

## Unauthorized shared taxis create unpleasant experiences for passengers at Hyderabad Airport

Hyderabad: Passengers arriving at Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) are increasingly falling victims to unauthorized shared taxi scams, resulting in frustrating and distasteful experiences. Numerous reports on social media platforms like Reddit and Quora reveal a troubling pattern of deception, where passengers are misled about ride-sharing arrangements and face extended waits and unexpected charges. The crux of these scams lies not in the concept of shared rides but in the dishonesty surrounding them. Passengers are often unaware they will be sharing their ride until it's too late. In some cases, their luggage is used as leverage, resulting in extra charges or prolonged waits.

Describing a recent incident on Reddit, a 26-year-old professional reported being charged ₹800 for what he thought was a convenient shared cab service. Instead, the ride became a two-and-a-half-hour ordeal with the cab making detours to drop off other passengers, resulting in the driver earning ₹3,200.

In another case, a traveler recounted being misled into canceling a pre-booked Uber ride, only to end up in a shared cab with strangers and facing a higher fare. In another troubling case, a passenger was forced to switch from a cab to an auto midway through the journey under the pretense of a shortcut, exacerbating an already stressful situation. A Quora user described the scam: "The issue isn't just the ride; it's about holding your luggage hostage. Once they have it, they may make you wait an hour or demand extra at your drop-off point." Numerous reports describe scammers promising cheap rides, only to take passengers' luggage, delay their departure, and then add additional riders, leading to uncomfortable conditions. This disturbing trend at RGIA highlights a network of drivers who form cartels to pool passengers while providing poor service despite initially low fares. In the wake of such incidents, travelers are advised to stick to pre-booked rides from services like Uber or Ola and to remain cautious of anyone offering alternative transportation options



on the spot. Despite the growing number of complaints, RGIA authorities have yet to address the issue or enforce stricter mea-

sures to curb these scams, leaving passengers to navigate these risks on their own.

## Beware! It's raining dengue, chikungunya in Hyderabad



Hyderabad: With seasonal ailments recording a significant surge this year, general public in Hyderabad and other parts of Telangana State, must exercise caution and take necessary precautions. Across the board, almost all the major seasonal ailments including dengue, chikungunya, malaria dengue, chikungunya, malaria and viral fevers have surged this year, when compared to last year, according to the latest statistics that

were released by the Director of Public Health (DPH), Dr B Ravinder Naik on Saturday. The top public health official has urged people from all walks of life in Hyderabad and districts to take precautions in their homes and surrounding regions while the health department in collaboration with other government departments continues to take preventive and surveillance measures. All the 42 diagnostic laboratories across Telangana are work-

ing overtime to conduct diagnostic tests of samples collected from patients. The local PHCs, UPHCs and Basthi Dawakhana will be able to provide the required primary care services to patients who walk-in. People in general, however, from their side must continue to take precautions," Dr Naik said.

Senior health officials in Telangana on Saturday have urged people to be cautious from emerging infections like mpox, which was recently declared as public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) by World Health Organization (WHO). Surveillance efforts to detect sus-

pected mpox infections at the earliest including tracking passengers at Hyderabad airport are also underway. If there is a need, more beds and hospitals in the districts will be added to provide medical services to patients with mpox infection. So far, there is not a single case of mpox reported in Telangana. In fact, the last mpox positive case that was reported in India was in 2022 in Kerala. We have identified Gandhi Hospital as a nodal agency to handle mpox cases if and when they get diagnosed. We have also received 100 kits to identify mpox infections from the Central Government," Dr Naik pointed out.

## Dengue, viral fevers surge in health minister's constituency

Sangareddy: The Andole constituency, represented by Health Minister Damodara Rajanarasimha in the State Assembly, witnesses increasing cases of dengue and other viral fevers.

While the district recorded 120 dengue cases in August, the Primary Health Centre at Talelama in Andole reported 20 cases. The government hospital in Jogipet, located in the Health Minister's constituency headquarters, was full of patients and

getting 20 to 30 admissions every day. As many as 31 dengue cases were reported in August alone in Jogipet while many persons were visiting the hospitals with fevers, colds and other health complications. Out of 200 samples sent by the Jogipet Hospital to the diagnostic hub this month, 31 tested positive for dengue. The number of outpatients coming to the Jogipet hospital has swelled to 550 compared to 350 to 400 reported during the normal days.

# Will Malayalam film industry report lead to changes?

On August 19, the Hema Committee report on a host of issues in the Malayalam film industry, particularly those faced by women, was released to the public, nearly five years after it was submitted to the Kerala government. The report, with the names of witnesses and the accused redacted, has shaken the industry with revelations of sexual exploitation, illegal bans, lack of written contracts, inhumane working conditions, especially for junior artistes and crew, the absence of even basic amenities on film sets for women, and a range of other issues.

Why did the government constitute the Hema Committee?

On the night of February 17, 2017, a prominent woman actor was abducted and sexually assaulted by a group of men inside a moving vehicle in Kochi, where much of the film industry is now based. The survivor filed a case the next day. The incident triggered a chain reaction that challenged the entrenched power centres of Malayalam cinema and led to the formation of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), comprising some of the industry's best-known women actors and technicians. In response to demands from WCC members, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan appointed a committee headed by K. Hema, a retired judge of the Kerala High Court, to study issues of sexual harassment and gender inequality in the industry. The committee included former bureaucrat K.B. Valsala Kumari and actor T. Sarada as members. The report, submitted to the Kerala government on December 31, 2019, remained under wraps for nearly five years, leading to intense speculation about its contents. Despite repeated demands from various stakeholders, including the WCC, the report stayed locked away. The Department of Cultural Affairs rejected Right to Information (RTI) applications, citing the privacy of witnesses. On July 6, the State Information Commission ordered the department to release the redacted report to the public by July 25. However, the government postponed the release after various parties, including a producer and one of the witnesses, approached the Kerala High Court, citing privacy concerns. The report was finally made public after the High Court rejected the petitioners' objections. What the Hema Committee report says about the Malayalam film industry

What did the Hema Committee find?

Rumours of the existence of a "casting couch"—the practice of demanding sexual favours from aspiring actors in exchange for roles—have long circulated within the industry. The report, accessed by The Hindu through an RTI request, confirms the existence of this practice through in-camera testimonials from several witnesses who appeared before the committee. Witnesses provided evidence, including audio clips, video clips, and screenshots of WhatsApp messages. Some women in the industry told the committee about men knocking on their doors at night, sometimes attempting to forcibly enter their rooms. The report highlights the plight of

women who were forced to act alongside their abusers. Many women expressed fears about approaching the police or disclosing incidents even to close family members, fearing repercussions such as being banned from the industry and cyberattacks. The report further notes that the Malayalam film industry is controlled by a powerful group of male producers, directors, and actors, whom a prominent actor referred to as a "mafia," as they can ban anyone from the industry. WCC members have also faced unofficial bans for speaking out about issues within the industry. The report highlights the lack of changing rooms or toilet facilities for junior artistes on sets, especially in outdoor locations, leading to urinary infections for many women. It extensively documents the plight of junior artistes, who receive meagre pay despite long working hours, likening their situation to that of slaves. Compared to the other South Indian film industries, especially Tamil and Telegu, the Malayalam industry usually works on relatively lower budgets, although its expanding markets in the past few years has led to a significant increase in investments. Annually, the industry produces an average of 200 films.

