disinvest the profit-making PSU Ferro Scrap Nigam Limited (FSNL). The CITU general secretary Tapan Sen in a statement said the Central Government is resorting to all "illegal practices" to sell the Mini Ratna company to Japan's M/s. Konoike Transport Co. Ltd and must roll back from the sale. Extending solidarity with the striking employees of FSNL, the CITU pointed out that PSU Navratna steel companies

are completely dependent on FSNL for scrap handling since its inception. "With utter surprise, no consultation with them has at all been initiated by the government on such a vital issue and the top managements of FSNL are also not properly aware of this clandestine move. FSNL is a company having a reserve fund of about Rs 200 crore and movable assets worth Rs100 crore employing more than 600 employees and 5,000 contract workers. During the year ended March 31, 2022, Company has paid Interim Dividend for FY 2021-22 amounting to Rs 9.50 per

equity shares," said CITU in a statement detailing the profits of the FSNL. CITU said that "such a golden egg producing company is straight away being guillotined by the government because of its sheer obsession for privatization factually without any valid reason." CITU once again condemns the authoritarian anti-National move of the Modi government and stands strong with striking FSNL workers. CITU calls upon all its units to take this issue to all sections of workers and mobilize them insolidarity with this anti-privatization struggle," said CITU.

Mental health certificates now needed for Transgender pre-hormonal therapy, surgery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Transgenders who want to go for pre-hormonal therapy or gender assignment surgery need to be assessed and certified by mental health professionals, according to the Union Health Ministry's standard operating procedures for the purpose. As for gynaecologists, the 'SoP for Medical Treatment of Transgender Persons' states that they should enquire as to how the patient wishes to be addressed in terms of name and pronoun, and also ensure that the words they use uphold the principles of safety, dignity and respect. Outlining the responsibilities of mental health professionals, the SoP document said their primary role would include assessment for gender incongruence, as per the

current diagnostic system followed by the World Health Organization, and certification for the same. Gender incongruence is characterised by a marked and persistent disparity between an individual's experienced gender and the assigned sex. It often leads to a desire for a 'transition' through hormonal treatment, surgery or other healthcare services in order to live and be accepted as a person of the experienced gender. According to the SOP, "Before endocrinology treatment, a certificate from one psychiatrist is required. Before Gender Affirmation Surgery, two certificates are required -- one by a psychiatrist and one by a clinical psychologist/psychiatrist." Apart from that, a mental health professional would also assess for distress and co-



morbid mental and/or substance use disorders and provide management of the same, the document stated. They would also provide support or therapy, if needed, to cope with issues related to gender incongruence, including participation in integrated cross-disciplinary care and intersectoral

collaboration for clients and caregivers. "The support would be provided pre-hormonal therapy/gender assignment surgery, during the period as well as post-surgery, if need be," it stated. According to the document, one cannot undergo gender affirmation surgery before the age of 18 years and a

certificate of being stable on endocrine treatment for one year and suitability for surgical procedure is required before gender affirmation surgery. The SOP stressed the need to make STD clinics friendly to gender-diverse patients and such facilities should document gender identity and sex assigned at birth for all patients to improve sexual healthcare for transgenders and gender nonbinary persons. Primary care providers should take a comprehensive sexual history, including a discussion on Sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening, HIV PrEP and PEP, behavioural health, and social determinants of sexual health. Clinicians can improve the experience of sexual health screening and counselling for transgender persons by

asking for their choice of terminology or modifying language to be used during clinic visits and history taking and examination, the SOP stated. Options for fertility preservation, pregnancy potential and contraception options should also be discussed, if indicated, the document said. As for the Fertility Preservation in Transgenders (Female to Male), the SoP states that the established method for fertility preservation includes cryopreservation of embryos and oocytes for females. Ovarian tissue cryopreservation is also a successful technique for fertility preservation and is no longer experimental, the document stated, adding that it has limited availability and is possible only after attaining puberty.



Prakash Karat to lead CPI(M) interim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Senior CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat will be the coordinator of the party's Polit Bureau and the Central Committee as an interim arrangement until the 24th Party Congress to be held in April next year. The decision comes in the wake of the death of CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury on September 12 at the age of 72. "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), now in session in New Delhi, has decided that Comrade Prakash Karat will

be the coordinator of the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee, as an interim arrangement until the 24th Party Congress to be held in April 2025 at Madurai," the CPI(M) said. "This decision was taken due to the sad and sudden demise of the sitting General Secretary of the CPI(M), Comrade Sitaram Yechury," it added. Karat, one of the senior most leaders of the CPI(M), was its general secretary from 2005 to 2015. He was elected to the Central Committee in 1985 and became a Polit Bureau member in 1992.

Congress demands Sitharaman's resignation over extortion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday attacked the BJP after a case was lodged against Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and others on a complaint relating to the now-scrapped electoral bonds scheme and demanded her resignation for "undermining democracy." The opposition party reiterated its demand for a Supreme-court monitored inquiry through an SIT into the whole electoral bond scheme. Addressing a press conference here along with party spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh charged that four ways were used to extort money through the "conspiracy of electoral bonds — prepaid bribery, postpaid bribery, post-raid bribery and through farzi companies". He said the Finance Minister should immediately resign as



she is "guilty" politically, legally and morally. Ramesh said the FIR was lodged on orders of the court and the Congress has nothing to do with the FIR. He said the Congress has been demanding a Supreme-court monitored inquiry through an SIT into the electoral bonds scheme and reiterates that demand. Singhvi also accused the BJP of "undermining democracy." "The Finance Minister cannot do this on her own. We know who is number 1 and number 2 and this was done on whose

