

Residential real estate market sees major dip

Hyderabad: The residential real estate market in Hyderabad experienced a significant downturn in the second quarter of 2024. The latest report by PropEquity, a real estate data analytics firm, reveals a significant drop in both new launches and sales during the April-June quarter of 2024. Among the nine major cities – Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Pune, Navi Mumbai, <https://telanganatoday.com/tag/qoq> and Thane – Hyderabad experienced the steepest quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) decline in housing sales, with a 36 per cent drop. In Q2 2024, 15,016 units were sold, compared to 23,595 units in Q1 2024. New residential launches in Hyderabad also saw a significant decrease, with 11,603 units launched—a 19 per cent decline from the previous quarter (Q1 2024).

Also, compared to same period last year (Q2 2023), Hyderabad experienced a 36 per cent decrease in new residential launches, dropping from 18,232 units launched to 11,603 units in Q2 2024. Regarding sales, Hyderabad saw a 20 per cent year-on-year (YoY) decline, with 18,757 units sold in Q2 2023 compared to 15,016 units in Q2 2024.

In contrast, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Chennai recorded YoY growth rates of 95 per cent, 67 per cent, and 21 per cent respectively in residential launches. Hyderabad's decline was second only to Pune, which saw a 47 per cent drop. For housing sales, Mumbai and Kolkata showed increases of 27 per cent YoY,



while Hyderabad experienced a 20 per cent decrease, followed by Pune at 15 per cent. "The marginal drop in new launch supply across top Tier 1 cities is primarily due to the election quarter and the typically sluggish nature of Q2. However, the higher absorption compared to new sup-

ply signifies the ongoing robustness and good health of the residential real estate market post-COVID," said Samir Jasuja, CEO & MD of PropEquity. Across nine major cities, 1,19,901 units were sold in Q2 2024, an 18 per cent decline from the pre-

vious quarter's 146,147 units. On a year-on-year basis, housing sales saw a marginal dip of 2 per cent. New housing supply has also witnessed a seven per cent decline on a QoQ basis with 97,331 units launched in Q2 2024 as compared to 1,04,391 units in Q1 2024.

Hyderabad witnesses spurt in seasonal flu, influenza infections

Hyderabad: A significant flare-up of infections related to seasonal flu, influenza, viral infections is being reported by doctors, immunologists and public health specialists in Hyderabad. The rise of infections in the last week or so could be a clear indication of an unknown infection of viral origin, which is circulating among the community in Hyderabad, they point out. There is a fear among caregivers that the present rise of viral infections in Hyderabad could end-up being a precursor for a significant wave of upper respiratory infections like severe pneumonia, wherein lungs get infected, in the coming days. An outbreak of influenza should not surprise anyone because last year (March, 2023) Hyderabad had witnessed a significant surge of infections among people due to influenza A (H1N1) and another subtype A (H3N2) cases, which were later confirmed by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

surveillance data. Typically, these days, hospitals in Hyderabad are receiving patients with symptoms of seasonal flu and within days, in some patients, the infection is spreading to upper respiratory tract and even to the lower respiratory tract, thus infecting lungs. There is a trend of rise in consumption and prescribing of anti-viral drug Oseltamivir, which is retailed under the brand name Tamiflu, for treatment of patients in Hyderabad. The administration of Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) is an indication that some flu positive patients, probably those with comorbid conditions, are facing severe symptoms, doctors here pointed out. "We are witnessing extreme flare-ups of infections in the last ten days in Hyderabad. Due to immunological changes among a large section of population during the Covid pandemic, even a simple flu is now getting intensified into upper and lower respiratory tract infections among

individuals. I am hoping that this sudden rise in infections does not lead to a major surge of pneumonia or viral infections," says senior immunologist from Hyderabad, Dr Vyakaranam Nageshwar. Senior doctors at the nodal government-health care facility for seasonal ailments, Fever Hospital, Nallakunta, however, have said that they are yet to witness a major rise in viral infections. "At present, we are witnessing a few cases of seasonal flu, which is normal because of weather changes, and a few sporadic cases of dengue. So far, we have not been able to witness any kind of trend that indicates major flare-up pneumonia-like cases. For an average person on the street, it is always better to keep taking precautions by leading a healthy and active life," says Superintendent, Fever Hospitals, Dr K Shankar. Doctors point out that inclement weather conditions are ideal for causing viral and bacterial infections and tak-

ing precautions is the best foot forward. If you have developed flu like symptoms i.e. cough with fever, headache, sore throat and associated body pains or conjunctivitis, reach nearby Government health facilities. Consult a doctor immediately if fever persists for more than 3 days. Symptoms of Flu: Fever, sneezing, runny nose, nasal congestion, cough, wheezing and often chest congestion. Body pains, lethargy, difficulty in breathing could cause oxygen saturation. How to prevent viral flu/ conjunctivitis etc? • Avoid shaking hands, sharing food, water and clothes, with someone who is sick, • Wash hands frequently, as well as use hand sanitizers often, to avoid being infected • Minimize contamination of hands, avoid touching door handles, table tops, lift buttons, stair banisters, and railings in public places • Cover your mouth while sneezing/cough, to avoid infecting people around you •

Northeastern View | One year on, restive Manipur continues to simmer as the state looks away

Exactly a year ago, Manipur convulsed into a devastating ethnic conflict that has refused to ebb. The repeated cycles of violence have etched neat lines between the state's dominant Meitei and tribal Kuki-Zo communities – both on and off the map. What was once widely recognised as a structural “hill-versus-valley divide” – with the Meitei mostly living in Imphal Valley and the Kuki-Zo in the surrounding hills – today looks like a total partition of two lifeworlds. Over 220 have been killed, thousands have been injured and dozens are missing. Inter-communal distrust snowballing into violence isn't rare in modern Indian history. Neither is state failure. But, in Manipur's case, the scope and enormity of these pathologies have been particularly appalling. The state stands accused of not only looking away as violence roiled but also proactively aiding ethnically motivated attacks.

How did Manipur get to this?