What has the committee recommended?

One of the key recommendations of the committee to the State government is the enactment of a statute and the creation of a tribunal to address the issues faced by women in cinema. The committee also notes that an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) may be ineffective, as powerful individuals could threaten or coerce ICC members into handling complaints in a biased manner. The report recommends that film production units provide temporary toilet facilities and changing rooms. The report highlights a significant barrier for women in the technical side of cinema, where their numbers are notably low. For example, at the K.R. Narayanan National Institute of Visual Science and Arts, a film institute under the Kerala Department of Higher Education, there were only two women out of 44 students in the technical departments during the years studied by the committee. The committee has recommended reservations and scholarships for women in film schools.

How has the State government responded to the report?

Legal experts believe that the revelations in the report provide sufficient grounds for the government to proceed with a special investigation. Opposition parties, which have criticised the government for delaying the release of the report, have also demanded an investigation led by an all-women team of senior police officers. Mr. Vijayan has stated that the government would intervene decisively if anyone who testified before the committee comes forward with a complaint against their alleged persecutors. Meanwhile, a division bench of the Kerala High Court has directed the government to submit the entire committee report in a sealed cover and sought the government's position on the action to be taken. The case will be heard again on



September 10. The release of the redacted report is seen as a partial victory by the WCC, as it has sparked discussions on some of the critical issues they have raised.

It could also lead to corrective measures in an industry that is now in the national spotlight for the quality of cinema it consistently produces.

## Architectures of Transition | When designs inspire social connections

What can an earthquake in Nepal tell us about the architecture of resilience and transience? When the Gorkha quake struck Kathmandu in 2015, community acceptance for bamboo and stone buildings grew as these resolutely withstood the fierce calamity. Today, projects like the Kopila Valley School in Karnali, crafted with rammed earth walls and bamboo trusses that double up as a children's jungle gym, are challenging 'perceptions of permanence'. The Madan Puraskar Library is another example of great design with arboreal materials. It is the first large-scale public library in bamboo and earth, housing the largest archive of Nepali literature. With its large ceiling — an intricate spider web-like arch — it is now a tourist destination. Over the last decade, South Asia has been the epicentre of incredible urban and climatic transformations. "Rapid urbanisation, shifting demographics, and explosive population growth are reshaping the social and cultural landscape," says architect Rahul Mehrotra, who co-curated Architectures of Transition, a travelling exhibition that debuted recently in Chennai. This transition has set the stage for young architects to mobilise new directions of ecological and social collaborations — reviving vernacular design, seeking alternatives like bamboo, wood, and mud, and refining local technologies to contemporary needs. The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre in Bangladesh, for instance, reflects a rare spirit of environmental stewardship. It inspires imaginations with hybrid and multi-functional spaces (using the skills of Rohingya artisans, such as bamboo weaving techniques and nipa palm leaf pallets for roofing), adapting to the ever-changing aspirations of refugee communities. "Architects play a crucial role in facilitating these transitions and responding to diverse chal-

lenges," adds Mehrotra. Architectures of Transition invited 41 young architecture practices from across South Asia — Bhutan, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan — united by similar urban challenges. Curated by architects Mehrotra, Devashree Shah, and Pranav Thole, it documents a diverse taxonomy of 'transient projects': from community housing (Gujarat), and the hybridity of a mosque that doubles as a community space (Afghanistan), to hospitals (Bhutan), bamboo schools, and a hostel that feels like a large family home (Ahmedabad). Through collaborations with the community, architects are now building a sense of trust and empathy, with a deeper understanding of the needs that shape design and construction. "We were excited to host this exhibition because it invites young architects who have dealt with and creatively confronted the issues of today such as climate change and sustainability, and come up with the use of local materials in solving problems that are very local." Ranvir Shah Founder trustee, Prakriti Foundation New forms of practice Urban masterplans often prioritise large infrastructure projects and fail to address inequities. This diminishing role of the architect in designing public realms is being bridged by patronage from NGOs — often addressing localised issues of underserved communities. "Many architectural practices are gravitating towards non-traditional organisational structures," says New York-based Thole, an architect and urban designer. "They are positioning the makers, collaborators, and a range of specialists as invaluable partners, giving them much more agency in the design process. Such collaborative frameworks allow for richer, contextually rooted designs."

# ChatGPT is flirting better than your partner and influencers can't get enough

A new ChatGPT update is catching the attention of influencers, where GPT-4o has enhanced flirty and conversational skills. Social media is full of influencers asking ChatGPT cheeky or mundane questions and getting flirty responses. Photo: Generative AI by Vani Gupta/India Today

Social media is full of influencers asking ChatGPT cheeky or mundane questions and getting flirty responses. Photo: Generative AI by Vani Gupta/India Today

In today's high-tech world, we are advancing towards a point where there seems to be nothing AI can't do. Give you recipes for a new dish? (Check Make your travel itinerary? (Check Become a personal trainer and help you work out? (Check And so much more. However, if there's one thing we humans have always believed AI cannot surpass us in, it's emotional maturity. We've been convinced that AI can't read the emotions of others or have its own emotions—or so we thought. Time and again, the scientific community have tried to find AI that can read emotions, and we have somewhat succeeded also. Take MorphCast Emotion AI, for example—an AI capable of detecting over 130 facial expressions, allowing for surprisingly engaging, almost human-like interactions across various industries. Yet, none have captured the spotlight quite like ChatGPT. Influencers flirting with ChatGPT. How far would you go for a social media trend? Well, it seems the latest craze involves not just chatting but, ahem, flirting with ChatGPT. Social media is now brimming with reels of influencers asking ChatGPT all sorts of cheeky or even mundane questions, only to receive responses that are... let's just say, rather flirty. See this video: The trend has made its way to India as well, with numerous influencers engaging in conversations with ChatGPT's voice assistant. And here's the thing—unlike the usual female voices of Alexa and Siri, ChatGPT's voice assistant can be customised to a male voice and even speaks Hindi.

'ChatGPT is customised to be flirty' In May 2024, OpenAI unveiled the latest update to ChatGPT, dubbed GPT-4o. This new version, rolled out to everyone, including non-subscribers (with a 5-10 message limit every 5-6 hours), has been fine-tuned to be even more 'conversational'. The new update allows ChatGPT to read and discuss images, translate languages, and even identify emotions from visual expressions. It also features memory, enabling it to recall previous prompts. What's really catching the attention of influencers, though, is GPT-4o's enhanced flirty and conversational skills. On top of that, ChatGPT offers cheeky features for non-subscribers like 'Dare to Flirt' and 'Flirt Master', which promise to teach you the art of flirting. People on social media have mentioned that this feature can help people who are socially awkward and improve their conversational skills. ChatGPT's 'dare to flirt' feature gives you tips for flirting. Photo: CHATGPT via Author

The artificial friend? However, this isn't the first time an AI has played the role of a partner for many. A similar trend previously gained traction in India, with young people chatting and sending snaps to the Snapchat bot, which

was straight-up creepy. There needs to be a clear distinction between chatting just for the sake of a social media post, and having fun and genuinely engaging with the bot. For instance, last year, Jaswant Singh Chail, who was arrested on Christmas 2021, admitted that a 'chatbot' not only encouraged him to 'kill the Queen' but also exchanged more than 5,000 "sexually explicit" messages with him, as the court was told. ChatGPT has become their safe space'

Now if you're wondering what makes ChatGPT and other AIs so attractive to humans that they ditch human-to-human contacts IRL, and rather prefer flirting with an AI, experts think there's a deep psychological reason for it. For instance, Dr Sathak Dave, a psychiatrist from Ahmedabad, tells India Today that the turnover rate of relationships in a person's life is higher as compared to older times. But, according to Dr Dave, building a relationship with a 'human being' requires effort, emotions, validation, adjustment and compromise.

