21st ASEAN-India Summit

The 21st ASEAN-India Summit, held on October 10, 2024, was a landmark event aimed at deepening the strategic partnership between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India. This summit took place against a backdrop of evolving regional dynamics, emphasizing cooperation in areas such as trade, security, and technology. The leaders of the ten ASEAN member states and India gathered to discuss pressing issues and chart a collaborative course for the future.

The ASEAN-India partnership has grown significantly since $\,$ its inception in 1992, evolving from a dialogue relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. This summit highlighted the importance of ASEAN as a critical partner for India in its "Act East" policy, which seeks to enhance economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asian nations.

During the summit, leaders acknowledged the challenges posed by global uncertainties, including economic slowdowns, climate change, and geopolitical tensions. They underscored the need for a resilient and inclusive framework to navigate these challenges, emphasizing mutual respect and cooperation.

One of the primary focuses of the summit was enhancing economic ties between ASEAN and India. The leaders discussed ways to boost trade and investment, aiming to increase the current bilateral trade volume significantly. The importance of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) was reiterated, with calls for removing trade barriers and improving connectivity.

ment of goods and services, as well as people. This included exploring new trade agreements and leveraging digital technologies to enhance e-commerce and trade logistics. Regional security was another critical agenda item. The lead-

ers recognized the increasing threats posed by terrorism, cyber

Several leaders proposed initiatives to facilitate easier move-

threats, and maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts and intelligence shar-During the 21st ASEAN-India Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's unwavering support for

ASEAN unity, centrality, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. He characterized the 21st century as the "Asian century," emphasizing the critical role of India-ASEAN ties in shaping the region's future. Highlighting the vibrancy of India's Act East Policy, PM Modi

noted that trade between India and ASEAN has doubled over the past decade, exceeding USD 130 billion. He pointed out that ASEAN has become one of India's largest trade and investment partners, underscoring the significance of this relationship. The establishment of direct flight connectivity with seven ASEAN countries was also mentioned as a crucial step in enhancing people-to-people ties.

PM Modi spoke about the promising beginnings made in fintech collaboration, which aims to leverage technology for economic growth. He also highlighted significant progress in the restoration of shared cultural heritage across five ASEAN countries, reflecting a commitment to cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

Furthermore, he urged the completion of the review of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AITIGA) in a timely manner to unlock greater economic potential for both regions. The Prime Minister also emphasized the progress in the India-ASEAN knowledge partnership, particularly through scholarships provided to ASEAN youth at Nalanda University, fostering educational ties and nurturing future leaders

Overall, PM Modi's remarks reinforced the importance of India-ASEAN cooperation in promoting regional stability, economic growth, and cultural ties, laying the groundwork for a robust partnership in the years to come.

India's role in regional security was emphasized, with leaders expressing appreciation for its contributions to peacekeeping missions and regional stability. Joint exercises and training programs were proposed to enhance interoperability among armed

The summit also prioritized discussions on sustainable development, with a focus on climate change and environmental sustainability. Leaders acknowledged the need for collective action to address the urgent challenges posed by climate change, including natural disasters and resource depletion.

In an increasingly digital world, the leaders recognized the potential for digital transformation to drive economic growth and enhance societal welfare. The summit focused on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly among youth in

Discussions included the establishment of collaborative platforms for startups and technology exchange. Leaders emphasized the importance of cybersecurity and data privacy in the digital age, advocating for robust frameworks to protect citizens while fostering innovation.

The summit reaffirmed the significance of cultural ties and people-to-people exchanges as a foundation for a strong partnership. Leaders emphasized the need to enhance cultural diplomacy through programs promoting tourism, education, and cultural heritage.

The "ASEAN-India Cultural Exchange Year" was proposed to celebrate shared histories and promote mutual understanding. Educational partnerships, scholarship programs, and youth exchanges were discussed as ways to build bridges between the peoples of ASEAN and India.

