

EYE SECRETS

Spy in every blink

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From Our Staff Reporter
Hyderabad, July 9

that Hyderabad will be the stage for hosting the Olympics being planned to be held in India in 2036.

During the launch of Gachibowli Sports District, YIPESU at Gachibowli Stadium on Thursday, July 9, Revanth Reddy said that India needs a policy for sports, training facilities in sports academies, and

Telangana to set stage for 2036 Olympics: CM

sports universities.

Recalling how sports infrastructure was created in Hyderabad from 1999 to 2004, Revanth Reddy said that it had enabled the then state governments to conduct Afro-Asian Games, World Military Games and the Asian Games.

"For the past 20 years there have been no important sports events in Telangana, despite the sports infrastructure in place 23 years ago. Today that infrastructure has become a stage for hosting private weddings and political programmes. It needs to change," the chief minister said.

Elaborating on the Young India Sports University, he said that the state government would only be a facilitator, and would not interfere in the matters of the academy of the university, and would give full freedom to the apolitical nominees in the board of directors to run the university free from politics.

He also said that Telangana would host the

upcoming Khelo India competitions in Telangana, in November 2026.

"I don't know if all educated people will get jobs, but those who excel in sports will definitely be encouraged by the state government," he said, referring to World Boxing Champion Nikhat Zareen and Indian Cricket Player Mohd Sirajuddin, who were appointed in the rank of Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP) by the Telangana government for their achievements in sports.

Concluding his speech, Revanth Reddy exhorted the players not to be disheartened by failures, by giving his own example of losing the 2018 Kodangal assembly election, but winning the election to the Malkajgiri Lok Sabha segment just four months later.

He encouraged the youngsters to excel in sports, and to achieve medals for the country in Olympics, which he felt, were scarce in the present scenario despite the fact that India has a population of 140 crore.

India, Australia sign uranium supply pact, expand defence, mineral & maritime ties

Addressing a joint press conference in Melbourne after the third India-Australia Annual Summit with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Melbourne, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the relationship as a partnership of the future, saying the two countries had emerged as trusted democratic partners in the Indo-Pacific.

A major outcome of the summit was the finalisation of the administrative arrangement under the India-Australia Civil Nuclear Agreement, signed in 2014, which operationalises the pact and enables uranium supplies from Australia to India for its civilian nuclear programme. "In the field of nuclear energy, we have reached an important agreement today. This will open the way for uranium supplies from Australia to India and give fresh momentum to our clean energy goals," Modi said.

The two leaders also agreed to accelerate negotiations on the long-pending CECA, building on the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) signed in 2022, which has expanded bilateral trade. They also decided to expedite negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty to encourage greater two-way investments.

Defence and maritime security emerged as key pillars of the upgraded partnership, with the two sides adopting a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation that renews the existing 2009 framework and expands collaboration in military

interoperability, defence industrial cooperation, cybersecurity, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. India and Australia also adopted a Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap aimed at enhancing information sharing, capability development and operational coordination in the Indo-Pacific.

Modi said India and Australia, as two vibrant democracies and important Indo-Pacific maritime powers, shared a common vision for a free, open and rules-based regional order.

The Indian Coast Guard and Australia's Maritime Border Command signed an agreement to strengthen cooperation in maritime law enforcement, domain awareness and maritime border protection. Australia also invited India to deploy a military instructor at the Australian Defence College during 2028-29. Recognising the importance of critical minerals and emerging technologies, the two countries launched the Australia-India Partnership for Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS) to strengthen cooperation in cybersecurity, digital resilience and trusted supply chains.

The two sides also agreed to work towards establishing a critical minerals corridor, while the Geological Survey of India and GeoScience Australia signed an understanding to promote advanced exploration methods, capacity building and technological modernisation.

Highlighting clean energy as a central pillar of the partnership, Modi said both countries would deepen collaboration in renewable energy, technology transfer and industry-to-industry cooperation. He also announced the operationalisation of a rooftop solar training academy at Pandit Deendayal Energy University, Gandhinagar, with Australian support to train 2,000 women and youth as solar technicians under the PM Surya Ghar Yojana.

Education and skill development also featured prominently in the outcomes, with Australia's Flinders University submitting a Letter of Intent to establish a campus in Bengaluru and Victoria University receiving approval to set up a campus in Gurugram.

A Centre of Excellence in Mining Equipment, Technology and Services (METS) will also be established at the National Skill Training Institute, Bhubaneswar, in collaboration with Technical and Further Education (TAFE), Western Australia, to develop expertise in mining operations, safety, mineral processing and machinery.

Modi highlighted the growing people-to-people ties between the two countries, noting that the Indian diaspora had become an important contributor to Australia's economic and social life.

Comparing India-Australia ties to cricket, he remarked, "Our agenda is as focused as a One-Day match, our decisions are as fast as T20 cricket and our partnership is as enduring as a Test match."

Telangana minister complains to state Congress chief against MLA's 'interference'

From Our Staff Reporter
Hyderabad, July 9



Srihari.

The minister sought a disciplinary committee inquiry and action against the MLA, alleging that he had conducted an unauthorised review meeting.

Srihari, who represents Station Ghanpur constituency, rejected her allegations that he violated protocol.

One of the 12 MLAs of Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) who defected to the ruling Congress, he accused the minister of lacking awareness.

also assured that dues for second, third, and fourth-year students would be paid.

The submission was made during the hearing of petitions filed by several engineering colleges alleging non-payment of fee reimbursement by the government.

From Our Staff Reporter
Hyderabad, July 9

Telangana Rakshana Sena (TRS) president K Kavitha on Thursday, July 9, ruled out returning to Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), dismissing claims that she will eventually re-join the party led by her father K Chandrasekhara Rao (KCR).

"I will not join BRS again till I am alive. There is no question of joining hands," the Telangana Rakshana Sena (TRS) president told reporters at Kothagudem, about 275 kms from Hyderabad.

Kavitha, who accused BRS of sending 1,000 complaints to the Election Commission against her party's name with the acronym TRS, demanded that BRS distribute the Rs 1,400 crore in the party's accounts to the families of 'martyrs' who sacrificed their lives in support of Telangana statehood.

"There is Rs 1,400 crore in the accounts of BRS. Did you not get it in a quid pro quo? Is it not corruption money? Was it not given by Andhra contractors? Distribute the corruption money to 'martyrs' families. Give Rs one crore per family," she said.

She demanded that Union Coal Minister G Kishan Reddy allocate all the coal blocks in the state to Singareni Collieries without the state-run miner having to participate in the auction process.

Kavitha said she would launch an indefinite fast if the state government failed to address the



issues of Singareni workers, including provision of jobs to the dependents of medically unfit workers, before July 20.

When contacted for comments on Kavitha's allegations against BRS, party MLC Dasoju Sravan said she was "very much an integral part of every process that the party has gone through, including electoral bonds".

Telangana Govt Tells HC Fee Reimbursement Will Be Cleared by Aug 15

From Our Staff Reporter
Hyderabad, July 9

The state government on Thursday informed the High Court that fee reimbursement for the current academic year will be cleared by August 15. It

Digital Detoxing: Science-backed strategies to unplug effectively



The ping of notifications often punctuates the rhythms of our lives. The impulse to check a message or refresh a feed is as automatic as breathing. This dependency on digital devices has sparked necessary concern lately, about its impact on our mental, emotional, and even physical health. Digital detox, taking intentional breaks from screens has moved from trend to necessity, but unplugging effectively requires more than simply shutting down our devices. One can turn to science for more nuanced strategies to help reclaim focus, foster well-being, and re-establish our connection with the offline world.

The constant allure of digital devices is not random. Dopamine, the brain's reward neurotransmitter, spikes whenever we anticipate social interactions, a phenomenon well-studied in relation to social media and messaging platforms. This surge keeps us returning for more, and hence we often find ourselves scrolling away time for far longer than intended. Platforms are designed with this response in mind; the endless scroll, the unpredictability of notifications, and likes to create a reward loop that keeps our attention fixated. Research in neuroscience confirms that our smartphones hijack the same reward pathways that fuel addictive behaviours. The result of this hyper-engagement isn't just wasted time but also potential long-term changes to our brains. Studies by the National Institutes of Health found that high screen time correlates with thinning of the brain's cortex, an area involved with critical thinking and decision-making. For adults, excessive digital use has been linked to reduced grey matter in the prefrontal cortex, impacting emotional regulation, empathy, and impulse control.

Beyond brain structure, the psychological toll of digital overuse is significant. A 2018 study by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that constant connectivity contributes to heightened stress, anxiety, and even symptoms of depression. Social media, for instance, can foster feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth, especially when exposure to carefully curated, idealised and utopic portrayals of others' lives becomes relentless. Digital detoxing can help mitigate these effects, offering a break from social comparison and the constant information influx. The rise in mental health concerns among teenagers, who spend more time on screens than any other age group, has brought a renewed urgency to this issue. Findings from a study published in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health show that teens who engage in more than three hours of screen time daily are more likely to experience mental health issues, a trend that has prompted some schools to introduce digital hygiene programmes. While the benefits of a digital detox are clear, the challenge lies in the how. Research-backed strategies can offer structure and purpose to the process, making it easier to stick to healthier habits and see tangible results in one's health. The easiest way to begin a detox journey would be by creating clear boundaries, like designated no-phone zones, a proven way to limit device use. A Stanford University paper suggests setting screen boundaries in specific environments, like the bedroom or dining room, to help reduce overall screen time and encourage a more mindful approach to device use. These boundaries can also extend to time, with the one-hour rule suggesting no screen usage an hour before bed. Not only does this habit reduce screen time, but it

The failed ‘Delhi model’
Sthanu R. Nair,Dhruv Jain

As Delhiites prepare to elect a new government, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has been pushing its welfare-based governance model, called the ‘Delhi model,’ on the campaign trail. It has been advertising its welfare schemes, such as the free electricity and water supply, bus travel for women, and primary health care, arguing that it not only managed to prioritise human capital development by spending more on the social sector, but has also succeeded in augmenting the fiscal space by cutting down inefficient government spending and mobilising revenues. To check the validity of these claims, we examined the fiscal indicators of Delhi on average during the 10 years when the AAP was in power (2015-16 to 2024-25) compared with those in the pre-AAP decade (2004-05 to 2012-13).Before the AAP came to power, Delhi had demonstrated fiscal prudence from 2004-05 by containing revenue deficit and gross fiscal deficit (GFD). The revenue account remained in surplus throughout the pre-AAP and AAP regimes. However, the revenue surplus declined on average from -2.38% of gross state domestic product (GSDP) during the pre-AAP regime to -0.82% under the AAP regime. Although the GFD-GSDP ratio was within the Fiscal Responsibility Legislation (FRL) limit of 3% in the pre-AAP and AAP regimes, it declined from 0.68% on average in the pre-AAP regime to 0.25% in the AAP regime. But this downward correction in GFD was achieved by reducing much-needed capital outlay, a violation of a ‘golden rule’ in public finance.The AAP government successfully reduced Delhi's debt-to-GSDP ratio to 2% on an average from 13.7% earlier. This is a stupendous achievement.The share of revenue expenditure in the total spending of Delhi increased significantly from 58.27% on average in the pre-AAP regime to 77.63% in the AAP regime. Con-

also minimises the blue light exposure known to disrupt sleep cycles. The 20-20-20 rule, recommended by optometrists and supported by eye health studies, involves taking a break every 20 minutes to look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This simple technique helps combat digital eye strain, a common issue for those who work or study on screens and reduces the physical stress that prolonged screen time can place on the eyes and neck. As part of a broader digital detox, the 20-20-20 rule can serve as a gentle nudge to step away regularly. The science of green time versus screen time encourages more time spent in nature to reduce cortisol levels, lower blood pressure, and improve mood. This is commonly also termed as nature therapy.

Studies by the National Institutes of Health found that high screen time correlates with thinning of the brain's cortex, an area involved with critical thinking and decision-making.Japan's Chiba University found that individuals who spent just 15 minutes in a forest experienced measurable reductions in stress and an increase in calmness. Nature therapy is the best antidote to digital immersion, providing a tangible, restorative experience that resets our focus and attention. The phenomenon of digital fasting is also gaining traction, particularly for those looking to reset their habits without quitting cold turkey. The University of California conducted an interesting study to show that workers who practised tech-free hours were able to improve their focus and productivity over time. Scheduling tech-free hours, quite like the no-phone zone method, can demarcate portions of time to experience digital detox in a manageable, realistic way.Popularised by author Cal Newport, digital minimalism encourages prioritising digital tools that align with our values and eliminate those that do not. Research published in Computers in Human Behaviour found that individuals who actively chose to reduce their social media presence reported lower stress and greater satisfaction with their daily routines. Engaging only in meaningful digital activities can be transformative, shifting the focus from quantity to quality.

