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SUNDAY POST

HERE . NOW



Elections & Expectations

COVER STORY

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After featuring in over 1200 music videos, 400 bhajans and a few TV shows, actor Sarthak Pradhan is in high demand in the entertainment industries of Odisha and Bengal. He has also performed in Sambalpuri and Santhali albums. During his free time, Sarthak plays cricket and helps his wife in household chores

Home is where the heart is
 Being an introvert, whether it's a Sunday or a day off, I prefer to be at home. I love to spend time with my father, son, and nephew.

Taking burden off wife's shoulder
 My wife works as a teacher, therefore she is in classrooms most of the time. So, I help her out with domestic chores like cleaning, dishwashing and cooking.

Panacea for mental peace
 Living in Old Town, I love spending my evenings by the stairs of Bindusagar Lake, which brings me mental peace.

Love for swimming
 Everyone should go swimming! I'm not any different. To stay in shape, I've made it a daily ritual to swim after my shoots.

Six-day vegetarian
 I'm not too keen on non-vegetarian food. But I consume a couple of pieces of fish once a week, on my day-off in particular. Desi cuisine, with its staples like rice, dal, and curry, is what truly nourishes my soul.



With family



With son and pet



Sarthak during a 'horse dance' show

MADHUSMITA SAHU, OP

WhatsApp This Week
Only on Sunday POST!
 Send in your most interesting WhatsApp messages and memes at: features.orissapost@gmail.com
 And we will publish the best ones
THE BEST MEMES OF THIS ISSUE

- What did the pig say at the beach on a hot summer's day? I'm bacon!
- Why is a baseball game a good place to go on a hot day? Because there are lots of fans.
- What do you call a turkey that's got no feathers? Thanksgiving dinner.
- What does a baby computer call its father? Data.

SPOTLIGHT ON DEEPFAKES

Sir, The ever-growing prevalence of deepfake technology presents significant concerns surrounding privacy, democracy, and the ability of public figures to safeguard their reputations. While the BJP's national vice-president Bajjayant Panda recently accused the BJD of misusing AI to mislead voters, several celebrities like Rashmika Mandanna and Aamir Khan have fallen victim to these sophisticated manipulations. Deepfakes can spread misinformation, violate privacy, and damage reputations, making it essential to educate the public and enforce strict regulations to maintain trust in the media and democracy. To complicate matters further, deepfake content creators are easily able to cloak themselves in anonymity. One way to address this issue would be to enact a federal law protecting a right to publicity.

ISHIKA SINGH, BHUBANESWAR

LETTERS

A WORD FOR READERS
 Sunday POST is serving a platter of delectable fare every week, or so we hope. We want readers to interact with us. Feel free to send in your opinions, queries, comments and contributions to features.orissapost@gmail.com
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First-time voters are more engaged and informed than previous cohorts. Besides, the tech-savvy generation is more vocal about their expectations from political leaders, demanding transparency and accountability, say a few voters who recently exercised their democratic rights

Elections & Expectations

MADHUSMITA SAHU, OP

As general elections enter the last phase, India's young voters are emerging as a critical force poised to influence the political landscape. With over 18.5 million first-time voters aged 18–19, this population holds the potential to significantly sway the outcomes.

Back home, the state has a young population of around eight lakh of the total 3.35 crore voters and the polls are witnessing a significant shift in electoral dynamics. It has become evident that first-time voters are playing a pivotal role in the elections. This demographic, characterised by a youthful and more digitally connected electorate, is bringing fresh perspectives and priorities to the fore, influencing both campaign strategies and electoral outcomes.

They are more engaged and informed than previous cohorts. Besides, they also are leveraging social media and online platforms to access information, discuss political issues, and mobilise support. This tech-savvy generation is also more vocal about their expectations from political leaders, demanding transparency, accountability, and progressive policies.

With just the last phase of polls remaining, a few new voters, from young first-timers to seasoned citizens, shared their perspectives with **Sunday POST**.

'Distorted policy making could be a reason for low voter turnout'

Chittaranjan Debata, a 45-year-old soft-

ware professional from Bhubaneswar, shared, "Due to the influx of new voters, social media and digital activism have put pressure on political parties to be transparent and accountable. In order to strike a chord with these young voters, parties have changed their mode of campaign, emphasising issues such as employment, higher education, women's safety and empowerment, affordable housing, and environmental sustainability."

