

Telangana loses the race to Karnataka, Foxconn to set up EV components unit in Karnataka

Hyderabad: Despite Telangana Government assuring all support to Foxconn, the iPhone suppliers, the company has opted for Karnataka for establishing its manufacturing and assembly facility for mechanical components in electric vehicle applications under Project Cheetah. It will be Foxconn's second-largest plant after the China unit. Foxconn, which is part of the Taiwanese Hon Hai Technology Group, is investing Rs. 25,000 crore to set up the plant near Doddaballapur. "Karnataka Government will extend full support to Foxconn. We will provide everything from water, electricity, and roads to legal assistance," Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was quoted as saying. He held a meeting with Foxconn Chairman Young Liu at Bengaluru on Friday.

The company has acquired 300 acres in the ITIR Industrial area located in Doddaballapur and Devanahalli Taluk of Bengaluru Rural district. The project is expected to generate employment for more than 50,000 people, the Chief Minister was quoted as saying. Business Today quoted Foxconn Chairman Young Liu saying "The unit in Karnataka will soon become the second-largest Foxconn plant after China's unit. It will create 40,000 direct jobs, especially for middle-level educated individuals and our investment will not stop here. In the future, we plan to explore other sectors also. If there is mutual trust, anything can be achieved."

A Foxconn team is also expected to visit the manufacturing unit at Doddaballapur on Saturday. This is the second unit of the company after the "Project Elephant" spanning over 300 acres at Doddaballapur. The construction



works are under progress. Interestingly, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy along with Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu met the Foxconn Chairman and other representatives of the company at New Delhi on Friday. The Chief Minister had assured all support to Foxconn for their expansion plans. In reply, the Foxconn Chairman had assured to visit

Telangana. Later in the day, the Foxconn team flew to Bengaluru to meet Karnataka Chief Minister and his team. After the meeting in the evening, Siddaramaiah shared the information about Foxconn Company's new plant at Doddaballapur. On March 2, 2023, the Telangana Government had signed a pact with Foxconn for setting up the manufacturing facility. And, in less than

three weeks, on May 15, the groundbreaking ceremony of Foxconn Interconnect Technology's electronics manufacturing facility was held at Kongara Kalan. Foxconn is setting up the manufacturing facility with an investment of US\$ 500 million. It is expected to generate 25,000 jobs initially, which will be scaled up further.

11th season of One World Fusion 2024 organised in Hyderabad

The One World Fusion, is a right mix of melody and rhythm from Western, Indian and Bollywood genres, where there is impromptu improvisation happening all the time.

Hyderabad: In aid of Autism Ashram, the 11th season of One World Fusion 2024 was organised by Sangitanjaly Foundation in association with Telangana Tourism and State government at Ravindra Bharathi.

The One World Fusion, is a right mix of melody and rhythm from Western, Indian and Bollywood genres, where there is impromptu improvisation happening all the time, without compromising on the very aesthetics of music, said Abhijeeth Bhattacharjee, who curated the concert along with GIMA award Winner Pt. Prodyut Mukherjee.

Grammy Award winner Pandit Vishwa

Mohan took the concert to a different level with his Mohan Veena and was equally well supported by Pt. Prodyut Mukherjee on Tabla, a press release said.

Trumpet King of India, Kishore Sodha played the popular Bollywood hit numbers, Ujjayeni Roy came with her soft and mellifluous numbers followed by a duet with Kishore Sodhaji while Vinod Rathod played his popular numbers.

The finale item was Raag Desh on Mohan Veena and jammed by Kishore Sodha on Saxophone, vocal by Ujjayeni and Chandni and the other instruments.



How AI image-generators work

THE FLURRY of images generated by artificial intelligence (AI) feels like the product of a thoroughly modern tool. In fact, computers have been at the easel for decades. In the early 1970s Harold Cohen, an artist, taught one to draw using an early AI system. "AARON" could instruct a robot to sketch black-and-white shapes on paper; within a decade Cohen had taught AARON to draw human figures. Today "generative AI" models put brush to virtual paper: publicly available apps, such as Midjourney and OpenAI's DALL-E, create images in seconds based on text prompts. The final products often dupe humans. In March AI-generated images of Donald Trump being handcuffed by police went viral online. And image generators are improving fast. How do they work—and how are they refining their craft?

Generative-AI models are a type of deep learning, a software technique that uses layers of interconnected nodes that loosely mimic the structure of the human brain. The models behind image-generators are trained on enormous datasets: LAION-5B, the largest publicly available one, contains 5.85bn tagged images. Datasets are often scraped from the internet, including from social-media platforms, stock-photo libraries and shopping websites.

The most advanced image-generators typically use a type of generative AI known as a diffusion model. They add distorting visual "noise" to images in the dataset—making them look like an analogue TV still disrupted by static—until the pictures are completely obscured. By learning how to undo the mess, the model can produce an image that is similar to the original. As it becomes better at recognising groups of pixels that correspond to particular visual concepts, it starts to compress, categorise and store this knowledge in a mathematical pocket of code known as the "latent space".

Let's say you ask a generator app to create a picture of a hippopotamus. A model that has learned which types of pixel arrangement correlate to the word "hippopotamus" (see picture, left) should be able to sample from its latent space to create a realistic image of the mammal. Adding more detail to the prompt—for example, "a renaissance-era oil painting of a green hippopotamus, somewhere along the river Nile" (see picture, right)—requires the model to source additional layers of visual detail, such as image style, texture, colour and location, and to combine them correctly. The responses to complicated prompts can be erratic, particularly if the prompt is not clearly phrased or the scene it describes is not well represented in the



training dataset. Even seemingly simple fares can trip models up. Human hands are often depicted with missing or extra fingers, or proportions that appear to bend the rules of physics. Because hands are usually less prominent than faces in photographs, there are smaller datasets for AI models to hone their technique on. Dodgy facial symmetry—especially inconsistencies in colour and shape between eyes, teeth and ears—is another sign of a machine's work. And image generators

struggle with text, often creating non-existent letters or imaginary words.

