

## Rising instances of hijras extorting residents during ceremonies in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: In a growing trend that has alarmed residents of Hyderabad, groups of Hijras (transgenders) are indulging in extorting significant sums of money from people during family gatherings, especially weddings and housewarming ceremonies. These incidents are not isolated, with multiple reports surfacing on social media platforms like Reddit and 'X' (formerly Twitter), where users have detailed their harrowing experiences. In a recent incident posted on Reddit, a resident hosting a housewarming ceremony in a gated community was visited by a group of Hijras early in the morning. The uninvited guests demanded a large sum of money, threatening to strip and cause a scene if their demands were not met. Despite the resident's attempts to seek help from the police, the situation escalated, forcing the family to negotiate and eventually pay Rs 40,000 to avoid embarrassment in front of their guests. Similar incidents have been

reported across the city. One resident from Kondapur shared an account of how a group of 20-30 Hijras arrived at his home at midnight, demanding money. Fearing a public spectacle, he complied with their demands, paying Rs 30,000. Other residents have reported being harassed and even physically assaulted by these groups, particularly in areas near the Outer Ring Road.

These extortion attempts are reportedly well-organized, with allegations that local auto drivers and tent house owners tip off Hijra groups about upcoming events. As a result, many families have been forced to pay exorbitant amounts to avoid public embarrassment and disruption during their special occasions. The increasing frequency of these incidents has led to growing concerns among Hyderabad residents, who are calling for stronger police intervention and regular counseling sessions for Hijras to curb such activities.



## SPDCL to replace metal clamps with FRP to avoid power outages caused by reptiles



Hyderabad: In order to avoid power outages caused by animals and birds, Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (TGSPDCL) has decided to replace metal clamps with specially designed Fiber Reinforced Polymer (FRP) silicon clamps on all the lines under its jurisdiction. According to SPDCL Chairman and Managing Director Musharraf Ali Faruqi, reptiles like Lizards, Iguana, squirrels and other small animals like cats and birds often get electrocuted and die when they come into contact with live wire (Metal clamp) point and earth (Metal clamp) point on Horn Gap fuse insulator sets at transformers, breakers and limbs causing tripping of feeders, leading to power supply disruptions.

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"Nearly 14 percent of tripping take place due to short circuits caused by reptiles, animals and birds," he said. Hence, to avoid power outages and to save the reptiles and other animals from being electrocuted, the current metal clamps used in HG fuse sets, breakers and limbs at various electrical equipment, would be replaced with FRP silicon clamps, he said, adding that these clamps were non-conductive, so even if reptiles come into contact with them, they would not be electrocuted. Initially, around 3,000 FRP silicon clamps would be installed in areas with high tree density

and reptile population, Musharraf said. "This small change is expected to benefit reptiles and reduce power supply disruptions," he added. However, for quite sometime now, the SPDCL authorities have started putting blame on reptiles and

birds for power outages. Whenever there is a power outage, the power utilities immediately issue statements stating that the disruption took place due to a short circuit caused by a reptile or bird or some small creatures.

## IIT-Hyderabad developing autonomous vehicles to meet Indian needs

Sangareddy: Researchers at the Technology Innovation Hub on Autonomous Navigation (TiHAN) located at the Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad (IIT-H) said the autonomous vehicles developed by them would successfully run Indian traffic systems unlike the vehicles developed by foreign players in the field. The researchers at TiHAN demonstrated autonomous cars developed by them in the presence of IT and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu and IIT-H Director Prof BS Murty.

Project Director Prof P Rajalakshmi said they had collected more than 4,000 km of traffic data by traveling on Indian roads which was then uploaded into the cloud. The autonomous vehicles use the data to identify obstacles, vehicles, humans, and others to navigate through the roads. The vehicles demonstrated by them on Monday would recognise traffic signals,



signs, and obstacles on the road besides passing through various curves including the most difficult "S" curve, she said.

Stating that the State government would rope in the IIT-H director as a member of the board of Skill University, the Minister said they would further invest Rs 2,400 crore in 65 Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) located across the State to enhance the skill base of students.



# GST rate rationalisation: GoM not keen on tweaking current slabs for now, seeks more data

GST rate rationalisation: GoM not keen on tweaking current slabs for now, seeks more data. The GST has five key tax slabs: zero, 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent. A compensation cess, ranging between 1 per cent to 290 per cent, is levied on demerit and luxury goods over and above the topmost rate of 28 per cent. The reconstituted Group of Ministers (GoM) on rate rationalisation under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime met for the first time on Thursday and broadly agreed to not make any changes with the existing slabs in the indirect tax regime. State finance ministers, who participated in the meeting, also said that the issue of reduction of GST rate in health and life insurance premiums was raised in the meeting of the GoM and it is being reviewed by the fitment committee. GoM members have sought more data on various items after which it will make a detailed presentation on rate rationalisation proposals at the GST Council meeting slated for September 9. The GoM will then meet again in September-end, state finance ministers said. Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, who is the convenor of the GoM on rate rationalisation said some members of the GoM were not in favour of any tweaks in the existing tax slabs under GST. "All matters were discussed. We will have further discussions. For now, every member has given their views. Some are demanding that there should be no changes in tax slabs under GST. More discussions will happen and then only a final decision will be taken," he said.

On reducing GST on insurance, Chaudhary said there have been deliberations on it but no decision has been taken. Chaudhary said he has received representations from some associations such as beverages, online gaming, and they will review those and some will be sent to the fitment committee. Other members of the GoM also supported the view of no change in GST slabs as of now. West Bengal's Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said she was of the view that there should be no changes in the GST slabs. "That (changes in GST slabs) will not happen for now. Slabs will be retained at 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. This view will be reviewed by the Council now," she said. When asked if there would be a rate cut, she said: "we have only discussed but no finality (is there)." Karnataka's Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda also emphasised on no need for a tweak in the tax slabs under GST, stating that it has broadly stabilised. "It (GST rate structure) has stabilised. So why disturb it... what do you achieve by disturbing it. We said in the next meeting we will discuss it (reducing slabs)," he said.

Gowda said the GoM had asked for a detailed breakup of data for some items, the implication on rates going up or down on those items and accordingly a decision will be taken. Any such recommendation of tweaks in rates or tax slabs by the GoM would require final approval of the GST Council. Other members of the GoM include Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, Goa Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho, Rajasthan Medical and Health Services Minister Gajendra Singh along with West Bengal Finance

Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya, Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, and Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal. In its previous meeting in June, Sitharaman had said in the next meeting of the GST Council, the GoM on rate rationalisation under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister, will give a presentation on the status of the work and aspects covered by the panel and work pending before the panel.