A widespread shift toward digital mindfulness could yield broader social benefits as well. Excessive screen time does not just impact individuals but creates a social environment where people feel less present and connected, making people feel alone even in the busiest crowds. In professional settings, digital burnout impacts productivity and job satisfaction, leading to higher attrition rates. Cultivating an environment that values offline time can enrich social interactions, boost productivity, and foster a greater sense of community, especially in workplaces and schools. There is an argument that digital detoxing on a large scale could serve as a public health intervention. Just as society has Apractices like mindfulness and exercise as pillars of health, digital wellness may be the next frontier.As beneficial as digital detoxing may be, the goal should not be to vilify technology. Rather, it's about finding balance. Technology, after all, offers undeniable conveniences and opportunities, from connecting with loved ones to accessing vast information pools. But the key is sustainable use, harnessing technology to serve us without letting it overtake us. Digital detoxing presents a counter-narrative to our world of screens.

comitantly, the share of expenditures which are incurred on asset creation, namely capital expenditure (CE) and capital outlay (CO), declined significantly on an average from 41.73% (CE)/15.82% (CO) in the pre-AAP regime to 22.37% (CE)/10.32% (CO) in the AAP regime. These trends show that public expenditure quality deteriorated under the AAP regime.Both the quantity and quality of the development expenditure and its components were compromised in the AAP regime. As a percentage of GSDP, expenditure on social services declined from 3.60% in the pre-AAP regime to 3.41% in the AAP regime. In the case of economic services, the decline was steeper from 2.29% to 1.28%. This drop was caused by a cut in the capital expenditure on these two functional heads. The capital expenditure on social services declined from 0.82% of GSDP in the pre-AAP regime to 0.56% in the AAP regime. In the case of economic services, the decline was steeper from 1.82% of GSDP to 0.38%.As a percentage of GSDP, the expenditure on education and medical and public health increased by only 0.08 and 0.06 percentage points in the AAP regime over the previous regime. The expenditures on water supply and sanitation, housing, urban development, transport, and communication declined as a percentage of GSDP under the AAP regime, with the decline being the highest for roads and bridges, water supply, sanitation, and urban development.On the revenue front, too, the AAP regime has performed poorly. On average, Delhi's total revenue receipts declined from 7.42% of GSDP in the pre-AAP regime to 5.82% in the AAP regime. Both own tax revenue and non-tax revenue contributed to the decline. The own tax revenue-GSDP ratio declined from 5.85% in the pre-AAP regime to 4.84% in the AAP regime.

What is the whip system that Jagdeep Dhankhar wants abolished, how it came to be adopted

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar's recent statement that party whips curtail an MP's freedom of expression by enforcing a party line has sparked a debate. "Why should there be a whip? Whip means you are curtailing expression, curtailing freedom, and subjecting your representative to servility. You do not allow such a person to use his or her mind," Dhankhar had told a group of students at his residence on January 23.In popular perception, a party whip is sacrosanct, especially when it comes to being present in Parliament when a matter important for the party is up for voting and casting their vote as per the party's wishes. There are consequences, including expulsion, for defiance of a whip.

Where does the term whip come from?

It originates from the hunting fields of England, where a whipper-in was a member of the hunting party whose job was to bring straying hounds back into the pack. Its use in politics comes from Anglo-Irish politician and philosopher Edmund Burke. As per Courtenay Ilbert's book Parliament, Its History, Constitution and Practice, Burke, during a speech in the House of Commons, is said to have talked about how the King's ministers "had made great efforts to get their followers together" and "had sent for their friends to the north and to Paris, whipping them in".

What is the history of the whip system in India?

In India, the whip system is as old as its parliamentary history, according to former Lok Sabha secretary-general P D T Achary. The system is important for parliamentary functioning as parties see voting on some matters as crucial to how their politics is perceived. Hence, MPs are expected to be present at the time of voting on matters critical to the party and follow the organisation's line. Absence or voting against the party line can be a huge embarrassment to the party.

For the ruling party or parties of the ruling coalition, full attendance and compliance during division — where each MP's vote on a motion is counted — on a crucial matter is also a marker of the real strength of the party or alliance and is seen as symbolic of whether they are indeed in a majority. Failure to demonstrate majority in the Lower House in such a context can also lead to a no-confidence motion.Given that parties require their MPs to be present and vote as per the party line during division (voting) on an important matter, the party chief whip in a House is required to inform all members about what the party leadership thinks of an important matter. The whip also has to ensure their attendance when the vote takes place. Essentially, the whip is the bridge between the party leadership and the MPs and also has a sense of which members ought to speak on different issues in Parliament.

What are the different kinds of whips?

Whate are three kinds. A one-line whip just informs members about a vote but permits them to abstain. A two-line whip asks them to be present but does not tell them how to vote. The three-line whip, largely the norm these days, directs members to be present and vote as per the party line.A three-line whip to party members by a party's chief whip carries the heading "Three-Line Whip". Under each sentence, there are three thick horizontal lines. Largely the norm these days, this kind of whip directs members to be present and vote as per the party line.Achary said if a member violates a three-line whip,



which is the strictest of directions by a party, the leader of the party can recommend his or her disqualification to the Presiding Officer of the House. "As per the Anti-Defection Law, disqualification can happen for violation of a three-line whip. There were always members who thought that this curtailed their freedom, but even the Supreme Court has said that the whip system is necessary for the preservation of political parties," Achary said.He said the party system was at the root of Indian parliamentary democracy and that violation of a whip can have serious consequences in the context of the Anti-Defection Law that came into force in 1985.

Who enforces the whip system?

The most important role in the whip system is that of the chief whip of a political party, said Achary. There are also additional whips, apart from the chief whip. The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs is the government's chief whip in the Lok Sabha and can request leaders of all parties of the ruling alliance to issue a three-line whip to their members to be present and vote in a certain manner.

"If a member of a party in the ruling alliance violates a whip by its chief whip, the leader of the party can recommend the member's disqualification," Achary said. In the Rajya Sabha, the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs is the government's chief whip, but what matters for members of parties most are the directions issued by their whips.

Why is the whip system important?

In Practice and Procedure of Parliament, former parliament secretary M N Kaul and former Chief Election Commissioner S L Shakdher write: "In a legislative body, not only the fate of a particular measure under consideration but the very life of the Council of Ministers itself may depend upon the result of a single division."Former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan told that the whip system was important for the functioning of Parliamentary democracy. "If you are an Independent MP, you are free and can choose how to vote on a matter. However, if you are elected on a party ticket, you have been elected because of a party vote. Being a member of a party also means that you agree with its ideology and policies. So, discipline is necessary. You can express disagreement with, say, a Bill in an internal party forum. Once the party has made a decision, you should either comply or leave the party," she said.Given that the whip system is crucial for all political parties, an All-India Whips conference has been held since 1952, when the first Lok Sabha was constituted.

Tavleen Singh writes: Real patriotism versus false nationalism

On an Air India flight from Delhi to Mumbai last week, I heard an announcement that puzzled me because it was so out of place. I cannot remember the exact words, but the gist was that the Indian Constitution was born on January 26, 1950, and that it was after this that Indians had been guaranteed democracy and fundamental rights. Why did we need to be told this on a flight? What kind of absurdity was this? When I asked myself these questions, I realised that I had come upon yet another example of the neo-nationalism that has sadly come to define India now. Here, let me confess that I have a distaste for those who feel the need to wear their nationalism or patriotism as badges of honour. Too many people do these days, and I have not met one who was not a big fat bore.For a while now, I have been meaning to discuss in this space the difference between real patriotism and pseudo-nationalism. Since this column appears today on India's 75th Republic Day, I believe the time is right for such a conversation. In my view, examining the absurdities and dangers of neo-nationalism has become necessary because too much aggressive, angry nationalism is being passed off today as patriotism. It is not. There are many differences of which, in my view, the biggest difference is that patriotism cannot be weaponised and nationalism most certainly can and has been.

In recent years, it has not just been weaponised but become enmeshed with Hindutva and been used to target Muslims to the point that their patriotism has been questioned in a noxious, ugly way. No real patriot would question the patriotism of another simply because his faith is different to his own, but today's neo-nationalists do not hesitate to do this. Nor do they hesitate to declare openly that in their view Muslims cannot be true patriots because their religion comes from elsewhere and their sacred places are in another country.

As someone who is old enough to remember an older, gentler India and those older Republic Day parades in that first decade after Independence, I would like to say that something vital and wonderful has been destroyed by weaponised nationalism. That first decade was a time when everyone who lived in Delhi could come and watch the parade. I remember that in my childhood we used to walk to it, armed with picnic baskets filled with hot drinks and hot parathas, and, because it was nearly always rainy and cold, we would be clad in our warmest clothes. I do not remember if there were VIP enclosures then, but I do remember that if we arrived early enough, we would get seats not far from the Prime Minister.What is more important is that it was a time when everyone was a patriot and real nationalism (not the pseudo kind) was seen as something that had helped India win freedom from our colonial masters. Nobody made any distinction between who was a patriot and who was not because it would have been considered extremely rude. Since then, much has changed, and it has changed for the worse. India has in far too many ways become a harder country than it used to be because of the rise of neo-nationalism.



When did this start to happen?

There are political pundits of my acquaintance who believe that this happened after Narendra Modi became Prime Minister. I remember that it was a bit earlier and it had everything to do with religion. It is hard to say whether it was political Islam or reckless politicians that encouraged religious Hindus to start setting off on 'yatras' for one reason or another. Nearly always, these religious excursions left Hindu-Muslim riots in their wake. And it was not just Hindu politicians who were responsible but Muslim politicians as well.most readToday, our problem is neo-nationalists who mix aggressive Hindutva with aggressive nationalism causing a sickness that has seeped like poison into the veins of India. These neo-nationalists are people who think nothing of killing men they suspect of killing cows. And they think nothing of openly denigrating everything that they associate with Islam. It is not just semi-literate thugs who have become victims of neo-nationalism. There are senior ministers in the Modi government who are rabid neo-nationalists and who do not hesitate to make clear that they think all Muslims are bad people.What I personally find deeply repugnant is that educated, supposedly civilized, Indians have also become victims of neo-nationalism. In fine hotels and elegant drawing rooms in Delhi and Mumbai, I seem constantly to run into people who do not hesitate to admit that they believe Muslims and Islam are the root cause of all the problems in the world. In Delhi, the same people who in an older time took pleasure in listening to Urdu poetry, now speak of how it is important to rid Hindi of all words that came to us from Arabic or Persian. The more idiotic among these believe that Urdu is a foreign language that came to us with Islamic invaders.All of this has quite simply gone too far. It is time for our political leaders to be held to account for the damage they have done and to remind them that spreading poison may win a few elections, but it is destroying India.

Dwarka Expressway residents seek toll relief for e-cabs, school buses

50 tonnes in, 1 tonne out: Bengaluru startup turns city garbage into green energy amid LPG crisis

Prompted by the burden of increasing school bus fees and inflated cab fares due to high toll charges, a residents' body in Gurgaon has approached the authorities seeking toll concessions and improved pass facilities for regular commuters on the Dwarka Expressway.The Dwarka Expressway Gurugram Development Association (DXPGDA) submitted a formal request on June 11 to the Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL) and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).The letter was addressed to Vishal Chauhan, CMD of IHMCL, with a copy marked to Akash Padhi, NHAI Project Director for the Dwarka Expressway.

The association has requested concessions specifically for registered school buses and electric passenger vehicles, including e-taxis, operating within the National Capital Region (NCR).“What prompted the letter was the fact that schools have had to pass on the increased transport costs to us, and also that the toll amount is often way more than half of the total fare, especially for short journeys. Due to the steep toll fee, even relatives and friends have reduced visiting us,” Sunil Sareen, deputy convenor of the association, told The DXPGDA stated that these measures would reduce operating costs, encourage shared mobility, and directly benefit thousands of daily commuters and school-going children.Request for quarterly and annual recharge optionsThe association also urged the NHAI to introduce quarterly and annual recharge options for local commuter passes at the Bijwasan Toll Plaza. The memorandum

highlighted that offering longer-duration subscriptions, along with suitable discounts, would reduce the inconvenience of frequent renewals and encourage greater adoption of local passes.

To further streamline pass management, the DXPGDA also pressed for an upgraded, user-friendly digital facility on the NHAI website and mobile application, so they can check their recharge history and detailed toll usage, track the number of trips used and remaining eligibility, and receive alerts regarding low balances and impending pass expiry.The residents' body highlighted that the Dwarka Expressway has emerged as a crucial urban transport corridor connecting Delhi and Gurgaon. Implementing these initiatives, the association noted, would significantly improve commuter convenience, promote the use of public and green transport, and build public confidence in the national highway tolling system.An NHAI officer said the matter would be examined and that any final decision has to be taken at the headquarters level.The toll rate at the Bijwasan plaza on the Dwarka Expressway for private cars and ordinary vehicles for a single trip costs Rs 225, while a return journey is priced at Rs 340. The monthly pass for 50 trips is Rs 7,550, and the concessional pass for residents within a 20-kilometer radius is now Rs 350.Commercial cabs face steeper rates, with a single crossing at Rs 365, a return fare of Rs 550, and a 50-trip monthly pass at Rs 12,195. For buses and trucks, the toll is Rs 765 for a single journey and Rs 1,150 for a return trip.

‘No proposal sent or received’: Supriya Sule on Congress-NCP (SP) merger talk

Days after Congress leader Nana Patole claimed that NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar had proposed a merger between the two parties, Baramati MP Supriya Sule denied it.“Our party president Sharad Pawar has not received any proposal for merger...Neither has he sent any proposal to anyone,” Sule told reporters on Saturday.Speculation of a possible merger between the Congress and smaller parties founded by its former leaders has intensified after Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee recently met Congress leader Sonia Gandhi at the latter's residence in Delhi.“People in political parties often meet each other for work. I do not know exactly what was discussed in the meeting between Mamata Banerjee and Sonia Gandhi. I do not know who is in contact with whom. No proposal has come to Sharad Pawar, nor has Sharad Pawar given any proposal to anyone,” Sule said.Sule was responding to a question regarding Patole's claim that Sharad Pawar sent a merger proposal when the Nationalist Congress Party split in 2023.Asked about Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut's suggestion that the NCP (SP) merge with the Congress, Sule said, “Sanjay Raut is a like an elder brother. He has the right to give suggestions or guide us.”

Sule said that whatever is happening with the TMC

is not different from what happened with the Shiv Sena and the NCP. “First, Shiv Sena was split and then NCP. Now, they are taking it out against Trinamool Congress,” she said. “We have never indulged in breaking parties or breaking families. And we will never do it. The Trinamool model is no different than what happened to NCP and Shiv Sena.”Saying that it was not a time to bicker, Sule said, “Should the ruling party and the Opposition keep bickering, or should they provide support to every farmer or citizen who is in trouble today due to inflation and unemployment? We also have responsibilities. People have brought us here with trust to make policy decisions. We have not engaged in industries like breaking homes or breaking parties, and we never will.”Sule also said she was proud that NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar was on a hunger strike for farmers. “I had requested Rohit not to go on such a hunger strike. I told him we have a bigger battle ahead. This government is extremely insensitive. We must conserve our strength to fight them. Because of his love for farmers, Rohit has decided to go on hunger strike. I spoke to him last night as well. He was fighting strongly all day yesterday. But when I reviewed the situation this morning, it has been 24 hours since he has had any food, and the heat is extreme.

