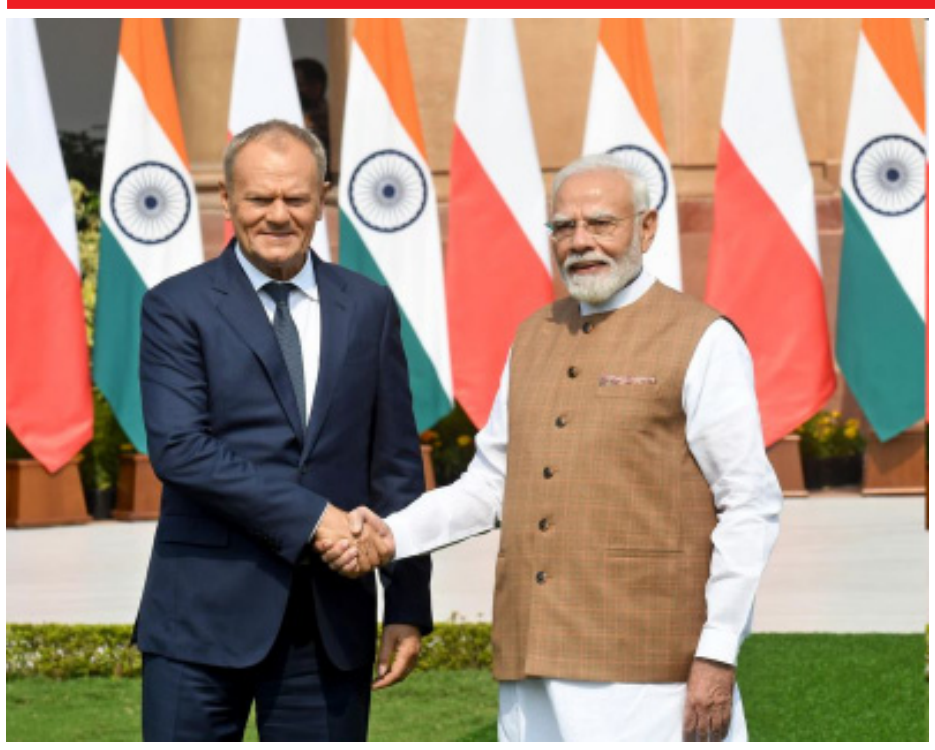
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India, Poland set target to double trade by 2030; eye defence co-production

New Delhi, Oct 22

India and Poland on Thursday agreed to double bilateral trade by 2030 and expand cooperation in defence co-production, critical minerals, semiconductors and artificial intelligence as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Polish counterpart Donald Tusk sought to strengthen their strategic partnership amid global economic and security uncertainties.

The two sides proposed a defence industry dialogue to promote business partnerships, technology transfer and the joint development and production of military equipment. They also identified space, cybersecurity, rare earth processing and battery recycling as priority areas.

Tusk is on a three-day visit to India from October 21-23 and is accompanied by a high-level delegation of around 100 business leaders, in a push to translate the strategic partnership established in August 2024 into tangible economic gains.

In a joint press statement, Modi invited Polish companies to collaborate with Indian partners in strategic sectors. “We have agreed to deepen our ties in the fields of defence, space and nuclear energy. In all these strategic sectors, we invite Polish companies to engage in co-development and co-production with India,” he said.

The leaders welcomed the conclusion of the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement and called for its early signing, ratification and implementation. Modi said it would create opportunities for Indian exports, including machinery, chemicals and engineering goods, while opening avenues for Polish investment in Indian railways, advanced manufacturing, food processing and biotechnology.

Modi also proposed an India-Poland start-up bridge and technology hackathons to encourage collaboration in AI, cybersecurity and fintech. The two countries agreed to explore cooperation in critical minerals, coal gasification, semiconductor development and quantum technologies.

Poland, Tusk noted, could serve as a gateway for Indian companies seeking to expand into central and eastern Europe. The leaders said their complementary economic strengths could help diversify global supply chains.

Next general elections crucial for country, says Telangana CM

Hyderabad, Oct 22 Telangana Chief Minister, A. Revanth Reddy, said on Thursday that the next general elections are crucial for the country and the people's full support to Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, is the need of the hour for all.

Participating in the Pandaga Sayanna Mudiraj birth anniversary celebrations, Chief Minister Reddy urged all to stand in support of LoP Gandhi at the crucial juncture.

He expressed confidence that the majority 'Bahujans' would be empowered only when LoP Gandhi became Prime Minister.

Stating that the 'People's Government' is according top priority to the political empowerment of all backward caste communities, CM Revanth Reddy announced that a Cabinet Sub-Committee would be constituted to study the inclusion of the Mudiraj community in BC-A category.

“Due to lack of accurate data, the Mudiraj community could not be reclassified from the 'BC-D' category to 'BC-A'. We will discuss this issue in the next Cabinet meeting and form a Cabinet Sub-Committee to conduct a comprehensive study on this issue,” he said

CM Reddy noted that the misconceptions and doubts raised by other castes regarding Mudiraj in BC - A category also need to be addressed.

CM Reddy highlighted the BC Census conducted by his government and added that the census data helped every community to raise their voice with greater strength.

"All the communities have been requested to furnish full details to rectify the errors if their population count is not correctly mentioned in the Census," he asserted.

The Chief Minister noted that Mudiraj community constitutes the largest population in his Kodangal constituency and the community is known for their trustworthiness.

He recalled that after becoming the Pradesh Congress Committee President, he had appointed Srihari Mudiraj as the District Congress Committee President. He was also given a ticket in the Assembly election and was also made a minister. Neelam Madhu was also given a party ticket to contest in the Lok Sabha elections.



CM Reddy suggested to minister Ponnam Prabhakar to bring to the attention of TPCC President Mahesh Goud to provide an MLC ticket to the Mudiraj community.

He listed out welfare schemes launched for all communities and poorer sections. "While NTR launched rice distribution at two rupees per kilogram, the Congress government is now providing fine quality rice to 3.48 crore people," CM Reddy said.

CM Reddy stated that the welfare schemes launched by former chief ministers NTR, Chandrababu Naidu, Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy and KCR were being continued by his government.

"We have continued the welfare initiatives undertaken by the previous government and building 'Indiramma' houses in every village," he said.

CM Reddy remembered the services of popular Telangana fighters Chakali Ailamma, Doddi Komuraiah, and Pandaga Sayanna and said that the statues of Sayanna and Doddi Komuraiah would be installed on the Tank Bund soon. The CM also recalled Gaddar, and Ande Sri's dedication to the service of society.

The Chief Minister praised Sayanna's fighting spirit who stood against landlords when they attempted to seize his land. "During the Nizam’s rule, feudal lords encroached upon the lands of the poor. It was Sayanna who stood in support of the marginalized and also formed a group against the feudals," he said.

Sayanna is also credited with providing financial assistance for the marriages of daughters from poor families. When Sayanna was arrested by the Nizam’s police, the then-Maharani of Wanaparthy paid a substantial sum to secure his release. Sayanna was murdered and even a century after his death, his songs can still be heard today during the sowing and harvesting seasons, the CM said.

Andhra Deputy CM orders legal action against fake WhatsApp channel

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Thursday ordered legal action against a fake WhatsApp channel operating in the name of ‘Deputy CMO’.

According to a statement from the Deputy Chief Minister’s Office, the WhatsApp channel operating under the name “Deputy CMO, Andhra Pradesh” is not an authorised channel of the Deputy Chief Minister’s Office. “This unauthorised channel is misusing the Office’s identity and circulating misleading information and unrelated content. Such impersonation and the deliberate spread of misinformation are unacceptable and will be dealt with firmly.



An FIR is being initiated, and strict legal action will be pursued against those responsible,” said the statement posted on the ‘X’ handle of the Deputy Chief Minister’s Office.

“The public is strongly advised NOT to trust, follow or circulate content from this fake channel. Please rely exclusively on the officially authorised social media handles and the verified WhatsApp channel of the Deputy Chief Minister’s Office for authentic information and official updates. Misuse of a Government Office’s identity will not be tolerated. Those responsible will be held accountable in accordance with the law,” it added.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Chief Minister has greeted Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah on his birthday. “May you be blessed with good health, strength and a long life to continue serving our nation with dedication. Wishing you many more years of service towards a secure, prosperous and Viksit Bharat,” he said.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has also conveyed his warmest birthday greetings to Amit Shah. “Your unwavering dedication, strong leadership, and tireless efforts for the nation’s security and unity continue to inspire us all. Wishing you good health, happiness, and many more years of service to our great nation,” he said. Minister for Human Resources Development and Information Technology, Nara Lokesh, has also greeted Amit Shah.



Shah signals BJP-SAD alliance in Punjab with ‘NDA govt’ claim ahead of 2027 elections

New Delhi, Oct 22

In remarks that can upend the current electoral equations in Punjab, Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday signalled a possible alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) by saying that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would form the next government in the border state.

“I was in Punjab only the day before. The way drug trade has flourished under the Aam Aadmi Party government there, people have decided that there will be an NDA government in the state in 2027,” Shah said in the presence of Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Delhi Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu. Both Puri and Sandhu contested the Lok Sabha election from Amritsar in Punjab in 2019 and 2024, respectively, and lost to Congress' Gurjit Aujla.

The Home Minister was speaking in Delhi at the launch of multi-crore projects for Yamuna rejuvenation and pledged to clean the river by May 2029. His reference to the formation of an NDA government in Punjab is significant at a time when the party is mostly speaking of contesting all 117 Assembly seats in the state on its own.

Shah’s statement was instantly read as a sign of potential realignment between the BJP and the SAD, which had quit the NDA on September 26, 2020, over the Centre's farm laws. The Tribune has learnt that the BJP is also in touch with leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal Punar Surjit (SAD rebels) and is exploring ways of bringing them on board for a broader coalition.

For the first time in six years, top BJP sources at the Centre, in private conversations, are not ruling out chances of a reunion with the SAD in Punjab. Ground-level surveys and trends are being used to shape the electoral strategy in the state. Even earlier, as The Tribune had reported, BJP president Nitin Nabin had said the alliance issue in Punjab would be assessed when the “time comes”.Signs of a thaw between the two estranged parties have been visible for some time. Recently, SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal reversed the party stand to back the Centre’s delimitation and 33 per cent women’s reservation agenda.

Why India-Bangladesh ties must focus more on Bay of Bengal link



New Delhi: Bangladesh shares a large border with India, across which issues such as smuggling, trafficking, irregular migration and other forms of organised crime require serious attention. However, the two countries also share a maritime link because of their proximity to the Bay of Bengal, according to a new report. Bangladesh is not simply a neighbouring state across India's eastern frontier.It is a gateway to the sea, a bridge to the Northeast and a vital partner in India's attempt to become a more influential power in the Indo-Pacific, according to an article in India Narrative. The article observes that when bilateral relations are viewed primarily through concerns on the land border between the two countries, the approach limits India's own strategic imagination.

It encourages New Delhi to look eastward through the lens of containment instead of opportunity. It gives disproportionate importance to short-term political controversies while neglecting the long-term value of maritime connectivity, energy cooperation, trade, and climate resilience. A maritime-centred relationship would enable India to combine security with connectivity. India must, therefore, retain a firm approach to border security while placing the border inside a much larger strategic framework, that includes the Bay of Bengal which is the country's Eastern Gateway, the article states.It highlights that the Bay of Bengal is increasingly becoming a central arena of India's economic and strategic interests. It connects India's eastern coast with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Southeast Asia. India's geography gives it a natural advantage in this maritime space.

Its eastern coastline, island territories, naval capabilities, ports, and growing commercial networks provide the foundations for regional leadership. India is one of the region's principal geographical and civilisational centres.Bangladesh's growing engagement with China is an important consideration for India. China has expanded its infrastructure, commercial and diplomatic presence across the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh seeks investment, technology and development opportunities from multiple partners. The article further states that India should respond with strategic seriousness, but not with insecurity.Bangladesh will not accept a relationship based on exclusive alignment. It has its own national interests and will continue to engage with different powers. India's answer should be to improve its own performance. It should offer projects that are timely, transparent, financially viable and responsive to Bangladesh's development needs. It should use its natural advantages of proximity, market access, cultural links, energy connections and regional knowledge- to become the partner Bangladesh finds most useful, the article observes.

US-designated terrorist Muhammad Sarwar dies in Lahore



Lahore: Muhammad Sarwar, designated as a global terrorist by the US Treasury Department, died in Pakistan's Lahore on Sunday."Pakistan Markazi Muslim League (PMML) Punjab President Muhammad Sarwar has passed away. He was on his way from home to the mosque to offer prayers when he collapsed and died," a PMML spokesperson said in a statement.The exact cause of his death has not been specified by PMML. However, 24NewsHD TV Channel reported that Sarwar died "due to a head injury sustained after falling down the stairs".

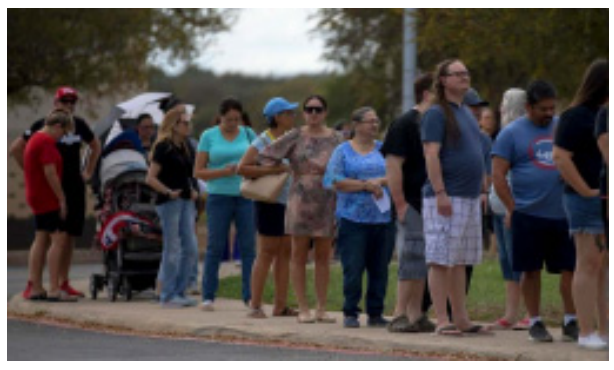
PMML is a political offshoot of Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed's Jamaat-ud-Dawa. Saeed has been in Lahore's Kot Lakhpat Jail since 2019 in multiple terror financing cases, for which he was convicted for multiple years, as per officials.PMML leaders — Khalid Masood Sindhu, Saifullah Qasuri, Hafiz Talha Saeed, Yaqub Sheikh, Khalid Naik Gujjar, and Muzammil Iqbal Hashmi — expressed grief over the loss of their party leader."With the death of Muhammad Sarwar, the party has lost a strong and fearless leader," said Muzammil Iqbal Hashmi.Sarwar's funeral was scheduled to be held at JuD headquarters, Jamia Al-Qadsia, in Lahore's Chuburji area late on Sunday night.In 2016, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Sarwar and Shahid Mahmood, another senior Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leader, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs).The action was aimed at disrupting LeT's fundraising and support networks. OFAC said the two men were designated for acting for or on behalf of the group, adding that all their property and interests in property subject to US jurisdiction were blocked."Sarwar and Mahmood of Lashkar-e-Taiba are responsible for raising and moving funds to support the terrorist group's operations. The action not only aims to expose activities, but also disrupts Lashkar-e-Taiba's financial network and ability to carry out violent terrorist attacks," OFAC said at the time.According to OFAC, Sarwar had been a senior LeT official in Lahore for more than 10 years and had held various leadership roles in the group. He had served as LeT's Lahore chief since at least January 2015.As the group's Lahore chief, Sarwar maintained ties with its senior leaders. Between 2012 and 2013, he worked with LeT's foreign affairs chief Hafiz Abdul Rahman Makki, who asked him for money to cover travel within Pakistan in early 2013, OFAC said.Makki was designated by OFAC under Executive Order 13224 in November 2010.Sarwar's association with LeT dated back to the early 2000s. In his capacity as the group's Lahore emir, he was directly involved in fundraising and used Pakistan's formal financial system to raise and transfer funds on its behalf, OFAC said.In 2008, Sarwar led delegations of businessmen to LeT facilities to solicit donations for the group. By mid-2009, he was one of two officials heading LeT's finance wing in Lahore, according to OFAC.

Indian-American candidates face key US midterm races as early voting begins

Washington: Voters in Texas and Florida's Palm Beach County begin casting early ballots on Monday in races where Indian-American candidates are fighting for state and congressional seats ahead of the November 3 midterms.In Texas, Democrat Pooja Sethi is running in House District 47. A win would make her the first Hindu and the first Indian American in the state Legislature.

