

Bengaluru-based band Swarathma's concert in Hyderabad to be powered entirely by solar energy

Hyderabad: Bangalore's folk-rock band Swarathma is making waves with their live concert scene in a whole new way. As they prepare to hit Hyderabad on their India tour, promoting the release of their fourth studio album titled Raushan, the indie band is set to pioneer India's first multi-city concert tour powered entirely by solar and clean energy. The five-member band kicked off their tour in Mumbai and Bangalore, followed by Pune, and is scheduled to hit Hyderabad on June 15 at Odeum by Prism in Financial District. Known for their soul-stirring hits like 'Pyasi,' 'Kaash,' and 'Naane Daari,' Swarathma has teamed up with Sustain Plus Energy Foundation, SELCO Foundation, and AmpereHour Energy, to design a revolutionary portable clean energy system, replacing the conventional diesel generators and proving that sustainability can rock just as hard. The tour aims to shift perceptions about renewable energy from small-scale applications to larger industrial uses. "As a band, we are excited to bring alive a concert experience that is friendlier to the earth," shared Jishnu Dasgupta, the bass guitarist of the band. "By proving that an eight-city tour can run on renewable energy, we hope to encourage other applications requiring mobile power to consider using renewable energy," he explains. Swarathma now travels with a setup featuring two battery banks, each offering four hours of backup power, and boasting a capacity of 430 kilowatt-hours per system. "A unique feature of their concerts is a display showing the remaining charge. It's quite exciting for the fans to watch the amount of charge left," he says. "Our battery-based energy storage



systems have the potential to replace diesel-based power generation, which has been used historically for powering events. This concert will act as a proof of concept that we hope to scale across the entire entertainment and events industry, helping them decarbonize their operations," says AmpereHour Energy CEO, Ayush Misra. Speaking about the track 'Raushan',

Jishnu describes it as a fusion of Indian and Western influences, reflecting the album's overall theme.

With eight songs, the album explores themes of enlightenment, freedom, and emotional growth. Swarathma plans to unveil one song each month, leading up to the full album release by year-end. In addition

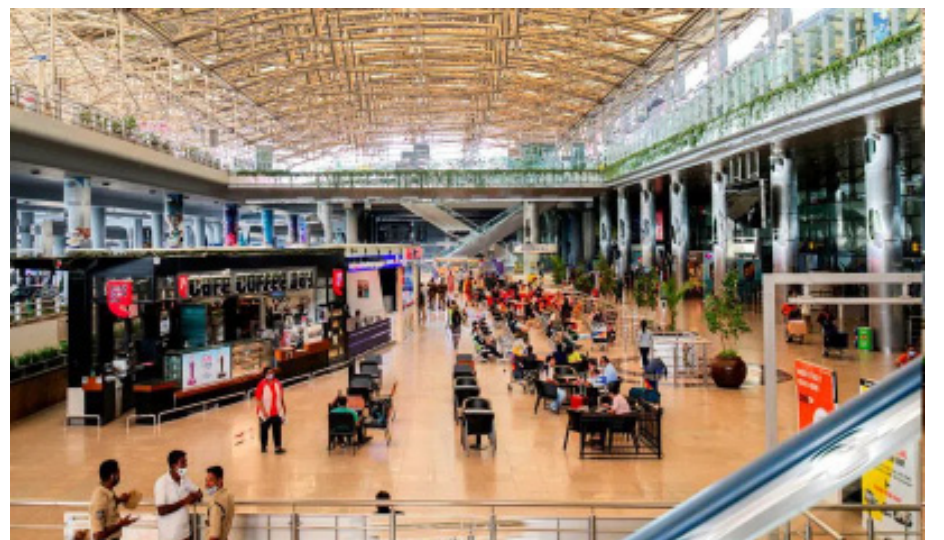
to their musical endeavors, the band aims to send a strong message about sustainability, hoping to inspire fellow musicians to embrace eco-friendly practices. Following Hyderabad, Swarathma will take the stage in Indore, Gurgaon, and Jaipur. Interested individuals can register for tickets at Book My Show.

iSprout to unveil Flyers Club for conducting business meetings at GMR Hyderabad airport

Hyderabad: iSprout unveiled its plan to launch the iSprout Flyers Club, a one-stop solution for conducting business initiatives that will cater to corporate travellers at the GMR Hyderabad International Airport. The firm is investing Rs.1 crore for the project, which will be launched in Hyderabad in the next two months, with subsequent plans to expand in other major airports in New Delhi, Bengaluru and Goa. The vision behind this new-age initiative is to enable corporate travellers to conduct strategic and confidential meetings in secured meeting rooms, workstations, and business centre services in the comfort of exclusive privileges like food and beverage options, a press release said.

Sundari Patibandla, CEO & Co-

Founder of iSprout, said, "Our goal is to eliminate the need for corporate professionals to travel into the cities for conducting client meetings or interviews, improving efficiency, and time management." Highlighting the cost-effective and enterprising aspects of the new initiative, Sreeni Tirdhala, CMO & Co-Founder at iSprout, said, "Our primary focus is to address the issue of time-management and lack of supportive services to corporate professionals in their business travels." Membership benefits at the iSprout Flyers Club will include state-of-the-art business centres, meeting rooms, workstations, telephone booths, dry pantry areas that serve food and beverage options and gaming zones.



Is America's economy heading for a consumer crunch?

Nothing has been able to stop American consumers. At first, they splashed COVID-19 savings on home-exercise bicycles; now they are more likely to plump for beachside holidays. Predictions made by bank bosses last summer that households would be squeezed by inflation have been confounded. Instead, their outlays have powered American GDP ever higher, at a pace beyond the country's G7 peers. But are the predictions at last coming true? Monthly consumer-spending growth fell from 0.7% in March to just 0.2% in April. Overall spending shrank in real terms. Retail sales have weakened, with brands from McDonald's, a burger purveyor, to 3M, a maker of sticky tape, warning that customers are closing their wallets. The recent spending data, released on May 31st, helped wipe almost a percentage point off the prediction of annual GDP growth from the Atlanta branch of the Federal Reserve, cutting its "nowcast" for the second quarter of the year to 1.8%.