Mumbai medical college sends doctor Sejal Pawar on forced leave over corpse joke

Mumbai's KEM Hospital has sent MBBS student Sejal Pawar on a 15-day forced leave and called in her parents for counselling, even as the administration on Saturday proposed a five-member inquiry committee to conduct a detailed investigation into the viral video controversy. The committee has been asked to submit its findings within seven working days.The decision follows a preliminary inquiry, after which the administration felt a comprehensive examination of all aspects of the incident was necessary. The proposed committee comprises one retired faculty member, three senior faculty members and one journalist as external members to ensure an independent review.

KEM Hospital dean Harish M Pathak said: “Today the student has been handed over to the care of her parents and concerns regarding her safety and mental well-being are also being considered. We have sent her on a 15-day forced leave and suggested the parents arrange for her counselling. All action concerning the student would be taken in accordance with applicable rules and guidelines, given that she is still pursuing her medical education.”Pawar had submitted a written apology on Friday acknowledging that some of her statements were inappropriate and may have caused distress. A prelimi-

nary inquiry by the hospital had found her comments “objectionable and insensitive,” falling short of the standards of dignity, empathy and professional responsibility expected from a medical student.

The controversy erupted after videos from a Pranit More comedy show went viral. In one clip, Pawar allegedly made insensitive remarks about male cadaver donors. Maharashtra Cyber Police have since registered an FIR against More, Pawar and another audience member, Himanshu Jangra. Jangra, who made a remark about physical intimacy in exchange for money spent on a date, has already lost his job over the controversy.The administration said Pawar would be given a full opportunity to present her version before the committee. The inquiry will examine the statements made in the viral video, complaints received, the student's conduct, social media activity surrounding the incident, and the impact on the institution's image.The committee's terms of reference will be finalised after receiving necessary approvals, following which the inquiry will formally begin. “While certain facts emerged during the preliminary assessment, a broader and impartial investigation was considered necessary before arriving at any conclusions,” Pathak said

Assam unveils artificial intelligence roadmap to drive inclusive growth and governance

Guwahati: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the state is laying the foundation for the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate inclusive growth, improve governance and enhance its global competitiveness while addressing the risks associated with the emerging technology.In a post on social media platform X, the Chief Minister shared a video outlining the government's vision for AI and the initial steps being taken to integrate the technology into governance and development.

“Assam seeks to harness the transformative potential of artificial intelligence for inclusive growth and improving its competitiveness, while addressing the risks that come with it,” CM Sarma said.He added that the video explains the foundational measures being initiated by the state to prepare Assam for an AI-driven future.The announcement comes as governments across India are increasingly exploring AI-based solutions to improve public service delivery, strengthen administrative efficiency and support innovation-driven economic growth.The Assam government has in recent years focused on expanding digital governance through online citizen services, digitisation of land records, technology-enabled policing and e-governance initiatives.

Officials believe AI can further improve decision-making through data analytics, automate routine administrative processes and enhance service delivery in sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture and disaster management.The state has also been working to attract



investments in emerging technologies and build digital infrastructure under its broader development agenda. Industry experts believe AI adoption can create new employment opportunities in technology, research and innovation while improving productivity across traditional sectors.However, policymakers have also emphasised the need for ethical AI deployment, data privacy safeguards and measures to address concerns related to misinformation, algorithmic bias and workforce transition.The Chief Minister's latest remarks indicate that the government intends to balance innovation with responsible regulation while creating an ecosystem that supports AI-led development.The AI initiative is expected to complement Assam's ongoing efforts to position itself as a technology and investment destination in the Northeast, with a focus on skill development, digital infrastructure and innovation-led economic growth.

At the Harohalli Industrial Estate, around 30 km from Bengaluru, trucks in large numbers can be seen moving out of a waste-to-green-energy facility. They are out to deliver biogas cylinders to dozens of restaurants around Bengaluru, including Konark Kanteerava, Konark Residency, RR Cafe, Little Food and SLV.Sustainable Impacts, a joint venture between a start-up firm Carbon Masters, and Hasiru Dala Innovations, an NGO involved in city waste handling, converts 50 tonnes of city waste to one tonne of biogas every day. Other similar waste-to-biogas ventures of Carbon Masters—being executed in collaboration with different partners around the city—have found a growing client base amid a commercial LPG crisis that has affected hotels and restaurants in Bengaluru in the last two months.

Since March 2026, the disruptions to LPG import routes due to the West Asia crisis have led to a shortage of commercial cooking fuel across Karnataka. The state government has capped restaurant supply at 1,000 commercial cylinders daily for a city with nearly 25,000 eating establishments. Domestic households also face a mandatory 25-day gap between refills.Every tonne of waste that arrives at Harohalli does not fill a landfill nor will it release uncontrolled methane, a harmful greenhouse gas.Som Narayan, a law graduate and a master's degree holder in carbon management, economics and geoscience from the University of Edinburgh, who is the co-founder of Carbon Masters, started the venture with a fundamental question: ‘Can we really reduce emissions through alternatives?’

Narayan, along with co-founder Kevin (Houston), realised that waste ending up in landfills is methane, and they had an afterthought: “Can we capture that and use it to replace other fossil fuels?”“You are not only solving one problem by capturing methane. You are also replacing another fossil fuel through renewable energy. So it's been a journey of discovery and realisation,” said Narayan.

Narayan stated that the LPG crisis is a warning that must be heeded. “We need to fix this once and for all. Over the next five to ten years, we can really create local, decentralised energy that solves multiple problems,” he said.How the facility converts waste to CBG

At the Harohalli joint venture facility of Carbon Masters, G E Muralidhara, the head of plant operations, explained the process involved in generating biogas from city waste. “Today 54 tonnes of municipal waste has arrived. The trucks tip their load onto a concrete receiving floor. The waste moves onto a slow-moving belt conveyor. Workers in masks and gloves manually pick out contaminants. Anything not organic cannot go into the digester. The slurry flows into a pre-digester, where pH levels are balanced and heavy sediment like eggshells and seeds settles out,” Muralidhara said. “The retention time is 30 days but because we feed fresh slurry in every day, gas is produced continuously,” he explained. The raw biogas is roughly 60 per cent methane, 30 per cent carbon dioxide, and some hydrogen sulphide. It is piped to purification units, where impurities are removed.What comes out is 96% pure methane, which is compressed and stored as Compressed Biogas (CBG).Harohalli facility Inside the

Mumbai KEM Hospital faces blood component shortage as key machine fails

A crucial blood component processing machine at Mumbai's KEM Hospital has remained defunct for months, forcing it to increasingly depend on supplies from other government and private blood banks.Records reviewed by The Indian Express show a sharp decline in the ability of the in-house blood bank at KEM Hospital to produce critical blood components. These include Random Donor Platelets (RDP), which are commonly used for patients suffering from blood cancers, dengue, and other conditions that cause low platelet counts, and Fresh Frozen Plasma (FFP), which is used in trauma cases, major surgeries, liver disease, and clotting disorders. The blood bank also prepares Single Donor Platelets (SDP), a higher-volume platelet product collected from a single donor and often used for patients requiring repeated transfusions.

In March 2026, around 500 units of RDP and nearly 1,000 units of FFP were prepared and issued to patients, highlighting the substantial demand for these blood components at the tertiary-care hospital. However, in April, production dropped sharply, with only 12 units of RDP prepared, no SDP produced, and only a negligible quantity of frozen plasma generated. By May, the blood bank had not prepared a single unit of RDP, SDP, or FFP.The impact is also reflected in the hospital's growing dependence on external blood banks. While KEM borrowed 400 packed red blood cell units from government blood banks and 129 units from non-government sources in March, the numbers rose to 579 and 209, respectively, in April. In May, the hospital procured 542 units from government blood banks and another 500 units from private sources, hospital records show.

The shortage comes at a time when demand for blood components remains high and is expected to increase during the monsoon season, when cases of dengue and other illnesses often lead to a greater requirement for platelet transfusions.According to figures available on Friday, KEM's blood bank had only 77 units of blood in stock across all blood groups, while the hospital issues around 100 units daily. The available stock included 24 units of A positive, two A negative, 12 B positive, one B negative, 15 AB positive, two AB negative, 21 O positive, and no O negative units.

Hospital sources said the decline was not due to manpower shortages. The blood bank has 28 technicians

Harohalli facility, slurry flows into a pre-digester, where pH levels are balanced and heavy sediment like eggshells and seeds settles out. Express/Photo credit: Mark Philip JayanCBG cylinders sold for Rs 120 to Rs 130 per kg

The plant's daily output runs between 900 and 1,000 kg. The conversion ratio is fixed: 50 tonnes of waste yields one tonne of fuel. “The gas is sold for Rs 120 to Rs 130 per kg in cylinders, and Rs 90 per kg through the pipeline,” he said.In April, the plant's CBG was pumped directly into the GAIL (Gas Authority of India Ltd.) pipeline network for the first time. The company has a clearance for GAIL pipeline injection from the Harohalli facility.“Around 700 kg per day now flows through that pipeline. Another 200 to 300 kg goes into cascades (for cylinders),” the plant head said.A commercial LPG cylinder is currently priced at around Rs 3,200. The equivalent volume of Carbonlites CBG from the start-up's Harohalli biogas plant costs approximately Rs 2,100, roughly Rs 900-1100 less per cylinder- equivalent, according to Narayan.Muralidhara said CBG is highly preferred by restaurants because it aligns with their environmental outlook. “It has a higher calorific value so it generates more heat and cooks the food faster... It is not anymore about just being environmentally friendly or saving costs; it can cost you the whole business itself. Several restaurants had to shut down. The ones we were supplying were able to keep their kitchens going because we produce locally and source the feedstock locally,” Som Narayan said.The organic residue left after gas extraction is processed into fertilizer and distributed to farmers under the central government's Market Development Assistance scheme, which provides Rs 1,500 per metric tonne. “The farmers get it free for now,” Muralidhara said.Bengaluru generates 3,000 tonnes of wet waste daily. Sustainable Impacts currently processes 50 tonnes of them. “We will be expanding to process 200 tonnes soon,” said Muralidhara. The Harohalli facility cost Rs 20 crore to build.An upcoming Kannahalli plant — a collaboration between the Bengaluru civic authorities and Carbon Masters — will process 900 tonnes daily at Rs 45 to Rs 48 crore. Carbon Masters intends to build six such plants, requiring roughly ?300 crore in total.The Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited, which is responsible for waste management in the city, has empanelled Sustainable Impacts as the authorised waste destination for the whole of south Bengaluru, guaranteeing feedstock from bulk generators across that half of the city, according to Narayan.However, even at full build-out, the plants will handle less than 40 per cent of the city's wet waste.Narayan clarifies that biogas is not the whole answer. “You can't rely on one silver bullet,” he said. “You need multiple green energy sources knocking off as much fossil fuel as you can, then generate everything locally.” The challenge is the absence of a sustained government price signal, says the start-up founder.“When solar power first came in, pricing was Rs 17 to Rs 19 per unit. Today it is Rs 3 to Rs 4. That happened because the government held a price guarantee long enough for investment to flow. Biogas has had no equivalent commitment. There is still a lack of long-term clarity — policy with a floor price is far away,” he said.

and two technical supervisors, whom they described as sufficient for its operations. Instead, they attributed the collapse in platelet and plasma production to the repeated breakdown of the ageing blood component separation machine, which is used to prepare Random Donor Platelets and Fresh Frozen Plasma from donated blood.The disruption is particularly affecting patients who require regular platelet support.The family members of an acute myeloid leukemia (AML) patient, who has been admitted to the hospital for the past 20 days, said they have had to arrange blood components from outside blood banks. “The government rate for platelets and plasma is around Rs 300, but when we have to procure them from outside, it can cost between Rs 400 and Rs 700,” a relative said.AML is an aggressive blood cancer in which both the disease and chemotherapy suppress bone marrow function, often causing dangerously low platelet counts and anaemia. As a result, patients frequently require repeated platelet and blood transfusions during treatment, sometimes several times over the course of a hospital admission.The issue was raised by Shiv Sena corporator Sachin Padwal, who, along with corporator Aboli Khade, met KEM Hospital Dean Dr Harish Pathak regarding infrastructure concerns at the hospital.

“Patients admitted to KEM Hospital sometimes need to be transferred to other municipal hospitals for specific tests or surgeries. Earlier, four ambulances were available, but currently only two are operational. We requested two additional ambulances. During the meeting, we also discussed the non-functional blood bank machine. Dean has assured us that it will be made operational within eight to ten days. He informed us that the machine is 10-12 years old and frequently develops faults, and that a proposal for a new machine would soon be submitted,” Padwal said.Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's Public Health Committee chairman Harish Bhandirge, who visited the hospital on Friday, also expressed concern over the issue.

“I learned that the platelet and frozen plasma preparation machine is not functional. It is unfortunate that patients come here for treatment but do not receive the facilities they need. Patients are being forced to arrange these blood components from outside. Such situations are regrettable and should not occur in a major public hospital,” Bhandirge said.

Shivakumar orders statewide quarry audit after fatal Bengaluru collapse

Bengaluru: Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Thursday said he would examine whether quarrying activities were happening in the state as per the norms following a mishap at a site that left eight workers dead.Mourning the demise of the labourers, mostly from Bihar, at a stone quarry in Bengaluru South Taluk, he said, “We will issue fresh guidelines for quarrying activities across the state. I will ensure that no such incident occurs again.” He said he had directed all officials to the spot. They are already there and are submitting reports.“As per initial reports, seven people have died.

