

Delhi Public School Nadergul Achieves Remarkable Results in Grade 10 Exams



The students of Delhi Public School, Nadergul have demonstrated exceptional academic excellence in the recently concluded AISSE (2023-24) board exams. The school management is thrilled to celebrate the remarkable achievements of its students, which are a testament to their perseverance, dedication, and commitment.

For the fourth consecutive year, the school has achieved a 100% pass percentage, a remarkable feat that reflects the un-

wavering efforts of the students, teachers, and the school administration. The school toppers, Nidhi Joshi with 97.2%, Bhuwigya Ishwar with 97%, and Santhoshi with 97%, have set the bar high and inspired their peers. The school's performance was further highlighted by seven students who scored centum in English, Mathematics, and their second languages. Additionally, the school celebrated the achievements of 12 students who scored 95% and above,

24 students who scored 90% and above, 53 students who scored 80% and above, and 64 students who scored 70% and above. The subject averages have also been commendable, with many subjects scoring above 80%. "Success in life is not merely a reflection of academic prowess, but a testament of perseverance, dedication, and commitment," said the school management. "We are incredibly proud of

our students' achievements and the unwavering support of our teachers and parents. This success is a true celebration of the collective efforts and the unwavering spirit that defines the Delhi Public School, Nadergul community. "The parents and students expressed their happiness and gratitude towards the school's administration and teachers for their tireless efforts in guiding the students to this remarkable success.

BRS gears up for Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduates constituency election

Hyderabad: Buoyed by the response to its campaign for the Lok Sabha elections, the BRS is now gearing up for the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal Graduates constituency elections to be held on May 27. BRS working president KT Rama Rao held a meeting with party leaders from the erstwhile districts of Nalgonda, Khammam and Warangal at Telangana Bhavan on Wednesday to chalk out the campaign plan for the next 10 days. About 4.7 lakh registered graduate voters will exercise their franchise to elect the MLC. Since the State formation, elections to the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduates constituency were held four times and the BRS won all four elections. The BRS fielded a BITS-Pilani alumni A Rakesh

Reddy, while Chintapandu Naveen alias Teenmaar Mallanna is contesting the elections from the Congress. Speaking to mediapersons on the occasion, Rama Rao exuded confidence that the BRS would win the election for fifth consecutive term and retain the seat. He emphasised the need for an educated and committed leader like Rakesh Reddy as MLC to question the State government on behalf of the graduates regarding their issues. He reminded that the previous BRS government led by former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao took numerous initiatives for graduates and also government employees. "The BRS filled nearly two lakh vacancies in different government departments and also

gave 73 per cent fitment benefit to the government employees making their salaries highest in the country. Comparatively, the Congress which promised to fill two lakh jobs within a year, is shamelessly taking credit for the recruitment taken up for 30,000 posts during the BRS regime," he said. The BRS president pointed out that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy who promised to announce a mega DSC in the first Cabinet meeting itself and also release a job calendar, was yet to initiate any measures in this regard. He also said the Congress leaders who found fault with the then BRS government for charging Rs 400 for TET applications and promised to conduct the exams at free of cost, had now increased the application fee by five times to Rs.2,000.



NASA uses oreo-sized device on Vikram for precise Lunar target location

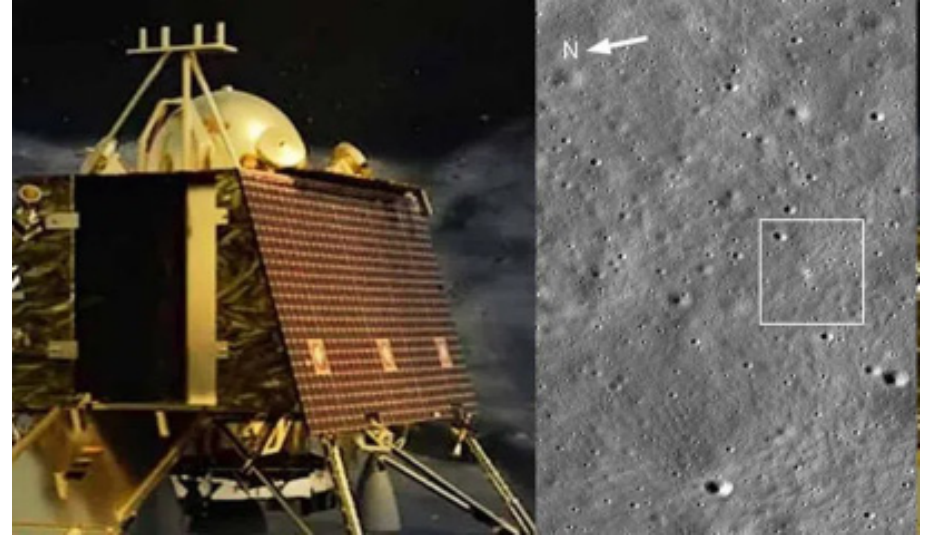
Chennai: With Vikram landing safely on the moon last year, one of its instruments is now serving as a location marker on the moon near its South Pole. According to ISRO, the scientific instruments/payloads on Vikram and the moon rover Pragyan have performed well. The Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA) on Vikram has begun providing 'fiducial points' (precisely located markers for reference) on the moon. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) achieved a laser range measurement using the LRA by successfully detecting signals reflected by it on December 12, 2023.

"For the first time on the Moon, a laser beam was transmitted and reflected between an orbiting NASA spacecraft and an Oreo-sized device on ISRO's Vikram lander on the lunar surface. The successful experiment opens the door to a new style of precisely locating targets on the Moon's surface," NASA said. Sending laser pulses toward an object and measuring how long it takes the light to bounce back is a commonly used way to track the locations of Earth-orbiting satellites from the ground. But using the technique in reverse — to send laser pulses from a moving spacecraft to a stationary one to determine its precise location — has many applications at the Moon, NASA said.