In the days leading up to the first phase of general elections polling in Manipur, Laishram Robason, the so-called “control room operator” of Arambai Tenggol, a hitherto nondescript Meitei armed group that came of age only last year, issued a stern diktat ordering Lok Sabha candidates to not campaign publicly, attempting to prohibit public gatherings, feasts, and use of loudspeakers. State authorities did nothing to bring the group to task for its blatantly illegal act of intimidation. Days later, on polling day, voters accused Arambai of heckling polling officers using physical force and even gunfire. Once again, state authorities have yet to take any action. The government of N. Biren Singh also looked away when top members of the heavily armed militia forced dozens of elected Meitei lawmakers, including a union minister, to take an unconstitutional oath at Imphal's Kangla Fort in January. One of the only times the state police detained an Arambai member was in February. In response, the group abducted the senior police officer responsible for the action. The militia later released him, but the Singh government refused to take further action against them. The state's silence was so loud that even the police were forced to protest publicly by laying down their arms and seeking help from central forces.

Recently, the Indian Army detained eleven Arambai members but had to free them when a large crowd of Meitei women agitators heckled the convoy. While the Manipur police claim that “necessary legal action” is being taken, authorities are yet to formally charge anyone from the mob or rearrest the militia members. Therefore, even the state police and forces deployed by the centre find themselves trapped in what looks more and more like a ‘militia state’. They seem to be hamstrung by Arambai's rising social clout and apparent closeness to the Imphal government. By doing nothing to defang the Arambai's leadership even after repeated acts of violent intimidation against both state authori-



ties and the Kuki-Zo community, the Singh government has set a regressive precedent. So has the Narendra Modi-led BJP government in New Delhi, which has not done enough to pressure its own chief minister in Imphal to disarm and dismantle the militia. The state government, according to media reports, has also silently watched as an older Meitei militant group, United Nation Liberation Front (Pambei), mobilises assets and partakes in ethnic violence alongside Arambai under the guise of a recently inked peace agreement. Through these acts of omission, Imphal and New Delhi may have arguably created Frankenstein's monsters, which now roam the streets of Manipur with astounding impunity. The carte blanche accorded to the Meitei groups has created an ethnically lopsided conflict dynamic. There is no equivalent of the Arambai, which is able to hold the state hostage in the middle of the state capital without the fear of consequences, on the Kuki-Zo side. This essentially implies that the crisis in Manipur is not, as widely argued, a “civil war” in which both sides enjoy equal political and military leverage. State complicity. The scales of a conflict can be tipped to one side by many factors. Among them, state complicity in violence – usually at the behest of one side – is pivotal. In July last year, a horrifying video of a Meitei mob parading two naked Kuki-Zo women in Manipur's Kangpokpi district sent shock waves across India. On April 29, journalist Makepeace Sithou, who was able to access the CBI chargesheet on the case, revealed that state police officials not only allegedly refused to help the two survivors, but also practically handed them over to the irate mob which then had its way with them. While five have been arrested for the heinous sexual assault, the police officers on the scene are yet to face the music. Allegations of police officials

willingly handing over weapons to Arambai members or joining them in attacks against the Kuki-Zo community have also largely slipped under the Singh government's radar. Instead, the chief minister has used his authority and reach to repeatedly recirculate divisive refrains against alleged Kuki-Zo “illegal immigrants” and “illegal settlements”, which has done little to mend broken ethnic relationships.

Manipur exhibits all the standard preconditions for the President's Rule. Among them is the BJP-led state government's glaring failure to serve as a neutral arbiter between the two warring sides. It is mind-bog-

gling that the Modi government has refused to do so despite the violence and forced displacement continuing after one whole year.

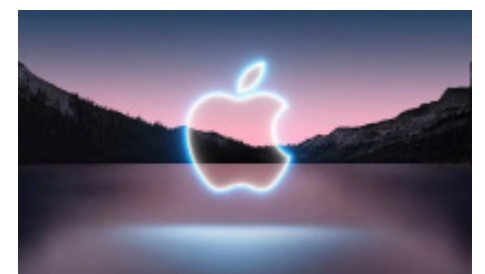
The ugly disruptions seen last month during polling are only the most recent manifestations of how India's famed democratic consensus has succumbed to its injuries in what was supposed to be one of Northeast India's crown jewel states. Angshuman Choudhury is an associate fellow with the Centre for Policy Research and focuses on Northeast India and Myanmar. The views expressed are personal.

Apple's big GenAI investments: Exciting reveals coming

New Delhi: Apple is making “significant investments” in generative AI, and that has some “very exciting things” to share with customers soon, its CEO Tim Cook has said.

He said that Apple continues to feel very “bullish about our opportunity in Generative AI”.

“We believe we have advantages that will differentiate us in this new era, including Apple's unique combination of seamless hardware, software and services integration, groundbreaking Apple's silicon, with our industry-leading neural engines and our unwavering focus on privacy, which underpins everything we create,” he told analysts during the quarterly earnings call. Reports claim that Apple will integrate OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini into future iPhone models.



Replying to a question, Cook said “we believe that we have advantages that set us apart there. And we'll be talking more about it in as we go through the weeks ahead.” “I think there are numerous ways there that are great for us. And we think that we're well-positioned,” said Cook. Apple is likely to announce GenAI features at its flagship Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) in June.