Nowhere is the pain clearer than in credit-card data. According to the San Francisco Fed, households burned through the last of their \$2.1trn of pandemic-era excess savings in March. The drawdown has pushed more and more to rely on credit cards to meet their outgoings, and some are now struggling to repay debts. Paul Siegfried of TransUnion, a credit bureau, estimates that since April last year, 440,000 credit card holders have been downgraded to subprime status. Accounts are becoming delinquent at a pace last seen in 2011. People who have taken out loans to buy cars are falling behind on repayments almost as fast, causing some to sell their vehicles. According to Kelley Blue Book, a sales platform, used-car listings were up 6% in May from a year earlier.

Florida is at the heart of the trouble. The state is home to lots of low-income workers and has the highest delinquency rates of a sample analysed by the New York Fed. Esther Lopez has worked at ACE Cash Express, a payday lender in Little Havana, Miami, for 15 years. She says her store is handing out fewer loans than before covid—but only because so many competing lenders have recently opened, in anticipation of a rise in demand. The city's residents will take longer than those anywhere else in the country to repay their credit card debt, reckons WalletHub, a personal finance firm. Aptly, Miami's baseball stadium is called loanDepot Park.

Some remain bullish about America's economy as a whole, however. Eric Wallerstein of Yardeni Research, a consultancy, sees rising delinquency rates as a return to normality, rather than a harbinger of worse to come. True, higher interest rates mean poor creditors are more likely to fall behind on repayments. And at 5.25-5.5% the Fed's benchmark rate is more than double what it was in 2019. Yet delinquency rates are much lower than they were in 2007—the last time interest rates were this high—and indeed at any time from 1991 to 2011. Banks are relaxed about the current level of stress and are raising credit limits faster than customers can use up their balances. Plenty of Ameri-

cans remain supremely comfortable. Big spenders on large incomes—the sort more commonly found in Miami's South Beach than in Little Havana—can easily repay credit card debts. Despite the rise in interest rates, overall debt-servicing costs on homes remain low, since many mortgage-holders are on long-term fixes. All told, one-third of mortgage debt was refinanced in 2020-21 as borrowers took advantage of low rates; households are spending a smaller share of income on paying down debts than at any point in the 2010s. Those who own homes and stocks are also enjoying rising asset prices and associated rental and dividend incomes. The S&P 500 index of large American companies is up by 12% this year, for instance. What matters for the overall economy is how many consumers end up struggling to make ends meet. Rising incomes, along with pandemic savings, were what really fuelled America's rip-roaring spending. With saving rates low and excess savings exhausted, continued spending will have to



be fuelled by still-higher incomes. Employment remains strong and initial jobless claims are steady. Although in April monthly nominal wage growth crept down, recent data also suggest that inflation may have

resumed its descent, which would provide a boost to real incomes. Households' balance sheets have weakened, but with a bit of luck America might keep dodging a consumer crunch.

A groundbreaking gene therapy trial enables deaf children to hear for the first time

For most of us, the joys of hearing a loved one's voice or the simple pleasure of listening to music is a given. But for five children in China who were born deaf, this is now a reality thanks to a groundbreaking development in gene therapy. This innovative treatment, reported on June 5 in the scientific journal *Nature Medicine*, delivered a working copy of a crucial gene to the inner ear to allow these deaf children to hear for the first time. Hearing loss affects over 430 million people, or more than 5 percent of the world's population, according to the World Health Organization. This includes 34 million children who suffer from hearing loss. Approximately 26 million people have hearing loss from birth, with 60 percent of these cases stemming from genetic factors. One genetic factor causing hearing loss at birth is called autosomal recessive deafness 9 (DFNB9), which occurs due to a mutation that leads to a faulty otoferlin protein. This genetic mutation affects 2-8 percent of children born deaf worldwide.

Otoferlin is essential for the proper functioning of hair cells in the ear, which detect sound and send signals to the brain. Without this protein, children with DFNB9 experience hearing loss from birth or early childhood. The five children involved in the gene therapy trial reported in *Nature Medicine*, aged 1 to 11, were all born with DFNB9 and because they lacked functioning otoferlin, they could not hear.

The gene therapy uses tiny, engineered viruses to carry the working otoferlin gene into the hair cells of the inner ear. The viruses used in the trial bring the gene directly to the cells that need it. Since the otoferlin gene is too big for a single virus,



it's split into two parts and delivered using two separate viruses in one surgery. Once inside the cells, the two parts come together, making the gene work properly again. In an earlier trial, researchers successfully restored hearing in one ear of other deaf children. Building on this success, the latest trial treated both ears of five children. This approach helps the children hear more evenly and effectively.

Six months after receiving the gene therapy, the children's hearing improved significantly. Their hearing reached about half of normal levels, allowing them to hear conversations at regular volumes. They also showed great improvements in understanding speech and finding where sounds came from. These skills help to understand conversations in noisy places, enjoy music, and stay safe by detecting warning signals. This was a follow-up to an earlier

trial that began in December 2022, in which the research team successfully performed gene therapy in just one ear, to reduce the risk of side effects by using a lower dose. Encouraged by the hearing improvements and lack of serious side effects, researchers now plan to treat the second ear of the children from the first trial.

This trial is part of a larger effort to expand gene therapy for hereditary deafness worldwide. Similar trials are happening in other countries, and their success could lead to treatments for other genetic forms of deafness. Researchers are making treatment responses more consistent and addressing the distinct types of hearing loss. They will also study how long the restored hearing will last. Early detection of genetic causes through newborn screening and better genetic test interpretations are crucial for effective treatment.