The range utilised the Lunar Orbiter Laser Altimeter (LOLA) on the LRO. The observation occurred during lunar night time, with the LRO ascending to the east of Chandrayaan-3, ISRO said. NASA's LRA was accommodated on the Vikram lander under international collaboration. It comprises eight corner-cube retroreflectors on a hemispherical support structure. This array facilitates lasers ranging from various directions by any orbiting spacecraft with suitable instruments. The passive optical instrument, weighing about 20 grams, is designed to last for decades on the lunar surface. Landed near the lunar south pole on August 23, 2023, Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander has been accessible for LOLA measurements since then. While several LRAs have been deployed on the Moon since the beginning of lunar exploration, the LRA on Chandrayaan-3 is a miniature version and is the only one available near the south pole currently.

NASA's LRA on Vikram lander will continue to serve as a long-term geodetic station and a location marker on the lunar surface, benefitting current and future lunar missions. These measurements, apart from helping in precise determination of spacecraft's orbital position, will help refine the lunar geodetic frame, revealing insights into the Moon's dynamics, internal structure, and gravitational anomalies. Be that as it may, last month, ISRO had brought back the Chandrayaan-3 propulsion module to orbit the Earth from orbiting the Moon. The move is similar to the unique hop experiment of the Vikram

the moon lander done earlier. The primary objective of Chandrayaan-3 mission was to demonstrate soft landing near the lunar south polar region and perform experiments using the instruments on Vikram and Pragyan-the moon rover. The spacecraft was launched on July 14, 2023 on-board LVM3-M4 vehicle from the Sriharikota rocket port. On August 23, Vikram Lander made its historic touch down on the Moon and subsequently Pragyan rover was deployed. The scientific instruments in Lander and Rover were operated continuously for 1 lunar day as per the defined mission life. The mission objectives of Chandrayaan-3 have been completely met. ISRO said the main objective of the propulsion module was to ferry the Vikram lander from the geo transfer orbit (GTO) to the final lunar polar circular orbit and separate the lander. Subsequent to separation, Spectro-polarimetry of HAbitable Planet Earth (SHAPE) payload in the propulsion module was also operated. The initial plan was to operate this payload for about three months during the mission life of the propulsion module. The precise orbit injection by LVM3 and optimal earth/lunar burn maneuvers, resulted in the availability of over 100 kg of fuel in the propulsion module after over one month of operations in the lunar orbit. It was decided to use the



available fuel in the propulsion module to derive additional information for future lunar missions and demonstrate the mission operation strategies for a sample return mission, ISRO said. In order to continue SHAPE payload for Earth observation, it was decided to re-orbit the propulsion module to a suitable Earth orbit. This mission plan was worked out considering the collision avoidance such as preventing the propulsion module from crashing on to the Moon's surface or entering into the Earth's

GEO belt at 36,000 km and orbits below that. According to ISRO, the main takeaways from this action are: (a) Planning and execution of trajectory and maneuvers to return from Moon to Earth (b) Development of a software module to plan such a maneuver and its preliminary validation (c) Planning and execution of a gravity assisted flyby across a planets/ celestial body and (d) Avoiding uncontrolled crashing of the propulsion module on the Moon's surface at the end of its life and avoid debris creation.

iPhone 15 Pro, Pro Max boost content creation with advanced Photo and video tools in India

New Delhi: For content creators in India, the latest photo and video tools on Apple iPhone 15 Pro and Pro Max have empowered them to consistently create content on the go with great quality. Rocky Singh, TV anchor, entertainer and food professional, told IANS that content creation is a highly competitive field and as a professional he needs the best imagery possible.

"I'm currently using iPhone 15 Pro Max to shoot all my content, digital online content and even my TV shows. I usually record at 1080p at 30fps but I can go up to 4K at 60fps for mind-blowing clarity," said Singh. The ability to smoothly change focus from close ups to wide shots is a game changer on iPhone 15 Pro Max and "my videos go from full wides to food close ups and back without loss of focus or any sort of jump whatsoever in a single smooth shot time after time", he noted. For travel filmmakers and food bloggers, with USB 3, iPhone 15 Pro supports recording ProRes directly to an external storage device, up to 4K60 for the first time. ProRes is even more powerful with Log encoding, and iPhone 15 Pro will be even better for filmmakers as the first smartphone in the world with support for ACES. According to Shakti Shekhawat, a travel blogger, the quad-pixel sensor on iPhone 15 Pro is very impressive, which makes the most of 48-



megapixels by adapting to what you're shooting, so you get low-light photos with phenomenal detail. "I'm also heavily impressed by the .5x Ultra Wide macro which gets you amazing close-up of tiny subjects with incredible details. But I'm most impressed by the 5x telephoto lens on iPhone 15 Pro Max. Also with the new ProRes video capabilities on iPhone 15 Pro I can shoot Log footage straight from my phone's camera," he told IANS. ProRes files capture more data when shooting, resulting in better quality footage than what you'd typi-

cally get from a phone or even some dedicated cameras.

"It allows me to edit colours with more control on shadows and highlights for high quality video production," said Shekhawat. Cinematic mode on iPhone 15 pro and Pro Max automatically shifts the focus to the most important subject in a scene. Just like Portrait mode, Cinematic mode now supports digital zoom from 1x up to 3x. Action Mode helps you capture smooth hand-held videos even when you're moving around a lot.

CM Mann colludes with Haryana govt to attack at farmers of Punjab – Sukhbir Badal

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), May 16: Former Punjab Deputy Chief Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal Thursday alleged that chief minister Bhagwant Mann had allowed the centre and the Haryana government to tear gas and shoot rubber bullets at farmers of Punjab to evade arrest in the multi-hundred crore liquor scam.