Developers can help models learn from their mistakes by refining the datasets that they are learning from or by tweaking algorithms. Midjourney was recently updated to improve the way it generates hands. Rapid improvements mean that telling an AI-generated image from a real photograph or painting may soon become impossible.

A health scheme in Kerala that is bleeding hospitals dry

Public hospitals in Kerala are paying a heavy price for the State government's administrative inefficiency in running Ayushman Bharat-Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhathi (KASP), the health insurance scheme covering nearly 42 lakh families.

The scheme that wins Kerala laurels from the Union Health Ministry every year for providing free medical treatment to the maximum number of people is draining the State's coffers and leaving public hospitals severely short of funds. According to a statement by the government in the Assembly last week, it owes private and public hospitals ₹1,128.69 crore as reimbursement for free treatment given to KASP beneficiaries. The State's finances have been in the red for several months now. Public hospitals have been experiencing an acute shortage of drugs, consumables, and implants such as stents, as pending payments running into hundreds of crores have forced pharma companies to stop all supplies to public hospitals. Private hospitals are exiting the scheme in the face of mounting bills that the government is yet to reimburse. Earlier, public hospitals could tide over such exigencies by utilising a hospital development society's funds for the local purchase of drugs. But now, due to the fiscal crisis in the State and the

overdues from the government under KASP, hospitals have no funds to purchase drugs or for development activities. Superintendents of hospitals say they are helpless as patients are forced to buy medicines from private outlets. Even the government's Karunya fair price medicinal shops do not have adequate stock.

According to the latest edition of National Health Accounts (2019-20), Kerala has the highest per capita out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) in the country at ₹7,206 despite being one of the States with the highest per capita government expenditure on health. KASP, a scheme meant to free people from the burden of healthcare expenditure, is now an indirect cause of increased OOPE in Kerala primarily because the government has not paid due diligence to the model of health financing it adopted. It also did little to ensure that the State Health Agency (SHA) had the necessary technical expertise to run KASP, or that there were adequate checks and balances. The Comptroller and Auditor General's recent audit report on Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) pointed out that KASP was being run by SHA without proper medical, death, or claim audits and no financial discipline, resulting in huge cost overruns and a high rate of overdue



claims. Kerala had been efficiently running its own health financing schemes, inclusive of good tertiary care packages too, in the insurance mode since 2008 through its own agency, the Comprehensive Health Insurance Agency of Kerala. AB-PMJAY was launched by the Centre in 2018. When the State chose to re-launch KASP in alignment with AB-PMJAY in 2019, there was concern that given the low share of the Centre, Kerala would end up paying a huge premium, especially because of its high morbidity burden and strong health-seeking

behaviour. Kerala's troubles with KASP began in 2020 when the government agreed to SHA's proposal to move the scheme from the insurance mode to the trust/assurance mode, wherein the financial liability of settling claims falls on the government in the absence of an insurance company.

The claims expenditure, which used to be contained at around 700 crore in the insurance mode, touched ₹1,563 crore in 2021-22 and 1,629 crore in 2022-23.

Clinical Infectious Diseases Society's (CIDS) 14th Annual Conference, CIDSCON 2024

The Clinical Infectious Diseases Society's (CIDS) 14th Annual Conference, CIDSCON 2024, commenced on 16th August at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre. This conference serves as a dynamic platform for fostering discussions on the latest advancements and challenges in infectious disease management, with a focus on India. The highlights of this year's conference address two critical challenges threatening public health in India: Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and Emerging Infections. Antimicrobial Resistance: A Silent Pandemic AMR continues to be a silent pandemic with alarming consequences, particularly in India, which bears one of the highest burdens of drug-resistant infections (DRIs) worldwide. Currently, about 1 million AMR-associated deaths occur in India, contributing to an estimated 5 million deaths globally each year. Projections indicate that by 2050, AMR could result in 10 million deaths annually, surpassing cancer-associated deaths.

The rise of AMR, driven by the misuse and overuse of antibiotics, is rendering many medical advances ineffective. In India, Gram-negative bacteria such as *Klebsiella* species, *Escherichia coli*, and *Acinetobacter* species are the primary culprits. Gut organisms like *E. coli* and *Klebsiella* harbor a common resistance mechanism called Extended Spectrum Beta-lactamases (ESBL) in 70-80% of cases, with rapidly spreading carbapenem resistance leading to mortality rates as high as 40%. Actionable Efforts Promoted by CIDS to Tackle AMR:

1. Stewardship Programs: CIDS promotes and helps implement antimicrobial stewardship programs in healthcare facilities across India. These programs aim to optimize the use of antibiotics, ensuring they are used only when necessary and appropriate.



2. Promoting Research and Development: Research to develop diagnostics and new antibiotics is urgently needed. CIDS calls for increased funding and collaboration between the public and private sectors to drive innovation in this field.

3. Surveillance and Data Sharing: Enhanced surveillance of AMR patterns is essential. CIDS advocates for the development of an AMR surveillance network to supplement and strengthen national surveillance, enabling timely data sharing and informed decision-making.

4. Infection Prevention and Control (IPC): Strengthening IPC measures in hospitals and communities is crucial. This includes hand hygiene, sterilization protocols, and vaccination programs to prevent infections and reduce antibiotic use.

5. Public Awareness Campaigns:

Educating the public about the dangers of antibiotic misuse and the importance of adhering to prescribed treatments is vital. CIDS continues to improve public awareness to address this issue. Emerging Infections in India: The emergence of new infections in India is a growing concern. In 2024, more than 150 cases of Chandipura virus encephalitis were reported in western India, new cases of Nipah virus infection emerged in Kerala, and over 20 cases of primary amoebic encephalitis were documented in Kerala and West Bengal. These incidents highlight the dynamic nature of infectious diseases and the urgent need for vigilance and preparedness. Actionable Efforts and Link to Climate Change:

1. Enhanced Surveillance and Rapid Response: CIDS advocates for the expansion of surveillance networks to de-

tect and respond to emerging infections promptly. Rapid identification and containment are essential to prevent widespread outbreaks.

2. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Addressing emerging infections requires collaboration across multiple disciplines, including infectious disease specialists, epidemiologists, veterinarians, environmental scientists, and public health officials. CIDS supports the formation of interdisciplinary collaborations to tackle these challenges.

3. Research on Climate Change: There is a growing body of evidence linking climate change to the emergence and spread of infectious diseases. CIDS calls for increased research to better understand these links and develop strategies to mitigate their impact.

No, your aches and pains don't get worse in the cold. So why do we think they do?

It's cold and wet outside. As you get out of bed, you can feel it in your bones. Your right knee is flaring up again. That'll make it harder for you to walk the dog or go to the gym. You think it must be because of the weather. It's a common idea, but a myth. When we looked at the evidence, we found no direct link between most common aches and pains and the weather. In the first study of its kind, we found no direct link between the temperature or humidity with most joint or muscle aches and pains. So why are so many of us convinced the weather's to blame? Here's what we think is really going on. Weather can be linked to your health

The weather is often associated with the risk of new and ongoing health conditions. For example, cold temperatures may worsen asthma symptoms. Hot temperatures increase the risk of heart problems, such as arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat),

cardiac arrest and coronary heart disease. Many people are also convinced the weather is linked to their aches and pains. For example, two in every three people with knee, hip or hand osteoarthritis say cold temperatures trigger their symptoms. Musculoskeletal conditions affect several million people around the world. So we set out to find out whether weather is really the culprit behind winter flare-ups. What we did

Very few studies have been specifically and appropriately designed to look for any direct link between weather changes and joint or muscle pain. And ours is the first to evaluate data from these particular studies. We looked at data from more than 15,000 people from around the world. Together, these people reported more than 28,000 episodes of pain, mostly back pain, knee or hip osteoarthritis. People with rheumatoid arthritis and gout were also

included. We then compared the frequency of those pain reports between different types of weather: hot or cold, humid or dry, rainy, windy, as well as some combinations (for example, hot and humid versus cold and dry). What we found

We found changes in air temperature, humidity, air pressure and rainfall do not increase the risk of knee, hip or lower back pain symptoms and are not associated with people seeking care for a new episode of arthritis. The results of this study suggest we do not experience joint or muscle pain flare-ups as a result of changes in the weather, and a cold day will not increase our risk of having knee or back pain. In other words, there is no direct link between the weather and back, knee or hip pain, nor will it give you arthritis. It is important to note, though, that very cold air temperatures (under 10°C) were rarely studied so we cannot make conclusions about worsening

symptoms in more extreme changes in the weather. The only exception to our findings was for gout, an inflammatory type of arthritis that can come and go. Here, pain increased in warmer, dry conditions. Gout has a very different underlying biological mechanism to back pain or knee and hip osteoarthritis, which may explain our results. The combination of warm and dry weather may lead to increased dehydration and consequently, increased concentration of uric acid in the blood, and deposition of uric acid crystals in the joint in people with gout, resulting in a flare-up. Why do people blame the weather? The weather can influence other factors and behaviours that consequently shape how we perceive and manage pain. For example, some people may change their physical activity routine during winter, choosing the couch over the gym. And we know prolonged sitting, for instance, is directly linked to worse back pain.

Hop on Kangaroo Appoints P. V. Narasimha Rao's Great Granddaughter Aditi Siri Gayatri Maramraju as Official Brand Ambassador for India



Hop on Kangaroo, a sports and leadership development initiative, is proud to announce the appointment of Aditi Siri Gayatri Maramraju as its official Brand Ambassador in India. The announcement was made at a special event held at the Jubilee Ridge Hotel in Madhapur, Hyderabad on 16th August, 2024.

Hop on Kangaroo is a unique tourism program for Indian students, founded by Telangana-based NRI and entrepreneur Harish Bisam from Australia. It is a leadership program that combines sports, team building, and personal development. The program offers a once-in-a-lifetime experience, with a focus on enhancing soft skills through sports. Aditi Siri Gayatri Maramraju, the great-granddaughter of Late. P. V. Narasimha Rao, the former Prime Minister of India, carries forward a legacy of leadership, service, and dedication to the nation. Her strong commitment to social responsibility and her passion for youth development make her the ideal choice to represent Hop on Kangaroo in India.

The 15-day Leadership Program through Sports in Melbourne, Australia, offers participants a diverse and immersive experience, covering a wide range of athletic disciplines. From soccer training with

the Real Madrid Foundation and tennis clinics with the Carlos Alcaraz Foundation to cricket, golf, and rugby introductions, the program allows attendees to engage with professional coaches and teams, learn new skills, and gain insights into the Australian sports landscape. "We are thrilled to welcome Aditi Siri Gayatri Maramraju to the Hop on Kangaroo family," said Mr. Harish Bisam, Founder and Managing Director of

Hop on Kangaroo. "Her distinguished lineage and her own dedication to making a positive impact on society align perfectly with our mission. We look forward to working closely with Aditi to inspire and empower young people through our programs." As the first Brand Ambassador from India, Aditi will play a pivotal role in promoting the values and mission of Hop on Kangaroo across the country. Her in-

volvement will include participating in workshops and events both in India and Australia, where she will represent Hop on Kangaroo on an international stage. PV Prabhakar Rao, Surabhi Vani Devi-MLC, NV Shubash -BJP Spokesperson, Ajitha Surabhi, Shekhar Maramraju - SRTMC Begumpet (PV Narasimha Rao's NGO), Advait, Dr Chandra Shekhar and Manoj were participated in the announcement program.