OpenAI unveiled the latest update to ChatGPT, known as GPT-4o. Photo: Unsplash

"They seek perfect answers from their partners, which isn't possible all the time," says Dave. However, with AI, people



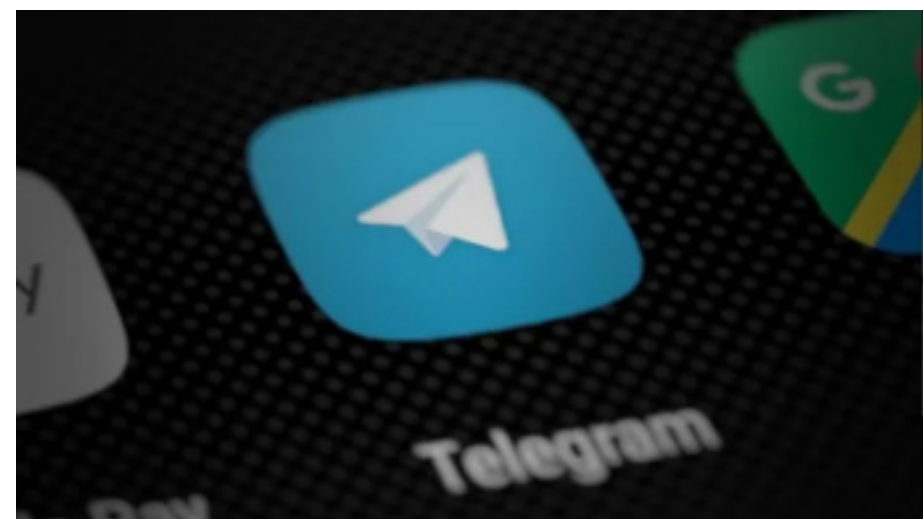
think that there is a requirement of commitment, emotional investment and effort. "In addition to this, AI knows how to give a 'perfect answer', which provides instant gratification and the convenience of chatting with AI gives a sense of control which creates a loop of going back to AI again and again," Dr Dave explains. Absy Sam, a psychologist from Mumbai agrees and says that people often assume ChatGPT and other bots as their 'safe space' and there is

'no judgement' and, since the answers are always quick, it also gives instant gratification, which is not in the case for humans (we see you, the slow texter). "Every new relationship and break up with humans takes a toll on one's mental health. But when it comes to AI, there is no break-up. The entire power lies in the hands of the user, giving them validation and a sense of control," adds Dr Dave. Will you flirt with ChatGPT before flirting with your partner?

## Amid Telegram CEO Pavel Durov's arrest, IT ministry orders investigation of app's violations in India

Telegram CEO Pavel Durov on Sunday was arrested in France for allegations that he neglected to moderate criminal activities on the Telegram app. As Durov is being held for 96-hour questioning, the Indian IT Ministry has ordered the Ministry of Home Affairs to "check on complaints pending against Telegram and what action can be taken". As Telegram CEO Pavel Durov sits in French custody, the Indian IT Ministry has asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to investigate if there has been any violations on the Telegram app in the Indian context, according to a PTI report. The IT Ministry wants to know if there have been any complaints against Telegram that are pending, then appropriate action should be taken against the app in India as well. "In light of what has happened in France, IT Ministry has asked Ministry of Home Affairs to check on complaints pending against Telegram and what action can be taken," the PTI report cites a source saying. "The basic question here is are there any complaint, is there similar situation in India, and what is the status, and what action is required," according to the report.

Meanwhile, another report by MoneyControl reports that the probe by the Indian government is specifically investigating Telegram over its alleged misuse in extortion and gambling. Reportedly, the ongoing investigation by the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre and MeitY is not tied to violations of the Information Technology (IT) Rules. An official confirmed that the platform complies with these rules,



which mandate the appointment of a nodal officer, a chief compliance officer, and the publication of monthly reports. Authorities plan to assess the information received and make decisions in accordance with local laws. On August 25, Telegram CEO Pavel Durov was detained in France, accused of failing to adequately moderate criminal activities on the platform. French authorities allege that this negligence allowed illegal activities such as fraud, drug trafficking, organised crime, and the promotion of terrorism and cyberbullying to flourish on Telegram. Telegram quickly dismissed the accusations as "absurd," asserting that Durov has "nothing to hide" and that the platform adheres to EU laws, including the Digital Services Act. Durov faces up to 96

hours of questioning, after which he could be charged or released. "Telegram's CEO Pavel Durov has nothing to hide and travels frequently in Europe. It is absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform. Almost a billion users globally use Telegram as means of communication and as a source of vital information. We're awaiting a prompt resolution of this situation. Telegram is with you all," the company wrote in a post on X. "Telegram abides by EU laws, including the Digital Services Act – its moderation is within industry standards and constantly improving," the statement adds. The ongoing legal battle underscores the tension between Telegram's commitment to privacy and freedom of expression.

# What is fall fashion like in India, a country where no fall exists?

Here in India, we don't really experience a classic fall season. That iconic autumn scene: leaves turning brilliant shades of red, orange and yellow? We only get that in Bollywood movies. Yet, fall fashion is still a major buzzword here. Autumn hues, festive-wear and layering define fall fashion in India. Photos: Instagram/AliaBhatt, Instagram/SanyaMalhotra and Instagram/Deepika Padukone This transition from warm to cooler weather brings with it a rich fashion palette of earthy browns, burnt oranges, maroons, and mustard hues and the classic greys and blacks — shades that perfectly complement the dry, rustling leaves of autumn. It's the perfect in-between weather: not too cold, not too hot; there is a nip in the air but your makeup is not melting with the sweat. You start layering up with shrugs, light knits, and befriend textures like suede, tweed, and leather. And, this fall (or autumn as they call it in the UK) doesn't require heavy overcoats or puffer jackets just yet. All that comes later, around November, when the chill truly sets in. For fashion houses, it is a significant time too. The 'Autumn/Winter' collections presented at the start of the year are now ripe for retail. Even fast fashion brands attract new customers with their fall collections. HM's UK website, for instance, already has some autumn staples on their homepage already. Think sweater vests, trench coats and suede skirts.

