

# Delhi top destination for Hyderabad passengers in 2024

Hyderabad: Delhi emerged as the top destination for passengers traveling to and from Hyderabad, accounting for 14.6 per cent of the total traffic between January and June 2024, according to data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA), Hyderabad saw a total of 16,14,660 passengers traveling to and from the nation's capital.

The report places Mumbai as the second busiest route for Hyderabad, with 11,97,952 passengers making up 10.8 per cent of the total. Bengaluru follows closely, with 11,11,649 passengers, representing 10 per cent of the total traffic. Overall, Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International

Airport handled 1,10,61,929 domestic passengers during this period, securing its position as the fourth busiest airport in India, trailing behind Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. The airport experienced a significant year-over-year growth rate of 10.9 per cent, indicating a robust increase in domestic travel. The first half of 2024 witnessed peak traffic at Hyderabad airport. January saw 1.802 million passengers, followed by a slight dip in February to 1.730 million. March marked a rise to 1.861 million, April saw a minor decrease to 1.858 million, and May hit a peak with 1.971 million passengers. June reported 1.841 million passengers, maintaining the trend of high summer traffic.



# Punjab CM Accuses Centre of 'Discrimination', Slams Budget Oversight

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), July 28: Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has accused the Centre of 'Discrimination' against Punjab. On Sunday Mann alleged that the Union government has stalled Rs 1000 crore of the state under the National Health Mission to deprive the Punjabis from the access of quality health services. Interacting with the media persons after flagging off 58 hi-tech ambulances for the state, the Chief Minister said that the state government is committed to impart quality health services to the state but the Union government is continuously hatching conspiracies to deny these to Punjabis. He said that the Union government has stalled the grant of worth Rs 1000 crore under the National Health Mission just to torpedo pro-people initiatives being taken by the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this is a condemnable move as the non-BJP governments are being harassed by the Union government on one pretext or another. The Chief Minister said that Aam Aadmi clinics have revolutionized the health care sector in the state. He said that 1.75 crore people have taken the benefits of these clinics in the state and more than 95% of patients visiting these clinics daily recover from their ailments. Mann said that ever since the starting of these clinics have witnessed a huge footfall indicating that every third person of the state has taken benefit from these clinics.

The Chief Minister said that today 58 new hi-tech ambulances have been dedicated to the people of the state thereby ensuring that they are available to people in hour of distress. He said that with this addition in the fleet of ambulances a total number of 325 ambulances have been pressed into the service of people across

the state to ensure that they get health services in time. CM Mann asserted that these Ultra-Modern Ambulances have been mandated to reach the needy patients within 15 minutes in Urban Areas and 20 minutes in Rural Areas. The Chief Minister bemoaned that it is strange that despite of immense contribution in the freedom struggle, making the country self-reliant in food production and safeguarding the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country, Punjab has been completely ignored in the Union budget. He said that this step motherly treatment with the state is unwarranted and reflects the myopic mindset of the Union government towards the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann further said that this high handedness of the Union government will not be tolerated and Punjabis will give a befitting reply to it. The Chief Minister also reiterated his demand for a special economic package for the state in recognition of the immense contribution made by Punjabis in every field. He said that it is the need of hour to ensure that Punjab makes tremendous progress in every sphere adding that this will give a major fillip to the growth and development of the state. However, Bhagwant Singh Mann bemoaned that currently, the tax holiday given to other states is acting as an impediment to the industrial growth of the state as industrial units are shifting there.

The Chief Minister welcomed the appointment of the new Governor of the state and expressed hope that constitutional rights of both the Government and the Governor will be safeguarded. Mann said that the outgoing Governor had unnecessarily tried to create hiccups in the smooth functioning of the state government. He said that it is unfortunate that the Governor had



not granted sanction for calling a budget session and had even declared a session illegitimate only to grant it sanction later. The Chief Minister said that this is unwarranted and undesirable in a democratic government country like India but unfortunately all this happened in the state. He said that today both freedom and democracy are in danger as the Union government is leaving no stone unturned to sabotage them by harassing the non-BJP governments. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the voice of opposition is being muzzled and the central agencies are being used to arm twist them and mute their voice. The Chief Minister said that meetings of Niti Aayog are a futile exercise as states do not even get the proper time to flag the issues of their concern. He said that owing to this reason only they had decided to boycott the meeting of the Niti Aayog this time. C M

Mann asserted that nothing fruitful had come out of the meeting of the Niti Aayog last time also so it was better to boycott it and do some constructive work in the state. The Chief Minister said that the state government is giving a major facelift to the health sector in the state adding that the hospitals running in the heritage buildings will be soon modernized. He said that a lot of resources and funds are being pumped in to upgrade the health sector in the state to ensure that people get access to quality health services. Mann also said that the medical colleges at Hoshiarpur, Sangrur and Kapurthala are coming up and the state government is duty bound to complete the work on them. The Chief Minister said that the youth who were compelled by the system of previous governments to migrate abroad are now returning back, which is a positive trend of reverse migration in the state.

# A case for reforming NEET

Recently, the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for undergraduate medical courses (MBBS and BDS) and the National Testing Agency (NTA) that conducts this exam have been in the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. While many have already discussed the allegations of wrong-doing threadbare, let us take a step back to look at the bigger picture to put things in context. This year, over 23 lakh students wrote NEET, competing for around 1.1 lakh MBBS seats across the country. This includes 56,405 seats in government medical colleges and 2,765 seats in private medical colleges. The annual fee in government medical colleges ranges from ₹13,000 to ₹74,000. In private medical colleges the annual fee varies from nearly ₹13 lakh to ₹22 lakh. For the government quota seats in private medical colleges, the annual fee is around ₹5 lakh.