Google criticised for forcing tech influencers to favour Pixel 9 devices at launch

Google reportedly informed tech influencers attending its Pixel 9 launch event that they must favour the new Pixel phones over competitors when creating content, or else their relationship with the brand would be terminated. Multiple content creators took screenshots of these stipulations and posted them on X and Threads. "By opting into this program, do you acknowledge that you are expected to feature the Google Pixel device in place of any competitor mobile devices?" a screenshot of the Google Form sent to

influencers states. "Please note that if it appears other brands are being preferred over the Pixel, we will need to cease the relationship between the brand and the creator." Kayla Geier, Google's communications manager, spoke about the criticism to The Verge tech outlet, saying that they had poorly worded the language in the form and it had been removed. She added that the form was meant for Team Pixel, which is a distinct program from the press and usual reviews. The program is handled by PR agency 1000heads and has special

caveats. Any influencers and journalists who are a part of the program are often briefed and given products under embargo before or during an event before the public gets their hands on it, in exchange for coverage on social media. Some YouTubers - Kevin Nether who runs The Tech Ninja channel, and Adam Matlock who reviews tech on his TechOdyssey YouTube channel - also shared that they ended up quitting the program because of the increasingly aggressive terms. Meanwhile, popular YouTuber Arun Maini also spoke against the tech giant on X,

Requiem for a dream: making peace with mortality in sport

Sport is primarily seen as the finest distillation of life's exuberance. Moving limbs, kinetic energy, streaks of sweat, the earnest desire to win — above all, it is in essence the pursuit of happiness. Precisely due to these associations, even if they are not explicitly spelt out, an athlete's death often seems like an oxymoron to our startled minds. How can a sportsperson die? Yes, that old line about death and taxes being inevitable remains strong as ever, and all of us are conscious about mortality. Yet, when the newswires bring home that sombre news about a player's demise, be it current or former, be it on the field, in a hospital bed, through an accident or self-inflicted harm, how does the larger public react? Why acceptance isn't easy

The usual grief-template of 'shock, denial and grudging acceptance' doesn't necessarily work. Obviously shock and denial remain massive but the acceptance part takes an inordinately long time. How can this wonderful athlete, who did spectacular things on the field, suddenly turn lifeless? This train of thought is at a dissonance with the fine print of most sports: injuries can happen and some could be life-threatening. Over the last few weeks, life's full-stop was evident in the sporting arena. Former India opener Aunshuman Gaekwad lost his battle against cancer at 71. And as if death was stalking the cricketing fields, England's middle-order stalwart of the 1990s and early 2000s, Graham Thorpe too succumbed at 55. It has now come to light through his grieving family that the left-hander's demise was a case of death by suicide.

Since sport is also invested with the metaphor of being in a battlefield, the presumption is that a sportsperson would even pause Father Time. Eternity and utopia are themes running through any athletic endeavour, and they get juxtaposed with the sporting practitioner's life. If Gaekwad could survive the bloodbath at Sabina Park in 1976, couldn't he muster the will to overcome cancer? Thorpe was at his resilient best against the finest of attacks and yet his mind's undercurrents, dallying with the diabolical shadows of self-doubt and depression, left him spent. Denial was again at play in the way we reacted and it is surely not the first time.

An Ayrton Senna departing in a crash on an F1 track at Bologna in Italy in 1994 still rankles. Senna was the master of mechanical speed but what was this haste towards the exit door? His legacy stands but his death at a mere 34 again drags in those queries about 'what could have been?' It is a question that shadows former India opener Raman Lamba too. Struck on the head while fielding close-in during a game at Dhaka, the Delhiite never recovered. A man, who once smashed the visiting Aussies all over the park during an ODI series, now lay dead. This was in 1998, and again, while being fully aware of the harm that a cricketing red cherry can inflict, disbelief hung in the air like a dark shroud.

Silence, tears, denial. Death on the grass is a dastardly episode that finds re-

peated segments as some footballers have inexplicably moved on while pursuing the beautiful game. The autopsy report about injuries and cardiac-arrest never cuts ice even if it is the essential truth. Australian opener Phillip Hughes pinned down forever by a bouncer in 2014 evoked the same response: silence, tears and denial. Sport at its highest form is always the truth. What you see is real, be it triumph or defeat, laughter or angst. But death, the one reality associated with life, is almost deemed impossible in the realm of sport. A tent-pegger in equestrian may find his horse swerving into the woods leaving him hung upon a branch with grievous injuries. Still in those rare cases, the abiding reflexive thought is 'how could that happen?' But sport is a workspace in which its practitioners are not essentially in control. A Hughes or a Lamba can never tone down the danger residing within a cricket ball. The former wore a helmet, the latter did not, and still their fate was the same. The metaphysical poet John Donne wrote through his poem Death, be not proud: "One short sleep past, we wake eternally. And death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die." A wordsmith with a feverish imagination, a rebellious streak and a philosophical air may write these lines but even Donne became part of the sands of time in 1631. Be it life or its athletic exposition sport, death is the unwelcome guest hanging around at the blind corner. It always seems difficult to accept the finish-line when the breath ebbs, rigor mortis steps in and the much speculated 21-gram loss in weight supposedly happens, as physician Duncan MacDougall propagated in 1907.

Sporting gods like Diego Maradona, Pele, Muhammad Ali, Shane Warne or Milkha Singh, all evoke strong emotions rippling through a fandom that seeks a quick-fix for a collective self-esteem enhancement. When a star wins, the ordinary fan's spirit soars. By extension, the athlete dispensing confidence to the larger mass could be seen as a mass-hypnosis state which perhaps the subject is never conscious about. This near-religious or cult-propagating experience tends to cloud the fans' judgement. That the sportsperson can never fail at the micro level and never die at the macro space becomes an idea that seeps in like a steady monsoon rain. An amalgam of fondness, love and reverence creeps in and inevitably the 'acceptance phase' of an athlete's death becomes prolonged. It is almost as if we lost a near and dear one. Still for the athlete the pressure is real. Most deal with life-long scars. Wicketkeepers have gnarled fingers, footballers end up with busted knees and ankles. The fear of failure, lonely nights in hotel rooms, all take a toll. Like army veterans, the retired player harks back to the good old days. The audience, after a while, gets bored. Relief is then excessively sought through a glass brimming with spirits. For every Martina Navratilova or Yuvraj Singh surviving cancer, there are others who find the mountain too steep to climb. High on their own sense of invincibility, because the indomitable belief drives them forward, athletes tend to ignore



health's alarm bells. Some recover in time, others struggle. Still the larger population tends to lean on the sportsperson's visible fitness and never get a grip on a silent illness or the shards of pain scything through the mind. Ironically, death as a metaphor lurks around sport. A dismissal, a goal missed, a catch dropped, even a celebrated retirement after a storied career are all seen as mini-deaths. But when the final whistle is genuinely blown in life, the

athlete's fandom would rather block that news for a while.