The GST has five key tax slabs: zero, 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent. A compensation cess, ranging between 1 per cent to 290 per cent, is levied on demerit and luxury goods over and above the topmost rate of 28 per cent. A merger of 5 per cent and 12 per cent slabs or 12 per cent and 18 per cent slabs has been deliberated upon earlier as well but has not been taken up formally for a decision. West Bengal's Finance Minister Bhattacharya also raised the issue of reduction in GST rate in health and life insurance premium, adding that it will be reviewed by the fitment committee.

Byre Gowda said the discussion on reducing GST on insurance was discussed in passing but it's not clear if the decision on it should be taken by the GoM or the Council in its meeting. Opposition leaders including Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee have demanded withdrawal of GST on life and health insurance premiums. Banerjee had also written a letter to Sitharaman for rollback of GST



on life insurance and health insurance premiums. Earlier on July 28, Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari wrote to Sitharaman, saying GST on life and medical insurance premiums amounted to taxing the "uncertainties of life". Sitharaman had earlier this month said that tax was levied on insurance premiums even before the imposition of GST and that GST revenues are shared between states and the Centre. The GST Council in its 45th meeting held in September 2021 at Lucknow had deliberated upon the revenue situation, after which a GoM was constituted under the then Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai to examine

rate rationalisation. The committee had submitted an interim report in June 2022 suggesting changes in rates for some goods and services along with correction of inverted duty structure. The concern of maintaining revenue neutrality has weighed on such discussions of rate changes earlier. Revenue neutrality is seen as a crucial factor as a study by the RBI had earlier shown that while the Chief Economic Advisor's report had pegged the revenue neutral rate at 15.3 per cent, the weighted average GST rate stood at 14.4 per cent in May 2017, and subsequently dropped to 11.6 per cent by September 2019.

## What Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has been accused of in the alleged MUDA scam

Karnataka Governor Thawarchand Gehlot has allowed three private individuals to seek investigations against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on complaints of corruption in the allotment of 14 housing sites in Mysuru to the wife of the CM — in exchange for 3.16 acres of land allegedly acquired illegally by a local authority in the city. The Governor's order was dated August 16, and was communicated the following day. On August 19, hearing a challenge to the order by the chief minister, the Karnataka High Court paused "precipitative action" based on the Governor's sanction until August 29, the next date of hearing.

In separate complaints, anti-corruption activists T J Abraham, Snehamayi Krishna, and Pradeep Kumar have alleged that the CM's wife was an illegal beneficiary of a controversial land exchange scheme that was devised by the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) in 2020 to resolve cases in which the authority had illegally acquired land without informing owners about the acquisition. Siddaramaiah and the Congress party have denied the allegations. The Congress has pointed out that the launch of MUDA's "50:50" scheme (to grant 50% of land in a developed locality in exchange for 50% of the land illegally acquired by MUDA), and the decision to allot

14 plots to Siddaramaiah's wife under the scheme took place in 2020 and 2021 — when the BJP was in power in the state. The three anti-corruption activists have questioned the original ownership of the 3.16-acre parcel of land, which was acquired by Siddaramaiah's brother-in-law in 2004, and subsequently gifted to Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi in 2010 before it was "illegally" acquired by MUDA. Until 2020, the compensation for people whose lands were wrongly acquired by MUDA without their knowledge was three times the value of the land, as stipulated by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

MUDA also had schemes for allotment of alternative land in the same undeveloped locality where it had wrongly acquired land at the rate of 40:60 (60% of land under development by MUDA for 40% of wrongly acquired land). In one instance of wrongful acquisition of land in 2013, the land losers (Sundramma and others) did not accept monetary compensation, and the Karnataka HC directed MUDA to provide an equal measure (2 acres) of developed land as compensation. According to former MUDA officials, the payment of three times the land cost as compensation (under the 2013 law) and the HC's order to give 100% of alternative land to land los-

ers became a huge burden on the Authority. MUDA then reportedly came up with the 50:50 alternative land allotment scheme under the Karnataka Urban Development Authorities (Disposal of Plots in Lieu of Compensation for Land Acquisition) Rules, 1991. However, on October 27, 2023, Siddaramaiah's government halted the scheme after the state urban development department said it violated the Karnataka Urban Development Authorities Act, 1987. District officials in Mysuru had flagged that the scheme did not conform to land compensation rules, and activists had alleged that even persons whose land had not been wrongly acquired were given alternative MUDA sites in developed localities. According to the urban development department, a total 1,328 sites were allotted to individuals and organisations under the 50:50 scheme.

Among them were the 14 developed housing sites that were given to Siddaramaiah's wife in exchange for 3.16 acres of land. Several local Mysuru MLAs from the BJP and JDS also reportedly garnered lucrative MUDA properties through the scheme. There are three specific allegations against Siddaramaiah. These are largely circumstantial in nature, and are not supported by documentary evidence. ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP OF LAND:

# Vi Invests Significantly to Ramp-Up Network Infrastructure to Enhance Data Speed and Coverage for Users in Telangana

Vi, a leading telecom company, today announced the upgrade of its network capacity in Telangana. Vi has upgraded its spectrum in the LTE 2500 MHz band from 10 MHz to 20 MHz to double the network capacity in this layer across more than 4000 sites in the state, including cities like Hyderabad, Warangal, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Ramagundam, Khammam, Mahbubnagar, Nalgonda, Adilabad, Suryapet, Miryalaguda, Kamareddy, Sangareddy, Rangareddy, etc. This upgrade will enable customers to experience faster data speed on Vi GIGAnet network.

Commenting on the development, Anand Dani, Cluster Business Head, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Karnataka, Vodafone Idea, said, "This spectrum upgrade is part of Vi's broader strategy to upgrade its network infrastructure and provide Vi's users with enhanced speed and reliability. Going forward, we will continue to strengthen our network with the deployment of the recently purchased 2.4 MHz of 900 MHz band." Vi has also introduced new offers and plans for its customers to thrive in this digital world. Some of the recent ones in Telangana include: Vi Guarantee Program: Vi customers will get 130GB guaranteed extra data over one



year, with 10 GB data credited automatically every 28 days for 13 consecutive recharge cycles after they opt in through Vi App.

This offer is valid for Vi customers with 5G smartphones or who have recently upgraded to a new 4G smartphone on daily data unlimited pack of Rs. 299 or above. The newly launched postpaid plan of RED X at a monthly rental of Rs. 1201 provides unlimited data for non-stop surfing, streaming, and connectivity. It gives consumers

the choice to subscribe to complimentary offers like Netflix basic plan, 6-month Swiggy One membership, 7-day International Roaming pack, along with Priority customer service across all Vi touchpoints.

Given the popularity of OTT platforms and growing consumer demands of bringing more entertainment at an affordable price for its users, Vi Movies & TV App now offers access up to 17 OTT platforms and 350 Live TV Channels in one single subscription. It has newly launched two new

subscription plans - Vi Movies & TV Plus priced at Rs. 248 per month and Vi Movies & TV Lite priced at Rs. 154 per month. As consumers increasingly lean towards content consumption, Vi now offers access to Netflix with its two subscription plans priced at Rs. 1198 for 70 days and Rs 1599 for 84 days.