“Vicks ki Goli Ab Ho Gayi hai Badi” - Vicks Breaks Sabse Badi Khabar with Powerhouse Ranveer Singh

BREAKING NEWS



Vicks breaks Sabse Badi Khabar “Vicks ki Goli Ab Ho Gayi hai Badi” with powerhouse brand ambassador Ranveer Singh unveiling the First-ever Double Powered Transformation of India’s iconic Triangular Vicks Cough drops in two decades. Sahil Sethi, Category Leader, Consumer Healthcare, P&G India, “Vicks ki Goli Lo, Khich Khich Door Karo” the iconic brand jingle of Vicks Cough Drops instantly brings in nostalgia, having helped generations of Indians speak up with a khich khich free voice since 1960s. Committed to build on this legacy we are always listening to what our consumers want and incorporating these insights across our product formulations and packaging. Along with the charismatic Superstar Ranveer Singh, we are delighted to announce our SABSE BADI KHABAR in decades – launch of Vicks Double Power Cough Drops, our first-ever double powered transformation of India’s iconic triangular Vicks Cough drops. Formulated based on Consumer feedback on the need of their preferred Cough Drop in a Bigger Size that can help relieve symptoms of throat irritation and cough, our new ‘Vicks Double Power Cough Drops’ is a BADI GOLI which provides BADI RAAHAT. Ab Vicks ki Goli Khao, Badi Raahat Pao.”Speaking about the Brand’s Badi Raahat promise, Dr. Jaspreet Kochhar, Di-

rector, Vicks Research & Development, “New Vicks Double Power Cough Drop is a superior product for relief from sore throat and cough formulated with a proven mix of effective and well known Ayurvedic ingredients such as Menthol, Eucalyptus oil and Camphor. The new formulation designed to be stronger with 2X Menthol comes in 3 different variants in cooling menthol, soothing honey, and warming ginger – developed and tested with Indian consumers. Consumers can now pop in their favourite and well-loved cough drops for better, fast, and long relief, with superior cooling and great taste. That’s what we call Badi Raahat.”Bringing the ‘Sabse Badi Khabar’ to life is none other than the face of Vicks-Ranveer Singh through a quirky new Television Commercial.

Talking about his association with Vicks Cough Drops, Powerhouse Ranveer Singh shared, “Vicks ki goli is a part of our culture. It’s always been the go-to remedy for clearing khich-khich! Proud to represent such an iconic brand as Vicks. I’m excited about the new Double Powered Cough Drops. The TVC is cute and quirky. I hope the audience receives the message with a smile.”With a legacy of powerful relief and care of over 125 years, Vicks the World’s #1 selling cough and cold brand continues to innovate for India towards providing

superior products that enables families and friends to care for one another. This is the Vicks’ 4th Innovation over the last 15 months after the launch of Vicks ZzzQuil Natura (from the World’s #1 Sleep Aid

Brand) for occasional sleeplessness, New Vicks VapoRub Steam Pods, its first steam inhalation capsules globally, and New Vicks Roll-On for Fast & On-the-Go Relief from Headaches.

RPF Secunderabad rescued 133 children under ‘Operation Nanhe Fariste’ in May

Hyderabad: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of the South Central Railway (SCR) zone during the month of May rescued 133 children including 31 girls who were either missing or separated from their families, under ‘Operation Nanhe Fariste’.

Under ‘Operation Yatri Suraksha’, RPF arrested 37 offenders and recovered stolen property worth Rs.29.58 lakh with registration of 53 cases against them during the month.

Likewise, under ‘Operation Amanat’, RPF personnel provided help in securing more than 243 belongings of passengers valued more than Rs.57 lakh and handed them over to rightful owners during the month. Similarly, under ‘Operation Narcos’, to curb narcotic smuggling through rail-

ways, marijuana valued more than Rs.38 lakh was seized and eight persons arrested. RPF personnel under ‘Operation AAHT’ rescued 52 boys and 6 girls from the clutches of 18 human traffickers.

Under ‘Operation Satark’, liquor worth Rs.3.9 lakh being smuggled through trains was seized and 11 persons were arrested and handed over to the Excise Department officials, who booked 21 cases against offenders. Likewise, the RPF personnel caught 27 touts and seized 129 live tickets worth Rs.2.3 lakh under ‘Operation Upalabdh’. Under ‘Operation Rail Suraksha’ during the month of May, 41 cases were booked in connection with railway stolen property and material worth Rs.1.6 lakh was recovered.

China's 'grey-zone' warfare tactics against Taiwan | Explained

The story so far: Since the new Taiwanese president Lai Ching-te has assumed office, all eyes have been on the rocky start to his tenure. While China's belligerent response to Mr. Lai's "pro-independence" and "secessionist" statements was striking, it has now resorted to a sophisticated ploy to respond to Mr. Lai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). This is often referred to as 'grey-zone' warfare, which comprises elements that frustrate Taiwan in a sustained manner.

What has China done?

China's preparedness to invade Taiwan and fight a high-intensity war over the island is a much debated subject. Training drills in the People's Liberation Army Eastern Theater Command (PLA ETC) are targeted precisely at demonstrating China's ability to fight and win. However, a more cognitive tool that Beijing is deploying to demonstrate this ability is simulated audiovisuals. On May 24, for example, the PLA ETC Weibo account released a 3D animation video depicting how in an invasion scenario, land-and warship-based ballistic missile launchers would fire tens of missiles at one go, striking areas in Taipei and Kaohsiung. Moreover, since 2020, the X account of the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence has turned into a repository of reportage on daily sorties conducted by PLA fighter jets, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), strategic fighters and early warning aircraft. While such sorties do not engage the island's defence forces directly, they exert sustained pressure on them. Further, these UAVs also conduct intelligence work in the areas surrounding the island. The long term presence of such mobilisation induces wear-out within Taiwanese forces, even before there is kinetic combat.

What about ideology?

To build a favourable image for itself, Beijing often deploys narratives within Taiwanese territory that thrust ideological choices upon its citizens. For example, sometime on May 25, just under a week after Mr. Lai assumed office, internet users in Taiwan observed a Youtube video of a Chinese citizen operating a drone to drop cardboard boxes on Kinmen island. When investigated by the Kinmen Defence Command on May 26, the boxes unveiled fliers written in simplified Chinese, stating "Both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China, one Chinese nation. Taiwan independence is a dead end. Lai's Taiwan independence is a dead end." Some other fliers warned, "Don't sacrifice your life for Taiwan independence, do you understand?" The Kinmen Command stated that this was "a typical cognitive warfare tactic" deployed by China, because it initiates public discussions on social media, and garners attention for the Chinese cause.

What are the political tactics China uses?