If sport is life, can death be far behind? Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on the State's health helpline 104, Tele-MANAS 14416 and Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050. Helplines across the country can be accessed here: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/suicide-prevention-helplines/article61753129.ece>

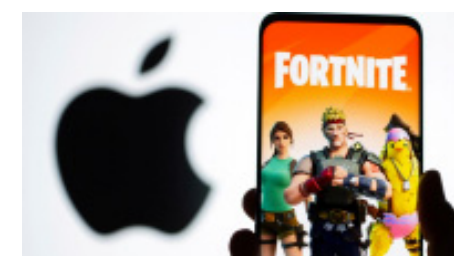
Fortnite returns on iPhones in EU, globally on Android

Multiplayer shooter game Fortnite is available again on iPhones in the European Union and worldwide on Google's Android devices after a gap of four years, following legal measures by the EU, developer Epic Games said on Friday (August 16, 2024). Fortnite, created by Epic, a U.S.-based studio, and backed by China's Tencent, the world's largest game studio, launched in 2017 and its last-player-standing, "battle royale" format became an instant hit, drawing in millions of dedicated players.

But in August 2020, Apple and Alphabet's Google removed Fortnite from their app stores for violating their guidelines by launching a payment feature, prompting several lawsuits challenging their rules of charging up to 30% commissions on payments. At the time of the ban, Epic had 116 million users just on Apple's platform.

The EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA) law is allowing Epic to launch its game store in the bloc, though Apple is still blocking users outside Europe from accessing Fortnite and its games store, the company said. "We are really grateful to the European Commission for not only passing the DMA and enabling store competition, but also going in and robustly holding Apple and Google's feet to the fire to ensure that they can't just obstruct competition," Epic CEO Tim Sweeney told reporters.

"They were going to great efforts to slow us down, and tried to stop us several



times, and the European Commission always stepped up and ensured that competitors were able to enter the market," he said. The store is launching with Fortnite, Rocket League Sideswipe and the all-new Fall Guys for mobile, and Epic is working with other developers to launch their games and apps through its store.

Epic, which has 75 million monthly active users in its PC store, expects to add 100 million new mobile users by the end of the year. The games would also be available through independent mobile stores such as AltStore. However, the installation process is lengthy with a 15-step installation process on iOS devices, confusing device settings and scare screens, Epic said. Apple said that to enable the new capabilities for developers in the EU, it worked to make them as easy as possible for users while also trying to protect their privacy and security. "We probably lost over a billion dollars of revenue by losing access to the iOS customer base worldwide for four years, but what's the cost of freedom?," Sweeney said.

Xi Jinping's paranoia is making China isolated and insular

"Ni hao, china" is the name of the country's latest effort to attract foreign visitors. The logo accompanying the phrase (which means "hello, China") features a panda—an image always handy when China wants to seem cuddly. Chinese officials have been touring the West to promote the campaign, helped by a video in which happy-looking foreigners intone the Chinese greeting. Those with a deeper grasp of the language might sense a different mood, including billboards on city streets warning people to look out for foreign spies, and government propaganda on social media urging vigilance against threats to national security. The Communist Party often tells Chinese people that tourists, journalists and businesspeople could all be after the country's secrets.

More than a year after China scrapped its "zero-covid" policy, which had kept it sealed off from most foreign visitors from early 2020 to the end of 2022, the country is now pushing in two contradictory directions. Parts of the government appear eager to court foreigners. Last month China sent a large delegation to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Li Qiang, the prime minister, told the gathering that "no matter how the world changes, China will...open its door still wider to the world."

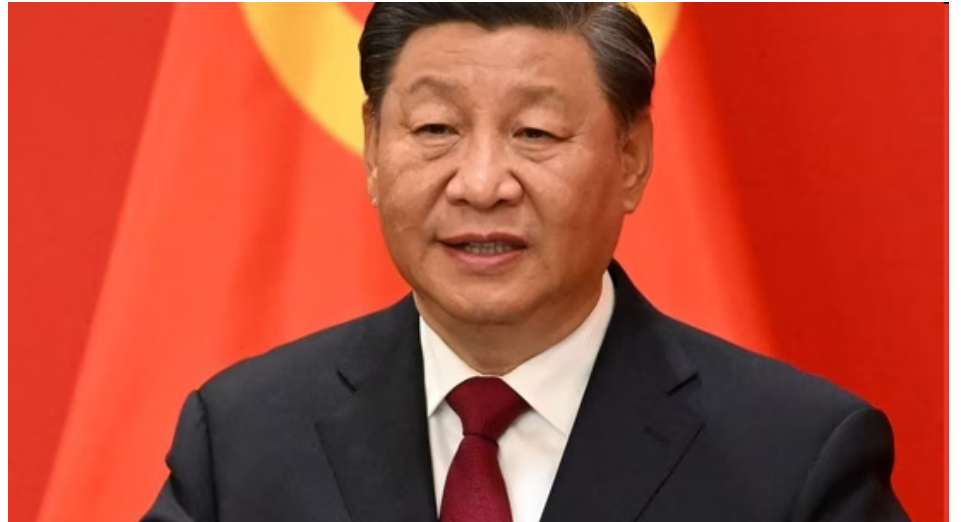
In at least one key respect this is true: China's trade in dollar terms is 31% higher than in 2019. But *The Economist* has looked at a range of other measures, from visits to China by foreign tourists and flight numbers to levels of academic exchange, investment flows and even the personal travel schedule of China's leader, Xi Jinping. They suggest a country overshadowed by a profoundly changing relationship with the West, a more security-driven style of policymaking at home and by the parlous state of its economy. China has become more inward-looking; the West more wary.