Democrat Sandeep Srivastava faces a steeper climb in House District 66 against Republican Matt Shaheen, who chairs the House Elections Committee and won 61.1 per cent in 2024. Srivastava lost a 2024 congressional race to Republican Keith Self 62.5 to 37.5.In Florida's 22nd District, Democrat Pia Dandiya's race against Republican Casey Askar is close to a dead heat. Cook Political Report and Sabato's Crystal Ball rate it a Toss-up, while Inside Elections has it at Tilt Republican. Forecasts are split: PollingForecast gives Dandiya a 56 per cent chance, and Call the Map gives Askar 54 per cent.Palm Beach County early voting runs through November 1 at 28 sites, according to the county elections office.

Outside money keeps pouring in. Federal filings show No Going Back PAC has spent about $3.8 million against Dandiya. Groups backing her, including Progressive Turnout Project, LCV Victory Fund and House Majority PAC, have spent more than $560,000.In Arizona's 1st District, Inside Elections on October 15 moved Democrat Amish Shah's race against Republican Jay Feely from Toss-up to Tilt Democrat. Cook rates it Lean Democrat and Sabato a Toss-up. About $7.6 million has been spent against Shah, led by Safety & Affordability PAC's $3.76 million.The two super PACs targeting Shah and



Dandiya have yet to reveal their donors. Both switched to monthly filing in September, and their first reports, covering donors through September 30, are due on October 20.In Ohio, where early voting is already under way, Democrat Amy Acton has refused to debate Republican Vivek Ramaswamy in the governor's race."I absolutely will never stand on a stage with someone who has lied in the egregious ways he has, who has a chronic history of lying," Acton said in an interview with The Vindicator.Ramaswamy told the newspaper he "was shocked" when he learned she would not debate.New York early voting begins October 24. Republican Saritha Komatireddy is challenging Attorney General Letitia James. A poll commissioned by her campaign, conducted by OnMessage Inc and reported by the New York Post, put James ahead 50.7 to 44.7. The last independent poll, by Siena in September, had James up 52-39.Los Angeles County vote centers also open on October 24, in a mayoral race where Nithya Raman is challenging Mayor Karen Bass.

Over 2,000 arrested as violent protests sweep France

Paris: More than 2,000 people have been arrested during violent protests across France on Saturday, French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said Sunday.In a post on social media platform X, Nunez said that protests in some cities continued late into Saturday night, adding that investigations were underway to identify the perpetrators of the violent acts and bring them to justice.More than 600 police officers, gendarmes and firefighters have been injured in the violence so far, he said, citing provisional figures, Xinhua News Agency reported.Material damage was considerable, affecting several hundred businesses, he said."Demonstrating is a fundamental right. Causing disorder through coordinated violence is not," Nunez said.

Around 550,000 people took part in protests across France on Saturday. Numerous attacks on public buildings, police stations and businesses were reported during the demonstrations.Violent clashes erupted between police and protesters in Paris and other parts of France on Saturday on the sidelines of the nationwide marches against rising inflation, with protesters setting fire to many places and looters breaking into dozens of shops to strip them bare. The unrest comes after weeks of student protests. Tens of thousands marched across the east and



north of Paris in one major march on Saturday. Protesters shouted slogans like "Everyone hates the police" and "Macron, resign."Protesters set fire to a tourist office in the city centre in Lyon and broke into town halls in the cities of Marseille and Lille, where they vandalised the premises before leaving, France 24 reported. Dozens of shops were looted, including many in Marseille. Over 300 protesters tried to move up towards Paris's Champs-Elysees, which has several flagship luxury stores. Protesters shouted "all cops are bastards" as police fired tear gas, blocking the way of protesters.

Zelensky says US halted intelligence sharing with Ukraine for three days



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the United States suspended intelligence sharing for three days, leaving Ukraine without American ballistic missile warnings. He also said Starlink restrictions remained partly in place, while US officials disputed his account of the communications disruption.

Washington: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the United States temporarily suspended crucial intelligence sharing with Ukraine for three days, leaving its forces without American warnings of Russian ballistic missile attacks during that period.In an interview with NBC's Meet the Press, Zelensky also said restrictions on satellite communications used by Ukrainian forces had not been fully lifted, raising fresh questions about Washington's military and intelligence support for Kyiv.

The Ukrainian leader said the intelligence interruption affected information that only the United States could provide, particularly advance warnings of ballistic missile strikes."We didn't see attacks of Russia using ballistic missiles," Zelensky said.He said Ukraine continued receiving intelligence from European governments and other international partners, but their capabilities could not fully replace American systems."We have dozens of countries who help. But only United States has this unique intelligence to say, to tell us, to tell our side when Russia uses ballistic missiles," he said."And we didn't get it during ballistic attacks during three days."Zelensky said the intelligence-sharing arrangement had since been restored."It was blocked for some period of time. And then it was deblocked by American side. We are very thankful for this. Now it works," he said.The disclosure came amid growing tensions between Washington and Kyiv over President Donald Trump's handling of the war with Russia.Zelensky also raised concerns about restrictions affecting Starlink, the satellite internet network operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX, and its military-related services.Asked whether the interruption had been deliberate, Zelensky said Ukrainian military officials believed the restrictions originated with the American government."Of course the message came from government. I don't know from whom, what cabinet, and etc," he said.He added that Ukrainian officials believed SpaceX had technically implemented the restrictions following instructions from Washington.Zelensky acknowledged that he did not know which American official might have authorised the move.Asked whether satellite services had been fully restored, he replied: "No, not of course. We have limitation."The Ukrainian President's account was challenged by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who appeared separately on the same programme.Bessent said Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio had denied that anyone in the administration ordered restrictions on Starlink."President Trump and Secretary Rubio have categorically said that no one in the Trump administration did that," Bessent said.He called Zelensky's allegation reckless and said he had no information about the reported intelligence interruption."Again, I don't know anything about that, but we've been very clear," Bessent said.The conflicting accounts left unresolved who was responsible for the communications disruption and why American intelligence sharing had been temporarily interrupted.Zelensky said Ukraine remained dependent on American military assistance despite its growing network of European partners."

Pakistan extends airspace ban on Indian aircraft until November 24

New Delhi: Pakistan has extended restrictions on Indian aircraft from using its airspace until November 24, 2026, according to a fresh Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) issued by the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA).Announcing the decision on social media platform X, the authority said the airspace ban would continue for another month and would remain applicable to both civilian and military aircraft associated with India.

The latest extension supersedes the earlier deadline of October 24 and means that Indian-registered aircraft, as well as aircraft owned, operated or leased by Indian airlines and aviation operators, will remain barred from entering Pakistani airspace unless authorities announce any change before the revised deadline.The restrictions cover both the Karachi and Lahore Flight Information Regions and apply to all categories of Indian aircraft, including military flights.The aviation measures trace their origins to heightened tensions between India and Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir in April 2025.

Pakistan initially closed its airspace to Indian aircraft on April 23, 2025. India responded a week later by imposing reciprocal restrictions on Pakistani airlines and aircraft from April 30, 2025.Since then, both countries have repeatedly extended the curbs, with no indication so far of an imminent easing of restrictions.India accused



Pakistan of backing the Pahalgam terror attack, a charge that Islamabad rejected, triggering a sharp escalation in diplomatic and military tensions between the two countries.In response to Pakistan's decision to shut its airspace to Indian aircraft, India imposed reciprocal restrictions on Pakistani airlines and aircraft from April 30, 2025.Pakistan has enforced similar airspace restrictions on Indian aircraft during previous periods of strained bilateral relations, including the 1999 Kargil conflict and the aftermath of the 2019 Pulwama attack, according to media reports.Pakistan's airspace is divided into the Karachi and Lahore Flight Information Regions, and the current restrictions remain effective across both sectors.

FM Sitharaman meets survivors of 2018 Tham Luang cave incident in Bangkok



Bangkok: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met members and representatives of Thailand's Wild Boars Football Academy here, including survivors of the 2018 Tham Luang cave incident, in which 13 people, an assistant coach and 12 boys aged between 11 and 16, were trapped in the cave for up to 17 days.Among them were Coach Ekapol Chanthawong, who was the assistant coach at the time and helped keep the trapped boys calm and sustain their morale, and Chanin Wibunrungrueang (Titan), who was just 11 years old, the youngest of the 12 footballers caught in the ordeal."The rescue of all 12 boys and their coach from the flooded cave brought together Thai authorities, international specialists, medical teams and volunteers in an extraordinary humanitarian effort. Their remarkable story of survival and the selfless efforts of those who brought them to safety remain an enduring testament to courage, human resilience and cooperation beyond borders," according to an X post by Finance Minister.Nopparat Kanthawong (Coach Nop), the Academy's then head coach who assisted the rescue effort from outside the cave and Noppadol Kanthawong (Coach Dol), the Academy's public relations representative and the younger brother of head coach Nopparat Kanthawong, were also present, she informed.The members shared their experiences and perspectives on the Tham Luang cave ordeal. FM Sitharaman also commended their courage and resolve and expressed heartfelt gratitude to Lord Buddha for His blessings and for protecting the young lives through the ordeal."

Pak repatriates Gujarat fisherman's body; family awaits son's release



When 48-year-old fisherman Bejal Bhaliya's mortal remains reached his village Kob in Una tehsil, there was hardly any sense of closure. The Pakistan security agencies had arrested Bhaliya and his son Ashvin for allegedly crossing into their waters in 2022. They had been languishing in jail since March 16, 2022, when they completed their sentences.Meanwhile, Bhaliya died on August 27 and was one of the 178 Indian fishermen currently in custody of Pakistani authorities for allegedly venturing into Pakistan waters while fishing, whose jail terms had been completed.

One of Bhaliya's four sons, Mansingh, who was in their village in the coastal Gir Somnath district, received the body but says their rites won't be complete without Ashvin. "My father's body arrived on September 18-19 around 12:15 am. I appeal that my brother should also be released immediately. We have performed the last rites of my father, but there are some rituals which we hope are done in the presence of my brother Ashvin", Mansingh told The Indian Express on Wednesday.According to Mansingh, Ashvin is the third brother, married, and has two minor children, a son and a daughter."We are a fishing family. My father and all four of us brothers are into fishing. We do not have any other profession. We have 2-3 bigha land, but it is saline and not very productive. We give it to others for sharecropping," Mansingh said.In August, five fisherfolk women from Gir Somnath district and the Union Territory of Diu, whose husbands or sons are languishing in Pakistan jails after completing their sentences, had come to Gandhinagar to meet deputy chief minister Harsh Sanghavi to urge the government to push for their repatriation.In a media interaction organised by Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace & Democracy (PIPFPD), a group working for peace between India and Pakistan and National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) the women urged both countries to use the occasion of their respective Independence Days on August 14 and 15 to free the fishermen.Mumbai-based peace activist and journalist Jatin Desai, who has been taking up their cause, said in a statement, "Shockingly, Pakistan didn't send his son Ashvin, who is also in jail. Both father and son were arrested in early 2022 when their boat inadvertently entered Pakistani waters. Their sentences was completed on 16 March 2022. The family was expecting Ashvin to be released and repatriated along with his father's mortal remains. In such a case, some goodwill gesture and humanity is expected."On July 1 every year, India and Pakistan share lists of prisoners in their respective custodies. This July India has shared lists of 386 civil prisoners and 53 fishermen in its custody, who are "Pakistani or believed-to-be-Pakistani", according to a Ministry of External Affairs statement. Similarly, Pakistan has shared lists of 52 civil prisoners and 198 fishermen in its custody, who are Indian or believed-to-be-Indian.According to the statement, the Indian government has "consistently called for early release and repatriation of civil prisoners, fishermen along with their boats, and missing Indian defence personnel from Pakistan's custody".However, activists say even if they release the fishermen they hardly return their boats. "Without their boats, they have to start afresh", says a leader from Mangrol, Junagadh district.Since 2023, 500 Indian fishermen fishermen and 20 Indian civil prisoners have been repatriated from Pakistan.

Bengal orders FIRs over missing Covid-time equipment at 64 health centres



The West Bengal government recently issued strict instructions to district health authorities following reports of missing and stolen medical equipment across dozens of state-run health centres. All district chief medical officers of health (CMOH) have been instructed to file FIRs after officials claimed that medical equipment worth crores of rupees, procured with Central grant funds during Covid, went missing or was embezzled.According to an official directive issued by the Health Department, essential items, including batteries, wire boxes, and critical machinery components, have gone missing from at least 64 public health facilities. The affected locations comprise 50 sub-centres (SCs), 13 block primary health units (BPHUs), and one primary health centre (PHC). The missing assets were procured under the 15th Finance Commission Health Grants (XV FC-HG) and delivered by the West Bengal Medical Services Corporation Limited (WBMSCL).

Department officials stated that the absence of these critical components has halted the installation and commissioning of necessary medical machinery across several facilities."Facility custodians must immediately file an FIR with local police authorities upon detecting any missing or stolen equipment. A full incident report including facility details, item descriptions, delivery dates, discovery dates, and designated custodian names must be submitted to the Health Department through the respective chief medical officer of health (CMOH)," read the order copy.Facility-level investigations will be conducted to fix individual responsibility, and administrative proceedings will be initiated against custodians found negligent in their duties. The state government has also authorised direct financial penalties to recover lost public funds."Where permitted under service rules, the government will seek full recovery of the cost of lost or stolen items directly from the salary or remuneration of negligent personnel. District CMOHs have been instructed to pass these directives to all block medical officers of health (BMOHs), community health officers (CHOs), and facility heads for strict compliance, alongside maintaining rigorous stock and movement registers for all state-supplied equipment," the order further said.

3 students, psychiatrist part of panel to probe Sahil's death



Days after 20-year-old Sahil Wakode died by suicide after he was caught using a mobile phone inside an examination hall, IIT Bombay Director Professor Shireesh Kedare said on Wednesday that the Board of Governors has set up a 10-member committee to examine the circumstances surrounding the student's death on September 18.He said, "The committee will be headed by Dr Ramesh Venkateswaran," who serves as the Chairman of the Board of Governors at IIT Palakkad.

While Professor Kedare said the institute will later issue an official statement to share information on other members of the committee, sources said the committee will include Professor K Narayanan of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Sadip Kumar Saha of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, convener of the institute's SC/ST Students and Staff Cell, and Professor Deepti Kalsi of the Department of Chemistry.The three student members included in the committee are Aditya Joshi, general secretary (Hostel Affairs); Dev Arora, overall coordinator of the Student Mentor Programme; and research scholar Devi Lal. The committee also includes retired IAS officer Vishwanath Giriraj, former institute vigilance officer Professor K G Suresh of the Department of Physics, and psychiatrist Dr Harish Shetty.

The move comes amid demand from students seeking an independent probe into circumstances leading up to Sahil Wakode's death.Meanwhile, a sharp divide among sections of IIT Bombay students has come into focus over Professor Doolla's suspension – a common demand from all students has been for an independent and transparent investigation by the institute into the entire episode – from the time Sahil Wakode was allegedly caught using a mobile phone in the examination hall to his suicide minutes later.Professor Doolla was the invigilator at the exam hall where Sahil was writing his exam along with other students. He was allegedly caught using his mobile phone, and hours later, he was found dead in his hostel room. His death has triggered protests on the campus.The committee is directed to submit its report within seven days.Meanwhile, reports have emerged that Professor Doolla is being sent on leave until the probe into the IIT student's suicide case is concluded. The Indian Express couldn't confirm the reports.

Bombay HC clamps down on festive noise, air pollution: What changes in Maharashtra now?



Amid Ganeshotsav celebrations across Maharashtra, the Bombay High Court on Tuesday, September 22, imposed a "total ban" on bursting firecrackers on public streets, and issued a slew of directions to curb "high level of noise pollution".Justices Girish S Kulkarni and Neela K Gokhale on Tuesday passed an order on a suo motu PIL, addressing noise pollution caused by amplified music systems and bursting of firecrackers on public streets. On Monday, the bench had observed that "innocent persons cannot be made to suffer due to a few who create objectionable noise pollution".

Raising concerns over the "cumulative effect on air quality" and "toxicity of pollution," causing a "serious health hazard", the Bombay High Court noted that "these concerns cannot be taken too lightly and stringent actions are required" to prevent air pollution amidst post-monsoon "persistent haze".Citing the "danger of accidents" on roads where pedestrians and vehicles ply, the court observed that firecrackers are used without "any indication of the level of noise pollution" or norms on the "extent of toxicity of the smoke," making it, "prima facie, … an unregulated area."It added that bursting firecrackers in private places must also remain "within the restrictive ambit of decibel levels."

