BRS condemns Congress govt's suppression of unemployed protesters
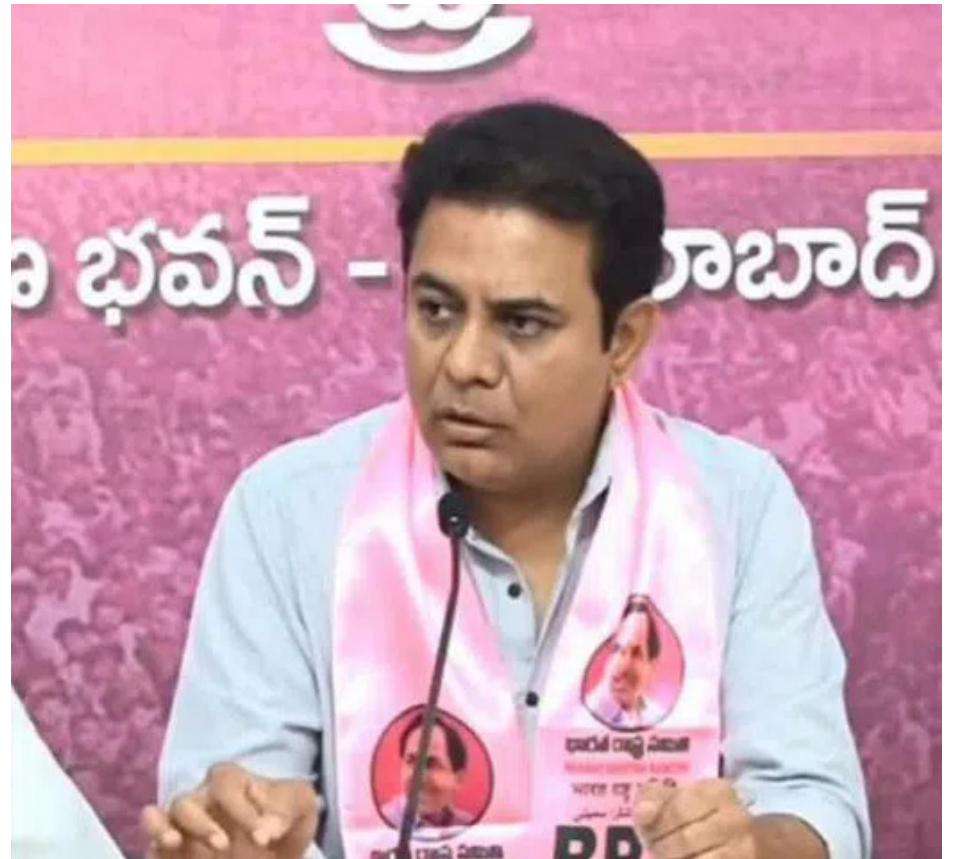
Hyderabad: The Bharat Rashtra Samithi on Friday condemned the arrests of unemployed youth and student leaders who took up a State-wide agitation for government jobs. The party accused the Congress of exploiting the unemployed for political gain before elections and then suppressing their legitimate demands once in power."Arresting student leaders who wanted to convey their demands peacefully is an evil act," BRS working president KT Rama Rao said, condemning the arrests of protesters. He demanded the immediate release of a job calendar, noting that the dates promised by the Congress had already expired. He assured that the BRS would support all protest activities of the unemployed. He called for the unconditional release of the arrested student leaders and unemployed youth.In a statement, Rama Rao slammed the Congress party's contradictory behaviour, noting that while they previously organised protest programmes with unemployed youth, they are now silencing the same group. "The Congress government, which claims to deliver 'Praja Palana' (people's governance), is acting like a dictator, not allowing youth and students to even stage protests," he said.

The police arrested several student leaders and members of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi Vidyarthi (BRSV) amid protests by unemployed youths in front of the Telangana Public Service Commission (TGPSC) office at Nampally here. The protests were part of the State-wide agitation by the unemployed to demand increased job opportunities.The demonstrators, led by the Telangana Unemployment Joint

Action Committee (JAC), have been advocating for a range of demands including an increase in group posts, a 1:100 ratio for Group 1 mains, and the cancellation of JV 46. The JAC had called for a siege of the TGPSC office and announced plans for an 'Unemployed March' with 30 lakh participants. However, the government has responded with stringent measures to prevent the march, including widespread arrests of youths traveling from the districts and heavy police deployment around the TGPSC office.

Former Ministers T Harish Rao, S Niranjan Reddy and several others condemned the arrests of unemployed youth and students, demanding for their immediate release. They denounced the arrests as a heinous act against democracy. "The unemployed have the right to protest peacefully in a democracy. Can't they even have the freedom to express their woes by submitting a representation?" Harish Rao questioned.Harish Rao said the Congress government dragged the students who were supposed to study, to the streets and forcing them to stage agitations. He vowed that the BRS party would continue to fight for the rights of students and the unemployed, demanding that the Congress government fulfill its electoral promises.

BRS leader RS Praveen Kumar stated that the barricades and barbed wire fences in front of the TGPSC reminded him of the international borders. He said unable to fulfill the just demands of unemployed youth, the Congress government was relying on the police, bouncers and also lies to tide over the situation. He hoped that the unemployed youth and government job

aspirants who were misled by the Congress during elections, would realise the truth now. He stated that the Congress always treated people as mere voters and did not hesitate to kill them, citing the firings at Basheerbagh and Mudigonda as examples."While the K Chadrashekhar Rao government filled 1.6 lakh jobs i.e.

16,000 government vacancies every year, the Revanth Reddy government which promised to take up recruitment for two lakh jobs within a year, was able to notify only 6,063 jobs in past seven months. The Chief Minister who is busy poaching opposition legislators and Delhi visits, did not take any measures to resolve issues raised by the job aspirants till date," he pointed out.
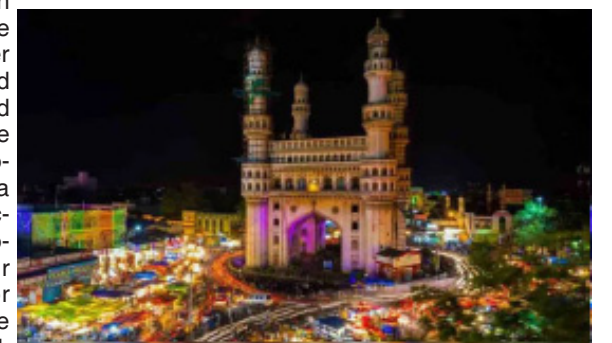
Night life in areas around Charminar, other parts of Hyderabad's Old City badly hit

