

LOVE OF URDU

All languages are beautiful and important and should never be seen from a political lens. However, Urdu, is a language that somehow gets owned as identity by many Muslims across India for sheer political reasons while the fact is that it's a very Indian language, nothing to do with religion. So why are some politicians perturbed over the road and railway milestone and sign boards not being written in Urdu, recently? Anyone is free to love the language but it can't be spoken as the identity of any community in J&K. Of course, it was pushed down in the schools ignoring the native languages for political reasons. This attitude gave it a religious colour and it suited leaders who made careers by diving people. It's one thing to ask the government to also use Urdu since a lot of people in Kashmir know the language because of schooling but it's vicious to call Urdu language as identity of people.

BENGAL POLLS

The second and the final phase of Assembly elections in West Bengal is one of the most keenly watched development in the country. The first phase saw an unprecedented 92 per cent polling and the second is likely to touch the same figure. The fight is between the Mamata Banerjee led TMC and the BJP. Mamata is seeking a third term with the BJP opposing it tooth and nail. The higher percentage of polling is commonly associated with anti-incumbency wave. West Bengal election is not limited to local issues but BJP has linked it to the unchecked infiltration from Bangladesh. BJP has been running a campaign that TMC is a roadblock in checking the influx of illegal immigrants and therefore maintaining national security. However, the most interesting part of the Bengal election is the total eclipse of the Congress from the scene. The party is nowhere in the reckoning in the elections.

The sacred relics of Tathagata Buddha de-

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

There are moments in a nation's life when history does not merely repeat itself — it deepens. This Wednesday, as the sacred relics of Tathagata Buddha descend upon Ladakh for the first time in India on this scale of public veneration, I find myself reaching not for the language of officialdom, but for something far older: reverence.

For centuries, Ladakh has held the flame. Through brutal winters that freeze rivers solid, through geopolitical pressures that would test the sturdiest of souls, through the isolation of altitude and the remoteness of high passes — the people of Ladakh have kept the Dharma alive with a fidelity that humbles every institution and every government. It is entirely fitting, then, that India's first historic public exposition of the Tathagata relics does not take place in a climate-controlled museum in a metropolitan city. It takes place here, on the Roof of the World, where faith is the very architecture of daily life.

And consider where these relics come from. They originate from Piprahwa, in Uttar Pradesh — the site historically identified with ancient Kapilavastu, the very birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama. Bringing them to Ladakh is, in the most literal sense possible, a homecoming.

A first that carries the weight of ages.

The Sacred Exposition of the Holy Relics of the Tathagata carries an official title that is also a declaration: "Peace in Times of Conflict." In a world convulsed by war, fracture, and rising hostility, these words challenge the premise that conflict is inevitable, that strength requires aggression, and that the only answer to uncertainty is force. The Buddha answered that challenge two and a half millennia ago. We

bring his physical presence back to remind a watching world that the answer still holds.

The sacred relics of Gautama Buddha — preserved with the utmost sanctity — are travelling for the first time from their permanent place of keeping to be venerated on Indian soil at this scale. Under Z-category security, aboard a special aircraft, they arrive in Leh on April 29 and for fifteen days, from May 1 to 15, beginning on the auspicious occasion of the 2569th Vesak Buddha Purnima, they will be accessible to devotees, monks, scholars, and pilgrims from across the world.

The venues themselves speak volumes. The Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, the Dharma Centre at the historic Leh Palace, the teaching ground of Jive-Tsal — the same sacred earth where His Holiness the Dalai Lama has delivered his teachings — will host this exposition. And the relics will not remain confined to Leh alone. Between 11 and 12 May, they will travel to the remote Zaskar Valley, carrying the Buddha's grace to a community whose Buddhist traditions remain as deep as the gorges of their landscape.