These packs offer the special benefits of Hero Unlimited to consumers with the features of 12 am-6 am unlimited data, weekend data rollover and data delight.

## The Intelligent CUV, MG Windsor Proves its Mettle at the Rann of Kutch

JSW MG Motor India's upcoming vehicle - MG Windsor, India's first Crossover Utility Vehicle (CUV) showcases exceptional performance in the challenging terrain of the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat. India's First CUV - MG Windsor proves its mettle and exudes engineering excellence under the extreme heat of over 44°C in one of the largest salt deserts in the world.

In the latest video released highlights MG Windsor's ability to master the harsh and formidable landscape under extreme temperatures, underscoring its prowess and resilience. The Intelligent CUV's jour-

ney across this extreme landscape is a testament to its robust design, advanced technology, and unparalleled performance. Engineered to withstand the toughest challenges, this test is not just about conquering the land, but also about establishing the Windsor's prowess and dominance in real-world conditions.

This video follows the recent reveal of the segment-first 'Aero-Lounge Seats' and 'Infinity View Glass Roof', which have already set a new standard for comfort and premiumness in the segment. The combination of these cutting-edge features will

make the MG Windsor a standout choice for Indian consumers seeking a premium driving experience, without compromising on practicality and performance. The Intelligent CUV is inspired by the iconic architectural masterpiece and emblem of royal heritage - Windsor Castle. Similar to the legendary castle, MG Windsor will demonstrate meticulous craftsmanship, a commitment to excellence and royalty. Attention to detail is another hallmark of this largest occupied castle in the world. The MG Windsor mirrors this excellence, ensuring every aspect of the car is precisely crafted to reflect the same level of superiority and

luxury that Windsor Castle embodies. As Indian roads continue to evolve, the need for CUVs has become progressively relevant. CUVs offer a perfect blend of aerodynamic design and spacious interiors, making them ideal for navigating bustling urban roads and tighter spaces in smaller towns. Due to their versatility and adaptability, CUVs ensure that families can travel, whether it's for daily commutes or weekend getaways. Their higher ground clearance allows for better navigation over potholes, speed bumps, and uneven surfaces, providing a smoother and more comfortable drive.

## The Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR) Announces the Prestigious Sir Jadunath Sarkar Fellowship

The Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR), founded by eminent historian Dr. Vikram Sampath, proudly announces the launch of the Sir Jadunath Sarkar Fellowship for Indian History. The prestigious fellowship aims to nurture fresh scholarship on India's diverse past.

The Sir Jadunath Sarkar Fellowship for Indian History is a key initiative of FIHCR, aimed at encouraging rigorous academic research across five distinct themes: Ancient Indian History, Medieval Indian History, Modern Indian History, the Freedom Movement, and Post-Independence

Indian History. Each year, through an open call for proposals, the Foundation will offer this prestigious fellowship to five to 10 deserving scholars. Ola Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Ola, has partnered with and supported the fellowship. This partnership underscores Ola's commitment to preserving India's cultural heritage and fostering academic excellence. The fellowship - open to Indian nationals including those abroad - will offer an INR 15 lakh grant for producing a publish-worthy manuscript. Qualification criteria for the fellowship includes a graduate degree and proven research and writing skills among

others.

For the first batch of Sir Jadunath Sarkar Fellows, 19 shortlisted candidates went through a rigorous selection process, including interviews by an eminent jury panel. Consequently, Chandrachur Ghose, Shaan Kashyap, Dr. Saumya Dey, Arshia Malik, Nabaarun Barooah, Jasraj Singh Dhanju, Aarti Tikoo, and Dr. Lakshmi Arya have been selected for the fellowship. The awardees will receive assistance, mentoring, workshops, and funds to publish their manuscripts. Dr. Vikram Sampath, Founder of FIHCR, said, "The Sir Jadunath Sarkar Fellowship represents a pivotal step

in our mission to rejuvenate Indian historical research. By providing substantial support to emerging scholars, we aim to uncover new perspectives on our rich past and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of India's historical trajectory."

Through this initiative, FIHCR aims to drive media interest and community engagement, and attract new sponsors and donors to support its CSR activities. Additionally, FIHCR will introduce research projects at premier Indian universities and the YUVA program, which is designed to engage children and young adults in Indian history.



# There is life after a stroke, with proper rehabilitative therapy

In April 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, Diya, a 20-year-old BDS student was rushed to the emergency stroke unit of Sri Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST). She was in a coma following a major stroke. She had severe brain swelling and needed emergency surgery. As she was rolled into the theatre, no one would have believed that two years later, she would live to tell her tale.

On World Stroke Day, Diya, now in her third year BDS, stood before a packed audience at SCTIMST and spoke about her long and often frustrating journey of recovery, the depths of depression and despair that she often sunk into and how her loved ones never let her give up on herself. "Diya suffered a rare complication following the COVID vaccination: venous thrombosis. This resulted in a major stroke. Post-surgery, she had weakness in her limbs, her speech was affected and it took a year of rehabilitation for her to recover. She was young, highly motivated but most importantly, her family was with her every step of the way, which made a full recovery possible," said Sylaja P.N., Professor and Head of Neurology, who heads the Comprehensive Stroke Care Centre at SCTIMST. In sharp contrast, far away in a small shack behind a row of small two-room houses off the coast of Poovar, lies 42-year-old Francis. He was on a fishing boat at sea, along with his brothers and friends, when he suffered a major stroke. By the time he was brought ashore and taken to the hospital, much time had elapsed. He was treated in the Government Medical College for over a month and discharged, because, "there was nothing more to be done". Paralysed on one side of the body, his speech incoherent, Francis is now confined to his bed. He spends his days alone because his wife has to go fish vending to feed their family of five. Apart from the palliative care volunteers who make a weekly visit to change the urine catheter, he has no contact with the outside world. The once robust fisherman is now a bag of bones, with atrophied muscles. Tears trickle down the corner of his eye when the palliative nurse holds his hand and asks him, "Sukhamano?" (Are you good?) "There is life after a stroke." Dr. Sylaja P.N., Professor and Head of Neurology

"There is life after a stroke. With proper rehabilitative therapy, family support, motivation and mental health support, most stroke survivors can make a good recovery and lead near-normal lives. They can at least be made independent so that they do not become a burden on their families. Some very motivated patients like Diya make a complete recovery. But each person's life and socio-economic background is different. It is sad but the after-stroke life of 50-60% of stroke survivors in the country resonates with that of Francis," Dr. Sylaja said. At least two-thirds of stroke survivors experience motor, sensory, visual, swallowing, language, cognitive, and psychological impairments that can limit

daily activities and restrict participation in family, work, and social life. According to literature, the proportion of people with a disability five years after a stroke ranges from 25% among those who had minor strokes to about 50% among those who had moderate strokes and 80% among those who had severe strokes. Ten years after a stroke, roughly half of survivors continue to remain disabled.