On HM UK's website homepage, some autumn staples. But that's all West talk. Here in India, we don't really experience a classic fall season; we just have three main acts: summer, monsoon, and winter. That iconic autumn scene: leaves turning brilliant shades of red, orange and yellow? We only get that in Bollywood movies (or in the Vale of Kashmir). Yet, fall fashion is still a major buzzword here. Thank the global influence and boundary-blurring reach of social media platforms. And of course, the global fashion weeks as well. October, for example, is among the most humid months in Mumbai. The thought of embracing fall can take a backseat. So, in a country where there is no fall, what does fall fashion look like? We took the question to fashion experts. Turns out, we can embrace it in our own distinctive ways. Fall fashion on HM India's website. "Fall is a significant part of the fashion cycle, where runway shows present collections six months in advance, allowing for market research-based orders and timely store launches that align with consumer demands. While India doesn't experience fall as a true season, the cycle remains essential for designing and producing collections," says celebrity fashion stylist Akshay Tyagi. "Internationally (in the Northern Hemisphere), where four distinct seasons exist (summer, fall, winter and spring), the concept of fall makes sense. However, in India, with its vast subcontinent and diverse climates, the term can feel redundant. There's no single fashion rule that applies across the country. For instance, while October starts cooling down in northern India, places like Goa and Mumbai experience their hottest, most



Here in India, we don't really experience a classic fall season. That iconic autumn scene: leaves turning brilliant shades of red, orange and yellow? We only get that in Bollywood movies.

humid weather," adds Divyak D'Souza, a celebrity fashion stylist. Festive-wear is our fall fashion. So, a uniform wardrobe for fall isn't practical across India. That said, fashion experts, however, zero in on the fact that festive-wear is essentially the fall fashion for us Indians. September to November is the time when we embark on the festive fervour and celebrate everything from Ganesh Chaturthi to Navratri, Durga Puja, Diwali, Bhai Dooj and Chhath Puja. Fashion designer and founder of the label 431-88 Shweta Kapur, who believes there is no distinct fall fashion anywhere because of climate change, says, "It feels like the boundaries between seasons are really blurred now. For me, what we loosely refer to as fall fashion in India is more about festive-wear. Since we don't have a distinct fall season here, our fashion tends to revolve around summer, winter, and the various festive occasions."

Fashion experts say festive-wear is the fall fashion in India. Photos: Instagram/AnanyaPanday (left), Instagram/DeepikaPadukone (right) D'Souza, who often styles Malaika Arora and Kareena Kapoor Khan, agrees. "In Indian culture, fall is a time for celebrations, whether it's hopping from one Diwali party to another or enjoying Raksha Bandhan with family. The excitement of the season, filled with gatherings, beautiful clothes, and memorable photos, is what truly makes fall special. The wardrobe is secondary to the joyous atmosphere that defines this time of year," he says. Fashion-wise, you can eas-

ily introduce silk into your wardrobe during this period. Be it in the form of sarees, pantsuits or simplistic suits, silk is an ultimate fall-festive marriage. "For Indian wear, transitioning from cotton to silk can be a smart move. Silk outfits are not only suitable for fall but also perfect for the various festivals during this season, like Ganesh Chaturthi, Raksha Bandhan, and Diwali," says D'Souza. Switching to heavier textiles and fabrics is an India-relevant fall-fashion move. Photos: Instagram/TheRealKarisma Kapoor (left), Instagram/AliaBhatt (right) Even velvet outfits fit the bill as long as they aren't too bulky. Layering, the ultimate fall behaviour. Layering is a source of immense joy for fashion professionals. It is one of the most exciting aspects of fall fashion for them. Shweta Kapur shares that she loves layering, for it brings so much fun to play with different pieces from your wardrobe, combining them in various ways to create entirely new looks. Layering lessons for fall ft. Deepika Padukone. "You can take the same items and layer them differently to achieve a fresh style each time. The versatility of layering really allows for endless creativity and experimentation with your outfits," she says. "The ability to experiment with different textures, colours, and lengths makes it visually enriching and creatively fulfilling," adds D'Souza. It goes without saying fall is the perfect time to let your inner fashion expert get playful. A denim jacket, scarves, and lightweight jackets are great to begin with. "Personally, I love denim jackets—

they're a great option because they can be easily dressed up or down," says Kapur.

India-relevant fall staples Technically, fall is more relevant to the northern parts of India, but even without a traditional autumn, there are ways to embrace fall fashion that goes beyond festive-wear and a denim jacket. Embrace the colour palette: Even if it is hot, you can bring in the fall vibe with the colour of your outfit. You can fall back on a mustard T-shirt or a printed co-ord set to make a statement. Maroon, mustard, burnt orange and forest green are the shades to pick. Rocking fall colours is a superb way to embrace fall fashion in India. Photos: A still from Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (left), Instagram/JanhviKapoor (centre) and Instagram/VaaniKapoor (right) Lightweight layers: Invest in lightweight layers like denim jackets, cardigans, and scarves that can be added or removed depending on the time of day or fluctuating temperatures. Mix textures: Pair different fabrics like cotton, silk, and light wool for a chic, layered look without feeling too bulky. Footwear: Ankle boots and loafers scream fall fashion! They are a subtle nod to the cooler weather without being too heavy for Indian climates. Fall fashion or not, here is an ultimate tip from stylist D'Souza that you can never go wrong with: "Invest in key, versatile statement pieces that can be recycled, repurposed, and worn season after season. Build a wardrobe with timeless, well-crafted basics that transition beautifully over the years."

# Unpacking your bags after a vacation is tough. Here's how to do it

It's OVER! The trip you meticulously planned for months, curated multiple outfits for, and crafted a detailed itinerary to ensure you didn't miss a thing has come to an end. Now, it's time to face reality. While you're left with a treasure trove of memories, you're also left with baggage (not emotional, but literal) that you need to unpack. There are two types of people at the end of a trip: those who feel an irresistible urge to unpack the moment they step through the door, and those who can't bring themselves to even open their bags. Most of us fall into the latter category and find every excuse to postpone the inevitable task until the suitcases become an unintended piece of home décor - 'I will definitely unpack tomorrow.' If this sounds familiar, this one's for you. Unpacking can be overwhelming. After a vacation, when you return to work or your routine life, it might bring back a sense of burden from the responsibilities of day-to-day activities, which at times might make you feel low for some days. This, in most cases, is a normal phenomenon," Dr Trideep Choudhary, associate consultant, mental health and behavioural science, Fortis Escorts Hospital, Faridabad, tells India Today.

Adding to this, Dr Rahul Chandhok, head consultant, mental health and behavioural science, Artemis Hospital, Gurugram, mentions that unpacking can be overwhelming for many people because it signals the end of leisure time and the return to routine. "The thought of unpacking might evoke feelings of fatigue, reluctance, or stress, especially after a relaxing or eventful trip. The association between unpacking and the chores or responsibilities that await can create mental resistance," says Dr Chandhok. According to him, unpacking also requires physical effort and decision-making, which some people may not feel ready to tackle immediately after travelling. For those who enjoy the freedom of a vacation, the act of unpacking represents the transition back to reality, which can be jarring. People may also avoid unpacking if they have a tendency toward procrastination or a lack of organisation. Some people may find it difficult to transition back to reality after a holiday (Photo: Getty Images). It says a lot about your behaviour. Your overall behavioural pattern speaks a lot about your personality and how you would act in certain situations.