The land that never let the flame go out

To understand why Ladakh is the right home for this occasion, one must understand what Ladakh is. It is not simply a dramatic landscape of monasteries and mountains, however breathtaking that landscape may be. It is a living university of the Dharma. From the serene heights of Hemis Monastery — whose annual festival draws pilgrims from across the Himalayan world — to the ancient frescoes of Alchi, painted in the 10th century and still vivid with devotional genius; from the towering Maitreya Buddha of Diskit, which faces the Shyok River with a gaze of infinite compassion, to the layered wisdom of Thiksey, often com-

pared to the great monasteries of Tibet — Ladakh has been, for over a thousand years, one of the most extraordinary repositories of Buddhist philosophy, art, manuscript tradition, and living practice on the planet. These monasteries, and the monks who inhabit them, are the active transmitters of a tradition that has survived every geopolitical storm the Himalayan region has known. And they have done this work of preservation under conditions that would tax the imagination of most administrators: extreme cold, scarce resources, infrastructural isolation, and a geography that demands courage simply to inhabit. It is India's formal acknowledgement of what Ladakh has always been — not a peripheral territory at the edge of the map, but a beating spiritual heart at the centre of the nation's identity.

A vision rooted in civilisational depth

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has consistently described Ladakh as a vibrant centre of Buddhist culture and spirituality. He has spoken often of the resilience and patriotism of the Ladakhi people — especially in difficult border conditions — linking their spiritual strength with national resolve and unity. He has made clear that development in Ladakh will go hand in hand with the preservation of its unique culture and environment. As the Prime Minister has emphasised: Ladakh is not only a land of immense strategic importance, but also a living centre of the Buddha's teachings. The visit of the holy relics is both a spiritual blessing and a recognition of Ladakh's centuries-old role in preserving Buddhist heritage, as well as the courage and dedication of its people in serving the nation. This vision — of a Ladakh that is simultaneously a frontier of national security and a citadel of civilisational wisdom — is the most coherent aspect of the

place.

What Ladakh teaches a fractured world

The exposition is expected to be one of the largest congregations of Buddhist communities India has ever hosted. In a world increasingly defined by conflict, polarisation, and the politics of suspicion, that congregation carries a message that transcends faith.

The Buddha's teachings on non-violence, compassion, and inner awakening are not the property of any single community, sect, or lineage. Whether it is the Gelug, Drukpa, Kagyu, or any of the other magnificent traditions that flourish in Ladakh, the essence of the Dharma remains singular: the path of karun a, of prajña, of harmony. The sacred exposition, arriving just as the region welcomes spring and the snow begins to melt from the high passes, is an invitation to cross every border that divides us: of sect, of nationality, and of fear.

Our commitment to this living heritage

The Government of India recognises Ladakh as one of the most important living centres of Buddhist culture in the world. We remain committed — not in the language of policy documents alone, but in concrete action — to supporting the preservation of its monasteries, the promotion of Buddhist scholarship, and the safeguarding of its unique cultural traditions. A large-scale Buddhist chanting ceremony involving a significant number of monks is being planned as part of this exposition — one that organisers hope will be entered into the Guinness World Records, a fitting symbol of the scale of devotion this land commands. The Union Government will continue to work closely with the monastic institutions and the people of Ladakh to ensure that this rich heritage flourishes and reaches the world. The recently launched

digital portals for both Ladakh Tourism and the Sacred Exposition itself are steps in that direction.

The Ministry of Culture, the Archaeological Survey of India, the International Buddhist Confederation, and the local organisations of Ladakh — the Gonpa Association, the Buddhist Association, and the UT Administration under Lieutenant Governor Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena — have worked together with a unity that mirrors the very teachings the relics carry.

A moment that belongs to all of us

As the sacred relics of Tathagata Buddha arrive in Ladakh this Wednesday, something ancient stirs. It is the recognition that some things in the life of a civilisation matter more than the political cycle of any given season. The Buddha's message of compassion is one such thing. Ladakh's fidelity to that message is another. May the blessings of the Buddha bring peace to every home in Ladakh, harmony among all communities, and spiritual awakening to all beings. And may this sacred exposition remind each of us — regardless of faith, regardless of where we stand — that the deepest human aspiration has always been the same: to live without causing suffering, to act with wisdom, and to leave the world a little more at peace than we found it.

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The writer is the Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Government of India; Views presented are personal.

MODERN PARENTING: DISCIPLINE OR CONVENIENCE?