Need for dignified processions in major cities: HCTerming steps taken by Nagpur, Solapur, and Pune Police Commissioners "heartening," the HC stated that "it is better that certain activities are restrained or banned" since they affect the "fundamental rights of the public at large.""It is high time that in large cities having dense population like Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Nashik, where the majority of the citizens are made to silently suffer such brazen violations, a regime of total restraint on the playing of loud music, by use of high-watt speakers, sound system, loud speakers, dhol tashas, use of cylinders etc. needs to be completely banned and a more dignified and civilised way of having these processions… is the imminent requirement of contemporary times," the bench noted.

The high court observed that noise pollution rules cannot be "presumed to be non-existent and/or completely relaxed" due to festivities. Despite a "rosy picture being painted" by the government, the high court criticised the complete lack of strict enforcement.Rejecting the state's "all is well" stance, citing ground realities of "no change in brazen violations," the bench observed that "all these issues cannot fall on deaf ears" and police permissions cannot be a "routine formality and (be) rendered ineffective" by permitting violations or acting only after receiving complaints.

Key directives by the Bombay High Court:1. Complete ban on street firecrackers: The court ordered a total ban on bursting firecrackers on public streets and roads during festivities, seeking strict measures to implement the direction.2. Prohibition of laser lights: Authorities must prohibit laser lights, high-intensity lumen lights, and beams in festive processions.3. Decibel checks and enforcement: Police and other authorities shall measure decibel levels of permitted sound systems and take strict legal action against unlicensed, unauthorised, or illegal noise pollution activities.4. Seizure of offending devices: Upon noticing breaches, authorities must seize and confiscate offending devices or instruments.5. Mandatory meters and limiters: Organisers seeking permissions shall undertake installing "decibel measurement meters" at every venue or procession visible to the public at large and ensure sound systems are fitted with "internal sound limiters."6. Recording noise levels: Designated officials to maintain meters at all relevant times and record decibel levels both individually and cumulatively.

7. Substantial security deposits: Authorities are directed to consider accepting deposits, a minimum of Rs 1 lakh for groups or associations and Rs 50,000 for individuals, as a condition for permission under Noise Pollution Rules. These will be forfeited upon any decibel level breach, over and above statutory legal action.8. Public display of permissions: Organisers must publicly display granted permissions alongside the names, addresses, and mobile numbers of responsible persons to fix accountability for violations.9. Sensitisation at starting points: Police and civic authorities must inspect and sensitise organisers at the beginning of every procession regarding their "obligations towards society at large" to maintain permissible decibel levels.10. Cumulative impact assessment: Designated authorities to assess the "cumulative impact" of noise pollution from multiple approvals in a single ward; permissions cannot be granted without such scientific assessment.11. Citizen responsibility: Every citizen to recognise their "individual and collective responsibility" to "fellow citizens and the society at large" regarding noise and air pollution.12. Penal consequences: Violators to be liable for penal action under the Noise Pollution Rules, Environment (Protection) Act, Explosives Act, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for public nuisance, and other statutes.13. Strict dealing with breaches:

Bombay High Court seeks state's response on PIL against 'illegal' detentions



The Bombay High Court has sought the Maharashtra government's reply to a petition on police actions, including "illegal" detentions during protests held in Mumbai against CEC Gyanesh Kumar.Seeking the state's and the petitioner's responses to intervention applications by local residents who alleged inconvenience due to protests in their vicinity, the bench orally remarked that while everyone has a right to agitate, it has to be a peaceful agitation.

A bench of Chief Justice Mahesh Chandra Tripathi and Justice Advait M Sethna was hearing a plea that sought directions from the court to declare the "indiscriminate" detention of peaceful protesters, of persons picked up merely based on previous detention, and of ordinary pedestrians as "unconstitutional and impermissible."On October 13, the HC said that while it cannot pass blanket orders on detentions during protests, it would "take care of" each case brought on record.On Monday, Senior advocates Gayatri Singh and Mihir Desai, for the petitioner and intervening protesters, submitted specific instances of "illegal" detentions and claimed that protesters, young bystanders, and those at their homes were picked up without specific reasons, kept at police stations all day, or detained at home before being released.

The lawyers representing intervening local residents claimed they were inconvenienced due to the protests without permission and filed an FIR.Advocate General (AG) Milind Sathe, representing the Maharashtra government, argued that "no person was detained as far as Gamdevi police station (near August Kranti Maidan) is concerned".He said police came across an X post about a protest march at August Kranti Maidan. "Near Nana Chowk, which is a locality that crosses about 10 or 12 roads, they (protestors) had blocked that entire junction. So, all that the police did was, they removed the protesters, took them to the police station, took their names, and release them," AG Sathe argued.The bench, seeking replies by the next hearing on November 19, orally remarked that the individuals should not have any criminal antecedents and their "credentials need to be looked into."CJ Tripathi added, "This would be our endeavour. Everybody has a right to agitate but it has to be peaceful agitation. Bring the facts on record. With the affidavits cited before us we will also examine, if under the guise of peaceful demonstrations, unwanted elements were added. However, if there are instances of unlawful detention, we will also take care of it."

Soham wins gold at CISCE National Taekwondo Championship 2026



Hyderabad: Soham of St George's Grammar School, Abids, won the gold medal in the U-17 (59–63kg) category at the Seventh CISCE National Taekwondo Championship 2026, held in Hyderabad recently.With this victory, Soham qualified for the 70th National School Games Federation of India (SGFI) competition, scheduled to be held in Srinagar from October 22 to 26.Soham has consistently performed well at the district, state and national levels.The school management and staff, including Rev. K. Reuben Mark (Moderator, CSI Bishop in Medak Diocese and chairman of St George's Institutions), Principal Priscilla Karunanidhi Aska and taekwondo coach Gade Veerabasavaiah,

'Be realistic': Karnataka warned against Rs 10,000-crore rural road plan



Karnataka's Rs 10,000-crore proposal to construct 15,000 kilometres of roads in rural areas across the state has come under scrutiny, with the state's Finance Department advising the government to be "realistic" about available funding.

Karnataka's Rs 10,000-crore proposal to construct 15,000 kilometres of roads in rural areas across the state has come under scrutiny, with the state's Finance Department advising the government to be "realistic" about available funding."In the current scenario, even if a part of the funds needed for proposals is to be met, it will lead to cutting down from the allocations marked to other departments," the Finance Department said in the Cabinet note related to the project, while pointing out the severe drought situation of the state.The D K Shivakumar-led Congress government made the big-ticket announcement mid-fiscal year at a Special Cabinet meeting held in Mangaluru last week. Besides, the government had cleared other projects worth around Rs 20,000 crore.Starting a project that demands thousands of crores which is not budgeted and funds are not earmarked, will create issues for cash flow and fiscal management," the Finance Department stated.The department noted that the state "has already exhausted its borrowing capacity to meet the budgetary announcements of the year (20)26-27… The state will not have any space to borrow any more amounts to fund any new projects of this magnitude."The fiscal deficit in the 2026-27 financial year was Rs 22,957 crore as against a permitted limit of zero, and cumulative liabilities were at 24.94 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product — compared to a permitted limit of 25 per cent under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, it stated.The Finance Department has noted that the state government had a balance cost of works exceeding Rs 2 lakh crore and pending bills to contractors worth Rs 36,136 crore. It said it had cleared an additional Rs 5,000 crore worth of works in the first supplementary estimate on the budget presented recently.

"Karnataka is reeling under severe drought, and substantial amounts may be needed to address the immediate issues of livelihood of farmers and of the people living in rural areas this year. There is also likely to be an increase of Rs 4,000-5,000 crore in the IP set subsidy as a result of the drought," the note said.The department said it would be "prudent to be realistic regarding the funding envelope that is available and not to add further to the overhang of pending balance cost of works. Before finalising the additional resources mobilisation or reallocation from already approved allocations, it would be difficult to fund new projects."

EDITORIAL

Power grab in Pakistan

The imposition of emergency and Governor's Rule in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province marks yet another instance of a brazen power grab remote-controlled by the all-powerful Army. This looks more like a political coup disguised as Governor's rule. While the coalition civilian government in Islamabad has justified the decision on grounds of a deteriorating security situation and the provincial administration's alleged disengagement from counterterrorism, the move carries far-reaching political implications and is widely seen as an attempt to further marginalise the jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is PTI's last remaining governing stronghold. Critics see the removal of its government after days of escalating tensions over Imran Khan's imprisonment as politically motivated. Taking direct control of a province through a federal decree weakens Pakistan's federal framework. The Shehbaz Sharif government has alleged that the provincial administration was working "hand in glove" with the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The move comes as thousands of Khan's supporters continue to stage anti-government protests demanding his release from jail. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has witnessed an increase in militant attacks in recent months, is a political stronghold of the cricketer-turned-politician, who has been imprisoned since 2023 on corruption and other charges. His PTI party had long governed the volatile province, but Islamabad's decision to impose emergency rule has now effectively removed it from power. Central rule can never be a substitute for an elected government.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa sits along the porous border with Afghanistan and has experienced a surge in insurgent violence, particularly from the TTP. Dismantling the local elected setup to manage a security crisis risks further alienating the local population, potentially worsening instability instead of containing it. Decades of contradictory policies towards the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban have left Khyber Pakhtunkhwa mired in insecurity.

The question now is whether the federal government's extraordinary powers can help correct the state's longstanding strategic failures. Critics point to the timing of the imposition of Governor's Rule, which coincides with PTI's planned march to Islamabad, and argue that it fits a pattern in which elected provincial governments opposed to the Centre are removed with the establishment's backing. The fact that Governor's Rule automatically brings Army deployment under Article 245 deepens the perception of direct military administration. The development exposes the military's growing role in Pakistan's political affairs. Confronted with a provincial executive aligned with an opposition movement that has directly challenged the military leadership, the establishment opted for direct intervention to secure its interests. The civilian coalition government, led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), serves as the political face of the administration, but all major decisions must align with the military's strategic calculations. By placing security imperatives and state control ahead of political negotiation, the establishment reinforces a familiar pattern in Pakistan's political history: using constitutional emergency provisions to reset political alignments.

'Come back soon, my brothers': Dipke as Ashutosh, Saurav set to appear in court



Hours before Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) members Ashutosh Ranka and Saurav Das are due to be produced in court on Monday, group founder Abhijeet Dipke wrote an emotional open letter to the two, saying he missed them and wanted nothing more than to see them walk out of jail.The two CJP members have been in judicial custody for five days after they were arrested on October 14 for allegedly breaching security and entering Jantar Mantar during protests against the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.Ashutosh and Saurav were booked in two FIRs, the CJP said. One relates to alleged trespassing at the JD(U) office near Jantar Mantar. The other concerns an alleged breach of a peace bond.The two are scheduled to be produced before the Special Executive Magistrate (SEM) court at Mandir Marg police station around 2 pm on Monday, as their judicial custody was due to end.'Turned CJP into hope for millions of people'

In the letter posted on Instagram, Dipke recalled how Ashutosh and Saurav had been instrumental in building the group over the past three months, saying their dedication and courage had helped turn CJP into "a hope for millions of people"."Today marks the sixth day of you both being in jail. I cannot tell you how much I miss you, my brothers," Dipke wrote."For the past three months, people may have seen me as the face of the CJP, but what most people don't know is that it was you two who were actually running it, building it and keeping everything together," he wrote.Dipke said that while he may have started CJP "by accident", it was the two members' efforts that had shaped the party into what it had become. He added that he did not believe the group would have achieved even half of what it had without them.The letter also acknowledged the sacrifices made by the two members and the limited recognition they had sought in return."Today is supposed to be the last day of your custody, and there is absolutely nothing I want more right now than to see you both walk out free. Nothing else matters to me at this moment. I just want my brothers back," he wrote.He also apologised to Ashutosh and Saurav, as well as their families, for the distress and uncertainty they had faced during the period. "I know an apology cannot make any of this easier, but I wish with all my heart that you and your families didn't have to go through any of it," he wrote.Recalling their constant communication, Dipke said he missed knowing that the two were just a phone call away. "I just want that phone to ring again," he wrote, signing off with the words: "Come back soon, my brothers."'Got threats to release them': MagistrateOn Sunday, a senior police officer said the SEM hearing the case alleged that anonymous people were threatening him to release the duo. Based on his complaint to police, an FIR was lodged in New Delhi district under sections of criminal intimidation, the officer added.CJP spokesperson Ratna Singh had alleged that the police are deliberately delaying their bail proceedings."The hearing in the matter was supposed to happen at 12 pm. But they kept pushing it till evening. After coming into the courtroom at about 5 pm, he (the SEM) said that he is receiving threats. If someone has given you a threat, how is it related to this case? How is it related to us coming here for the past four days? They are not approving the sureties. They are deliberately trying to keep Ashutosh and Saurav inside," Singh told reporters at a briefing.

Gurugram's stilt+4 row: 32,000 approvals in 7 years, Haryana opposes construction freeze



Over 32,000 residential plots have been sanctioned for stilt-plus-four (S+4) constructions across Gurugram over the past seven years, the Haryana Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) has told the Punjab and Haryana High Court,In its affidavit opposing a plea seeking an immediate halt to ongoing construction and the issuance of occupation certificates (OCs), the department also disputed claims that approvals were rushed through after the state revived the policy in July 2024.

The S+4 policy allows residential buildings to have four floors above a stilt parking area. While it triggered a surge in development, it saw widespread protests by Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs) in Gurugram over concerns about drainage, parking shortages and structural damage.RWA office bearers had flagged alleged misuse of the policy, including PG facilities on narrow 10-metre roads, four-floor buildings on 100-square-yard plots, and stilt areas being used for commercial purposes instead of parking.In February 2023, the Haryana government froze approvals under the policy and appointed an expert committee headed by retired bureaucrat P Raghavendra Rao. The government revived the policy with restrictions on July 2, 2024, based on the committee's findings. However, the Punjab and Haryana High Court stayed the notification on April 2, 2026.

The affidavit by DTCP Director-General Dr J Ganesan was placed before a division bench of Acting Chief Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra and Justice Rohit Kapoor on October 14. The bench had issued notice on July 27 on the application filed by petitioner Sunil Singh in an ongoing public interest litigation challenging the policy.No 'hurried' clearancesThe DTCP said 32,024 permissions had been granted in Gurugram up to April 2, 2026. Of these, 18,719 building plans were approved in private licensed colonies by the department, while the Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) approved 13,305 in its sectors.The department rejected the petitioner's claim that around 30,000 permissions had been granted under the July 2, 2024, order, calling it "factually incorrect" and "wholly erroneous".Of the 15,447 approved building plans in private licensed colonies in the Gurugram-Manesar Urban Complex, 9,625 (62.3%), were sanctioned before July 1, 2024, the affidavit said.These approvals were governed by instructions issued on March 7 and September 2, 2019. The former allowed the fourth floor as an independent unit, while the latter provided for purchasable development rights.The remaining 5,822 plans (37.7%) were approved between July 2, 2024, and the High Court's stay on April 2 this year.The DTCP, in its affidavit, argued that alleged unauthorised construction in individual cases could not justify a blanket ban on all permissions and construction under the policy.The department asserted that "the applicant has failed to establish any factual or legal basis for the blanket restraint sought", maintaining that the High Court's April 2 stay order "cannot be read as a finding that every permission granted under the Stilt+4 regime is illegal, non-compliant or incapable of being regulated".Enclosed stilt parking risks cancellationAddressing allegations that stilt parking areas were being enclosed and used as residential or commercial spaces, the DTCP said violations of approved building plans could be checked when applications for OCs were examined.Under Clause 8 of the July 2, 2024, instructions, building plan approvals or OCs are liable to be withdrawn if the stilt area is enclosed, fully or partially.The department said action was being taken against violations on a case-by-case basis under Section 10 of the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act, 1975. It opposed physical verification of all properties, calling such a blanket exercise based on "erroneous assumptions".The affidavit, however, said the department had no records of pending applications for OCs for residential plots submitted to architects under the self-certification system.It said under a standard operating procedure issued on November 16, 2022, private architects were designated as the competent authority to inspect properties and issue OCs. The DTCP said it received records only after an OC had been granted.Responding to concerns about inadequate civic infrastructure, the DTCP said the HSVP had framed a standard operating procedure for sector-wise capacity audits of water supply, sewerage, electricity and roads.The audits would prioritise areas with inadequate services, with separate accounts funded through S+4 charges, the department said.