The first report indicates that the incident was not due to blasting, but due to soil erosion. I will get a detailed report on this,” the chief minister said.When reporters asked him about the ex gratia, he said compensation is not the priority right now. “We will certainly provide compensation to the families, there is no doubt about that. But my priority is to ensure that such incidents do not happen again in Karnataka,” he said.Yashwanthpur MLA S T Somashekar said the eighth labourer died in the hospital.

EYE SECRETS
Editorial

Eleven years on, Digital Mission still faces challenges

Technology has the power to bridge socioeconomic gaps and propel a nation into a new era of innovation and a knowledge economy. The 'Digital India' mission, launched 11 years ago to transform India into a digitally empowered society, has demonstrated this in an exemplary manner by building a robust digital infrastructure and providing a host of government services online. Today, India can boast of recording the highest penetration of digital payment methods in the world. The ubiquitous presence of QR code scanners across the country — from small street vendors to large retailers —tells the success story of the country's digital transformation.

This widespread adoption is driven by the simplicity, affordability, and adaptability of QR codes, making them a convenient tool for both businesses and consumers. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) now processes a staggering 75 crore transactions daily and is recognised by the IMF as the world's largest real-time payment system. India accounts for nearly half of all real-time digital payments in the world. While digital adoption is one of the big success stories of India, several challenges remain.

Among them are the rural-urban and gender digital divides, cybersecurity and data privacy enforcement, welfare-authentication exclusion errors, and language and institutional gaps. Nearly 103 crore Indians now have internet connections, but that still leaves several hundred million people outside the net, and access is not evenly distributed. Fibre-optic connections reach only about 7% of households nationally, and just over 3% in rural areas. Most connectivity still rides on mobile data rather than the stable broadband network.

Rural youth are also considerably less likely to own a device outright, and women are particularly less privileged on this count, making the digital divide an uncomfortable reality. In rural India, only around 57% of young women own a phone against over 81% of young men. Another challenging area is the poor public awareness about where to report online frauds, especially among rural and female users, at a time when instances of digital fraud are rising sharply. As UPI, Aadhaar and DigiLocker have become load-bearing infrastructure for the country, they have also become easy targets for cyber fraudsters.

The mission has weathered periodic UPI outages that exposed how much now depends on a small number of systems staying up, and analysts expect more coordinated, AI-assisted phishing and fraud attempts in the years ahead. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, gives India, for the first time, a comprehensive legal framework for handling personal data, but its rules are still being operationalised, and the harder test — consistent enforcement, and genuine recourse for citizens whose data is misused — is still ahead. Overall, the impact of the digital mission has been transformational. Powered by the Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile (JAM) trinity, the sovereign digital identity framework has facilitated the government to transfer Rs 51.5 lakh crore directly to citizens through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

Migrant workers robbed at knifepoint, forced to transfer cash via UPI in Bengaluru

Four migrant workers from West Bengal were allegedly robbed of cash, mobile phones and money from a digital wallet by a group of unidentified men at knifepoint near Bettadasanapura in Bengaluru's Electronics City Sunday evening, the police said.

According to the FIR registered on June 29, the complainant, Sabir Shaik, 20, and his friends, Yunus, 25, Irfan Shaik, 19, and Owaidur Islam Laskar, 18, have been living in Bengaluru for the past eight months and work under a contractor.In his complaint, Sabir alleged that at around 6.30 pm on June 28, the four were sitting near Bettadasanapura after returning from work when three unidentified men approached them. While Sabir was speaking on his mobile phone, the men allegedly claimed that his friends had called them. When he denied knowing them, they asked him to show photographs of his friends on his phone.

After looking at the photographs, the accused allegedly snatched Sabir's mobile phone and walked towards the rear of a nearby temple. When Sabir followed them, demanding the return of his phone, his friends arrived at the spot.The accused allegedly threatened the four with a knife, a wooden club and an iron rod, assaulted two of them and demanded money. They allegedly fled with Rs 10,000 in cash, four mobile phones, as well as the victims' SIM cards.

The complainant further alleged that the accused forced him to unlock his PhonePe account and transferred Rs 488 from it to another account before fleeing. They also allegedly threatened the victims with dire consequences if they approached the police.The victims later informed their employer and filed a complaint with the Electronics City police. A case has been registered for robbery and dacoity with attempt to cause death or grievous hurt."Efforts are on to identify and apprehend the accused," a police officer said. Further investigations are underway.

5 caregivers booked for putting toddlers in washing machine at Bengaluru IT campus creche

Bengaluru creche child abuseBengaluru police have registered a case against five caregivers at Capgemini's on-campus creche in Bengaluru (Image generated using AI).The Bengaluru city police have registered a criminal case against five daycare workers at an on-campus creche belonging to Capgemini Technology Services India Limited after allegations that employees' children were subjected to physical assault, intimidation, and cruelty.The FIR was registered on June 29 at the HAL police station following a complaint by Tilakesh Kumar, a legal-cum-

Spiti's seabuckthorn, Kinnauri apple and topi among 8 Himachal products to get GI tag



Eight traditional products of social, economic, cultural and agricultural significance of Himachal Pradesh have been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) status, a senior official on Wednesday said.The products granted the GI tag include Seabuckthorn (Chharma) of Spiti, Salooni Safed Makka, Chamba Metal Art, Sirmauri Loiya, Kinnauri Topi, Sepuvadi of Mandi, Kinnauri apple and Kinnauri jewellery.The fresh registrations have taken products from Himachal Pradesh that now enjoy the GI Tag to 17, the official said, adding that these products represent the rich heritage, traditional knowledge, craftsmanship and agricultural excellence of different regions and reflect the unique identity of the State. The registrations have been secured through the Himachal Pradesh Council for Science, Technology & Environment (HIMCOSTE).

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu congratulated the people of the state, describing the recognition as a significant step towards preserving Himachal Pradesh's rich cultural, agricultural and artisanal heritage. He said the achievement is a testimony to the sustained efforts of the state government during the last three and a half years to preserve, protect and promote Himachal's traditional heritage.The GI recognition would protect the authenticity of these products, enhance their market value and create new livelihood opportunities for farmers, arti-

sans, weavers and indigenous communities. "This recognition will help preserve our invaluable cultural heritage while opening new avenues for economic growth, rural entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods," Sukhu said.The CM further said that the state government is further pursuing GI registration for four indigenous products – Bhot Jau (barley from the Pangri region of Chamba), Chamba Chukh, Plectranthus honey (from the Bharmour region of Chamba) and Sirmaur ginger.He said that the GI recognition for these products will strengthen the livelihoods of indigenous communities, artisans, weavers, farmers and traditional producers by creating greater opportunities for value addition, rural entrepreneurship and sustainable economic development.Secretary, Environment, Science, Technology and Climate Change, Sushil Kumar Singla, said that GI registration serves as an effective instrument for protecting these products from unauthorised imitation and misuse while significantly enhancing their branding, marketability and export potential.Earlier, nine products of Himachal Pradesh, including Kullu Shawl, Kangra tea, Chamba Rumal, Kinnauri shawl, Kangra painting, Himachali Kalazeera, Himachali Chulli oil, Chamba chappal, Lahauli Knitted socks and gloves, have received the GI tag.As per the World Intellectual Property Organisation, a GI is "a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin".ypically, the GI tag is granted to agricultural products, foodstuff, handicrafts, industrial products, ane even wines and spirit drinks. The GI is covered as an element of intellectual property rights under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property and under the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement. Once the GI tag is granted to a product, traders can apply for get a unique GI number to sell the said product carrying the GI logo. Those dealing in GI products without obtaining the unique GI number can be prosecuted under The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

First tranche of funds credited to 1.1 crore Annapurna Yojana beneficiaries: Kolkata CM Suvendu Adhikari

The first tranche of funds disbursed by the state government under the Annapurna Yojana, a direct cash transfer scheme for women, was credited to the accounts of nearly 1.1 crore beneficiaries, Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari said on Wednesday.While about 1.6 crore applications were received for the scheme, 26 lakh of them were rejected on grounds of deaths, doubts over citizenship and domicile status, deletion from voter rolls and multiple account-holding beneficiaries, Adhikari added.Speaking at the launch of the scheme at Netaji Indoor Stadium in Kolkata, Adhikari said, "The 26 lakh forms submitted under the Annapurna scheme have been rejected. Screening was necessary. Money has been transferred to the remaining around 1.3 crore accounts. By Wednesday morning, funds were credited to 1.1 crore bank accounts. Those who are yet to receive the amount will have it transferred by the end of the day. However, it must be ensured that no one receives money outside the rules."

"There are names of 26 lakh women who are not Indian, and names missing on the voter list. Some are dead, some do not have voter ID cards, and some had their names listed in three places. Such names have been removed. Government money cannot be received by any non-Indians," he added.The Chief Minister also delivered an important message regarding women's safety, saying there would be no compromise on the issue and that the



administration is being made more active so that prompt action can be taken as soon as a complaint is received."A system is being put in place to respond promptly to any complaint. The government has a zero-tolerance policy towards any kind of crime against women. The government is also taking measures to confiscate properties of those accused in serious crimes," Adhikari said.The Chief Minister also said that the state government has decided to have a separate women's helpdesk at all police stations across the state from Thursday.In addition, a new emergency service, 'Dial 112,' is set to be launched to address the complaints. He claimed that although the average police response time in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat is comparatively low, in West Bengal that time is often much longer. This new system is being introduced to change that situation.

Punjab's first quarter GST collections jumps 24.25% to Rs 7,833 crore

Punjab registered a 9 per cent growth in State GST (SGST) cash collections, against the national average of around 3 per cent, he added.Punjab registered a 9 per cent growth in State GST (SGST) cash collections, against the national average of around 3 per cent, he added.Punjab has registered a 24.45 per cent growth in collection of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection in the first quarter of 2027-27, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said on Wednesday.

"The gross GST collections climbed to Rs 7,833.45 crore during the April-June quarter of FY 2026-27, compared with Rs 6,294.57 crore in the corresponding period last year," said Cheema.Punjab registered a 9 per cent growth in State GST (SGST) cash collections, against the national average of around 3 per cent, he added.The increase of Rs 1,538.88 crore reflects the state's improving revenue position with better tax compliance, sustained economic activity and improved administration, the minister said, adding that the government has simultaneously focused on facilitating genuine businesses by issuing GST refunds worth Rs 1,270 crore during the first quarter. Of the total refunds, Rs 713.70 crore was towards the SGST component, he said."Timely refunds helped improve liquidity for businesses and promoted ease of doing business in the state," he added.

The state also recorded an increase of Rs 242 crore in VAT/ CST collections, demonstrating the effectiveness of the state's revenue mobilization strategy and the clear strengthening of state's fiscal position, he said.Emphasising a policy of zero tolerance towards tax evasion, Cheema pointed out that the Excise and Taxa-



tion Department's intensive enforcement drive has yielded substantial results. "During the first quarter, penalties amounting to approximately Rs 633 crore were imposed and recovered, representing a 207 per cent increase over the Rs 207 crore recovered during the same period last fiscal year".Detailing the specific actions taken in June 2026 alone, minister added, "The penalties amounting to Rs 225 crore were imposed, and 20 First Information Reports (FIRs) were registered against bogus taxpayers involved in fake invoicing and fraudulent registrations".Furthermore, the department conducted property auction proceedings during the month to expedite the recovery of long-pending dues under the VAT regime, which successfully brought in approximately Rs 14 crore in arrears.Cheema said the government remains committed to a transparent tax administration and strict action would continue against tax evaders while honest taxpayers would be supported through timely refunds, simplified procedures and improved services.

complaint.According to the complaint, the incident came to light on June 25, when the complainant, upon inquiry, learned that the five women had been entrusted with the care and supervision of children at the creche.Instead of caring for the children, the accused allegedly subjected them to physical assault and mental harassment, including locking crying children inside washing machines to frighten them, forcing them into narrow pipes filled with water and leaving them there, stuffing them into bathroom spaces, and physically intimidating them in various other

Vadodara bus services operator suspends operations after contract expires, services resume after VMC okays extension



Commuters in Vadodara city were left stranded for a brief while on Wednesday morning after city bus services operator Vinayak Logistics abruptly suspended operations following the expiry of its contract with the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC), prompting the civic authorities to step in and approve a last-minute extension of the contract for three months.The disruption began early on July 1, when around 160 city buses operated by Vinayak Logistics went off the roads without prior public notice, triggering confusion and long waits at bus stops during peak commuting hours as travellers were unprepared for the development.

The crisis was resolved only around 10:30 am when the VMC granted the operator an interim three-month extension, allowing services to resume from 11 am. The restored fleet of 160 buses will now operate alongside the 30 newly launched electric buses introduced by the civic body on Monday.Vinayak City Bus Manager Narendra Singh Rana confirmed that the operator had received a three-month extension and that services on all existing routes would resume from 11 am onwards. Deputy Municipal Commissioner Rituraj Desai described the disruption as a communication lapse rather than an operational failure."There was no fault or error as such... Discussions regarding extension of the contract were underway and the arrangement has now been extended for three months until the e-bus services are normalised," Desai said, adding that the civic body would examine the reasons behind the communication gap.