Sakshi Sethi

In an age defined by speed, noise, and constant distraction, an uncomfortable question confronts us: are we truly raising disciplined children, or merely managing their behaviour for our own convenience? The distinction may appear subtle, but its consequences are already unfolding in homes, classrooms, and society at large. Discipline, in its truest sense, is not about control or punishment; it is about guidance, self-regulation, and the steady shaping of character. What often passes for discipline today swings between two extremes — rigid restriction or complete absence of boundaries. Both are equally harmful. Consider the increasingly common sight of children pacified with smartphones in public spaces. While this may offer parents immediate relief, it creates a deeper dependency. Instead of learning patience or emotional control, children begin to rely on instant gratification. This pattern, visible in restaurants, homes, and even schools, replaces long-term development with short-term convenience. To be fair, modern parenting is not easy. Dual-income households, academic pressures, and the pervasive influence of digital media stretch parents to their limits. In such circumstances, convenience



often becomes a coping mechanism.

Yet, when convenience replaces conscious effort, discipline becomes the first casualty. The impact is evident in classrooms. Educators increasingly encounter students who struggle with basic skills such as attentive listening, patience, and the ability to accept feedback. These are not intellectual deficits but signs of weakened discipline. Such behavioural gaps do not emerge overnight; they are the result of gradual neglect in nurturing essential habits. Technology plays a decisive role in this shift. Today's children grow up in a world of constant stimulation—likes, views, instant answers, and endless comparison. Algorithms are designed to capture attention, not build character. When children become accustomed to immediate rewards, the slower, effort-driven processes of real learning begin to feel burdensome. A child abandoning a difficult math problem within minutes is not necessarily lacking intelligence, but endurance—the very quality discipline is meant to cultivate. Equally concerning is the growing reluctance to say "No." Many parents fear that setting limits may harm a child's self-esteem or strain their relationship. However, dis-

cipline without boundaries is directionless. A child who never encounters refusal does not become confident, but entitled—ill-equipped to handle rejection or responsibility. Even simple routines, like fixed bedtimes, play a vital role in building self-regulation. Their absence often manifests in irritability, lack of focus, and declining performance. It is also crucial to distinguish discipline from punishment. Harsh scolding or humiliation may enforce temporary compliance, but they do not foster understanding. True discipline is rooted in consistency, explanation, and example. It teaches children how to respond to failure—with reflection and resilience, not frustration or blame. Importantly, discipline is not the sole responsibility of parents. Schools, communities, and media collectively shape a child's environment. Discipline cannot flourish in contradiction. The reality, then, is uneven. While many parents and educators strive to instill values, there is a growing tendency to prioritise ease over effort and freedom over responsibility. What we need is not stricter control, but smarter discipline—built on consistency, clear expectations, meaningful dialogue, limited digital exposure, and an emphasis on effort rather than mere outcomes.

Nepal's 'Ghanti' govt rings in change

Ashok K Mehta

Lame Ahal in Kaski district of Pokhara was a traditional Nepali Congress-voting village; it did not surprise anyone when it voted en masse for the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP). The sound of bells (ghanti, RSP's election symbol) has enchanted music-loving Nepalis. Last Saturday, more than three weeks after Balen Shah took oath as Prime Minister on March 27, to my question whether Lame Ahal was happy with the Balen government, veteran Yam Bahadur replied: "ekdum! bilkul khushi chha".

Incidentally, Balen has not spoken a word in public; no meeting with the press; no address to the nation or the newly elected Parliament; no posts on X or other social media. His longest election rally speech was five minutes. He presides in silence, and it works for him, as an RSP PhD scholar at South Asia University, Delhi, told me. All he did was release a five-minute video clip, "Jai Mahakali", the Gorkha war cry that went viral, establishing his skills as a renowned rapper. For Balen, style is more important than substance.

He has introduced several changes: the diplomatic code of conduct—meeting ambassadors en bloc or in batches, not individually. Former Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi used to drop in at Sheetal Niwas (the President's residence) or Baluwatar (the Prime Minister's residence) without informing the Foreign Ministry. Balen will follow protocol: meet emissaries at the appropriate level without deviation. The test will be on 1 May, when the US super

ambassador and presidential envoy to South and Central Asia, Sergio Gor, has sought a meeting with him, and only him.

