

O HERALDO

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Why is UN, USA interfering in Kejriwal case?

The statements made by United Nations' Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Thursday over Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest while Lok Sabha polls being right around the corner have become quite a topic of discussion. Guterres' spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric while commenting on the Kejriwal's arrest and freezing of Congress' bank account said that the UN wishes to have the political as well as civil rights protected during the general elections in India so that everyone can vote in an independent and unbiased environment.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, the US State Department had said that it is closely monitoring reports of Mr Kejriwal's arrest, and called on New Delhi to ensure "a fair and timely legal process" for the jailed Aam Aadmi Party leader. The US State Department's comments came days after Germany's Foreign Office stressed that Kejriwal, like any other Indian citizen facing charges, is entitled to a fair and impartial trial. The External Affairs Ministry of India summoned Gloria Berbena, US' Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, for a 40-minute meet at its office in Delhi on Wednesday afternoon. In a brief statement released shortly afterwards, spokesperson for Ministry of External Affairs Randhir Jaiswal has termed the comments from USA as "unwarranted" and "unacceptable" and said that India is proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions. Germany too, had made similar remarks over Kejriwal's arrest but had later withdrawn their statement after India's strong objection. However, America has reiterated its stance.

Technically, Kejriwal's arrest or freezing Congress' bank accounts are India's internal matters but what could be the reason behind USA's stance on it? Is it signalling the recently growing tension between India and America? USA President Joe Biden turned down India's invitation to be present at the Republic Day parade as chief guest and chose to attend the Quad Summit instead. This could be called the most recent example. Or, one must also remember America accusing an Indian national security officer of planning the murder of most-wanted Khalistani leader Gurbatvant Singh Pannun who was residing in America. Indeed, there is no doubt that bilateral relations between the two countries regarding trade, technology sharing, military, as well as strategic cooperation are still very strong. However, one cannot deny the fact that when the USA makes a comment that leads to suspicion over democratic environment in the country, it's bound to have an impact on the universal stage.

So, it is obvious to then raise questions over the state of Indian democracy and whether it is still able to protect the rights of the people. This then leads to the series of actions taken by major intelligence agencies such as ED, CBI and IT over the last ten years. The Opposition has constantly alleged that these agencies have been misused by the ruling party in its favour to eradicate the opposition parties entirely. As per Congress leader and Arvind Kejriwal's lawyer Abhishek Manu Sanghavi, 95% of the total actions by central intelligence agencies since 2014 have been against MLAs, MPs and those associated with the opposition parties. Interestingly, the accusations have been proven true in only 5% of the cases. Fourteen political parties, including Congress, had filed a petition in the Supreme Court in regard to this on March 24 this year. The petitioners had urged the Supreme Court to have an urgent hearing on the matter of the Central government misusing CBI and ED to wrongfully harass the Opposition, however, the apex court refused to take upon such a hearing. As mentioned in the petition, only 14 (53%) out of total 26 political leaders were from the Opposition parties who were interrogated by ED during UPA's 10-year long rule. On the other hand, 115 political leaders out of 121 are from Opposition parties during the Modi government's nine years. At the same time, 93% of the cases were filed from the raids conducted by ED during UPA rule while the number of raids after 2014 stands at more than 3,000. Interestingly, only 29% of those matters were heard in the court while ED could not make a strong case in the rest of the matters.

These discrepancies are being discussed all over again after Kejriwal's arrest. A person who happens to be from one of the major opposition parties and a sitting CM has to spend time in jail while only 20 days remain for the first phase of the voting for Lok Sabha elections. Is it possible for central agencies being under political pressure to achieve this accurate timing? It is important to analyse it on the background of serious accusations levied by the various parties. Merely four days before Chattisgarh went up for the Assembly polls, ED claimed that the promoters of betting apps had possibly transferred Rs 508 crore to the then Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel who is from Congress party. Soon after this, BJP leaders accused Baghel of being involved in a huge scam. This led to change in the mood of voters instantly. It would not be unfair to say that the same tactics are being used in the case of Kejriwal.

As AAP's two leaders are already in jail in the liquor sale scam, followed by Kejriwal's arrest, the complexities will only increase from here on. It is clear as day that longer Kejriwal - one of the biggest Opposition voices - remains in jail, it would only benefit BJP. The future politics will be played based on the court's verdict on April 1.

comment



LUIS DIAS

Deafening indictment of our woefully skewed education system that offers English-medium instruction to a privileged few in urban India to the neglect of the remaining majority of our children and youth in suburban and rural India



actual events, entities or persons, whether living or dead, is entirely coincidental."