directions," he said. "The larger issue is the level playing field which is necessary for free and fair polls. Free and fair polls are critical for democracy. This is an attack on our democratic system," Singhvi said while terming it as 'EBS - Extortionist BJP Scheme'. A case was registered on Saturday against Sitharaman and others on the directions of a court in Bengaluru, following a complaint relating to the now-scraped electoral bonds scheme. According to police, an FIR was registered under IPC sections 384 (punishment for extortion), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) against Sitharaman, ED officials, office-bearers of the BJP at state and national level, based on the order of a special court. BJP Karnataka chief B Y Vijayendra and party leader Nalin Kumar Kateel have also been named in the FIR. The complaint was lodged by Adarsh R Iyer, Co-President of 'Janadhikara Sangharsha Parishath' (JSP) alleging that the accused "committed extortion under the guise and garb of electoral bonds" and benefited to the tune of more than Rs 8,000 crore. The complainant further alleged that Sitharaman through the clandestine aid and support of ED officials facilitated extortion of thousands of crores of rupees for the benefit of others both at the state and national levels.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Saving Sunita Williams

Relying on her mental fortitude, Sunita has not only survived the ordeal but plays a crucial role in her rescue

It is heartening to hear that Sunita Williams will be back home soon. Elon Musk's SpaceX has launched a Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida to rescue two astronauts stranded in the International Space Station (ISS). The mission aims to retrieve American astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams, who have been stranded on the International Space Station for months due to issues with Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. Originally planned for an eight-day stay, the astronauts' mission was extended far beyond after technical problems with the Starliner. As every Indian waits for her rescue the image of Kalpana Chawla flashes in the mind who lost her life in a space mission. She was one of the seven crew members who died in the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster when the spacecraft disintegrated during its re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere on February 1, 2003. The vast, unexplored frontier of space offers countless wonders, but it also brings unique challenges. The present snag is no fault of the astronauts but a lapse on the part of NASA and Boeing company which allowed the mission to proceed despite several alarms and glitches.

Sunita Williams, a veteran of two spaceflights and a woman who has spent over 300 days in space, embarked on her latest mission with the confidence and expertise that comes from years of training and commitment. However, space is as unpredictable as it is vast. A critical error occurred during her mission, which disabled vital components of the spacecraft, leaving her stranded in the ISS. The malfunction wasn't just a minor glitch—it was a cascade of failures. Yet, if there was one person equipped to face such adversity, it was Sunita Williams. Her resilience, mental fortitude, and the ability to maintain calm in even the most extreme conditions became the defining elements in her survival. Williams is no stranger to adversity. The daughter of Indian and Slovenian immigrants, she broke barriers early in her career by rising to prominence in a male-dominated field. Her indomitable spirit and work ethic have always stood out. She has done spacewalk. she holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, spending 195 days in space until 2017. Over her career, Williams has accumulated more than 322 days in space, marking her as one of the most experienced female astronauts in history. Sunita Williams approached this life-threatening situation with a mix of grit, hope, and resourcefulness. She immediately got involved in troubleshooting, all the while keeping her own morale high through mental exercises and meditation. Let's hope and pray that the rescue mission succeeds and Sunita along with colleague Butch Wilmore reaches home safely and is united with her family. This mission is also a lesson and learning for NASA and its contractors to ensure zero tolerance for any glitches and snags in their operations.

PICTALK



Artistes perform 'Mahishasur Mardini' act ahead of Durga Puja festival, in Nadia district

PTI

Breaking life into small steps for lasting fulfillment

Happiness is actually the most important project of life. True contentment comes from savouring each step, no matter how small

Happiness is the most important project of life. It should be broken up into smaller activities to attain the eventual goal. The only time that we probably understand this is in our childhood. As a child, I had intuitively learned the art of allocating the hours of the day for various activities, like waking up, getting ready and spending time in school, having lunch on return, completing homework, going out to play, returning for dinner, and going to bed. We lived in the present from one hour to the next. I was a satisfied and happy person as I could complete the 'Project Day'. We did not have the need or the time to look too far into the future. As we outgrew childhood, we forgot the lessons learned.

I joined college. Like others, I too started making grand resolutions on the first day of the year. My resolution could be as mundane as losing the 15 kgs within the first three months, which had taken me a year to gain. It could also be an important resolution to secure 90 per cent marks in my semester examinations, a substantial



improvement over the 60 per cent in the previous one. Each resolution would fly out of the window within the first few months. I had forgotten to take small steps to reach the end destination. Things did not improve even after I started working. I found a new toy – a 'To Do List'. A diary would be earmarked for this most important ritual. I would start with one such list and continue adding till I had inked the second or third page with only a few activities completed. I would give up, and start all over again. The previous year's diary was promptly destroyed lest anyone glanced into it and called my bluff. This continued for a few years till I discovered the computer. I could delete these pending activities at will, with

no one any wiser to my shenanigans. I was fooling only myself. I quit my railway job to join a government company working in the execution of construction projects. I was exposed to software-based project management tools for the first time. I reluctantly spent weeks with the consultant to develop an activity-based project breakdown structure. He educated us about the importance of breaking each activity into smaller sub-activities. We were reluctant to accept that more activities to monitor would result in successful and timely completion. He was not satisfied with the first draft of less than 100 activities. He was a tough taskmaster. We marched on, to our ever-increasing despair, and his impatience, till we

called it quits after we had reached 1000 odd activities. It was a revelation to me. I now appreciated the time that my wife spent planning the daily household chores. The exercise in project management also brought into stark focus all the wrong I was doing while making my New Year resolutions and the To-Do Lists, and more importantly, living my life. I now understand why we remain unhappy most of the time. We forget to derive joy out of each step that we take, however small it may be. The young of today are far more mature. Hina Khan, a young actor, recently diagnosed with cancer, is a courageous woman fighting all that life has to throw at her. Her thoughts are the most inspiring words I have read in some time, "First normalise the challenges of your lives then set goals for yourself and try to live up to them all along the way. No matter how hard. Never back down. Never give up." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