Hyderabad: With the Hyderabad police acting tough against hotels and commercial establishments and forcing them to close down early, the night tourism or nightlife in the old city has gone for a toss.Scores of visitors, locals as well as tourists from other parts of the country, are now forced to think twice before visiting the old city after 10 pm.Until a month ago, Charminar vicinities used to bustle with visitors till late at night, recalls Syed Jameel, a businessman. "After a spate of murders in the city, the overenthusiastic cops are closing the area bothering little about the government plans to promote night tourism here," he says.The gruesome videos of the killings in public and the police thrashing innocent daily wagers for moving on the

roads, appears to have created a sense of unease among the public."People in other parts of the city are presuming that there are night restrictions in the old city and not many are venturing here in the night. It is affecting the businesses here," complained Mohiuddin, a trader.The shops around Charminar in the past were opened until midnight while group of youngsters and couples, despite police patrolling used to hang around."People came here to celebrate birthdays, until a month ago. Now we don't find a single person coming here after 11.30 pm. Don't know what message the authorities want to send about old city to the people across the country," lamented Nooruddin, a hotel manager.Social activists feel the image of the old city is getting

dented due to over enthusiasm shown by the police department."In the past, old city was considered unsafe due to frequent communal violence. However, in the last ten years, things have changed and people from other parts of the city were noticed comfortably moving in and around the old city round the clock," said Mohd Akram, a social worker from Moghalpura adding that now with the restrictions, old city is becoming a 'no-visit' place for outsidersMeanwhile, a senior police official working in the south zone of Hyderabad said, the police were acting tough only to ensure safety and security of the citizens. "In

recent offences we noticed innocent people were targeted by criminals over small issues. We want people to remain in

their houses after midnight," said the official.

Delhi's place of pride in the gay rights movement in India

In the epic Mahabharata, most of which is set around what is considered to be the present-day National Capital Region of Delhi, we find one of the first references to a major transgender character in Indian mythology, Shikhandi, who was responsible for the death of Bhishma, the patriarch of the Kurus.Shikhandi was born as a daughter to the king of Kashi but was brought up as a boy. Different versions of the Mahabharata proffer different stories of Shikhandi's gender transformation, some like the Javanese version have him born as a male who later becomes a woman. The ancient epic seemingly shows more tolerance for transgenders than modern polity, despite all the social and technological progress that has been made over the last few centuries.

Section 377 was brought in 1861 when India was under British rule. This law itself was modelled on the Buggery Act of 1533 which was enacted by King Henry VIII, that banned anal intercourse with man or beast. The colonial-era law and Victorian morality instilled a rancid prejudice against transgenders, which gradually developed deep roots in both the Indian psyche and law.The first major legal challenge to this arcane and inhumane law was brought by the Naz Foundation in the Delhi High Court in December 2001. The Foundation demanded that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code be repealed completely and that homosexual intercourse between consenting adults be legalised.This led to outrage and protests by mainly right-wing groups who just a few years ago, in 1998, had violently opposed the screening of the movie, Fire, which was based on a 1942 Ismat Chugtai story ('Lihaf') that portrayed a romantic relationship between two women.

Naz had challenged Section 377 on the grounds of it being both unconstitutional and discriminatory. Indira Jaisingh, of Lawyers' Collective, who took up the case for Naz, said at the time, "We can't do advocacy amongst a section which is essentially criminal in the eye of the law. How do we recommend safe sex to prevent HIV-AIDs to people who are criminals in law?"In 2004, the Delhi High Court dismissed the Naz Foundation's petition stating that the NGO had no locus standi to file the petition. Undeterred, Naz went to the Supreme Court in 2006 and got a favourable verdict saying that it was their right to file a public interest case and directing the Delhi High Court to hear the case. In the same year, National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), which is a government organisation went to the Supreme Court for the legalisation of homosexuality.Delhi High Court took up the case in 2006. A two-judge bench of Justice A P Shah and Justice S Muralidhar categorically agreed with the contention that 377 violates the right to equality before law and equal opportunity for homosexuals. The verdict asked the government to amend 377 to decriminalise homosexuality.Eight years of legal battle ended with cries of joy and disbelief among gay activists and their allies across the country. But visceral opposition

soon followed on the streets, led by orthodox religious Hindu, Muslim and Christian leaders.The see-saw struggle for basic human dignity and legal rights was far from over. Petitions challenging the High Court's verdict were filed in the Supreme Court.In 2013, the Supreme Court reversed the gay rights movement's hard-won progress. A two-judge bench of Justice G S Singhvi and Justice S J Mukhopadhyay heard the contention of various religious and social organisations who argued that homosexuality is against India's cultural and religious values. The bench reversed the Delhi High Court verdict of 2009 and ruled that homosexuality is indeed a crime, and therefore Section 377 should be retained in the penal code.Among those who opposed decriminalisation were the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Raza Academy, yoga guru Ramdev's follower S K Tijarawala and astrologer Suresh Kumar Kaushal.The Supreme Court justices also stated that a "minuscule fraction of the country's population constitutes LGBT".

Once again, the gay rights movement was back to where it had started in 2001. In 2016, several prominent Delhi citizens including classical Indian dancer Navtej Singh Johar, hotelier Aman Nath, and journalist Sunil Mehra among others went back to the Supreme Court.Their petition stated that Section 377 violates their and others' rights to "sexuality, sexual autonomy, choice of sexual partner, life, privacy, dignity, and equality along with the other fundamental rights enshrined under the constitution".On 6 September 2018, gay rights in India received a further and hopefully final win, when a larger Supreme Court bench of five judges which included the present Chief Justice of India, D Y Chandrachud, decriminalised homosexual intercourse between consenting adults. This was a partial striking down of Section

377 as the Supreme Court upheld those provisions under 377 that pertain to non-consensual acts and sexual acts with animals.Six years since that day, the gay rights community has remained cautious. In 2023, according to media reports the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs recommended Section 377 be reinstated and homosexuality be recriminalised.It is in a way fitting that the legal struggle for gay rights has played out most prominently in Delhi, a city that is dotted with many monuments and shrines revered by the transgender and queer community. The Jamali-Kamali tomb abuts the

eponymous mosque in Mehrauli and is believed to be the final resting place of a 16th-century poet Shaikh Fazlullah (Jamali) and his lover Kamali, who is believed to have been queer.Another revered shrine among the queer community is the Hijron Ka Khanqah, a 15th-century complex of 49 tombs all believed to be of Eunuchs who lived and thrived during the reign of the Lodi dynasty.HistoriCity is a column by author Valay Singh that narrates the story of a city that is in the news, by going back to its documented history, mythology and archaeological digs. The views expressed are personal