Addressing massive public meetings in Bathinda Rural and Bhuchio assembly segments, the SAD president said the chief minister knows he can go behind bars like his boss Arvind Kejriwal because he has perpetrated the same liquor scam in Punjab as was done in Delhi. This is why he is ready to hand over the Punjab government to the BJP by forming an AAP (Punjab) unit by taking it out of the control of the AAP central unit led by Arvind Kejriwal. This will be done in the same manner as the Shiv Sena and NCP were broken in Maharashtra by the BJP. Asserting that Bhagwant Mann and AAP would have to answer for colluding with the Haryana government and allowing the latter to attack Punjab farmers on Punjab soil, Mr Badal said “can you imagine this happening in any SAD government?” He said this is why he was appealing to Punjabis to snub Delhi parties in the forthcoming parliamentary election. “Only a regional party can safeguard your interests. Delhi based parties only come to loot you and your resources”, he added.

Speaking about the development done by the SAD in this constituency, Mr Badal said “you have seen how Bathinda was developed during the two successive terms of the SAD government from 2007 to 2017. During this period Bathinda became a modern city with an influx of infrastructure and institutions. The SAD government brought in the AIIMS institute to the city



besides a thermal plant, central university and an airport. You have witnessed how all civic amenities have fallen into decay and no new project has come to Bathinda in the last seven years of Congress and AAP tenure. I appeal to you to vote and support Mrs Harsimrat Kaur Badal who has always raised your voice in parliament. This will pave the way for the next SAD government in 2027 and a restart of development

in the city”. Mr Badal also spoke on how Punjabis could never expect any development under chief minister Bhagwant Mann. “He promised that the government would run from villages but has visited his own constituency Dhuri only twice in the last two years”. He also disclosed how the chief minister and his family members including Bhagwant Mann’s mother, wife and sister were travelling with hundreds of security

personnel in tow even though they had pledged not to take any security. The SAD president also spoke on how former chief minister S Parkash Singh Badal had nursed Bathinda constituency. “Badal Sahab used to hold ‘sangat darshan’ programmes at your doorsteps. He used to sanction water works, RO systems, Irrigation channel and underground piping projects on the spot. He also used to listen to your grievances and resolve them immediately”.

TSSPDCL asks people to be cautious

In case any power lines snap and fall on the roads or in water logging areas, people should stay away from such places, local TSSPDCL officials should be alerted.

Hyderabad: With heavy rains lashing the State, TSSPDCL chairman and managing director Musharrif Farooqui appealed to the people to be cautious as there was scope for tree branches, flex banners and other material collapsing on power lines. Reviewing the power supply, he said the power supply was normal and there was no major disruption. He listed out a few procedures to be followed during rains to avoid any untoward incidents. People should not stand near transformers, power lines and stay wires also should be avoided. Measures should be taken to ensure cattle and pets do not move near transformers and power lines, he said. In case any power lines snap and fall on the

roads or in water logging areas, people should stay away from such places, local TSSPDCL officials should be alerted. If there are any fluctuations in power supply due to heavy rains, all electrical appliances should be switched off and the control room should be alerted. While lodging complaint with TSSPDCL regarding power supply or other issues, consumers should mention the USC number from their power bills.

In case of cellar flooding or low lying areas, residents should immediately call the officials. During emergency situations, consumers can call fuse off call office, 1912, 100 or on the 20 special control rooms, he said.



PhonePe collaborates with LankaPay to promote UPI payment acceptance in Sri Lanka



PhonePe, today announced that it has enabled UPI payment acceptance in collaboration with LankaPay across LankaQR merchant points at a grand event held in Colombo. The event was graced by His Excellency Shri Santosh Jha, the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, as the Chief Guest, who highlighted the key role played by fintech connectivity in the overall connectivity between India and Sri Lanka. Addressing the gathering Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), acknowledged the collaboration's capacity to unlock new opportunities and enhance competitiveness and the benefits that it would bring to Sri Lankan merchants.

Channa de Silva, CEO, LankaPay also addressed the audience and moderated an insightful panel discussion on 'The Future of Digital Payments in Sri Lanka: Opportunities for Sri Lankan Businesses,' which focused on the possibilities and growth avenues for local businesses.

The session featured Mrs. Shashi Kandambi, GM/CEO, National Savings Bank; Mr. Sanjay Wijemanne, COO, Hatton

National Bank PLC; Mr. Conrad Dias, Chairman, LOLC Finance PLC; and Ms. Renuka Fernando, Chairperson, Dialog Finance PLC who discussed how businesses can leverage digital payment technologies and tap into a wider market to stay competitive in an evolving economic landscape.

Following the panel discussion, Ritesh Pai, the CEO of International Payments at PhonePe, unveiled insights on leveraging UPI for global markets and the growth prospects it offers for merchants.

The event also saw the presence of several key stakeholders from the Sri Lankan financial landscape, including senior representatives from Banking sectors, Payment System Providers, and representatives from tourism sector and business associations. This alliance is facilitated through LankaPay's partnership with NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL).

During the event, PhonePe announced that its app users travelling to Sri Lanka can now make payments using UPI across LankaPayQR merchants nationwide. Users can simply scan LankaQR

code to make secure and quick payments without carrying cash or calculating currency conversions. Their account will be debited in INR, showing the currency exchange rate. These transactions are facilitated by the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and LankaPay National Payment Network.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Santosh Jha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, shared that, "The UPI launch is an important part of a larger goal for both countries to collaborate through a digital partnership." He mentioned that "India is also supporting Sri Lanka in the development of its Unique Digital Identity Program and other components of the Digital Stack that has immense transformative potential for Sri Lanka and the bilateral economic partnership."

Ritesh Pai, CEO, International Payments, PhonePe, added, "We are thrilled to announce our partnership with LankaPay. This collaboration offers unparalleled convenience to Indian tourists who can now use a familiar and secure pay-

ment method while traveling and pay across LankaQR merchant points. PhonePe has always been at the forefront of driving innovation in payments. We are incredibly proud to be driving UPI adaptation across India, and our expansion to Sri Lanka is another exciting step forward." Channa de Silva, CEO, LankaPay, added, "LankaPay is delighted to collaborate with PhonePe to revolutionize the cross-border payments between Sri Lanka and India.