On September 25, the country observed 10 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's game-changing 'Make in India' initiative that is transforming India's industrial landscape by encouraging job-creating investments and giving many ordinary citizens the confidence to become wealth creators. It's been a remarkable 10-year journey, which gave renewed vigour to industrial sectors turning these into engines of growth, meeting domestic demand as well as contributing to exports. The exciting journey began at a difficult time when domestic investors were despondent because of the policy paralysis and poor governance by the indecisive Congress government.

The economy was down, confidence was shattered, headlines were dominated by a regular dose of corruption scandals, inflation was soaring, interest rates were high and the rupee had an uncertain outlook. To end the feeling of doom and gloom, the Indian voters decisively voted for PM Modi. Our Prime Minister came with a vision for India. He wanted to ensure that India became a global superpower. He wanted India to provide jobs and opportunities to our youth, recognising that manufacturing was critical to India's success story. That is when the PM launched the 'Make in India' initiative. Ten years has been a remarkable journey, but it would not have been possible for the multidimensional and transformative changes done by the Modi government. Initiatives include GST, the Bankruptcy Code and a multitude of other reforms. To improve the ease of doing business, as many as 42,000 compliance requirements were done away with, and 3,700 provisions that provided for criminal penalties for minor offences were removed from various statutes to protect small businesses from harassment. India sharply improved its rank in the World Bank's Doing Business Report from 142nd in 2014 to 63rd in 2019. The government's Startup India initiative



has encouraged many job seekers to become job creators with the help of Startup India initiative. This has helped the number of recognised startups increase to 1,40,803 in June this year, bringing in investments, and creating more than 15 lakh jobs.

These startups are driving the innovation ecosystem in the country, working on solutions to pressing issues in areas such as sanitation, space navigation, reducing food wastage, improving access to healthcare, and empowering women. The development of 11 Industrial Corridors is another focus area of the Government. 20 industrial smart cities are being developed under the program, which would help make these corridors the backbone of India's manufacturing growth. Four of these smart cities have already become magnets of investment with infrastructure and clearances available for manufacturing units to be set up. Potential investment of Rs 1.7 lakh crore is already committed which will provide direct employment to 80,000 persons and indirect to many more. The Government's PLI schemes focus on critical sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles and medical devices to create the eco-systems in these sectors for sustained growth

MANY COUNTRIES ARE KEEN TO SIGN TRADE DEALS WITH INDIA. THE WORLD IS NOW LOOKING AT INDIA AS A MANUFACTURING DESTINATION. AND THE KEY REASON FOR THIS INTEREST IS INDIA'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND ROBUST ECONOMIC FUNDAMENTALS

and ensure their global competitiveness. PLI schemes have resulted in Rs 1.32 lakh crore in investment and a significant boost in manufacturing output of around 11 lakh crore. More than 8.5 lakh jobs have been created directly and indirectly through this initiative. The Prime Minister's initiatives on infrastructure have been another shot in the arm of Indian manufacturing, apart from generating demand for goods and services, infrastructure development is a major facilitator of industrial activity. Today, India has a huge, and growing, network of expressways and highways. New, world-class railway stations are being built, while new freight corridors are coming up. India is increasingly being seen as a very attractive destination for investment. The country provides the 4D advantage - The decisive leadership of PM Modi; the Demographic dividend of our youthful, talented, skilled Indians; the Demand that 140 crore Indians generate in the economy; and Democracy that ensures the safety and security of investors, and the rule of law which will never allow discrimination against one or the other. The 4-D is a very, very compelling case to attract manufacturers to India. Domestic and international investors today find a golden

opportunity to grow their business. There is a flurry of activity in the investor community. A series of delegations is visiting India, hungry for opportunities to invest and participate in the Indian growth story. Foreign governments and global CEOs are keenly eyeing opportunities in India. Many countries are keen to sign trade deals with India. The world is now looking at India as a manufacturing destination. And the key reason for this interest is India's competitive advantage and robust economic fundamentals. Today, inflation is under control, economic growth is strong and the Modi government is following strict fiscal discipline. This is all the more commendable in the current global situation marred by conflict and uncertainty. The initiatives of PM Modi have helped India rise from the unenviable situation of being regarded as one of the "Fragile Five" in the world in 2014, to being one of the Top Five in the world. In effect, PM Modi's initiatives like Make in India have contributed to making the last 10 years a transformational decade – a quantum jump over the lost decade of Congress rule. (The writer is Minister of Commerce and Industry; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