Home Minister Sudhan Gurung (and one more minister), who has reportedly resigned (?), performed equally spectacularly: he arrested former Prime Minister KP Oli and Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak on March 28, indicating that corruption and misgovernance were his government's targets. Both have since been released on bail. Investigations were ordered into money laundering allegations against former Prime Ministers SB Deuba, Prachanda, and Oli, while former minister Deepak Khadka and industrialist Shankar Agarwal were arrested. The Deuba family is in Singapore/Hong Kong for medical treatment and has been declared fugitives. A commission will investigate the wealth of individuals, officials, and politicians since 1991. Many hope that the omissions of the Karki Judicial Commission, and the events of 9 September 2025, will also be separately investigated, as they implicate Shah and RSP President Rabi Lamichhane.

Primus inter pares, Lamichhane is the leader, elected to Parliament but currently on bail. He is hoping to be cleared of multiple cases in court on allegations of fraud and money laundering. As a former TV host, he is charismatic, eloquent, and ambitious, with a large following in the party. A clash between Balen and Rabi is likely. The government launched its 100-point reforms—many aspirational, but several already implemented, such as the five-day week, an overhaul of the bureaucracy, and the recall of ambassadors. Shankar Sharma, the cat-with-nine-lives

envoy to New Delhi—previously recalled twice and reinstated—will finally say goodbye to diplomacy. The RSP is just five years old and has no experienced civil servants; so it will focus on youth in its selections. Although the focus of the government is internal and domestic, diplomacy has taken centre stage. The first caller in Kathmandu was US Assistant Secretary of State Paul Samir Kapur, who met Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle, Lamichhane, and Army Chief Gen Ashok Sigdel. He pre-empted any Indian diplomatic visitor, though Foreign Minister S Jaishankar—who was the first to land in Colombo after President Anura Dissanayake's landslide victory in 2024 — is not a frequent visitor to Kathmandu. He met Khanal during the Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius this month.

Kapur was on a dual mission: to accelerate the utilisation of the USD 550 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal Compact; and the US State Partnership Programme (SPP). The MCC was cleared after strenuous debate in Nepal and is set to expire in August 2028. The SPP, which seeks military cooperation, was rejected in 2022. Kapur also urged Nepal to issue ID cards to Tibetan refugees, as around 20,000 Tibetans of various denominations are present

across Nepal. Not to be outpaced by the US, Chinese Deputy Director General of Asian Affairs Cao Jing arrived in Kathmandu. The Nepalese are often wary of the bluntness of Chinese officials. She is said to have warned against the MCC and SPP, and against any tinkering with the Tibetan issue, a highly sensitive matter for Beijing.

Cao also warned against any Nepalese official visiting the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala for the inauguration on 28 May of Penpa Tsering, re-elected Sikyong (Prime Minister) for another five years. The China-US geopolitical rivalry now supersedes India's primacy in Nepal's tri-polar contest. Sources in Kathmandu indicate that Balen will visit Delhi either before or after the UNGA in September, but India will be his first foreign visit. Balen or Wagle have not indicated how the primary challenges—jobs and the economy—will be addressed.

The economy was growing at 4.5 per cent, and both remittances and foreign exchange reserves were sound. Two million Nepalese work in the Gulf, and another 6 to 8 million in India and elsewhere. The Gulf war over the past two years has hit tourism and remittances, and the economy may slide despite new austerity programmes. Losses due to arson during last year's GZ protests were colossal, running into billions of dollars.

Still, the investment climate is likely to improve now that a politically stable single-party government is in power after three decades. India, as the reputed first responder, has yet to show its cards. The RSP was considering closing the open border and attempting the northern route for trade through Tibet, despite most trade being routed through India. Nationalism has its place. Oli signed a slew of agreements to spite India following the economic blockade (2015). Kathmandu should have learnt its lesson about the North, as the Kodari-Kathmandu railway and North-South BRI corridors remain largely aspirational.