This partnership is bound to provide greater convenience to Indian Tourists and Business Travelers in making seamless UPI payments at all LankaQR merchant points in Sri Lanka via PhonePe app. We are excited about the potential of this collaboration that would enhance payment experience to Indian tourists and business travellers during their stay in Sri Lanka and also provide the merchants with a cost-effective proposition to card payments.

I envisage that innovation to be the cornerstone of this alliance and would lead to further strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries."

Canon India Bolsters Presence in Large Format Printing with Launch of 7-colour imagePROGRAF GP Series & Expanded 12-Color imagePROGRAF PRO Series

Canon India, a leader in digital imaging solutions announced the launch of six new cutting edge large-format printers. Among these, a new 7-colour category was announced as part of the imagePROGRAF GP series (GP-526S/546S/566S) tailored for the graphics art market harnessing the new LUCIA PRO II pigment ink to deliver impressive print quality for bright, eye-catching posters & photographs. Further, strengthening its 12-colour category with its imagePROGRAF PRO series lineup, three new printers were unveiled (PRO-526/546/566) with superior print quality for photography and fine art applications, promising print longevity of up to 200 years.

Sharing his thoughts on the launch, Mr. Manabu Yamazaki, President and CEO, Canon India said, "With the professional printing industry in India witnessing remarkable growth owing to technological innovations, our latest launches are in response to the increasing demand for quality output. The newly launched GP Series 7-Colour Large Format Printers and the expansion of our PRO Series 12-Colour Printers underscore Canon's commitment of consistently pioneering technology that caters to evolved industry needs. These advancements aim to empower India's vibrant creative community by providing tools that push the boundaries of digital imag-

ing for professionals in the graphics art, photography, and fine art sectors. By doing so, we endeavor to shape the future landscape of printing in the country which has immense potential." Commenting on the new lineup, Mr. C Sukumaran, Senior Director, Products & Communication, Canon India, said, "The introduction of the 7-colour LUCIA PRO II pigment inks in our new GP series represents a significant leap forward in color precision and print quality for the graphic arts market. These printers are designed to produce high-quality photographic content with enhanced color depth and fine textures. On the other hand, our PRO series continues to excel in delivering unmatched color range and longevity, crucial for fine art and professional photography. The innovative design features of both series, like the new translucent covers and interior lighting, reflect our focus on enhancing user experience and operational efficiency." imagePROGRAF GP Series: Vivid and Smooth Gradation Print in High Speed With LUCIA PRO II 7-colour pigment inks which include orange and grey inks, vibrant prints with smooth gradation can be achieved when it comes to fine texture and high-quality posters for different market segments such as in-house advertising offices and print shops. Designed with fast speed, the GP series de-



liver good quality prints within a shorter time.

With high colour reproducibility, the new GP series has achieved 96% coverage in PANTONETM FORMULA GUIDE Solid Coated color book and supports

printing of product advertisements including corporate colors. Prints on glossy or semi-glossy paper have excellent scratch resistance, which makes post-production handling such as carrying, displaying and packing easier.

MG Hector emerges as the best Value-for-Money SUV

The Hector, a flagship SUV of MG (Morris Garages), a British automobile brand with a 100-year-old legacy, which comes equipped with a host of attractive features while offering a comfortable ride is also the best value vehicle in the SUV segment. It has garnered top rankings for ownership costs among the popular hatchback cars and compact SUVs in the recent NielsenIQ Service Cost Survey. Additionally, Droom's recent analysis placed the Hector at the forefront for factors such as, resale value, fuel efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The NielsenIQ Service Cost Survey analysed SUVs and Hatchbacks purchased between Jan '21-Aug-21 and completed average of 3-5 regular services. For petrol models, where MG Hector was ranked as the leading car in terms of affordable cost of ownership amongst all other vehicles surveyed including some major hatchbacks. Additionally, the rigorous Droom survey reveals that the Hector is the SUV with the highest resale value of 74% for the diesel variant while the petrol variant outperforms the competition with a resale value of 67%. **Commenting on this

achievement, Satinder Singh Bajwa, Chief Commercial Officer, MG Motor India, "The MG Hector has carved a niche for itself among Indian SUV enthusiasts since its launch. It embodies a perfect blend of luxury, efficiency, a bold & iconic design packed with tech-led features offering a comfortable ride to its passengers. Beyond its impressive features, the Hector stands out for its low Total Cost of Ownership, high resale value, and superior quality that sets a benchmark in the industry."

The MG Hector, India's first Internet SUV, was introduced in 2019 and has since set a new bar for SUVs. With some best-in-class offerings like its dual pane panoramic sunroof, the diesel variant of the MG Hector is an exceptional package for SUV enthusiasts who are looking for power and performance, with a touch of technology and top-notch performance. With an industry-best 35.56 cm (14-inch) HD infotainment system, 75+ connected car features, advanced safety offerings, a dual-pane panoramic sunroof, and other equally attractive incorporations, the Hector has been designed to provide exceptional and distinctive experiences to SUV enthusiasts.



This feature-rich SUV caters to tech-savvy buyers seeking a bold design and a smooth, comfortable ride. Available in 5, 6, and 7-seater configurations, the MG Hector starts at an attractive price of ₹13.99 Lakhs (Ex-Showroom). MG India has recently introduced the BLACKSTORM edition of the MG Hector. This new edition

boasts a starry-black exterior and stylish Black Theme interiors featuring Gun Metal accents, reflecting the bold personality of India's premier Internet SUV. The Hector BLACKSTORM offers a unique appearance, and combination of tech-savvy and connected features, elevating the luxurious driving experience for its customers.

Has the economy improved in the NDA's second term?

On February 1, the BJP-led government will place its Interim Budget in Parliament, seeking a vote on account. Has the NDA government's economic performance in its second term fared better than its first? D.K. Srivastava and G. Vijay discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Kunal Shankar. Edited excerpts:

In retrospect, how do you view the government's policy prescriptions in 2019?