So: what in the film is "an accurate recreation", and what is a "fictionalized" account? I found an English translation of the book on which the film is based, and read through it. Maybe it reads better in Hindi, but the English translation is rather clumsy. However, there are so many scenes in the film that one assumes were "actual events that transpired" (for instance the theft of Manoj's bag

My son's school took its 8th and 9th standard students earlier this month to see '12th Fail', the 2023 Hindi-language biographical drama film directed, produced and written by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, based on the 2019 eponymous non-fiction book by Anurag Pathak about Manoj Kumar Sharma, who overcame extreme poverty to become an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer.

I totally get why school students should see it. It is an inspirational rags-to-riches story, with so many life lessons: Dare to dream big. Honesty is the best policy. Never ever give up. Try, try again until you succeed (or to borrow the film's catchphrase: 'Restart').

I had heard a lot about '12th Fail' but hadn't yet seen it. Now that my son had gone to see it and liked it, I decided to see it too. (If you haven't seen the film and wish to, stop reading here, as there are spoilers ahead).

I did come away impressed. But there was a disclaimer at the very beginning, that although the film was "inspired" by true events, "it is not a documentary/biography of any character depicted in the film. No scene should be construed to represent a true or accurate recreation of the actual events that transpired. The story and the relationship between the characters depicted in the film have been fictionalized. Any resemblance or similarity to any

And then, wonder of wonders, the ever-selfless 'Gauri bhaiya' instead of returning home, opens a tea-stall named 'Restart', a 'free UPSC guidance centre' (again not in the book).

All the motivational rhetoric is of course necessary for young minds to hear and internalize, but what comes across in book and film and is painfully obvious in real life is the yawning chasm between rich and poor. It is no coincidence that the rich kids are fluent in English and able to afford expensive coaching classes for these entrance exams (which are conducted in English), while those from poorer, rural India, educated in vernacular-medium schools have to compete with their affluent peers at these incredibly tough exams with this added handicap of language (which comes across poignantly when Manoj misreads 'Tourism' as 'Terrorism'). To me '12th Fail' is not just "the gripping

with his grandmother's life savings on the bus to Gwalior) that are absent in the book.

I realise of course that any 'biographical' film has to truncate a lot, but there is a dizzying and frankly rather depressing timeline of "attempts" of the three-step (prelims, mains, interview) sequence of the UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) qualifying exam of not just the main protagonist but his friend circle, with so many "failures" along the way, compressed into a short span. And there are the various state-level exams as well, to further thicken the plot.

As one fellow aspirant 'Gauri bhaiya' (who is also not in the book) explains, the odds are rather sobering in what he calls a game of 'snakes and ladders.' "Out of 200,000 Hindi-medium applicants for the UPSC, only 25-30 become IAS (Indian Administrative Service) or IPS officers. The remaining 199,970 go back to zero. Restart."

'Guari bhaiya' seems an invented composite character just for the film (part of the 'artistic license'), but was it really necessary to have this very character come from a 'backward caste', who then explains that he is allowed six attempts (rather than the four in the 'general' category), and have him then fail even that last attempt? Caste is strangely absent in the book, a glaring omission in caste-discriminating India.

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narrative of a man who put his heart and soul into making the impossible possible" (as one publicity blurb puts it) but it is also a deafening indictment of our woefully skewed education system that offers English-medium instruction to a privileged few in urban India to the neglect of the remaining majority of our children and youth in suburban and rural India. Surely the abysmal annual UPSC exam pass percentage (0.015% according to the film) could be far higher if English-medium instruction was more uniformly distributed?

Another issue I found disturbing is the subtle emotional blackmail, the family pressure "of only returning wearing a police uniform" i.e. having passed the IPS exam. Pressure like that can be a double-edged sword. I knew a young Indian doctor in my UK years who repeatedly failed the PLAB (Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board), the qualifying exam to start working there as a doctor, incurring huge financial losses and borrowing money from friends and family, but felt he "couldn't return home without getting a British postgraduate degree." Eventually after many years it got too much for him and he did return, but the stress he endured was so unnecessary, from the real or imagined psychological pressure: "I can't face my family and society unless I'm successful."