The 21st ASEAN-India Summit concluded with the adoption of a joint statement outlining the key outcomes and commitments made by the leaders. The statement emphasized the importance of a rules-based international order and the need for cooperative mechanisms to address regional and global:

Divergent Election Mandate In Jammu & Kashmir

Needs Introspection to retain the Unity of Jammu & Kashmir



is a matter of great pleasure that after 10 long years "free and fair" elections have been held in Jammu and Kashmir without any untoward incident for which the people of Jammu and Kashmir deserve felicitations. The peaceful electoral process and participation of millions of voters is testimony to vibrant democracy and people's faith in democratic values of the country. Today, J&K

stands taller guided by principles of good governance, people-first, social justice and social harmony. Equally, the Modi government ruling India for the last almost 10 years have ensured that peace and tranquility is restored in Jammu and Kashmir which was shattered and snatched away from people due to extreme militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. In these election results one is seeing the most polarized results in J&K, with the National Conference showing its political edges on Kashmir and the BJ in Jammu, when it was not so in earlier elections. The NC has won 35 of the 47 seats in Kashmir emerging as the single largest party, in the Muslim majority region. The BJP has won 29 out of the 43 seats in Jammu, emerging as the dominating political party in the Hindu-majority region. NC has only 7 seats in Jammu and that too mostly from the Muslim dominated zones of Jammu. NC has just two MLA's in its fold from Jammu, who are Hindus and the rest are all Muslims, BJP has no Muslim MLA in its fold. Congress has just six seats and could not get even a single seat from the Hindu belts of Jammu. Jammu is now almost 'Congress-Muketh". Congress has performed miserably in this election. Is the NC manifesto for these elections responsible for such a divide? It may be and it may not be. Yet, it is a million dollar question. Why bring the issue of Pakistan in its manifest. Just to give a flip to the polarity of fundamentalism partially, for garnering votes on the basis of emotions of the people of the vallev involved, who have always been exploited by the political rulers of Kashmir for their ulterior political motives of remaining in power for ever. What was an urgent need to rename the two sacred religious places of Hindus in Kashmir and get it declared through the political election manifesto. Can it be called as evolving of a worst type of communal passion, to create a big communal divide between the Hindus and Muslims at the time of elections for getting votes from the Muslim voters? Can any logic refuse it? However it is not good by any standard of equity of tolerance at this advanced stage in the religious concerns of minorities like that of KP's who have been driven out of J & K forcibly under inequitable conditions.

National conference manifes to says, "We advocate Indo-Pak dialogue as the best method to resolve ongoing conflicts. It means that India should talk to Pakistan about Kashmir, if at all it is an issue with Pakistan. Does the National Conference equate J & K as a separate country involved in turmoil between India and Pakistan? The other point of their manifesto is about the changing the names of the most sacred religious places of Kashmiri Hindus in Kashmir, the Shankaracharya in to "Takht-e-Suleiman"

and Hari Parbat, in to "Koh-e-Maran". Was it a communal move of NC, to appease the Islamic fanaticism in Kashmir? Have such post election utterances resulted in divergent election results between Kashmir and Jammu. This mandate shows that the people of the two regions viz, Jammu and Kashmir are not allowed to be on the same wavelength, as far as the political aims and objectives about Jammu and Kashmir are concerned, by the greedy politicians. In Kashmir the political euphoria in elections, may be assembly or parliamentary elections, mostly does not go beyond consuming the factor of Pakistan as an issue, relevant to the existence of Jammu and Kashmir, while as Jammu and its people mostly barring some hilly districts, are open to any positive mind set, in this regard in the broader interest of Jammu and Kashmir. when the people of Jammu consider Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India, without any preconditions.

BJP has drawn a blank in Kashmir and the Congress a virtual blank in Jammu. There is thus a clear and sharp political divide between the two regions, which will be a challenge for the new democratic Government to overcome both politically and administratively. If such acts of divide and rule by the politicians is allowed to continue it may be disastrous for the unity of adherence as for as the existence of Jammu and Kashmir as a single unit is concerned. Ladakh is already separated from Jammu and Kashmir, a big cost having been paid by the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It is a revelation in this regard. Let it stop somewhere before a big void is generated between the Jammu and Kashmir, which will be disastrous for both the regions. Let no more divisions occur to Jammu and Kashmir. In the valley, the deep ideological questions of restoration of statehood and the restoration of Article 370, as per the NC and the Peoples Democratic Party is a prime factor of this election for these political parties. In Jammu, the act of the abrogation of Article 370 evoked a very minimal response, when there was no question of its restoration even among people who argued that it had not benefited them to the extent imagined. Probably they are least bothered about it. In fact they may be even happy with it, feeling that Jammu and Kashmir is now a full-fledged part of India. Jammu actually saw a more consolidated election campaign, on the plank of the development by Modi government, when the contest became fully bipolar, due to the issues contested by the NC and the other regional parties of Kashmir, which had more tendencies of polarization rather than having healing discourses. This si bound to create a vertical wedge between Jammu and Kashmir. The new government has to perform beyond regional considerations and shall have to carry on the work done during the Lieutenant Governor's rule, which was fully development oriented, equally for both the regions of Kashmir and Jammu. There was no discrimination with Jammu as was being done in the past during democratic governments. Because of the majority mandate from Kashmir, when the proper representation to Jammu may be skipped, Jammu should not be again discriminated as was done in the past by similar political set ups from the valley. Jammu has always been discriminated in all respects of its development during all those times of rules dominated by politicians from Kashmir. By an approximate estimation the region