A stroke is a life-changing event and while there has been a lot of attention on medical technologies like thrombolysis and thrombectomy to deal with the acute management of stroke, secondary prevention strategies and neuro-rehabilitation services for stroke survivors continue to be neglected, consigning these persons to a lifetime of disability. The extent of functional recovery after a stroke is variable and depends on several factors, including health and socioeconomic status before the stroke, age, the severity of the stroke, its location and size, comorbidities, and the quality and quantity of rehabilitation received after the event. The road to recovery from a stroke is a long and lonely process. Interdisciplinary stroke care (involving physiotherapists, speech therapists, psychologists, and occupational therapists) can dramatically improve the outcome of stroke patients and provide them good quality of life. Community-based support groups are crucial to handhold the stroke survivor and the family through the long recovery process. However, there is a huge unmet need for rehabilitation facilities for stroke survivors across the country where most patients are discharged without a proper rehabilitation plan. Awareness about the importance of continuous and consistent post-stroke rehabilitation is poor among the general public and the services are also mostly available only to those with some capacity to pay. The recent report of the World Stroke Organisation-Lancet Neurology Commission, "Pragmatic solutions to reduce the global burden of stroke", highlights that for each of the four pillars of the stroke quadrangle — surveillance, prevention, acute care, and rehabilitation. Specific interventions are required so that the global burden of stroke can be brought down, particularly in low and middle-income nations. Implementing primary and secondary stroke prevention strategies and evidence-based acute care and rehabilitation services are the need of the hour to bring down the stroke burden. However, low awareness of stroke and its evidence-based management among communities, health-care professionals, and policy makers is just the beginning of the problem. Poor awareness of stroke amongst the public and delays in taking the patient to an appropriate hospital (with the means to perform thrombolysis) is often compounded by a lack of a proper public emergency response system, infrastructural deficiencies in government hospitals, lack of expertise in hospitals to triage and manage those with stroke efficiently and quickly, shortage of neurolo-

gists and radiologists in the system to administer thrombolysis to eligible stroke patients and above all, the absence of standard care pathways and protocols. If, till recently, the focus of all emergency stroke-related interventions was clot-busting therapy or thrombolysis, only a fraction of patients who reach hospitals within the critical window period of 4-6 hours were eligible for this therapy. Strokes due to large vessel occlusion or blockages in the brain constitute up to 30% of all acute ischaemic strokes. These strokes in large vessels are responsible for a significant proportion of permanent stroke-related disability. Neurologists have now shifted the focus to Mechanical Thrombectomy (MT) for treatment of strokes in large vessels. Thrombectomy involves a catheter placed in the femoral artery, which is navigated up the aorta and into the cerebral arteries to retrieve the clot. The procedure is deemed safer, effective and capable of removing clots up to 90%, as long as the patients (select patients as per guidelines) are treated rapidly within 24 hours. Thrombectomy can reduce the rate of neurological disability significantly by 40-60%. Thrombectomy however requires a cath lab and hospitals which are equipped to perform thrombolysis can refer the patient to a thrombectomy centre for comprehensive stroke care once the emergency has been dealt with. India has 566 stroke centres (primary and comprehensive together), of which only 360 have thrombectomy facilities, most of which are in the private sector. Even after massive public awareness programmes, less than 50% of the patients recognise stroke signals. The thrombolysis rate in India is abysmally poor at less than 5% and even in the U.S., this is still less than 25%. There are also issues of some atypical presentations of stroke which physicians at the primary care fail to recognise, leading to delayed referrals "Maintaining a patient in a stroke unit where there are mandatory ICU protocols for prevention of complications of stroke like aspiration pneumonia and a team of neurologists, radiologists, interventional radiologists and nurses trained in stroke management for continuous evaluation gives the best outcome for patients. However, there are less than 300 such stroke units across the country and most are in the private sector, unaffordable to most patients. Unless more stroke units with endovascular thrombectomy facilities are established in government hospitals, especially the government medical colleges, we cannot hope to reduce the mortality and morbidity burden of stroke," points out Dr. Shylaja. Kerala, which has one of the highest prevalence of hypertension (44%) in the country, is also one State which has tried to de-centralise stroke care since 2018, with commendable results. The State is the only one in the country which has stroke units (thrombolysis facility with a neurologist) in 10 of its 14 districts. SCTIMST was a technical consultant to the State Government for the training of primary care physicians in all as-



pects of acute stroke management and to establish stroke-care pathways with an added accent on good stroke rehabilitation, which involves getting trained community-level health workers to visit stroke survivors at home to aid with rehabilitation. The district stroke units have so far managed to perform over 256 thrombolysis successfully and residual paralysis was reported only in 4% of cases, said Bipin Gopal, State nodal officer for NCD programmes. Two thrombolytic drugs — TPA and Tenecteplase — are supplied to the stroke units by the government at no cost to the patients. However, the system has not been able to expand the number of these facilities or upgrade any of the centres to a thrombectomy centre because of the shortage of funds and trained medical professionals to run these centres. The health system has only 15 neurologists. General transfers in the health services with no attention to the clinical requirements in each institution means that the neurologists as well as the casualty medical officers trained to recognise strokes are constantly moved around. One out of four strokes in the country are said to be recurrent strokes and secondary stroke prevention strategies, which stress adherence to medication and adequate risk factor control, are important in preventing stroke recurrence. However, both adherence to medication and risk factor control are sub-optimal in low- and middle-income countries. A community-based study conducted by SCTIMST with the Department of Health in Kollam district in Kerala to determine the efficacy of post-stroke care in the community showed an overall medication adherence of just 43.8% among stroke survivors. Of the 896 stroke survivors in the community, only 35% had checked their BP and blood sugar in the previous six months. Even after education by trained healthcare workers, only 20% more did their blood investigations. "People did not seem to think that having medication on long term was necessary or that it was important. Some believed that their kidneys would bear the side effects of medication in the long term. Some just forgot to take their meds. None who had been prescribed diabetes and hypertension medication had any idea about their blood sugar or blood pressure targets.



# A \$5 trillion economy, but for whom?

Last week, at an election rally in Chhattisgarh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that he is extending the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojna, a scheme providing 5 kg of foodgrains free every month to beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act, by five years because he does not want any citizen to sleep hungry. This means that 80 crore Indians will still be receiving free foodgrains to stave off hunger in 2028. This is the year the government expects India to become the third largest economy in the world, with a GDP of \$5 trillion. Will large swathes of Indians still be hungry with a GDP of \$5 trillion? Who will benefit from the five-year dash to these targets?