HDFC ERGO to redefine insurance offering with a new-age tech platform from Duck Creek Technologies

HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company, India's leading private sector general insurer, is proud to announce a landmark initiative with revamp of its core operational business processes. Leveraging new-age technological capabilities offered by Duck Creek platform, this marks a significant milestone in the organisation's journey towards the commitment of a 'Digital First' insurer, with large operational capabilities. With the deployment of this cutting-edge technology, the insurer will now be equipped to offer enhanced seamless and intuitive experiences to customers and provide better hyper-personalised insurance solutions. Besides, this new-age technology will facilitate making insurance more affordable and accessible to a larger segment of the customers with the roll-out of customised products and tie-up with new-age insurtechs, thereby enabling the insurer to reach out to newer customer segments. This landmark move will help the insurer to build an ecosystem enabling integration with a leading third-party insurtechs through API, allow to offer hyper personalised products and services to the customers, and provide seamless claims experience, all supported by its own engineering team. Commenting on the adoption of the system, Parthani Ghosh, Director and Chief Business Officer, HDFC ERGO General Insurance, said, "As a leading non-life insurer of India, who is also committed to offering superior and hyper-personalised solutions to our customers with new-age digital solutions, we understand the importance of adapting to an advanced technology platform. Hence with an aim to deliver more value to our customers in an ever-evolving world, we began this journey with Duck Creek a year and a half back, and today we are happy to announce our next step of implementation of this platform. The robust power of this new platform enables us faster go-to-market capabilities, customised offerings, improved efficiencies, and enhanced data security. We are confident that this new initiative will help us address the evolving needs of our customers with innovative and customised solutions, and contribute towards the regulator's vision of making insurance affordable and accessible to citizens of India." Rohit Bedi, Chief Revenue Officer, Duck Creek Technologies said, "It is an exciting phase for the India insurance industry given the transformative reforms, rapid digital transformation and increasing consumer awareness. The IRDAI has set a visionary goal of Insurance for all by 2047 and we are proud that our innovative SaaS-native next-gen core insurance delivery solutions have been chosen by HDFC ERGO to enable them to expand the reach of insurance to the underserved and enhance penetration of insurance across the country." The cloud-native architecture of Duck Creek's solutions provides reliability, scalability, agility, and security allowing it to adapt to changing customer and sector needs. The no code and low code technology platforms will allow for easier maintenance and adaptation to changes, while also enabling

personalised, data-driven and rule-based sales process. Besides this, the automated processes are expected to reduce the Turn Around Time during policy issuance and claims management, and will empower the insurer to offer innovative products faster and enhance customer convenience. The technology shifts from data and people processes will allow the Company to leverage the power of data analytics to gain deeper insights into customer preferences and journeys. With the adoption of this new platform, and by leveraging APIs to enable partner ecosystems, the solution enhances data enrichment using third-party sources and offers an intelligent product suggestion engine based on customer preferences. This approach ensures a simple user-friendly experience with the ability to quickly adapt to market and regulatory developments. HDFC ERGO is leading the way in revolutionising the customer experience through innovative digital-first initiatives. By leveraging technology and data, the organisation is empowered to address need-based demands and offer hyper-personalised services that enable it to provide customised solutions.



Skill Development, Financial Support, and Resource Access Key to AI Growth for Indian Tech MSMEs – Nasscom-Meta Whitepaper

Committed to empowering the tech MSMEs, Meta has entered into a strategic partnership with Nasscom to spotlight the current state of AI Adoption journey of tech MSMEs in India. On occasion of World MSME Day, Nasscom supported by Meta unveiled a white paper titled, 'Empowering India's Growth: Unlocking AI's Potential for Tech-Enabled MSMEs' that delves into key opportunities and challenges faced by tech MSMEs in adoption of AI in their business operations. Aimed to promote AI awareness and capacity building for MSMEs, understand the challenges and potential solutions, and catalyze adoption of AI technologies to improve productivity and business growth, earlier this year, Nasscom and Meta launched a 'AI Enablement for MSMEs' program for tech-enabled MSMEs in the country held across five cities - Gurugram, Bangalore, Pune, Mumbai and Hyderabad - which saw more than 300 MSMEs attend based on whose inputs the white paper was crafted. A comprehensive sentiment analysis of the tech-enabled MSMEs was done to assess their level of awareness, and approach towards AI technologies. The analysis revealed a strong belief in the potential of AI among tech-enabled MSMEs where 94% of them acknowledged its ability to drive business growth and 87% of respondents were confident in its capacity to improve overall productivity.

Underlining the importance of AI for tech-enabled MSMEs, the Whitepaper identifies key areas where AI can catalyze their business growth. Specifically, 48% of respondents support AI's potential in content creation and marketing, and 46% in customer engagement, followed by 68% in developing new products and services.

Furthermore, with productivity being a cornerstone of business success, the white paper calls out AI as a transformative tool in streamlining processes, reducing operational inefficiencies, enhancing output quality, and maximizing profitability. Sangeeta Gupta, Senior Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer at Nasscom said, "MSMEs, pivotal to India's economic engine, are at a critical point in today's fast-evolving tech landscape. Integrating AI offers them a unique chance for unprecedented growth, increased productivity, and sustainable innovation. Ecosystem collaboration, coupled with access to user-friendly tools and resources, is essential for tech-enabled MSMEs to harness AI's full potential and for India to maximize its AI dividends." Said Sandhya Devanathan, Vice President (India) at Meta, "As the backbone of the Indian economy, empowering MSMEs with cutting edge business solutions is pivotal for the growth of the country. With its massive developer base and the third largest startup ecosystem in the world, India is going to be a driving force in the global AI revolution. Meta has been committed to creating an ecosystem for

MSMEs to thrive, and our joint efforts with Nasscom focus on equipping MSMEs with the necessary tools and knowledge to unlock the full potential of AI." Said Nilaya Varma, CEO Primus Partners, who were the knowledge partner for the white paper, "We were amazed to experience first hand how aware MSMEs are of the power of AI. However, the study also uncovered a key impediment for the MSMEs to operationalize their knowledge - a lack of awareness of tools and resources to enable their AI journey was identified as a major challenge by 65% of these businesses." Alongside the opportunities, the white paper also identifies significant challenges faced by tech MSMEs in navigating the benefits of leveraging AI for a sustainable business expansion and growth. T

The paper called out an awareness gap with 65% of tech MSMEs struggling due to the limited awareness about available tools and resources, while 72% emphasized the necessity for AI training programs underlining the importance of skill development in facilitating adoption.

RTC to run special buses to Swarnagiri

Hyderabad: The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) has introduced special buses for the convenience of the devotees from the city visiting Swarnagiri temple in Yadadri-Bhongir. These electric non-AC Metro Ex-

press buses will run on the Jubilee Bus Station (JBS) - Swarnagiri route and travel through Tarnaka, Uppal 'x' Road, Medipally, Ghatkesar, AIIMS, Bibinagar, Renuka Yellamma and Swarnagiri. RTC officials said the average ticket fare per person will be Rs 100.