A 20th Anniversary edition 21 years on

Hyderabad: Writing about Beyond Good and Evil's just released 20th anniversary edition without addressing the two elephants in the room is impossible.The first is the endless wait for a successor to the cult classic—announced in 2008 and then again at E3 in 2017. However, 16 years on, we are still patiently waiting. The second is the sudden and unexpected availability of the 20th-anniversary edition on Ubisoft+ last November, allowing a few players to experience the game. A few months later, however, here is the review of a game that promises quality of life upgrades and a new mission that establishes a narrative link to the sequel.In my first few hours with the game, I absolutely relished what this second remaster offered (the first in June 2011)—a 4K experience that preserved the aesthetic style of the original and a thorough remapping of the original game's controls onto modern controllers.I

found the experience so simple and seamless that I was soon off repairing my hovercraft and firing my guns at serpents from space that unleashed sea-mines. The experience here was just as garish and crazy as I remember it from 2003.Despite the simple combat and the aging game mechanics, there is a lot here to explore and enjoy. You can find hidden paths or admire the game's unique flora and fauna with your trusty old camera.The 20th anniversary edition promises a few quality-of-life upgrades, which I was most looking forward to trying but ultimately found a bit disappointing. For a remaster marking a game's 20th anniversary, there could have been more effort. For example, the loading screens could have been eliminated, given the SSDs and higher memory capacities in modern consoles.Additionally, the game's inputs could have better utilized the features of modern controllers.

What we do in the shallows: Inside the mad dash to save coral reefs around the world

As of last month, those sounds have quieted further. More than two-thirds of the world's coral reef areas experienced bleaching-level heat stress over the past year, according to data from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).In April, NOAA announced that the fourth global coral-bleaching event on record — and the second in a decade — is underway. This means that bleaching has occurred, or is occurring, in all the ocean basins that support warm-water coral life, in both hemispheres.Drone footage of Australia's Lizard Island indicates that about 97% of corals have died over the past three months. In India, NOAA has issued a red alert for the Gulf of Mannar, indicating a high likelihood of mass coral mortality. Marine heatwaves in the Lakshadweep Sea since October have destroyed reefs there.An estimated 99% of all existing reefs will die out as the planet reaches and breaches 2 degrees Celsius of warming, likely by 2100. (The planet is currently, on average, about 1.2 degrees Celsius warmer than the pre-industrial levels of the 1850s.)Given that warming will likely intensify, at least in the short term, what is the outlook, and why does it matter?First, the outlook. Coral won't go extinct, oceanographers say; some species will die out and others will step in, so most reefs will look very different, as temperatures rise.Why? Well, corals are unusual animals. They are hard (like rocks) and live rooted to the ground (like plants). But they spawn to reproduce, as animals do; and like other animals, cannot produce their own food.Coral polyps get their nutrition (and their colour) from microscopic algae called zooxanthellae that live in their tissues. Changes in seawater temperature, light or nutrients can cause the algae to release toxic chemicals, forcing the corals to expel them. This leaves the polyps translucent, starving and vulnerable to disease.As temperatures rise, corals may be replaced by algae in some regions. In others, more weedy species may persist, says Ian Enochs, head of a coral research programme at NOAA's Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory. "These species don't create the same complex habitats that reef-building corals do, and so they don't support all the biodiversity and ecosystem services that a healthy reef provides."Reefs may shift into deeper waters, adds Alexander Neufeld, science programme manager at the Florida-based non-profit Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF). "Or we may see new kinds of reefs on which corals continue to exist but where they are no longer the foundational keystone species."

Why does this matter?

Coral reefs are often called the rainforests of the sea. They support large swathes of oceanic ecosystem.An estimated 25% of all marine species intersect with such reefs at some point in their lifecycle, says Derek Manzello, coordinator of the NOAA online research initiative and resource Coral Reef Watch.They also act as a natural barrier, protecting coastlines from erosive waves and violent storms. This protection helps other vital habitats, such as seagrass beds and man-grove ecosystems, flourish. These, incidentally, are carbon sinks, which means that their well-being has implications for far larger ecosystems too.Meanwhile, many of the fish that such reefs support are filter-feeders, consuming particulate matter and other pollutants and keeping seawater clean or feeding on corals and excreting fine grains of biogenic sand that make up seafloors and beaches.Any disturbance that kills enough corals forces reefs into a net erosional state, which means the architecturally complex reef structure gets broken down, sometimes quickly, says Manzello. "Reefs will soon be flatter and less topographically complex, which has serious ramifications for local biodiversity."A flattened reef will provide considerably less coastal protection from storms too.For now, there is some good news.Dramatic new efforts are underway, to keep reefs from fading or flattening. The new efforts include a form of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) in which reproduction is boosted and monitored. There are experiments underway with coral "gyms" and nurseries, and evacuation efforts that include keeping some specimens safe on land, in tanks, for a time, and later restoring them to hospitable zones in the sea.Eventually, though, the primary driver of large-scale coral reef decline must be addressed, "and that is climate change and ocean warming," says Manzello.More needs to be done in India, adds Mridula Ramesh, founder of the Sundaram Climate Institute and author of The Climate Solution. "While the coral-climate story is grim, we can't blame everything on climate change alone. Preventing effluents from being dumped into sensitive waters and promoting sustainable fishing practices are immediate practises that can help and need greater attention."Manzello agrees. "To give corals the best possible chance, we need to reduce every other stressor that we can control."How can you help? If you'd like to be more involved, the NGOs ReefWatch and Coastal Impact invite citizens to pitch in, and CRF and NOAA offer volunteering opportunities in India too.It was like a massacre. In the summer of 2023, the Sombrero Reef was almost obliterated, when sea surface temperatures — which usually hover between 23 and 29 degrees Celsius in the string of islands that make up the Florida Keys — shot up to 32.5 degrees Celsius.The non-profit Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF) watched as the protected site they had been working to restore for a decade, was lost.Desperate, they began to rescue still-living corals from the nearby waters of the Upper and Lower Keys. Working with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and with other non-profit groups, thousands of survivor colonies were lifted out of the warming ocean and moved to temperature-controlled tanks, where they stayed until their home was habitable again.When temperatures dropped in October, the evacuated corals were relocated to the sea. This helped preserve at least some of the region's genetic diversity.This was the first such rescue effort, but CRF has successfully rehabilitated corals over and over within the ocean, over the past decade. Small bits nurtured in "nurseries" are reattached to parent reefs, to keep the latter from fading.The "nurseries" are made up of vertical structures called coral trees that stand in the sea. Here, fragments are exposed to 360-degree sunlight and high nutrient loads. In six months, a fragment the size of a finger can grow to the size of a football.Each attempt at rehabilitation gives the scientists more metrics to test: Can they make the corals more resistant to heat; boost their immunity to certain diseases?But all the "sciencing" is merely a stopgap, says Alexander Neufeld, science programme manager at CRF. "What we need is for pollution and climate changes to be curbed, for long-lasting impact." That said, Neufeld adds, "there are more corals on the reefs in Florida today than there would have been if we had spent the last 20 years doing nothing."One of the ways to make reefs more heat-resistant is to breed more heat-resistant algae.After all, it is the algae that respond to the temperature, releasing toxic chemicals that cause the polyps to expel them. Without the algae, the corals then lose their colour, and their source of nutrition (like all animals, they cannot make their own food).Previous attempts to breed heat-resistant algae have failed. But, in 2012, researchers at the Australian Institute of Marine Science decided to give it a fresh shot.They evolved 10 clonal strains of a common coral microalgae, over four years, in a laboratory, with the key focus being resilience to high temperatures. Findings published in journals such as Science Advances in 2020 showed some of these species proved beneficial to keeping corals alive in temperatures as high as 31 degrees Celsius (most corals begin to bleach if sea surface temperatures stay at 31 degrees Celsius for more than three to four weeks)."This is really promising, and could be combined with other interventions," says lead researcher Patrick Buerger, who now heads an applied-biosciences lab at Macquarie University.There's still a lot to learn about the survival of these experi-mental strains in the wild, he adds. Will there be trade-offs in terms of nutrient production, coral growth, reproductive output or disease susceptibility? Can the process of experimental evolution be sped up further? For now, though, he repeats, it is a step in the right direction.It was a mesmerising sight at Australia's Great Barrier Reef that spurred marine biologist Peter Harrison into action, in 1981. During a night excursion there, he saw trillions of microscopic eggs and sperm being released by multiple coral species in a mass spawning event.Most of the eggs and sperm would become fish food, he knew. And that gave him an idea: Could spawn from one healthy, hardy reef be collected, saved and used to rejuvenate it and others?The procedure has since come to be called coral in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) or larval restoration. The spawn of heat-tolerant specimens that have survived bleaching are captured and used to rear larvae in special floating reef pools on the surface of the ocean. The larvae are then transplanted onto degraded sections of a reef, so they can replenish them.Since 2012, this method has been successfully used in areas where reefs have been degraded by blast fishing (where explosives are used to stun or kill fish) in the Philippines. More recently, it was used on the Great Barrier Reef and in the Maldives."The restored populations have a higher chance of surviving future changes," says Harrison, founding director of the Marine Ecology Research Centre at Southern Cross University, Australia. This method is also expected to prove helpful as populations dwindle, leaving fewer of a species to reproduce.At the Experimental Reef Lab (ERL) at the University of Miami, corals are on a unique fitness journey.Researchers have built 16 large tanks that mirror certain projected ocean conditions, such as changes in acidity levels, temperature and light. Within these tanks, they then conduct experiments on different species, with the aim of monitoring their response and finding ways to boost immunity and resilience.