The story of Japan's growth

For reference, let's take a look at Japan today, the third largest economy by GDP in the world. In Japan, there is reportedly a death by suicide every 20 minutes. About 15 lakh Japanese have not left their homes for years, a form of severe social withdrawal known as hikikomori. Old parents rent actresses who come in on Sunday to call them 'Mom' and 'Pop' because their own daughters don't visit any more. Every day, dead people are discovered in tiny apartments days or weeks after they died; these are called kodokushi or lonely deaths. Clearly, Japan's climb to the third position economy-wise has not lifted all boats equally; it has tossed the weak to the margins where they languish because economic growth on steroids has unpicked the safety catch of family and community ties. For 40 years, Japan was the world's second largest economy, powered by manufacturing and exports. But after the 2008 world financial crisis, the wheels came off the Japanese economy. Japan's population started spending less, exports shrank, and government incentives dried up. On the other hand, China enjoyed a manufacturing boom and dislodged Japan to become the world's second-largest economy by GDP.

On losing rank, however, Japan dis-

played remarkable ego-free economic diplomacy. As soon as the economy plunged to the third position, Japan's leadership publicly welcomed China's ascent, stating that sustained demand from the (then) most populous country could only be good for Japan's exports. Even if this statement was made partially to save face, the two economies intertwined immediately. Today, China is Japan's largest trading partner, proving that in the world political economy it pays to embrace your main competitor, even if you are Vishwaguru (global teacher). This ego-free 'activism' has ensured that Japan has held on to the third position in world GDP rankings for the last 14 years. But let us return to the parallel story in Japan. As the high-value industrial economy took centre stage, the strength of personal and professional relationships withered and the multi-generational family and social structure became atomised. This was a perfect storm in the lives of the traditional, semi-skilled workforce. Workers moved from the countryside and satellite towns to cities expecting 'salaryman' jobs, but many discovered that they were not trained for the technological tsunami sweeping the high-growth sectors. They fell through the cracks into financial collapse and social withdrawal. Today, the Government of India claims that the country is on the cusp of an economic tsunami. How does the sprint to the target of \$5 trillion bode for citizens, especially the 80 crore who will still be on free rations in 2028? India's economic growth pivots on capital, productivity and labour, and data show that for over four-fifth of Indians, the \$5 trillion economy is a bridge too far.

Consider capital: in 2021, 1% of the population owned about 41% of the nation's wealth, while 50% owned 3% of its wealth, according to Oxfam. In such an environment, the dash towards a \$5 trillion economic trophy lies in the grip of the resource-rich power brokers who will seize the initiative. But ironically, it is the low-resource citizens who are funding the investment for the proposed \$5 trillion



economy: approximately 64% of the total Goods and Services Tax (GST) came from the bottom 50% of the population, and the top 10% contributed 3% of GST. At the same time, the contribution of labour, the other driver of growth, is hamstrung due to dubious educational and skill attainments and halting digital literacy. Productivity is just beginning to get a boost through the creation of digital and physical infrastructure. The government is aware that the rich are moving into pole position to deliver the \$5 trillion target just before the 2029 general election. Clearly, this will bolster upscale India's influence and power abroad, and the Prime Minister's primacy in the world. The government's tools and sectors for achieving this goal were identified by the Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhri, in Parliament on August 2023 as "digital economy, fintech, energy transition, climate change... GST, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, decrease in corporate tax, Make in India, Start-Up India, Production Linked Incentives", all prefaced by the mandatory mantra "inclusive growth". But these cutting-edge sectors and tools are not native to the 80 crore marginalised citizens and to crores of others. They cannot seize the opportunities

on offer in Artificial Intelligence or data science or robotics or fintech — either now or in the next five years. There are also other issues with Mr. Modi's guarantee that India will be the third largest economy in five years. First, with a per capita income of \$2,400, India ranks 149 among 194 countries in 2022. Since per capita income is a keen index of a population's well-being, note that the average Japanese at \$34,000 is considered better off than the average Chinese at a \$13,000, even though China has outstripped Japan in world GDP rankings. What is India's per capita income projected to be at \$5 trillion? There are no official estimates available. Second, the nub of the chase to \$5 trillion GDP is in its distribution, or the inequality index. This index, generated by World Economics, is on a scale of 0-100. A high value indicates a more egalitarian society. The values of both China and Japan are more than 50. These countries appear to be sharing their economic fortunes more evenly than India, which has a value of 21.9. Will the divide between the two Indias deepen with the \$5 trillion target? India might be on its way to achieving this goal, but most of the population still remains marooned in the slow lanes of an older India, watching as the new caravans storm past.

## Amended surrogacy law doesn't go the full distance

The amendment to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022, now allows donor gametes to be used by couples facing medical issues. A 2023 amendment had disallowed this. So, the latest amendment corrected what the courts too noted was an excessively strict criteria for surrogacy. While logical, the amendment still does not go far enough because even now at least one donor gamete has to be from the commissioning parents and a single woman still needs her own gametes. So couples or women with medical conditions cannot undertake surrogacy. The amendment is the result of multiple petitions across the country. Courts have passed interim orders in multiple cases allowing women with Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser (MRKH) syndrome to use a surrogate, allowing import of the embryo of commissioning parents and gametes of an intending father into India as well as allowing parents who had lost a child to use surrogacy. Even allowing maternity leave to the commission-

ing mother was an issue decided by litigation. Similar orders have also been passed in the Arun Muthuvel Vs Union of India and related cases pending in the Supreme Court. These cases question various aspects of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 (SRA) and its related Rules as well as the apparent contradictions between the SRA and the Assisted Reproductive Technology Act, 2021 (ART Act) and its related rules. According to the SRA, only a heterosexual married couple with no surviving children and widowed or divorced single women are currently eligible to commission surrogacy arrangements. Single men and women who are not widowed or divorced cannot enter into surrogate arrangements. The regulation of surrogacy and surrogacy clinics and also providing a legally sound set of safeguards for all parties, i.e. the commissioning parent/s, the surrogates and the children born of such arrangements was urgent. In the decade prior to the passing of the two Acts, the

Volden (Netherlands), Jan Balaz (Germany) and Manji Yamada (Japan) and other cases highlighted the plight of parents and children separated from each other or having to undertake costly and time-consuming litigation to bring Indian-born children to the countries of their parents/grandparents. But India has to be careful not to make Indian parents the ones having to litigate to allow for the completion of their family. The ART and surrogacy cases highlight some important issues. The stricter legislation post-2019 has not led to better regulation of ART and surrogacy clinics. As of 2017, 80% of the IVF clinics were still unregistered and 98% of the ART clinics were not registered. The number of registered clinics falls far short of the total number of clinics in the country, and there seems to be no clinic which was rejected as per the national ART and surrogacy registry website. The SRA does not recognise even live-in relationships despite such relationships having legal sanction in India since 2010. Within the narrow group of



married heterosexual couples, at least one of the commissioning parents must be able to produce gametes. Same-sex couples and foreigners were prohibited from surrogacy in India in 2013 and 2016, respectively. The SRA did not change this position. At first, the SRA allowed only Indian citizens the right to enter into surrogacy arrangements, but an amendment now allows overseas Indian citizens this right too. The age limits for the couples currently set at between 23-50 years for the women and 26-55 years old for the men also seem to be needlessly restrictive.