Ministry of Agriculture Hosts National Workshop on Unleashing India's Agribusiness Potential through Innovative Agri Value Chain Financing (AVCF) in New Delhi



“Accountable and digital systems for effective AVCF needs to be developed”-Secretary, Agriculture Experts and Stakeholders Convene to Discuss the Future of Agricultural Financing A working group formed to explore innovative banking products for AVCF

New Delhi: Reflecting on the importance of Agriculture Finance in the value chain, Manoj Ahuja, Secretary of DA&FW, underscored the pressing need to transition from a production-centric approach to a demand-driven one. “To develop Agricultural Value Chains (AVCs) more holistically and integrate them with global markets, we must shift our focus from merely addressing supply shortages to meeting market demands,” he stated. Shri Ahuja emphasized the importance of implementing accountable and digital systems for effective AVC development and highlighted the need for a comprehensive policy framework to ensure financial inclusivity for all stakeholders. Shri Ahuja further advocated introducing financial instruments like bill discounting, bridge financing, and risk-hedging to improve liquidity and economic stability. “Creating an enabling environment with simplified application processes and reduced bureaucratic hurdles is crucial for effectively implementing these instruments,” he added.

Dr. Vivek Joshi, Secretary of DFS, emphasized the critical role of Digital Financial Services (DFS) in providing timely credit within the Agricultural Value Chain Financing (AVCF) framework, noting a significant increase in agricultural credit availability. “Our focus is on ensuring seamless and affordable access to credit to support

farmers throughout the value chain,” he stated. Further highlighted is the significant role of NBFCs, fintech, and startups in providing last-mile credit access and specialized financial products, particularly in high-value agricultural markets. It is pertinent to mention that the Department of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare (DA&FW) organized a workshop titled “Unleashing India's Agribusiness Potential through Innovative Agri Value Chain Financing” on 27th June 2024 in New Delhi. The event brought together senior officials of the Government of India and the State Government, experts, and stakeholders to discuss the dynamics of agricultural financing. The workshop focused on creating awareness, facilitating collaboration, exploring solutions, and empowering participants with innovative agricultural finance solutions. The workshop saw robust participation from academia, industry, financing agencies, facilitating agencies, and various government departments. It served as a crucial platform for collaboration and partnership-building, paving the way for transformative initiatives in India's agricultural sector. It included high-level strategic discussions featuring notable speakers such as Prof. Ashok Gulati, a Distinguished Professor at ICRIER, who highlighted the importance of transitioning to a demand-driven approach in agriculture to improve farmer in-

comes, the need to focus on the nutrition aspect in the food chain and develop climate resilience in agriculture.

While welcoming the participants, Ajeet Kumar Sahu, Joint Secretary (Credit), DA&FW, set the context at the beginning by highlighting the need for a holistic approach to Agricultural Value Chain Financing (AVCF), noting that projections indicate agricultural Gross Value Added (GVA) will reach Rs 105 lakh crore by 2030, making value chain financing increasingly vital.

Chairman NABARD, Shri K.V. Shaji, emphasized the urgent need to improve farmers' finance access and ensure reliable data availability for SHGs and FPOs, as the data is critical for the banks to make informed decisions and offer effective value chain financing. He advocated for the development of public infrastructure in rural areas, including facilities for processing, branding, and marketing agricultural products. He also emphasized the need to strengthen the governance structure of cooperatives in rural areas. He said these will lead to integrated value chain financings. Insurance and CEO of PMFBY, Shri Ritesh Chauhan, gave a presentation on fostering financial resilience in agriculture through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) scheme. Shri Chauhan highlighted the government's holistic ap-

proach to Agri-Value Chain Financing, emphasizing the need for comprehensive risk protection and financial support throughout the agricultural value chain. He underscored the importance of leveraging technology through platforms like SARTHI, AIDE, Kisan Rin Portal, and AGRISTACK to streamline credit availability and enhance agricultural resilience. Panel discussions covered various aspects of agri value chain financing, including cluster-based approaches, innovative financing mechanisms, and integrating Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) into value chains. Experts from diverse backgrounds shared insights and experiences, enriching the discourse.

The workshop highlighted the potential of cluster-based agricultural value chain financing approaches to unlock synergies and scale impact. It identified opportunities for innovation and collaboration to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and profitability within the agricultural value chain. The event aimed to improve strategic access to financial tools across value chain actors. Understanding critical finance points, including current fund flows and sources, was deemed essential for enhancing model effectiveness, contributing to the development of self-sustaining agricultural finance models capable of being scaled and replicated.

AAP MPs protested outside Parliament against Kejriwal's arrest



Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), June 27: Stating the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal a gross misuse of investigation agencies, Aam Aadmi Party Members of Parliament on Thursday held a protest outside the Parliament House and also boycotted the President's address, saying – 'full respect for the President, but the address is written by the government'. On Thursday, all the MPs of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) protested against the arrest of AAP convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the CBI outside the parliament and said that this is a gross misuse of investigation agencies.

AAP MPs also boycotted the President's address and said, "We have full respect for the President but the address is written by the government. That is why we are not attending this program". AAP MP from Sangrur Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer said that the Modi government talks big about democracy and the Constitution but in reality, on the contrary, the Constitution and democracy are being crushed in the entire country.

Investigative agencies are being openly misused from Delhi to West Bengal, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. Current Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal was put in jail. Current Chief Minister of Jharkhand Hemant Soren was put in jail. Our education minister Manish Sisodia and Health Minister Satyendra Jain have been arrested and kept in jail for about two years. AAP MP Sanjay Singh was kept in jail for six months without any reason. This is very dangerous for the democracy of the country. He said that Arvind Kejriwal was arrested by the CBI in a hurry when he had every possibility of getting bail from the Supreme Court because he had got bail from the trial court. This is a big example of dictatorship.