In its 'carrots and sticks' approach towards Taiwan, Beijing deploys sticks for the DPP and carrots for its primary opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT). Well



known for its relatively pro-mainland views, the KMT continues to engage with Communist Party (CPC) officials, even as any meaningful communication between the DPP and the CPC has stalled since Ms. Tsai became President of Taiwan in 2016. DPP legislators have often described these engagements as KMT's "collusion" with the CPC. In fact, KMT officials have, in the past, been investigated by the Tsai administration under the 'anti-infiltration law' after their visits to China. China's 'sticks' against the

DPP entail coercive economic measures, which leverage the cross-strait trade and business interdependence to seek concessions. One such example is China's unilateral suspension of preferential tax rates for chemical imports from Taiwan, granted under the only trade agreement to exist between the two sides — the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). Beijing announced that such a suspension, applicable to 134 items imported from Taiwan, is retaliation against

Mr. Lai's propagation of "separatist" sentiments in his inaugural speech, as well as Taipei's own restrictions against imports of over 2,000 goods made in China. Mr. Lai's electoral victory revolves around '3Ds' — defence, deterrence and diplomacy. Maintaining the balance between pursuing them and avoiding Chinese provocation will be a tight-rope walk. As 'grey-zone' warfare tactics become a subject of deliberation, Mr. Lai will have much to grapple with during his tenure.

Advertisers, media organisations push back on self-certification rules for ads

Media bodies — such as print, radio and broadcast players — and their ad agencies, have urged the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to defer the implementation deadline for a "self-certification" for all advertising. The requirement was put in place by the I&B Ministry in response to a Supreme Court order on May 7 in the Indian Medical Association's case against Patanjali, where the court found that the ayurvedic conglomerate was endangering people's health by printing misleading claims on evidence-based medicine and its own products.

In representations to the Ministry reviewed by The Hindu, three industry bodies pushed back on the rapid implementation of the Supreme Court's order. The order requires advertisers to reaffirm their ads' compliance with the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994. The rules are currently on track to kick in on June 20. An industry body representing print media asked the Ministry to keep the requirements

in "abeyance" until ambiguities in terms of the scope of advertisements, applicability for digital ads, advertorials, government ads, and other issues are sorted out. The body also requested that the requirements be limited to medical advertising.

A body representing TV broadcasters and some of their streaming services said that the SC only imposed requirements on advertising firms, and not channels, whereas the MIB has sent advisories to channels and other media requiring them to "verify the authenticity" of self-certification furnished by advertisers. "[We] urge that the compliance period be extended by 45 days since the transition would involve practical challenges and would require cooperation by various stakeholders," the letter said.

A grouping of ad agencies, for its part, said that firms they service "may lose revenue due to the inability to launch campaigns on time," and that the Broadcast Seva portal set up for permissions and

clearances may have technical glitches that could hobble ads from being released on time. The scope has also been confounding some media houses — for instance, one source at a broadcast channel wondered, would a channel and its show be considered a product or a service meriting a self-certification? Would viewership claims — based on constantly fluctuating data released by the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), be considered claims?

While the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has lined up meetings on a variety of subjects, there is no clarity on when advertisers and ad agencies will have an opportunity to discuss their reservations with the requirements. While associations had chalked out a plan to approach the Supreme Court to clarify these issues, The Hindu has learnt, they have chosen to wait longer to decide whether or not to file intervention applications before a vacation bench.

Politics and livelihood issues around a 'half statue' in Karkala

A strange sight greets anyone who enters Bailoor, a small town in Karkala taluk of Udupi district in coastal Karnataka: a statue on a hillock with no torso. This is a portion of what was meant to be an impressive statue of Parashurama, an avatar of Vishnu in the Hindu pantheon whom the devout believe carved out the western coast with his axe. On getting closer, one realises that what was meant to be a theme park around this statue and a great tourism draw is also in disarray. The "half statue" that has been standing at the centre of the village for over eight months now is witness to much political slugfest and hopes of better livelihood of locals being dashed. A 33-year-old woman who sells meat (who did not wish to be named) said her business had improved significantly after the theme park was inaugurated in January 2023, as several hotels started banking on improved tourism. But about nine months later, the situation changed drastically, forcing business establishments to shut down one by one. This was thanks to politics that started brewing around the statue. Only the lower portion of the Parashurama statue in Karkala taluk of Udupi district stands now as the top half has been dismantled for reinforcement. Only the lower portion of the Parashurama statue in Karkala taluk of Udupi district stands now as the top half has been dismantled for reinforcement. | Photo Credit: H.S. MANJUNATH "Everyone here was jumping with joy for Karkala was finally having a major tourism spot attracting many visitors. This led to the mushrooming of shops, hotels, and eateries in the vicinity, thus creating jobs for locals. My business shot up as new restaurants started buying fish and meat and they too had good business," she says. Locals estimate that more than 1,000 people were visiting the park, which had a 33-foot bronze statue of Parashurama, every day. The statue was standing atop a 450-foot-tall rock. People from many parts of the State used to visit the place which also has an amphitheatre with a seating capacity of 1,000, a bhajan mandir, an art gallery, and a film studio. In October 2023, however, the park was closed to the public and it has not opened since then, forcing the shopkeepers to leave the place.

Sunil Wagle, another local resident who had set up a restaurant near the park, said his hopes were high after the commencement of work on the park in 2022. He invested a good amount of money, and when the park opened, many people started visiting his restaurant for refreshments and to purchase water bottles and cold drinks. Wagle said not just him, a few others also set up businesses. Several others had purchased land hoping that the prices would shoot up. He is very upset with politicians for derailing what held promise for many. "Now we do not know when this project will restart, and people are not showing interest in re-establishing their businesses. The aspiration that locals would secure jobs because of tourism has also taken a hit." Before the project, an acre of land around the town would cost about ₹18 lakh to ₹20 lakh and many people



purchased the land. The opening of the park, by the then Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, drove the land price up. The price of roadside parcels of land near the park increased to ₹50 lakh an acre. While some purchased for investment, a few built buildings to lease out or rent. "But the park was closed to repair the statue and the price crashed. Hotel owners and shopkeepers vacating the space also left a deep impact on the business prospects," said Ramesh Kallotte, a daily wage labourer. During weekends, a lot of people used to visit the place and business was good, he said. Design flaw, statue politics Warnings of some trouble were there even as the park was inaugurated in January 2023. The event was attended by BJP as well as Congress leaders. During the inauguration, the then Minister and BJP MLA for Karkala Sunil Kumar announced that although the park was opened, the statue needed a "fix" as the hand that was holding the axe did not have proper support and could break due to strong wind or lightning. The modification for the statue proposed was reinforcing the hand and joining a portion of it to the back of the head. It is anyone's guess why the statue was inaugurated in such a hurry without first fixing the faulty work. The Legislative Assembly elections were months away and the then BJP government wanted to take credit for the project. For about nine months nothing happened, but in October 2023, the chairman of the government agency Nirmiti Kendra — the Deputy Commissioner of Udupi district — permitted the contract agency Krish Art World to repair the statue. The agency had sought permission for reinforcement work by dismantling the upper half portion of the statue. The park was closed to visitors as the work commenced. What snowballed into a controversy was a piece of fibre that fell while the statue was being dismantled. Several local Congress leaders alleged