After firing on Tiger Shroff, a look at Haryana gangsters who targeted celebs

Anil Pandit, a notorious gangster believed to be part of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, has claimed responsibility for the firing incident targeting Bollywood actor Tiger Shroff at Mumbai's Juhu on Sunday evening. He hails from Haryana's Panipat.Pandit is not the only Haryana gangster to have come to light as part of criminal networks that have targeted Bollywood figures and other celebrities. Several other such gangsters have roots in the state.

The police's Special Task Force (STF) and other wings dealing with anti-gangster operations told The Indian Express that they have busted several such gangster networks over the last few months.DGP Ajay Singhal said, "The STF has been specifically activated to tackle organised crime and extortion cases. Whether the objective of criminals is to intimidate citizens, demand extortion from businessmen or establish dominance through gangs, the Haryana Police will not allow any such attempt to succeed."

Celebrity targets: A prominent associate of Lawrence Bishnoi, he claimed responsibility for the October 2026 shooting at Tiger Shroff's car in Juhu, warning the entertainment industry against associating with Salman Khan.In July this year, the Delhi Police arrested six people for firing outside singer Guru Randhawa's gym in Delhi and the killing of gym trainer Kapil Redhu in Hansi, Haryana. The police said all of them were connected to Anil Pandit and Sunder Hansi, associates of the Harry Boxer-led Lawrence Bishnoi gang, through encrypted messaging applications Signal and Zangi.

Celebrity targets: The Himanshu Bhau gang claimed responsibility for a firing incident outside the Gurugram residence of YouTuber and Bigg Boss OTT winner Elvish Yadav, citing grievances over Yadav's promotion of certain betting apps in August 2025. Two men arrested among the three people who opened fire at Yadav were allegedly in touch with the Himanshu Bhau gang.Bhau is reportedly based outside India, while his criminal network has roots in the Rohtak-NCR region. His associates in India are said to carry out activities on behalf of the network.A Haryanvi music-producer-turned gangster operating from the UK and Dubai.Celebrity targets: He has been linked to severe extortion networks in northern India. His operatives have specifically targeted high-profile artists, including Haryanvi singer Rahul Fazilpuria and Sufi singer Bismil, demanding protection money running into crores of rupees.Celebrity targets: While incarcerated, they command the Haryana faction of the larger Lawrence Bishnoi-Goldy Brar alliance. Their vast local network provides the ground shooters and logistics used to target Bollywood A-listers like Salman Khan, filmmakers like Rohit Shetty, and Punjabi and Haryanvi music industry figures.

Kaushal Chaudhary is a Haryana-based gangster whose network has roots around Gurgaon-NCR and has historically been connected with the Bambiha side of the gang rivalry. Chaudhary, the leader of the gang, is currently imprisoned in Bhondsi jail in Gurgaon and is facing over 40 criminal charges.As Chaudhary's network is linked to the Bambiha side, it has also been part of the wider gang rivalry between the Bambiha and Bishnoi networks.The inter-gang rivalry often led to shootouts in Chandigarh, Delhi, and Punjab. The gangs not only fought over protection money but also for supremacy over the Punjab music industry and kabaddi players.

Born in 1989, Rohit Godara is from Bikaner district in Rajasthan. Also known as Rawatdas, he is a close confidant of Goldy Brar and was allegedly involved in the conspiracy to kill Punjabi music icon Sidhu Moosewala. He was allegedly behind the plot to kill Karni Sena leader Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi in Jaipur in December 2023.The Rohit Godara network is linked to a criminal network that extends beyond India and has connections with criminal groups and associates in Rajasthan, Haryana, and other parts of North India.Godara is believed to be operating from outside India.In January 2026, the Haryana STF arrested four people allegedly connected to Goldy Brar and Rohit Godara. The police linked them to shooting incidents in the US and seized foreign-made weapons. The police also suspect a growing rivalry between the Lawrence Bishnoi and Godara-Brar factions.In the past nearly 30 months, from January 2024 to August 2026, the STF has apprehended 813 gang members belonging to nine criminal gangs operating in Haryana and neighbouring states.The highest number of arrests were made from the Rohit Godara/Lawrence Bishnoi gang, with 335 gang members apprehended, followed by the Himanshu Bhau gang (111), Noni Rana gang (76), Bhanu Rana gang (61), Neeraj Faridpur gang (55), Rakesh alias Kala Khairampur gang (54), Kaushal Chaudhary gang (51), Kapil Nandu gang (45), and Deepak Nandal gang (25).

'Punjab always first': Artists unite to demand justice after anti-drug activist's murder

A growing number of Punjabi singers and actors have rallied behind the family of Punjabi singer and anti-drug activist Parvinder Singh Jhota, following his murder in Mansa. Prominent figures from the entertainment industry have put professional commitments on hold and joined the demand for justice.Jhota was shot dead in Mansa on October 13 during a confrontation with a local medical store owner. The killing has sparked state-wide outrage, massive public protests, and a widespread shutdown across Punjab.

From Balkaur Singh Sidhu, father of slain singer Sidhu Moosewala, postponing his Signed to God Tour shows in Canada and the United States, to actor Neeru Bajwa putting the release of her upcoming Punjabi film Thaapi on hold, artists across the industry have expressed solidarity with Jhota's family and the people of Punjab.The latest to join the protest was Punjabi singer R Nait, whose song "Dabda Kithe A" Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann adopted as a campaign anthem during his election rallies. R Nait visited the ongoing protest in Mansa on Monday, joining the growing chorus of voices seeking justice for Jhota.Sidhu Moosewala's father postpones Canada tourIn a gesture of solidarity, Balkaur Singh Sidhu announced that the Signed to God Tour would be temporarily postponed in view of the situation in Punjab and the protests following Jhota's death.Explaining his decision, Balkaur Singh said Punjab and his constituency, Mansa, would take precedence over his professional commitments."For me, my constituency, Mansa and my Punjab always come first," he said, while apologising to supporters in Calgary and the United States for being unable to meet them as planned.His announcement has added to the expressions of solidarity from prominent Punjabi personalities, with the family's decision highlighting the emotional significance of the ongoing protests across the state.Punjabi actor Neeru Bajwa announced that she and her team decided to put the release of their upcoming Punjabi sports drama Thaapi on hold amid the prevailing atmosphere of grief and unrest in Punjab.Explaining the decision on social media, Bajwa emphasised that the film industry's relationship with the state and its people must come before commercial commitments"Whatever we are today, it is because of Punjab and Punjabiyat. Cinema is for the people. It can never be greater than the people," she wrote.She further affirmed that the film would remain out of cinemas until the situation improves, reiterating her support for Punjab and its people."

After Haryana, stones pelted at Kashmir-bound bus in Punjab

Over 24 hours after a Kashmir-bound bus was pelted with stones in Haryana's Karnal district on Saturday, another bus of the same transport company was allegedly attacked with a stone in Punjab's Doraha town near Khanna in Ludhiana district around 11 pm Sunday.The Khanna police said a stone hit a windowpane of the bus belonging to Star World Ventures transport company. The bus was en route to Srinagar from Delhi, and no one was hurt in the incident, the police added."As soon as the information of the incident was received, a gypsy pilot of the police was deputed to escort the bus out of Khanna police jurisdiction safely. One stone hit a windowpane. No one was hurt. We are checking CCTVs to identify the suspects," Rakesh Kumar Yadav, Khanna Superintendent of Police (Investigation), told The Indian Express."Since the bus belongs to the same transport company that was attacked in Haryana's Karnal district, we are investigating if both incidents were linked. An FIR is being registered at Doraha police station," he added.'Luckily no one was hurt'Speaking to The Indian Express, bus driver Ishfaq Ahmad Sofi said, "We started from Delhi at 4 pm. There were around 35 passengers. We stopped at Ambala in Haryana for dinner, and everything was peaceful. Soon we entered Punjab. When we reached near Doraha, three stones were thrown at the bus. I immediately stopped the bus. I got scared as the passengers included children, women, and the elderly. A window was shattered, but luckily no one was hurt.""The Khanna police escorted us for nearly 20 km, and we travelled ahead safely," said Sofi, who was still on the way to Srinagar when he spoke to The Indian Express over the phone. "It's not just Kashmiris but also people from Delhi, Punjab and Haryana who travel to Srinagar in our bus daily," he added.Star World Ventures is owned by Kashmir-based Aadil Bhatt, who started the luxury bus service from Srinagar to Delhi around two months ago, Sofi said. "It is a relatively new transport firm, but we never encountered such an issue before," he added.Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir Students Association national convenor Nasir Khuehami urged the Punjab chief minister and director general of police to take appropriate action against the miscreants."Why this hatred towards Kashmiris? Why should people from Kashmir fear for their safety while travelling through different parts of the country? I urge Punjab Chief Minister @BhagwantMann and @DGPPunjabPolice to take immediate cognisance of the reported incident, ensure a thorough and impartial investigation, identify those responsible, and take strict legal action against the perpetrators," he wrote on X."Repeated incidents targeting Kashmir-bound vehicles raise serious concerns about the safety and security of Kashmiri passengers.

Veteran BJP leader LK Advani discharged from hospital

New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Lal Krishna Advani, who was admitted to Indraprastha Apollo Hospital in New Delhi, is being discharged, the hospital said on Monday. The 98-year-old leader has shown improvement and, hence, is being discharged today."Mr L.K. Advani, who was admitted to Apollo Hospitals on 16th October with a chest infection, is being discharged today. He has been under the care of Dr Vinit Suri, Senior Consultant – Neurology and has shown improvement in his medical status," the hospital said in a press statement.The former Deputy Prime Minister was admitted to Indraprastha Apollo Hospital's pulmonary department with a chest infection at around 7.30 p.m. on October 16. Earlier on Saturday, Union Health Minister JP Nadda also met Advani at the hospital and enquired about his health. This is not the first time the veteran leader has been hospitalised in recent months. He was last admitted to Apollo Hospital in May this year due to age-related health complications. He remained under medical care for a few days before being discharged.Earlier, in December 2024, Advani was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Indraprastha Apollo Hospital for medical management and investigations. He was treated under the supervision of a neurologist. The hospital then stated that his condition was stable. Born on November 8, 1927, in Karachi (present-day Pakistan), Advani is one of the most prominent leaders in the BJP. He played a key role in the party's growth from a relatively small political force into a major national political organisation

A taste of Kerala in Hyderabad: stores that bring home closer



In different corners of Hyderabad, about 80 Kerala stores are doing something special: helping over five lakh Malayalis in the city feel a little closer to home. For them, these shops don't just sell groceries; they bring back memories, traditions and the warmth of home.Walk into one, and you'll likely find banana chips, tapioca, coconut oil and pappadam. For many Malayalis residing in Hyderabad, these simple items are deeply personal—reminders of family, festivals and meals from childhood."People come in and smile when they see the tapioca or smell the chips. It's not just food, its an emotion," says Raghunathan, who runs 'New Kerala Stores' in Uppal. He came to Hyderabad from Thiruvananthapuram in 1985, looking for a job. He worked as an engineer and is now active in social work. The store is a side business that he runs with his wife. "We've been doing this for five years now," he says. "We make the banana chips ourselves; Malayalis say they taste just like the ones back home."Wholesale of Kerala products

Most Kerala stores in Hyderabad get their products from one person: Pradeep. Now based in Fateh Nagar, he came to Hyderabad from Kannur in Kerala in 1990, hoping to join the Army. When that didn't work out, he started a small shop at the Monda Market in Secunderabad. By 2010, he developed it into a wholesale establishment, which now supplies over 50 Kerala stores, hotels and even supermarkets."Malayalis mostly buy chips and pappadam," says Pradeep. "People also ask for tapioca, pickles and other items they grew up with." Pradeep is more than a businessman. Like many others in this community, he is deeply involved in Malayali cultural associations like Thanal Maram.

One of the oldest Kerala stores in the city is run by Pushpachandran, having opened his in Fateh Nagar in 1997. He came to visit his brother-in-law in Hyderabad. "He gave me the idea to start a Kerala store," Pushpachandran says. "At first, business was dull. But slowly, more Malayalis began coming, and sales picked up." Another long-time shop owner is Santhosh from Palakkad, who runs 'Devi Kerala Stores' in Safilguda. He started his business in 2000 and still runs it alone. "Most people come for tapioca and banana," he opines.For Binoy, who was born and brought up in Hyderabad but whose native is in Kozhikode, these stores help him feel connected to his culture. "I always buy nendran banana, coconut oil, chips and pickles," he says. "I even introduced some of my non-Malayali friends to the shop. One of them now loves 'Kanan Devan' tea and chips."

In Picket, Secunderabad, there's a more modern Kerala store called 'Achoos', run by Parthasarathy, who is originally from Thrissur. An MBA holder, he worked in multinational companies in Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad before deciding to start his own business in 2009."I wanted to do something meaningful," he says. "Something that connects with who I am. This shop does that." He brings products from Kodungallur in Kerala and also offers online delivery. Most of his customers are Malayalis, but others come in too, often curious to try Kerala snacks. Varghese, originally from Thiruvalla, is a regular customer at Achoos. "I usually come for coconut, pappadam, idiyappam and Kerala rice," he says. "It's part of my routine now."Despite their different journeys, all these shop owners have something in common: they are keeping Kerala's taste and spirit alive in a big city. For the Malayali community, these stores offer more than just products.

Why the Anna University sexual assault case must be a wake-up call on women safety | Explained



The story so far: On December 23, 2024, 37-year-old D. Gnanasekar, who ran a roadside biriyani shop named Gravity Biriyani, entered the Anna University campus at Guindy in Chennai on his two-wheeler, and raped an engineering student. Cognisant of the topography of the varsity, he was even well aware of the coverage area of CCTV cameras and their blind spots on the campus. The shocking incident, which occurred right inside the university campus, the manner in which the survivor reacted to it, the response — or the lack of it — from the women's helpline number 181, the subsequent police action, and the 199-page judgment delivered by the Mahila Court sentencing the convict to life imprisonment without any remission for 30 years, serve as a wake-up call for all stakeholders involved in women's safety.

What was the modus operandi?

According to the police, the modus operandi of the accused was to identify young couples on the campus, threaten to complain about them to the college management, and then take the women to secluded places before sexually assaulting them. Besides the complainant in the present case, another student too had told the police about the accused having attempted a similar crime against her on the university campus on December 22, 2024. However, a security guard's whistle from a distance saved her. Though this student was included as a prosecution witness in the rape case, no separate charge with respect to the sexual assault attempt on her was framed against the accused because she had failed to identify him during the test identification parade conducted by the police at Puzhal central prison. In her deposition during the trial, the student witness told the court that she did not identify the accused in prison due to fear, but realised it was big mistake much later.The police also informed the court that yet another student of the university had lodged a complaint alleging that the accused had confronted her when she was speaking to her boyfriend on the college campus, and subjected her to sexual assault on December 24, 2021. Her complaint was under investigation by the Crime Branch-Criminal Investigation Department (CB-CID).The police also found that the mobile phone seized from the accused contained a video of the sexual act that he had forced the survivor to perform on the university campus. Apart from this video, there were 19 other obscene videos on the mobile phone, and a forensic examination confirmed that all 19 were "screen recorded by the accused on various incidents" and not the ones downloaded from any porn site.How did the women helpline 181 react?

Immediately after the incident at around 8 p.m. on December 23, 2024, the survivor had telephoned her sister, who was also a student of the same university but had gone to her hometown after the semester examinations. The sister, in turn, told the entire family, and they sought the assistance of a lawyer friend. The lawyer made a conference call to the women helpline number 181 and asked the survivor to narrate the incident. The call centre had connected the call to the One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC), serving under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development, at Tambaram Sanatorium in Chennai.A case worker serving at the OSCC, on night duty, asked the survivor to send a written complaint on her WhatsApp number. The student did so at around 1:30 a.m. The case worker then forwarded the complaint to her administrator in the morning and left office on completion of her duty at around 7 a.m. Since no help was forthcoming from the OSCC, the survivor contacted the advocate again and dialed the police control room number 100 on his advice.