of Jammu got only 30 percent share in the administrative set up of the state, when Kashmir got about 70 percent representation in such services. At the level of the civil secretariat manning the whole administration of the state, hardly 30 to 40 percent officers of the levels of secretaries and below could find a place, when the rest would come from Kashmir only. So was the case with the cabinet ministers. The major chunk of ministries were given to the legislators from Kashmir division, on the plea that Kashmir division has more population and thus deserved more share in the ministerial cabinet. The cabinet births allocated to the Jammu legislators were allotted portfolios of lesser importance. A glaring example of discrimination in this behalf can be cited by referring to the Kashmir Administrative Service. It shows the apathy towards Jammu. The same attitude of discrimination was adopted in all the development sectors like the road sector, irrigation facility sector, urban and rural electrification sector, power generation sectors, education sector both technical and non technical, public health sectors, medical services sectors, agriculture and horticulture sectors, housing and urban development sector, etc. Regional imbalances in all these sectors are still visible between Kashmir and Jammu, if a true and an honest study is made in this regard.

The apportionment of funds received from the government of India for development schemes and projects were the sole legacies and priorities of the Kashmir alone, with a brazen neglect of Jammu in this behalf, during the previous democratic rules. It has been the case with the tourism sector. Jammu has a tremendous potential for tourism development and has abundant charming tourist's spots, which could be exploited for the development of the tourism sector in Jammu. Just a max factor was added to Jammu in this regard like Patni Top tourist spot, when huge funds under central government schemes for tourism were utilized only in Kashmir. There are numerous such portraits of discriminations against Jammu and its people, when all such incidents cannot be mentioned here for want of space. A famous axiom of law, justice is not only to be done, but justice should appear to have been done. Similarly where is the development in Jammu being done, as is being claimed? It should appear to be done on ground.

Should still the people of Jammu remain calm and continue to suffer, under the new dispensation of democratic governance. Probably they will not. Let the new ruling political powers in Jammu and Kashmir, feel the political pulse of the people of Jammu now and rectify all previous acts of hypocritical discriminations against them and ensure that Jammu gets its due in all the areas of development sectors. In the alternative Jammu will probably refuse to be a part of the Jammu & Kashmir for obvious reasons of discrimination. Once bitten twice shy. In that case and situation, why shouldn't Jammu be a separate entity and suffer for the problems of Kashmir, which can be geo - political and strategically loaded with other security consider-

(The author of this article is a chartered

Why Complementary Feeding is Most Critical Agenda for Child Malnutrition?

¬his September, India celebrated7thRashtriya Poshan Maah ¹2024, a month dedicated to nutrition awareness and action, a crucial aspect that demands our collective focus is Complementary Feeding. This practice of transitioning infants from exclusive breastfeeding to a diet that includes solid and semisolid foods is fundamental to addressing the persistent issue of malnutrition in India. Complementary Feeding is not just about food; it is about ensuring that children receive the right nutrients at the right time, laving the groundwork for a healthy and productive life. Since milk alone cannot meet the nutritional needs of a growing child, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends introduction of nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods at 6 months of age together with continued breastfeeding up to 2 vears of age or beyond. Complementary Feeding is crucial for the vital role it plays in brain function, physical growth and immunity development. Scientific evidence on brain development reveals that within two years of birth, brain volume increases by more than 100%, driven primarily by the development of grey matter Similarly, during the first year, a baby's birth weight almost triples. Hence, complementary feeding is not only essential for brain development but also for its role in deterring child undernutrition-a condition that affects nearly one-third of children under five years of age in India. Undernutrition in children encompassing stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height) and underweight (low weight for age), can have significant implications for the physical and mental development of the growing child. For example, research shows that stunted children are more likely to have lower test scores, poor cognitive outcomes, and even reduced economic productivity later in life. Moreover, complementary feeding is essential in building a strong immune system. It helps reduce the incidence of infections such as diarrhoea, respiratory illnessesand food allergies, which are common in young children. Evidently, the first two years of a child's life, is a critical window of opportunity where adequate nutrition can significantly enhance physical growth, cognition and immunity of our future generations. It is a critical period where a balanced diet full of vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, eggs and dairy products can have long-lasting effects on a child's health. Despite its significance, prevalence of complementary feeding in India remains alarmingly

low. Data from the National Family Health Surveysshows a significant gap in complementary feeding for young children, which requires urgent attention to effectively combat malnutrition. It is in this context that prioritization of Complementary Feeding by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) in the Rashtriya Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month) 2024, highlighted an important milestone in India's Nutrition Agenda.