"This behaviour of delaying unpacking can suggest that you are quite hesitant when it comes to sudden changes in your lifestyle. It also indicates that you may struggle with effectively managing your time, which often leads to months of unpacked travel bags lying in your bedroom," shares Dr Sonal Anand, psychiatrist, Wockhardt Hospital, Mumbai. Further, Dr Chandhok says that those who struggle with unpacking after a holiday might have a preference for avoiding tasks that feel tedious, overwhelming, or signal the end of pleasurable experiences. This behaviour can indicate a tendency toward procrastination, where an individual postpones tasks that they perceive as difficult or unpleasant. Linked to mental health. As per Dr Snehal Thamke, consultant psychiatrist,

Brain and Bone Clinic, Mumbai, difficulty in unpacking after a vacation doesn't always mean that you may be dealing with mental health issues. "But yes, people having difficulty finishing up the tasks in their hands and those who often avoid or procrastinate doing certain tasks may have underlying anxiety issues. Delaying these tasks just gives them some sense of temporary relief from the anxiety they are going to experience later," she adds. For people with anxiety, the thought of returning to routine and facing responsibilities can feel overwhelming. Unpacking, in this context, might trigger anxious thoughts about the tasks ahead, leading to avoidance behaviour. Meanwhile, Dr Anand feels that your room or how you keep your environment is a complete mirror of what goes on in your head.

"A cluttered room often indicates the countless thoughts in the mind. This is why some common symptoms of mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and ADHD are difficulty in multitasking, lack of energy, and cluttered space," adds the doctor. Difficulty with unpacking can also be linked to control issues. Those struggling with the same may feel resistant to the inevitable transition back to daily life, where they no longer have control over their time and experiences as they did during the holiday. Delaying unpacking can be a sign of a mental health issue. The feeling of denial

Dr Chandhok explains that the attempt to delay unpacking can be a combination of procrastination and denial. Denial plays an active role as unpacking symbolises the end of a vacation and the return to the responsibilities of daily life. By avoiding unpacking, you may be subconsciously trying to extend the holiday mindset or avoid confronting the shift back to reality. The combination of procrastination and denial allows you to put off the inevitable transition for a little longer, but it can also create stress later on when the task of unpacking looms larger and becomes more urgent. Getting to do the deed. The experts suggest that breaking the task down into smaller, manageable steps can help you mentally prepare for the unpacking process. One strategy is to set aside a specific time to unpack, treating it like any other necessary post-vacation task such as checking emails or doing laundry. Create a post-vacation ritual for yourself. This could involve dedicating an hour to unpacking while sipping tea or chatting with family members. Alternatively, you could dedicate 15-30 minutes every day for 4-5 days to unpacking. This way, you won't feel the pressure, and the task can be done swiftly. Another strategy is to unpack in increments, tackling one section at a time, for example, starting with toiletries, then clothing, and finally souvenirs or other items. Doing so can make the task feel less overwhelming. Start with the easiest things, and then move on to the more difficult ones. You also need to shift your mindset. Consider unpacking as a way to fully settle back into your space and reflect positively on your vacation. Additionally, if you create a calming environment while unpacking, such as listening to music or a podcast,



you may find the task more manageable. You can also use the old reward system; treating yourself to your favourite snack or a relaxing activity afterward can provide motivation to complete the task. Tidying up can be good for your mental health because it helps create a sense of order and control. A clutter-free space can also reduce feelings of overwhelm and anxiety, making it easier to transition back into your routine. Dr Choudhary says, "An orderly space is always an easy way to bring calmness to your mind. So, it is always helpful for your mental health if you make it a habit to keep things in order and keep your space decluttered." For some, the act of decluttering provides a sense of accomplishment, which can boost mood and increase motivation. Dr Thamke goes on to add, "Clutter can weigh you down and hold

you back. It has the capacity to rip away all your positive energy. It is linked to negative emotions like confusion, tension, and irritability, while an organised home tends to produce more positive emotions like calmness and a sense of well-being." The irresistible urge to unpack. Now, if you're wondering why some people start unpacking the moment they get home, Dr Anand explains that it's about tidiness. Such people are organised and want to ensure things are in order after the trip. For them, unpacking immediately after the trip re-establishes normalcy and comfort, allowing them to transition smoothly into everyday life. It also leads to a feeling of productivity and clarity. For those who can't tolerate the sight of unpacked luggage after returning home, decluttering can be a relaxing and comforting activity, helping them beat the post-vacation blues.

## Apple announces iPhone 16 event, launch set for September 9

Apple has finally announced the launch event of the iPhone 16 series. After months of leaks and rumours, the company has confirmed that its 2024 iPhones will launch on September 9. Apple has finally announced the launch event of the iPhone 16 series. After months of leaks and rumours, the company has confirmed that its 2024 iPhones are coming soon. Apple has started sending out special Apple event invites with a mysterious message. The iPhone 16 launch event will take place on September 9.

The brand was heavily rumoured to launch its new iPhone 16 series on September 10 but it seems that Apple might have made some last-minute changes. The official Apple announcement also includes the Apple logo with a cryptic message - "It is Glowtime." Well, this sounds quite interesting, but no one really knows what it means. We will likely get clarity in the coming days and hopefully before the iPhone 16 launch event.

The latest Apple event will include an in-person component at Apple Park but those who are interested in watching the

full iPhone 16 series launch event will be able to livestream it online. In India, the iPhone 16 event will start at 10:30PM, just like every year. The event will likely be live-streamed via Apple's official YouTube channel.

Apple will likely introduce four models, including iPhone 16, iPhone 16 Plus, iPhone 16 Pro, and iPhone 16 Pro Max. The standard models are expected to receive minor upgrades. The standard and the Plus models are said to retain the old displays and camera setup but offer a new chipset, a bigger battery, a new vertical rear camera layout, and a new Action button. The Pro models, on the other hand, are tipped to come with big camera upgrades, a slimmer design, a larger display with minimal bezels, a new chipset and a bigger battery. It is currently unknown whether Apple will offer faster charging or not. We do know that all the iPhone 16 models will likely come with support for Apple Intelligence features. The price details have also leaked online ahead of the official Apple event. The iPhone 16 base model is tipped to cost \$799 (about Rs 67,100 in India).

# breaking the 9 to 5

Just five years ago, Elon Musk was tweeting how “nobody ever changed the world on 40 hours a week”, suggesting a work week of 80-100 hours. “Pain level increases exponentially above 80,” he warned. The young workforce responded with cheer and admiration — after all, they were part of a millennials-fuelled hustle culture punctuated by #ThankGodIt’sMonday hashtags. Things are different in the post-pandemic world. Today’s youth, the infamous Gen Z, don’t react kindly to 77-year-old billionaires or anyone else telling them to work 70-hour weeks. Their priorities are different, to say the least: they don’t want to be 9 to 5 “corporate mazdoors”; they’ll avoid working overtime unless “the world is falling apart”; they’ll talk to the director of the company as casually as they do a co-worker; they all seem to have side-hustles, or at least side-dreams that they nurture in anticipation of future fruition. All in all, there’s a sense of limitless possibilities. As one Gen Zer put it, there are so many choices that it’s paralyzing because “we could be so many things right now”. The flip side, however, is that the retention rate for Gen Z employees tends to be quite poor. Most stay on at companies anywhere between one and five years — the number often being closer to one. This generation is also the most susceptible to ‘corporate despair’ (videos of youngsters screaming in panic rooms, for instance, are doing the rounds on social media). According to data from LinkedIn, 94% of Gen Z professionals are considering a job switch in 2024. Their top priority, the platform found, is work-life balance, with 20% listing it as their main career goal and 36% leaving their current jobs for it.