D.K. Srivastava: In the interim Budget of 2019, the Indian economy was not that well placed. Just before 2019, two major reforms had been introduced. The first was the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which had certain implementation problems. Corporate income tax reforms had been introduced, which led to an erosion of the Central government's tax revenues. So, we started 2019 with a weak fiscal situation. The situation was still somewhat subdued when we entered the COVID-19 phase in 2021. We were not prepared; we did not have economic or fiscal strength. This is why we experienced a sharp contraction. Column | Multidimensional Poverty Index reduction under the NDA is flawed

Since then, we have recovered very fast in terms of GDP growth. In FY22, because of the base effect, we clocked in more than 8.7% and in FY23, 7%. In FY24, from the latest estimates, the growth rate for the year is pegged at about 7.3%. So, recovery has been very good. The effect of COVID-19 was experienced in a more serious way in the contact-intensive sectors and in many large service sectors. These sectors, particularly small- and medium-scale industries, also employ vast numbers of people. Therefore, recovery was a K-shaped one. But the government focused on infrastructure expansion, which means building public assets, which would serve the economy and support growth in the medium to long term; this is a positive outcome. We must not forget that those were the years following demonetisation. Ms. Sitharaman said on July 5, 2019 that the "government stood out as a performing government, a government whose signature was in the last mile delivery." She said, "Between 2014 and 19, we provided a rejuvenated Centre-State dynamic, cooperative federalism, GST Council and a strident commitment to fiscal discipline." Comparing her pre-pandemic Budget presentation with the scenario now, how do you think the economy has fared?

G. Vijay: First, with reference to the GDP numbers, one might say that the government's performance looks good. But the question is whether or not this is sustainable. This is where I would go back to the 2016 demonetisation exercise, which contributed to a long-term contraction. GST as well as COVID-19 were additional shocks, which the unorganised sector especially received. Recovery from these is still seen with scepticism given the high

rates of unemployment that we continue to see. To look at the recovery in terms of mere value versus looking at it in terms of employment and livelihoods would require different kinds of assessments. There are multiple reasons why the numbers on unemployment and inflation look unfavourable and scholars have begun describing this phenomenon on the lines of jobless growth. Therefore, I think the current situation cannot be analysed beginning with 2019; we have to go back to 2016. Mr. Srivastava, coming to the GST Council, Kerala just announced a march in Delhi to protest against the Union government's "neglect" of the State. In the past five years, the concern appears to be skewed revenues and centralised decision-making in Delhi. D.K. Srivastava: There is no doubt that the GST story is incomplete and there are many aspects of GST reform that require attention. It did not turn out to be revenue neutral, although it is at a point of transition. In fact, in the Constitution amendment, the voting has been structured such that it is difficult for any State government to carry forward any of its own decisions. There has been an effective loss of revenue autonomy for the State governments. Even when many State governments get together, it will be difficult for them to either agree on a certain change in the GST structure or get it passed through the GST Council. I don't think it can be reversed any more, but it can be reformed.

Explained | What may 2024 hold for the economy?

On the issue of last-mile in your previous question, I think the government has succeeded in introducing large-scale digitisation of the transactional matrix of the Indian economy. Many small-scale industries and economic agents in the informal sector are able to participate in the digital transactions through the UPI platform. We must recognise that we are facing massive global challenges aside from the COVID-19 shock. The supply side challenges continue to emanate from the global economy. Therefore, the government must provide capital stimulus as it is doing now. But it must do more to stimulate consumption to match investments. So, in times of this massive external sector challenge, maintaining a high level of growth is the first requirement for also ensuring jobs. G. Vijay: The way the GST Council has been working cannot be analysed independently of Centre-State relations, which have been problematic under the current regime. We have seen the kinds of conflicts between Chief Ministers and Governors as well as the kinds of pressures that the state is facing vis-a-vis the requirements of finance in terms of the structural distribution of responsibilities. While revenues are being controlled extensively by the Centre, with little leverage for State governments, following the implementation of the GST regime, we see a politicisation of the entire distribution of these resources. The respon-



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sibility of executing many welfare programmes lies with the State governments and they are therefore likely to face a lot of pressure if they fail. This clearly wouldn't emerge in terms of numbers, but one has to look at other kinds of institutional relations, a variety of conflicts, and then analyse the role that the GST Council is playing. In its last Budget, the government announced an increase of 33% in capital expenditure to ₹10 lakh crore, which it claimed was for income generation and employment growth. Has this happened?

G. Vijay: I think the problem has been with the kind of capital-intensive technologies that have been employed to carry out these infrastructure projects, they adversely affect the elasticities vis-a-vis employment generation. The unemployment rate was around 9.4% in October 2023. Although it has witnessed a marginal decline since, it still remains quite high. So, if that expenditure was indeed creating a large number of jobs, I don't think these numbers would be so bad. So, I think with reference to the emphasis on building infrastructure, the focus has not been on employment generation. And by employment generation I also would like to point to the quality of employment. The kind of employment avenues that are getting generated through these projects are predominantly in the informal sector and these are highly unprotected and lacking bare minimum social security protections. For the past nine to 14 years, there has not been a wage revision in almost 72 notified sectors. So, you

clearly see what is happening to labour.

In the backdrop of the severe supply chain shocks that we witnessed this past year due to extreme weather and spikes in wholesale and retail prices of food, how do you view the agricultural sector's performance over the past five years?

G. Vijay: The numbers show that a substantial share of children suffer 'wasting'. Given this, moves such as producing ethanol using rice grains or sugarcane are problematic. This is an indirect way of resorting to corporatising agriculture. But there the policy has been quite inconsistent. The government began by saying that we have a huge surplus foodgrains and then eventually due to the uncertainties of weather, there were bans on exports and sale from the Food Corporation of India and a 'pause' on using sugarcane to produce ethanol. Quite clearly there is a challenge. If you look at inflation and the food basket, pulses are at 20.73%; vegetables at 27.6%; food at 11.4%; sugar at 7.14%; cereals at 9.9%; and spices at 9.7%. So, with reference to assessing inflation overall, if we see the aggregate versus what matters to the average person, there is a structural crisis emerging. D.K. Srivastava: As far as sectoral growth figures are concerned, agriculture, except for the current year, has done very well. In fact, its average growth rate was more than 3%. Agriculture has been a saving grace in the last four years and our overall agriculture strategy, although it is largely a subject handled by the State governments, is like that of any other developed economy.