Shift to a two-level exam Government college seats and government quota seats in private colleges are allotted based on the NEET scores rank list. Even a small increase in NEET score can mean getting into a top government medical college with a much lower fee. This makes NEET a very high stakes exam. High stakes and large numbers is a deadly combination inviting cheating attempts. Just more policing cannot stop so many determined efforts to cheat. We need structural changes that significantly reduce the value gained by cheating. One such structural change is to conduct NEET as a two-level exam. The first level exam is a qualifier exam that is taken by all aspirants (say 23 lakh). Only those who qualify (say 5 lakh students) are allowed to write the second level exam which is used to create the rank list. The first level exam has huge scale but is low-stakes as it does not directly ensure a seat. The second-level exam has high-stakes but a smaller scale and can be more tightly controlled. Restoring the sanctity of the exam process is just the first step needed. There is a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed. Higher qualifying cut-off

The original argument presented while making NEET mandatory for all medical seats was the worry that rich students were simply buying up seats in private medical colleges. Without putting in the hard work to learn medicine, these students were getting degrees. These unqualified doctors would pose a danger to the health of our people, it was felt. That's why NEET was not just introduced as an entrance test, but also as a minimum eligibility filter. But today the cut-off for qualifying NEET is really low (just 164 marks out of 720) and nearly 13 lakh students have qualified NEET this year for 1.1 lakh seats. About 65,000 of these students will get government seats based on the rank list.

What happens to the remaining 45,000 seats? These are management quota seats that are given to the students who can pay the highest fees. A poor (or middle class) student who scores 400 marks in NEET does not get a medical seat, but a rich student who scores 170 out of 720 buys a seat in a private medical college. This system is unfair to the student who scores more marks but not enough to get a government seat. More importantly, this nullifies the original purpose of NEET which was to ensure money power does not threaten the health of the nation. Why is NTA qualifying 12 lakh candidates when



there are only 1.1 lakh seats? Why not increase the cut off to at least 250 (35% of 720)? Why not limit the number of qualified students to three lakh students (three times the seats available)? This will reduce the number of qualified rich students who can buy seats, forcing private medical colleges to reduce their fees to reasonable levels.

A more egalitarian solution would be to remove the management quota system and simply allocate all the medical seats (both government and private colleges) based on the NEET rank list through a com-

mon counselling process. There can be different fee structures but all admissions would be based on the same rank list. Restrict number of repeat attempts. The number of NEET repeaters has been increasing year after year. These are students who after their 12th boards, spend one, two or even three years just preparing for NEET and writing the exam year after year. This is one of the reasons for the increase in the number of students writing NEET each year. The increasing number of repeaters puts the students who pass out of Class 12 at a major disadvantage. The present situation forces aspirants to

typically spend two to three years (after class 12) in coaching centers in order to do well in NEET. If unchecked, this will soon lead to more and more years spent repeating. Restricting the maximum number of NEET attempts to two can go a long way in controlling this. As we think about ways to streamline NEET and medical college entrance, it is important to remember that entrance exams like NEET put poor students at a major disadvantage. Affirmative action like Tamil Nadu's 7.5% quota for government school students can go a long way in addressing this disadvantage.

## Threat to magnetic field

Northern lights have a dark side Auroras, while awe-inspiring, reveal critical information about disruptions to Earth's magnetic field, especially relevant in our technology-driven era. The forces behind auroras also generate currents that can damage electrical infrastructure, such as pipelines and power grids. A recent study highlights that the impact angle of interplanetary shocks plays a crucial role in the strength of these currents, providing a way to predict and mitigate potential damage. Both auroras and Geo-magnetically Induced Currents (GICs) are driven by space weather events. Auroras serve as visual indicators that electric currents in space can produce GICs on the ground. During severe geomagnetic storms, the auroral region can expand significantly. Typically, its southern boundary is around 70 degrees latitude, but during extreme events like the May 2024 storm, it can extend down to 40 degrees or further, marking the most intense storm in two decades. Auroras occur through two primary processes: Particles from the sun striking Earth's magnetic field or interplanetary shocks compressing the magnetic field. These shocks can also generate GICs that threaten electrical infrastructure. The impact of interplanetary shocks on Earth's



magnetosphere significantly disturbs the geo-magnetic field and electric currents in the magnetosphere-ionosphere system. At high latitudes, auroral electro jet currents are most affected by these shocks, generating ground-based GICs that interact with and damage artificial conductors, including power transmission lines, oil and gas pipelines, railways, and submarine

cables. Stronger shocks result in stronger currents and auroras, while frequent, less powerful shocks can also cause cumulative damage over time. Understanding the relationship between interplanetary shocks and their impact on Earth's magnetic field is crucial for predicting and protecting against potential damage to our electrical infrastructure.

# Marvel Madness Takes Over POCO; Launches the Deadpool Limited Edition POCO F6 in India

POCO, a brand synonymous with rapid growth in India's consumer tech space, today announced an exciting collaboration with Marvel Studios to launch the Deadpool limited edition POCO F6 in India. This exclusive partnership comes ahead of the theatrical release of the third film in the iconic Deadpool franchise, titled *Deadpool & Wolverine*. With the immense popularity and fan frenzy that the Deadpool series enjoys, this launch is set to amplify the excitement among Marvel fanatics across the country.

The Deadpool limited edition POCO F6 is a testament to the innovative spirit of POCO and the captivating world of Marvel. Created with meticulous attention to detail, this special edition smartphone will include a striking custom design that pays homage to Deadpool and Wolverine. The device exterior boasts Deadpool's iconic red and black color scheme, complete with his logo. Fans can expect an exquisite blend of cutting-edge technology and the iconic Deadpool aesthetics, making this device a must-have for both Marvel enthusiasts and smartphone aficionados.