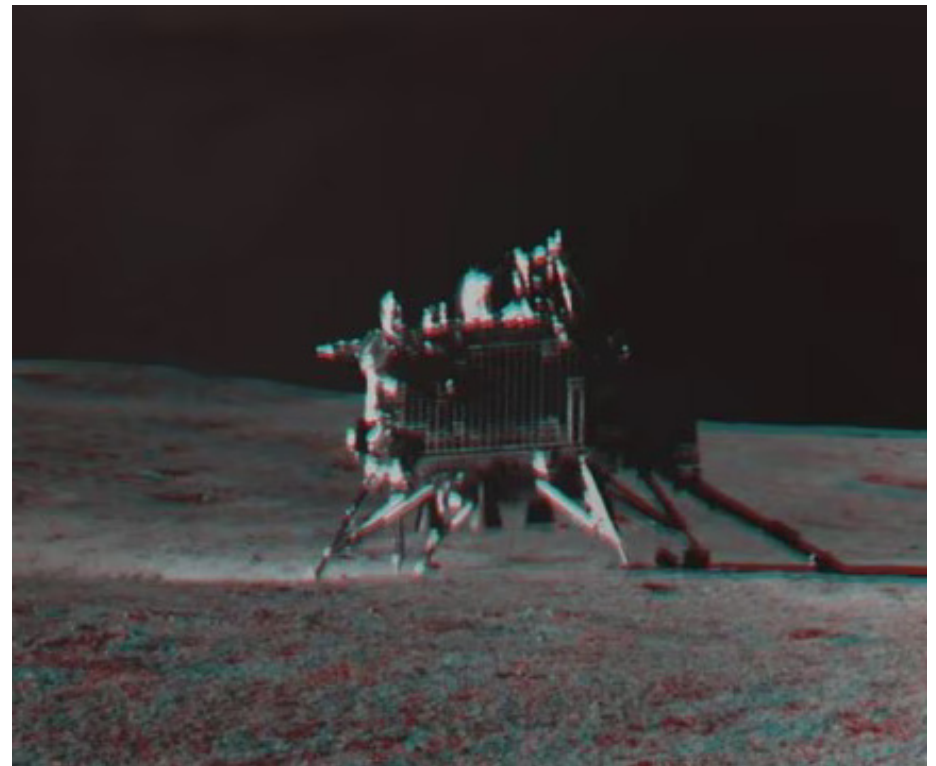
# What the first findings from ISRO's Chandrayaan 3 mission tell us about the Moon

Almost a year after Chandrayaan 3 landed on the Moon, scientists in India have released the findings of studies carried out by one of the instruments on the rover module. The findings comprise the first analysis of the composition of the topsoil in the Moon's southern latitudes, and support the widely-accepted hypothesis that the lunar surface in the immediate aftermath of the Moon's formation was covered by a sea of molten material. The data collected by the Alpha Particle X-ray Spectrometer (APXS) also contain new information about the elemental composition of the lunar surface that can help to better understand the evolution of the Moon. The findings were published in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday. Scientists have reported three key findings.

\* The Moon's crust was formed layer by layer, which adds weight to the lunar magma ocean (LMO) hypothesis; and\* The topsoil around the lunar south pole has a greater-than-expected sprinkling of minerals which compose the lower layers of the lunar crust. What the first findings from Chandrayaan 3 mission tell us about the Moon How does APXS work? Taking forward LMO hypothesis The Moon is thought to have been formed after a large asteroid collided with Earth some 4.5 billion years ago. Scientists hypothesise that in its early life, the Moon's surface was made up entirely of an ocean of magma. As this ocean cooled over millions of years, heavier silicon- and magnesium-rich minerals such as olivine and pyroxene sank to the lower levels of the lunar crust and its upper mantle (which is generally the largest layer inside a planetary body, bounded by the planet's core on the inside and the crust on the outside). Lighter minerals, composed of calcium- and sodium-based compounds, floated to the top and formed the upper crust. The findings of Chandrayaan 3's APXS take this hypothesis a step further. They support a class of models under the umbrella of the LMO hypothesis which theorises a stratified lunar crust — where 80-90% of the upper crust is believed to be composed of iron, magnesium, and sodium-rich rocks, and the lower crust of magnesium-rich rocks. "Among the different possible scenarios of lunar crust formation within the premise of LMO, the APXS measurements support the models indicating stratified crust formation," the study says. 'Mixing' of crust's lower levels The third APXS finding is a new discovery — and suggests that some "mixing" of the various levels of the lunar crust might have taken place. The researchers have proposed that this "mixing" could have been caused by the asteroid impact that led to the formation of the South Pole Aitken (SPA) Basin, the largest and oldest basin on the Moon. The SPA basin has a diameter of approximately 2,500 km — equivalent to the distance between Delhi and Kochi — and a depth of 6.2-8.2 km. It is believed to have been formed 4.2-4.3 billion years ago, when the asteroid hit near the lunar south pole. The researchers theorise that this asteroid impact resulted in the excavation of magnesium-rich material from deeper layers of the Moon, out to the surface of the surrounding areas as ejecta. The

Chandrayaan 3 landing site was just 350 km from the rim of the SPA basin.

Significance of the findings While these findings more or less support what is already known via modelling, imaging, and various hypotheses, they are novel nonetheless. This is primarily because Chandrayaan 3 landed near the Moon's south pole, a first in lunar exploration. While the composition of lunar topsoil near the equatorial and mid-latitude regions have previously been studied by earlier Moon missions sent by other countries, this is the first time that such measurements have been carried out near the Moon's poles. This makes Chandrayaan 3 the first to carry out in situ experiments of any kind at the poles. The rover moved within a 50-metre radius of the landing site, and took readings on different kinds of surfaces, from relatively smooth ones to near the rims of small craters. The overall finding, which suggests that the topsoil near the landing site is fairly uniform, is novel. Notably, the uniformity of the surface is unlike that of Earth, where tectonic plate movements led to the creation of undulating surfaces. With measurements taken at 23 spots along the rover's path, this is the first time that soil measurements on lunar highlands (light coloured, elevated basins on the Moon standing above dark-coloured basins known as maria) have been taken with such high frequency. Other missions — such as the US's Apollo 16, Russia's Luna 20, and China's Chang'e 4 — too have sampled the lunar highlands, but sparsely. The total observation duration for the APXS measurements was about 31 hours, which



were spread out over the mission period of 10 days. Impact on future missions If the mixing of the various layers of the lunar crust was propelled by the impact on the SPA basin and by further impacts subsequently in and around the basin, scientists believe that the APXS measurements will serve as the "first ground truth in the south polar highlands and probably play a key role in the overall understanding of the origin and evolution of the Moon". The uni-

form surface also implies that the region can be used as a calibration point for remote sensing operations, and can thus be used for planning future missions. Future missions near the south pole can also evaluate for source-crater pairing of lunar meteorites. Lunar meteorites are meteors that originate from the Moon, ejected upon impact from an asteroid or comet. Caught in the Earth's gravitational field, the lunar meteorites eventually end up on Earth.