He said that the misuse of investigation agencies is very unfortunate for the democracy of the country. Therefore, the Prime Minister should stop its misuse and clarify his stand on this matter. He should also speak on the atrocities being committed against Arvind Kejriwal and release him as soon as possible. Meet Hayer said

that today we have started a protest against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal at our party level. Talks are also going on with the leaders of the INDIA Alliance. This issue will be discussed with them too and with their support this voice will be raised louder. Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann tweeted, "The Modi government, which is destroying democracy, is misusing the investiga-

tion agencies... The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal by the CBI just before the Supreme Court hearing is a direct indication of this.... In protest against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, today all the MPs of Aam Aadmi Party protested against this dictatorship in the Parliament. We are not going to be afraid or bow down... The fight against dictatorship will continue."

OPPO's Reno12 Series sets a new AI benchmark

OPPO India is poised to launch 'Your Everyday AI Companion', the Reno12 5G and the Reno12 Pro 5G. Both devices pack cameras backed by artificial-intelligence-based features—AI Best Face, AI Eraser 2.0, AI Studio and AI Clear Face—that eliminate the need for photo editing for pro-grade results. The Reno12 Series, which underscores OPPO's commitment to making AI available across its smartphone lineup, also integrates AI Summary, AI Record Summary, AI Clear Voice, AI Writer and AI Speak into the smartphones' functionalities to streamline productivity tasks. Gen AI in Photography

If you ever clicked a photograph with your friends and family only to have that perfect moment ruined by a photobomber in the background, then OPPO's AI Eraser 2.0 is the feature for you; it removes background distractions at the touch of a button. The AI Eraser 2.0's diffusion model has been trained on billions of public domain images to offer up to 98% image recognition accuracy. With its ability to recognise human beings and almost any everyday

object—whether a trash can or a lamp post—AI Eraser uses Generative AI to remove distractions and fill that space with results that rivals professional editing software. Putting your best foot forward with the perfect headshot for your LinkedIn profile no longer requires photo-editing software. The Reno12 Series introduces AI Perfect Shot, a suite of AI-powered features that work together to deliver stunning pictures. At the heart of this technology is AI Clear Face, an industry-leading technology that portrays every person clearly and vividly in group photos as if they were the main character. Unlike traditional facial optimisation, AI Clear Face uses independently trained large models to generate high-definition details of facial textures, hair, eyebrows and more. How often have you shot a group photo only to realise that one person had their eyes closed? OPPO's AI Best Face features help you create the perfect shot through its recognition of human faces, expressions, and its ability to turn closed eyes into open. Together, these features elevate regular pictures to profes-



sional-looking shots that retain natural beauty while optimising light and shadow areas, without complex photo-editing tools. The Reno 12 Series' AI Studio feature adds a touch of fun to the photography experience by letting you transform any photo into a digital avatar. Be it a cowboy or a cyberpunk hero, AI Studio empowers you to let your imagination run wild and uses the latest Generative AI technology to recreate images in different styles.

Authors sue Nvidia for using their work to train NeMo, say their books taught NeMo AI how to write

Last year, OpenAI made headlines when comedienne-author Sarah Silverman as well as several other award-winning authors sued ChatGPT for using their work without their permission. And now, a similar case has been registered against chipmaker Nvidia. As per a Reuters report, Nvidia is facing legal action from three authors—Brian Keene, Abdi Nazemian, and Stewart O’Nan—who allege that the company utilised their copyrighted books without authorisation to train its NeMo AI platform, renowned for powering artificial intelligence. The authors claim that their works were used in NeMo’s training. The training dataset was taken down in October following reported copyright infringement issues. Nvidia sued by authors

The authors, Brian Keene, Abdi Nazemian, and Stewart O’Nan say that their literary words were included in a dataset comprising around 196,640 books. This dataset was utilised to train NeMo in replicating ordinary written language. However, the dataset was removed in October following reports of copyright infringement. The report then adds that in a class action filed on Friday night in San Francisco federal court, the authors argued

that Nvidia’s decision to take down the dataset is equal to an acknowledgment of using their copyrighted material to train NeMo, thereby violating their copyrights. The authors are seeking unspecified damages on behalf of individuals in the United States whose copyrighted works contributed to the training of NeMo’s large language models over the past three years. Notable works mentioned in the lawsuit include Keene’s 2008 novel "Ghost Walk," Nazemian’s 2019 novel "Like a Love Story," and O’Nan’s 2007 novella "Last Night at the Lobster." When authors sued OpenAI

As mentioned already, Nvidia isn’t the only company that has faced legal action for training AI on authors’ works. Last year in September, a group of US-based authors including Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon, sued OpenAI in federal court in San Francisco. The authors accused OpenAI of misusing their writing to train ChatGPT. The lawsuit said that OpenAI copied the authors’ work without permission to teach ChatGPT to respond to human text prompts. The lawsuit added that the authors’ works like books, plays and articles play a key role in training ChatGPT



as these works are the "best examples of high-quality, long form writing." Before that in July 2023, comedienne and author Sarah Silverman, and two other authors made headlines for suing ChatGPT creator OpenAI over copyright infringement. Silverman, who authored the book *The Bedwetter*, argued that ChatGPT summarised the contents of her book when

prompted and that she had never given permission to OpenAI to use her book’s content to train the chatbot. Writer Christopher Golden, who wrote *Ararat*, and author Richard Kadrey, who wrote *Sandman Slim*, also sued the company for using their books’ contents without their permission. The trio asked for a jury trial along with monetary damages.