This leads us to the key question: What steps can be undertaken to increase the adoption of Complementary Feeding among young children in India? First and most essential for successful complementary feeding is the inclusion of healthy and nutritious food in the diet, especially during the window betweensix months and two years. India's rich culinary heritage offers a variety of nutrientdense options that are ideal for young children. Traditional recipes like khichdi and daliya, are not only easy to prepare, but also packed with essential nutrients. For example, Ragi banana porridge is an excellent source of iron and calcium, while Bajra Khichdi provides a good mix of vitamins and minerals. Most importantly, MoWCD's ouidelines for Mission Poshan 2.0 put a big emphasis on promoting "dietary diversity" and consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, millets and whole foods which are locally available, nutritious and suited to the regional context. Building on these guidelines, reviving traditional weaning foods made from locally available and affordable ingredients can help ensure that children receive a balanced diet that supports their growth and development.

Second, the use of cultural platforms for scientific messaging can be a key strategy in promoting largescale social and behavioural change. Interestingly, WHO's recommended timing for initiating complementary feeding after six months of birth, matches perfectly well with the age-old practice of 'Annaprashan', an important milestone in the Indian cultural context. Recognizing the importance of complementary feeding, MoWCD promotes the celebration of Annaprashan Divas as a community-based event organized by Anganwadi Workers across the country to counsel mothers and local communities about the importance of introducing diverse and nutrient-rich foods to children's diet. Utilizing traditional wisdom and socio-cultural practices for scientific messaging thus emerges as a best practice for promoting the acceptance and uptake of evidence-based infant and young child feeding practices. Third, to ensure that all young children, regardless of socio-economic back-

ground, have access to nutritious food, it is crucial to leverage existing government programs. MoWCD's Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNP), which provides Take-Home Rations (THR) and Hot Cooked Meals (HCM) to children aged six months to six years, acts as a lifeline for families, particularly in low-income communities where access to nutrient-dense food is often limited.

Fourth, while promoting healthy foods, it is equally important to protect children from the dangers of "junk" and ultra-processed foods, particularly those high in fat, sugar, and salt. Junk foods such as cookies, chips, namkeens, instant noodles, soft drinks, and bakery products have unfortunately become staples on the "Kids Menu". Additionally, heavily marketed "baby foods" from leading multi-national brands have recently come under the scanner by institutions like the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights for containing "high sugar" content, particularly for sale in India. It thus comes as no surprise that junk food consumption among young children in India is rising exponentially every year. Alarmingly, recent scientific evidence indicates that early exposure to these unhealthy foods can lead to early onset of obesity and dia betes, culminating in chronic health conditions adulthood. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness about the harmful effects of processed foods and encourage parents to opt for healthier alternatives. This can be achieved through community education, media campaigns, and the active involvement of healthcare providers and community health workers in counselling par-

ents on appropriate feeding practices. Conclusively, Complementary feeding was critical component of 7thPoshan Maah 2024, addressing one of the most overlooked aspects of maternal and child nutrition. By promoting evidencebased practices, leveraging cultural traditions like Annaprashan, disseminating affordable and locally available food recipes and protecting children from unhealthy foods. India can make significant strides in addressing its priority agenda for eliminating malnutrition. The Government's efforts, combined with "Jan Andolan" or mass mobilization, can ensure that all children receive the nutrition they need to thrive, setting the foundation for a healthier future for

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World Mental Health Day: Embrace joy in life, and let go of stress

SURJIT SINGH FLORA

very year on 10 October, we observe a day dedicated to increasing awareness about mental health issues globally and rallying support for mental health initiatives.