Why is India not exercising enough and why this needs to change



To understand why exercise is not something we, in India, have embraced and made part of our everyday lives, we need to look back to our past. India is a country with a long, rich and deep history. For hundreds of years, we lived simple yet strong lives. Most people's days involved doing physical labour in the form of chores, tasks or work, eating whatever was cultivated or produced in the surrounding regions, engaging in social interactions, and relying on nature to protect and nourish. For the longest time, even up until a few decades ago, the average Indian's life ran more or less along these lines. As a result, exercise was simply not something we prioritised. We did not have to.

Our days were filled with enough physical tasks that required us to move our limbs and use our muscles regularly. Our lives were hard enough that they demanded a lot of walking and load-bearing activities. Our food was simple and well-portioned, so we did not need to 'burn it off'.

While different forms of 'exercise' such as wrestling, mudgar swinging, kalaripayattu, yoga and more existed, these were not considered activities that the everyday person must engage in. There were coaches, gymnasiums, schools and students, but the common person, thanks to how difficult life was back then, was active enough (and busy enough) to not require such exercise, daily, for general health. Similarly, dance and sports were art forms. There were enthusiasts and specialists who trained for excellence and spent hours practising every day for years on end. But, again, these were specialised skills and not everyday activities. Participation was not mandatory or even strongly recommended. The everyday person had other problems to deal with and other activities that took up their time and energy on a daily basis. In other words, life was hard, and hence everyday living kept us occupied with little time left for self-care.

Now, what does this have to do with well-being? For any person to look, feel and function well, we need three fundamental things - food, activity and rest. Food is how we procure energy and nutrients. Activity is how we keep our bodies stimulated and functioning well. And rest is how we rebuild, recover and recuperate. As evolutionary beings, we need all three of these in optimal amounts to thrive. Back in the day, we did get all three. But while we had to find ways to procure food and find time to rest, activity was just a natural part of life. We did not have to find opportunities to be active like we do today as everything in life required movement. In the absence of machinery and technology, procuring food, cooking, visiting friends and family, sourcing water, commuting, travelling, cleaning - pretty much every aspect of living required movement. As a result, 'exercise', as we know it today, was blended into daily life. Add to this, food scarcity, minimal variety, the general lack of processed high-calorie foods, inaccessibility to easy entertainment and constant distraction, and we have ourselves a situation where we are moving maximally, eating minimally and resting optimally. In such a scenario, there was simply no need for exercise.

What is happening today?

Fast forward to today, and a lot of us still carry the same feeling about exercise - that there is no reason to exercise unless there is an absolute need. Most people need a doctor to recommend exercise before they take their first steps. In familial structures, exercise is not considered a priority. Except for a few families, most families do not teach their children about exercise. While parents stress the importance of education and health, exercise somehow slips through the cracks. It does not even garner the importance that eating vegetables does. Parents do not model behaviour by exercising or trying to stay fit, and playing a sport is considered a waste of time after a certain age. Unless a child or person is clinically unwell or extremely overweight, going to the gym or playing a sport is not something that is commonly encouraged.

In educational structures too, exercise is not considered a priority. Other than a couple of PT periods per week (that most children promptly use to do homework or eat snacks), there is quite literally no focus on exercise or movement. You would think, that in schools where students are expected to sit (in sub-optimal postures) for six hours or more every day, there would be a few minutes of basic movement every hour. But you would be wrong. Such is the state of movement in our schools, colleges and universities today. This is not unconnected to the general mindset of 'education is more important than movement' that arises from the familial structures that precede educational structures in a child's life. To add to this, schools and teachers do not do much to change this mindset even though children spend most of their time in educational institutions. In political structures too, exercise is not considered a priority. Parks, walking trails, gyms, sporting arenas and other outdoor recreational spaces that promote exercise are not easy to find in places other than metropolitan cities. Even when installed, they are not showcased and maintained well leaving them inaccessible to the everyday person. Governments tend to care more about healthcare and less about fitness. And that means governments are more intent on curing ailments and not preventing them. While cure might be the need of the hour, what we need to remember is that chronic metabolic diseases, which are a direct result of lifestyle factors such as movement and nutrition, contribute to more ailments than infectious diseases by a huge margin.

Without sufficient movement, our joint mobility, blood circulation, posture, body weight, heart health and energy levels are all affected. Photograph used for representational purposes onlyOur bodies are designed to move: Today, an average adult living in a city walks just about 2,000 to 3,000 steps per day. This works out to just about 30 minutes of walking every 24 hours. While most of what we need to do in a day (chores, tasks, work, etc.) can be achieved with this, our bodies are designed to move and need more activity. Without sufficient movement, our joint mobility, blood circulation, posture, body weight, heart health and energy levels are all affected. Increasing the number of steps we walk is one of the simplest ways to improve health. And since we do not have a real reason to walk anymore, it becomes all the more important to create time to walk every day. Multi-joint, multi-planar movement is necessary: While walking helps, our bodies are made up of multiple joints and muscles that are meant to move in different planes. While earlier, we had opportunities to use all of these joints and muscles and move in different planes and at different speeds, today, a structured exercise programme is the only way for us to ensure we give the body the optimal movement it needs. Energy and weight management: With an abundance of food around us and the convenience with which we can procure it, energy management has become vital. Consistently consuming more energy and expending less have resulted in creating an energy surplus in our bodies. This surplus has, in turn, resulted in consistent weight gain leading to obesity which could lead to other metabolic conditions such as insulin sensitivity, cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, breathing difficulties and musculoskeletal disorders. One way to address this energy surplus is by expending more energy. And the only way this can be achieved is by doing physical activities. Metabolic health: This is our body's ability to process food to fuel and use it efficiently to work, repair cells and store excess energy, and is a critical part of well-being. And regular exercise is the simplest and most effective way to improve one's metabolic health. Exercise significantly improves metabolic health by improving insulin sensitivity, regulating blood sugar levels, improving lipid profiles (lowering LDL, raising HDL), reducing body fat, and positively impacting the function of organs such as the liver and pancreas, all of which help in lowering the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

Basal metabolic rate: While regular walking and endurance exercises can help in increasing our energy expenditure in the short-term, in the long-term, the smartest way to consistently increase energy expenditure is by increasing our basal metabolic rate (BMR). A person's basal metabolic rate is the amount of energy burnt throughout the day excluding the energy they burn through exercise and activities of daily life. The most effective way to increase one's BMR is by building more muscle. Compared to fat, muscle is more expensive for the body to maintain. So, having more muscle demands that the body burn more energy to simply maintain one's current body weight and composition. And the simplest way to build more muscle is to strength train consistently. While strength training sounds scary to many, in reality, strength training is a simple process of stimulating our existing muscles and thereby gradually building more muscle. It is safe to say that, irrespective of who you are, adding strength training to your life will only result in positive outcomes.

Longevity: A buzzword today, longevity is something almost all of us are after. It is no surprise that we want to live long lives. And for that, we are after different diets, pills, supplements, treatments and procedures. But it has been proven without a doubt that all these efforts matter less than consistent exercise. Exercise is the single strongest predictor of longevity and all-cause mortality. In other words, if you want to live a long life, the simplest and most effective way to do so is to start exercising and making it a consistent part of your life. Quality of life: While exercise helps with weight loss, muscle building, metabolic health, energy management and longevity, the most important reason to embrace exercise is to improve our quality of life. Because it does not matter how long we live if the quality of our life is not optimal. While lifespan is about how long one lives, healthspan is about how long one lives healthily. We all want to live for as long as possible but without suffering and without being a burden to those around us. And exercise is an incredible tool that can enable us to do just that. To put it all together, we do not exercise enough not because we are not capable of it or because the benefits of exercise have not been proven. It is simply because we are not used to it. What we need is a mindset shift that helps us build new habits as a population. And why should we go to this trouble? Because exercise is a tool that can help us become better versions of ourselves. It is a guaranteed way to look, feel and function better. And it is most certainly the magic pill that can add years to our lives, and life to our years.

Antarctica hides a vast mountain range beneath its ice

Sydney: Have you ever imagined what Antarctica looks like beneath its thick blanket of ice? Hidden below are rugged mountains, valleys, hills and plains. Some peaks, like the towering Transantarctic Mountains, rise above the ice.But others, like the mysterious and ancient Gamburtsev Subglacial Mountains in the middle of East Antarctica, are completely buried. The Gamburtsev Mountains are similar in scale and shape to the European Alps. But we can't see them because the high alpine peaks and deep glacial valleys are entombed beneath kilometres of ice.Typically, a mountain range will rise in places where two tectonic plates clash with each other. But East Antarctica has been tectonically stable for millions of years.

Trump threatens to annihilate Iran as diplomats push for deal at UN



UNITED NATIONS, US President Donald Trump warned on Tuesday that he could annihilate Iran if there is no deal to end the war, but also suggested an agreement ?could come soon amid a diplomatic push at the United Nations."I have a big decision to make," Trump said in a speech at the UN General Assembly in ?New York.The Reuters Iran Briefing newsletter keeps you informed with the latest developments and analysis of the Iran war. Sign up here."Will a deal be made with Iran that lets them rebuild and create a far greater country than it ever was before?... Or do I annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again?"In a statement on Tuesday, Iran's Armed Forces dismissed Trump's comments at the UN as "propaganda", saying their response is "full readiness to inflict more severe, crushing, and unpredictable blows on the aggressors."

But away from the fiery ?rhetoric, discussions continued to try to end the nearly seven-month conflict that began with joint US-Israeli strikes and has since killed thousands, driven up oil prices and drawn in neighboring ?countries.US envoy Steve Witkoff in a post on X said that the United States and Iran engaged in lengthy talks on Tuesday on the sidelines of ?the UN General Assembly through mediators "who shuttled between the two sides throughout the day".

The mediators will continue their work, Witkoff added, saying that he hoped Tuesday's discussions would "prove constructive and promising."Trump also met the ?leaders of Middle Eastern countries who are keen to restore shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for a fifth of global oil and gas shipments before the war, but are wary of giving ?their longstanding rival Iran too much power.Many also host huge US military bases that have come under repeated Iranian attack throughout the war.

"We think that the situation with Iran could end right after the (November 3) midterm elections, maybe before. I don't know. You never know," Trump said as he met the leaders.The diplomatic maneuvering comes as Trump faces pressure on multiple fronts — rising energy costs at home, a widening regional conflict abroad, and the midterms six weeks away that ?could reshape his political standing. Whether talks produce a deal or the war escalates further carries consequences for global oil markets, Gulf security and millions of Iranians.

Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araqchi met with Prime ?Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani of Qatar, which has spent months trying to de-escalate the conflict, the Qatari state news agency reported.Item 1 of 3 US President Donald Trump addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City, US, September 22, 2026. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid[1/3]US President Donald Trump addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City, US, September 22, 2026. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tabA senior Iranian official said Tehran could reopen the Strait of Hormuz within days if ?the US ?eased military pressure and lifted its blockade on Iranian ports.The senior Iranian official told Reuters that Tehran had conveyed its latest proposal to Washington through mediators last week and could reopen the strait to Gulf shipping within seven days if its demands were met.In a reminder of Iran's firm position so far, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who headed Iran's negotiating team at previous talks, said Iran would never surrender: "Trump must understand that he cannot impose his power on the Iranian people and its armed forces."

WIDENING REGIONAL CONFLICTOn the table at the Gulf states' meeting with Trump is a Qatari proposal for a common security framework ?involving Iran and the Arab Gulf states, regional sources ?said. One source said Iran was reviewing ?the proposal.Al Thani has said any such arrangement would need to provide security guarantees for the Gulf states and expand economic interdependence with Iran.Saudi Arabia, the largest of the Gulf states, has been drawn deeper into the war this month as Iran-aligned Houthi fighters have advanced in Yemen, routing forces of the ?Saudi-backed government and threatening Saudi oil exports through the Red Sea.The US, which bombed the Houthis for two months last year, has so far rebuffed ?repeated pleas from Saudi Arabia's ?Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to rejoin the fight. The New York Times reported that Trump called off US strikes against the Houthis on Sunday at the last minute.Asked why Washington had held back from striking the Houthis, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the United States would always support Saudi Arabia, adding:"That said, that is a very dangerous and complex conflict that pre-exists ... We have a history with the Houthis as ?well, and that's ?something we don't want to see impacted either."Oil markets did find some relief on Tuesday after sources told Reuters that ?Saudi Arabia had restarted operations at its East-West Pipeline and could resume exports from the Red Sea port of Yanbu within hours, albeit at reduced volumes.The pipeline, Saudi Arabia's main export route bypassing wartime disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, had been shut after ?attacks this month that Riyadh blamed on Iranian-backed groups in Iraq.Gram Slattery is a White House correspondent in Washington, focusing on national security, intelligence and foreign affairs. His work covers how key U.S. foreign policy decisions are debated, shaped and executed. He was previously a national political correspondent, covering the 2024 presidential campaign.

Australian man is accused of being Islamic State group propagandist who shared 10,000 files online



Wellington: A man in the Australian city of Melbourne is accused of pledging allegiance to the Islamic State group and spreading thousands of pieces of extremist propaganda online over a period of years, the authorities said on Wednesday.He was the seventh man to be arrested in Victoria since May over allegations of possessing or distributing IS content online. Australia's federal police didn't link the latest arrest to the other six and wouldn't say if they believed the man's case was connected.The 65-year-old Australian citizen, whose name hasn't been released, was due to appear in a Melbourne court later on Wednesday. He's charged with being a member of a terrorist organisation and with transmitting violent extremist material in an encrypted messaging app the authorities didn't name.The maximum penalty for the offenses is 10 years in prison.

The authorities said the man had sent 10,000 files containing extremist content between 2015 and 2020, including material relating to executions, torture and IS propaganda. The federal police allege that he also shared information about avoiding detection from law enforcement and instructional guides on planning and conducting mass casualty attacks, a statement Wednesday said.Acting Assistant Commissioner Paula Hudson told reporters in Canberra that the scale and distribution of the materials by the man "placed him as a principal distributor of ISIS propaganda within the group." "The material glorified acts of violence and terrorism, spreading hateful ideology that is designed to radicalise others," Hudson said.

An investigation into the man began when border officials examined the man's luggage as he departed Australia for a six-month trip to Egypt in 2020, the authorities said. He wasn't known to have travelled abroad since 2020 and wasn't linked to any attack or plot, Hudson said.Earlier this month, a 30-year-old Melbourne man was arrested and charged with possessing violent extremist content as he attempted to depart Australia for the Middle East, authorities said. The federal police allege he was part of an online group chat with five other Victoria state men arrested in May, who all face charges relating to possessing extremist material, including IS propaganda.The Islamic State group is a scattered and considerably weaker group since a 2019 United States-led military intervention drove it out of territory it had seized in Iraq and Syria, but its cells remain active, and it has inspired a number of independent attacks, including in western countries. In Australia, a mass shooting at a Hanukkah event in 2025, in which two men are accused of killing 15 Jewish people, was motivated by the shooters' IS affiliations, the authorities allege.It's thought 200 Australians travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State group between 2012 and 2019, according to a website for the country's national security agencies.

Taiwan is watching closely as Xi, Trump meet and hopes US will keep up its arms sales



Tainan: As China's Xi Jinping arrives in Washington to meet with US President Donald Trump, Taiwan expressed confidence that US arms sales to the island that Beijing claims as its own will continue — despite China's pressure.China has pressed Washington to halt the arms sales, most prominently during a summit in May between Trump and Xi in Beijing. After that meeting, the United States paused the sale of a record-breaking USD 14 billion package — and Trump described arms sales to Taiwan as a "very good negotiating chip" with China.

Still, the US government and Congress have "repeatedly expressed support for Taiwan's self-defence capabilities," Taiwanese Defence Ministry spokesperson Maj. Gen. Chiao Fu-chun told reporters in the southern city of Tainan."We will continue to maintain close contact with the US Department of War and continue to push forward the arms procurement deal between Taiwan and the US, ensuring it proceeds as planned," he added.The US is bound by its own laws to provide Taiwan — a self-ruled democracy that China sees as its own territory — with the means to defend itself. While not recognising Taiwan as a country, the US is the island's strongest informal backer and arms provider.Washington approved another USD 11 billion package for Taiwan in December.Hours before Xi's arrival for the three-day state visit to the US, Taiwan's military on Wednesday conducted live-fire drills featuring a domestically developed eight-wheeled armoured vehicle, highlighting efforts to strengthen its own arms production.