School students accused of generating nude images of classmates using AI, face legal action



Artificial Intelligence (AI) isn’t really a new concept but interest around the technology reached new heights when ChatGPT was made available for all. Gradually, other AI tools like Dall.E and Midjourney also saw a rise in users as people began experimenting with the power of the new technology. While tools like ChatGPT and Google’s Gemini (earlier called Bard) are known for responding

to questions in a human-like manner and aid with various written tasks, tools like Midjourney, Bing AI image generator and Dall.E are known for creating images from text prompts. However, ever since AI gained popularity, there has been an ongoing debate about how dangerous the technology can be, if it is misused. Even though AI tools have certain safety guidelines in place, at times, these tools can be manipulated to

generate harmful content. And this is what two school students in Florida did, which got them in trouble. As per a report in Wired, two school students from Florida were arrested in December as they allegedly generated explicit images of their fellow classmates. Teenagers arrested for generating nude images using AI

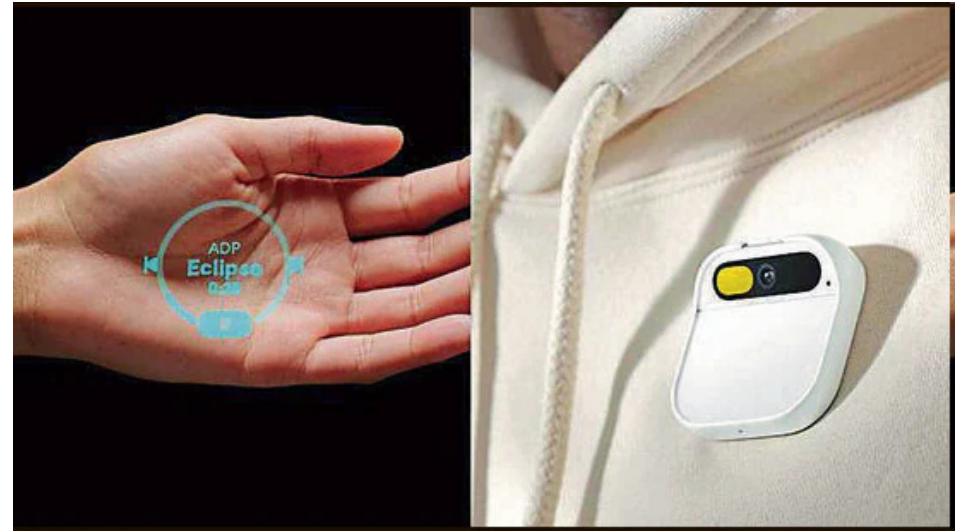
As per the Wired report, two teenage boys, aged 13 and 14, are facing charges

under a newly enacted 2022 state law for allegedly generating AI-produced images portraying their middle school classmates. The arrest, which occurred in December, involved the teenagers accused of creating and distributing AI-generated nude pictures of both male and female classmates without their consent. This information was obtained from police reports acquired by Wired through a public record request. According to the arrest reports, the boys, aged 13 and 14, crafted these images depicting students aged "between the ages of 12 and 13." This Florida case seems to be the first instance where arrests and criminal charges have emerged in connection with the alleged sharing of AI-generated explicit content. The teenagers are facing third-degree felony charges, a level equivalent to offences such as grand theft auto or false imprisonment, under the 2022 Florida law criminalising the sharing of "any altered sexual depiction" without the person’s consent. A similar case recorded earlier. This case might be the first one where an arrest has been made, but it isn’t the only one where students were accused of generating explicit content. In November last year, a New Jersey school was making headlines when some of its students were accused of making AI-generated pornographic images of their fellow classmates.

Wear next? The future's calling: A look at the next-generation smartphone

The 'phone' to aspire to, in the age of AI, will likely be a tiny, multi-functional wearable device that looks nothing like what we're accustomed to. There's a sense of suspense around smartphones today. What's coming next? Well, the new phone for the age of artificial intelligence will likely be a wearable, AI-led device that looks nothing like what we have grown accustomed to. Take the US-based start-up Rabbit's R1. This is a palm-sized personal assistant device released this year in a vivid, luminous orange. "Our mission is to create the simplest computer, something so intuitive that you don't need to learn how to use it," Rabbit co-founder and CEO Jesse Lyu said, while introducing the wearable. The Rabbit R1 is a square device 3 inches wide, weighing 115 gm. It can dangle on a keychain or sit in a pocket, as it is issued spoken instructions. Hardware includes a microphone, camera, scroll wheel and e-SIM card slot. At \$199 (about ₹16,500), it pairs with apps on one's phone to engage apps on the latter. In this way, it can play music, book a taxi, place and track deliveries, conduct web searches, take notes. Powered by MediaTek's Helio P35, a hardy and capable chip currently in use across some mid-range Android phones, what remains to be seen is how well the software on the Rabbit, and indeed its digital assistant, are optimised for accuracy and speed.

The other AI-driven companion device making waves is, of course, Humane's AI Pin. This device, unveiled at the Paris Fashion Week in September, is considerably more expensive, costing about \$699 (₹58,000). Aluminium and light-weight, at just 34.2 gm, it is powered by a high-speed Qualcomm Snapdragon chip. The AI Pin looks like something out of Star Trek, and works a bit like something out of Star Trek too. Once again, one doesn't tap or swipe, one talks to the Pin, treating it as a mediator between oneself and one's phone. This device can also project visuals onto the palm of an outstretched hand, allowing one to read messages, use navigation apps and conduct online searches more easily. How feasible is it, to have two devices in place of one? It is still unclear, admittedly, whether the wearable assistant will be a passing phase and a brief interim step, in the larger evolution of the smartphone. A lot will depend on how the role of the intelligent assistant unfolds. Can it effectively take on menial tasks, be trusted to "Book a cab to take me home, but avoid surge pricing" or "Order the salad dressing we usually get... not the one we tried last time". Consistency of experience will be key. Meanwhile, for something in-between an AI assistant and a wearable, there's Samsung's bowling ball-sized robot, Ballie, unveiled this year. It can follow its owner around at home, double as a smart home controller, be a