The race to save India's coral reefs

The wildlife biologist has been posted in Lakshadweep since 2020. Diving to study reef conditions is part of his job as a research assistant with the NGO Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF)."Every single colony across the 2,000-sq-metre Goniopora patch perished as I watched," he says. "I saw the tissue sloughing off the skeletons, and algae smothering the remains."India has five major reef structures along its coasts: at the Gulf of Mannar in Tamil Nadu, the Gulf of Kutch in Gujarat, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Malvan coast of Maharashtra and parts of Goa, and Lakshadweep. They were under immense strain even before the recent heat waves and mass-bleaching events.Illegal harvesting once posed a major threat and so, as with tigers and elephants, corals are protected in India under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. They cannot be harvested, bought or sold.Other stressors emerged, in the form of marine pollution from effluents and oil, bottom-trawling (using towed nets to catch fish close to the seabed), blast-fishing, reef-fish harvesting, and steady infrastructural development along the shoreline. Now, the heat is stepping up threat levels.

Heat-wave durations in the Indian Ocean are expected to grow from about 20 days a year (between 1970 and 2000) to about 220 days a year by the end of the century, according to data from scientists with the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) and National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), among others.Efforts to preserve the Indian reefs have largely consisted of restoration programmes in which coral fragments are moved to pro-

tected underwater "nurseries" or to artificial reefs. But most of these efforts have focused on the dominant family of reef-building coral species called Acropora. They grow and calcify the fastest. But they are extremely sensitive to temperature.This means that, as temperatures rise, India's artificial reefs can be expected to bleach and die too.

NCF is monitoring bleaching sites and will be using the data gathered to identify refugia: areas that will be most hospitable to coral, as ocean temperatures rise. "These reef refugia may either remain cooler during the bleaching events, through upwells from cooler deep waters or local current systems, or the coral there may have evolved to deal with the high temperatures," Pinto says.Already, this kind of evolution is altering how reefs look.In Lakshadweep, colonies of Acropora are being replaced by the more heat-resistant Porites family. Species like Porites are expected to become more dominant, as the intervals between bleaching events shrink.The algae that inhabit coral tissue, giving them their colour and their nutrition, are changing too. Corals in Lakshadweep are increasingly hosting Clade D, a more resilient zooxanthella found in abundance in the Gulf of Kutch.That gulf could provide more clues to the way forward."The marine fauna here are exposed to high surface temperatures during low tide for a long time, and research on how they have adapted could help map the way forward," says Deepak Apte, a marine biologist and director of the not-for-profit Srushti Conservation Foundation.What we urgently need is a holistic canvas of comparative data from

the various reefs in India, he adds. "Data is currently scattered across various institutes. We need a centralised pool so we can determine, together, how to carry out restoration efforts more efficiently."A rainforest without its treIt's important to act soon, the researchers agree. These marine ecosystems, without the corals, will be the equivalent of a forest without trees.Exposed sites like coral atolls will face the worst impacts. These are coral reefs that have essentially isolated a stretch of saltwater from the sea, and become completely exposed at low tide. The Lakshadweep archipelago is home to 12

such atolls."The islanders who live there are dependent on the reef for protection from storm surges and cyclones, for fishing and for tourism. The death of these reefs could eventually make these islands uninhabitable," Pinto says.Planning the next phase scientifically will be vital, Apte adds. "We can try new methods, but they should not end up like our tree-planting drives, which are not always planned or executed scientifically."Meanwhile, the hope is that global efforts will slow the overall warming. Which still wouldn't save the reefs, Pinto says, but would give us more time to work something out.

5 Reasons Why Crossovers are Perfect Commuters for Indian Roads

India's bustling urban landscapes and diverse road conditions demand vehicles that can effortlessly navigate through the daily hustle and bustle. Crossovers, combining elements of SUVs and sedans, embody the best features of both vehicle types. Beneath their stylish exteriors lies a suspension system specifically designed for crossovers, enhancing handling and providing a smoother ride. This makes crossovers an ideal choice for Indian roads due to their blend of practicality, space, comfort, and style. Here are five compelling reasons why crossovers are perfect for Indian roads.

1. Improved Ride and Handling Characteristics

Crossovers are built on car platforms rather than traditional SUV frameworks, which significantly enhances their ride and handling characteristics. Passengers enjoy a smoother and more comfortable ride compared to larger SUVs. Additionally, their lower center of gravity makes them more stable and easier to drive, ensuring a pleasant commuting experience on both highways and city streets.