"We are incredibly excited about our collaboration with Marvel Studios to launch

the Deadpool limited edition POCO F6. The collaboration is aimed to engage with Marvel fans in a truly immersive and interactive manner, taking their passion for the Deadpool franchise to the next level," said Himanshu Tandon, Country Head at POCO India. "Deadpool has become a pop culture phenomenon, resonating with fans worldwide. The Deadpool Limited Edition POCO F6 perfectly embodies the innovative spirit of POCO and the bold, unconventional character of Deadpool. We're confident that this collaboration will resonate strongly with our tech-savvy audience and Marvel fans across the country."

The Deadpool limited edition smartphone will not only showcase an exclusive design but also offer top-of-the-line features and performance of the POCO F6. The POCO F6 is equipped with the Snapdragon® 8s Gen 3 processor, making it perfect for gaming and multitasking. With a 50 MP Sony OIS+EIS camera and an 8MP ultra wide-angle camera, the POCO F6 is ideal for capturing stunning landscapes and group photos. It also supports AI Image expansion, Magic Eraser Pro, AI Bokeh, Magic cut-out, and more, providing users with a range of creative options. The POCO F6 offers rapid charging with its ro-



bust 90W Turbo Charging capability and comes with a 120W Inbox Charger. Operating on Xiaomi HyperOS based on Android 14, this device promises long-term support and enhanced functionality. The Deadpool limited edition POCO F6 will be available on Flipkart at INR 29,999\* start-

ing 7th August in a 12+256GB storage variant. The price is inclusive of INR 4,000 Bank offers. With its powerful performance and unique Deadpool-inspired design, this limited-edition smartphone is set to be the perfect companion for fans ready to embrace their inner anti-hero.

# OPPO Launches OPPO K12x 5G with Military-Grade Durability at INR 12,999



OPPO India has introduced its K12x 5G, the toughest 5G smartphone in its segment, at just INR 12,999. The device is available in two attractive colours, Breeze Blue and Midnight Violet, and will be available starting 2nd August 2024 on the OPPO e-store and Flipkart. It boasts segment-leading durability with the 'MIL-STD-810H' military-grade certification, IP54 rating for dust and water resistance, and segment-first Splash Touch technology so users can operate its touchscreen even with wet fingers.

Durable, Yet Stylish

The OPPO K12x 5G sets a new standard under INR 15K with its 360° Damage-Proof Armour Body. Its twice-reinforced Panda Glass display and its High-Strength Alloy Frame—developed by

OPPO—add robustness; its Sponge Bionic Cushioning creates adequate gaps for components to increase drop resistance while its Shock-Absorbing Foam safeguards key parts to ensure comprehensive protection against impacts and shocks. This combination—certified by MIL-STD-810H—makes the K12x 5G highly durable and resilient. The phone also comes with an Anti-Drop Shield Case in the box designed with corner cushioning and a reinforced back shell to protect against accidental drops. The K12x 5G also offers IP54-rated splash resistance. Additionally, OPPO's Splash Touch technology ensures that the screen remains functional even when used with wet hands. This technology is based on an advanced algorithm within the touch chip that improves touch

accuracy and responsiveness when the screen is wet. The 7.68mm ultra-slim OPPO K12x 5G weighs just 186g and comes with a fingerprint-resistant mid-frame that ensures a comfortable grip. The device's rear is defined by an eye-catching oval frame around the camera module—paired with the Cosmic Flashlight—that adds to its premium aesthetic. "The OPPO K12x 5G is the first handset with 'MIL-STD-810H' durability standard under INR 15,000," said Savio D'Souza, Head of Product Communications at OPPO India. "It strikes the perfect balance between design and durability, without compromising performance and battery life to make it an extremely attractive value proposition for those who need day-long battery in an attractive yet robust package." Endless Entertainment The OPPO K12x 5G delivers a high-quality viewing experience with

a display capable of reaching up to 1000 nits in sunlight. In addition, its 120Hz refresh rate assures a smooth visual experience when scrolling, or in apps that support this feature. Its large 6.67-inch display comes with Amazon HD and Widevine L1 certifications that guarantee compatibility with popular streaming services at HD settings for a superior on-the-go multimedia experience. Backing up the entertainment quotient is a large 5100mAh battery, supported by a 45W SuperVOOC™ charger in the box. The OPPO K12x 5G is capable of keeping up the pace with multimedia and multi-tasking all day long. Its long-lasting battery—thanks to OPPO's smart charging support—ensures four years of optimal usage. Users can expect the battery to maintain over 80% of its original capacity after 1,600 charge cycles, equivalent to over 4 years of use if charged once daily.

## Alcoholic parents kill younger son mistaking him for older one in Mancherial

Mancherial: A man, who sustained serious injuries, when his alcoholic parents mistakenly attacked him on Friday, died while undergoing treatment at a hospital here on Monday. Police said that Aburla Shekhar, 24, a daily wage earner and the younger son of Vijay Kumar breathed his last while undergoing treatment. Shekhar received injuries on his chest and abdomen when his father attacked him with a sickle while his mother

Padma held his legs when he was asleep on July 26 night. He was immediately rushed to a hospital in Mancherial. Shekhar's parents were in an inebriated condition when they attempted to kill him. They wanted to eliminate his elder brother Ashok for quarrelling with them under the influence of liquor. However, they mistakenly murdered Shekhar in the dark, assuming the person sleeping on the bed as Ashok.

# Border region lagged behind due to regressive and feudal outlook of dynastical leaders, alleges CM Mann

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), July 29, 2024: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Monday said that the progressive and brave border region of the state had lagged behind in the pace of development due to regressive and feudal policies of the dynasties that have been representing this area since long. Addressing the gathering after dedicating Railway Over Bridge on Monday, the Chief Minister said that the residents of border districts of the state are brave people who have always safeguarded the unity and sovereignty of the country.