China crisis At the most basic level, far fewer outsiders are crossing borders into China. Last year the country recorded about 62m fewer entries and exits by foreigners than in 2019, before the pandemic began: a drop of more than 63%. Behind these figures lie deeper trends. Take the geopolitical environment. In the three years during which China shut its borders to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and its leaders hunkered at home, the West—led by America—was engaged in a wide-ranging re-think of how to cope with China's rise as a global power. President Donald Trump focused on trying to cut America's trade deficit with China, but his administration sought to push back on other fronts, including efforts to contain China's military activity. There was no let-up after Joe Biden took over in 2021. In the following year, Russia's invasion of Ukraine drove the wedge between the West and China even deeper. China called itself a "no-limits" partner of Russia. Mr Biden ramped up controls on the export to China of advanced

semiconductors. The invasion threw up an unexpected obstacle to the restoration of normal flows of people between China and America. In response to Russia's aggression, America and its allies barred Russian airlines from using their airspace. Russia imposed a tit-for-tat ban. This has impeded the re-opening of aviation routes between America and China that were severed during the pandemic: America does not want to give an advantage to Chinese airlines by allowing routes to re-open, when those airlines could save time and fuel, and therefore gain passengers, by flying over Russia.

At a meeting in November, Mr Biden and Mr Xi agreed to "work towards a significant further increase in scheduled passenger flights". But by the end of 2023, there are still only 63 direct ones between the two countries per week, far fewer than the roughly 300 flights that were in operation before the pandemic (see map). According to FlightAware, an American flight-tracking website, Chinese airlines are avoiding Russia on newly approved routes. In part, America is to blame for a reduction in contacts between the two countries that were once considered routine. In 2022 it ended a Trump-era campaign by the Department of Justice, known as the China Initiative, whose aim was ferreting out Chinese spies in American academia and business. It had become mired in accusations of racial profiling. But ditching this has not put scientists at ease.

Worried about being accused of helping China by sharing advanced know-how, American researchers have become increasingly wary of collaborating with their Chinese counterparts. In 2020 the number of science papers jointly produced by Chinese and American researchers began to fall. "That is certainly a consequence of the political environment" in America, says Jonathan Adams of Clarivate, an analytics firm. Of China's internationally collaborative research papers, the share involving American co-authors has fallen from a peak of 47% in 2013 to 32% in 2022, the company's data show. At America's borders, officers have become twitchier about Chinese entering for study. Chinese diplomats complain that some students with valid visas are being subjected to lengthy interrogations, often about Chinese government backing for their projects. They say a few of them have been sent back. Deborah Seligsohn of Villanova University in Pennsylvania, who has been studying Sino-American exchanges in science, says she knows Chinese academics whose research is "completely uncontroversial" and who have been subjected to such questioning. Among foreigners mulling trips to China, memories have been slow to fade of China's sometimes brutal enforcement of its zero-covid measures. China now all but ignores COVID-19 (it abolished the last vestige of pandemic control in November, by ending the need to fill out a health-declaration form on arrival). But potential visitors are "still fearful at the back of their



minds about potential lockdowns," says John Grant of Oag, a travel-data firm. "You know, the horror stories that we've all heard about...all of that impacts consumers' perceptions of the market."

Journey to the West China's state-controlled media likes to highlight examples of American mistreatment of Chinese people. Such cases serve as a propaganda campaign that portrays the West as racist and a builder of barriers and of menacing security networks that are aimed at keeping an innocent China in its place. Perhaps intentionally, this depiction of the West may be deterring some Chinese students from going to America: in the academic year of 2022-23 they numbered about 290,000, down from a peak of more than 370,000 in 2019-20. Mr Xi likes to present his own country as a champion of global engagement (in a world laden with doubt about globalisation, he describes it with striking confidence as an "irreversible trend of the times"). In reality, he seems less inclined to travel abroad. In 2023, after the better part of three years without venturing overseas, he spent only 13 days outside the country compared with a more typical 28 days in 2019. In September last year, he shunned an annual gathering of G20 leaders in India, despite having attended previous such events in person or online. He did, however, travel to San Francisco in November for a summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum. There, at his first face-to-face meeting with Mr Biden for a year, he insisted that for America and China, "turning their back on each other is not an option". Many Chinese officials survey their struggling economy, with its collapsing property firms and mountains of debt, and still see benefits to be gained from the West's markets, capital and technology. Mr Xi is maintaining military pressure on Taiwan but does not appear ready for an all-out clash with the West that an assault may entail. In December China resumed military-to-military communications with America, having suspended them for more than a year in protest against high-level contact between America and Taiwan. The door is barely ajar: China's armed forces share little in such dialogue. But the message is that Mr Xi wants a stable

relationship with the West. He appears not to want Westerners to rush for the exits. That is evident in the "Ni hao, China" campaign. Since December tourists from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, as well as Malaysia, have been allowed to visit China visa-free for 15 days. Russians may be close friends, but they do not enjoy such a concession. Many Western businesspeople, however, look at China's shaky economy and the government's heavy hand over it, and worry. Foreign direct investment in greenfield projects in China has declined from more than \$87bn in 2013 to less than \$18bn in 2022. Flows of portfolio investment into China have been negative for the past four quarters as global funds dump Chinese equities. Foreign businesspeople are anxious about the growing assertiveness of China's secret police: raids last year on foreign consulting firms in China rang alarm bells. On February 1st the American Chamber of Commerce in China released its annual survey of member companies' mood. Nearly 40% said they believed foreign firms were less welcome in China than they were in 2022, a year when many businesses were battered by covid-related lockdowns. Mr Xi is "living in his own world, surrounded by the security people", says a prominent Western businessman in Beijing. "And then you have these economic decision-makers around him who find it very difficult to find time with him, to alert him and to stop this erosion in sentiment." Mr Xi keeps railing against what he sees as "ideological infiltration" by the West, and talking up the need to make China's economy "self-reliant". The West's heightened resolve to counteract harmful behaviour by China abroad has stiffened its sinews. In response to America's chip war, his government is pumping money into Chinese companies to help them produce cutting-edge technology by themselves. The east is bread What about the big exception to the trend of isolation, China's soaring trade flows, which reflect its continuing role as an industrial powerhouse? Even they tell a story. During Mr Xi's rule, the share of China's foreign trade with major rich-world economies has been falling.