Desai added that the extension was intended to ensure uninterrupted public transport until the city's transition to electric buses gathers pace. The development comes barely two days after the VMC flagged off 30 air-conditioned electric buses under the Centre's PM e-Bus initiative. The city has received approval for 250 electric buses, of which 130 are expected to be deployed in the first phase.The new buses feature GPS-based tracking, CCTV surveillance, digital ticketing through UPI and mobile applications, wheelchair accessibility and dedicated seating for women, senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

Elderly woman went to recover loan, killed and dumped near rail track in Karnataka



A 75-year-old woman who left home to recover a Rs 20,000 loan from a neighbour was allegedly strangled, her jewellery stolen, and her body dumped near a railway track by the borrower and her friend in Karnataka's Ramanagara district, the police said on Wednesday.The Ramanagara rural police arrested Girija, 36, and her friend Mahesh, 42, in connection with the murder of Sushilamma, a resident of Sangabasavanadoddi village.According to the police, Sushilamma left her house on June 15 after telling her family that she was going to collect the Rs 20,000 that Girija had borrowed from her. When she did not return, her family searched for her and later filed a missing complaint. The police said Girija joined the search to avoid raising suspicion.On June 21, Sushilamma's decomposed body was found near a railway track on the outskirts of the village. Her family noticed that the 39 grams of gold jewellery she regularly wore was missing and suspected foul play, following which another complaint was lodged.During the investigation, the police found that an argument broke out at Girija's house, and she strangled the elderly woman. Girija then called Mahesh, who allegedly helped her place the body in a gunny bag and dump it near the railway track in an attempt to destroy evidence. The two also allegedly stole Sushilamma's gold ornaments.The police said they recovered the stolen jewellery."We examined the victim's movements before she went missing and gathered technical and circumstantial evidence, which led us to the accused. Further investigation is in progress," a senior police officer said.

ways."The toddlers belonged to professionals working at the campus who leave their children at the facility while on duty. Parents and officials were horrified to see the manner in which the care staff was handling these toddlers," a police officer said.Saidulu Advavath, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Whitefield Division), confirmed the developments, stating that the police have registered the case."We have initiated an investigation. Notices will be served to the individuals responsible, and they will be summoned for interrogation," Advavath said.

Google vs CCI: What the Android antitrust case means for India’s digital ecosystem



Story so far: On August 8, 2025, the Supreme Court admitted an appeal filed by Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google, against a judgment of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). The tribunal had earlier upheld, at least in part, the Competition Commission of India’s (CCI) findings that Google had abused its dominant position in the Android ecosystem to indulge in anti-competitive practices. Alongside Google’s appeal, the Court also admitted related petitions from the CCI itself and the Alliance Digital India Foundation (ADIF), which is a coalition of Indian startups critical of Big Tech dominance. A bench led by Justice P.S. Narasimha has listed the matter for a detailed hearing in November.

What has the CCI accused Google of?

The CCI’s investigation into Google began in 2020, sparked by complaints from app developers and industry groups who alleged that Google was using its market dominance in Android to push its own services and restrict fair competition.By 2022, the Commission concluded that Google had engaged in multiple anti-competitive practices. Chief among them was the mandatory use of the Google Play Billing System (GPBS) for in-app purchases on the Play Store. This meant that developers had to use Google’s payment processing system, paying a commission that typically ranged between 15% and 30%, rather than integrating their own billing solutions.The regulator also found that Google exempted its own app YouTube from these billing requirements, giving them a cost advantage over competing services. This, the CCI argued, distorted the level-playing field and harmed both rival developers and consumers.In addition, the CCI highlighted that the Android licensing model required smartphone makers to pre-install Google’s suite of apps — Search, Chrome, YouTube, and others — as a condition for access to the Google Play Store. According to the Commission, this bundling restricted consumer choice and suppressed innovation from alternative app providers.Based on these findings, the CCI imposed a fine of 7936.44 crore on Google and issued a set of behavioural remedies, including directives to decouple Google’s payment system from Play Store access, ensure transparency in billing data, and refrain from using such data to advantage its own services.

What is Google’s defence?

Google rejected the CCI’s conclusions, arguing that its practices were designed to enhance user experience, maintain security, and enable a sustainable business model for the Android ecosystem.The company maintained that Android is an open-source operating system, available for free to device manufacturers, and that OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) are not obligated to install Google’s proprietary apps if they choose to license the core Android platform without Play Store access. It argued that pre-installing a set of Google apps was a matter of efficiency and user convenience, and did not prevent users from downloading competing apps.On the billing side, Google claimed that GPBS ensured safe and reliable transactions for users, helping to prevent fraud and reduce payment failures. The commission fees, it said, were consistent with industry standards and provided developers access to Google’s global infrastructure, distribution reach, and regular security

updates.Google also argued that exempting certain in-house services from GPBS was not anti-competitive but a recognition of differences in their business models. It pointed out that many leading Indian apps like PhonePe, Paytm, and Hotstar had grown successfully on Android, which shows that the market remained vibrant and competitive.

What was the NCLAT’s judgment?

In March, the NCLAT delivered its ruling on Google’s appeal against the CCI’s 2022 order. The tribunal upheld several of the CCI’s findings, agreeing that Google’s mandatory billing policy and bundling of apps amounted to abuse of dominance. However, it reduced the financial penalty from ₹936.44 crore to ₹216.69 crore, reasoning that the original amount was disproportionate to the conduct in question.The NCLAT also struck down some of the CCI’s behavioural directions, holding that certain remedies were either over-broad or lacked sufficient evidentiary basis. In May 2025, following a review petition, the tribunal reinstated two key directions that Google must be transparent about its billing data policies, and that it must not use such data to gain a competitive advantage for its own apps and services.This partial victory left all parties dissatisfied. Google sought a complete reversal of the findings, the CCI wanted its original penalties and remedies restored in full, and ADIF argued that the tribunal had gone too easy on Google.

What’s at stake now?

The case raises fundamental questions about how much control a dominant platform like Android should have over the devices and services it supports, and to what extent regulators can intervene in the name of competition.For consumers, a ruling in favour of the CCI could mean more choice and potentially lower prices. If developers can bypass GPBS and use cheaper payment systems, they might pass on some of the savings to users. Greater transparency and restrictions on data use could also enhance privacy and fairness in app rankings and recommendations. However, industry observers warn that loosening Google’s control could lead to more fragmentation in Android, with different devices offering inconsistent user experiences.

For smartphone makers, the verdict could influence licensing costs and product flexibility. If the Supreme Court upholds the CCI’s original remedies, OEMs might gain more leeway to pre-install competing services or experiment with alternative Android versions without losing access to the Play Store. This could be especially significant for smaller Indian brands that have struggled to differentiate themselves in a Google-centric ecosystem.For Indian startups and app developers, the case represents an opportunity to level the playing field against a global giant. ADIF has argued that Google’s policies not only limit payment options but also give it an undue edge in promoting its own apps. A strong pro-CCI ruling could give local companies better bargaining power and distribution access.For Google, the stakes go beyond India. The country is one of its largest markets by user base, and an adverse ruling here could trigger similar regulatory demands in other jurisdictions. It could also force Google to reconsider its global Android business model, especially if courts require it to unbundle services or open its billing systems.

What’s the road ahead?

The Supreme Court’s hearings in November will likely examine both the legal interpretation of “abuse of dominance” under Indian competition law and the economic realities of platform markets. Whatever the outcome, the decision will set an important precedent for how India balances innovation, consumer protection, and market fairness in the digital era. With Android powering over 95% of smartphones in the country, the Court’s ruling will directly influence how hundreds of millions of Indians access apps, make payments, and use mobile services in the years to come.

What are the new rules on chemically contaminated sites? | Explained

The story so far: The Environment Ministry has notified new rules under the Environment Protection Act that lays out a process for addressing sites with chemical contamination. Called the Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules, 2025, they give a legal structure to a process of addressing chemical contamination, that until now was missing despite several such sites already identified across the country.

What are contaminated sites?

Contaminated sites, according to the Central Pollution Control Board, are those where hazardous and other wastes were dumped historically, and which has most likely resulted in contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water that pose a risk to human health and the environment. Some of the sites were developed when there was no regulation on management of hazardous wastes. In some instances, polluters responsible for contamination have either closed down their operations or the cost of remediation is beyond their capacity. These may include landfills, dumps, waste storage and treatment sites, spill-sites, and chemical waste handling and storage sites. There



are 103 such sites identified across the country. Only in seven sites has remedial operation commenced, which involves cleaning the contaminated soil, groundwater, surface water and sediments by adopting appropriate technologies.

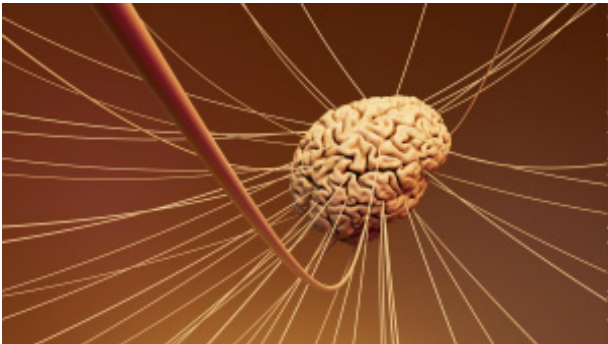
Why were these rules necessary?

The Environment Ministry had, in 2010, initiated a Capacity Building Program for Industrial Pollution Management Project to formulate the National Program for Remediation of Polluted Sites. This consisted of three broad tasks — creating an inventory of probable contaminated sites; developing a guidance document for assessment and remediation of contaminated sites; and developing a legal, institutional and financial framework for the remediation of

contaminated sites. While the first two steps have been in place, the last step, regarding a legal codification, remained unfulfilled. The rules that were made public on July 25 were part of this legal codification process.Under these rules, the district administration would prepare half-yearly reports on “suspected contaminated sites.” A State board, or a ‘reference organisation’ would examine these sites and provide a “preliminary assessment” within 90 days of being thus informed. Following these, it would have another three months to make a detailed survey and finalise if these sites were indeed ‘contaminated.’ This would involve establishing the levels of suspected hazardous chemicals — there are currently 189 marked ones under the provisions of the Hazardous and Other Wastes

(Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016. If these sites exceed safe levels, the location of these sites would be publicised and restrictions placed on accessing it. Then, the ‘reference organisation’, which would basically be a body of experts, would be tasked with specifying a remediation plan. The State board would also have 90 days to identify the person(s) responsible for the contamination. Those deemed responsible would have to pay for the cost of remediation of the site, else the Centre and the State would arrange for the costs of clean-up. “Any criminal liability, if it is proved that such contamination caused loss of life or damage would be under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023),” an official said.

Major study opens window to the brain when an emotion first appears



Simply put, emotions are intangible responses to what we see happening around us. They arise spontaneously, without conscious thought.Emotions allowed early humans to efficiently dodge dangers as they explored the world around them. While the world and our lives in it are very different today than the way they were for our ancestors, our emotions haven’t changed.Despite being so fundamental to our survival as a species, however, scientists are still piecing together how emotions arise in our brains. In a study recently published in Science, in fact, scientists have just reported mapping the brain-wide activity patterns that trigger emotions.The team found that once an emotion was set off, it outlasted the trigger that sparked it in the first place. If this sounds familiar, it’s because this is what you feel when you accidentally stub your toe, burn your hand, and even when you enjoy your favourite flavour of ice cream.In all these examples, there is incoming sensory information that prompts an emotional response while the good or bad feeling lasts even after the body part has been reflexively pulled back or after the ice cream is finished.Stories hidden in blinks

In the new study, scientists led by Karl Deisseroth at Stanford University examined how emotions emerged in response to unpleasant (but not painful) sensory stimuli.The participants were subjected to an eye puff assay: a machine called a tonometer blew light puffs of air into their left eye in specific sequences. Each puff lasted about 60 ms, the gap between puffs was 3-8 s long, and the entire session lasted 5 minutes. The scientists varied the gap between puffs so that participants didn’t reflexively tense up for the next puff they knew was coming.During the entire duration, a high-speed camera recorded the way participants closed their eyes and their behavioral and subjective responses.As expected, repeated puffs of air to the eye elicited reflexive blinking as participants instinctively pulled back from the tonometer. They also kept the eye closed for certain durations or squinted or blinked rapidly during the gaps. As part of their subjective reports, the participants said this experience was “unpleasant” and “annoying”.The scientists recruited a separate group of participants who were, at the time of the study, inpatients at the Stanford university hospital and had electrodes planted in their brains to check for epileptic seizures. Members of this group who consented to participate underwent the same eye puff assay. The scientists found that these participants’ behavioural responses were consistent with those of the previous group. They also blinked reflexively and kept their eyes closed for (relatively) long periods.Each puff causes a signal to be broadcast throughout the brain, like a “breaking news” alert, followed by a slower, more persistent signal. In this second phase, based on data from the electrodes in the brains of participants, scientists found that specific circuits in the brain were activated, which were linked to the generation of an emotional response in the individual.

To confirm this possibility, the scientists administered ketamine to some of these participants and had them redo the eye puff assay. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved ketamine’s use as an anaesthetic and at lower doses as an antidepressant. Ketamine also induces short-term dissociation: i.e. for a brief period, it alters subjective perceptions. By injecting it, the team could separate a person’s reflexive response from the emotional one.