QUAD STRENGTHENS INDIA'S ROLE

Madam — China's aggressive posture has consistently threatened peace in the Indo-Pacific region. India, has faced quite a few challenges from the latter. It is a matter of pride that New Delhi is looked upon by other countries to be their firm partner on global platforms to tackle Beijing's economic and military prowess. Specifically, the Asia-Pacific region was described as Indo-Pacific to denote India's increasingly active involvement in the region. The Quadilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is one international forum that glues the four friendly nations—the United States, Japan, Australia and India—together. All these nations are keen to usher in a free and open Indo-Pacific region, diminishing the influence of a marauding Beijing. The four have been able to sustain a momentum that no country can ignore. In the fourth in-person Quad summit at US Wilmington, leaders of the four countries underlined the importance of shared democratic values that have kept them together. Issues of health, security, climate change, capacity building and technology occupied the leaders' attention. More importantly, India is emerging as a 'leader' of the four, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has proposed to host the next year's summit in New Delhi in 2025. It can only grow stronger from here.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

TOP COURT REJECTS GUJARAT PLEA

Madam— The Supreme Court has dismissed a plea filed by the Gujarat government seeking a review of the court's verdict, which contained certain observations against the State while quashing the remission granted to 11 men convicted of raping Bilkis Bano and murdering seven of her family during the 2002 riots. Having carefully gone through the review petitions, the order under challenge and the papers annexed therewith, the judges were satisfied

Durga Puja has transformed



This is in response to the article titled "A symphony of tradition and transformation" (September 29). In the mid-1980s, Durga Puja used to get celebrated with utmost devotion according to rituals with dominance of Bhakti encompassing both the organisers and public. Only on Saptami morning, we used to get awakened by the rhythmic beats of Dhak, all puja rituals used to

commence with rendition of Sanskrit mantras and people used to start flocking to the pandals. But in last 4 decades all things associated with Durga Puja have undergone a sea change! Far from commencing the Puja on Saptami morning, many pandals and idols now open up for public "consumption" right from the Mahalaya itself thereby "promoting" 4-day Puja to a "modern" 10-day extravaganza! After all majority of these "glamorous" Puja committees do not care to actually offer homage to it through rituals mantras holy hymns or flowers! Durga Puja of today is nothing but a fashion show of sorts with exhibition of flexing muscles - be it monetary might or trophies garnered!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

that there is no error apparent on the face of the record or any merit in the review petitions, warranting reconsideration of the order impugned. The review petitions are, accordingly, dismissed and it is a landmark decision. The Gujarat government in its plea had said the apex court's observation in the January 8 judgement, holding the State guilty of "usurpation of power" and "abuse of discretion" for complying with an order of another top court bench, was an "error apparent on the face of the record" primarily on three grounds.

CK Subramani | Kerala

TOURISM EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT

Madam — Tourism plays a pivotal role in the global economy acting as a bridge between cultures and fostering economic growth in various regions. It contributes approximately 10 per cent to the world's GDP and generates millions of employment opportunities, especially in rural and less developed areas.

By integrating tourism studies into academic curricula, institutions can equip students with essential skills in areas such as sustainable tourism practices, travel management and hospitality management. This education not only prepares students for diverse career opportunities but also fosters a deeper understanding of how to balance tourism's economic benefits with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. Promoting tourism education in colleges cultivates a new generation ready to take the bull by the horns, driving innovation while advocating for responsible tourism practices that balance economic growth with social and environmental accountability. Moreover, it supports regional development by teaching students how to effectively market and manage local attractions thereby preserving cultural heritage while boosting local economies.

Tanisha Gupta | Ujjain

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FIRST COLUMN

HARNESSING INNER POTENTIAL

The human mind is still an enigma. It has enormous potential and is a reservoir of energy



RAVI VALLURI

His alcoholism became a quotidian habit. Dharmendra was making a last-ditch effort as he boarded a flight from Jaipur to the Art of Living Ashram in Bangalore. Fortuitously, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar had given him an appointment at 4 PM that evening. Stinking of liquor, and reeking of stale cigarettes, with an unsteady gait he landed at Bangalore airport. He needed a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional, parachute. Only a 'Master' through grace could provide such a life support system. For some time, my friend was trying to seek redemption from the lethal disease of alcoholism. My inventory list was prepared: join a rehab, attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and undertake the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living.

Gurudev advanced the appointment to 11 AM., and after one glance asked my friend to get admitted to the Ayurveda Hospital in the Ashram for a complete detoxification of body, mind, and soul, and after a 15-day rehab to undergo the Happiness Programme. The Guru had scripted a change in the life of Dharmendra, it was for his mind to grab the opportunity. But the monkey mind invented an excuse and Dharmendra left the Ayurveda Hospital and once again indulged in brinkmanship.

He could not draw the redlines or flag the issues confronting his mind and succumbed to temptation. While the brain is an organ that serves as the centre of the nervous system, the mind is the faculty of consciousness and thoughts. It is an individual's intellect, memory or attention span and will, whose potential needs to be enhanced or live in the past. Such individuals are unable to break the patterns and barriers of their comfort zone. Their prana levels



are exceedingly low and the pendulum of their mind's swings to the past. The moot question is how we use this enormous energy. If we look at the brighter aspects of life, such mental imagery works miraculously. Over some time the mind feels blessed, gains in abundance and becomes grateful. This is what Masters refers to as the

Law of Attraction

The Law of Attraction remains an illusion if it is not in conjunction with the Law of Gratitude. Both these laws operate in tandem and will fuel inner potential to harness growth leading to robust minds. Low and the pendulum of their minds swings to the past. They carry the burden of the past and attempt a course correction without any professional help (Guru) displaying false bravado in their imaginary worlds. They invariably try to also change the behavioural patterns of those close to them, essentially to market their point of view. Such minds invariably resort to shortcuts in life, trying to please everyone without any success. Ignoring the larger picture, this is a cunning and selfish mind, which does not trust anyone: basically, short of confidence and haunted by fear. The human mind is an enigma. It has enormous potential and is a reservoir of energy. The moot question is how we use this enormous energy. If we look at the brighter aspects of life, such mental imagery works miraculously. Over some time the mind feels blessed, gains in abundance and becomes grateful. Positive thoughts beget positivity and have a spiralling effect. The jigsaw puzzle of life gets sorted out. This is what Masters refer to as the Law of Attraction. The Law of Attraction remains an illusion if it is not in conjunction with the Law of Gratitude. Both these laws operate in tandem.