Punjab's Nasha Roko Committees: the anti-drug lords

In the 47 days since the arrest of Parwinder Singh 'Jhota', 36, a sit-in has been in progress on the premises of the Mansa district administration complex. About 15 to 20 people show up each day to join the handful camping here. They are supported every couple of weeks by a few thousands who come in from across Punjab's southern Malwa region. Organised by the Nasha Roko Committees (NRCs) that have sprung across the area to fight the drug problem that is rampant across the State, they are joined by a few farmer unions. This is their way of registering a protest against Parwinder's arrest and to show their lack of faith in the police and the government to rein in the drug problem. Parwinder was a star athlete in school and college. He got the name Jhota, meaning bull, as a State-level boxer, though he also dabbled in cricket. He started using chitta, a heroin-based opioid, the first time he went to jail for a street fight. He quit in 2015 after a friend died from an overdose in front of him, a needle still in his arm.

The National Crime Records Bureau's Accidental Death report showed that Punjab had 78 deaths from narcotics abuse in 2021. The State registered 127 deaths, the second-highest in the country, due to illicit substances or spurious liquor that year. In early April this year, shaken by seeing children shooting up in a local park, Parwinder, now claiming to be clean, reached out to Punjab Kisan Union leader Sukhdarshan Singh Nato, who was also his neighbour. With his help, he started the 'Nasha roko, rozgaar do' (stop addiction, provide employment) campaign. The NRCs — each village has its own — have been set up organically over the last four months as informal initiatives to stop the use and sale of drugs. Districts like Bathinda, Mansa, Sangrur, and Faridkot, all south of the Sutlej river, use their networks to monitor their villages. Each committee has anywhere from 12 people to the whole village involved. They track spots that addicts frequent, raid chemists they suspect are selling drugs, set up night-watch duties shared by volunteers, and even force their way into homes they feel chitta is being sold out of. Twenty of Punjab's 22 districts now figure in the Union government's list of 372 districts most affected by substance abuse across India. In March this year, the Health Minister of Punjab, Balbir Singh, told the Assembly that the State had 8.74 lakh people in government-run and private de-addiction centres for substance abuse.

It is 1 a.m. About 10-15 men in their 20s position themselves at key intersections leading into Ghuman Kalan village in Bathinda district. Armed with swords, sticks, and smartphones, they have a shift until sunrise. Through the night, they will check and search any 'suspicious' vehicle or person coming their way. "We check any vehicle from outside the village," says Rajendra Singh, a member of the drug vigilante squad. "If they are high, we see it in their eyes," he says, but also, "When people smoke the chitta off the foil paper, they use a rolled-up currency note to inhale the smoke. When we search them, we look for currency notes that are rolled up or black-

ened," the farmer in his early 30s explains enthusiastically. "If we find anyone who is an addict or a peddler, we gather around them and try to explain to them what they are doing is wrong. When they don't listen to us, we give them 10 minutes of seva (community service)," Jakhsir Singh of the committee in Ghuman Kalan says, chuckling along with the others. Seva, which forms the bedrock on which the Sikh faith is founded, usually means an activity like serving food in a gurdwara. Here, it means that they are roughed up. Then, they call the police.

Chitta is not the only substance abused in Punjab. There is also the prescription-only pharma drug, pregabalin, usually used in capsule form to treat chronic pain and opioid addiction in de-addiction centres. It is street-named 'signature', after one of the companies that manufactures it legally. In fact, the approved drug, in 75 mg doses, is available in government de-addiction centres under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana. As a result, it is not under the schedule of banned substances under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, making it a challenge for the police. This is where the committees 'step in'. They conduct 'sting operations' on chemists selling 'signature'. They live-stream these 'raids' on social media, publicly humiliating the people behind the counter and the addict. The videos have views in the thousands. The committees have no government sanction to do this, but villagers feel the police are both inactive and complicit. "We have no other option. Everything we are doing the police are capable of doing, but are not. At least now, we can keep an eye on our village," says Lucky Dhillon, 22, the youngest member of Ghuman Kalan's NRC, who records the committee's activities and puts them up on his Instagram account. "All of this started with one man: Parwinder Singh 'Jhota'," he announces grandly. "Parwinder was a tall, strapping boy. During his college days, he got into a lot of fights. He started doing drugs in jail," Bhim Singh, Parwinder's father, a former Army man, says. "One day, he came to me and said he was done. He locked himself in his room for a week to deal with the withdrawals. He would have fevers, keep screaming, vomit. But he made it." Once he quit, after about eight years, he got married and had two children, both under 10 now. So when he saw the children in the park, something hit him. "In April, he came to me. He said that he wanted to do something to stop the drug menace in Punjab. I asked him if he was clean first and if he could promise to remain that way. He was so sure of himself," Nato, the Punjab Kisan Union leader, says. He had known Parwinder even as a boy. From the get-go, Parwinder chose to conduct 'stings' and began to template it, says Nato. On April 22, he got a boy to buy capsules from Sanjay Medical Store in Mansa for ₹400, and caught it on camera. He returned to the store with the drugs and told the pharmacist to stop selling them, taking back the ₹400. The video went viral and Parwinder won significant support. It also became the cause for the first of four