## This ginger-lime digestive aid gets a thumbs up from a dietician (recipe inside)

During the rainy season, many people experience digestive issues. As such, it's not surprising our social media algorithm shows many natural home remedies that "promise" relief. One such was by Chef Keertida Phadke, who suggested having ginger and lime with some salt, sugar to combat metabolism issues. "A ginger-lime digestive that needs only 4 ingredients to come together and makes the tastiest, chatpata digestive aide perfect for monsoons. There's no recipe per se," she said. How to make it? Ingredients\*Thinly sliced/grated ginger with\*Sugar\*Salt\*Lime juice (enough to cover the slices)Method,\*Combine everything in a glass jar. Put the lid on and shake well.

\*Taste and check if you need more salt/sugar.\*Refrigerate for 2-3 days. You'll see how the concoction turns the prettiest shade of pink. "Do a final adjustment of salt/sugar now that the flavours have steeped," said Phadke.\*This easily stays in the fridge for 10-12 days. According to Phadke, beyond its digestive powers, this makes a great relish — crisp, salty, savoury — and so much better than the vinegary ginger served alongside subpar



sushi. Such a simple digestive/condiment that comes together with minimum effort or ingredients and yet rewards you with maximum flavour, she added.

Veena V, dietician, Aster Whitefield Hospital, Bangalore said that ginger and lime are powerful ingredients with diverse healthful properties that make them great choices for the monsoon. "Ginger contains gingerol, which is a bioactive compound with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant ef-

fects. It also helps get rid of nausea, improve digestion, and prevent flu and common colds that abound during the rainy season. Also, ginger has warming properties," said Veena. The combination of ginger and lime helps in maintaining hydration and electrolyte balance. Conversely, lime is rich in vitamin C that strengthens the immune system improving its ability to fight diseases. "i



# Parvathy Thiruvothu on Justice Hema Committee Report: 'Put through a long wait..., expected quicker action...'

In the wake of the 2017 sexual assault of a prominent actor, which led to the arrest of one of Malayalam cinema's biggest stars, Dileep, a group of women from the film industry formed the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC). The WCC demanded dignity and safety at the workplace for women who work in Malayalam cinema. The Kerala government responded by establishing a three-member committee, led by Justice K Hema, to look into the problems faced by women in the industry. The committee's report, which revealed pervasive sexual harassment and gender bias in the film industry, was released earlier this week – more than four years after it was submitted to the government in December 2019 – with several pages redacted.

As the findings ignited a heated debate about the culture of silence and the dire need for systemic change, Parvathy Thiruvothu, a leading Malayalam actor and WCC founding member, speaks to Arun Janardhanan. Has Malayalam film industry changed (with regard to plight of women) since 2017?

There have been many changes during this period. It's important to note that the formation of the WCC led many of its members to lose projects and even their careers for challenging the power structures in the industry. The fact that some people are willing to work with members of the WCC itself is evidence of change. The people who choose to give us work show where they stand in this process. Both new and older generation actors have also become much more sensitised to these issues. Without this movement, even these initial changes wouldn't have occurred.

When we look at these changes, some have embraced them, understanding their importance, while others have changed out of fear of the consequences if they don't. But yes, there is change, though it's still in its early stages. Even if there had been no sign of change, we would have continued to fight, and we will continue to fight.

What next? Do you believe the release of this report will lead to significant change?

We have made specific demands: proper contractual remunerations, the application of the POSH Act (Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act), and mandatory Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) for all productions. Change is a process, and it should address physical and all other forms of exploitation based on complaints. It is important to remember that when we demand ICCs, they are meant to protect everything and everyone, not just women. However, we are still waiting to see the recommendations of the Hema Committee. Two ministers who held the Culture portfolio in the last seven years now claim they haven't seen crucial parts of the report. How do you assess the government's handling of this issue – from the formation of the committee to the report's release? Our review – the WCC's – of the government's role in the entire process is ongoing. I can't speak for the collective as a whole. More importantly, the collective cannot go against the govern-

ment – it can either work with the government or push it to act. But if you ask me personally, I felt we were put through a long waiting game. We expected quicker action. If justice delayed is justice denied, then justice has been delayed here for so long, and the report only came out after a lot of pushing. We were initially told that the process would be confidential, and we trusted the process as it is a government process. But then, it is like a doctor seeing a patient, writing a prescription and refusing to give it to the patient saying he will keep it. Hey, I need the prescription, I need to buy the medicine. This report, submitted to the government in December 2019, only came out in August 2024. This is such a long period. During this time, how many have been exploited financially and physically in this industry. I agree that when there is a recommendation, it can't be implemented quickly. But how do we protect people until the recommendations are implemented? That should have been considered by the government. I don't view the government's handling of this positively. But at least the report has finally come out. We are going to study it in detail. Wishy-washy, broad-stroke answers won't help. We need to put systematic changes in place.

The focus of the Hema Committee report was larger. When we talk about three 'P's – prevention, prohibition, and punishment – the larger outcome is that if the first two Ps are taken care of, there is no need for the third P. Punishment was not the main focus of the Hema Committee, but when prevention and prohibition were ignored, the supposed purpose of the committee was also forgotten.

What action do you expect from the government now? The Chief Minister said the government will definitely take criminal action if victims approach them with a complaint. If, through suo motu action, an FIR is filed, will victims who gave statements to the Hema Committee personally be able to cooperate with a criminal investigation? When it comes to criminality and potential POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) charges, it's all guesswork as to what the government might do. In criminal cases, minors might be involved, so the government needs to sit with the committee and clarify the choice of words used in the report – such as "women" or "girl" – to ensure accuracy.

This report was submitted to the government in 2019, yet despite the significant resources and money spent on the committee, the Cultural Minister (Saji Cheriyan) says he hasn't even seen the report. Why did it stay with the government for so long without being studied? When will they start looking into the nuances and details of the cases documented in the report? Of course, they must take suo motu action if there are potential POCSO charges. When we give confidential statements, and if such actions are taken, survivors will also have to cooperate. However, the real job of the government should have been to bring about systemic changes, not just put the onus on us by saying, "We will take action if you file a complaint." Thank you for saying that, but we already knew



this. If the government wants to take action on its own, that's a valid fight. But when we talk about survivors' choices and whether they should participate in this process, we have to ask: when was the last time a survivor actually received justice? It hasn't happened in a long time, and that makes this whole conversation incredibly draining. When examining issues of sexual harassment, exploitation, and inequality, do you see the root cause as power, morality, or character aberrations of individuals?