(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)



ASHU KAPOOR

ed to the soil. In the same way, India's educational progress in infrastructure is commendable, but the students' foundational skills—the seeds of education—are still not producing the robust results we hope for. Year after year, surveys like the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and the National Achievement Survey (NAS) reveal a startling reality: a large proportion of students struggle with essential

skills like basic literacy and numeracy.

These are the building blocks of education, without which the entire edifice remains shaky. Students are spending years in school, but many are not learning at the expected level. The alarming gap between schooling and actual learning points to a crucial flaw in the system. If foundational skills are not nurtured early on, the benefits of educational progress will remain elusive, much like the farmer's poor harvest.

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 brings a renewed sense of hope. It promises transformative change and a shift towards a system that values not just access to education but the quality of learning.

Together with the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational and School Education, NEP 2020 emphasizes the need to measure educational progress through well-designed assessments and to tailor interventions accordingly.

The goal is clear: to raise a generation of learners who are not only equipped with knowledge but also the critical thinking skills required to thrive in the modern world. Research consistently shows that assessments play a transformative role in improving education. Their primary goal is not to rank students or schools but to provide insights into where learners stand on their educational journey. By identifying what students know and can do at individual, school, and

system levels, assessments offer a roadmap for educators to develop targeted interventions that can address specific learning gaps.

In the quest to transform learning, large-scale assessments like ASER and NAS will be pivotal. ASER, a household-based survey, provides insights into basic literacy and numeracy skills, while NAS offers a broader view of students' achievement of curricular outcomes. Recently, the State Educational Achievement Survey (SEAS) was conducted by NCERT to provide state-level insights into educational progress.

Simply generating report cards on students' performance is not enough. The data must be used to inform policy decisions and to implement specific

interventions aimed at improving learning outcomes. If not, students will continue to face the same challenges year after year, with little improvement. Large-scale assessments should be seen as the first step in a larger strategy to address educational inequities.

While NAS offers a broad overview of the education system, state-level assessment surveys (SAS) have the potential to zoom in on specific issues at the school level. NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of these surveys and recommends that each state conduct its own census-based assessment to drive continuous improvement. By focusing on local contexts, SAS can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by

individual states, enabling more targeted interventions. However, the effectiveness of SAS depends on how well states define their objectives. To make SAS truly impactful, states need to align their assessment frameworks with clear objectives. A well-designed assessment should consider the needs of the educational system at the state level, and the data collected should be used to support and improve schools, rather than ranking them. India's states would do well to ensure that all stakeholders in the education system—teachers, school administrators, and district-level educators—are trained in data use and analysis.

The road ahead is challenging, but the promise of census-based state assessments is

transformative. By monitoring student progress and providing data-driven insights, SAS can reshape India's educational landscape. When combined with national-level assessments like NAS, SAS has the power to create a more responsive, equitable education system. With a strategic approach and strong governance, India can ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

The writer is a Research Fellow at Australian Council for Educational Research (India) and a former Senior Academic Consultant at NCERT and Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Views are personal. Inputs by Dr Priyanka Sharma, Director ACER (India)

Can India become a manufacturing hub?



UTTAM GUPTA

Growth is driven by strong domestic demand, export potential, government infrastructure efforts, private sector investment, and initiatives like 'Make in India'



According to a Study Report by IDBI Capital, India is set to add US\$ 1 trillion to its gross domestic product (GDP) every 18 months over the next six years. It goes on to say that "with this momentum, the country is on track to become a US\$ 10 trillion economy positioning itself as the world's third-largest economy by 2030". Currently, India has a GDP of US\$ 4 trillion. The report has also highlighted that "India's accelerated growth will be driven primarily by the manufacturing sector, which is projected to contribute 32 per cent to the incremental Gross Value Added (GVA)". It adds "India will overtake the top five economies in manufacturing IIP (Index of Industrial Production) viz. US, China, Germany, South Korea and Japan..."

"Manufacturing essentially involves the production of a wide spectrum of consumer products, industrial machinery and so on. It is the most important component of Industrial activity at a broader level which also includes Construction (primarily building infrastructure); Logistics (transportation and storage of goods); Aerospace (aircraft and spacecraft etc) and maintenance and services required to support industrial activities. The contribution of the Industrial sector to India's GDP is around 30 per cent of which manufacturing alone is 17 per cent. The share of Agriculture and allied activities in GDP is around 18 per cent. The remaining 52 per cent comes from the Services sector (SS).