Called The Cheetah, the vehicle can be fitted with a 105-millimetre (4.1-inch) cannon and can reach a maximum speed of about 100 kph (62 mph) and an operational range of about 500 kilometres (311 miles).Taiwanese Maj. Gen. Chen Chien-chung said the vehicle can be used on various terrains and is suitable for urban warfare.Trump has in recent years pressed Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te to dramatically increase Taiwan's defence budget. The budget will exceed 3 per cent of Taiwan's gross domestic product for the first time in 2027, and Lai has pledged to get to 5 per cent by 2030.

In UN farewell, Macron denounces Trump's Gaza diplomacy as spectacle of shame

UNITED NATIONS France's President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday dismissed US President Donald Trump's claims of having ?secured peace in Gaza, saying not a single humanitarian corridor had been reopened in the enclave despite the proclaimed peace.In ?his final address to the United Nations before leaving office next year, Macron said the world was witnessing a spectacle that should shame everyone, rebuking Trump's portrayal of his Gaza peace plan as a diplomatic triumph.

Get a look at the day ahead in European and global markets with the Morning Bid Europe newsletter. Sign up here.He spoke at the United Nations General Assembly hours after Trump had from the same rostrum hailed his Gaza peace plan as a diplomatic ?triumph."A year ago, here in this very hall, about a dozen states had recognized Palestine. I hear the cynicism of some people: 'Recognition ?is just a piece of paper, look at the reality,'" Macron said, banging his fist on the podium in ?his last speech at the United Nations before stepping down next May."But what credibility do we have if we continue to remain inactive in ?the face of Gaza? Some boast of a supposed peace. But that peace has not reopened humanitarian access for a single second. Are we simply ?to stand by and watch this spectacle that should shame us all?"

In response to Macron's criticism, White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said: "President Trump ended the war between Israel and Hamas, freed all living hostages, returned the bodies of the deceased to their loved ones, and is now leading the implementation of the 20-Point Plan for Peace ?in Gaza. While others talk, this President took this complex problem head on. No one has done more for peace and stability in the ?region."Macron has faced criticism among some politicians and activists in France that he has done little since recognising a Palestinian state last September.Despite the criticism, Paris has toughened ?its stance ?on settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, imposing some national sanctions and launching a process to ban products from Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank."Look at what is happening in the West Bank, where every day violations are committed. In whose name? Hamas has never operated in the West Bank," Macron said.Item 1 of 3 France's President Emmanuel Macron addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City, US, September 22, 2026. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid

[1/3]France's President Emmanuel Macron addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City, US, September 22, 2026. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab"What is happening there is building, day by day, the impossibility of a project that should be based on respect for ?the legitimate right of the Palestinian people ?to exist."France's ties with Israel ?have been particularly strained over the last year. Macron said those who believed that violating the sovereignty of all of Israel's neighbors would ensure its security were mistaken."They are weakening Israel's security, both today and in the future," ?he said.'LONG LIVE THE UNITED NATIONS'

Seven months from France's next presidential election, Macron was making his last ?appearance after first taking ?to the rostrum in 2017.Often showing a keen eye for the trappings of diplomacy — the grand settings, the symbolism, the personal connections — he has at the same time failed to translate this into lasting strategic gains, analysts say.However, he has always been a staunch defender of the multilateral system and the United Nations.Macron ?warned against ?a global "return to the law of the jungle", saying countries faced a choice between a ?world governed by power and coercion and a "civilized international society.""Our duty, more than ever, is to stand alongside the United Nations. We cannot accept the new order of impunity that some ?would like to build," he said.He ended his speech with "Long Live the United Nations!"Additional reporting by Steve Holland; Editing by Michelle Nichols and Howard GollerOur Standards: The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles., opens new tab



Hyderabad hospital ordered to pay Rs 20 lakh for medical negligence

Hyderabad: Holding a city-based hospital and a consultant neurosurgeon responsible for medical negligence, the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission-I in Hyderabad has ordered Venkateshwara Ortho Health Care to pay Rs 20 lakh in compensation.

According to multiple reports, the case is from March 2021, when a US-based endocrinologist visiting the city underwent spinal surgery at the facility. The reports have indicated that a protective membrane tear occurred during the procedure. Although initial repairs were made, the patient subsequently suffered a persistent fluid leak from the surgical site.

According to the commission's findings, rather than performing standard secondary suturing upon readmission, the caregivers applied surgical adhesive without properly informing the patient, media reports have indicated.The complainant later returned to the United States, where local specialists discovered fluid accumulation and bone debris, requiring him to undergo emergency revision surgeries.

Russian attacks injure 7 across Ukraine and damage structures

Kyiv: Russia launched strikes at businesses and storage facilities in Ukraine overnight, injuring seven people across the country, according to local authorities.The Russian Defence Ministry said Wednesday that its forces overnight carried out "group strikes" using drones on Ukraine's "military-industrial and energy sector facilities, logistics centres and maritime vessels." In Kyiv and the surrounding region, a storage facility and an industrial facility used for storing and making drones were hit, the ministry said.The Kyiv City Military Administration said three people were injured in the city, and added that a warehouse in Kyiv's Holosiivskyi district was damaged and caught fire, while a fuel station and an office building in the district were also damaged.

In the Solomianskyi district, drone debris fell in open areas between residential buildings and at another location.In the Darnytskyi district, debris fell in an open area in a non-residential zone and a gas station was damaged, the administration said.In Zhytomyr region, west of Kyiv, two people were injured in a Russian attack on a business, Ukraine's Emergency Service said in a post on Telegram.

And in Zaporizhzhia, in southeastern Ukraine, two men aged 37 and 39 by a strike that sparked a large fire at a shopping centre. Emergency services said the fire spread across about 6,000 square metres (1.5 acres) before being brought under control.Emergency crews worked under difficult conditions as the threat of further attacks forced them to periodically halt operations and take shelter, it added.In the southern Odesa region, Russia also attacked warehouse buildings, sparking a large fire. Firefighters faced difficult conditions as repeated air raid alerts, the structure of the building and the large quantity of goods inside complicated efforts to extinguish the blaze, the service said.Russia said three logistics centres used for storage of military and dual-use goods were hit in Odesa. Another storage facility used for storing drone components, was hit in the wider Odesa region, the Russian defense ministry said.A bulk carrier "transporting military supplies to the port of Odesa" was also hit at sea, the ministry added.



EAM Jaishankar discusses collaboration in AI, space, energy with counterparts from UAE, France

New York: External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot participated in the India-UAE-France trilateral on the sidelines of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, where they discussed collaboration in Artificial Intelligence (AI), space, health sciences, energy and culture.

The three ministers reviewed progress in trilateral cooperation across agreed areas of mutual interest, including space, artificial intelligence, and culture and heritage. They also discussed the situation in West Asia, according to the statement released by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).The three ministers emphasised further strengthening and expanding trilateral cooperation in the areas of mutual interest and further building upon the strong and friendly ties that exist between India, France and the UAE.

During the meeting on Tuesday (local time), EAM Jaishankar, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Jean-Noel Barrot reaffirmed their commitment to further build constructive ties between the three nations through concrete initiatives and agreed to meet at regular intervals to review the progress in all synergetic areas, according to the MEA statement.In a post on X, EAM Jaishankar wrote, "Glad to participate in the India-UAE-France trilateral on the sidelines of UNGA81. Collaboration in the fields of Artificial Intelligence, Space, health sciences, energy and culture was the main topic of discussion. Our shared interests and complimentary capabilities offer immense scope for cooperation. Agreed to meet again soon to take the discussion forward."On September 21, EAM Jaishankar held a meeting with Jean-Noel Barrot in New York and discussed regional and global issues, particularly the Ukraine and Gulf crisis.The ministers also spoke about multilateral issues, including the reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)."Pleasure to meet FM Jean-Noel Barrot of France UN High Level Week.

Manipur's long road to recovery



Sitting outside a small eatery constructed with tin sheets and iron mesh, Kundram Memori, 55, adjusts an assortment of vegetables spread on gunny bags on a footpath in Manipur's Bishnupur district. Sprinkling the stock of cabbages, beans, and carrots with water as she waits for buyers, Memori recalls how less than two years ago she lived a comfortable life, around 15 kilometres away in Churachandpur, where she owned a grocery store and her husband taught in a school.Memori's life changed on May 3, 2023, when ethnic violence erupted between the tribal Kuki-Zo and the Meitei people in Manipur. It was triggered by a Manipur High Court order seeking the State government's response on the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list. Her home in Churachandpur, dominated by the Kuki-Zo people, was burnt down. The family of four had to escape overnight.

Now, she lives in a relief camp in Bishnupur, and she says the family's income has dropped by 80%. "My son is a research scholar; my daughter is pursuing a master's degree in Imphal. After the violence, my husband developed hypertension. We do not have a home. I need to support the family now. We manage with whatever vegetables I sell here during the day. Evenings are spent in the camp, where we take turns to cook food and do the other chores," says Memori.In Churachandpur, Holkim, 70, sits quietly on a thin mattress on the floor of a community centre. The centre was converted into a relief camp in May 2023. She stares blankly when asked about her life in Sugnou, a Meitei-dominated area from where she was displaced in May 2023. "She was born in Sugnou, where she owned a shop and a small hotel. Everything was razed during the violence," says a relative.

Forced to stay in a large hall with broken windows along with 102 others, bedsheets and plastic sheets doubling as walls, Holkim's relative says that she hopes to go back home one day. "While the men go out to do odd jobs during the day, we stay back, cook meals and maintain the camp, clean the toilets. There is no running water; we store it in buckets. For the past few months there has been a shortage of medical supplies," said Gracy Niengneilhaing, 36, another camp resident whose house in Imphal was destroyed by a mob. She says the community members lean on each other for support but also that there is no privacy.Memori and Holkim are among the 62,000 people still living in relief camps, more than 21 months since ethnic violence erupted in the State. They have no opinion about President's Rule in the State. All they want is to go back home.Manipur was placed under President's Rule following an impending political crisis. The Congress party, in Opposition, was to move a no-confidence motion in the Assembly, which was set to be supported by the sitting Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislators. On February 9, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh was summoned to Delhi in a chartered flight. Following a meeting with the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, he resigned.The valley, with 10% of Manipur's landmass, is dominated by the non-tribal Meitei ethnic group, mostly Hindus, who account for over 64% of the State's population. The hills comprise 90% of Manipur's area but send only 20 MLAs to the Assembly, mostly Kuki-Zo and Naga members.As per the 2011 Census, the population in the State stood at 27.21 lakh and the decadal population growth from 2001 to 2011 was 18.65%. Other than the Manipur police and the Army, 288 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) are deployed in the State. The strength of each company may vary from 80-120 personnel.

The point where Bishnupur and Churachandpur districts converge has been one of the most volatile areas with armed men or 'village volunteers' aiming at each other frequently. To keep the warring communities away, 'buffer zones' were created. These buffer zones, where the Meitei areas in the valley and the Kuki-Zo areas in the hills converge, are secured by the CAPF and the Army, but not the State police. When The Hindu visited the Bishnupur-Churachandpur buffer zone, there were at least six checkpoints on a 2-km stretch. The Army and the CAPF personnel take photos of all the visitors and note down personal details such as phone and Aadhar number.After Central rule was imposed in the State, bunkers — sandbags and tin sheds — built by village volunteers in buffer zones to protect their communities have been removed. Some have been occupied by Central security forces."We had a meeting with civil society groups. Some bunkers were voluntarily dismantled, and some were destroyed by the security forces," says a police officer in Churachandpur.According to a senior government official, around 450-500 bunkers have been destroyed in the past 22 months. "Sometimes they are rebuilt. Since President's Rule, it is being ensured that none of the bunkers exist in the buffer zones to prevent confrontation between the two communities," says the officer.

The government is working on a 13-point road map to end violence and restore peace in the restive State. The road map includes disarmament, arrest of armed miscreants and extortionists, rehabilitation of internally displaced people, restoration of damaged and destroyed religious places, and free movement on highways.On March 8, after National Highways 2 and 37 — which connect the valley to Nagaland and Assam respectively — were opened for all vehicles, violence was reported in the hill district of Kangpokpi, leaving one protester dead and 40 others, including 27 security personnel, injured.Since ethnic violence began, cases of extortion and abductions by armed groups have seen a rise, particularly in the valley areas. On January 26, 2025, as India celebrated Republic Day, the Manipur government established a dedicated Integrated Anti-Extortion Cell to deal with the "significant" law-and-order threat in the State, as a government press release put it. It said that people, including government officials, had been threatened with severe consequences via calls, messages, or letters from unlawful organisations if extortion demands were not met.Post February 13, billboards and posters have been put up across the State displaying the helpline number of the Anti-Extortion Cell.The trader community, many of who migrated to Manipur at least 100 years ago, have been the softest target of armed gangs. Those from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar say they are contemplating migrating from the State, which has become home to them."Even at the height of insurgency and violence in the State in the 1980s and 1990s, the situation was not this bad. People no longer have the purchasing capacity. With daily blockades, goods cannot move. First, we pay in the hills to move vehicles, then we have to pay sundry armed gangs in the valley. I do not accept calls from unknown numbers as those may be from extortionists," says a trader from Uttar Pradesh on condition of anonymity. He notes that extortion calls and visits have stopped since President's Rule was imposed.

Under a glass table at his shop in Thangal Bazaar in the heart of Imphal, the trader has a receipt of ?4,500 acknowledging payment to Arambai Tenggol, a radical armed Meitei group, whose popularity has shot up in the past two years, coinciding with the period of violence. The trader says it is a pass to save him from other extortionists, as a few days after he paid the amount, another group arrived at his shop seeking money."It is 6 in the evening now. The market should be bustling with activity. But what do you see here? Many shops are shut, while many have started rolling down their shutters," says another trader of Marwari origin at Thangal Bazaar.

Anil Haorokcham, secretary of the Manipur Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says they have been pursuing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the State and Central government for a moratorium on bank loans. "Up to 99% of entrepreneurs here will fall in the category of non-performing assets (NPA) if a financial package is not announced by the government," he says.He says the government is yet to publish data on financial losses incurred in the State. "More than 50% of regular transactions have been lost. As the main city (Imphal) is cut off from satellite towns (hill areas) of Manipur, the towns are also facing collateral damage," Haorokcham says.Kundram Memori, a resident of Churachandpur in Manipur, whose house was burnt down during the May 2023 ethnic violence.

He says the vegetable vendors at Ima Keithel (mother's market), the all-woman-run market in Imphal, whose average turnover per day was ?10,000 before May 2023, are not able to sell ?2,000 worth of produce now. The exodus of Kuki-Zo people from Imphal has had an impact on health care, hospitality, and other sectors too."Private hospitals are contracting their businesses because Kuki-Zo people are not coming. Private schools are affected; tourism is wiped out from the State. A hotel owner said they are running the hotel at a 20-30% occupancy. The staff is on a rotational basis. They can't fire the staff, nor can they employ them full-time. Salary is based on working days," he says. His list of economic troubles continues: FMCG distributors say demand has gone down by 50% because people have lost purchasing power.

Ch Priyoranjan Singh, a professor in Manipur University's economics department, says many businesspeople from the valley are moving to neighbouring Guwahati in Assam, to Manipur's west. "First the pandemic and then the violence have set back the economy by several years. A mineral water bottling plant shut down two of its units after rampant extortion calls," Singh says.Manipur has a sizeable Nepali population. Devi, a clothes shop owner who came to Imphal after she married 12 years ago, says her family is considering moving back to Nepal. "We came to India as the education here is much better. But the other day my son was talking about guns and bombs. Last year, he heard gunshots outside his school. Many families from Nepal are now thinking of going back," Devi says as she waits for customers to come.After President's Rule was imposed, Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla appealed to members of all communities to surrender looted police weapons at the nearest police station within seven days or face strict action.Since May 2023, around 6,020 police weapons and lakhs worth of ammunition were looted from police armouries, almost 90% in the valley areas dominated by the Meitei people. Since 2023, there have been multiple advisories by the government to surrender the weapons.The amnesty period was extended until March 6. From February 20 to March 6, as many as 1,063 weapons, 15,027 pieces of ammunition, 684 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and 5,971 other items such as bullet-proof jackets and helmets were surrendered.