2. Easy Manoeuvring

Navigating through India's narrow and congested streets can be challenging, but

crossovers excel in this aspect. Their appropriate size allows them to manoeuvre through smaller spaces with ease, making tight turns and parking in cramped areas a breeze. This agility translates to reduced stress for drivers and a more efficient daily commute.

3. Vibrant & Fresh Styling with More Interior Space

Crossovers boast modern and stylish exteriors that appeal to a wide range of consumers. They offer generous interior space, providing ample legroom and headroom for passengers. This combination of stylish design and spacious interiors makes crossovers an attractive option for families and individuals alike.

4. Improved Efficiency and Range

Fuel efficiency is a crucial consideration for commuters, and crossovers tend to outperform traditional SUVs in this regard. Many crossovers feature advanced engine technologies and lightweight materials that enhance fuel economy without compromising performance. This improved efficiency translates to long distance commutes on a single tank of fuel or superior range if built on pure EV platforms, reducing the frequency of refuelling stops, frequent charging, and overall commuting

costs.

5. Competitive Pricing

Crossovers offer an excellent balance between cost and features, making them a cost-effective choice for many buyers. They provide many of the benefits of larger SUVs—such as higher ground clearance and a commanding driving position—without the associated high price tag. This competitive pricing makes crossovers accessible to a broader audience, including

young professionals and families looking for a versatile and budget-friendly vehicle.Crossovers are perfectly suited for the unique demands of Indian roads. Their combination of comfort, manoeuvrability, stylish design, efficiency, and affordability makes them an ideal choice for daily commuters. Whether you're navigating crowded city streets or embarking on a weekend getaway, a crossover provides the versatility and reliability you need for every journey.

India proud to win T20 world Cup 2024 trophy: Sreesanth

As India lifts the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 trophy, Sreesanth says "As we lift the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 trophy, I am overwhelmed with pride for Team India. Our journey in this tournament has been nothing short of extraordinary, filled with grit, resilience, and moments that will be etched in history. This victory is a testament to the hard work and dedication of every player, coach, and support staff in-

volved. I want to thank our fans whose unwavering support fueled our determination on the field. It's a privilege to lead such a talented group of individuals who have shown immense character and skill throughout. This win is not just for us but for every Indian cricket lover who shares our passion and belief. Let's celebrate this triumph and look forward to more successes in the future."

Read an exclusive excerpt from Amal Allana's book on her father, Ebrahim Alkazi

Massive crowds were converging from all directions onto the Opera House intersection, where the bus had eventually been stalled—from Chowpatty, from Charni Road, from Grant Road. The sea of humanity narrowed itself into a rope-like stream and made its way over French Bridge. Caught up in the frenzy of the moment, he joined in, shouting slogans: 'Boycott British Goods!' Suddenly, there was a surge in the movement of the massive crowd. Screams rent the air as the crowd turned back in an attempt to flee in the opposite direction. It was not clear why. British Tommies appeared out of the mist, many of them on horseback. Menacingly, one of them galloped in Ebrahim's direction. Trying to get out of the way of the officer's swaying truncheon, Ebrahim stumbled and fell, hitting his head on the sidewalk, his debate papers scattering in all directions.

A few passersby rushed forward to help him up. 'He's bleeding!' said someone. Incensed, a Parsi gentleman in a pheta screamed after the officer, 'Go home! Ghere jao, mother fuckers! Suna tumne, we want Home Rule!' Then, turning to Ebrahim, he dabbed the wound with his kerchief and began tying it like a bandage across his forehead. "Don't worry! Not a deep wound, Dikra! Aisa hota hai . . . Azadi ke leye, buddha, baccha, sab ko khoon bahana padta hai! Shaheed hona padta hai! Aaj tumhari baari thi! Aaj tum asli desh bhakt ho! Jao! Mummy Daddy ko dikhao! Woh itna khush hone wale hai!' (Son, such incidents happen! In order to win freedom, young and old alike must be prepared to shed their blood! Become martyrs! Today, it was your turn! From today onwards, you will be counted as a true patriot! Go! Show your wounds to your parents! They will be proud of you!)Ebrahim swelled with pride. For the first time, he was mistaken for a Hindustani, not a Parsi or a Jew! He was thrilled! 'Thank you, Uncle, thank you!' stuttered Ebrahim, overcome with emotion. Forgetting his head injury, he was at once energized and forged ahead.For the first time, the thought momentarily flashed through his mind—how desperately he wanted to belong, to feel part of a larger movement, a cause like this one! The cosy comfort and pristine world of contentment that his family had always provided him with had indeed given him a sense of security, but he had always sensed that they lived isolated lives. As children, they were constantly reminded not to mingle, not to participate in any kind of politics… because that would implicate them and complicate their lives. Ebrahim had never really been able to understand what exactly it was that they should fear. Yes, he did remember the great transformation that took place while they were in school after World War II began in 1939. Many of the Jesuit priests at St Vincent's High School were foreigners—Italian, American, Swiss and German. All of a sudden, one day, the German priests were picked up and taken off to internment camps! As children, they had watched this happen with almost a sense of bereavement and, of course, fear.

But today, at Gowalia Tank, people's spirits were uplifted, they appeared undaunted. Their multiple voices merged into a full-throated, unified and defiant call! Ebrahim was elated, his spirits buoyed. He had lost track of time. What time was it? He looked in vain for his wristwatch, but it was gone! It must have been snitched in the chaos. It was long past the time for the debate, long past the time he was to meet Fr Duhr at Xaviers'. After hectically trying to find a way out of this avalanche of humanity, he finally succumbed, allowing himself to fully experience these glorious moments, where it was not about him but something much, much larger, something beyond himself or his immediate family.And then miraculously, through the mist of white clothing, there in the distance, sitting calmly on the dais, was the iconic Mahatma Gandhi—sacred, still, silent, composed. He was carefully spinning his charkha (wheel) with complete focus, unperturbed by the commotion around. No one disturbed him from his sadhana, the spinning wheel creating the movement of life, yet steady on its fulcrum. Ebrahim was quite close now and totally transfixed. The sea of white around the Mahatma was like a shining light, a halo—pure and undiluted. Aruna Asaf Ali sat quietly to one side, not betraying her steely determination to make today's rally a meaningful event in their journey towards freedom.The microphone was tapped and the Mahatma was asked to address the gathering. The raucousness and sloganeering died down and a hush descended over the entire maidan.'My brothers and sisters', Gandhiji began, 'Occasions like the present one do not occur in everybody's, and but rarely in anybody's, life. I want you to know and feel that there is nothing but the purest ahimsa in all that I am saying and doing today. The Draft Resolution of the Working Committee is based on ahimsa, the contemplated struggle similarly has its roots in ahimsa. If, therefore, there is anyone among you who has lost faith in ahimsa or is weary of it, let him not vote for this resolution.'The crowd responded that they were 100 per cent with him. He continued, 'Ours is not a drive for power but purely a non-violent fight for India's independence. In a violent struggle, a successful general has often been known to effect a military coup and set up a dictatorship. But under the Congress scheme of things, essentially non-violent as it is, there can be no room for dictatorship… The Congress is unconcerned as to who will rule when freedom is attained. The power, when it comes, will belong to the people of India, and it will be for them to decide in whom they will place their trust.'It may be the reins will be placed in the hands of the Parsis, for instance, as I would love to see happen—or they may be handed to some others whose names are not heard of in the Congress today… Ever since its inception, the Congress has kept itself meticulously free of communal taint. It has thought always in terms of the whole nation and has acted accordingly…