The Day offers a platform for all parties involved in mental health to discuss their efforts and explore what further actions are necessary to ensure mental health care becomes a reality for individuals around the globe. Mental health remains overlooked by society, often regarded as a taboo subject. Conversations around it are scarce, and individuals facing mental health challenges frequently encounter stigma and discrimination, leading to inadequate treatment and support. There remains a persistent stigma surrounding mental health in society. There remains a lack of sensitivity surrounding mental well-being, and it frequently does not receive the attention it deserves. Therefore, we observe world mental health day annually to address these challenges and eliminate the taboo and stigma surrounding mental health through education and awareness. This day highlights the significance of mental health, ensuring that those who are struggling feel acknowledged and supported. While Mental health issues are becoming increasingly serious worldwide. The most alarming trend is the rising prevalence of depression and anxiety among young people. According to data from the World Health Organization, an estimated 3.8 percent of the world's population suffers from stress, including 5 percent of adults (4 percent of men and 6 percent of women) and 5.7 percent of adults over 60 years of age. Worldwide, more than 10 percent of pregnant women and women who have just given birth suffer from stress. Every year, over 720,000 individuals lose their lives to suicide. Suicide ranks as the third most common cause of death for individuals aged 15 to 29. Although there are effective treatments for mental health, more than 75 percent of people in low- and middle-income countries do not receive adequate care.

The influence of social media

Kenya's future hinges on its young people. The pressure from school to job is growing harder for young people to handle. Social media, online activities, and information spread have complicated matters. No longer is mental health a personal problem. Given its extensive influence, we need to take action. First, find and investigate the problem's root causes. Experts believe that social media plays a significant role in mental health illnesses. Many feel inferior when they see others' lifestyles. Trolling, cybercrime, and unwanted information can hurt emotionally. Social media addiction disrupts routine. Competition and a lack of education and work options are hurting the youth. Numerous students struggle to achieve their educational and career goals while away from their

Symptoms A person suffering from stress feels depressed, irritated, and empty. They may experience a lack of joy or interest in activities. In addition to this, symptoms of stress may include a lack of concentration, self-doubt, thoughts of death or suicide, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite or weight, extreme fatigue, or a lack of energy.

Treatment and prevention Although provision for mental health counseling and support is increasing, it is still not universally available. Detecting a physical or mental problem early and initiating counseling can simplify the solution. Many studies have found that even after realizing a problem, people are reluctant to seek medical help or psychological counseling. The main reason for this is social bias. We must liberate ourselves from it. Young people should not hesitate to seek help. When a person experiences stress, it's crucial to discuss their issues with others. Try to continue the activities that you used to enjoy. Stay connected with friends and family.

Get expert advice.

Exercise regularly, even if it's just a short walk. Stick to regular eating and sleeping habits as much as possible. Avoid or reduce alcohol and do not use illegal drugs, which can exacerbate depression. Talk to someone you trust about your feelings and seek the advice of a health professional. Remember that you are not alone: many people have gone through this hardship. Find whatever is positive in life and be proud of it. If someone around us seems to be suffering from stress, then help him and help him get out of the stressful situation. There is no stress in life; always give place to

Taking time for mental health is crucial and can significantly contribute to overall well-being. Taking a day for mental health means stepping away from work or other obligations to concentrate on self-care and emphasize emotional and mental wellness. Here's why

- 1. Rest and Recovery: Days dedicated to mental well-being offer a chance to relax and rejuvenate. Just as our bodies need physical rest, our minds also need time to recuperate from stress, burnout, and the pressures of everyday life. Stepping away for a moment can alleviate fatigue and enhance overall mental strength.
- 2. Alleviating Tension: Ongoing stress can negatively impact mental well-being. A mental health day provides an opportunity for stress relief and can aid in preventing or easing feelings of burnout, anxiety, and depression. It offers an opportunity to participate in activities that encourage relaxation, self-care, and methods for managing stress

- 3. Emotional Well-being: Focusing on mental health days enables individuals to take care of their emotional health. This allows for the exploration of feelings, consideration of individual desires and aspirations, and participation in pursuits that offer happiness and satisfaction. This can improve emotional strength, self-understanding
- and general joy 4. Enhanced Efficiency and Concentration: Regularly taking mental health days can lead to better efficiency and concentration over time. By focusing on mental well-being and alleviating pressure, people can approach their duties with fresh vigor, clear insight, and innovative thinking. Taking a break from work can offer a new outlook and help avoid exhaustion, resulting in enhanced efficiency upon returning to tasks.
- 5. Self-Care and Prevention: Taking time for mental health encourages a mindset of self-nurturing and proactive management of mental well-being. By acknowledging the significance of stepping back to focus on mental well-being, individuals can avert the worsening of mental health issues and incorporate self-care as a regular part of their lives. The availability and acceptance of mental health days can differ based on personal situations, workplace environment, and regional regulations. Being aware of the specific guidelines or requirements established by employers or educational institutions concerning time off is crucial. If you're feeling overwhelmed stressed, or emotionally strained, it might be helpful to talk about your needs with a trusted supervisor, human resources department, or healthcare professional. They can offer insights on effective strategies to tackle your mental health issues and help you manage the process of taking a day for your well-being.

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