The scientists found that being subjected to air puffs in the eye when a person was on ketamine changed neither the initial reflexive behaviour nor the initial burst of neural activity in the brain. However, it caused the subsequent slower brain response to dissipate much faster, so much so that the volunteers no longer described the experience as annoying but as a “tickling of the

eyeball”.Consistent with this ‘weaker’ subjective experience from ketamine, the participants’ behaviour also changed. They didn’t blink or close their eyes between consecutive air puffs. Instead, they held their eyes open even though they knew more puffs were in the offing.Ketamine is known to block a sensor in the brain whose job it is to integrate signals coming from different corners. This means in the participants injected with ketamine, the brain may not have integrated the various signals into a coherent emotional response.Of mice and men

Even though vertebrates have brains of vastly different sizes and complexity, the overall ‘brain plan’ is highly conserved. (The brain plan is akin to the building plan of a house or apartment.) To zero in on those systems responsible for emotions and which have survived evolution, Deisseroth’s team repeated their experiments with lab mice. The mice went through the eyepuff assay, had their brain activity measured with surgically planted electrodes, and had ketamine injected.The team noticed the same patterns in mice as they had in humans. Injecting ketamine substantially changed the spiking activity in some neurons but not others. Only those neurons (or brain regions) coordinating the second phase — the slower response after the burst — were affected by ketamine. The initial burst didn’t change in any way, just as with the human participants.The scientists could also study the neural activity following a puff in greater detail in the mouse model. They found that the fast/reflexive responses corresponded with a sharp rise in activity in some of the midbrain regions. This included the thalamus, where incoming sensory signals converge before being relayed onward, and the periaqueductal grey, which is involved in emotional behaviours.They also found that the second phase of neural activity corresponded with activity in the brain’s emotional centres (described by the umbrella term ‘limbic regions’) and the frontal cortex. Again, as expected.Then they dissected the brain activity patterns by stages, focusing on how quickly activity in brain regions shot up after the eyepuff and how long it took to fade away. They noticed that activity patterns in most of the pertinent regions increased at an explosive pace right after the eyepuff — but the rate of decrease was more interesting.A pattern appears

The patterns in different regions slowed at different rates, fading first in the midbrain regions and last in the frontal cortex. The thalamus was active both in the first and the second phase. Considering the thalamus is the brain’s coordinating centre for all sensory signals, it makes sense that it would be active in the first phase. Incoming sensory signals go on to higher brain regions from the cortex. So it also served the role of handing off the baton, so to speak, and thus essayed a sort of bridging role across timescales.The new study is the first to report this sort of differential pattern across different parts of the brain vis-à-vis emotions. At this point, it is not possible to say with any certainty what the implications are for the brain’s cortical and mid-brain areas.With computational models of neuron firing activity in the mouse and the mouse’s behaviour following the eye puff assay, the team found that the timescale of neural activity was an important factor that shaped the emotional response.Indeed, if the sensory signals dissipate before the brain has a chance to integrate the information, the person won’t be able to learn the lesson: “protect yourself from that obnoxious thing”. On the other hand, if brain activity is more strongly coupled to the fast and slow phases that Deisseroth & co. observed, such activity also lasts longer than normal, causing its own problems. Overstabilised brain states have been correlated with depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, all of which cause people to experience uninterrupted or mistimed thoughts and emotions.Beyond the binary of health and disease, the fast and slow phases of brain activity highlighted in the study could reveal the fundamentals of information processing in the brain. People differ in how their brains process information about their environment — in turn a product of their genetic makeup and their upbringing in their formative years.

Why do we have emotions? For now it may be more gainful to flip the question: what would happen if we didn’t have them?

In the absence of an instinctive reaction that our emotions afford us, the brain’s response would be based entirely on risk-benefit analyses, which can be very time consuming.

After a brief pause, physical bank branches are back

Over the last two years, India’s private sector banks have been expanding their physical presence. The two biggest lenders — HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank — opened 3,284 and 1,341 branches, respectively, between 2022 and 2024. Both lenders also increased their workforce, adding 40,305 and 9,204 employees in FY 2024, respectively.In FY25, however, HDFC Bank added only 994 new employees, while ICICI Bank cut back its workforce by 6,723. The juxtaposition of expanding physical bank presence with a recent slowdown in hirings places Indian banking in new, uncharted waters.

Traditionally, the presence of physical bank branches allowed banks to screen and monitor their borrowers. Proximity to their borrowers made it easier for bankers to gather ‘soft’ information and monitor their loans closely, especially for loans collateralised by movable properties.In a seminal paper published in 2002, Mitchell Peterson and Raghuram Rajan demonstrated that this model underwent a fundamental shift in the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s, as banks adopted credit scoring technologies. Information technologies could substitute for the soft information based on local interactions.

The average distance between a bank branch and its borrowers increased as a result. Similarly, the recent wave of digitisation in India has also fundamentally changed the need for close physical proximity between banks and their borrowers.Over the last few years, the digital revolution in India has streamlined various administrative and logistical tasks related to banking. Consequently, ease of access has improved for many individuals across the country. With the smartphone and 4G revolution ensuring affordable Internet access to the most remote corners, multiple banking services, including account creation, verification (via eKYC), and transactions (via UPI) are now possible online. Given this transformation, are traditional brick-and-mortar bank branches becoming obsolete?From the turn of the century, physical



bank branches expanded significantly. Between 2008 and 2023, the number of commercial branches doubled from 25 per 1,000 sq km to 50. Concurrently, accessibility also improved, with the number of commercial bank branches per 1,00,000 adults rising from 9 to 14. The chart shows the bank branch availability over time.Both per capita and geographical branch growth have stabilised since 2016. This physical expansion was accompanied by financial inclusion schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, which aimed to provide a bank account to every Indian citizen.

According to the Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey, conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation, 94.6% of adults have an active bank account (2022-23).

This phase of expansion was followed by a slowdown. Between 2020 and 2022, the rate of bank office closures saw a sharp uptick, despite new branches opening every quarter. Consequently, net bank branch openings fell sharply and stayed flat throughout this period. The chart shows the bank branch openings, closures and net additions over timeThis was a period of branch consolidation, with many small branches being subsumed into larger ones.

When a tiger killed Shanti: What makes women vulnerable to tiger attacks in Corbett

Shanti Devi was attacked by a tiger, metres away from her home at Okhaldhunga in the Ramnagar forest division near Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand. Villagers say the 47-year-old was on a tree, cutting leaves for her horse, and was climbing down when the tiger caught her by the foot. Around 5.30 pm, her husband found her decapitated body and her sandals in the shrubs. "Tigers have never attacked us before... They prey on goats and dogs; not humans. In fact, children from our village have to walk five km to reach the inter-college (for Classes 11 and 12). We often hear the tigers roar and it shakes the floor, but we never feared for our lives until now," says Shanti's mother-in-law Anuli Devi, 70.

Two days after the incident, the tiger was captured by the Forest Department and sent to the Corbett Rescue Centre. Since 2017, Ramnagar division has seen 12 deaths in attacks by tigers, of which seven were of women. In 2024, five deaths were reported near the Corbett buffer area — four of these victims were women and three of them from Dhela, a village in the buffer zone of the Corbett National Park. So far this year, there have been two deaths in tiger attacks in two days. Ramnagar Divisional Forest Officer Diganth Nayak says women often fall prey to tigers because they venture into forests to collect fodder for their cattle and firewood. "When women sit on their haunches to pick firewood and cut grass, tigers mistake them for prey," he says. The Corbett National Park, spread over 1,288.31 square kilometres and three districts — Pauri, Nainital, and Almora — is home to 260 tigers, making this the park with the highest density of tigers in the country, according to the Status of Tiger report 2022. According to data provided by Saket Badola, director, national park, there are nearly 46 villages with a combined population of 2,939 near the Corbett buffer zone. While a few youth are employed in homestays and resorts, most of the villages surrounding the park rely on dairy and subsistence farming. But with the produce of rice and wheat barely enough for their families and with frequent instances of animals raiding their crops, the villagers turn to the forests for firewood and minor forest produce. Since most of the men have migrated to the cities for work, it leaves the women to shoulder the foraging responsibilities.

tiger attack, jim corbett, uttarakhand news, indian express Villagers are seen bringing firewood from the jungle. According to officials, since men have migrated to cities in search of work, women are left to shoulder the foraging responsibilities. On a January morning, the forest department called a meeting at Dhela, a village on the road to one of the eight Corbett zones, to resolve this human-animal conflict and to find an answer to a prickly problem: how to stop women from venturing into the forests. At the meeting, Corbett Deputy Director Rahul Mishra's intervention — that legal action would be taken against villagers venturing into the forest — is met with anger. "Our women go to the forest for livelihood and it can't be stopped. If you threaten to send us to jail, we will gladly go," a man seethes.

DFO Nayak shoots back, "You say you have been going to the forest for 20 years. Back then, there were 80 tigers. Now, there are over 260. We have to change our traditions. Nothing is more important than life." DFO Nayak finally tables a resolution: "Women can go out to fetch firewood, but in groups of 15, twice a week from each village, and our forest officials will accompany them. This will decrease the chances of an encounter." The officials also promise to bring fodder to the villages at nominal rates of Rs 2.50 per kg.

Why do women enter the forest? When the meeting ends, the women are the first to leave. Prema Mehra, 43, says the forest officials will stop accompanying them after two days. "They are more scared than us," she says, and her group of 10 women laugh loudly.

Mimicking the DFO at the meeting, she says, "Is going to the forest for firewood more important than her life? Of course we need firewood and where will we get that but from the forests? See, my husband earns Rs 400 a day as a driver at the safari park, but he does not get a ride daily. We have 1.2 acres on which we grow wheat but that's barely enough for us. Anyway, whatever little we grow has reduced drastically as animals keep raiding our crops. We cannot afford heaters or blowers. Firewood keeps us warm, heats our water, and helps us cook food. The government has given us gas cylinders, but who will pay us for refilling it every 20 days." Forest officials, however, say the women often illegally sell the firewood to homestays and resorts for Rs 300-400 during the winter season, when agriculture is on the wane.

Though, under the Forest Rights Act, villagers are allowed to collect and use minor forest produce, this is restricted to self-consumption. Only the Uttarakhand Forest Department Corporation is allowed to engage in the sale of timber, firewood, bamboo and minor minerals for public and industries. "We have been asking the resorts not to buy from the villagers and have told them to pro-



duce the receipts of purchase from the Forest Corporation, yet, the practice continues," he says. Dr K Ramesh, scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India and Adjunct Professor at the University of British Columbia, says the problem requires more than just policing and compensation when a casualty happens. "The government should figure out a regional land-use strategy with zoning — mark out human-use areas, core wildlife habitat, buffer zones, and corridors," he says. A kilometre away from the meeting ground, 76-year-old Devaki Devi is cutting grass on her small piece of land — fodder for her cow that's cooped up in a dilapidated shed. "Today, I will manage with this, but soon, we will have to go again to the forest," she says. A widow, Devaki's six sons work in towns and cities in other states. The burden of venturing out into the forests for foraging has been disproportionately shouldered by women over centuries. In conservationist Jim Corbett's fabled Man-Eaters of Kumaon, he mentions several instances of how women were vulnerable to tiger attacks as it was "their duty to fetch grass". During one of his days out on the lookout for a 'man-eater tiger', Corbett writes of a woman he saw in the forest. "Was there no man? Yes, there was a man, but he was in the fields ploughing, and in any case, it was the duty of women to fetch water," says the book published in 1944.

Shanti's mother-in-law Anuli says, "We have to go to the forest for our livelihood. We don't have a job. I had three goats which were eaten by the tiger once. The only source of income was the horse, but after Shanti's death, we gave it away," Anuli says. A neighbour, Muni Devi, says, "We have not stepped out of our homes in four days. We will not leave for two more days, uske baad phir se chaalu hoga (after that, we will go back to the forest)." In 2007, the Forest Department came up with a plan to stop women from venturing into the forest — teaching them to stitch tote bags that they can sell at the Corbett souvenir shop. This was in addition to a souvenir shop that was opened in 2022 and a bakery a year later. However, villagers say the tote bag scheme has been stuck for the last three years. A hike in compensation for deaths caused by animal attacks — in Uttarakhand, it is currency Rs 6 lakh — has been a continuous demand by villagers. They cite the case of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, where governments award Rs 25 lakh in similar situations. Dr Ramesh of the Wildlife Institute of India, however, says compensation schemes are known to be counterproductive. "In Maharashtra, there have been cases of old people being thrown inside forests for families to get compensation money. There need to be long-term solutions. The reasons that drive women to risk their lives need to be studied," he says.

Girls in the villages While it's hard to keep their mothers out, the younger girls in these villages hope they would never have to venture inside the forests.

Though her father dropped out of school after Class 10 and mother after Class 5, Lalita Mehra, 22, has an MSc in Botany. She is now in Dehradun, preparing for an exam that will take her closer to her goal of being a forester. "There were no colleges near our village that offered a PCB combination (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), so I went to Dehradun. When I called my family two days ago, they told me that a man was killed by a tiger three km away from our village. I have been pleading with my mother not to go to the forests," she says. Her sister Babita says that after Class 12, she plans to leave the village to prepare for a defence personnel test. An aunt, she says, was killed in a tiger attack 18 years ago. "We girls will put an end to this practice of going to the forest," she insists. At Okhaldhunga, Shanti Devi's 23-year-old daughter-in-law Kiran says she has never ventured inside the forest. A Bachelor of Pharmacy student, Kiran shakes her head when asked if she goes to the forest. "I will never go. I live in Almora for my studies and visit the village every two weeks. Now with my mother-in-law's death, there is no one at home to look after my father-in-law, so everything is uncertain. But I am certain that I do not want to do this work. I will look for a job in the local anganwadi after graduation," she says.

The challenges facing India's medical profession

Every year, India celebrates National Doctors' Day on July 1 in honour of Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, one of the country's greatest physicians, educators, and statesmen. His birth anniversary and death anniversary both fall on July 1, making the day a fitting tribute to a life dedicated entirely to medicine and public service. Dr BC Roy exemplified the ideals of compassion, professional excellence, and selfless service—values that continue to inspire generations of doctors. Indian tradition has long held physicians in the highest regard. The ancient concept of 'Vaidyo Narayano Hari' reflects the belief that a physician is next only to God, for they restore health and preserve life. Even in today's era of artificial intelligence, robotic surgery, and precision medicine, the essence of this philosophy remains unchanged. Whether it is reopening a blocked coronary artery during a life-threatening heart attack, performing emergency surgery, or making a timely diagnosis that saves a patient, doctors leave an indelible mark on countless lives. Their contributions endure far beyond hospital walls through the lives they save and the families they restore. The extraordinary commitment displayed by the medical fraternity in both the public and private sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic earned well-deserved recognition globally. Doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers stood at the forefront despite enormous personal risk. However, once the applause faded, many of the longstanding challenges confronting the profession remained unresolved. Perhaps the most pressing concern

today is the health of doctors themselves. Young medical professionals work exceptionally long hours under immense physical and emotional stress. The journey from medical school to independent practice is significantly longer and more demanding than in most other professions. Constant examinations, residency pressures, demanding work schedules, and the race to establish a career contribute to alarmingly high rates of burnout, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues among doctors. Caring for those who care for society must become a national priority, and there is a strong need for both professional and public discourse in this arena. The practice of medicine has also become increasingly competitive. The era of the family physician and small independent clinics is gradually giving way to large corporate healthcare chains. Many practitioners find themselves compelled to invest heavily in branding and social media simply to remain visible. With increasing corporate consolidation and rising foreign investment in healthcare, individual practitioners often struggle to sustain independent practice. Whether the traditional family physician model will eventually regain its place in our society remains uncertain. Alongside these professional pressures are disturbing realities such as violence against doctors, fear of medicolegal cases, and the growing number of physicians who lose their lives prematurely due to chronic stress, overwork, and occupational hazards.