In order to streamline the movement of traffic in the historic city of Dinanagar, the Punjab Chief Minister Mann on Monday dedicated the newly constructed Railway Over Bridge on the Amritsar-Pathankot Railway section near railway station Dina Nagar in district Gurdaspur. Constructed over a cost of Rs. 51.74 crore, the Railway Over Bridge is a big bonanza by the Chief Minister to the residents of the city. The ROB has been constructed in lieu of level crossing C-60 on the Amritsar-Pathankot Railway section near railway station Dina Nagar in district Gurdaspur. Addressing the congregation, the Chief Minister said that though leaders from this area had remained in pivotal positions, they never bothered about the development of the region and welfare of people. He alleged that the leaders who have been elected from here since long have done nothing to give fillip to development of the region. He said that this region which had produced great patriots and nationalists had not witnessed the development during the regime of these rulers. Bhagwant Singh Mann bemoaned that it is unfortunate that despite being at the helm of affairs for a considerably long time these leaders just focussed on their growth and development rather than that of the region. The Chief Minister said that these opportunistic leaders have no ideology and their only aim is just to remain in power for which they frequently switch their loyalties. Citing an example, he said that in this area one house has two flags of separate parties because these leaders want that all the power should remain in their hands only. CM Mann said that these leaders had got new wardrobes stitched in hope of getting elected by the people but their dreams never came true as people out rightly rejected them. The Chief Minister said that out of 17 toll plazas that have been closed by his government 14 were constructed by a self-proclaimed leader of this area who had remained PWD Minister.

He said that these leaders had just done lip service to the people whereas his government has delivered services to the people. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that people should elect the leaders who are their companions and not those who want to rule them. However, the Chief Minister said that ever since he has assumed the charge of office every day a new saga of development and growth is being witnessed in the state. He said that the state government is committed for safeguarding the interests of Punjab and no stone is being left unturned for it. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that earlier governments had



done nothing else than nepotism and favouritism but his government has ensured all-round development of the state. The Chief Minister said that the Punjab government has taken several path-breaking initiatives for welfare of the people. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that 90% of households are now getting free power, more than 43,000 youth have got government jobs, health and education facilities are being provided to people. He said that all these initiatives are aimed at the well-being of the common man and no stone is being left unturned for it. Quoting verse 'Pawan Guru, Paani Pitaah, Mata Dharat Mahat' from Gurbani, the Chief Minister said that the great Gurus have equated air (pawan) with teacher, water (paani) with father and land (dharat) with mother. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that now the time has come when we must imbibe the teachings of Gurbani in our lives for restoring the pristine glory of the state by resolving to save the environment of the state. He said that the state government will leave no stone unturned for this noble cause adding that the people of state should support the state government by planting more and more trees. The Chief Minister said that this region produces maximum soldiers for the country and to recognize their supreme sacrifice the state government gives Rs 1 crore as financial assistance to families of any soldier who attains martyrdom during line of duty while serving the country. Reiterating the firm commitment of the state government to help the families of the soldiers who sacrifice their life at the altar of the motherland, he said that it is the bounden duty of the Punjab government to bail out the families of these heroes in hour of crisis. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the financial assistance to the families of martyrs is in consonance with the commit-

ment of the state government to ensure the well-being of the soldiers and their families. The Chief Minister said that the state government has adopted a zero-tol-

erance policy against drugs. He said that the state government has already snapped the supply line of drugs and big drug peddlers have been put behind the bars.

## Shri Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD and CEO at National Stock Exchange (NSE) on the Union Budget 2024 under the Modi 3.0 Government

"The budget for the financial year 2024-25 presented by Hon'ble Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman has given a huge fillip to job creation in India by ensuring that the private sector also participates in job creation in addition to the government sector while ensuring that India becomes the number 1 start up nation and a nation of entrepreneurs by providing relief on the angel tax as well as increasing Mudra loan scheme limit from Rs 10 lakhs to Rs 20 lakhs per person. She has also focused on increasing women participation in India's labour force which will help India reap demographic dividend even further by increasing young women's participation in the workforce. Skill development as a part of job creation has been also an out of the box idea from her while keeping infrastructure outlay intact and reducing fiscal deficit at 4.9% from the expectation of 5.1%. All these things are being achieved without much tinkering with the direct or indirect tax structure ensuring that India's long term credit rating improves by giving a glide path to 4.5% fiscal deficit in 2025- 26. Overall, 10/10."



# The goal is to deliver swift justice to the people.

Rachakonda Police Commissioner Sudhir Babu



Rachakonda Police Commissioner Sudhir Babu said that we are taking measures to maintain peace and security in a new way by giving high priority to visible policing in the jurisdiction of Rachakonda Police Commissionerate. Officers and staff are being guided to make police services more accessible to the public and to increase public confidence in the police system. \*Bluecolts, Petrocar and Cycle Patrolling in every area\* Officers, Bluecolts and Petrocar Police personnel are responding quickly to complaints received through Dial 100 and 112 to curb crime and increase public confidence in the police and are working to reach the victims as quickly as possible. He said that with the experience

of working in Rachakonda in the past, he has complete knowledge of all the areas under Rachakonda and police personnel have been given orders to patrol in all areas and every street.

\*Increasing Women Police Participation\* In order to increase the role of women police in bringing police services closer to the people, women personnel are also enthusiastically performing Blue Colts and Patrol Car duties through the measures taken by the Commissioner without any problems for the women personnel in the performance of duties at the field level. People are getting confidence in the police force through bicycle patrolling by women personnel. He said that



Aharnishala is working to provide speedy justice to the people and will ensure that public problems are resolved quickly. It has been specifically mentioned that we will work together with everyone to prevent

crime and we will also focus on the welfare of police personnel. He called on the officers and staff to work in coordination and control crime so that people do not have to fear crime.