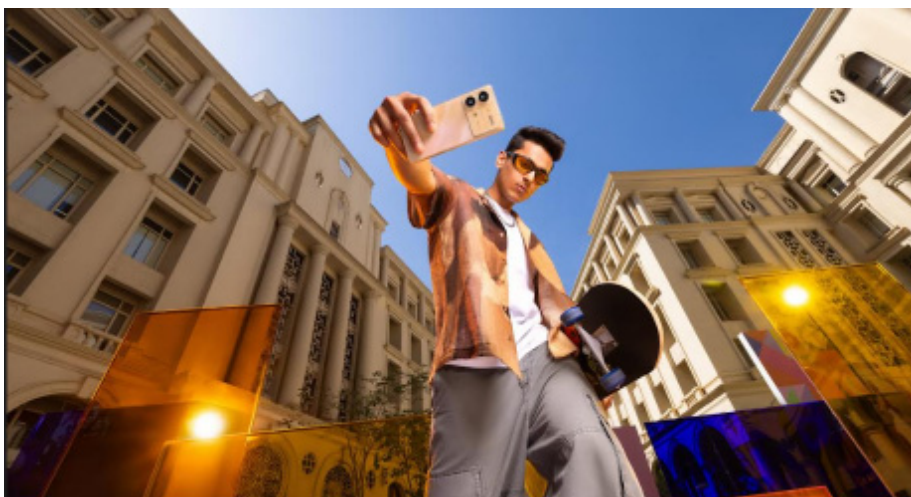


very chatty chatbot, and allow one to check on pets or elders while one is at work or on a trip, via its built-in camera features. Ballie can also serve as a projector, streaming content onto a wall. The aim with all these is a life without a smartphone at one's side. Between wearable digital assistants, robot aides and immersive headsets, the ability to maintain distance from device could become a symbol of opulence and luxury. Of course, AI has a long way to go before this dream can be realised. Humane, at its launch, for instance found that the AI

Pin provided incorrect information about the next solar eclipse and about how much protein there is in almonds.

The company has promised that such issues with its training data will be fixed by the time the first Pins are shipped out later this year. How safe is it to link such a device to one's phone, or trust it with one's conversation and communication? As with all evolutions in technology, the vulnerabilities of the next-generation wearables are not yet known. Continue reading with HT Premium Subscription

POCO X6 Neo Debuts in India: Segment best AMOLED Bezel-Less Display, Sleek Design - Up for Grabs starting at INR 14,999



Committed to striving for excellence in technological innovation, POCO, a leading technology brand has unveiled its slimmest smartphone ever – the POCO X6 Neo. Crafted as a stylish mobile device offering an immersive visual experience and an AI Camera, POCO X6 Neo provides exceptional value at a competitive price of INR 14,999*.

Commenting on the launch,

Himanshu Tandon, Country Head, POCO India said, "Our steadfast commitment to delivering exceptional value to our users through groundbreaking innovations has remained resolute. POCO X6 Neo is designed with sleek sophistication and boasts AMOLED display technology, specifically tailored to meet the demands of GenZ. This is the ultimate no-compromise phone, delivering cutting-edge technology without

breaking the bank. The POCO X6 series has been doing extremely well in the Indian market and we anticipate the same level of appreciation and response from our Indian customers for the POCO X6 Neo as well."

POCO X6 Neo exemplifies the slimmest design in the brand's smartphone lineup, weighing a mere 175g and measuring an ultra-thin 7.69mm. The phone boasts a remarkable 93.3% screen-to-body ratio for an immersive bezel-less visual experience. It provides durability by featuring Corning® Gorilla® Glass 5 protection and IP54 water/dust resistance. The device also showcases a 6.67-inch 120Hz AMOLED FHD+ Display and with SGS Low Blue Light and TÜV Triple Eye Protection Certifications, it minimizes blue light, offering a flicker-free screen and prioritizing user vision protection. POCO X6 Neo comes with a 108MP Dual AI Camera featuring f/1.75 and 3x Lossless In-Sensor Zoom, ensuring top-notch photo quality. Selfie enthusiasts will appreciate the 16MP Selfie Camera with diverse film filters and camera modes.

Powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 6080 Processor, a robust 5G chip crafted

with 6nm process technology, the device offers two memory variants - 8+128GB and 12+256GB. Supporting up to 24GB RAM, including 12GB Virtual RAM, it guarantees a seamless and lag-free user experience. Running on MIUI 14 based on Android 13, the POCO X6 Neo ensures users receive 2 significant Android updates and 4 years of security updates for prolonged support. Connectivity options include support for both 2.4GHz and 5GHz Wi-Fi, delivering dual-band capabilities. Moreover, with Bluetooth 5.3, seamless connectivity to compatible devices is guaranteed. The device features a 5000mAh Battery and includes a 33W Fast USB Type-C Charger. Equipped with a 3.5mm jack and a single speaker with Dolby Atmos®, it ensures a rich audio experience for music enthusiasts on the move.

POCO X6 Neo will be accessible in the Indian market starting 12 PM on 18th March, available in 3 attractive colors - Martian Orange, Horizon Blue, and Astral Black, at an appealing price of INR 14,999* for 8+128GB and INR 16,999* for 12+256GB. These prices are inclusive of the INR 1,000 discount applicable on ICICI Credit/Debit cards and EMI transactions.

Purrfect storm: India's wild small cats face too much love, and too little

Species such as the caracal and rusty spotted cat are threatened; poached as pets; mistaken for leopards and attacked. Yet all eyes remain on the tiger, lion. Every year, the NGO Wildlife SOS receives calls from panicked villagers who have mistaken a juvenile rusty spotted cat for a leopard cub.

The rusty spotted cat is the smallest wild cat in the world. It doesn't grow to more than 1.5 ft in length (not including its foot-long tail) and rarely weighs more than 2 kg. Unlike leopards, which can weigh up to 70 kg and are apex predators, this cat's biggest prey are frogs and certain small birds. Wildlife SOS typically conducts a medical examination and then waits until their mother appears to reclaim them, but many stories involving wild small cats in India have less-happy endings. It is often a case of too much love, or too little. Among other threats such as loss of habitat, small cats are captured and trapped as pets, or mistaken for more menacing big cats and attacked or killed. They are even, in some cases, mistakenly hunted for their meat. A key issue is that we know too little about them, says Shomita Mukherjee, senior principal scientist at the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. "There are instances where the kittens of small cats have been mistaken for domestic cats and brought home, only to find that their behaviour is different," says Kishor Rithe, director of the Bombay Natural History Society. The kittens are typically then abandoned or must spend a year being reintroduced to the wild (if they have been away from their mother for more than a few days, the chances of a successful reunion are slim.) The caracal, meanwhile, is elusive and so rare that there are just two known viable populations in India, one each in Ranthambore and Kutch. There are reports of the Eurasian lynx, a medium-sized species found in Ladakh, being mistaken for the wolf, which is viewed as a threat to livestock. The fishing cat is sometimes mistaken for the civet, which is hunted for its meat. The fishing cat is an endangered species found in wetlands in South and South-East Asia. The world's first census of this species outside a protected area, conducted in 2022 around the Chilika lake in Odisha, found 176 individuals in the region. Profit can be a motive too. "In Gujarat, our team has found that poachers are intentionally picking up small cats and selling them as leopard cubs," says Raj Bhavsar, project coordinator at Wildlife SOS and president of the Gujarat Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The scale of the threat to India's wild small cats is significant, and the lack of data only clouds the problem.