How is India streamlining the pharma sector? | Explained

The story so far: India's drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), has withdrawn powers delegated to State licensing authorities to issue NOCs (no objection certificates) for manufacture of unapproved, banned or new drugs for export purposes. This latest announcement covering drugs for export comes at a time when India has been under scrutiny for allegations of supplying substandard drugs causing health concerns in several countries. The CDSCO is now the sole authority for issuing manufacturing licences for drugs meant for export.

What is India's role in the pharma market?

India ranks third worldwide as a producer of drugs and pharmaceuticals by volume, exporting to around 200 countries/territories. The Indian pharmaceutical industry supplies 62% of the global demand for vaccines and is a leading supplier of DPT (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus), BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin, used primarily against tuberculosis), and measles vaccines. At least 70% of WHO's vaccines (as per the essential immunisation schedule) are sourced from India, the Centre had noted in a submission in Parliament.

What will be the impact?

India is a key player in the international generic medicine market and any change in policy has a direct impact on manufacturers and importers, say industry insiders. The centralising of the licensing authority is significant, they point out, because according to a study conducted by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, India needs to get ready to take advantage of drug sales worth \$251 billion going off-patent this coming decade. The study notes: "In the years between 2022 and 2030, the pharmaceutical sector in India will undergo landmark changes as several drugs are expected to go off-patent and provide an opportunity for the entry of generic products. Expiry of patents is very promising for the Indian generic drug market as it is expected to expand and grow further with inclusion of these new drugs. With ongoing developments, India has started focusing on self-reliance at a large scale. Hence, it is imperative to identify these drugs beforehand, draft and implement strategies which help in their timely entry into the market by promoting generic drug manufacturing."

What are the challenges?

India is dealing with several challenges, including tackling intellectual property rights, lack of research and development etc. The study points out that understanding the political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental, and legal factors is vital for assessing the opportunities and challenges in the pharmaceutical market in India. "The industry must adapt to changes in these external factors,



navigate regulatory requirements, leverage technology advancements, and align their strategies with the evolving needs of the pharmaceutical industry to succeed in the global market," it noted. Speaking about the change, Raheel Shah, business development director, BDR Pharmaceuticals, says the move is welcome as the centralisation of NOCs will formalise the Indian pharma industry. "This will result in the efficiency of the overall process along with bolstering pharma exports to key international markets. It will help to bring uniformity in protocols, achieve the target of reaching \$450 billion by 2047," he adds.

What about the quality of manufacturing?

An article in the British Medical Journal titled, 'Indian government cracks down on 18 drug companies for poor quality manufacturing', noted that the Indian government had cancelled the licences of over 10 pharmaceutical companies as part of a crackdown on poor quality manufacturing. The action last March came after an inspection of 76 drug firms across 20 States. "The government is also understood to have given notices to a further 26 companies for not complying with good manufacturing processes. The Indian pharmaceutical industry has an estimated 10,500 companies, with drug exports having more than doubled in the past decade. But the industry has faced a series of scandals of late, including a World Health Organization investigation into four contaminated cough syrups that caused acute kidney injuries and were linked to the deaths of 66 children in the Republic of the Gambia last year," it added. In what seems like an effort to keep a strict watch, the latest order by

CDSCO states that pharmaceutical companies will have to get their NOCs from the zonal offices of CDSCO online before applying for manufacturing licences from their respective State/UT drug regulators. The Drugs Controller General of India, Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, said the decision was taken to facilitate the application process. In 2018, the CDSCO had permitted State and UTs' drug licensing authorities to grant permissions to export some specific drugs. As per the new order, local regulators will have to hand over the details of all the approvals they have given from August 2018 to May 2024 to CDSCO. Are drugs manufactured in India safe? | In Focus

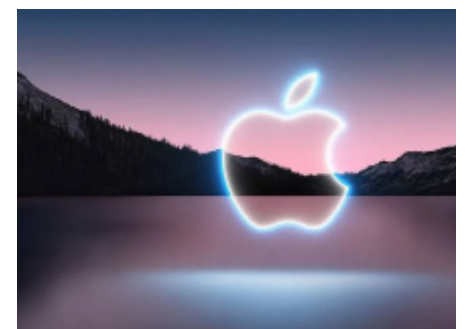
podcastThe centralisation of powers hasn't come as an overnight development, says an industry expert. The Central government's advisory group on drugs had earlier this year noted that getting NOCs from local drug regulators for pharmaceutical products is a tedious process, leading to delays. Says Harish K. Jain, president, Federation of Pharma Entrepreneurs: "We don't anticipate any major impact as far as costing or delays with this latest move. Export of goods is on the Union List. Also, the central authority was always the Central government; the power to hand out licences for export of drugs was delegated to States a few years ago."

Apple's big GenAI investments: Exciting reveals coming

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

He said that Apple continues to feel very "bullish about our opportunity in Generative AI". "We believe we have advantages that will differentiate us in this new era, including Apple's unique combination of seamless hardware, software and services integration, groundbreaking Apple's silicon, with our industry-leading neural engines and our unwavering focus on privacy, which underpins everything we create," he told analysts during the quarterly earnings call.

Reports claim that Apple will integrate



OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini into future iPhone models. Replying to a question, Cook said "we believe that we have advantages that set us apart there. And we'll be talking more about it in as we go through the weeks ahead."