## Aakash Educational Services Limited (AESL) Celebrates 15 Glorious Years of ANTHE with the Launch of the Biggest and Most Awaited ANTHE 2024, Offering Up to 100% Scholarships and Cash Awards for Class VII-XII Students

Marking 15 glorious years of its flagship scholarship examination ANTHE, Aakash Educational Services Limited (AESL), the national leader in test preparatory services, proudly announces the launch of the latest edition of the highly anticipated Aakash National Talent Hunt Exam (ANTHE) 2024. The popular and most-sought after exam offers students from Class VII-XII the chance to earn up to 100% scholarships along with significant cash awards, helping them achieve their dreams of a successful career in medicine or engineering. This year, an exciting addition includes a 5-day all-expenses-paid trip to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, USA, for five outstanding students. The John F. Kennedy Space Centre, located in Florida, is one of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) ten field centres in the United States.

ANTHE scholarship recipients will benefit from Aakash's extensive coaching programs, which prepare students for exams such as NEET, JEE, State CETs and scholarships like NTSE and Olympiads. Mr. Deepak Mehrotra, CEO and MD of Aakash Educational Services Limited (AESL), remarked, "ANTHE has played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the aspirations and abilities of countless students.

Celebrating these 15 years of ANTHE, we have worked to make our courses accessible to deserving students across the nation, regardless of their location. ANTHE enables students to prepare for NEET and IIT-JEE exams at their own pace, wherever they are. We anticipate strong participation in ANTHE 2024 and are dedicated to guiding students towards a bright future. "Celebrating its 15th successful year, ANTHE has a distinguished record of nurturing top achievers. Over the years, many of its students have excelled in prestigious examinations, including top ranks in NEET UG and JEE Advanced. Some notable achievers who enrolled in Aakash through ANTHE and secured top ranks are: Rishi Shekhar Shukla (JEE Advanced 2024 AIR 25); Krishna Sai Shishir (JEE Advanced 2024 AIR 67); Abhishek Jain (JEE Advanced 2024 AIR 78) among others. In NEET 2023, our top scorers were Kaustav Bauri (AIR 03); Dhruv Advani (AIR 05); Surya Siddharth N (AIR 06); Aditya Neeraje (AIR 27) and Aakash Gupta (AIR 28). ANTHE 2024 will take place from October 19-27, 2024, in both online and offline modes across 26 states and union territories in India. In addition to scholarships of up to 100%, top scorers will also receive cash awards. ANTHE offline exams will be conducted on October 20 and 27, 2024



starting 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM at all 315+ centers of Aakash Institute across the country while online exams can be taken from October 19 to 27, 2024 anytime during the exam window. Students can choose a one-hour slot convenient to them. ANTHE will be a one-hour test carrying a total of 90 marks and comprising 40 multiple-choice questions based on the grade and stream aspirations of students. For Class VII-IX stu-

dents, the questions will cover subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and Mental Ability. For Class X students aspiring for medical education, the questions will cover Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mental Ability, while for engineering aspirants of the same class, the questions will cover Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and Mental Ability. Similarly, for Class XI-XII students who aim for NEET,

# Between a fascist past and Right-wing present, Italy is fighting its many battles

What do we talk when we talk about Italy? Beyond the Modi-Meloni (now Team Melodi) memes, appropriations of food, and the deluge of travel bucket list items, there exists a country that knows how not to stay trapped in its history. Or the historical mistakes, to be precise. On July 25, 1943, Benito Mussolini, the man responsible for some of the worst crimes against his countrymen, was overthrown and less than three months later, Italy officially switched sides in the Second World War. Rome was saved, literally and metaphorically. In a three-storey flat on Via Tasso, at least 3,000 men and women were incarcerated, interrogated, tortured, and even killed during the Second World War. Their crime could be anything from being a partisan, a Jew, a thinker, or protesting peacefully or otherwise against the wanton killings in the streets by the fascists. If nothing else, they could have just been an annoyance to the fascist.

The flat is now a memorial to the fallen citizens who did not have a chance against this killing machine. Their 'relics'—photographs, blood-soaked clothes, messages scratched on the walls by the prisoners or sewn into the hems of clothes delivered by their relatives, fake identity cards to hide their identity are all on display in this museum exuding a strong 'never again' vibe. The worst of this condemned lot were the Jewish partisans who were also thinkers. This flat, now called Museo Storico Della Liberazione (Liberation Historical Museum), is not very far from Rome's Jewish ghetto. "Save Ghaza," says the graffiti on a wall barely 20 metres from the museum. Rome is a city of contradictions like this. Symbolically seen as the seat of civilisational and religious glory, real Rome exists in the twilight zone of irreverence and remonstrance. No matter how much tourism cash is generated by the Roman Catholic 'industry', Romans continue to be mostly nonchalant about religion. Thousands of churches in the city, very few devotees. This is an easy observation: the separate entry passages for the believers barely have people passing through them while the visitor lines run into kilometres. Rome resembles many other European cities in this regard. Across Europe, churches of different orders and sizes have been converted into pubs, something the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib would have been very proud of. Complicated situation

But why talk about fascism today? Bursting at its seams with immigrants from the Global South — thanks to its geography — and with a Right-wing government in power, Italy finds itself in the eye of the identity politics storm. What complicates the matter further is the country's perception as being on the wrong side of the not-so-long-ago history. The F word, therefore, looms large. It does not help the average Italian that Prime Minister Georgia Meloni was a youth activist of Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), a now-dissolved neo-fascist political movement founded in 1946 hailing Mussolini. The average Italian is worried more about the poor infrastructure and livelihood issues. Cab drivers turning the app off after accepting a ride — to be able



to charge more on made-up grounds — or refusing to turn on the air-conditioning on a 40-degree day.