‘Seeing his body might weaken my resolve’– In Chhattisgarh, a man’s legal fight to give his father a Christian burial

It's been three weeks since his pastor father died, but Ramesh Baghel, 45, a farmer from village Chhindwada in Chhattisgarh's Maoist-hit Bastar has resolved not to see or move the body — kept at a mortuary in Jagdalpur — until he fulfils the former's wish: of being buried in the village graveyard next to the rest of his family. On January 18, over 10 days after his father Subhash breathed his last, Baghel moved the Supreme Court asking to be allowed to have him buried in the village graveyard — a move intensely opposed by various village groups. His appeal to the court, which is expected to give its ruling on January 27, came after the Chhattisgarh High Court dismissed his petition on January 9 saying it "may cause unrest and disharmony in public at large".

Chhindwada, the village where Ramesh's father Subhash — a local pastor — was born and raised in, is a tribal majority village of 6,450 people, according to government records. While 6,000 of these are tribal families, the remaining residents belong to the Dalit Mahara caste — including Ramesh's family. According to various estimates, the village has over 100 Christians — mostly Mahara but also tribals. For just over a year, however, the issue of burials appears to have divided the village, with many village residents that The Indian Express spoke to considering Christian funerary rituals as posing a threat to the "Rudi Parampara" — a set of tribal sentiments, traditions and cultural values. On February 7, 2024, the Gram Sabha passed a resolution forbidding a village burial for those who have given up the Rudi Parampara and converted to other religions. The resolution wasn't limited to tribal converts but also applied to Dalit Maharas such as Baghel. As a result, Ramesh now faces "social non-cooperation" — a punitive punishment the resolution prescribes for "violators". "Life has become a nightmare," Ramesh, a school dropout who travelled 450 km to attend the hearing at Chhattisgarh HC, says. "Slowly, people stopped coming to the (now-closed) grocery store that my father had opened and I can't get labourers to work in my farm.... I live in a joint family with my wife, two brothers, their wives and six children, but now we have no source of income." Tribal belief versus religious identity According to village residents, Ramesh's grandfather Lakheshwar and his family — including his father — were among the village's first Christian converts back in 1980s. Ramesh talks about the reformation his father underwent since they converted to Christianity. "My father and grandfather were both alcoholics. Villagers tell me my father used to beat and abuse my mother. But due to Christianity, they came in touch with good people and slowly their bad habits stopped. We saw a massive change in my father, and our family progressed from having a cycle to owning cars," he says.

The village has between 7-10 graveyards — one for each of its varied caste groups. A visit to one of the graveyards shows a number of Christian headstones. Among those are Ramesh's grandfather Lakheshwar, who died in 2007, and a paternal aunt who died in 2015. "They were given Christian burials. No one objected back then," he says. Through a 13-point resolution last February, Chhindwada Gram Sabha forbade village burials for anyone who does not follow the Rudi Parampara, and warned of "social non-cooperation" and a fine to those villagers not only seen as challenging village traditions but also those "working" with such alleged transgressors. As a result, there was a row over the burial of a Christian woman, Pachami Bais, with the standoff only ending when the family agreed to bury her without a cross on her tombstone. Sukram Kashyap, 63, a government teacher whose wife is the sarpanch of Chhindwada 2 — one of three villages that comes under the Chhindwada Gram Panchayat — says the resolution was aimed at "protecting the tribal identity". "Although there has been a growing



resentment against religious conversions for years, the majority began to feel it when the converted villagers, including tribals, stopped participating in our 'Rudi Parampara' (cultural and traditional activities) and even stopped believing in our 'Dev Gudi' (the tribal sacred stone), worshipped by tribals as well as Maharas. They stopped taking our prasad (offerings) and refused to attend festivals and marriage rituals... The village finally decided that since they gave up their identity and accepted a new one, they must not be allowed to use our graveyard either," Kashyap says. The second flashpoint came last October, when Eshwar Nag, a Christian native of Chhindawada, died in Sukma's Tongapal village, and his cousin Jaldev Andhkury, a 42-year-old pastor from the village, buried the body there. This led to a heated argument with villagers, and Andhkury and six of his family were eventually arrested. "We were in jail for four days. I still don't know the charges against me. But the villagers have approached the high court to get my brother's body exhumed." Jaldev told The Indian Express. The Bastar Police confirm the arrest, but claim it was "preventive custody".

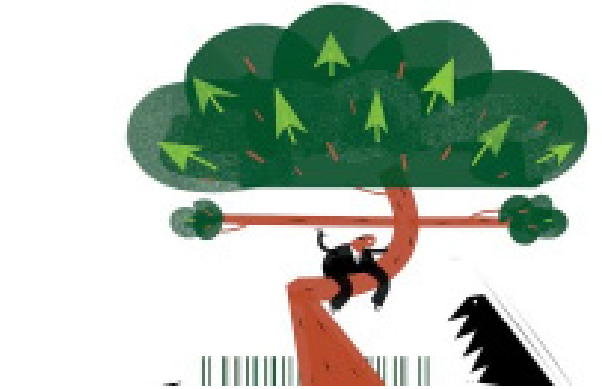
The issue once again resurfaced after Subhash's death this month. When word of his demise spread, a crowd — including Sukram Kashyap — gathered at his house to prevent his burial. "One sarpanch pati told me: 'You are Christian and so you cannot bury your father here' and the police were called. But even in their presence, the villagers warned me against burying my father. The police as well as tehsildar supported them," he says. But police claim it "never picked sides". "We heard a Christian person has died and rushed to the spot and ensured no untoward incident occurs," one officer said. Tehsildar Deepika Dehari, meanwhile, claimed that authorities had "no role in it".

On their part, Christian groups such as the Grahmin Isai Seva Samiti and the Progressive Christian Alliance see this as "the right-wing's attempts to provoke tribal sentiments and cause communal issues". They are also seeking a burial space for Christians at the block level. "They want to divide our village on religious lines," Grahmin Isai Seva Samiti vice-president Nukesh Baghel says. But Chhindwada 1 Deputy Sarpanch and Bharatiya Janata Party leader Rameshwar Nag dismisses these allegations. Instead, he associates the issue with tribal rights and reservation. "Tribals don't see themselves as part of any religion, although there are some similarities with Hinduism... Villagers here don't like that some people have given up in the tribal culture and have forgotten our ancestors, which will ultimately take away our tribal identity and affect our rights under Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) of 1996 and the reservation that comes with it," he says. But for Ramesh, the row has already extracted its toll — it has severely affected his mental health and cost him close friends. "My childhood friends aren't speaking to me. Since my father's death, I've had many sleepless nights," he says. "I have no appetite and every interview with the press brings back bad memories."

Our tax system retards growth. It's time for an overhaul

The month of January is named after the ancient Roman God Janus, who is depicted as having two faces — one facing forward and the other backward. This symbolises the importance of looking back at the year gone by and simultaneously looking ahead at the new unfolding year. It's a time for deep introspection and understanding the lessons learnt so that the coming year can be planned for course correction. Looking back at 2024, the decisions taken at the 55th GST Council are a symptom of slipping back to the old harmful habits of chronic tinkering with individual rates, promptly overruling any adverse Supreme Court ruling and very high rates of tax that on the one hand suppress demand and dampen growth, and on the other, are an incentive for tax evasion and a thriving parallel/black economy.

In 2014, the late Arun Jaitley termed retrospective taxation "tax terrorism". Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also condemned this practice on more than one occasion. But the 55th GST Council has now recommended a retrospective tax amendment to nullify a recent Supreme Court judgment that would have resulted in granting input tax credit to warehouses and infrastructure projects. The nature of the dispute, the judgment and the impact of the proposed retrospective amendment from July 1, 2017 merit a separate article. What is retrograde is the message being sent to the business world: We will first deny you relief, if you still fight us for several years and up to the Supreme Court and succeed, we will simply reduce the judgment to a nullity by a retrospective amendment. If we win in court, fine; if we lose, we will still win by a retrospective amendment. Sadly, the GST department may succeed in recovering a few additional crores of GST by the amendment. But the collateral damage to India's reputation as an investment decision is staggering. Apart from disrespecting your own Supreme Court, the message conveyed is the absence of the rule of law. The Vodafone verdict was a golden opportunity to showcase India as a rare developing nation where court verdicts are respected and the rule of law prevails. The ill-advised retrospective amendment to nullify that judgment resulted in an international award of Rs 8000 crore, which India had to pay. It is time to have a new year's resolution: No more retrospective amendments. The fatal flaw in the functioning of the GST Council is the single-minded focus on revenue maximisation. The department repeatedly has news items published that only report tax evasion — often with exaggerated claims. No attempt is made to rationalise rates, cut down complicated notifications and circulars, check



arbitrary and exaggerated demands through show-cause notices and create a fair and impartial appellate system. It is morally unfair and economically disastrous to levy GST on various goods and services but deny them input tax credit. In particular, the GST Council must seriously re-think the levying of GST on lease rentals, on assignment of leasehold rights, and joint development rights as these are neither goods nor services. This will be a huge boost to the real estate sector and, indeed, the economy if there is no GST on any activity other than works' contracts. It is paradoxical to speak of affordable housing but make it unaffordable by multiple taxes. It is necessary to have careful empirical studies of the impact of high taxes on consumption. Will lowering of taxes stimulate demand, eventually resulting in larger tax collection? Will lowering of taxes enable Indian companies to compete with similar Chinese products? For example, why cannot there be a single rate of 12 per cent on all hotels and restaurants instead of multiple rates based on room tariffs and other parameters? Will a maximum rate of 18 per cent on cement reduce the cost of affordable housing and infrastructure projects? High rates of tax, a complicated system of exemption and concessions, and an overarching focus on revenue collection were the hallmarks of our direct and indirect tax system from 1950 to 1990. This socialist mindset crippled the Indian economy and led to the 1991 liberalisation that gave a boost to the economy. Looking back over the last few years, there are several signs that we are once again getting back to the old retrograde system that is a paradise for lawyers, chartered accountants and revenue officers but a nightmare for businesses. The adverse consequences are clear: Imports from China have increased from \$70 billion in 2018-19 to \$100 billion in 2023-24 .

FWICE’s selective outrage: Ban on Ranveer Singh, but no action on 242 editors’ 2023 plea



Hours after the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) announced its ban on Ranveer Singh on Monday, Shweta Venkat called out their selective outrage. The editor, best known for films like Gangs of Wasseypur (2012), Newton (2017), and Haseen Dillruba (2021), has claimed that the FWICE has taken swift action against Ranveer, acting on a complaint by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani’s Excel Entertainment, but is still conveniently sitting on what 242 editors’ joint grievance from three years ago.FWICE sitting on editors’ grievance from 2023

“It has been a while since industry editors have been trying to sort issues like pay slabs, pending dues, and working conditions. We needed a dialogue with the producers,” Shweta tells SCREEN. A few of them got together to meet the FWICE, and were assured of a meeting with the producers body. This was in 2023, but no progress on the same has materialized so far.“There was also a letter sent to them, signed by 242 editors working in the industry, outlining the issues. But there has been no communication or revert post that meeting,” adds

Is Ranveer Singh ban legal? Its impact on his next Pralay, and why Farhan didn’t go to court

“A superstar is not above the law,” declared BN Tiwari, the president of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), while addressing the media in Mumbai on Monday over Ranveer Singh’s unceremonious exit from Farhan Akhtar’s directorial Don 3 this past December. The film body has now asked its 4 lakh-plus members — including technicians and workers — from working with Ranveer until he appears before them personally to resolve the issue. Ranveer is all set to roll out his next, Pralay, in the months to come and the directive can make the process of assembling crew extremely complicated, making it akin to a ban.

Can FWICE really ban Ranveer Singh? But the question is, does the FWICE really have the legal authority to issue a “non-cooperation directive” to its members and prohibit them from collaborating with Ranveer in any professional capacity? “FWICE is a federation of craft associations, not a statutory regulator. Its authority is consensual and confined to its members,” Sanjay Vasudevan, a media and entertainment lawyer at Bay Counsel LLP, tells SCREEN. He argues that since Ranveer is not even a member of the FWICE, he “is outside its jurisdiction, and the directive has no binding force against him or third parties”.Does Ranveer need to engage with the FWICE?

For the same reason, Ranveer isn’t even legally bound to engage with the FWICE for discussions. The film body stated that as per its rules, it sent three periodical reminders to the actor every 10 days, inviting to present his side of the story. But it’s exactly that — an invitation — and by no stretch, any form of summon. “Its invitation is a request, and declining a request from a non-authoritative body attracts no liability. Ranveer is well within his rights to not indulge in the conversations,” argues Vasudevan.“Having said that, it’s always more prudent to engage with the other side. The reality is there are so many competing stakeholders. When indifference seeps in, then there tends to be such a reactive response. Selective, controlled engagement may shorten the dispute, but it’s a commercial choice, and not a legal duty. The ‘no one is above the law’ framing is rhetorical, not legal,” he adds.

Do FWICE members need to cooperate with the film body?