FIRs against him over four months. The Mansa police booked him for 'extorting' ₹400 from the pharmacist. With the FIR only bringing more support to Parwinder, he continued visiting villages and stopping at locations across Mansa district where he knew drugs were sold. Videos of him confronting addicts and alleged peddlers started going viral and every village he would visit would open an NRC — often on the very day he would visit, like the one in Ghuman Kalan. "He kept meeting senior police officers in Mansa district and they kept asking him to stop," Parwinder's lawyer, Lakhwinder Singh Lakhpanal, says. "They told him it was not his job; Parwinder kept asking them to do theirs properly. He had also given them a list of places he knew drugs were sold." On July 15, the Mansa police arrested Parwinder when a mob that he was not a part of initially 'raided' another chemist in the town. They garlanded the pharmacist with shoes on suspicion of selling capsules. His popularity had peaked so much that the news of his arrest evoked strong criticism of the State government from Opposition parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress. In addition, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the politically powerful representative body of the Sikhs, appreciated his work and condemned his arrest. The movement kicked off by Parwinder's campaign has also given fresh impetus to activists like Seera Dhillon, 25. He has been doing the same work at his village, Joga, in Mansa district for a couple of years now. "Jhota's work is great, and we are with him. It is clear that the police are involved, otherwise why would they have a problem with us cleaning up our villages?" Seera says. Sitting under the shade of trees next to his 4.5-acre farm currently sprouting with paddy, he talks about getting addicts in Joga to quit. He, like all other NRC members, believes they are also disrupting the supply chain by catching peddlers. Police officers at the Joga police station are not so sure. They say that most people being caught by NRCs are addicts, not peddlers. In a year-long anti-drug operation that ended in June this year, the Punjab police had arrested over 14,000 drug smugglers and seized over 1,100 kg of heroin. But out of the over 11,000 FIRs registered, only 11% were for commercial quantities. Only 250 gm or above of heroin is considered a commercial quantity under the Narcotic Drugs and

Psychotropic Substances Act. "The people caught by the Nasha Roko Committees are all repeat offenders. They are addicts who usually have 5-10 gm [chitta] on them. They will sell a part of it for their next fix and then use the rest. We cannot classify them as peddlers. At most we register the case and release them on bond, because the amount is too little," says a senior officer at the Joga police station. Another officer at the police station, which oversees 15 villages, says, "We are in touch with the committees in all the villages. Our focus is on telling them that they should call us first. They should not be taking the law into their own hands. We promise to act promptly."

Despite insisting that whoever they catch is a peddler, members of Ghuman Kalan's NRC say the biggest 'seizure' they have made in their two months of existence has been a packet containing 20 gm of chitta. Unapologetic about working in the realm of vigilantism, Seera says, "We need not be doing this if the police did it. Children are dying with needles in their arms. So, if my work helps people come out of it, I'll keep doing it." He talks about several young men who have joined him on his mission after quitting drugs. Gaggi Singh, 24, is one such member of Seera's committee, who is inspired in equal measure by Parwinder and Seera. "I started doing drugs when I was 16. We used to spend at least ₹3,000 on chitta every day. Two years ago, I saw one of my friends overdose and die in front of me. That shook me. It was around that time that Seera found me and helped me quit," he says. He now works as a plumber and helps the NRC. Members of the NRCs are confident about the impact of intervention. Not so much the 'elders' in villages like Joga. Lounging under a banyan in the village, panchayat member Butta Singh, says, "The committee is there, but what power does it have? They don't consult with us. They are not recognised by us. Whoever they catch, goes back to doing drugs. Children will go to the next district, get high and come back." A substance abuse study conducted in 2018-19 by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, AIIMS, Delhi, says that Punjab has the second-highest number of people across the country that need help with opioid (heroin is a kind of opioid) addiction: an estimated 7.2 lakh. While the NRCs may not understand the problem at a macro level, they do know of its impact on individuals. "

Felling anti-microbial resistance with rationale

Over the last couple of weeks, some key issues sprung up in India, decisions on which will influence in a significant way health care and treatments in the country. From insisting on explanations while prescribing antibiotics, to revising the ICU guidelines and revising the current National Essential Diagnostics list for the first time, it has been a notable fortnight, as far as we are concerned.

Primary among these new changes is the Union Health Ministry's order mandating doctors to write the indication (reason/justification) while prescribing antimicrobials, and directed pharmacists to stop the over-the-counter sale of antibiotics, and sell them only with the prescription of a qualified doctor, as Bindu Shajan Perappadan reports, here. As its own rationale for issuing the order, the Ministry cites the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials, which it said is one of the main drivers of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Recently, data from the National Centre for Disease Control plunged intensivists into despair as it revealed rampant and broad-based misuse and overuse of antibiotics. For an overview, see this piece from the data team: Over 38% of patients in India were given more than one antibiotic. A timely wake-up call, indeed given that estimated bacterial AMR is directly responsible for 1.27 million global deaths in 2019, while 4.95 million deaths were associated with drug resistant infections.

According to the Ministry's direction, the change must begin from the medical college itself. It notes that medical colleges not only provide tertiary healthcare in the country but are also hubs for the education of the younger generation of doctors, so this makes it important that doctors at medical colleges set an example of the judicious use of antimicrobials for the next generation of doctors who will face crises in much more severe forms. Pharmacists have been told to implement Schedule H and H-1 of the Drugs and Cosmetic Rules, and sell antibiotics with only one valid prescription. "It is important that doctors mention exact indications on their prescriptions while prescribing antimicrobials," the communication noted. Naturally enough, this direction was welcomed by doctors, as Siddharth Kumar Singh reported: Directive mandating explanation for antimicrobial prescription lauded.

Another significant story in the health sector this week, was ICMR beginning to revise the current National Essential Diagnostics List, (NEDL) for the first time. While this is a work in progress, this is consultative and hopes to come up to scratch with the latest requirements, and as such is a welcome move. The list contains the minimum diagnostic tests that should be available at healthcare facilities; ICMR asks stakeholders to submit suggestions on the addition and deletion of tests by the end of February. Considerable time has passed, in face aeons, since the first such list was released in 2019, after the WHO recommended that nations develop such a NEDL, to indicate the essential and most basic tests that should be available at various levels of healthcare in the country, in-

cluding at the village level, in sub-health centres, health and wellness centres, and primary health centres. ICMR has now asked stakeholders to consider factors such as how essential a test is, the disease burden, and the alignment with Indian public health standards before proposing any additional tests to the existing list. It defined essential diagnostic tests as those that satisfy the priority healthcare needs of the population and are selected with due regard to disease prevalence and public health relevance, evidence of efficacy and accuracy, and comparative cost-effectiveness. For more on this, stop by at the link above.