The SS encompasses 'intangible' services such as education, health, entertainment, hospitality and tourism, banking, insurance and so on. While, all three sectors play a crucial role in growth, creating jobs and increasing incomes, manufacturing can provide a more sustainable basis for providing jobs and surety of income. This is in sharp contrast to agriculture which is fundamentally a seasonal activity and economic fortunes are largely tied to how monsoon pans out. Manufacturing can also provide a good buffer for absorbing the excess workforce from agriculture with positive spin-offs even for the latter in terms of higher productivity and income. Within the manufacturing sector, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) occupy a pivotal position. The



WHILE, ALL THREE SECTORS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN GROWTH, CREATING JOBS AND INCREASING INCOMES, MANUFACTURING CAN PROVIDE A MORE SUSTAINABLE BASIS FOR PROVIDING JOBS AND SURETY OF INCOME

MSMEs are ancillary units engaged in the production, manufacturing and processing of goods and commodities (mostly intermediate goods) which are supplied to large enterprises or master units. These units operate on a small scale and are further categorized into micro, small and medium enterprises depending on the 'investment' and 'turnover' threshold. According to the Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation, the share of MSME manufacturing output in all India Manufacturing output is around 36 per cent. The share of export of MSME-specified products in all India exports has oscillated between 44 - 50 per cent during the last couple of years. As for employment, according to a report released by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), MSMEs in India contribute 62 per cent to the total. Yet, in the past, manufacturing hasn't been given the desired push. Its low contribution of 17 per cent in GDP and even lower share of total employment at about 10 per cent says it all.

Now, India aiming at the generation of 32 per cent of the incremental GVA from manufacturing shows its determination to put in the effort during the next six years or so, which is nearly double what it has done cumulatively to date. At this pace, by 2030, the share of manufacturing in GDP will have reached 26 per cent (4x0.17+6x0.32)/10.

Is it doable? The factors that can make it happen are robust domestic demand; strong export potential; heavy lifting by the Central Government (plus support to States) by building infrastructure; increasing investment by the private sector; key initiatives such as 'Make in India' playing a pivotal role in bolstering the country's manufacturing capabilities underpinned by the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes; India taking up a lead role in recalibrating global supply chains to position the country

as a global manufacturing hub; giving a boost to the micro small and medium enterprises (MSME) and so on. Nearly 70 per cent of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption; Stimulating demand holds the key to putting manufacturing on an 'accelerated' and 'sustained' growth trajectory. For this, not only people's income should grow, but it should also be evenly and widely distributed. What do the facts speak? According to an Oxfam report, 'Inequality Kills', the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people in 2021 hit a record high of US\$ 775 billion or over 25 per cent of India's GDP. This shows the extreme inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth. There are other pointers to confirm that this is indeed so. According to an analysis of the financials of India's largest companies - those comprising the BSE 500 index - over five years, the profits of corporations included in this index more than doubled from Rs 480,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 1000,000 crore during 2021-22, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent.

This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital such as to employees/workers, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits. The aggregate dividend paid by these firms increased from Rs 176,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In those five years, cumulatively, they paid 34 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. This is an unusually high payout ratio - even higher than 30 per cent paid by the world's largest companies in America's S&P 500.

The products made in India need to be priced low if they are to be competitive. But, there are three major reasons as to why prices are downward inflexible. First, several big businesses operating in metals

such as copper, zinc, aluminium or hydrocarbons like oil and gas, enjoy a natural monopoly enabling them to set high prices. Firms in the chemical, petrochemicals, pharmaceutical and agrochemicals sectors also charge more courtesy, high tariffs on imports and licensing and registration requirements. Second, you have the impact of high taxation particularly when it comes to petroleum products. These are taxed under the pre-GST regime leading to the high incidence of 80 per cent of the ex-refinery price of petrol (Delhi). Ditto in the case of diesel. Increasing the cost of the movement of goods raises the cost of almost every manufactured item. Third, how can one be oblivious of the exorbitant power tariff set in double digits in many states? The power distribution companies or discoms (mostly owned and controlled by the States) are forced to charge high rates on supplies to industries as they have to make up for the under-recoveries incurred on supplies to farmers and households, either free or at a heavily subsidized price.

Finally, industries are operating in highly interesting environments. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has kept the policy rate (the interest rate at which it lends money to banks) unchanged at a high of 6.5 per cent along with a 'withdrawal of accommodation' stance (a jargon for tight liquidity) for nearly 20 months. This leads to high cost loans to all industries across the board. The MSMEs are more vulnerable to all the above cost-push factors. To add salt to the injury, they get delayed payment for their dues from large firms. Unless the above fault lines are addressed, Initiatives under 'Make in India' won't yield the desired result and India becoming a manufacturing hub of the world will remain a distant dream.

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

India's education system must prioritise learning over infrastructure

Despite schools being filled with students, foundational skills like basic literacy and numeracy continue to lag

Since gaining independence, India has made significant strides in the field of education, especially in terms of infrastructure and expanding access to schools. Classrooms now accommodate children from all walks of life, and government initiatives have succeeded in bringing millions of students into the education system.

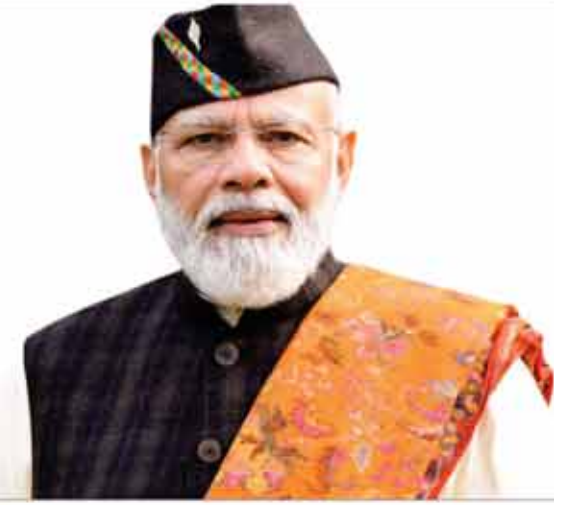
However, despite these achievements, a critical component remains neglected—the quality of learning. Infrastructure may be flourishing, but the foundational skills that students require for future success often lag behind. To understand this, imagine a farmer who diligently sows seeds in well-tilled soil, only to find the harvest insufficient because the seeds weren't suit