And there are assimilation issues. But there are two facets to what is seen as the locals' resistance to the immigrants: there are Italians who do not like poor immigrants ad hominem and then there are those Italians who see them as the harbinger of all regressive value systems that the former fought hard to desist and discard. Women's rights, for example, become a particularly sticky spot. Rapists and kidnapers in Italy could simply marry their victims and avoid any legal action till as late as 1981, thanks to the practice of matrimonio riparatore (rehabilitating marriage). Those who protested on the streets against this almost half a century ago may not be excited about the practice of young girls pushed into forced marriages, even if it is a culturally accepted practice in many immigrant communities. The immigrants are not a homogenous lot either. Religion may or may not be a binding factor there. Look no further than a tourist hub. The tensions between the Indian and the Bangladeshi Muslims are often palpable. Coreligionists do not often band together. Iqbal (name changed), an Indian 'trip advisor' from Andhra Pradesh working near St Peter's Basilica, rues the fact that the aggressiveness of Bangladeshi tourists brings a bad name to everyone. A little later, Rahim, a Bangladeshi scarf-seller outside the Vatican Museums, shouted at a woman tourist "Indians not allowed [inside] Sistine Chapel" as if to balance the equation. These two immigrant nationalities are not the largest but appear rather ubiquitous in Italy. Unlike what we know from The Roman Holiday, The Talented Mr Ripley or the many Dan Brown films, Rome has a subterranean flow of traumatic memories. The mafia, for example, is alive and kicking in the country in its white-collared ava-

tar — a legacy of the Berlusconi years. A lawyer from southern Italy shares in a casual conversation that the mafia earn a lot more by cartelising illegal immigration. After all, the undocumented can be underpaid and exploited like cattle. They can also be disappeared when convenient. The raids on the manufacturing units of high-end luxury brands in Milan brought to the fore what Italians have known for years. The trauma of the past manifests in Italy in multiple ways, many rather strange to the outsider. At the annual week-long feste of the democratic party this year, held

right across the historical Caracalla Baths — a symbol of Roman decadence — a retrospective of singer Lucio Battisti was organised one night. Battisti, a supporter of the erstwhile communist party, was 'cancelled' decades ago by the partisans and followers for being a 'fascist'. He is back as an icon. If you go looking for traces of fascism in Italy today, it mostly exists in the form of imaginary scenes woven around the traumas of the past. The Left uses the F word to silence its critics and the Right is eking out a niche by playing on the livelihood and cultural anxieties of the citizens by making it about race.

## PETA calls for revocation of veterinarians licenses over Hyderabad Muharram and Bonalu elephant issue

Hyderabad: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India called for the revocation of the veterinary licenses of veterinarians who issued health certificate to permit the transportation of elephant Roopavathi from Karnataka. They claimed that the tusker was used for Bonalu and Muharram processions in Hyderabad despite its illness.

In a press statement released on Thursday, the organization said that a recent examination by independent wildlife veterinarians has determined that Roopavathi is unfit for public events due to severe health issues like unilateral blindness and arthritis.

"The group seeks accountability for and action against Karnataka veterinarian Dr Sathish and Telangana veterinarians Drs M Navin Kumar, M Abdul Hakeem, G Shambhulingam, and B Sambasiva Rao, who falsely declared Roopavathi to be in good health even though she is unilaterally

blind in the right eye and has feet with overgrown cuticles and cracked footpads. Her gait also shows arthritic changes and lameness," read the statement. PETA has also written to Karnataka and Telangana veterinary councils to report the matter.

Adding that the elephant requires immediate rehabilitation at a sanctuary where she can live unchained and in the company of other elephants, the animal welfare organisation added that her transportation violated several rules including the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

PETA India had also offered to fund and facilitate the use of a life-size mechanical elephant for the Muharram and Bonalu processions instead of a real elephant. These realistic mechanical elephants can replicate the experience of using a real animal without causing harm, thereby ensuring both human safety and animal welfare.

# Three Maharashtra cities to host India's first low emission zones by 2026

LEZs are designated urban areas that aim to restrict high-polluting vehicles, such as older diesel, petrol and CNG vehicles, and only allow mobility alternatives that have low- to zero-tailpipe emission and zero-emission modes such as electric vehicles (EVs), walking, and cycling. So far in India, there are tourist-focused LEZs around the Taj Mahal in Agra and the Statue of Unity in Kevadia, Gujarat, while New Delhi has implemented an LEZ-like restriction by charging an environmental compensation charge for heavy vehicles entering the city. However, cities do not have designated zones demarcated as an LEZ yet nor restrict polluting vehicles across all vehicle types.

The municipal corporations of Pune (PMC), Pimpri Chinchwad (PCMC), and Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (CSMC) have collaborated with non-profit organisations The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) and the International Council for Clean Transport (ICCT) India to assess and identify likely LEZs. "For a city such as Pune which has high vehicular density leading to transport emissions as a dominant source, it will be tough to demarcate such a zone ensuring strict adherence to guidelines but we have decided to implement it on a pilot basis and scale it up gradually," said Mangesh Dighe, environment officer at PMC. "Currently, we are in the phase of stakeholder discussions to refine the plan." Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar municipal commissioner G Sreekanth said: "We are identifying high-emission zones in the city, which we aim to convert into LEZs. Certain areas have already been identified that could be potential LEZs." Pimpri Chinchwad (PCMC) has adopted a strategic approach. "We are considering LEZ areas keeping in mind the need to provide alternate routes for polluting vehicles not entering proposed LEZs. This careful planning is essential for a smooth transition to achieve the target by 2026," said Shekhar Singh, municipal commissioner, PCMC. LEZ implementation plan

The three corporations are presently in the preparatory phase till 2025. "This will involve establishing monitoring mechanisms, gathering data, and reaching out to citizens for consensus. During these two preparatory years (2024 and 2025), interventions such as augmenting public transport, and improving footpaths and cycle tracks can be planned," said Siddhartha Godbole, senior associate, ITDP India. To enter an LEZ, vehicles must meet Bharat Stage (BS) emission standards, which regulate air pollutant output from internal combustion engines. India currently follows BSVI, the strictest standard for pollutants like nitrogen oxide (NOx) and particulate matter (PM). "Our research in these three cities identified the proportion of PM, NOx, and CO2 emissions by vehicle type. Transport emissions, especially PM 2.5, are very harmful to children and vulnerable populations. We propose restricting or de-incentivizing these polluting vehicles in high-risk zones by 2026 to encourage a shift to cleaner modes," added Godbole. Within LEZs, non-compliant vehicles may face fines, enforced through manual checks, automatic number plate



recognition (ANPR) cameras, and heavy penalties. LEZs are supported by EV charging stations, enhanced public transport, and improved cycling and walking paths.