All of the country's 11 species of wild small cats, for instance, feature on the IUCN Red List of threatened species globally. Unlike big cats, these smaller wild cats tend to feed on prey that is smaller than them, and thus play a vital role in ecosystem management. Most feed on small

rodents. In one of Mukherjee's early cat-diet studies, she found that a single jungle cat (which weighs about 4 kg) and a single caracal (about 6 kg) at the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan ate up to 5,000 rodents a year. This makes them indispensable in rodent population control. "One of the reasons we know so little about our small cats is because they are so hard to study," says Mukherjee. "For one, they are small. Several are nocturnal and solitary. Because they have keener senses than us, they detect us before we detect them, and then stop doing what they were doing and run away, or go silent and watch us instead, and we don't obtain much information." Technology is helping somewhat, allowing researchers to study animal scat at the molecular level, to glean far more about these animals, their populations and habitats. "We also have a much better idea of some small cat species' distribution, although it's not complete information, because of tiger monitoring exercises that have involved setting camera traps across large swathes," says Mukherjee of the Salim Ali Centre. For instance, the rusty spotted cat, historically found only in India and Sri Lanka, was spotted for the first time in Nepal in 2016, in camera traps set up for a tiger census. They have been spotted in an expanding range of ecosystems across India too, via such camera traps. To really learn about small cats though, Mukherjee says, researchers will have to design far more specific camera-trap studies. "For tigers, for instance, one may place one camera per 5 sq km," she says. "But there will possibly be many more individuals of several small cat species in that area, since they have smaller home ranges. We have to go at it with a fine-toothed comb, to fill the gaps in our data." All this while, small cat habitats shrink and fragment, roadkill remains a persistent threat, and poaching for small cats as exotic pets continues. The government has made something of a start. In 2020, the union environment ministry, along with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Wide Fund for Nature, Global Tiger Forum and India's National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), launched a small-cat conservation programme in Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, to secure small-cat habitats and encourage community participation and corporate partnerships. Still, there is no concerted effort for the conservation of small cats in India, says YV Jhala, former dean of the Wildlife Institute of India, an autonomous institute under the environment ministry. "The belief is that if you conserve apex predators, such as the tiger and lion, everything else will stabilise. But that is not the case. In fact, in the effort to increase tiger and lion numbers, habitats are being changed to increase their prey. The umbrella role of the tiger and lion is compromised when management interventions go beyond ecological carrying capacities, and that's detrimental for small cats and for the habitat as a whole." Jhala argues



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that small cats have a particularly vital role in ecosystem management because they regulate small mammal and bird populations that affect humans the most. "It's still difficult to say what the impact of losing our small cats would be, because we're still figuring out the extent of their populations and distribution across the country, and have rudimentary information on the populations of a few species," adds Mukherjee. "But as chief rodent-eaters, we can logically assume that the impact would be immense." BEJEWELLED AND brocaded, she gazes serenely at the viewer. Her complexion is as smooth and creamy as a split almond; her cheeks are the colour of ripe peaches. The painting's deep blue background enhances her youthful beauty. Her lips bear the hint of a smile—she is, perhaps, happy with how she looks. Agnolo di Cosimo, better known as Bronzino, finished the portrait of Eleonora di Toledo, the Duchess of Florence, in 1545. The mesmerising oil painting demonstrates the artist's skill. But it reveals another story, too: of an ambitious woman who accrued power despite the constraints imposed on her sex. It is not by accident that a copy of the portrait appeared in "The Favourite", a historical drama of 2018 about machinations in the court of a female monarch. Visitors to Florence can see the painting in its full majesty in an exhibition devoted to the duchess at the Palazzo Pitti, an estate she bought around 1550.

High-profile figures have long sought to shape their public personas. In the 16th century, portraiture was a useful tool; in the 21st, royals and celebrities tend to opt for a tell-all memoir or a podcast to influence how they are perceived. (Though visual art remains important, as the photographs released by royal families to mark birthdays and holidays attest.) Eleonora understood

it was important to be in control of the finished product: it is thought that she commissioned the painting. Today the equivalent might be appointing your own biographer or producing a documentary about yourself. Eleonora was the scion of an aristocratic Spanish family with ties to the Habsburg monarchy and she married Cosimo, the young Duke of Florence, in 1539. (Cosimo had assumed the title two years earlier after his unpopular relative, Alessandro de' Medici, was assassinated.) As Alessandro had no legitimate heirs, his death left the Medici line in limbo. To secure the Medici hold over Florence, Cosimo needed children. Eleonora delivered 11 babies—including two sons within the first five years of marriage. Dynastic stability was the message Eleonora wanted to convey. Bronzino associates his subject with an abundance of womb and purse. Round, lustrous pearls encrust her gown and hair. Pomegranate motifs, symbols of fecundity, are emblazoned across her sumptuous dress. Florentines and foreign nobles encountering Bronzino's tableau would have been struck by the presence of the duchess's second-oldest son, who peers out from beneath her arm. It marked the first time that a ruling European woman had posed with an heir in a state portrait. The painting projected Medici's wealth and power to the world: an estimated 40 replicas of it were sent as diplomatic gifts to ruling families elsewhere. She was an active participant in public life: by the time Bronzino completed the painting, Eleonora had already stepped into her husband's shoes three times as regent. Some Florentines grumbled that an untrustworthy Spaniard was roaming the Medici palace, but, on the whole, the arrival of this foreigner into the ruling family was a success.