It’s important to acknowledge, as many of these Gen Z professionals do, that they are part of a relatively privileged minority. Even as unemployment among the rest of India’s youth is rampant, almost touching 46%, with every new day bringing news of job cuts and digital disruptions — like Reliance Industries reportedly cutting 42,000 jobs in FY 2024 — this select group of highly educated youngsters float above it all. Their parents, beneficiaries of India’s steadily growing GDP over the last 20 years, have acquired sufficient wealth and security that their children can now afford to demand better, raise the bar higher, and if not met, quit jobs that don’t suit them. Employers, for their part, are having a hard time dealing with this new, ‘high-maintenance’ generation. Very few are equipped for these fresh-from-college graduates talking about mental health, toxic work culture, and choice of pronouns. Part of the “COVID-batch”, Nadia Khatib’s college years were spent online. Amid Zoom classes and Google Meet study sessions, the 24-year-old started creating food videos and offering restaurant reviews and recommendations on Instagram. Before she knew it, she had become a social media influencer for all things Goa. Her job as a social media marketing associate at MindShift Interactive, a digital marketing and branding agency, was an extension of this — and it was great. The job was remote, the company was filled with Gen Z employees, and Khatib’s boss was open to creative ideas, even when it involved luxury clientele such as Taj who usually have strict, staid brand

guidelines. The company also had no problem with Khatib being a ‘creator’ on the side. “There were so many days that I worked from an event with my laptop,” she recalls.

Eighteen months later, she moved to a different marketing company (the workload not aligning with her health), but this time around, her experience was very different. She was the only Gen Zer there, the rest being millennials. There was a lot of micro-managing and doing things the long way. “Gen Z, we like to close our work as efficiently as possible. But I find that millennials will have doubts, will rethink things, and end up doubling the work,” she says. (On the contrary, Khatib’s former boss, Marilyn Pinto, 31, believes Gen Zers tend to overthink, especially since, for many, it is their first job.) She also felt like she was judged for drawing boundaries: not working late, not working on weekends. But why should she? “They only pay us for work hours and I have a life beyond work.” For now, she’s managed to squeeze her content creation and freelancing projects into the weekend, but she’s looking for a switch, preferably to a Gen Z-heavy company. Others are more jaded. In Bengaluru, Bani S.\* has worked at three different start-ups in the last few years spanning a variety of sectors, all of which have had a “crazy pace” of work — “My output was what two people would have produced anywhere else”. But one of them was the worst. “It was the most toxic job that I’ve ever had, and I didn’t last more than six months,” says the 24-year-old, describing it as a “dafta from the 90s, where to prove your loyalty to the company, you had to sit in front of the boss from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.”, apart from working Saturdays, sometimes Sundays, and always being available. “It felt like such a fundamental difference. The things they considered important, that level of micromanagement, I just didn’t get it,” she says. She soon moved to a new company, and her expectations this time were more modest. “All I’m looking for is flexibility. If you give me more control over my time and the same deliverables, I’m okay with it.” A recent Stanford-affiliated study, spearheaded by researcher Roberta Katz, states that Gen Z as employees are collaborative, self-reliant, and value diversity and inclusion. Katz recently told the Stanford Report: “Gen Z may be more likely to question rules and authority because they are so used to finding what they need on their own.” But that’s not to say they are always right. “Often they don’t know what they need, especially in a new setting,” she says, “and this is where inter-generational dialogue can be helpful. The older colleague can learn new ways of getting a job done, while the younger colleague may learn good reasons for why things have been done in a certain way.”

Focus on money and growth Bosses, sitting on the opposite end of the spectrum, come with their own perspective. Nayla Pandit, 37, has worked at an American multinational technology company for eight years, and has encountered her fair share of Gen Zers. From her experience, they want two things: money and accelerated growth. “There are freshers from IIT, BITS, and NIT who join with insanely high packages, like ₹18-₹19 lakh per annum — it’s



almost as much as I’m getting paid after all these years. And within three months, they’re talking about appraisals and asking for promotions,” she says.

The company does its best to retain them, but often can’t keep up with their expectations. Pandit divulged that they hired 40 freshers in 2019; of them, 38 have left. Some leave for better packages elsewhere, but she’s also seen a few quitting the corporate grind altogether to do “whacky” things: start restaurants, and, in one case, join the Padukone Academy to become a professional badminton player. Even the ones who end up staying are clear that they’re doing it just for the money. “They all want to retire by 35,” she says. This requires avid financial planning, and Gen Zers seem on board. According to a recent Financial Times article, the last few years have seen a frenzied enthusiasm for trading among the country’s Gen Z cohort, courtesy cheap brokerage, and a band of ‘influencers’. The benchmark Nifty 50 index of large Indian companies has doubled over the last five years, beating Japan’s resurgent Nikkei 225 and even America’s S&P 500. Looking at today’s employed youngsters, Pandit can see why. “Even before they’ve walked into their first job, they have their financial planner on board with them. SIPs, mutual funds, everything is in place,” she jokes, a stark difference from her own generation (millennials) who never had that level of financial literacy. Her company has recently taken to discouraging employees from hiring freshers, in favour of someone with two to three years of experience. They want someone well-versed with the ins and outs of corporate culture. Most significantly, one often has to pay a fresher as much as someone with two to three years of experience. It’s no wonder that job listings have now started specifying requirements for “freshers with 2-3 years of experience”. How someone with three years of experience qualifies as a ‘fresher’, or what real freshers with zero experience are to do, remains to be seen. Even the BITS graduate Pandit hired this year has a year’s experience, and in spite of it, has been hired on a contractual basis.

How to motivate a young workforce According to Gen Zers themselves, it’s the little things that count. For instance, it might be breakfast for people who start shifts early or electric foot massagers for those on their feet for long periods of time. Nadia really appreciated the

weekly CPC (Chai Pe Charcha) sessions at MindShift Interactive, where the entire team got on Zoom calls to bond over games, debates and gossip; Bani enjoyed the evening cricket sessions with teammates; and still others have said they appreciated things like subsidised housing, team lunches, and employee awards. These things might seem negligible, but for Gen Zers, it’s a sign that their companies care.

Can Gen Z and corporates play well?

This gap, between Gen Zers and the companies they work for, is real. A few organisations are trying to bridge it, working with young professionals to get them job-ready while simultaneously training corporates on how to deal with, and retain, their Gen Z workforce. Shveta Raina’s Talerang is one of them. A Harvard Business School graduate and former McKinsey employee, Raina has experienced firsthand how university doesn’t prepare you for the corporate grind.

At Talerang, they start students off with an assessment to gauge how job-ready they are. Depending on the results, they are provided training in a set of hard and soft skills followed by mentorship. “If you look at Gen Z as compared to Gen Y or X, they expect a lot of communication, recognition, and respect for how they’ve done their work. They’re also big on authenticity. Whereas corporates are used to keeping things very black and white,” says Raina. So, on the one hand, Talerang works with young graduates to temper their expectations, and on the other, they work with corporates on how to get Gen Z adjusted into their organisation. The most effective way of doing this, Raina has found, is through internships. “All initial teething issues get brought up at this stage, and we can work through them.”

After every internship, Talerang gives students feedback on what the company said about them. “This ensures that when they get placed, they’re not ‘learning on the job’. They’re prepared.” Interestingly, the latest Union Budget has adopted a similar approach with its new internship scheme. Under this, 500 top companies in India have been encouraged to hire 21- to 24-year-olds as interns, where the government will offer a monthly allowance of ₹5,000 for 12 months. This is expected to make the country’s vast youth work-ready, paving the way for easier employment.