'I believe that in the history of the world, there has not been a more genuinely democratic struggle for freedom than ours. I read Thoma Carlyle's book, The French Revolution, while I was in prison and Pandit Jawaharlal has told me something about the Russian Revolution. But it is my conviction that, inasmuch as these struggles were fought with the weapon of violence, they failed to realize the democratic ideal. In the democracy that I have envisaged, a democracy established by non-violence, there will be equal freedom for all. Everybody will be their own master. It is to join a struggle for such a democracy that I invite you today. Once you realize this, you will forget the differences between the Hindus and Muslims and only think of yourselves as Indians, engaged in the common struggle for independence.'Gandhi's stirring speech continued in this vein. In conclusion, he said, 'There is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You should imprint it on your heart and let every breath of yours give an expression to it. The mantra is "Do or Die".' The crowd was ecstatic… 'Do or Die! Do or Die!' they chanted in unison… surging towards the stage… 'From now on, there are only two words to offer by way of resistance,' said Gandhiji. 'Quit India!'By now, it was past midnight, and, the entire Congress, to the man, returned to headquarters and passed the famous 'Quit India' Resolution. The young Aruna Asaf Ali remained at the site. Unknown to the others, she hoisted the Congress flag, marking the commencement of the nationwide mass movement. The crowd went berserk, as this was the first time the Indian tricolour was being hoisted. Lathi charge was used by the police to disperse the crowds. The crowd refused to budge. Finally, the police began firing tear gas at the assembly. The national flag was pulled down and volunteers who went to its rescue were beaten off mercilessly.Ebrahim was shaken to the core. Each word Gandhiji had uttered was imprinted in his consciousness. They were so simple, so effective so unpretentious, spoken without any histrionics because truth, he realized, did not require a loud or strident voice. And it was so magical—the manner in which Gandhiji was able to reach out to each and every person in that huge audience. He not only captured their imagination, but more importantly, encouraged them to take action—not just passively applaud him but use their energies positively to transform ideas into words and words into actions.Isn't that what was meant to happen in theatre too? Theatre was the field he felt more and more drawn to. It was a field where one could make a difference, where one could directly affect the lives of others and bring people together. That certainly appeared to be the need of the hour. The films he had begun to watch were also filled with a sense of purpose, a spiritof sacrifice and of serving one's country. He had read about the selfless work of missionaries in remote parts of Africa with much interest! For Ebrahim, these were examples of what it meant to serve a community—to devote oneself with passion and a tremendous feeling of commitment so that the society around you benefited from your presence, your knowledge, your expertise. On the one hand, there were these stirrings of the Independence movement taking place, while on the other, there was this kind of idealism, all of which made Bombay such an exhilarating place to be in!With such thoughts crowding his mind, Ebrahim made his way back home, walking through streets that were emptied out by now. There was a lightness in his step—he felt he was shedding his old life and was being nourished, not by the ideals and ideas of his parents and teachers, but directly by participating through his own experiences.

T20 World Cup 2024 | Hardik Pandya exorcises his demons at last

It has to go down as one of the moments of the T20 World Cup. It actually came after the final ball had been delivered, after victory had been snatched (by India) and defeat courted (by South Africa). It transpired after tears were shed, after hugs and high fives were exchanged, after the shock of a heist was slowly replaced by the euphoria of being crowned World champions.It's not an uncommon sight, especially in football. Generally, it happens when a player has scored a crucial goal – a scything run through the defence, or an equaliser at a vital time – or when the goalkeeper has pulled off a spectacular save, close-range or off a penalty kick. In cricket, not so much. In Indian cricket, almost unheard of.We are referring, of course, to the kiss Rohit Sharma planted on Hardik Pandya's cheek, not long after the latter had expertly closed out the final over of the T20 World Cup final at the Kensington Oval. In itself, it was huge, the ultimate show of thanksgiving and affection from the captain to his deputy. The subtext which preceded it lent it greater meaning and import; if Hardik hadn't already traversed the spectrum from Villain No. 1 to an unquestioned hero after his death-over heroics, he was now back in public favour. Thanks in no small measure to his wonderful captain.Electric undercurrentsThings have been a little tense beyond the ambit of the Indian dressing room for about six months now, since Hardik supplanted Rohit as the captain of the Mumbai Indians franchise ahead of IPL 2024. It wasn't a popular move, it didn't go down well with the numerous fans of either MI or Gujarat Titans, who Hardik led with aplomb for two years, or of Rohit, affable and well-liked and with five IPL titles under his belt as captain.Rohit had taken over the captaincy of the franchise from Ricky Ponting in the middle of a stuttering 2013 campaign, and immediately turned his team's fortunes around by leading them to the title that same year. That sparked a remarkable run of successes in 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020, when Rohit became the only captain after Mahendra Singh Dhoni to successfully defend the IPL title. Tactically astute and blessed with exceptional man-management and leadership skills, Rohit was the peoples' captain.It wasn't so much the fact that MI snatched away the captaincy from Rohit than how they did it that rankled the fans. If Rohit was party to that momentous decision, it hasn't wended its way into public consciousness. MI had sound reasons to look beyond Rohit, also the Indian cross-format captain at the time who had just played a stellar individual role in his side's march to the 50-over World Cup final at home. After all, they had the future to consider, and a mega auction was due ahead of the 2025 season. In Hardik, a prodigal son who had steered GT to the title in their maiden appearance and taken them to the final the following year, MI saw the perfect candidate to step into Rohit's shoes. Hardik is both an excellent captain and a brand on his own, so it made cricketing and marketing sense to rope him in. The problem is, no one seemed to have told Rohit that.Hardik had a terrible IPL. Terrible cricket-wise – 216 runs from 14 innings, highest of 46, and 11 wickets at an economy of 10.75 – but otherwise too. His team stumbled from one defeat to another, bringing up the foot of the table with just four wins from 14 outings. At various times, it looked like a disjointed bunch of individuals, though Rohit was nothing if not the consummate team man.The deposal must have stung, especially because it came without warning, but he put that disappointment aside to finish with 417 runs at a strike-rate of 150, his highest in 17 years of the tournament. Often banished to the outfield, his tactical inputs were minimal to none, but even he wouldn't have been unmoved by the fury unleashed on Hardik across the country.