that the statue was made of fibre and not bronze as was being claimed. Sunil Kumar, however, contended that "fibre patches" were used only to attach the pieces of bronze and that this was a standard practice. He said this was countered not just by him but also by officials of the Nirmiti Kendra. There was a problem with the statue but the public was not kept in the dark about it, he said. He alleged that to score a political point, the Congress had set this narrative and had sought an investigation. "I welcome the probe as I do not have anything to hide. Every procedure was followed during the implementation of the project," he said. Sunil Kumar said the Congress was alleging that the BJP had let down a religious space. This, however, is not a religious space but a theme park, a tourism spot, he said. Meanwhile, as the location is prone to extreme weather conditions, including lightning strikes, the contractor requested the Nirmiti Kendra for scientific reinforcement. After the kendra granted permission to dismantle the statue for reinforcement, the contractor removed the upper half of the structure. But the kendra on December 21, 2023, served a show-cause notice to the company for non-completion of work. The company filed a writ petition in the High Court of Karnataka on April 10, 2024, seeking protection at the site citing a threat. In the petition, it was argued that they could not complete the work as there were extreme weather issues. The High Court disposed of the petition on April 22 as the Nirmiti Kendra and the company came to an agreement. The Nirmiti Kendra agreed to provide security, while the company said it would resume work. The work could not be started then as the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections was in place, and subsequently, in May, the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government ordered a probe into allegations of irregularities. Congress

leader Muniyal Uday Kumar, while admitting that it is a good project for the town, alleged that Sunil Kumar was instrumental in the failure of the project. He said while the lower portion of the statue was made of bronze, the upper portion was made using fibre "to swindle money" that was released to build the statue. He said the total cost of the statue was ₹2.4 crore but the government paid just ₹1 crore to the contractor. The contractor, therefore, executed sub-standard work, he alleged. Even in the theme park project, which has other infrastructure, there are irregularities and hence the government ordered a probe by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). He said the BJP, which claims to be a pro-Hindutva party, has turned this religious space into a mess. He said though action should have been taken against the wrongdoing by now, it did not happen as at the top level both the Congress and the BJP had "an unwritten understanding". He said for the inaugural event, the previous BJP government had spent a whopping ₹2 crore. The MLA wished to make this a major political event to galvanise voters, he claimed. Set aside politics, say locals But all that the locals now want is the completion of the project as this would become the "pride of Karkala". Lokesh (name changed) said the project is suffering due to politics between the two major parties. Lokesh, who runs a small business in Karkala, said when the roads were asphalted and the park was inaugurated, the people rejoiced. "There is not a single statue of this scale of Parashurama, who we believe created the land of coastal Karnataka. This spot would have attracted lakhs of people if the project was completed as envisaged. As this location is close to the highway, many people would visit," he said. People hope that the CID probe is completed soon and the statue as well as their hopes of a better livelihood takes shape again.

Cultivating reform: 12 policy strategies for India's agricultural revival

Farmers' distress in India is a profound socio-economic issue deeply rooted in systemic challenges. Low crop prices, unpredictable weather patterns exacerbated by climate change, and rising input costs contribute to their financial instability. The lack of adequate infrastructure, timely access to credit, and comprehensive insurance schemes further aggravate their plight. The dependence on middlemen for market access often leads to significant economic burdens. This distress manifests in widespread discontent, protests, and farmer suicides, highlighting the urgent need for holistic policy interventions to ensure sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic equity for India's farmers. In the aftermath of the recent elections, the new government finds itself at a pivotal juncture, particularly concerning the growing distress and discontent among farmers in various states. The electoral mandate underscores the urgency for decisive and empathetic policy interventions to address the myriad challenges faced by the agricultural sector. This piece proposes a series of strategic policy tweaks to reduce farmers' ire and foster sustainable growth in the agricultural landscape.

1. Implementing Fair and Transparent Price Mechanisms

The perpetual grievance of inadequate pricing for farm produce remains central to farmer discontent. Establishing fair and transparent price mechanisms is crucial. These measures would provide a more stable and predictable income, mitigating the financial uncertainty that plagues many farming households. Enhancing transparency in pricing can involve integrating digital platforms that provide real-time market prices, effectively reducing the exploitation by middlemen and ensuring that farmers are better informed about the true value of their produce.

2. Prioritising Agricultural Activities in the MGNREGA Scheme

MGNREGA has been a lifeline for rural employment but its potential to support agriculture remains underutilised. By prioritising agricultural activities within the scheme, the government can provide a dual benefit: assured income to farmers and additional support for farming-related tasks. This could include water conservation, soil improvement, and infrastructure development, benefiting agricultural productivity and sustainability. Such integration would ensure that farmers have reliable income streams even during off-seasons, thus stabilising their financial situation and reducing migration to urban areas in search of work.

3. Investing in Rural Infrastructure

Modern and efficient rural infrastructure is a cornerstone of agricultural productivity. Post-harvest losses can be significantly reduced by improving irrigation systems, building storage facilities, and enhancing market linkages. This can ensure that produce remains fresh and valuable when it reaches the market, thereby

maximising farmer profits. Investment in rural infrastructure should also focus on developing transportation networks. Good road connectivity ensures farmers can quickly and easily transport their produce to markets, reducing spoilage and ensuring higher returns.

4. Enhancing Access to Credit and Insurance

Financial security is a major concern for farmers, who often face barriers in accessing credit and insurance. Expanding the reach of institutional credit and crop insurance schemes, particularly for small and marginal farmers, is imperative. Simplifying loan procedures and ensuring the timely disbursement of insurance claims can provide critical support, enabling farmers to invest in quality inputs and innovative farming techniques. Offering targeted financial products, such as low-interest loans and flexible repayment schedules, can also boost the confidence of farmers to take calculated risks and invest in higher-yielding practices.