LEZ areas are chosen based on PM 2.5 levels, population density, road network, and available public and non-motorised transport. "Areas with strong public transport and NMT infrastructure are ideal for LEZs," said Sreekanth. "Our plan includes meetings with police, transport, traffic departments, and regulatory authorities. We will focus on high-emission areas, implementing restrictions, penalties, and incentives to transition to LEZs." Technological considerations are also a key factor. "We are evaluating technologies like CCTV and electronic road pricing (ERP) systems as used in Singapore. However, issues remain, such as gaps in the Vahan portal data, crucial for verifying vehicle compliance with BSIV and BSVI emission standards," Singh said.

85% reduction potential in emission load at LEZs The Maharashtra EV Policy 2021 identifies six cities for the creation of LEZs. These cities are Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Nashik, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, and Amravati. "Some cities have already begun work on this but we are hopeful that by 2030, all six cities will have at least one LEZ," said a senior Maharashtra transport department official, requesting anonymity. "The EV policies of several states include components such as green zones, low emission zones, and healthy air zones. However, the challenge is that there doesn't exist any directions or agreed methodology to identify, plan and enforce these zones," said Vaibhav Kush, researcher, ICCT, adding, "To witness significant improvement in air quality, we need a larger area (15-20 square kilometres), depending on the city's characteristics. For instance, London has seen up to a 46% reduction in NOx due to its LEZ."

A joint study by ICCT and ITDP provides a detailed assessment of how LEZs can significantly reduce vehicular emis-

sions. "If we continue with the business-as-usual (current) scenario, by 2030, the PM 2.5 concentrations can lower by 50% due to natural fleet turnover and improvements in vehicle technology. However, this is a slow process. By enforcing LEZs, adopting newer vehicle technologies, and promoting alternative modes of transport, we can see a reduction in vehicular emission load by up to 85% by 2026," said Godbole. Moorthy Nair, associate researcher, ICCT said: "Similarly, an approximate 74-84% reduction in NOx and 10-50% reduction in carbon monoxide emission load is possible within LEZ area by 2026. These numbers are subjective and can vary depending on the action taken on the ground and the duration of enforcement." PCMC to use GRAP as a strategy for LEZs Pimpri Chinchwad's Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), now in final consultation, will guide the transition to LEZs, aiming for full implementation in two years. "Our strategy includes a transition phase before the full implementation date, allowing time for readiness and public adaptation," said Singh.

Singh highlighted that their assessment considered density, demographics, pollution levels (AQI, PM2.5, PM10), temperature, and urban heat islands. "We categorised areas into high and low priority. With adequate infrastructure, public

consultation, and proper monitoring, LEZs can be identified," he said. In support of this transition, PCMC is promoting EVs. The Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal Ltd (PMPML) operates around 2,200 buses, with 600-650 being electric or 28%. "We are also transitioning three-wheelers to electric, with significant subsidies provided by the government and our corporation to encourage this shift," Singh said. Emulating global urban innovations London has seen notable success with LEZs and ultra-LEZ, experiencing reductions in NOx emissions. A 2023 study by the Department of Economics, University of Bath, found that LEZs significantly improved air quality and health in Greater London. Between 2008 and 2013, LEZs reduced PM10 levels by 13% compared to pre-LEZ levels (2003-2007). In Central London, NOx levels decreased by 18% in 2019 compared to pre-ultra low-emission zone levels (2016-2018). Other European cities, including Berlin, Paris, and Amsterdam, have also implemented LEZs with varying degrees of restriction and success. The timing and specific locations of LEZs remain under careful consideration. With these efforts, these three Maharashtra cities are poised to set a precedent for other cities in India, aiming for cleaner air and healthier urban precincts by 2026.

## K Padmaja takes charge as PCCM of South Central Railway

Hyderabad: Senior Indian Railways Traffic Service (IRTS) officer, K. Padmaja, assumed charge as Principal Chief Commercial Manager (PCCM) of South Central Railway (SCR) at Rail Nilayam here on Thursday. Belonging to the 1991 IRTS batch, Padmaja is the first woman PCCM on SCR and prior to the present assignment, was working as Chief Transportation Planning Manager. During her career

spanning over 30 years with Indian Railway, Padmaja held several key positions including Assistant Commercial Manager (ACM) in Hyderabad division; Assistant Traffic Manager (ATM) and Divisional Operations Manager (coal & goods), Senior Divisional Safety Officer, and Senior Divisional Operations Manager. At Headquarters, she served as Deputy Chief Operations Manager/Coaching.

# Why the influential Ezhava community in Kerala is leaning towards the Sangh Parivar

When the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, better known as SNDP, began operating in 1903 to spread the teachings of iconic social reformer Sree Narayana Guru, it marked the start of an era of scientific thinking, logical ideas, and rational perspectives in Kerala.

This was a significant development in a region divided into the princely states of Travancore, Kochi, and the British Malabar and immersed in numerous obscurantist practices. Despite the organisation's primary membership being from the influential OBC community, Ezhava, and its founders, P. Palpu and Kumaran Asan, were steadfast in maintaining SNDP as a secular, progressive, and all-encompassing entity. Their vision was to uphold Guru's philosophy of "Ask not, say not, think not caste." Historical records show that Guru was determined not to let SNDP become an extension of the caste-based organisations Thyya Maha Sabha and Ezhava Sabha. These organisations, which rejected his reformist legacy, were subservient to Brahminism, and promoting equality among social outcasts was not part of their agenda. Over time, SNDP evolved into a symbol of Malayalee pride, significantly influencing Kerala society by embracing progressive values.