He said, "New first-time voters in India are primarily concerned about unemployment,



which is currently a pressing issue. Many of them also aspire to pursue higher education, prompting parties to consider policies addressing these concerns. Additionally, there is widespread concern about the ease of doing business and inadequate support, particularly among youth. Implementing reforms in this area would benefit this demographic significantly."

Asked about his thoughts on significant changes in campaign strategies, Debata added, "Political parties are increasingly

leveraging digital platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp to connect with new voters and spread campaign messages. They create engaging content, such as videos, memes, infographics, and quizzes, to capture attention and encourage social sharing, boosting visibility among younger audiences. Additionally, candidates use pre-recorded phone calls to highlight their manifestos. Parties are also emphasising issue-based campaigning, focusing on policies and reforms in areas like employment, education, healthcare, and governance to attract new voter support."

The software engineer also flagged the issue of reported low voter turnout in several states. "This could be triggered by reduced accountability, distorted policymaking, and a cycle of apathy," he pointed out.

Enhanced voter participation promises enduring shifts in political engagement. As voters become more engaged, politicians will face heightened accountability pressures, driving improved performance, he said.

"This cycle, once initiated, holds the potential for a brighter democratic future for India. When voters cast their ballots for NOTA, it is often seen as a form of protest. They may opt for NOTA when they are discontent with the selection of candidates who will shape political decisions and policies impacting their future within society," concluded Debata.





'I see my vote as a crucial part of a larger movement'

Ritesh Sahu, an 18-year-old student from Bhubaneswar and a first-time voter, shared, "I feel my role and influence in the 2024 electoral dynamics are significant. By participating for the first time, I have contributed to the growing number of voices that demand attention from candidates and policymakers. My vote, along with those of other new voters, can sway outcomes, especially in closely contested races. I believe our collective emphasis on issues like climate change, social justice, and economic equality is pushing candidates to address these concerns more prominently. Overall, I see my vote as a crucial part of a larger movement that's shaping the future political landscape."



He added, "I believe the most important issues for us in this election cycle are climate change, affordable education, and healthcare access. Many of us are concerned about the future of our planet and want strong environmental policies. We're also worried about the rising costs of college and student loan debt, seeking candidates who support education reform. Healthcare is another critical issue, as we want to ensure everyone has access to affordable and quality

medical services."

Additionally, social justice and equality are significant concerns as we strive for a fair and inclusive society, Ritesh said.

"I expect political parties and candidates to prioritise addressing the needs and aspirations of young voters in India. This includes focusing on quality education, job creation, and affordable housing. I also want to see a strong commitment to tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development. Transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures are crucial for restoring faith in the political system. Additionally, providing platforms for youth engagement and ensuring our voices are heard in policy-making processes are essential. Young voters seek leaders who are forward-thinking, inclusive, and genuinely dedicated to creating a brighter future for all," Sahu added.

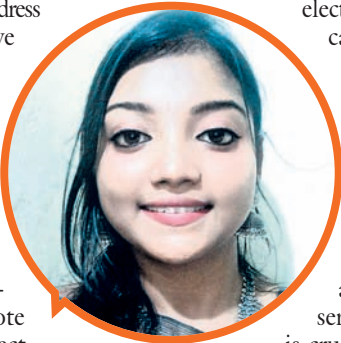
Speaking about the low voter turnout, he said, "Lower participation in exercising franchise is certainly a cause for concern. Many people feel disillusioned with the political system, believing their vote won't make a difference. Additionally, there might be a lack of education about the importance of voting and how it impacts our lives. Some also face barriers like complicated registration processes or limited access to polling places. As a new voter, I believe it's crucial to address these issues by making voting more accessible and ensuring people understand how their participation can drive change. This could help increase voter engagement in future elections."

'I want to see solid plans for combating climate change'

Khusbu Das, another first-time voter from Bhubaneswar, said, "As a Gender Studies student and a new voter, I perceive my role and influence in shaping the electoral dynamics of 2024 as both significant and empowering. I recognise that elections are not gender-neutral. I can contribute to breaking down gender stereotypes and advocating for policies that promote gender equality. I consider how candidates address issues such as reproductive rights, equal pay, and violence against women when casting my vote."