Uttarakhand's burning forests: Worrying cluelessness in times of climate change

Last week, the Supreme Court asked the Uttarakhand government to take preventive steps against its longstanding forest fire problem. It asked the state government to not pin hopes on temporary solutions such as "cloud seeding". While the apex court was delivering its verdict, Uttarakhand experienced its first significant spell of rain for the summer. Almora and Bageshwar experienced cloudbursts and Uttarkashi was lashed by hailstorms. The rains broke a dry spell and brought relief from the wildfire frenzy that has affected more than a thousand hectares of forest. The question now is: Will the state authorities use the respite provided by the elements to frame long-term solutions or will complacency be the name of the game again? Uttarakhand is, of course, not alone. Time and again, the SC has asked governments to frame long-term solutions to environmental questions. And, time and again the complexity of a crisis at hand has become an alibi for administrations to prevaricate. Whether in Delhi's reoccurring pollution crisis, or Assam's perennial trysts with floods or the water shortage issues in several parts of the country – most recently Bengaluru – landslides in Himalaya or the blaze in Uttarakhand, evasion, blame games, finding easy scapegoats and even denying the seriousness of the situation are standard tactics to hide the lack of political will.

In Uttarakhand, the state administration has blamed "criminal elements" for the forest fires. In the court, its representative also said that barely 0.1 per cent of the biosphere has been gutted. The state government had figures for human casualties. But it could only tell the SC that it will "get the numbers" of the animals which have perished in the fires. The state's representative said "the media has painted a wrong picture". The pine and the oak The sense of déjà vu about such arguments is the less worrying part of the story. The more troubling issue is that the political inertia is in, large measure, a symptom of the failure of the authorities to join the dots between the lives of people – their livelihoods, the infrastructure they rely on, their energy sources, their daily commute, the farms that produce their food – and natural phenomenon. Take the case of Uttarakhand. For long, fires were essential to the regeneration of the state's forests. Traditionally, people would set fire to leaves, pine-needle litter and grassy hillsides so that with the first rains, a new flush of grass would appear. There has been very little attempt to understand how this once-ecologically beneficial activity got linked to unscrupulous business, including the timber mafia. It's also strange that in times when decolonisation and tradition have become political buzzwords, there is very little attempt to understand the natural legacy of regions. The pine, for instance, was introduced in the Himalaya by the colonists. It's a tough species that spreads fast and its needle-like leaves do not add to the mois-



ture in the region – certainly not the tree variety for times when Uttarakhand has begun to feel the impacts of climate change-driven aridity. In contrast, the oak, once the most charismatic tree variety in the region, allows other species to flourish around it. Its roots hold the soil secure and when its leaves fall to the ground they quickly turn to humus and add to the topsoil. While half-hearted attempts are sometimes made to control the timber mafia, little has been done to help the broadleaf forest regenerate itself. In other words, what passes off as a forest is actually pine

plantation. Giving effect to the SC's directions on preventing forest fires, would require creating a repository of bioindicators that can help judge the health of the ecosystem – the plant animal, bird and insect life that help the forest regenerate itself. If its response to the SC's queries is any evidence, the Uttarakhand government does not have much by way of such information. The push from below In an article in this newspaper, on environmental issues not getting their due election after election, pollution scientist Abhijit Chatterjee (Roti, Kapda, Makan, Good Air,

IE, May 9) writes "pollution has not made it to the list of people's priorities, and, by extension, to the top-priority lists of parties". The roti-kapda-makaan from a few decades ago became bijli-paani-sadak, "which in the recent past turned to job opportunities and anti-corruption," he points out. The next step is linked to sustainability. Macro-level solutions like renewable energy or green hydrogen needs to be linked to local-level remedies like caring for forests or airsheds or protecting against floods and landslides.

That can only come when these issues become a regular part of politics.

From visiting Ayodhya's namesake to celebrating Thai Diwali, 6 things to do in Thailand as visa-free entry for Indians extends

Great news for Indian travellers! Thailand has extended its visa exemption scheme for Indian passport holders until November 11th, 2024. This means you have six glorious months to explore the vibrant culture, stunning landscapes, and delectable cuisine of the Land of Smiles — all without jumping through the hoops of visa applications. Whether you crave adventure, relaxation, or cultural immersion, Thailand has something for everyone. Here are some ideas to jumpstart your Thai adventure. Attend these festivals that fall between May and November Experience the unique and colourful Phuket Vegetarian Festival between September and October where devotees adhere to a strict vegetarian diet and engage in self-mortification rituals. Be prepared for a visually striking and culturally significant event. Celebrate the festival of lights, Loy Krathong in November, by releasing beau-

tifully decorated krathongs (floating baskets) onto rivers and lakes. Make a wish as your krathong floats away, creating a magical and atmospheric experience. If you think this sounds like Diwali, you're not wrong. The two festivals do share similarities. Delve into Thailand's rich history at the magnificent ruins of Ayutthaya, the former capital kingdom. Explore the ornate temples of Wat Phra Mahathat and Wat Arun, and marvel at the architectural grandeur. The name Ayutthaya, the former capital of Siam (present-day Thailand), isn't just a coincidence – it's a deep homage to the legendary Indian city of Ayodhya. King Ramathibodi, the founder of Ayutthaya, deliberately chose this name, establishing a clear connection to the birthplace of Lord Rama, a central figure in the Hindu epic Ramayana. This act showcased the profound influence of Hinduism on the region and its culture. The legacy lives on not just

in the name, but also in the presence of the Ramakien, the Thai version of the Ramayana, which continues to be a cornerstone of Thai literature and performance traditions. Celebrate the festival of lights, Loy Krathong in November, by releasing beautifully decorated krathongs (floating baskets) onto rivers and lakes Find inner peace at majestic temples like Wat Pho in Bangkok, home to the awe-inspiring Reclining Buddha statue. Learn about Buddhist traditions and witness vibrant monk ceremonies throughout the country. Become a jungle explorer Embark on an adventurous trek through the lush jungles of Northern Thailand. Discover hidden waterfalls, encounter exotic wildlife, and immerse yourself in the beauty of the natural world Join a Thai cooking class Go beyond indulging your taste buds with a Thai food adventure. Try to make one! Learn the secrets of Thai cuisine by taking a cooking class.