“Essentially, the trade union in question is seeking its members to not cooperate with the person because he’s acted adversely in the interests of not only the producers, but also the workmen working on the film. This doesn’t come as much from legal authority as from a union which has a certain leverage,” explains Vasudevan.He adds that while there are members within the union who can choose not to act in tandem with the union, their repercussions at the most would be rejection of membership from taking an adverse position. “Outside of that, there’s no legal sanctity per se,” asserts Vasudevan. However, he also adds that the FWICE can benefit from reconsideration of such a directive because it’s an “ethical dilemma” for the workers to comply with their union’s ask despite their livelihood depending on working in a film headlined by Ranveer Singh.

“Ultimately, all these unions are here to fight the good fight for their workers, but their reactions can’t be disproportionate to the actual harm caused,” states Vasudevan, adding, “Such a directive should be issued in a way that in the event that the workmen, in the event of working with him to earn their livelihood, should not face any ramifications for doing so. They should not be disqualified because the membership offers them certain privileges. That’s something to be sensitive about as well.”

Can the ban impact Ranveer Singh’s next, Pralay?

Ranveer has already committed to his next project, Jai Mehta’s zombie apocalypse thriller Pralay. The film, mounted on a huge budget, is expected to go on floors this year. Would then the producers — Applause Entertainment and Hansal Mehta and Sahil Saigal’s True Story Films — be liable to follow the directive issued by the FWICE? “The risk is operational (technicians and crew declining to service the shoot), not legal. There is no statutory mechanism to penalize producers for engaging the actor,” points out Vasudevan.“The reality with how a union operates is all basis cooperation. If they elect to not cooperate, they can do so legally. But again, the union can be

Shweta. She also called the FWICE’s ban on Ranveer “cute” on her Instagram Stories, and asked why no action has been taken yet on their plea from three years ago.“When film editors had come to you for help setting up a dialogue with producers, where was this efficiency? It has been 3 years. Or maybe we weren’t cool enough. Basically producer ya actor bano (become either a producer or an actor),” she wrote. SCREEN also reached out to FWICE President BN Tiwari, but hasn’t received a response yet.

Why has FWICE banned Ranveer Singh? FWICE issued a non-cooperation directive to all its members, which go up to over 5 lakh, to not work with Ranveer Singh in any capacity until he personally meets them to amicably resolve the issue. This past December, the actor allegedly walked out of Don 3 three weeks before the commencement of the shoot overseas. Excel Entertainment has demanded damages of Rs 45 crore from the actor to indemnify them of all the pre-production costs incurred after he agreed to do the film.The FWICE also claimed that despite sending three periodical reminders every 10 days to him, Ranveer hasn’t appeared before them. His representative argued that the FWICE doesn’t enjoy any jurisdiction over the matter, prompting the film body to take a strong stand against the actor. It also sought the cooperation of producers body to not employ Ranveer in any capacity till the issue is resolved.Ranveer’s team issued a statement in response on Monday evening.

“Throughout the recent developments surrounding Don 3, he has consciously chosen to maintain silence, believing that professional discussions and personal equations are best handled with dignity, maturity and mutual respect. While several narratives and speculations have surfaced over time, Ranveer has never considered it necessary to respond publicly or contribute to conjecture. His focus remains firmly on his work and the commitments ahead,” it stated.



reactive. There could be some ramifications that Applause and True Story Films may also face,” he adds. While the FWICE warned the producers that they may face losses if they go ahead with Ranveer’s projects, Vasudevan claims “the statement is just a warning, not a legal prohibition”. But he also underlines the other side of the coin. “While one has the right, the other may not be under the obligation to work with you. It’s a little bit of a matrix,” adds Vasudevan.

Why has Farhan Akhtar not gone to court? The usual remedy, as one has witnessed with similar cases in the past, is when an actor walks out of a project (for instance, Sara Ali Khan in Kedarnath), the producers usually send them a legal notice. However, since Farhan Akhtar-Ritesh Sidhwani-led Excel Entertainment hasn’t taken that route yet, there’s reason to suspect that they may not have a strong case given how their contract with Ranveer was shaped.“Contractually, when Excel and Ranveer entered into an agreement, there might be clauses which excluded the intervention of trade unions and other such bodies. We encourage parties to cooperate with the respective trade unions, but sometimes there’s a caveat that waives the interference of any such union. I anticipate there was such language in the contract, but we’d be able to arrive at that only once the contract is made public,” states Vasudevan.

He also hints at the possibility of the absence of a kill fee clause, which is a stipulated sum the actor commits to pay the production house on voluntary exit. “Now, the problem might be their lack of fortitude from a legal standpoint to envision such a walkout. They might have had loosely defined termination rights,” argued Vasudevan. Excel Entertainment has previously collaborated with Ranveer on two successful projects — Zoya Akhtar’s Dil Dhadakne Do (2015) and Gully Boy (2019) — and had also signed a three-film deal with the actor.“The indemnity provision is sometimes subjected to a cap of liability. Now, if the liability was capped for Ranveer to a certain amount, regardless of what happened, you can’t quite make a claim beyond that,” says Vasudevan, highlighting another contentious clause. “There’s generally an exclusion of indirect damages. Have the parties contracted in way that tried to account for such a situation? If they had not, then they might be on a stickier wicket. And that’s perhaps why they’re not immediately legally enforcing it,” he adds.But he’s confident that despite the possible disadvantage, Excel Entertainment could still go to court. “What a good lawyer would argue is to enforce not just the letter, but the spirit of the contract. That’s the more challenging case to make if the contract reads in any other kind of way,” he argues. “It’s not the first time an actor has walked out of a film. You can see there’s a rhetoric throughout that he was always satisfied with the script. The reason they’re trying to build that narrative to make a case that he’s left the film out of convenience and for frivolous reasons rather than something substantive. Ranveer might make the case there was a cause, but we can’t extrapolate that unless there’s further comment,” adds Vasudevan.

Can Ranveer Singh take FWICE to court? Speaking of taking to court, even if Excel Entertainment chooses not to go down that path, Vasudevan feels Ranveer has “some remedies” when it comes to the ban imposed by the FWICE. “You have the constitutional right to be able to carry out any trade of your choice, so long as it’s legal.

‘It will destroy you’: Shah Rukh, Akshay’s warning to Honey Singh about his drug abuse



Yo Yo Honey Singh has opened up about the emotional emptiness he experienced even at the peak of his fame, admitting that despite becoming one of India’s biggest music stars, he was deeply unhappy from within.During a conversation on the ABtalks podcast, the singer looked back at the height of his popularity in the early 2010s, and admitted that success never truly brought him peace.“Even when I was successful, when I became Yo Yo Honey Singh, it was crazy days in India if you see, 13 years back. Still, I was broken from inside. I don’t know why. I was in darkness. I was not enlightened. Now I feel enlightened,” he said.’I used to call myself God’

Honey Singh further admitted that during the peak of his fame between 2011 and 2014, he had completely lost himself in success, money, and substance abuse.“No, I was not happy. I was at my peak in 2013 and 2014. I was not in my senses. My ideology was different at that time. When I made it, I used to walk differently, talk differently, and disrespect everyone. I used to think that I did it all. I even used to call myself God. I was making money and getting successful at a very young age, and while doing that, I was also doing drugs. I was in a very demonic state of mind. I didn’t like that version of myself.”The singer also rejected the idea that fame or the entertainment industry itself was responsible for his downfall. Instead, he blamed his own actions and mindset.“I don’t blame music or fame for this, I blame myself. I think there is no dark side to music and fame. If you are dark inside, you will spoil your life no matter where you are — not just in music and fame, but in anything.”

Honey Singh also spoke warmly about some of the biggest stars he worked with during his rise, including Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan, and Akshay Kumar.I don’t want to blame the entertainment industry for anything. I got the chance to share screen space with legends and have personal access to their lives at a very young age. People like Shah Rukh Khan,

Perfect Crown row explained: Why IU, Byeon Woo-seok’s hit K-drama faces suspension



A petition demanding the removal of Perfect Crown from all streaming platforms has crossed 52,000 signatures, formally triggering a National Assembly review of the historical distortion controversy surrounding IU and Byeon Woo-seok’s hit drama.

It had all the ingredients for a successful Korean drama. Perfect Crown, starring IU and Byeon Woo-seok, aired on MBC in the first half of 2026 and drew some of the strongest ratings a Korean drama has seen this year. Its final episode, which aired on May 16, recorded a nationwide rating of 13.8 percent, marking a series high. Fans were invested, the cast was celebrated, and the show had clearly connected with a large audience.Then the controversy arrived, and it had nothing to do with the performances or the storyline. It had to do with a crown and a chant, and what both of those things meant to Korean viewers who knew their history.

Within days of the backlash erupting, the director had issued a public apology, a pop-up store tied to the drama had been cut short, the script book publisher was revising disputed terminology, and the production was facing the possibility of having to return the government funding it had already received. For a show that had just finished on a ratings high, it was a remarkably swift and serious unravelling.

What went wrong with Perfect Crown?

Perfect Crown is set in a fictional version of present-day South Korea where a constitutional monarchy still exists and the Joseon royal family never dissolved. Byeon Woo-seok plays Grand Prince I-an, who ascends the throne in the course of the story, while IU stars alongside him. The premise required the production to build an entire royal world from scratch, filling it with costumes, rituals, and ceremonial language. The choices they made in doing so became the problem.The backlash focused on two specific moments from the coronation sequence,

Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar — they are such simple people, there is no darkness in them.”According to Honey Singh, several stars had repeatedly warned him about his lifestyle and addictions.

“They used to observe me and tell me to stay away from what I was doing because it was wrong. Especially Shah Rukh Khan and Akshay Kumar. Shah Rukh Khan told me many times, ‘This is going to spoil you, finish you, and destroy you.’”Honey Singh on divorce, loneliness and losing friendsThe singer also spoke about his divorce and why he eventually became comfortable with loneliness after his illness.“You are alone, you have to be alone. My first marriage and divorce were a different case. When I got sick, she was there in the same house. But when I decided to move out, we had conflicts and got separated.”

Honey Singh said his years of isolation changed the way he looked at relationships and attachment.“Since then, I felt that I have to be alone, and now I love being alone because you came alone and you will go alone. I am in a state right now that even if everyone leaves me, including people without whom I thought I could never live, I will still be okay. I am prepared for it because I have already seen the trailer for seven years.”Recalling how people disappeared from his life during his lowest phase, Honey Singh said only one childhood friend stayed by his side.

“When I was Yo Yo Honey Singh, 40 boys and friends used to walk with me everywhere. There was always a huge entourage. But when I got sick, everyone left. Only one childhood friend stayed. Now after my comeback, everybody is coming back, but I have realised that ultimately I have to be alone.”Honey Singh calls Mahesh Bhatt ‘the greatest philosopher’The singer also shared his unconventional views on books and philosophy, revealing that he prefers learning directly from conversations rather than reading.“I have never read any book in my life. I don’t believe in reading somebody else’s ideology or thinking which has been edited so many times. I want to meet people and understand their ideology through conversations, not books.”He further revealed that filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt is among the people he admires the most intellectually.

At the peak of his fame, Honey Singh enjoyed massive popularity and worked with several leading Bollywood stars before suddenly disappearing from public life due to mental health struggles and substance abuse issues.The singer was married to Shalini Talwar, but the couple later separated and officially divorced in 2023 following legal disputes and allegations made during their separation.Disclaimer: This article discusses personal experiences with mental health struggles, isolation, and substance abuse. If you or someone you know is going through a difficult time, experiencing emotional distress, or struggling

both of which carried historical weight that a significant portion of the audience immediately recognised.The first was the headgear. Byeon Woo-seok’s character was shown wearing a guryu myeonryugwan during his coronation, a form of royal headgear which critics noted was historically associated with subordinate kings within the traditional East Asian tributary order. Sovereign rulers such as Chinese emperors were typically represented with a sibi myeonryugwan featuring 12 strands of jade beads, while the nine-stranded guryu version was associated with kings of tributary states acknowledging imperial authority. The king of a fictional independent Korea, in other words, was crowned wearing the headgear historically worn by rulers who answered to a higher power.

The second was a chant. During the coronation, court officials proclaimed “Cheonse,” meaning “Long live for a thousand years,” a phrase historically linked to vassal states, rather than “Manse,” meaning “Long live for ten thousand years,” which has traditionally been used to signify an independent sovereign ruler.

Why this struck such a nerveThis is not a matter of pedantic historical correction. Viewers argued that although the story is set in a fictional 21st-century Korea, the production overlooked how modern audiences might interpret its depiction of Joseon court traditions linked to the East Asian tributary system. For many viewers, these ceremonial elements recalled a historical hierarchy in which Korea appeared subordinate, rather than reinforcing an image of a fully sovereign and independent nation.Korea’s relationship with imperial China is not a subject Koreans take lightly, particularly when it comes to questions of sovereignty and how the country has been historically represented. Put that into a primetime drama with a massive domestic audience and an international streaming reach, and the response was always going to be strong.Director Park Jun-hwa issued a public apology after the backlash escalated. In a statement posted on the production’s official website, the creators said, “We sincerely bow our heads in apology to the many viewers who have supported the drama with affection for the concerns caused by issues surrounding the worldbuilding and historical accuracy.”He further added, “Without any room for excuses, I, representing the production team, bear the greatest responsibility. I apologize to all viewers. Personally, I feel sorry for the actors who have worked hard to create this drama, as I caused them hardship rather than rewarding their efforts. I offer my deepest apologies.”The petition that changed everythingA public petition demanding that MBC pull Perfect Crown off air and remove it from all streaming and video-on-demand platforms has crossed the 50,000-signature mark, the number required under South Korean law for the matter to be taken up by the National Assembly.Filed on the Assembly’s online petition platform, the petition had collected 52,344 signatures as of Tuesday afternoon.The petition accuses Perfect Crown of drawing heavily on Chinese-style costumes, ceremonial language, and court etiquette, and argues that in doing so, the drama reinforces historical narratives associated with China’s Northeast Project, a state-funded academic programme that has long been criticised for appropriating Korean history and culture. Beyond calling for the drama to be taken off air, the petitioner is asking for all related content to be scrubbed from domestic and international platforms. c