Asked, what difference her vote can make to the system, she adds, "Firstly, I believe my vote can contribute to electing representatives who prioritise policies that promote gender equity and protect women's rights. By supporting candidates who advocate for comprehensive healthcare, equal pay, and protections against gender-based violence, I can help push these critical issues to the forefront of the political agenda."

She went on to explain, "Furthermore, as a Gender Studies student, I bring a unique academic perspective to the discourse. My education enables me to critically analyse political rhetoric and policies, distinguishing between performative



promises and substantive commitments to gender equality. I approach voting as a feminist act, one that shapes the future and allows me to make informed decisions that align with my values and advocate for systemic change."

Talking about her expectations from the people's representative, she said, "As a first-time voter in Odisha, I believe several critical issues should be at the forefront of our electoral discussions. Firstly, education and employment opportunities are paramount. Many students face challenges in accessing quality education and securing jobs after completing their studies. Secondly, healthcare is a significant concern. Ensuring that everyone has access to affordable and quality healthcare services, especially in rural areas, is crucial. This includes improving the infrastructure of government hospitals and ensuring the availability of essential medicines and healthcare professionals. Additionally, environmental sustainability is a growing concern. Odisha is prone to natural disasters like cyclones, and addressing climate change through sustainable practices and disaster management plans is vital for our future."

Das said, "As a new voter, I expect political parties to prioritise education and skill development, create job opportunities, and address mental health issues. Environmental sustainability is crucial, and I want to see solid plans for combating climate change.

Transparency and accountability are essential, with leaders engaging young voters and considering our opinions in decision-making."





Russian imperial army general Grigory Zass

The forgotten genocide

Although less recognised than the Armenian killings or Khmer Rouge genocides, the massacre of about 1.5 million of Circassians by Russian army in mid-19th century serves as sobering reminders of humanity's darkest chapters

to Ottoman dominance in the south. To achieve this, Russia decided to seize Circassian land.

The Russo-Circassian War

For more than a century, from 1736 to 1864, the Circassians battled Russian forces in the Caucasian mountains. They effectively employed guerrilla warfare tactics, but their resistance was undermined by internal power struggles and disagreements among tribes and between leaders and commoners. In the early 1800s, the Russian Army devised a retaliatory strategy against Circassian raids. Troops targeted villages where the families of Circassian fighters resided, carrying out assassinations and kidnappings to dismantle the fighters' rural support base. They also destroyed crops and livestock, depriving the Circassian people of their means of survival and ultimately forcing them to either submit to Russian rule or abandon their villages.

Death or exile

Top Russian Military General Dmitry Milyutin proposed a solution to Russia's Circassian problem by advocating for their complete expulsion, calling it a public necessity. He published his views in 1853, stating that eliminating the Circassians was essential to cleansing the land of hostile elements. Tsar Alexander II approved his plan, and Milyutin became Minister of War in 1861. Subsequently, Russian commander Nikolai Yevdokimov suggested that the Circassians be expelled from the Ottoman Empire, giving them the ultimatum of choosing between death and allegiance to Russia.

The floating graveyards

From March to May 21, 1864, nearly the entire Ubykh tribe, a significant Circassian group, was exiled to Anatolia in the Ottoman Empire. The scale of the expulsion was so vast that the Russian Empire struggled to find enough farmers to work the fertile lands of western Caucasus. The Ottoman Empire dispatched ships to transport Circassians to Anatolia. During this mass exile, thousands of Circassians perished in the Black Sea due to disease and drowning, turning the sea into a graveyard for many. The settlement policy of the Ottoman Empire, intended by some to tighten control over the Christian population, faced criticism for its poor planning and execution.

Concluding thoughts

Currently, Circassians are dispersed across the globe, thriving in various regions. Their estimated global population stands at approximately 8 million, with Türkiye hosting the largest community. A study reveals that 90% of Circassians live outside their historic homeland, spread across the interior of Anatolia and the fringes of the old Ottoman Empire – in the Balkans, Egypt, and the Levant. The Circassian tribes are gradually becoming a forgotten example of a stateless people in modern history. The lack of recognition and their continually diminishing visibility serve as a testament to the gradual elimination of a people and their erasure from history.

OP DESK

Several banners at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi read – Sochi, the land of genocide referring to the coinciding of the game with the 150th anniversary of 'the first modern genocide' of the world's most scattered ethnic diaspora and the ethnic cleansing of indigenous inhabitants of Sochi, the Circassians.