Destination Uttarakhand

WORLD TOURISM DAY SPECIAL

Kedarnath Dham gets a major facelift, enhances facilities for pilgrims

Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama is pushing ahead Uttarakhand government's efforts to transform Kedarnath into a premier spiritual destination



I congratulate the Uttarakhand government on the remarkable progress achieved in the last few years. This has been made possible by sustained policy push and focus on key sectors such as tourism and renewable energy. Alongside, the state has made significant strides in infrastructure development, setting new benchmarks for sustainable growth. Uttarakhand's commitment to harnessing its natural resources and promoting tourism has not only bolstered its economy but also showcased its potential on the global stage. I applaud the state's dedication to inclusive development and look forward to its continued success in the years ahead."

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister



PM Narendra Modi along with CM Pushkar Singh Dhama during his visit to Kedarnath Dham

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's deep faith in Baba Kedarnath and his special attachment to Uttarakhand, have received support from the Centre. With assistance from the Centre, reconstruction work is going on at Kedarnath Dham. Uttarakhand Government led by Pushkar Singh Dhama, endeavoured to restore the shrine and the surrounding area to its pristine glory, while providing devotees with all modern amenities and services. The state administration has provided all kinds of facilities to the pilgrims, which is among the reasons behind the record number of people visiting every year.

The redevelopment and reconstruction work in the first phase of Kedarnath Dham was completed in 2022. In the second phase, 21 works worth Rs 188 crore are underway. The master plan proposes the redevelopment of the Kedarnath temple area that was washed away in the Uttarakhand floods of 2013. The plan proposes a wide and clear path that leads to the shrine, with structures in small clusters on either side accommodating the residential needs.

MANDAKINI PATH READY FOR PILGRIMS COMING TO KEDARNATH

The master plan proposes a new layout to ensure

a safer and more organised settlement around the shrine, including the construction of Mandakini path, leading to the temple and the arrangement of residential spaces in small, dispersed clusters for better management and safety. Officials confirmed that the first phase of the Kedarnath Dham's redevelopment was completed in 2022, and the second phase is currently underway.

Under the supervision of CM Pushkar Singh Dhama, the Mandakini path is ready for pilgrims' ease, and additional amenities such as food kiosks and pilgrim care will be available there. All the work would be completed before the yatra commences



Under PM Narendra Modi's leadership, U'khand is experiencing growth with new ropeway projects and advancements in rail, road, and air connectivity. These initiatives promise eco-friendly travel, boost regional economy, and create opportunities for locals. With its rich spiritual, adventure, and cultural experiences, the state continues to attract global visitors while preserving its natural and cultural heritage.

Pushkar Singh Dhama
Chief Minister



CM on his visit to Corbett National Park

Tehri takes flight: Rising paragliding destination

According to some internationally renowned paragliding experts, Tehri has the potential to become a world-class paragliding center. With



a clear dropping height of more than 1500 mt, conducive climate with lesser wind disturbances and easy access from Dehradun airport, the Tehri-lake is being touted as an upcoming paragliding hub.

The Tourism Department organised an International Paragliding Acrobatic Festival in November 2023 which saw participation from more than 150 paragliding acrobats from more than 30 countries. The event catapulted Tehri to an exalted status in the international paragliding circuit and international paragliding instructors are being up at Tehri for their training groups.

In order to promote paragliding activity in the state, the tourism department has started various levels of paragliding training courses like P1, P2 and SIV at Tehri to equip the local youth with the necessary skills and safety certifications to meet international requirements. This step would ensure availability of local skilled manpower as Tehri sees a rise in paragliding sporting activity.

U'khand Tourism Policy 2023-30: Spiritual bliss with modern tourism

Following PM Modi's vision, and under the leadership of CM Pushkar Singh Dhama, Uttarakhand has embarked on creating better experiences for tourists



CM Pushkar Singh Dhama, CM, Uttarakhand, interacting with Goa government officials. MoU was signed recently with an aim to enhance the overall tourism in both states

Uttarakhand, also known as Devbhoomi, has been a spiritual center since time immemorial. With holy cities like Haridwar and Rishikesh on the banks of the River Ganga, the annual Char Dham Yatra, the Kumbh Mela and several Shiva and Shakti temples, each telling its own mystical story, dotted across the state, the state is a haven for spiritual seekers.

Under the able leadership of Uttarakhand Chief Minister, Pushkar Singh Dhama, the state has embarked on creating better and newer experiences for tourists visiting the state. From infrastructure development to opening up

newer segments of tourism, the state is offering multitude of tourism products to target various strata of tourists. At the same time, it is imperative for the state to take note of the fragile ecology and plan activities without causing any harm to the natural environment.

The Tourism Policy envisaged by Government of Uttarakhand lays the roadmap for developing new tourism related activities in the state. The state is offering several incentives including capital subsidy, interest subvention, marketing & promotion, training etc for industry players who wish to invest in the future tourism growth of the

state. The activities for which these incentives are offered range from hospitality services and other tourism services such as adventure parks, electric taxi services etc.