There's also the undiscussed issue of the girl-child's education opportunities in the film. Manoj's sister Rajni has to be content studying in the village and doing household chores. The only female students in Manoj's friends circle are from well-to-do backgrounds. Maybe I'm nit-picking here, but it's a thought.

What does one make of the media hype over lead actor Vikrant Massey getting a 'tan look' for the film? Would a lighter skin tone in hue-obsessed India make his role less believable? We can guess why. Poor India, literally, isn't 'fair'.

Around the same time, another article discussed school drop-outs and '12th fails' in celebrity Bollywood dynasties. What a stark contrast between the two Indias!

(Dr Luis Dias is a physician, musician, writer and founder of Child's Play India Foundation. He blogs at luisdias.wordpress.com)

The flip side of 12th Fail

people'sedit

RAY OF HOPE

GLEN FERNANDES

As the sun will rise on Easter morning, it illuminates the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death, casting a radiant light of hope, forgiveness and redemption upon the world. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not merely a historical event but a symbol of spiritual rebirth and renewal. Easter brings a message of hope to everyone, irrespective of their circumstances or background. It is a celebration of the boundless love and mercy of God, who offers forgiveness and a new life to all who believe. A time of profound reflection and joy for millions around the world.

The love demonstrated by Jesus through His sacrificial death and resurrection is unconditional, all-encompassing, and available to all. It is a love that knows no bounds, transcending barriers of race, religion, nationality and social status. It serves as a reminder to us that no matter how broken, lost or undeserving we may feel, there is always a path to healing, forgiveness and a renewed relationship with the Divine. The journey from the grave to grace is not merely an external event but an internal pursuit for transformation of our lives.

For many, the journey to the grave represents the struggles, pain, and challenges we face in life. It is a reminder of our own vulnerabilities and the inevitable trials that test our faith and resilience. Just as Jesus was laid to rest in the tomb, we too encounter moments of despair, loss and uncertainty in our lives. However, there is promise and hope. We're encouraged to shed the grave clothes of regret, guilt and resentment and step out into the light of a new day just like Jesus did when he rose from the tomb, transformed and radiant. The symbolism of the empty tomb is an invitation to forgive ourselves and others, to heal from past wounds and to cultivate a renewed sense of self-worth, purpose and identity.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides a ray of hope in a world full of pain, injustice, and conflict. It tells us that there is always hope and that, with faith, forgiveness, and endurance, we can rise above our differences and start over new beginnings. It encourages us to acknowledge our mistakes and strive to live in a way that honour God and reflects His love and grace. Let us be proactive in reaching out to those in need, extending a helping hand to the less fortunate and showing compassion to those who are suffering. It is also a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the family bonds and create lasting memories.

As we will bask in the joy of the resurrection on Easter Sunday, we are called to embody these values in our daily lives, becoming beacons of light in a world often shrouded in darkness. May we all experience the resurrection power in our lives, transforming our graves of hopelessness into gardens of grace.

May the blessings of resurrection joy fill your hearts and homes!

Unemployed youth prone to exploitation

This refers to 'Challenge of unemployment' (March 29). The recent India Employment Report released by the International Labour Organisation, gives a much needed broad-brush picture of India's employment challenge. Unemployment is weighing India down, with the country's youth accounting for almost 83% of the unemployment workforce.

Unfortunately, the world's most populous nation and also the fastest-growing major economy is ignoring its youth is deplorable. Share of youth who are not in employment, education and training has averaged 29.2% between 2010 and 2019. It's highest in South Asia. It is a sorry state of affairs that PhDs applied for the post of Peon in Uttar Pradesh where Class V was the eligibility criterion. Unemployed youth are ready to risk their lives by taking up jobs in war zones countries like Israel and Russia.

Robust growth in manufacturing, services and construction sectors should guide stakeholders to optimally use the skills of India's educated youth. The much lauded programmes launched by PM Modi in different parts of the country in the past few years have done very little in terms of creating employment opportunities. The government and the industry need to work in close coordination to rein in joblessness.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

Netizens beware of online impersonation

The Cyber Cell of Goa Police have reportedly booked an unknown person for allegedly impersonating Goa's Chief Secretary. It is learnt that the accused used the name and

picture of the Chief Secretary on his WhatsApp number and sought financial favours from the people by asking them to transfer money into his bank account. An offence has reportedly been registered under Sec. 66-C of IT Act. In the past, there have been instances of anti-social elements physically impersonating as policemen and extorting money from the citizens. However in today's digital age, where online interactions are increasingly common, the risk of impersonation has become a pressing concern. Impersonation refers to the act of pretending to be someone else with the intent to deceive or defraud others.