5. Empowering Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)

FPOs can revolutionise the agricultural landscape by giving farmers collective bargaining power and market access. Strengthening and expanding the reach of FPOs can empower farmers to negotiate better prices, access quality inputs at lower costs, and enhance their overall competitive edge in the market. The government should provide these organisations with technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and financial support. Facilitating partnerships between FPOs and private enterprises can open new avenues for investment, innovation, and market expansion.

6. Developing Pest and Disease-Resistant Crop Varieties

The agricultural sector relies heavily on pesticides, which can be cost-prohibitive and environmentally damaging. The development and dissemination of pest and disease-resistant crop varieties are critical. Investing in agricultural research and development to produce resilient crops can significantly reduce dependency on chemical inputs, lower production costs, and minimise the risk of crop failure. Collaborations with agricultural universities and international research bodies can fast-track the introduction of these varieties, ensuring that farmers have access to the best possible pest and disease management solutions.

7. Facilitating Diversification and Value Addition

Diversification is a powerful tool to enhance farmer resilience and income. Encouraging the cultivation of high-value crops, livestock rearing, and non-farm activities can provide multiple income streams. Supporting value-added products through training, infrastructure, and market linkages can further elevate farmers' earning potential. Promoting cottage indus-



tries and processing units at the village level can ensure that farmers benefit from the entire value chain, from raw produce to final consumer products. This not only increases income but also creates local employment opportunities.

8. Strengthening Extension Services and Knowledge Sharing Knowledge is power, especially in agriculture. Strengthening extension services can empower farmers with the latest agronomic practices, market information, and technological interventions. Training extension workers, establishing digital platforms for real-time information dissemination, and promoting peer-to-peer learning networks can democratise agricultural knowledge, fostering innovation and productivity. Digital platforms providing tutorials, weather updates, market prices, and pest alerts can be revolutionary. Tailored local language content can ensure accessibility and understanding, leading to better on-ground practices.

9. Developing and Distributing Suitable Agricultural Implements

Farm mechanisation tailored to the needs of small farmers can significantly enhance productivity and reduce physical strain. Developing and distributing suitable agricultural implements, such as small-scale tractors, planting tools, and efficient harvesting devices, can transform the farming landscape. Subsidised equipment leasing programs, government grants, and cooperative ownership models can ensure that even the smallest farmers can access modern agricultural tools, increasing efficiency and output.

10. Promoting Agroecology and Sustainable Practices

Sustainable farming practices are essential for long-term agricultural health. Promoting agroecology, which emphasises diversity, resilience, and ecological balance, can improve soil health, reduce input costs, and improve climate resilience. Incentives for organic farming, agroforestry, and integrated pest management can reduce chemical dependency and ensure healthier, more sustainable agricultural systems. Community-based agroecology projects can also educate and

encourage farmers to adopt eco-friendly practices, contributing to environmental conservation and sustainability.

11. Encouraging Vegetable and Horticulture Development

Promoting vegetable and horticulture development, alongside barren land development through initiatives like *Jatropha* plantation, can significantly enhance agricultural diversification. These initiatives provide alternative income sources and fully utilise land resources. Government support for cooperative nurseries and community gardens can further promote these activities, ensuring farmers can access quality seeds, training, and market connections.

12. Enhancing Collaboration Between Research Institutions and Policymakers

Effective collaboration between research institutions and policymakers ensures that innovative agricultural solutions are translated into actionable policies. Bridging the gap between academic research and practical application can lead to more effective and scalable interventions. Establishing farmer-researcher forums, engaging in participatory research, and promoting pilot projects can validate new technologies and approaches, ensuring they meet the needs of farmers and are readily adopted on the ground.

Collaborative Strategies for Revitalising India's Agricultural Sector

Engaging agricultural economists, policy analysts, and farming stakeholders in constructive dialogue will provide nuanced insights into addressing farmer issues in Maharashtra, Punjab, and beyond. By prioritising inclusive, evidence-based policy interventions, the new government can effectively address the farmers' grievances and pave the way for a thriving, sustainable agricultural sector. Through thoughtful and collaborative efforts, India can ensure its farmers survive and flourish in an evolving economic landscape. Harmonising traditional wisdom with contemporary innovations through strategic policy changes can revitalise India's agricultural sector.

A look at the Supreme Court's judgments on water disputes in the country

In the words of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), water is 'the stuff of life and a basic human right'. Thus, water is an essential element for life – including human life – on earth and as a result is a core concern in law. Despite immense reservoirs of water in the country, there are water shortages everywhere often leading to riots, roadblocks and other disturbances and disputes for getting water. In many cities and colonies, people get water for half an hour in a day, and sometimes not even for that long. Recently, a bout of water crisis in New Delhi led to hue and cry across major parts of the city. To meet the requirements, the Delhi government borrowed water from its neighbouring states, which however, did not turn out to be sufficient. Consequently, the Delhi government requested Himachal Pradesh (HP) to release 137 cusecs of surplus water. The matter subsequently reached the Supreme Court, which ordered HP to release water from upstream from where it can reach the Wazirabad barrage in the Capital. As and when Haryana receives the water, it must provide the "right to passage" until the Wazirabad barrage. However, Haryana objected and contended that there is no method to measure whether HP has released additional water or not and that Haryana is also tackling a water crisis. However, the top court bench refuted the objections and emphasised the serious drinking water crisis in Delhi. The major point to witness here is that prima facie, there is no dispute raised on the use of the water either by the HP or Delhi, but by Haryana while giving the passage for the water to reach from upstream to Delhi.

In *Networking of Rivers* (2012), the Court ruled that Section 11 of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 ("the 1956 Act") uses the expression "use, distribution and control of water in any river" and they are the keywords in determination of the scope of power conferred on a tribunal constituted Under Section 3 of the 1956 Act. If a matter fell outside the scope of these three crucial words, the power of Section 11 of the 1956 Act in ousting the jurisdiction of the courts in respect of any water dispute, which is otherwise to be referred to the tribunal, would not have any manner of application.