When he returned to Ahmedabad as MI skipper, the all-rounder was roundly booed. It was initially construed as franchise-loyalty finding resonance; after all, their captain of the two previous seasons had made a deal with the 'enemy'. But as MI went to Hyderabad and Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata, the boos just wouldn't stop. Most damagingly, Hardik was greeted with jeers in his own backyard, at the Wankhede Stadium, where MI would play seven home games. Sanjay Manjrekar once chided the Mumbai fans, asking them to 'behave' themselves, but they were having none of it. With reason or without, Hardik was installed as the culprit, the main reason for Rohit's ouster. It wasn't a good look on anyone.Through it all, Hardik put on a brave face. By nature, he is effervescent and ebullient, full of life and vigour and vim. Sometimes, he treads the line between carefree and careless dangerously, but his sunny disposition is not a put-on. He must have seriously been hurt by what he felt was unfair treatment, but through it all, he maintained a studied silence while remaining outwardly cheerful and breezy. Only he must have known what he was going through, seemingly isolated from the larger, experienced bunch and living a nightmare all by himself

The dynamics were further addled by the fact that he would be Rohit's deputy at the T20 World Cup. How would this work out? Would there be residual tension, if not outright bad blood? How would Rohit handle Hardik? How would Hardik react to playing under someone for the country whom he had captained at his franchise? Would that impact India's campaign?Fact is, Rohit and Pandya have been around long enough, the former far longer than the latter, to be working at cross purposes. In a way, they both had been put in impossible situations by their franchise, but when it came to India, that was a closed chapter. There was unfinished business to tend to, a World Cup to win. Rohit isn't the vindictive, grudge-carrying kind; he is a giver, as his teammates will readily attest, and he gave Pandya space. Confidence. Belief. Respect. He gave him freedom, and he gave him responsibility. And look at how Pandya repaid the faith.Rohit used Hardik superbly at the World Cup, holding him back till the last few overs when the right-hander could bat with undiluted freedom. He summoned his heavy medium-pace at key moments, realising that the latter's smarts, intelligence and skills could be handy at different stages of an innings depending on the pitch, the opponents, the pressure being imposed by the other bowlers. In both their corners was a solid older brother-like presence, someone who has had first-hand experience of being sucked into a battle of someone else's making. Rahul Dravid's calming, stabilising, erudite presence comprehensively scuttled even rumours of a dressing room divided.Hardik responded to being the vice-captain with aplomb. He took a little while to work his way into the tournament, but once he found his feet, he performed like the pivotal cog in the wheel he was always going to be. At No. 5 and 6, he was the buffer between the top-order and his fellow all-rounders, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja; as the third or fourth pacer, he could slip in overs unnoticed while always posing a wicket-taking threat because he has great faith in his short ball.To no one's surprise, Hardik boasted the highest average by an Indian, 48.00, aided by three not outs in six innings. His strike-rate of 151.57 was second only to Rohit's 156.70 of all batters who faced at least 25 balls. He also finished with 11 wickets – behind Arshdeep Singh and Jasprit Bumrah – and his economy of 7.64 was impressive, any which way one looked at it.Changing their perceptionTo say that he sang the redemption song during the exciting climax of the final against South Africa will be a touch unfair because Hardik didn't need to redeem himself; he had done nothing to put himself in that position. But with his last two overs of the World Cup, the 17th and 20th of South Africa's chase, Hardik forced the fans to change their perception. Not by design, because that's not why he plays the game, but through his performances.

Study finds gene mutation that turns familiar faces into strangers

A simple joy, often taken for granted, is to unexpectedly run into a friend or a relative at a train station or market. Recognising a familiar face in an unfamiliar context or crowded place gives most of us unalloyed pleasure.We should give thanks to our MCTP2 gene for this ability. According to research published in this month's issue of the journal Genetics, by researchers led by Ye Rao of Capital Medical University, Beijing, when this gene is mutated the ability to recognise faces is severely impaired.

Individuals with the misfortune of carrying the mutant gene took much longer than is socially acceptable to recognise people with whom they were expected to be familiar — such as spouses, siblings, and children — while they confused strangers with familiar people.This disorder is called prosopagnosia, or face blindness. Its prevalence worldwide is estimated to be 1.8-2.9% in the general population. Prosopagnosia is one form of visual agnosia, or inability to identify everyday items just by looking at them.The MCTP2 gene is thus the first found to be required for a higher form of visual social cognition in humans.Face recognition and a geneThe researchers identified a family of 35 individuals spread across three generations. The members of its eldest generation were all older than 60 years. Nine members of the family had daily problems with recognising faces. They also performed very poorly on a standardised face recognition test. Another nine performed normally in the tests, yet they too had difficulty recognising faces.

The remaining 17 — including nine who married into the family — performed normally in the tests and had no difficulty recognising faces.By charting the family tree, the researchers inferred that a great-grandparent of the eldest generation must have carried the mutation. The eldest members then passed on the mutation to their affected children and grandchildren.Examining the genome of the affected family members revealed they had all inherited the same genome segment in one copy of their chromosome no. 15. Recall that we inherit two copies of each chromosome, one from each parent, and in this way each one of us possesses 23 pairs of chromosomes.By sequencing the genomic DNA, the researchers found that the MCTP2 gene, located in this segment, had been altered by a mutation. As a result, one amino acid in the protein encoded by the MCTP2 gene had been replaced by another. The researchers didn't find this mutation in any of the hundreds of thousands of human genome sequences stored on different databases.That is, the mutation was novel and private to this family.Validation from population studiesBut how did the researchers conclude that face blindness was caused by precisely this mutation, and not by some other mutation in the candidate genome segment?They came to their conclusion on the basis of a population screen. The researchers recruited a cohort of 2,904 individuals (743 male and 2161 female, all around 19 years of age) to answer an online questionnaire. The questionnaire incorporated elements of the face recognition test. Seventy-eight individuals scored very poorly: that is, their scores deviated by two standard deviations or more from the average score.The researchers sequenced the genome of 75 of the poor scorers and found seven of them carried one of five other sequence alterations in the MCTP2 gene. This demonstrated that unrelated individuals who performed very poorly in face recognition tests were more likely to carry independent mutations in the MCTP2 gene compared to the general population.Additionally, the team found that the individuals' first-degree relatives, such as a parent, a child or a sibling, who shared their mutation also shared the facial recognition impairment.These findings implicated the MCTP2 gene in face recognition.