The exiled Circassian diaspora at a ski venue even stated, "We want the athletes to know that if they compete here, they will be skiing on the bones of our relatives."

The Circassian genocide resulted in nearly 1.5 million people. The gruesomeness can be gauged from how Russian general Grigory Zass conducted the operation. He openly encouraged the killing, torture, and rape of Circassian civilians and kept a personal collection of decapitated Circassian heads and body parts in a box under his bed.

A few days after the observance of Circassian Day of Mourning, May 22, to remember the victims of the genocide **Sunday POST** takes a look at one of the deadly mass killings of human history.

Who are Circassians?

Predominantly Muslim, Circassians inhabit the Caucasus, a region spanning from the eastern Black Sea to the Caspian Sea. Traditionally known as mountaineers, they endure harsh conditions and maintain a tribal structure comprising 12 tribes. Circassia, their namesake land, lies along the eastern Black Sea, strategically positioned between historical rivals the Muslim Ottomans and the Christian Russians.

Circassians & Islam

Most Circassians were originally Christians before converting to Islam in the 15th century. Muslim states often recruited Circassians and other Caucasians into their elite military units, where Circassian fighters achieved high-ranking positions. The Egyptian Mamluk Dynasty, which rose to power in the 13th century and ruled much of the Middle East for over 300 years, was led by Circassians. By the early 17th century, the majority of Circassians had embraced Islam as their faith.

Russia's imperialism

After the 17th century, Russia expanded southward into areas where large Muslim populations, including the Crimean Tatars and Circassians, had lived for centuries under Ottoman and Persian protection. The Russian Empire aimed to sever the connection between the Circassians and the Ottomans and sought to control the northeastern Black Sea, in contrast



An 1872 painting by P.N. Gruzinsky shows Circassians leaving their homeland.

Nimrat: Have been a student of life

Nimrat Kaur, who started her acting career with the music video *Tera Mera Pyar* in 2005, has reflected on her two decades of journey in the industry, sharing that she has tried to enjoy the moments and not rest on past laurels.

Speaking to this news agency, she said, "So much has happened. I have learned so much. And I have enjoyed every bit of it. *Tera Mera Pyar* was my first work on camera. I had just come to Mumbai. I was very fortunate that it came my way and opened the advertising world before me. I did a lot of ads and theatre after that."

She added, "I have always been a student of life as an actor and have tried to learn every medium that I have explored. When I did *The Test Case*, it was one of the few web series to be made in India. I have tried to enjoy the moments and not rest on past laurels."

"I don't feel like it's been 20 years... What happens with actors is that when you are essaying a part of your life, and your years are gone. Time keeps passing by... It's very interesting when you look back; I just like to experience my life through people and their reactions and understandings," she added. **IAN S**



Oscars recognition for song featuring Alia

Actress Alia Bhatt, who recently made waves with her much-talked-about appearance at the Met Gala, has given fans yet another reason to celebrate.

The Academy's official Instagram handle shared a video of her popular song *Ghar More Pardesiya*. Sung by Shreya Ghoshal, the hit track from Karan Johar's production *Kalank*.

Sharing the video, The Academy wrote, "Alia Bhatt performing 'Ghar

More Pardesiya' (vocals by Shreya Ghoshal with Vaishali Mhade) from the film 'Kalank.' Directed by Abhishek Varman; Starring Varun Dhawan, Alia Bhatt, Madhuri Dixit, Sanjay Dutt and Sonakshi Sinha; Song composed by Pritam Chakraborty; Lyrics by Amitabh Bhattacharya."

The video went viral quickly, with fans expressing their gratitude to the Oscars for recognising Alia's talent.

On the work front, Alia will be seen in Vasan Bala's *Jigra*. **AGENCIES**

Neha Sharma on her 'b&w' upbringing

Actress Neha Sharma, who will soon be seen in the third season of *Illegal* alongside Akshay Oberoi, said that she knows many people who operate in the gray area, but she was raised by her parents to firmly see things as either black or white.

The actress revealed: "I was brought up in an environment that boosted my moral compass. I know many people who operate in the gray area, but my parents raised me to firmly see things as either black or white. I can't relate to Niharika in this season, as she ventures into the gray zone a lot. However, I do understand our writers and director's intention for Niharika's character development and consider it necessary."