# Why is sanction for prosecution needed?

The issue of granting sanction to prosecute a public servant has once again come to the fore, following Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot's approval to open an investigation against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and to prosecute him in connection with alleged irregularities in the allotment of compensatory plots to his wife whose land had been lost to the acquisition process by the Mysore Urban Development Authority. The issue has raised legal and constitutional questions, resulting in the Karnataka High Court asking a trial court to postpone its consideration of private complaints against him.

Why is sanction required to prosecute a public servant?

Sanction for prosecuting a public servant has been a mandatory feature of anti-corruption law. This is intended to protect public servants from vexatious and malicious prosecution for actions and decisions made in the course of discharging their official duties. Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) said no court could take cognisance of a case against a public servant unless an authority competent to remove that person grants sanction. Section 197 spoke of anyone who 'is or was' a public servant. Section 6 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, has a similar provision. However, the sanction requirement was limited to the period when the public servant was in office, and, no sanction was necessary if the person no more held that office. Under both the CrPC and the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), the State and Central governments had the authority to sanction prosecution of their respective employees. The provision was preserved in Section 19 of the PCA, 1988.

What are the latest provisions on granting sanction?

Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), the procedure code that has replaced the CrPC, retains the sanction provisions. When the PCA was amended in 2018, a new provision was introduced under which the government's approval is required, even to begin an investigation. While under Section 17A, the appropriate authority's approval is necessary to begin an investigation, the provision for sanction under Section 19 is a prerequisite for any court to take cognisance of a charge sheet or complaint of corruption. Another feature of the 2018 amendment is that it applies to those who are and were public servants.

What is the Governor's role in a case against a CM?

Provisions relating to sanction in the CrPC generally spoke of the State government and the Central government as the authority to grant sanctions for those employed by their respective governments. However, both the 1947 and 1988 versions of the PCA have a clause stating that in the case of "any other person", the sanction would be granted by the authority competent to remove the public servant in office. As the power the Governor is vested with the power to dismiss a CM, the Governor is seen as the authority to consider granting sanction for prosecuting a CM. Questions have often arisen as to whether the Governor exercises his discretion while consid-

ering sanction, or he is bound to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. In the case of A. R. Antulay, the Supreme Court held that the Governor should act in his discretion: "... We have no doubt in our mind that when there is to be a prosecution of the Chief Minister, the Governor would, while determining whether sanction for such prosecution should be granted or not under s. 6 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, as a matter of propriety, necessarily act in his discretion and not on the advice of the Council of Ministers."

What have courts said on the issue?

In a Madhya Pradesh case concerning corruption charges against two Ministers, the Council of Ministers held there was no material against them even though the Lok Ayukta's report confirmed the charges. The Governor went against the Ministry's decision and granted sanctions because there was sufficient material against them. In Madhya Pradesh Special Police Establishment vs. State of MP and others (2004), the Supreme Court found the Council's



decision "irrational" and upheld the Governor's action. It said: "... on those rare occasions where on facts, the bias becomes apparent and/or the decision of

Council of Ministers is shown to be irrational and based on non-consideration of relevant factors, the Governor would be right, ... to act in his own discretion and grant sanction".

## How about a gut reset programme?

Are you getting stressed out over climate change? Feeling anxious every time you walk under an airport canopy, or every time your child appears for a competitive exam conducted by the NTA? Do you get panic attacks when it rains in your city, or when your daughter says she wants to study medicine? Does endemic institutional decay fill you with despair? Does idiotic enthusiasm for tyranny make you ill? If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, then I have just the solution for you: reclaiming gut health. As per the latest medical research, an unhealthy gut is the most important effect, and cause, of stress, anxiety and depression — regardless of whether or not there are objective external triggers that might make stress and anxiety a legitimate human response. The critical determinant of a healthy gut: the 1,000 species of 'good' bacteria you are supposed to host there. These little darlings produce the enzymes that help your body absorb the nutrients in your food. They destroy the bad bacteria in your gut. And they also reduce the risk of cancer, diabetes and sadomasochistic behaviours such as voting repeatedly for those who squeeze out your life blood and feed it to cronies.

Given these benefits, people all over the world — including 'pure' vegetarians — are gulping down millions of live organisms every day. Those who would never dream of adopting a puppy or kitten are adopting billion-strong colonies of fully-grown bacteria. Acquaintances who would constantly bemoan the degeneration of the nation are now in perpetual high spirits. Their secret: they underwent a gut reset programme. This column is a satirical take on life and society.

Seeing their dramatic transformation, I also signed up for a gut reset programme with a celebrity gut microbiome specialist. It was a six-day course, and it didn't come cheap. Full disclosure: I negotiated a 15% discount in exchange for writing a column raising awareness about gut health. But frankly, I would have written this anyway, given the public interest involved. Apart from immediate personal benefits, a healthy gut also improves air quality and combats climate change by reducing emissions of certain kinds of gases. For the benefit of those who would like to try a gut reset without paying for a formal programme, here are the five key principles drawn from my experience:

1. Probiotic is the new antibiotic

I know that as Indians, we love antibiotics. We are so crazy about them we have them for breakfast with milk, eggs and honey. Our love for them has even rubbed off on germs (bad bacteria), which have begun to stick around in our bodies for the tasty antibiotics they know are sure to come their way. But no more of this. We live in a polarised society where everyone must pick a side — 'pro' or 'anti'. You are a pro from now on.

2. Know your CFUs (not to be confused with STFs)

Each probiotic capsule has billions of CFUs (Colony-Forming Units) — the good guys who will start setting up homes, offices and enzyme-making factories as soon as they land in your gut. Are the CFUs in your pill alive or are half of them dead? Do any of them have freeloaders (germs) lurking around? You don't want to pay good money to eat dead bacteria, or worse, bad



bacteria. So make sure you get the right CFUs.3. Don't eat junk

Live for the animals in your tummy. Every time you pick something up at the supermarket, or read a restaurant menu, ask yourself: would Mr. *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* approve?

4. Consume fermented stuff

My favourite. Gut microbiomes love it when there is regular inflow of fermented foods because they create a billion-strong confluence of happy, healthy gut microbes. It's like a bacteria visiting a foreign country and being welcomed by thousands of NRI bacteria — it builds a fantastic atmosphere of microbial bonhomie, which is why beer, the world's top fermented drink, is so important. Me and my current best friend *Lactobacillus acidophilus* bond over beer every night, and so should you.5. Join a gut health cult This would give you the necessary motivation to start talking about gut health with everyone you meet—an absolute must if you want to spread the good bacteria around. One major challenge people face is that you can't see your gut bacteria or make Reels out of them. But you can't see God either. And people do crazy things to please their gods. I've reset my gut. Now you reset yours. And then, one after another, convert all your friends.

# Why is lateral entry policy under scrutiny?

On August 17, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) advertised lateral recruitment for 45 posts at the ranks of joint secretary, director, and deputy secretary in different ministries and departments. The move led to an outrage as quota benefits are not applied for such "single post" recruitments. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, termed the recruitment an "anti-national step" as it was "openly snatching away" the reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs. Following the backlash, on August 20, Union Personnel Minister Jitendra Singh wrote to the UPSC Chairperson to cancel the advertisement. Hours later, the UPSC cancelled the advertisement.