'Water dispute' has been defined in Section 2(c) of the Act, 1957 to mean any dispute or difference between two or more State governments in respect to the use, distribution or control of waters of or in any inter-state river or river valley. It was urged that the Krishna River Water Dispute Tribunal award popularly known as the Bachawath award made it clear that the Krishna river, which flows from Maharashtra, through Karnataka and then Andhra Pradesh is an inter-state river and the words "use", "distribution" or "control" are of wide import and would include regulation and development of waters and waters of any inter-state river which can only be regulated through the construction of reservoirs and dams, etc. In the *TN Cauvery Sangam v. Union of India* case, the Supreme Court held that once the Union gov-

ernment finds that the dispute referred to in the request received from the State Government cannot be settled by negotiation, it becomes mandatory for the Union government to constitute a tribunal and refer the dispute to the tribunal for adjudication and in case it fails to do so, a writ of mandamus could be issued to constitute a tribunal. In the *State of Karnataka v. Union of India* case, Justice Bhagwati emphasised that the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction under Article 131 should not be influenced by considerations of "cause of action" typical in suits. The scope of this jurisdiction should be determined solely by the terms of the Article. He also noted that Article 131 aims to provide a forum for resolving disputes between states or between a state and the Union, ensuring final adjudication by the highest court in the land swiftly and efficiently, avoiding prolonged legal proceedings through multiple courts.

In the matter of *Tamil Nadu C.N.V.V.N.U.P Sangam v. Union of India* (1990), *State of Tamil Nadu v. State of Karnataka* (1991), and *Re: Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal* (1993), the writ petition raised a dispute relating to water, therefore, in view of Article 262(2) of the Constitution read with Section 11 of the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 jurisdiction of the Court is barred. The SC observed that no doubt the writ petition would not be maintainable provided a water dispute as defined in the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 is raised therein. In the *Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal*, the Inter-State Water Disputes Tribunal constituted under the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 under Article 262, gave an interim order to Karnataka to release water to Tamil Nadu. In response, Karnataka's Governor issued the Karnataka Cauvery Basin Irrigation Protection Ordinance, 1991, nullifying the Tribunal's order. The Constitution Bench ruled that Article 262 vested all powers in the Tribunal, making its orders binding. The Ordinance interfered with the Tribunal's judicial power and was declared unconstitutional. This decision affirmed the Tribunal's exclusive authority under the Constitution to adjudicate inter-state water disputes.

Thus, it can be seen that there has always been a tussle between the powers of the tribunals as well as the courts and at different stances, the SC pronounced contrary judgments taking into consideration the facts and circumstances of each case. The extension of legal rights to rivers is groundbreaking and unprecedented. In 2017, the Uttarakhand High Court declared the Ganga and Yamuna rivers as legal persons with the rights, duties, and liabilities of a living person. This decision blurred the lines between a living person and a legal person, leading an environmental activist to report the rivers' 'murder' due to pollution. The argument for including water management in Union list

Meanwhile, there is a growing movement to shift water management to the Union or Concurrent list. The Union ministry of water resources is advocating more actively for this change. The Ashok Chawla



committee, focused on rationalising natural resource allocation to reduce corruption, reportedly recommended this shift. Currently, state governments control river water allocation, leading to inevitable disputes as rivers cross state boundaries. According to expert KC Wheare, the Constitution of India is quasi-federal, so 'water' should remain a state matter. Despite numerous laws, few address river water disputes. Minimal Union interference is preferred, except when necessary. Water disputes are inevitable,

necessitating a permanent, non-arbitrary tribunal with clear objectives and transparent outcomes. Recognising water as a finite resource, the Government should urgently push for comprehensive national legislation, evolving a consensus to include water in the concurrent list. This would create a national framework for water management, conservation, development, and equitable distribution, with authority devolved to lower tiers of government. Existing water laws should also be thoroughly reviewed.

Addressing anxiety in young adults: A growing concern

Anxiety is increasingly common among young adults, those transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, typically in their late teens or early twenties. The pressures they face can lead to significant stress and anxiety, especially in an academic setting. Fourteen year old Nishant was gripped with anxiety as he worked on a school composition. His hunched shoulders and tight grip on the pen were signs of his distress, further evidenced by his habit of nervously plucking at his nearly non-existent eyebrow. His teacher had threatened to hold him back if his composition wasn't good enough, escalating his stress.

Our students face numerous challenges that contribute to rising stress levels, leading to anxiety. Some students struggle or fail academically, and it's crucial for parents and teachers to recognise how poor academic performance can result in anxiety. Understanding these challenges is essential for us to provide effective help. Common signs of anxiety in students:

- Physical Symptoms: Headaches, stomach pain, and sleep disturbances can indicate anxiety, further affecting academic performance and overall well-being.
- Decreased Motivation: Anxiety can hinder students' ability to focus on their studies, leading to a downward spiral in performance and increasing stress.
- Social Withdrawal: Students may feel embarrassed or

ashamed of poor performance, leading them to withdraw socially, which aggravates their stress and anxiety. To support students with anxiety issues, consider these strategies:

- Provide Emotional Support: Instead of shaming or scolding, parents, teachers, and peers should offer emotional support and reassurance. Understanding their struggles and giving them a safe, non-judgmental space to express themselves can significantly reduce anxiety.
- Encourage a Growth Mindset: Teach students that failure is a natural part of learning and growth. This mindset shifts the focus from fixed outcomes to the learning process, helping students overcome the fear of failure.
- Teach Coping Strategies: Equip students with coping strategies like time management skills, which can help them manage anxiety and improve their performance.

- Seek Professional Help: For severe anxiety, connecting with a mental health professional, counsellor, or therapist can be beneficial. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can help students develop healthier thought patterns and reduce anxiety.
- Supportive Environment: Schools should foster an environment that values individual learning differences, offering after-school tutoring and counselling. The importance of understanding anxiety; Anxiety has a profound impact on students who struggle or fail academically.

The Bareilly case and a flawed criminal justice system

A few weeks ago, the case of a woman who had filed a rape case, was sentenced to imprisonment, and fined by a court in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, dominated the headlines. The narrative, echoed by select media users, painted a picture of a woman who had brazenly fabricated rape accusations. This, of course, perpetuated the damaging stereotype that false claims by women are the norm. But, a deeper dive into the trial proceedings reveals a range of systemic shortcomings in our law enforcement machinery and social complexities that demand urgent attention. In 2019, Pooja's (name changed) mother filed a missing person's complaint stating that her 15-year-old daughter was missing and that she suspected Ramesh (name changed) of having kidnapped her. But Pooja appeared a few days later saying that she had been taken to Delhi by Ramesh and raped by both him and several other men, with the knowledge of his mother and sister. She claimed that she ran away from Delhi to her home. No proof of her age was available, but an external medical examination showed her to be 18, and not 15 years old as she claimed to be. A more thorough examination was crucial for the prosecution's case for any evidence of sexual assault, but she refused to undergo this. Another fact is that she is a married woman.