While speaking about the plot development in season 3, Neha said: "This season, Niharika will be seen in a new form. Of course, you will still see

glimpses of the old Niharika, but now that she has built her own firm with Punneet, she has changed. We see a bit of resemblance between her and JJ (Janardhan Jaitley) as her goals have shifted. She takes on many interesting cases this season, all inspired by real-life incidents."



Neha's *Illegal 3* will be released on JioCinema Premium from May 29. **IAN S**

B AFTA-nominated actor Adarsh Gourav, who is known for his roles in *Hostel Daze*, *Leila*, and *Guns N Gulaabs*, said his inspiration for music is rooted in his immense love for indie rock artists.

Adarsh on his musical roots

"My inspiration for my music is deeply rooted in my love for indie rock and indie artists from the 90s and early 2000s. *NIRVANA*, *The Strokes*, Elliott Smith, Pakistani band *Jal*, *Coke Studio*, AR Rahman, *Coldplay*, *Porcupine Tree*, *Karnivool*, *Tool*, *Tesseract*, Ustad Amir Khan, and Kishori Amonkar have been pivotal in shaping my musical sensibilities," stated the *White Tiger* actor.

He said that their experimental sounds match his taste. "Their



raw energy, introspective lyrics, and experimental sounds have always resonated with me," the actor said.

Adarsh is a trained classical singer. He started his acting journey in 2010 with the Shah Rukh Khan-starrer *My Name Is Khan*. He was then seen in *Madhy*, *Mom*, *The White Tiger*, *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*, and *Woh Bhi Din The*.

On the work front, Adarsh will next be seen in Ridley Scott's *Alien*. **IAN S**

INDOOR PLANTS

More than just Natural air purifiers



In the hustle and bustle of modern life, the allure of indoor plants cannot be overstated. They not only add a touch of nature to our living spaces but also purify the air we breathe and uplift our spirits. However, for many of us with busy schedules or limited gardening experience, the idea of caring for plants can seem daunting. Here are five low maintenance plants sorted by **Sunday POST** that thrive with minimal attention, perfect for even the busiest of individuals.

Snake plant (Sansevieria)

Known for its striking appearance and air-purifying properties, the snake plant is a staple in any low maintenance indoor garden. With its upright leaves that resemble, you guessed it, snakes, this resilient plant can tolerate low light conditions and infrequent watering. In fact, it prefers to dry out between waterings, making it an excellent choice for forgetful plant parents. Whether placed in a bright corner or a dimly lit office, the snake plant adds a touch of elegance to any space without demanding much in return.



Pothos (Epipremnum aureum)

Dubbed the "devil's ivy" for its ability to thrive in low light and neglect, the pothos is a favorite among beginner gardeners and seasoned plant enthusiasts alike. With its heart-shaped leaves that cascade elegantly from hanging baskets or climb trellises, this versatile plant adds a touch of natural beauty to any space. Pothos plants are forgiving when it comes to watering, preferring to dry out between waterings to prevent root rot. Plus, they're excellent air purifiers, making them a must-have for any indoor garden.

ZZ plant (Zamioculcas zamiifolia)

If you're looking for a plant that thrives on neglect, look no further than the ZZ plant. With its glossy, waxy leaves and upright growth habit, this tropical gem can survive in low light conditions and go weeks without water. In fact, overwatering is one of the few ways to kill a ZZ plant, so it's best to err on the side of underwatering. Whether placed on a bookshelf, desk, or coffee table, the ZZ plant brings a touch of lush greenery to any room with minimal effort.



Peace lily (Spathiphyllum)

For those seeking a touch of tranquility in their indoor oasis, the peace lily is an excellent choice. With its elegant white flowers and glossy green leaves, this tropical beauty adds a touch of serenity to any room. Peace lilies thrive in low to moderate light conditions and prefer consistently moist soil, making them ideal for forgetful waterers. Plus, they're excellent air purifiers, removing harmful toxins from the air and creating a healthier indoor environment for you and your loved ones.



Spider plant (Chlorophytum comosum)

Last but certainly not least, the spider plant is a classic choice for those seeking a low maintenance yet visually striking plant. With its arching leaves and spider-like offsets, this resilient plant adds a touch of whimsy to any space. Spider plants thrive in bright, indirect light and prefer to dry out between waterings. Plus, they're known for their air-purifying properties, making them a popular choice for bedrooms, offices, and living rooms alike.



Anwasha



WANT TO BECOME A MODEL?

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