Whether it's assuming another person's identity online or imitating a public figure, impersonation can have serious consequences for individuals and society as a whole. Impersonation in social networks refers to accounts that use the name, image, or other identifying elements of a person, company, or organization for fraudulent purposes. Generally speaking, it is the act when a person pretends to be someone else on social media platforms and is a serious threat to one's online privacy, safety, and peace of mind. Social media impersonation is a form of digital identity theft. The goal is to use an impression of authenticity to exploit those who interact with the fake account. Netizens need to beware of the latest threat.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Safeguard fragile ecosystem in Ladakh

Ladakh's climate activist, Sonam Wangchuk asked the Centre

letterstotheeditor

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to safeguard the fragile ecosystem of Himalayan mountains in Ladakh. Fragile ecosystems in both Ladakh and Uttarakhand demand careful environmental impact assessment before undertaking an excavation for building a tunnel or a high-rise. The Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi had collapsed trapping 41 workers for 17 days in November last year. The project has again restarted. Recently, an operator, Govind Kumar, was killed when a machine on which he was sitting fell into a 25-feet-deep trench near the mouth of the Silkyara tunnel. Was there proper evaluation of safety and environmental issues before resuming the project?

Sujit De, Kolkata

Money required to fight elections

Nirmala Sitharaman has said that she does not fight the LS polls because she does not have the money for it. So our Finance Minister has realised not only that money is required to fight elections and the extent of it to say that she does not have that kind of money. If she is privy to this knowledge then should she, being the Finance Minister not have moved against our councillors and legislators who every time come elections file their Assets Returns with the Election Commission that shows crores in their names and each time the crores are increasing in the successive returns as time goes by.

There is probably not a single councillor or legislator in the country who is not a Crorepati. They file their As-

sets Returns and move around with impunity. None of our Central Agencies like the Income Tax Dept., ED or others question them how their assets are increasing year by year and the source of funds for the increasing assets.

With most of these agencies reporting to the Finance Minister should Nirmala Sitharaman not have questioned her legislative compatriots? This is the duplicity in our system.

Srinivas Kamat, St Cruz

Bipolar individuals need all care

According to a rough estimate, there are more than ten million men and women who exhibit "bipolar disorder". Affected individuals display extreme mood swings---they can become manic at a point to depressed at another. From being overjoyed, elated and excited to being down, hopeless and sad, the person stands to be disassociated with the surroundings. In-between, the person may appear normal. At times, there may not be a normal mood phase or there may be an admixture of excitement and depression. During a low, suicidal thoughts are not uncommon, and that makes the condition troublesome for all. An individual who is not aware that he is in the manic phase can have strained interpersonal relations.

Not surprisingly, the management of bipolar disorder is aimed at reducing the severity and length of mania and depression to enhance quality of life. Generally, a person is said to be remission for bipolar if he or she has not exhibit-

ed either mania or depression for atleast one week; to be described as a person in "sustained remission" the person may have to be symptomless for a longer period.

Since mood stabilisers, behavioural therapy and lifestyle alterations are integral part of bipolar disease management, the affected may go on to effectively discharge his duties in remission. World Bipolar Day is observed on March 30.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Goan must speak Konkani

Admitting that I have been bought up speaking mainly English which has helped me progress in Global Organizations. However saying that in my travels/stays abroad, I have witnessed successful people fluent not only in English but also their local language; which made me think why English (only) speaking Goans can't do the same with their local language Konkani?

I also realized that the essence of one's identity is the local language for Goans it's Konkani!

In Goa, here I attempt to sharpen my Konkani by speaking with the shop keepers/vendors etc and whilst credit to many non Goans for speaking good Konkani, the sad part was that even Konkani speaking niz Goenkars start speaking Hindi with these respective "Konkani speaking" non-Goan vendors! Today in Goa many parents hardly encourage their children to appreciate Konkani (leave alone) which is really unfortunate!

The Goan mentality really amazes me! Looks to me like the Goan ego is too high to respect our roots and should we not change our mentality, I think it's obvious where Goa and its identity are headed to!

Arwin Mesquita, Colva