Due to the unique ecological positioning of the state, with the Himalayas being one of the youngest mountain ranges of the world, subject to various geographical changes, the Tourism Policy 2023-2030 lays down guidelines for development of environmental-friendly sustainable tourism infrastructure.

Several initiatives have been taken by the govt to boost tourism in the state ranging from promoting Adventure Sports, yoga and wellness, Border Village Tourism and boosting tourism to hidden gems of the state through Manaskhand Express train

Recently, the government has laid down policy guidelines for inviting investment from within the state for state players with intended investment of Rs 1-5 crore. With this policy, the state aims to develop entrepreneurial enterprise within the state for land owners of the state. Another unique feature of the policy is that the investors will have to provide employment to at least 70% local youth in their enterprise.

The policy includes several incentives including Capital Subsidy and Interest Subsidy depending upon the geographical location of the project.

Homestays: Future of accommodation in the state

Empowering homestay owners, strengthening economy

Due to various geographical and ecological factors, setting up of large hotels in the state is not feasible. Hence, the state has launched various facilities and incentives to homestay owners to develop a resilient homestay infrastructure across the state.

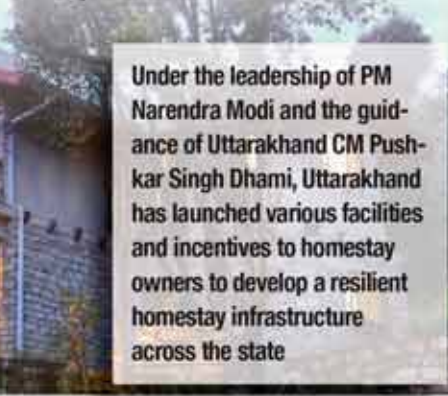
The state has adopted a three-pronged strategy to promote the homestay economy – providing capital support to build infrastructure, providing training to hone skills and the third is the launch of a dedicated homestay booking portal www.uttarastays.com, which offers homestay owners to list their homestays without any integration charges and commission.

This strategy is set to impact migration from the state with more locals setting up homestays and the tourism department providing online booking facility through a state-owned portal.

The Himalayan hinterland is dotted with pictur-



CM Pushkar Singh Dhama at a homestay



Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and the guidance of Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhama, Uttarakhand has launched various facilities and incentives to homestay owners to develop a resilient homestay infrastructure across the state

Uttarakhand embraces new-age tourism for sustainable and ecological growth

With new-age tourism products, Uttarakhand is poised for an era of tourism growth, which is both sustainable and inclusive

Uttarakhand has been known as a hub for Yoga and wellness activities for a long time with Rishikesh being branded as the Yoga Capital of the World. With various developmental initiatives of the Department of Ayush and Department of Tourism, Wellness Centers are being developed across the state providing

holistic Ayurvedic remedies. These Wellness Centers are being promoted by the Tourism department by linking them to the nearby homestays. The Tourism Department and Ayush Department have also developed an Ayurveda based welcome kit for the tourists residing at the homestays.

The wellness centers linked to

the homestays are being actively promoted on the www.uttarastays.com portal to provide information about the facilities available at these Wellness Centers.

With these new-age tourism products, Uttarakhand tourism is poised for an era of tourism growth which is both sustainable and inclusive.

Nakshatra Sabha: Exploring the Cosmos

With focus of 'Leave No Trace', the event aimed to promote responsible tourism with the participants actively involved in the managing the surroundings



With an aim to promote 'Leave No Trace Behind' tourism activity and expose remote locations of the state, the tourism department has come up with a six-part astro-tourism event series titled Nakshatra Sabha. The locations chosen for these events are unique with astro enthusiasts camping at the sites in tents. The astro enthusiasts witness various celestial events and objects through state-of-the-art equipment, participate in sessions about astronomy, learn about astro-photography,

unravel the mysteries of the night sky, go on local hikes, indulge in musical evenings and admire the beauty of their surroundings pledging to 'Leave No Trace' when they vacate the site.

The first event in the series was held at the iconic George Everest House near Mussoorie in June 2024 which saw overwhelming response from more than 100 participants from all across the country and even international participation.

The next event is scheduled to be held at Jageshwar in Almora in the first week of October 2024 with more events lined up at Benital in Chamoli, Jading in Uttarkashi and Gunji in Pithoragarh. The events aim to create awareness about Dark Sky Observations, develop a Dark Sky Policy for the state, promote training & development around the events to create opportunities for the local youth.

With focus of 'Leave No Trace', these events also aim to promote responsible tourism with the participants actively involved in the managing the surroundings.

Adventure Tourism gains momentum



With a full-fledged adventure tourism wing functioning under the Tourism Department, adventure tourism activities in the state have evolved over the years. In the year 2023, the department took a decision to waive off the river rafting fee from rafting operators for all rivers except the Ganga. This fee waiver has generated interest of the rafting operators to start rafting operations in rivers other than the Ganga including Tons, Ramganga and Sharda, thus paving way for rafting activities at many more destinations in addition to Rishikesh.

The National Rafting Championship was held in the Sharda River at Champawat, which saw participation from several teams including a team from Nepal.

The state has organised several paragliding competitions at various locations including Tehri and Pithoragarh

to boost the paragliding activities in the state.

Water Sports activities have been added at Baur Jalashay in Udham Singh Nagar District and more activities are being planned at Tehri-lake. Uttarakhand became the first state to test fly a Gyrocopter from Haridwar. Gyrocopters are light weight helicopters which can fly at low altitudes and can usher an new era in adventure tourism.

The state was awarded the Best Adventure Tourism State in 2023 by Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI).

#ExploreUttarakhand



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