Guru's radical thinking and significant influence over a diverse population, transcending caste barriers, created a fertile environment for Kerala's left politics to flourish. Many followers of the 19th-century reformer, who helped the Ezhava community overcome untouchability and discrimination, became the founding members of the Undivided Communist Party, which took root in the 1930s. Over the years, the Ezhava community has become the backbone of both CPI and CPI (M), with many leaders and cadres coming from it. The Ezhavas, Kerala's largest Hindu caste group, constitute around 23% of the state's population. With a population of over six million, this community predominantly resides in southern Kerala and has consistently supported the Left in elections. When the CPI (M) appointed V. S. Achuthanathan as chief minister in 2006, it was a testament to the community's unwavering support. The current chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, also belongs to this community. Lately, however, Left leaders have accused the present leadership of the SNDP of trying to align with the Sangh Parivar. They claim that the left parties' significant loss in the Kerala election was due to the SNDP handing over Ezhava votes to the BJP. They accuse the SNDP's general secretary, Vellappally Natesan, and his politician son, Thushar Vellappally, of being tools of fundamentalist forces aiming to divide society. Natesan accepts the allegation, saying that the Ezhavas are joining the Hindutva fold after finding it tough to deal with the Left, alleging that they follow a policy of appeasing Muslims. He says it would be natural for backward classes to revolt once their so-called protectors just treat them as vote banks and abandon them to give undue favours to minority communities.

"Consider this paradox: despite



When the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, better known as SNDP, began operating in 1903 to spread the teachings of iconic social reformer Sree Narayana Guru, it marked the start of an era of scientific thinking, logical ideas, and rational perspectives in Kerala.

Guru's teachings that manufacturing and selling liquor is a great sin, a liquor baron and his politician son have managed to control SNDP over the years. They have contradicted Guru's anti-caste philosophy by emphasising the difficulty of avoiding considering caste or religion in today's Kerala. This behaviour has led to accusations that Natesan and his family are selling the community to the Sangh Parivar to protect their business and political interests," said K T Kunhikkannan, director of CPI(M) think-tank M K Kelu Study and Research Centre. The BJP, which increased its vote share to nearly 20% in this election, believes that the strong support from the Ezhava community contributed significantly to its better performance in the Thiruvananthapuram, Alappuzha, Alathur, Attingal, and Kottayam constituencies. The party won Thrissur, with actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi securing the party's first Lok Sabha seat in Kerala. Based on the division of the votes polled in the Lok Sabha election, the BJP emerged first in 14 assembly constituencies across the state, a first in history.

The political landscape in Alappuzha saw a significant shift, with the BJP candidate Sobha Surendran, who belongs to the Ezhava community, gaining ground over CPI(M)'s AM Ariff in several areas. Despite the CPI(M) securing the only seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal wrested the constituency from Ariff this time. Natesan wrote an article in the SNDP mouthpiece Yoga Nadam, accusing the CPI(M) and CPI of appeasing Muslims by giving them more than a fair share of Rajya Sabha seats from

the state. He mentioned that out of the nine Rajya Sabha nominated MPs, five are from the Muslim community, and two are from the Christian community. The BJP leadership has supported Vellappally's assertions. Alappuzha BJP district president MV Gopakumar said that the party had only 40,000 votes in Alappuzha in 2014. "It went up to 140,000 in 2019, and this time it is nearly 300,000. This change was not sudden but slow and gradual. Many people from CPI(M) have switched to BJP in the last few years," he said. While Natesan's leaning towards the Sangh Parivar began years ago, the Vijayan government appointed him as the vice-chairman of a state-level body for the protection of renaissance values after the BJP-RSS made the women's entry to Sabarimala a controversial issue. However, a Muslim body member resigned, citing objections to Natesan's communal stand. Many members of the body, which is supposed to protect the inclusive and progressive characteristics of the state, have urged the chief minister to reconstitute it and remove Natesan from his position. "The Muslims, who make up 17% of Kerala's population, control the majority of schools and colleges in the six districts of northern Kerala. Furthermore, Arabic is being taught in schools at government expense," Natesan added. The state secretary of CPI(M), M V Govindan, stated that progressives within the SNDP Yogam, influenced by Guru's teachings, must guide the organisation in the right direction and prevent its leadership from veering towards the right. So far, Vijayan has not addressed this issue, possibly due to his personal relationship with

Natesan. "Since the 1940s, the Ezhava community has been the backbone of the Communists. Ninety-nine percent of the martyrs of Communist agitations are from our community. But we have been trampled upon and not given our share of political and social power," said Natesan when the Hindustan Times contacted him over the phone. Natesan's attempts to bring the Ezhavas closer to the Hindutva fold are seen as undermining the community's struggle against caste hierarchies. Historian K N Ganesh said: "Guru's campaign against caste adopted simple, common sense means. As Ezhavas were denied the right of worship in temples, he consecrated a Shiva Linga at Aruvippuram near Trivandrum in 1888. In two temples, he put up mirrors where the deity is usually placed, making his message clear. He strongly advocated internal reform among Ezhavas." In the 19th century, temples in Kerala became inaccessible to the Ezhavas, traditionally engaged in farming and tapping toddy. They were required to pay head tax, known as thalakkaram, while Ezhava women were forced to pay breast tax, known as mulakkaram. There is growing pressure within the community against Natesan as well. The Sivagiri Mutt, which follows the ideals of Guru and is involved in various socially oriented activities, has said that SNDP has deviated from its core teachings. The Sivagiri Mutt recently passed a resolution condemning the politicisation of the Guru's teachings. Although it was directed at Natesan, no names were mentioned. The Mutt stated that the politicisation was an attempt to sabotage the image of the Sivagiri Mutt and the Guru.