A police officer says that the deadline was not extended as people would stop taking the administration seriously. "A message had to be sent that the police mean business. The image of the police had taken a hit after Arambai Tenggol members abducted and assaulted a police officer on February 28 last year. After the deadline to surrender arms was over, it was made clear that the police and security forces would crack down on people hoarding them," says the officer. Since February 18, around 90 people have been arrested for extortion-related activities.Meitei civil society groups argue that the Kuki-Zo people are backed by armed insurgent groups that are in a Suspension of Operation (SoO) pact with the Centre. They also want this protection.

In Churachandpur, most Meitei homes have been flattened after the arson. In Imphal, Kuki-Zo properties have either been gutted or occupied by members of the Arambai Tenggol. The Trulock Theological Seminary, run by the Kuki Christian Council, located metres away from the office of the Manipur Rifles, has "mobile unit of AT" scribbled on its wall, pointing to its current occupants.Mutum Yoiremba, a political consultant, feels the way forward is through an agreed collective amnesia, "a forgetfulness, even if not forgiveness". "The government must enable, encourage, and protect those who are willing to come out and engage in this dialogue. The military way of resolving things with an iron fist has failed in the past. It was through political dialogue that the Northeast had finally seen peace after nearly half a century of turmoil. The Government of India must act as an enabler for peace," said Yoiremba.Haorokcham says that a deteriorating economy does not discriminate on caste or religion. "There are many Kuki women married to Meitei men. When they want to have a family gathering, they go to Guwahati or Delhi. I wish normalcy comes back soon," he says.Sharad Leishangtham, 46, who used to work as a welder in Churachandpur, now sells sugarcane juice in Bishnupur, and lives in the relief camp.

Tanks battle polluted groundwater in Haryana



Ikbal Khan, 60, speaks in Hindi accented with a strong, rough Mewati accent. He recalls a time, over 25 years ago, when women from his village of Ghaghas would fetch drinking water from a well on the outskirts of the village. As the groundwater diminished, borewells were sunk. "But over the past four to five years, the groundwater has turned salty," he says. People in Nuh district in Haryana began constructing kundas, underground water tanks, some with government support.Ikbal, like most of his fellow villagers, constructed one a month ago. He spent ?60,000, with financial aid from the Block Samiti, a rural government body. Ikbal lives below the poverty line, with an annual income of less than ?1.8 lakh. His tank, like most others, has a capacity of around 20,000 litres. The farming family uses the water only to drink, relying on the rain to feed the crop. This cuts the produce per acre to less than half that well-irrigated land brings in.

Before his family of six got their own tank, Ikbal used to share one with other families. This is common in this village of about 5,000 people, which now has close to 200 tanks. Together, three or four families bear the cost of water, supplied by privately owned water tankers. This way, they share the financial burden.Ghaghas is situated in the foothills of the Aravali mountain range, 10 km off National Highway 248A, connecting Gurugram in Haryana to Alwar in Rajasthan. Nuh figures among the government think-tank NITI Aayog's list of 100 'Aspirational Districts', for faring poorly on various development parameters. But it's not just Nuh. More than two-thirds of Haryana's districts face a groundwater crisis. Harmful chemicals have entered underground streams, making the water unfit for drinking and irrigation.

The Annual Ground Water Quality Report, 2024 released by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) in December 2024, stated that fluoride concentrations exceeded the permissible limit in Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Haryana was second on the list, with 208 out of 879 samples containing excessive fluoride. In addition, several samples had arsenic beyond permissible limits. Long-term exposure to both these contaminants can have severe health consequences, including fluorosis that degrades the skeletal system and causes cancer.Out of Haryana's 22 districts, anomalous values of uranium (over 30 parts per billion) were found in 16 districts. This makes it part of the "over-exploited, critical, and semi-critical groundwater stress zones", the report says. Chronic exposure to uranium can lead to kidney damage. The report was based on groundwater samples collected from 15,259 background monitoring network stations in May 2023 across India.In Haryana, 19 districts had a high electrical conductivity (EC) groundwater value. This is a measure of the ease with which water conducts electricity, indicative of the degree of salinity.Referring to the CGWB report, Indian National Lok Dal leader and Rania MLA Arjun Chautala raised the issue of deteriorating groundwater quality during the Budget Session in the Haryana Assembly this year. The first-time MLA said the report had made alarming revelations. He said groundwater contamination is a serious matter and that attention must be paid to ensure testing and reducing rising uranium levels in the Ghaghar and other rivers.Haryana Public Health Engineering Minister Ranbir Gangwa, in his reply, informed the House that a water testing laboratory had been established in every district of the State.Activist and convener of community-led Mewat RTI Manch Rajuddin Meo, who led a campaign, Jal Care Mission, for clean drinking water in Nuh in 2009, says, "The groundwater crisis is now serious. The water here has become so salty that even birds and animals do not drink it." He adds that Nagina block bore the brunt. Out of 68 villages, 26, including Ghaghas, were the worst hit."A survey by the Haryana government in 2022 identified these 26 villages as having levels of total dissolved solids (TDS) beyond the permissible limit," he says. Nuh district water testing laboratory sources confirm this. "Of 860 borewells, 70 had a TDS over the permissible level of 2,000 mg/litre," says a source.Meo says a locality of around 100 families in Ghaghas continues to use the groundwater as they cannot afford water from the tankers. He claims that the government's free piped drinking water to Nuh villages is yet to cover the entire district. "Also, the ?2,100 crore three-phase Mewat Canal project, announced by former CM Manohar Lal, is yet to take off." A pipeline of the Central government's Jal Jeevan Mission and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation for Rural and Urban Areas was laid in Ghaghas last year. Villagers say it is being tested, so there is no regular drinking water supply.About half an hour's drive from Ghaghas, down the highway, across the road, is Madhi village. Mohammad Jubair, 58, sits under a thorn-ridden keekar tree, often the only foliage in this water-starved area. His white beard matches white turban and kurta. He claims that the village is divided into three localities for water supply through pipelines. "Each locality gets only 10 minutes of piped water supply every third day. We need at least 30 minutes a day to meet our household's water needs," he says.

Mohammad Sabir, 42, on a handicap tricycle, joins the conversation, adding that the water supply is only in name and the village is dependent on private water tankers. People in Jhajjar and Hisar had similar stories. Agroha, Barwala, and Adampur blocks of Hisar are the worst hit.Many village panchayats in Hisar have bought their own tankers. "Dushyant Chautala (former Deputy CM) had facilitated a donation of 50 tankers through a private firm four years ago," says Suresh Kumar, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (Hisar) president. He lives in Durjanpur village.Raj Kumar, Jhajjar's Kheri Khumar village sarpanch, says, "The two wells in the village have been abandoned, as the water is not fit for drinking. We are dependent on a canal for irrigation and drinking water." Around a dozen villages in Jhajjar district, including Gudha, Dhor, and Palra, also face similar problems. Sushila, the sarpanch of the neighbouring Khatiwas village, wonders what will happen when the canal dries up.Sandeep Kumar, an executive engineer at the Public Health Engineering Department in Punhana block, Nuh, says the whole district has piped water. "About 100 villages face difficulties, including those pertaining to illegal connections, but Madhi does not have a problem."When Arjun Chautala raised the issue of groundwater in the Assembly, Chief Minister Nayab Saini had said that the government had, as part of its commitment to ensure the supply of clean drinking water, worked to provide tap water to every household in the last 10 years.Hazi Fateh Mohammad, who has been running a water supply business for the past decade, selling water to three or four villages in Nagina block, Nuh district, says the demand for tankers has decreased since the arrival of the pipeline. "We supplied 25-30 tankers during the month of Ramzan last year. Now it is down to 5-10 tankers." He has installed a common water point fed by his tanks in his village of Nagina, where he gives water free of cost.Maya, 65, a fellow resident of the village, says she fetches drinking water from here twice a day despite the piped water supply to her home. "Almost all households prefer groundwater from the filling point for drinking. It tastes better. The piped water is mostly used for washing, cleaning, and for animals," she says.Dilshad Khan, 32, is a marginal farmer in Madhi. He owns less than an acre of land and works as a truck driver to supplement his income. He shares a kunda with a neighbour, but they still find the water bill high. "A tanker costs ?1,200 in winter, but it's hard to find one for even ?2,000 in summer. There's often a five- to six-day waiting period. We need at least two tankers a month," he says.Like him, many others in Nuh own agricultural land, which is often too little to live off. People either rear cattle or work as drivers and helpers to make ends meet. "We are at the mercy of god! There is neither a canal nor any drain for irrigation," says Irfan Khan, 35, who holds a vocational diploma from an industrial training institute. "The groundwater here is so salty that we cannot even bathe with it. It causes a burning sensation. We put out clay pots filled with the tanker water even for the birds," he says.

In Haryana, 1.14% samples have high sodium levels and 0.34% have very high levels making the groundwater unfit for irrigation, as per the CGWB report. The CGWB has listed some of the reasons for deteriorating groundwater quality. These included an excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides in farming, improper waste disposal, sewage leakage, landfill contamination, and the over-extraction of groundwater, among others.Kumar from Hisar says the government's approach to the crisis seemed short-term, with the stress mainly on supplying water through a pipeline. "Instead of focusing on long-term sustainable solutions, such as recharging groundwater and promoting crop diversification to reduce the extraction of groundwater, the government is taking stopgap measures," he says.Shiv Singh Rawat retired as a superintending engineer in the Haryana government's Irrigation and Water Resources department. He is now the convener of the Yamuna Bachao Abhiyan, a movement to clean up the river ghats and protect the river from pollution.He advocates for a comprehensive and sustainable water management strategy to move from water scarcity to water security. He suggests "holistic solutions adopted globally for water management, such as floodwater aquifer rechargers, large-scale rainwater harvesting, and the reuse of treated wastewater".

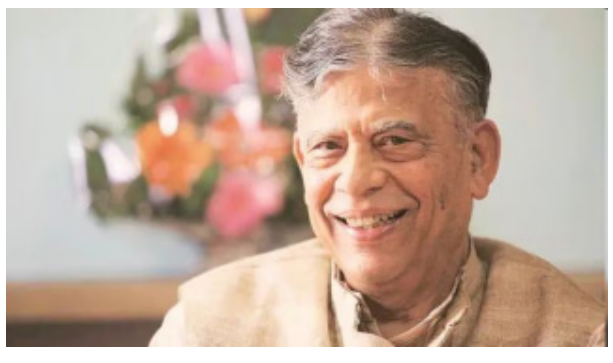
Apple's new watches are always listening

Melbourne: The latest Apple Watch models have some new features: they can listen to the sounds around you all day, transcribe snippets of conversation on demand, and write up summaries of everything they heard.This kind of ambient, always-on surveillance raises privacy concerns, which Apple addresses well.

AI doom fears overstated, global pause unrealistic: Zoho Co-founder Sridhar Vembu

Chennai: Predictions that artificial intelligence could lead to catastrophic outcomes are overstated, and a global pause in AI development is unlikely, Zoho cofounder Sridhar Vembu said on Wednesday, while urging India to keep its strategic options open and invest heavily in foundational R&D across sectors.Vembu, said India should pursue an independent approach to AI, building on partnerships without becoming locked into the emerging technology rivalry between the United States and China."We must be friends with everybody, enemies with nobody and keep our options open," Vembu, Chief Scientist and Co-founder, Zoho said in an interview with PTI.Machine Learning & Artificial IntelligenceHe called for extensive investment in foundational research and development, drawing a distinction between long-term scientific and technological capabilities and the large sums being spent by global companies on developing and deploying frontier AI models."We need to make extensive investment in critical foundational R&D. There is a difference between foundational R&D versus spending tens of billions of dollars on AI model development or deployment," he said.Such research should span every sector, Vembu said, adding that building foundational capabilities does not necessarily require investments on the scale of frontier AI model development."It is not a USD 10 billion proposition and can be done for USD 100-200 million," he said.Vembu said he does not subscribe to predictions that AI will inevitably wipe out humanity, although he acknowledged that concerns about the risks posed by increasingly capable systems merit attention.... Maybe we can pay attention to it, but am I really worried about it? No, absolutely not," he said.His greater concern is the erosion of human judgment and skills as people become increasingly dependent on AI tools, as well as the potential disruption to jobs, particularly in software engineering.On regulation, Vembu said governments are likely to remain behind technological advances, as has happened with earlier technologies. He compared the development of AI with the early automobile industry, when cars became widespread before rules governing licensing, speed and road safety were established.The implication, he said, is that AI governance will evolve alongside the technology rather than necessarily preceding it.Vembu also rejected calls for a worldwide halt to AI development, arguing that such a move would be difficult to implement because major AI laboratories would have little incentive to stop while competitors continued developing the technology.A central concern for Vembu is the effect of AI on the development of skills among younger workers and students.Citing a study by the US National Bureau of Economic Research involving lawyers, he said junior lawyers using AI tools completed tasks faster but did not necessarily build or retain the underlying knowledge needed to perform the work independently.

‘GST is a good tax to share with urban local bodies. Every citizen becomes a stakeholder in welfare’: Vijay Kelkar at Idea Exchange



Dr. Vijay Kelkar, a distinguished economist and academic, has held several prominent positions in India and internationally. As Chairman of the Finance Commission (2008–2010), he contributed significantly to India’s fiscal policy. He served as Finance Secretary of the Government of India (1998–1999) during Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s tenure, playing a pivotal role in shaping economic policies aligned with Vajpayee’s vision of liberalization and development. Earlier, he served as Secretary to the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (1985–1988) and chaired the Tariff Commission (1997–1998). From 2010 to 2012, he served as Chairman of the National Stock Exchange and was a Director at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) from 2010 to 2017. Dr. Kelkar has been a consultant for the UN and UNCTAD, contributing to global economic discussions. Honoured with the Padma Vibhushan in 2011, he holds a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, an M.S. from the University of Minnesota.‘GST is a good tax to share with urban local bodies. Every citizen becomes a stakeholder in welfare.’

Sunanda Mehta: You have been delivering these talks on former Prime MinisterAtal Bihari Vajpayee and his policies. Would you like to start with that?

To my mind, the reform story of late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is seldom talked about. I have worked with him in various capacities. In 1999, I was moved from chairman of the tariff commission where my idea was to make it an independent body to safeguard liberal trade policies. I remember my daughter was studying in the US and I was visiting her when suddenly I received a call from Montek Singh Ahluwalia saying ‘Look I’m moving to the Planning Commission, you have to become the Finance Secretary’. I said, ‘I have bought tickets for my wife and myself out of my own savings and I would not come back immediately. When I came back though, I became the Finance Secretary. I had never met Vajpayeeji. As soon as I took charge, I went to meet him.It was a bit daunting as he did not speak much. I kept quiet. After a great pause, he said, “Aapko bahut soch samajh ke banaya gaya hai (You have been appointed after much deliberation).” Then, he said, if you have any problem come to me directly. When I came back to my office I wondered why he said that. He wanted to signal that the government might have changed but the reforms would continue. I was replacing Ahluwalia, who was spearheading the reforms, and, instead of choosing a civil servant, I was chosen.The way to think about Vajpayeeji’s reforms is that they fall in four categories — micro, meso, macro and meta economic reforms. He firstly continued the path the earlier government of P V Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh had started of trade liberalisation. It was the first time during the Budget that no excise rates were changed. Back then, we were facing nuclear sanctions. So, we had to show the world that we were open for business and are not a closed economy. So, we continued tariff reforms in a planned manner, which was rule-based. Liberal trade policies became the cornerstone of the micro economy.If you slice or dice the macroeconomic performance for 30 years, Indian growth rate is stable and between 5-6 per cent. Our inflation rate is also stable. I would argue that is possible because Vajpayeeji created the policy infrastructure necessary for two reforms — one was the Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management (FRBM) Act. For the first time, a democratic country’s politicians put constraints on themselves on fiscal policy. The second was the Monetary policy. These were the guardrails which kept the Indian economy from falling off its rails. I would argue that these two guardrails helped India do well in comparison to other developing or developed countries in spite of enormous shocks, one of them being Covid-19. We got all sorts of advice but we did not require it because of these two guardrails that also explain India’s macroeconomic stability in spite of sanctions, war, and the oil crisis.Now the Meso economic policies. He reformed three important sectors: telecom, electricity and roads. Interestingly, all three sectors are network industries. And they give enormous boost to goods productivity.I’m told an apocryphal story of how he got fed up with the great discussion in the Cabinet when he proposed the Golden Quadrilateral and he got up and drew the same on the map of India and got it pushed. More important is the concept of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna that revolutionised rural connectivity and is not well-appreciated. He took a lot of interest in this project.In the Telecom sector if you remember we had the licensing policy where people gave enormous bids and were stuck. He took a bold decision to change the policy: scrap the biddable licensing policy. This led to the telecom boom and revolutionised India’s telecom sector. IT export was possible because of this. Another important reform was in the port sector, which allowed for private ports to be developed.His contribution to the meta economic policies is through the formation of various institutions, one of which is the Competition Commission of India (CCI). It was an independent commission. Second was the National Statistical Commission (NSC). One more institution was created, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which was to be led by a Supreme Court Judge. He was concerned about social justice. He used to talk about Antyodaya as a policy.His crisis management was par excellence. A crisis came during his prime ministership when from a high interest rate regime, we went to a low interest rate regime. State governments, Maharashtra for example, had done borrowings on high interest rates, while the market rates were low. The Central government took all the high interest rate and allowed state governments to take the interest at a lower rate. I remember the Cabinet meeting which as Finance Secretary I was privy to. I told him ‘Sir, do you remember our classics when the Samudra Manthan took place. Lord Shankhar took the poison and became Nilkanth. Reforms are like manthan and the government has to be Nilkanth’.He was a great prime minister and everything he did was by consensus. I think he had a God-given gift to charm and persuade people. He had the knack for managing people. He knew exactly which button to push. In public meetings, he used to talk but in private he used to listen. He was a class apart.