It is a combination of power, morality, and character aberrations. Women have always been defined in a patriarchal system in a particular way. The dignity of an actress is often questioned, and she is reduced to something less than her skillset at work places. Unlike men, when a woman succeeds, it's almost seen as a stroke of luck. They would say she "happens to be good at it". People ask, "Aren't you here for money? Fame?" And those who exploit believe they are doing us a favour by giving us opportunities. True, they may be holding power over distribution and production. But times are changing, and women are becoming producers and directors, too. Unfortunately, the conditioning alone hasn't changed. There is a deeply rooted patriarchal way of looking at women, and it persists. When I talk about these issues, people ask, "Why don't you just leave this profession if it's difficult?" Would they ask the same question to a man?

How do you view male actors, like the late Thilakan, who faced challenges in the Malayalam industry and confronted power?

I have only heard about what Thilakan went through, but it shows that when power is at play, those in control have the ability to weaken and take away everything from someone. They did just that to Thilakan – it was truly horrific. He held an important, undeterred space in the industry and paid a heavy price as he continued his fight. If he had to endure that, just imagine what women are going through now. Many of us had to sacrifice our careers to form the WCC. We've drawn inspiration from those earlier battles, learned lessons, and have expanded the fight. Ever since I started giving interviews, seven-eight years after beginning my acting career, speaking out about rights, basic amenities for women, and sexual exploitation, the immediate impact was that my work was taken away from me. This happened even though my movies were doing well and making good revenue. I was sidelined. Despite achieving commercial success back-to-back, I found myself with no work after I spoke out about these issues.

Do these issues signal a degeneration of media and the medium itself – cinema? Or do they reflect deeper cultural problems? I wouldn't say it's entirely a sign of degeneration, because there's also an awakening happening. Media is now being held accountable by the public. It's not just one-sided media trials and slut-shaming anymore. Social media is calling out TV channels for their biases. We can see that many channels have really cleaned up on their own. As for the medium itself, I wouldn't say the problem lies with cinema, but rather with our culture, which is built on exploiting minorities and weaker sections, such as women.

## Residential hostels in Hyderabad inspected by Food Safety wing

Hyderabad: The Food Safety authorities conducted a series of inspections in government and private residential schools and hostels spread across multiple locations in Hyderabad between Wednesday and Friday. The Food Safety authorities of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) conducted thorough inspection of kitchens, raw food materials,

storage areas, cooked food and evaluated the situation of general sanitation in government and private residential hostels and schools. As a part of these inspections, the Food Safety authorities, between August 21 and 23, inspected a total of 23 private and government residential hostels. A total of 4 residential hostels in LB Nagar, 6 in Charminar,



# A 2,000-year-old chariot that livens up the temple festival in Tiruvottiyur

The Metro Rail tracks were built at a higher elevation in Tiruvottiyur just so the temple car could continue using its usual route during the festival, says Tamil scholar Ma. Ki. Ramanan, who is a long-time resident of the area. For most people who pass through Tiruvottiyur Theradi on the Metro Rail's Phase I Extension line, it is just another station on the stretch. But for those who have lived long enough to fall in love with the quaint old town, the spot is an emotion. For, it used to be the resting point of the chariot of the Sri Thyagarajaswamy and Vadivudaiamman temple, which is said to be over 2,000-years-old, and a place that Tamil Saints Appar and Thirugnanasambandar Sundaramurthi, and Carnatic composer Saints Thyagaraja and Muthuswamy Dikshitar are said to have visited.

"There used to be around 25 steps and a mandapam on Tiruvottiyur High Road where the temple car would be parked after its annual procession. However, following the road widening and civic developments, the temple car is now parked near the temple," said Ma. Ki. Ramanan, a Tamil scholar and long-time resident of the area. Several decades ago, the chariot used to be around 70 ft tall. But, due to annual repairs, its height has reduced to 40 ft over the years. "The Metro Rail tracks were built at a higher elevation in Tiruvottiyur just so the temple car could continue using its usual route in February-March. The tracks have been built at a height of 17 m (around 55 ft)," he added. The annual car festival during the Tamil month of Masi is a sight to behold and is a time when families and friends



come together to celebrate. "Those who have settled in other areas come back every year just to witness the grandeur of Sri Thyagarajaswamy giving darshan to those standing on the Mada streets. Women draw large kolams along the route and devotees pour crystal salt under the temple car's huge wheels, distribute turmeric and saffron, and serve free refreshments to beat the heat. It brings the community together

and cuts across religious and communal barriers," said Indira Kannan of Pillayar Koil Lane. Ms. Kannan, who has been living in the locality and witnessing the festival for more than 75 years, is happy that though the place where the chariot was once parked has been demolished to make way for the Metro Rail station, at least the station itself has been named after it. For many people, participating in the pulling of the

temple car is a highlight of the festival. The vadam, as the rope is called, is made of coconut fibre. But when bound together and twisted, it has immense strength. Many are just happy to just touch the rope, she added. Sivacharya Sundararam, another resident, said the temple chariot procession carrying the deities would be led by a small chariot carrying the idols of Lord Ganesha, Lord Muruga, and other deities.

## Anthropic says California AI bill's benefits likely outweigh costs

The benefits of California's revised bill that seeks to regulate how artificial intelligence is developed and deployed in the state likely outweigh the costs, Anthropic said on Thursday. San Francisco-based Anthropic is a rival to ChatGPT-maker OpenAI and is backed by Amazon and Alphabet.

California's proposed bill on AI regulation, SB 1047, advanced by State Senator Scott Wiener, a Democrat, mandates safety testing for many of the most advanced AI models that cost more than \$100 million to develop or those that require a defined amount of computing power. Developers of AI software operating in the state would need to outline methods for turning off the AI models if they go awry, effectively a kill switch. The bill would also give the state attorney general the power to sue if developers are not compliant.

Why its important Senator Wiener recently revised the bill to appease tech companies, relying in part on input from Anthropic. The revised bill did away with a

provision for a government AI oversight committee. Tech companies developing AI - which can respond to prompts with fully-formed text, images or audio as well as run repetitive tasks with minimal intervention - have largely balked at the bill. Alphabet's Google and Meta have expressed concerns in letters to Wiener, with Meta saying the bill threatens to make the state unfavorable to AI development and deployment. OpenAI had said AI should be regulated by the federal government and that the California bill creates an uncertain legal environment. "In our assessment the new SB 1047 is substantially improved, to the point where we believe its benefits likely outweigh its costs. However, we are not certain of this, and there are still some aspects of the bill which seem concerning or ambiguous to us," Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei said in a letter to California Governor Gavin Newsom on Aug. 21. "Our initial concerns about the bill potentially hindering innovation due to the rapidly evolving nature of the field have been greatly reduced in the amended version."