As for the 68 others who did poorly on the test but had non-mutated MCTP2 genes: some of them might have had mutations in yet other genes for face recognition. Others might have suffered face recognition problems because of infection or injury. And still others might indeed have been false positives.A questionnaire-based screen is unlikely to have been 100% specific for identifying individuals with face recognition deficits; for extraneous reasons, even 'normal' face recognisers might perform poorly on a questionnaire.In the brain, the right middle fusiform gyrus, a.k.a. the fusiform face area (rFFA), is activated during facial recognition. When the researchers used functional magnetic resonance imaging to study individuals carrying the different MCTP2 mutations, they found abnormal responses in the rFFA.When a glove becomes a puzzleIt is perplexing for most of us to imagine what it is to live with a visual agnosia. In his bestselling 1985 book 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat', the gifted neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks (1933-2015) recounted case histories of some of his patients. Dr P. was a distinguished musician and teacher, and had a visual agnosia caused by a tumour in the brain.When Dr P. was offered a glove and asked what it was, he described it as "a continuous surface infolded on itself,

(with) five outpouchings…" He imagined it to be a change purse for coins. When asked to put on his shoe, he was unable to tell his foot from his shoe. He mistook water hydrants and parking metres on the street for children and patted them on the head. And he mistook his wife for a hat.Baffled, Dr. Sacks wondered how a man such as this could function as a teacher at the Music School. Yet Dr P. taught music until the last days of his life.With the discovery of MCTP2's role, our helpless bewilderment regarding visual agnosia should give way to our first molecular glimpse of what actually might be happening in the troubled brain. Both Dr. Sacks and Dr P. would have been pleased with this progress.

India joins citizen astronaut program with SERA and Blue Origin

New Delhi: In a bid to democratise space, US-based Space Exploration and Research Agency (SERA) and Blue Origin on Monday announced India as a partner nation in their human spaceflight programme.SERA will offer citizens from India a seat on Blue Origin's future mission of reusable rocket New Shepard on an 11-minute journey past the Karman line (100 km), the internationally-recognised boundary of space.

Indian citizens will be part of the six seats that together SERA and Blue Origin aim to offer to people from countries that have sent few or no citizen astronauts to space.The astronauts will experience several minutes of weightlessness before making a controlled descent back to the landing pad."We're excited to have India as part of our human spaceflight programme," said Joshua Skurla, Co-Founder, of SERA.

While lauding India for "becoming the first country to reach the Moon's South Pole", he said the company aims "to make space accessible for everyone and is happy to offer this unique opportunity to an Indian citizen who wants to experience the wonders of space travel."Any Indian citizen can register for the programme by paying a fee of about $2.50 to cover the costs of verification checks that ensure safe and

fair voting.The final candidates will be voted for by the public — based on their story which they can promote via their mission profile pages, social media, and other resources — for an opportunity to fly to space onboard the New Shepard mission.

Should education be brought back to the State list? | Explained

The story so far: The NEET-UG exam has been embroiled in controversies over the award of grace marks, allegation of paper leaks and other irregularities. The government also cancelled the UGC-NET exam after it was held, while the CSIR-NET and NEET-PG exams have been postponed.

What is the historical background?

The Government of India Act, 1935 during the British rule created a federal structure for the first time in our polity. The legislative subjects were distributed between the federal legislature (present day Union) and provinces (present day States). Education which is an important public good was kept under the provincial list. After independence, this continued and education was part of the 'State list' under the distribution of powers.However, during the Emergency, the Congress party constituted the Swaran Singh Committee to provide recommendations for amendments to the Constitution. One of the recommendations of this committee was to place 'education' in the concurrent list in order to evolve all-India policies on the subject. This was implemented through the 42nd constitutional amendment (1976) by shifting 'education' from the State list to the concurrent list. There was no detailed rationale that was provided for this switch and the amendment was ratified by various States without adequate debate.The Janata Party government led by Morarji Desai that came to power after Emergency passed the 44th constitutional amendment (1978) to reverse many of the controversial changes made through the 42nd amendment. One of these amendments that was passed in the Lok Sabha but not in the Rajya Sabha was to bring back 'education' to the State list.

What are international practices?

In the U.S., State and local governments set the overall educational standards, mandate standardised tests and supervise colleges and universities. The federal education department's functions primarily include policies for financial aid, focussing on key educational issues and ensuring equal access. In Canada, education is completely managed by the provinces. In Germany, the constitution vests legislative powers for education with landers (equivalent of States). In South Africa, on the other hand, education is governed by two national departments for school and higher education. The provinces of the country have their own education departments for implementing policies of the national departments and dealing with local issues.

What can be the way forward?

The arguments in favour of 'education' in the concurrent list include a uniform education policy, improvement in standards and synergy between Centre and States. However, considering the vast diversity of the country, a 'one size fits all' approach is neither feasible nor desirable. Further, as per the report on 'Analysis of Budgeted expenditure on Education' prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2022, out of the total revenue expenditure by education departments in our country estimated at ?6.25 lakh crore (2020-21), 15% is spent by the Centre while 85% is spent by the States. Even if expenditure by all other departments on education and training are considered, the share works out to 24% and 76% respectively.The arguments against restoring 'education' to State list include corruption coupled with lack of professionalism. The recent issues surrounding the NEET and NTA have however displayed that centralisation does not necessarily mean that these issues would vanish.Considering the need for autonomy in view of the lion's share of the expenditure being borne by the States, there needs to be a productive discussion towards moving 'education' back to the State list. This would enable them to frame tailor-made policies for syllabus, testing and admissions for higher education including professional courses like medicine and engineering. Regulatory mechanisms for higher education can continue to be governed by central institutions like the National Medical Commission, University Grants Commission and All India Council for Technical Education.

RBI signs pact to link UPI with 4 ASEAN countries for instant payments

Mumbai: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday announced that it has now joined Project Nexus with the four ASEAN countries to create a platform to facilitate instantaneous cross-border retail payments.

Nexus, conceptualised by the Innovation Hub of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), aims to connect India's UPI (Unified Payments Interface), with the fast payment systems of ASEAN members — Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. These four countries and India would be the founding members and first-mover nations of this platform, the RBI said.An agreement to this effect was signed by the BIS and the central banks of the founding countries i.e., Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), Bank of Thailand (BOT), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), and Reserve Bank of India on June 30, 2024, in Basel, Switzerland, according to an RBI statement.

Indonesia, which has been involved from the early stages, continues to be involved as a special observer.The RBI has been collaborating bilaterally with various

countries to link India's Fast Payments System (FPS) – the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), with their respective FPSs for cross-border Person to Person (P2P) and Person to Merchant (P2M) payments.

"While India and its partner countries can continue to benefit through such bilateral connectivity of Fast Payment Systems, a multilateral approach will provide further impetus to our efforts in expanding the international reach of Indian payment systems," the RBI said.The platform can be extended to more countries, going forward. The platform is expected to go live by 2026.