Her statement to a magistrate was recorded, and Ramesh arrested. In her first statement to the court during the trial, she said that she had been kidnapped and raped. In her cross-examination four months later, she said that she had been made to give a false complaint against Ramesh by her mother as there was personal animosity between the mother and Ramesh. She also said that a police officer had coerced her to lie. Based on glaring loopholes in the prosecution's case, such as the contradictions in her statements on her abduction and recovery, the lack of medical evidence due to the negligence of the investigating officer and her refusal to undergo a medical examination, Ramesh was acquitted in 2024. A perjury case was registered against Pooja, for which she was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment and a fine (SC No. 215/2024 before Additional District Judge Bareilly) imposed.

This case is a telling example of the lackadaisical approach to police investigation and where the prosecution did not even attempt to patch together a case. At the time of filing the charge sheet, other than Pooja's statement and her family members supporting the fact that she was missing, there was absolutely no evidence against Ramesh. Of course, the statement of a prosecutrix in a sexual assault is crucial, but this was a case where there were claims of her being taken to another place and where multiple accomplices were allegedly involved. But those angles were not probed. There is no circumstantial evidence placing Ramesh along with Pooja at any point. There is no medical evidence to corroborate the claim of rape. There is a claim of the mother calling Ramesh when Pooja went missing but there is no evidence placed on record to prove this. The

alleged crime scene — a room in Delhi — remained unlocated and unexamined, and the clothes worn by Pooja were not even collected for forensic analysis. Even the rented property where Ramesh was living in was not examined. The site map produced as evidence was a map showing the front door to Pooja's house since her mother said she had been abducted from their house. A vegetable market, from where she was taken, as in Pooja's statement to the magistrate, was not examined. Even though it was alleged that Ramesh's mother and sister witnessed the rape, they were neither charged for abetment nor examined as witnesses. Multiple stakeholders overlooked what has been a notably weak case along the way. Section 173(8) of the CrPC allows a magistrate to direct further investigation in case of a flawed investigation. However, in this case, the magistrate committed the case for trial despite the glaring gaps in the investigation. The magistrate could call for the case diary under Section 172(2) of the CrPC, which may have revealed discrepancies or inadequacies in the investigation. The public prosecutor's endorsement of a patently weak charge sheet shows a lax attitude, and a failure to fulfil their duty, to the court and the public.

Arbitrary and prolonged undertrial detention is, unfortunately, pervasive within India's criminal justice system. In this case, where an individual had to undergo over four years of incarceration, other than the judge noting that there were issues in the investigation, there was a startling absence of accountability directed towards the investigating officers or the prosecution. That there were no repercussions for those responsible for wrongful detentions perpetuates a culture of impunity and undermines public confidence in the integrity of judicial processes. Pooja's version of events in her statement to the magistrate, her initial court statement, and her cross-examination all differed, which suggests coercion.

During the cross-examination, she attributed it to her mother and a police officer. Thereafter, during the sentencing hearing of her perjury case, Pooja's husband claimed that he told her to claim that her mother had coerced her to lie about the kidnapping and the rape so that they would not have to be bothered by the case any more. Even if not a minor, she was clearly a very young person who had been coerced by various adults. This was not taken into consideration by the court that sentenced her. This is not to take away from the fact that Ramesh was a victim of the system. His trial dragged on in a fast-track court in Bareilly amidst the disruptive backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fast-track courts were set up to ensure swift justice for victims of sexual crimes and corruption cases. Although, ideally, these cases are to be finished within a year of filing the charge sheet, this timeframe is rarely adhered to. The trial in this case spanned 1,559 days, in which there were 109 hearings (data from the e-Courts portal). The data also show that most of these hearings just resulted in adjournments, 13 of which were because of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The examination of witnesses went on from November 2020 to February 2024. These timelines are shocking because the case itself was not complicated, given that there were only six witnesses and six exhibits. Ramesh remained in jail throughout this time.

The state of fast-track courts The functioning of fast-track courts has been far from ideal. New courts with the necessary infrastructure and dedicated judges are not set up for fast-track purposes. Instead, existing courts are typically designated as fast-track courts, requiring judges to manage their regular caseloads in addition to these expedited cases. Without looking into these systemic challenges, the centrally sponsored scheme for Fast Track Special Courts (FTSC) has recently been extended till 2026, with a budgetary allocation of around ₹2,000 crore. This case also raises questions about the issue of bail in India. Ramesh filed a bail application before the sessions court in 2021, but it was rejected

because of the serious nature of the offence. His family did not have the economic means to file an appeal, so he remained in jail till his acquittal. Notwithstanding directives from the Supreme Court of India to decongest prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ramesh was not granted bail even during this period. And, despite the constant discourse in policy realms and constitutional courts in favour of a reduction in undertrial detention, the grim reality within trial courts shows how indifference along with poverty prolong such detention. Ultimately, the notoriety surrounding this case, cited to bolster the stereotype of women lodging false accusations against men, underscores a critical call for reforms within the criminal justice system. Rather than weakening laws safeguarding women, this case highlights the necessity for enhancements in police investigation protocols, prosecutorial autonomy, and judicial supervision to mitigate the risk of wrongful and protracted imprisonments.

Musk asks X users to post long-form articles to promote citizen journalism

New Delhi: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, on Sunday, encouraged X users to post long-form articles on the platform and create space for citizen journalism. Some users have already started posting full-length articles written by them on X, as Musk tries to compete with traditional media giants. Another user commented: Great idea! Engaging content on X will attract more readers.

Last September, the tech billionaire

visited the US-Mexico border and live-streamed his tour of the region. Musk then encouraged people to do citizen journalism on X. "Please encourage more citizen journalism! You can do live video easily from your phone. More on-the-ground reporting from regular citizens will change the world," he posted. The X owner has invited journalists to publish directly on X and earn more. He has also made X an open-source platform.