There has been much debate in the country about the Union Health Ministry's recently released list guidelines that list out criteria for ICU admissions and discharges, the role of intensivists or critical care specialists in the ICU and the patient as well as the family's right to refuse admission revision of ICU guidelines. If you want to know more, do listen in to Zubeda Hamid talking to Dr. Ram E. Rajagopalan, head of intensive care at Sri Ramachandra Medical Centre in Chennai - What do we know about India's new ICU guidelines in the In Focus podcast. Some hopeful news was unveiled this past week, in the health and diagnostics sector. Indian Immunologicals unveiled indigenously developed Hepatitis A vaccine. Currently, Hepatitis A vaccines are being imported by India. IIL's vaccine, which comes after eight years of work, according to its managing director K. Anand Kumar. It was being rolled out following extensive studies ranging from pre-clinical toxicology studies in animals, phase I trial in human beings to phase 2/3 trials in eight centres involving nearly 500 healthy volunteers across various age groups.

Mini Muringatheri reported on researchers from Kerala identifying a compound from 'Indian tobacco' that has the potential to ease Alzheimer's symptoms. Based on a paper on their study, she wrote that with the help of computational biology, it was discovered that structural modifications to lobeline yielded novel chemical compounds with potential applications against Alzheimer's. Lobeline was extracted from a plant *Lobelia inflata*, commonly known as 'Indian tobacco'. At a time when the availability of vaccines against COVID-19 has become iffy, there is a great deal of rejoicing over this announcement: COVID vaccine Corbevax gets WHO's emergency use listing. N. Ravi Kumar reports that 100 million doses of India's first indigenously developed COVID-19 vaccine based on the protein sub-unit platform, Corbevax, were utilised in pan-India immunisation campaigns, mainly in 12-14-year-old children. Corbevax was approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for restricted use in emergencies among adults, adolescents and young children in a sequential manner from December 2021 to April 2022. Biological E managing director Mahima Datla explained: "The EUL will help us to use the platform to continue developing COVID-19 vaccines as and when it starts impacting public health. We are confident this endorsement



from WHO will bolster our global fight against Covid-19." This week, an idol was consecrated in a temple in India, and the way these things usually function, spilled over to every other area in the country. Not the least is health care. With the government issuing a half-day holiday for Central Government employees on January 22 in view of the Pran Prathista of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya, Central Government health institutions also declared a similar holiday, immediately running into a storm of protests on social media and in the courts. It began with this: AIIMS to run only critical care services till 2.30 p.m. and in the wake of opposition to its move to declare a half-day holiday, AIIMS clarified that critical clinical services will remain open on January 22. Other institutions followed suit: Siddharth Kumar Singh reported that AIIMS Bibinagar would remain shut for half a day on January 22, and NIMHANS declared a half-day holiday on Monday while the Madras High Court allowed Jipmer in Puducherry to be closed for half a day after it gave an understanding that no critical procedures were scheduled for the period, Mohamed Imranullah recorded.

Meanwhile, of course, there was this as well: Cashing in on the fervour whipped up on the occasion of the consecration, Amit Bhelari reported that Bihar CM Nitish Kumar dedicated a 500-bed hospital named after Lord Ram and goddess Sita in Samastipur. With just over a week left for the Interim budget, there were a lot of expectations that were articulated via the media. The Healthcare industry, for one, made clear expectations including incentives to promote private investment, R&D, et al. Representatives of the industry sought greater incentives to promote private investment, and sustained incentives for research and development particularly in antibiotic research, while calling for action to address escalating Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient cost, including incentives for domestic manufacturers and a reduction in GST. They have also demanded accelerating growth of bed strength in the country to reach close to the World Health Organization's mark of 3.5 beds per 1,000 population. This, they believe will be the tool that could deliver effective universal health coverage. For more on the subject,

hit the link above. Turning the gender lens on this week, there were issues concerning the health care of women that we brought to the attention of our readers, including court cases. The right of a woman to decide bearing children is litigated with an annoying frequency in this country. Two such cases also went to the courts this week: Centre moves Delhi HC to recall order allowing termination of pregnancy. Earlier, the Delhi High Court allowed a widow to terminate her 29-week pregnancy, the appeal urged the court to consider protecting the right to life of the unborn child to allow it a "fair chance of survival". In another case, Rajasthan HC turned down a minor rape survivor's plea to terminate pregnancy, on the same ground — that a fully developed foetus also has the right to life and live a healthy life without any abnormalities. It has become routine for such cases to be dragged to court questioning the woman's agency over her own body, and asserting the might of the State over this basic right, even as debates about the right of the unborn continue. Afshan Yasmeen reports on a significant study that found that a low dose of calcium supplement taken regularly during pregnancy can reduce the risk of preeclampsia and preterm birth. Provided there was good compliance on the part of the patient, researchers from St. John's Research Institute and Medical College have found that the required dose of calcium for risk-reduction of preeclampsia in pregnant women could be reduced to 500 mg/day. Preeclampsia (PE) is a hypertensive disorder that typically starts after the 20th week of pregnancy, and manifests with an increased blood pressure and the appearance of protein (albumin) in the mother's urine. The incidence of PE during pregnancy varies from 5% -15% in India. The severe form of preeclampsia is eclampsia, which varies from 0.18% to 3.7 % in India and is characterised by seizures, and even mortality in some cases. On the occasion of cervical cancer month in January, here is a public information story on the importance of periodic testing for the Human Papilloma Virus. Officials of the health programme in the State of Tamil Nadu are seeing a disturbing trend: Psychological factors emerging as one of the primary risks in maternal deaths,