Anuradha Mascarenhas: What are the challenges India is facing as an emerging economy?

I think India’s challenge number one in terms of competition would be China. We have to work out a strategy in which we need to build our technology at home. That’s the only way we can outpace China. In many ways we have the demographic dividend. China is aging. We are also aging but it would take some time to show. We have a small window to catch up. We have to really build on an innovation-led model for India. We are not spending enough on technology or innovation.

Partha Sarathi Biswas: A large part of our population is still working on minimum or below minimum wages. Should it not be a cause of concern? What is your opinion about Ladki Bahin Yojana?

I think this is where social policy is extremely important. Markets would provide market wages. We can’t force them to pay higher. By improving public goods, public schools and public health, we can help the population. Improvement in public services can help growth.As for those schemes, they do not bother me much. What bothers me the most is that economic policies have become very bureaucratic. Our real problem is, public policy is not rule-based anymore. Have you tried starting a business or buying a flat? I would rather have general improvement in productivity rather than a few UnicornsI have no problem about direct benefit transfer if they go to those intended. But wastage is a cause of concern. Look at the city’s infrastructure. There is no accountability. There is no elected mayor in the town. You would probably know who is the mayor of New York than who is the mayor of Pune

Sushant Kulkarni: You talked about nuclear independence and fiscal independence. In a largely interconnected world, how is this evolving?

Strategic patience and rapid economic growth are important. We have to be patient while dealing with China. If we grow we can catch up with them sooner than they think. In my view, we should concentrate on growth. We have to be intelligent with economic sanctions against them. Just be patient, grow, grow, grow and grow.Anuradha: Are you satisfied with the manner in which the Public Private Partnership model has evolved?No. The government is used to a one-time purchase contract while PPP is like marriage, so a different approach has to be taken. It has to be give and take. You can’t write everything in advance and be ready to negotiate. Unless you do that it would not work. No one can anticipate change. The only PPP which works is the one when the contract owes the government money.

Sushant: So how does an economist who is in an administrative chair deal with a political leader? How was your experience?

No, I was not a dyed-in-wool civil servant. The one thing I have learnt, the only change agents in the country are the politicians. They want change. Because they want to win elections. All changes don’t come from civil servants. They come from politicians.

Sunanda: So talking of changes by politicians, what is your opinion on demonetisation?

That’s the kind of change one should not bring about. No civil servant would have recommended that. Continued languishing of the employment issue, which you mentioned, is the scar left by that shock. The whole idea came from the Pune-based group- many years before that they had discussed the idea with me and I had actively discouraged them from pursuing it.Soham Shah: Do you see any justification for the rationale they gave for it? That they wanted to fight black money through demonetisation.I don’t understand it (the justification). Black money is not stocked, but it flows. So this move cannot be a means to end black money. The intention was honourable but the instrument chosen was a wrong onePartha: An economist is like a doctor. Feeling the pulse, you can understand the illness and the state of the Indian economy.As I mentioned to you, India is now recording 5-6% growth and no one can bring it down. Even if I became the PM, I will not be able to bring it down. In other words, as long as there are two guardrails, the economy will not be in crisis.As I told you, we passed the FRBM Act. And before that, Jaswant Singh was very correct. He told us that we should tax services. But according to the Constitution, the right to tax manufacturing was with the Centre. Agriculture was with states. So he said, ‘Yeh toh accha nahi hai. Why don’t we go to Parliament and get it done officially, the right to tax.’I said, this is the time. Let’s share this service tax power with states in exchange for a common market. We called it a grand bargain. Because we gave Goods & Services Tax (GST), states also can now tax services. They can also tax imports now, which was with the Centre. So we gave this grand bargain. We are getting more money. But you share the sovereignty. The Centre is also sharing its sovereignty. So we share the tax sovereignty and GST was born. And then we submitted our report. The minister loved it, the Prime Minister loved it. And suddenly I got a call from Rashtrapati Bhavan that the President wants to see you.A P J Abdul Kalam was President. He asked penetrating questions. The last question was most interesting. He said, ‘If we have GST, would trucks go unchecked from Kanyakumari to Srinagar?’ I said yes. He said, ‘I’ll support you.’ To him that was the litmus test. Till then every state had boundaries and checks for trucks.Anuradha: GST has its problems too.GST has been a problem. Our solution, ‘lakh dukho ki ek dawa hai’: Have a single rate GST. No exceptions. You’ll find compliance will go up. Your earnings will go up. Exports will go up. All these problems can be solved.I have been arguing that the real problem with delivery of public goods is because the urban local bodies are not strong enough. My argument is to share a portion of GST with them. Have a flat rate of GST and share equally with three levels of government.. You have to empower the federal base and build a tax base.

Introducing circularity in used-textile waste management, with inclusivity at its centre



At her Textile Recovery Facility (TRF) in Hirandahalli where used textiles from around 10 wards of Bengaluru arrive, Indumathi, a waste picker-turned-entrepreneur seems quite exuberant and optimistic. She remembers how during Deepavali the metal roof facility “almost turned into a shopping mall.”“I was stunned that there is so much demand even for second-hand clothes! During Dasara and Deepavali, locals as well as migrant labourers came here to buy these clothes. The business was fast-moving during the festive month.” TRF, run by Indumathi and employing four people, is part of a larger attempt to create a value chain for post-consumer textile waste while weaving into it alternate livelihood possibilities for waste pickers.

Circular Apparel Innovation Factory or CAIF (an Intellecap initiative) and Hasiru Dala, an NGO, in partnership with Saamuhika Shakti – a not-for-profit organisation that brings together multiple organisations to empower the informal waste picker community – have been working to see if they could introduce systems and processes for the same. Under the initiative, used clothes are collected from individual houses, sorted, segregated and, depending on their quality, recycled, upcycled, downcycled or resold. According to the NGOs, this successfully diverted 1,31,000 kgs of cloth from reaching landfills last year between March and December and resulted in an 18-25% increase in the income of the waste pickers directly engaged with the programme. After a successful pilot last year with eight wards in the city, the programme has been scaled up to cover 10 wards this year. Five more DWCCs (Dry Waste Collection Centres) are getting operationalised and the aim is to save 800 metric tonnes of clothes from reaching landfills in the next three years.

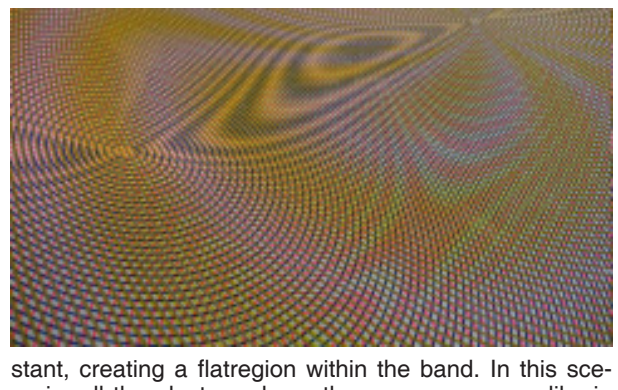
In India, more than 80% of PET bottles are recycled, thanks to the value chain established around it. Collecting them makes it a valuable proposition for waste pickers too. The same has not been the case with used textiles. With no formal system in place to create value out of textile waste, most of it ended up in landfills making it among the top three items in landfills. “Earlier, it was not known what you could do with post-consumer textile waste. However, through the experiments and pilots done in 2023 and 2024, we have been able to showcase that there is value to post-consumer textile waste, and through methods and processes, we can create a system similar to what we have for plastics in India,” says Zibi Jamal of Sattva Consulting, the facilitator partner in the Saamuhika Shakti collective. The first step is to collect the textile waste from individual houses. Waste pickers at the DWCCs in select wards were trained in collecting textile waste and awareness was created among residents. After collection, the first level of sorting happens at DWCCs. Once a month, when the quantity of clothes becomes a ton or more, they are sent to TRF. A secondary level of sorting happens at TRF. A lot can be thrifted. Some can go into recycling, be made into yarn. A small quantity can be upcycled. Some can be downcycled and used for stuffing. There is a small percentage - about 10 to 15% – which can’t be used for anything. They are sent to the waste-to-energy plant in Bidadi,” Jamal explains. It all started when CAIF launched its Closing the Loop on Textile Waste programme in 2021. The idea was to design and implement a circular textile waste management model. “This programme, as of today, is scaled up in 10 different cities across India, but it all started in Bengaluru with two entrepreneurs,” says Rahul Chatterjee of CAIF. Hasiru Dala came on board as an on-ground implementation partner and the implementation of the programme in Bengaluru was supported by H&M Foundation and Saamuhika Shakti. “Together we onboarded eight DWCC operators as part of the programme and showed them the value that they can reclaim out of the textile waste,” notes Chatterjee who points out that apart from preventing large quantities of clothes from reaching the landfill, the programme impacted the lives and livelihoods of 225 waste workers. “Out of them, 33 were directly getting employment out of this and they saw an increase in their income ranging from 18 to 25 percent.” Kumuda who manages a DWCC in J.P. Nagar had been one of the first to on-board the programme.Kumuda, who runs a DWCC in J.P. Nagar, was one of the first to sign up for the programme. She notes that every day about 10-15 kg of used clothes come into her centre and income from it has been increasing over the period. “We get about ?15,000 for a ton of used clothes,” she says.

Ravi, a division manager with Hasiru Dala, notes that the awareness-building exercises have helped. He is one of the team members who do door-to-door visits twice a week to raise awareness and inform people about BBMP guidelines.“As fast fashion started, we saw a lot of textile waste coming into the centres. Earlier, it would go to cement kilns. But right now, there is so much waste that even the cement factory is not taking them in,” says Bianca Fernandes who works with Hasiru Dala. “That is when Hasiru Dala identified different kinds of streams where waste pickers can get a livelihood out of. As part of it we collaborated with CAIF for this initiative.” As the programme progressed, certain challenges cropped up eventually. The DWCCs experienced space crunch to store the textiles. Additionally, there were legal restrictions that allowed them to collect only from households and not from other sources. Some of the commercial buyers preferred to buy the textiles in bulk from a single entity instead of multiple DWCCs. “Factoring in all these learnings, in phase two, we pivoted to a hub and spoke model. We established TRF as the hub and the DWCCs would be the spokes. DWCCs will do the collection, a primary sorting and then sell it to the TRF. TRF will work as the central hub for aggregation, do a secondary sorting based on material and colour and then sell it to different buyers such as the recyclers, upcyclers, downcyclers and resellers. The TRF can also collect from other sources because they do not have such restrictions. They can collect from commercial entities, schools, hostels, and so on,” explains Chatterjee. The second phase of the project aims to impact the livelihoods of 500 waste pickers between 2024 to 2026. Products like bags and artefacts are made from upcycled clothes.

The team also works on a ‘skill as a service’ model which CAIF introduced in partnership with Sambhav Foundation, yet another NGO which is a Saamuhika Shakti partner. Under the model, women from the waste picker families are trained to make upcycled products using textile waste. “We work with informal waste picker women and upskill them so that they don’t remain at the lower end of the waste picking spectrum, but move on to production and higher value chains,” says Dr Padmini Ram from Sambhav Foundation. “We get upcycled cloth from Hasiru Dala. We work on creating products such as bags, artefacts and so on from them and the products are sold to a buyer. The women get trained here to make the products and they get a share of the profits that’s earned from selling them,” she explains. Sagaya Mary, at her DWCC near R.V. Road, has finished the sorting for the day. All the clothes have been packed and neatly stacked away. The vehicle from TRF is expected to arrive the next day to collect them. “We have delivered clothes five times to the TRF. We are making profits,” Mary says. Three months since becoming operational, TRF has processed 42 tons of textile waste. It is yet to turn profitable though. But Indumathi is optimistic. Drawing hope from the sales during the Deepavali season, she believes the facility would see financial success in about two years.

New moiré superconductor opens the door to new quantum materials

Scientists are constantly engineering new materials that exhibit exotic properties. Moiré materials are a deceptively simple.Take a material made of a single type of atom, like a block of graphite. Slice off a thin layer from the top so that you have a two-dimensional sheet of carbon atoms bonded together (graphene). Place one sheet on top of another. Finally, twist the top sheet by a small angle.You now have a moiré material.These materials have unusual electronic and quantum properties. The one made of graphene has even been found to be a superconductor.In a recent study in Nature, scientists reported that moiré materials made from semiconductor materials can also be superconducting, a property once considered to be exclusive to the graphene system.Exploring why semiconductor moiré materials behave differently from graphene in terms of superconductivity is key to advancing our understanding of quantum materials. This in turn can pave the way for new materials with more unusual properties — and unusual applications.The moiré patternThe researchers explored superconductivity in twisted bilayer tungsten diselenide (tWSe2), a moiré material created by stacking two layers of tungsten diselenide, a semiconductor, and rotating one layer by a small angle.Even though the two layers of a moiré material have the same arrangement of atoms, the misalignment caused by the small twist produces a completely different pattern when seen from the top (see image above). This is called the moiré pattern.In moiré materials, the moiré pattern gives rise to new behaviours that are not present in the individual 2D materials alone. This is because the twist leads to the formation of flat bands in the electronic structure of the material.Flat bands to superconductivityThe electronic structure of a material describes how electrons in the material behave. The energy bands are a way to visualise the energy the electrons possess and how fast they move within the material.Imagine the energy bands to be a ladder: each step (or band) represents the range of energies an electron can have. As you go up the ladder, the electron possesses more and more energy and momentum, meaning it will move faster.A flat band means that the energy values of the electrons across the ladder are nearly constant, creating a flatregion within the band. In this scenario, all the electrons have the same energy, unlike in typical materials where the energy levels are spread out over a range.Also in typical materials, electrons gain or lose kinetic energy when they move across different energy levels, which affects their speed and momentum. But in moiré materials, because the bands are flat, the electrons experience very little variation in energy.As a result, the electrons move slowly and are said to be heavy. These slower-moving electrons are more likely to interact with each other, creating strong electron-electron interactions that aren’t seen in typical materials.These interactions can lead to the formation of Cooper pairs, where two electrons pair up across a short distance and move around as a single unit. This pairing is central to the phenomenon of superconductivity. (Leon Cooper, for whom the pairs are named, passed away on October 23.)Their coordinated movement helps them avoid scattering, a process where electrons collide with atoms or impurities in the material and deviate from their path, causing electrical resistance. On the other hand, Cooper pairs can travel through the material without scattering, leading to zero resistance and energy loss, and thus superconductivity.The devil in the twistThe researchers used tWSe2 with a twist angle of 3.65º to form a moiré material.Then they examined how the electrons behaved when the material’s electronic states were half-filled, a configuration strongly associated with superconductivity in moiré materials



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