What is the reason for lateral hires?

As per the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), lateral recruitment is a government initiative to achieve the twin objective of bringing in fresh talent as well as augmenting the availability of human resources at middle management levels for specific assignments keeping in view their specialised knowledge and expertise in their domain area.

Was this the first time such a recruitment was being done?

No. Since 2019, as many as 63 posts have been filled through the lateral route. At least seven officials quit their jobs midway. The positions are open to candidates from the private sector, State government and public sector undertakings, autonomous bodies, statutory organisations, universities, and recognised research institutes. The tenure can range from three years to five years. In 2021, for three posts of joint secretaries, 27 posts of director, and 13 posts of deputy secretaries, the Commission received a total of 295 applications, 1,247 applications, and 489 applications respectively. The UPSC recommended candidates for 31 posts and the remaining 12 posts became infructuous, the 2021-22 annual report of UPSC noted.

What is the genesis of the policy?

In 2017, the NITI Aayog, in a report titled India-Three Year Action Agenda, 2017-18 to 2019-20, regarding 'Civil Services Reform,' suggested lateral entry inductions. "Today, rising complexity of the economy has meant that policymaking is a specialised activity. Therefore, it is essential that specialists be inducted into the system through lateral entry. Such entry will also have the beneficial side-effect of bringing competition to the established career bureaucracy," the report stated. The advisory body said government officers may be encouraged to gain expertise in specific areas and the current system of rapid rotation of officers may be replaced by a system of longer postings according to specialisation. It added, "Such a system will bring top talent and energy into the government and will lend new dynamism to the ministries." For tax reforms, NITI Aayog recommended that the tax boards be given considerable flexibility to bring outside tech-

nical staff laterally to utilise the available information to ensure tax compliance. On February 10, 2021, the PM criticised the work culture of IAS officers, questioning what objectives could be achieved by surrendering the country to "babus." Under the Congress-led UPA government in 2005, the second Administrative Reforms Commission also recommended lateral entry into government service.

Is there a shortage of All India Services officers?

In December 2021, the DoPT moved a proposal to amend the Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules 1954 to depute IAS, Indian Police Service, and Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officers to the Centre without necessarily taking the State government's nod. The proposal was mooted as the Centre was facing an acute shortage of AIS officers. According to a 2023-24 parliamentary panel report on the DoPT, only 442 IAS officers were working with the Union government, against the required strength of 1,469. According to existing norms, States have to depute AIS officers to Central government offices, but it cannot be more than 40% of the total cadre strength. In 2020, the DoPT sent a letter to the States, that it was unable to fill vacancies in various Central ministries. Around 40% or 390 Central Staffing Scheme posts are at the joint secretary level (more than 19 years experience) and 60% or 540 such posts are at the rank of deputy secretary (nine years) or director rank (14 years of service).

Were such appointments made during the term of the previous governments?

Former PM Manmohan Singh was inducted as Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 1971; he served as the Chief Economic Adviser from 1972-1976; then he became the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and later the Finance Minister. Retired diplomat Nirupama Menon Rao said on X, "... When we set up the various civil services, post-independence, our first Prime Minister brought in a number of lateral entry officers into the Services. Strength lies in numbers and we had none. The system did work and helped tide over scarcity, and of course, simultaneously, our recruitment through the UPSC examination system began to add up and reinforce the numbers. Today, we need more specialists and 'experts' in the system." Another retired IAS officer said, "Earlier also lateral entrants were recruited. But these were not many joint secretary/director posts per se which were being filled en masse. If they advertised 45 posts, they should have followed the roster system (of DoPT) to apply reservations." Reservation in government jobs is implemented via DoPT's 13-point roster policy or quota by rotation. The roster system takes each department as a unit and not the ministries as a whole. For example, if a joint secretary rank post has been advertised in a particular Ministry, the reservation rules will not apply as against the cumulative vacancies in all ministries. Mr. Jitendra Singh said that eligible candi-



dates from reserved categories are considered along with other eligible candidates for lateral entry, "however, reservation is not applicable to such single post appointment." According to retired IPS officer Yashovardhan Azad: "Efforts to bring experts in the moribund bureaucracy started much earlier. Their contributions are stellar — the green, white, nuclear, space and economic revolutions were all brought in by the likes of M.S. Swaminathan,

Verghese Kurien, Homi Bhabha, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Manmohan Singh and Montek Singh Ahluwalia. But the entrenched 'babu' mafia never allowed outsiders. In fact, the 'babus' went to the best universities and countries on taxpayers' expense, ostensibly to modernise the system but came back writing papers how to entrench it while tinkering with it here and there. In UPA I and II, lateral entry was tried but it failed."

## The security tsar

To Lam, Vietnam's newly elected President, recently concluded a three-day visit to China. Mr. Lam's choice of China as the destination for his first overseas visit since assuming office was a testament to the new leadership to strengthen ties with its bigger communist neighbour with which it fought a war in 1979. The welcome ceremony for Mr. Lam and his wife was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, with the highest honours reserved for heads of state, including a 21-gun salute. Mr. Lam, who succeeded long-serving Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong, who died at 80 in July 2024, moved fast in consolidating power at home and strengthening Vietnam's partnerships abroad. Mr. Lam was born in 1957, the year a communist insurgency began in southern Vietnam. A member of the Communist party since 1981, Mr. Lam cut his teeth in the police service. He studied at the People's Security Academy and was recruited into the security force in October 1974 and rose through the ranks, eventually becoming the Minister of Public Security in April 2016, a post which would turn him into one of the most powerful men in the one-party dictatorship. He has been a member of the 12th and 13th Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which holds immense power in the country by directing the government's policies. Mr. Lam had his share of controversies as well. In 2021, he was seen eating gold-plated steak at celebrity chef Nusret Gokce's fine dining restaurant in London. Mr. Lam was in London after attending the UN COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland. The video went viral on TikTok, at a time when Vietnam

was navigating economic complications after the COVID-19 pandemic. The video was quickly removed from TikTok, but not before it was viewed by millions of people. The video, posted on November 3 on Mr. Gokce's TikTok account, showed the chef personally preparing steak dishes in front of the delegation, and himself feeding a slice of meat to Mr. Lam. A noodle vendor in Vietnam, who went viral for impersonating chef Gokce's typical salting style, was imprisoned for five years in 2023 for "anti-state propaganda". The vendor had posted a video of himself shortly after Mr. Lam's video went viral. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) has also raised alarm about Mr. Lam's rise to power in Vietnam. According to the group, his "rise to power is indicative of the Vietnam government's worsening repression, its complete intolerance of criticism, and utter hostility to basic civil and political rights". In 2016, when Mr. Lam was the Minister of Public Security, activists were reportedly barred from meeting former U.S. President Barack Obama during his historic trip to the country. Vietnamese security forces, under Mr. Lam, were also accused of kidnapping former party official Trinh Xuan Thanh from Berlin in July 2017, and blogger Truong Duy Nhat from Bangkok in January 2019. German authorities said Vietnamese businessperson and former politician Thanh and a companion were abducted and dragged into a van in downtown Berlin, while Vietnam countered that he surrendered to Vietnamese authorities after evading an international arrest warrant for nearly a year. Mr. Thanh was sentenced to