

Pharma Hub to come up in 2,000 acres in Sangareddy

Sangareddy: Yet another industrial hub is coming up on 2,000 acres in Sangareddy district. Since the State government decided to permit pharmaceutical industries away from Hyderabad and human habitations, the Sangareddy district administration and Telangana Industrial and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (TGIIC) was asked to identify land in a suitable location. The district administration identified a location close to Malgi, Dappur and Vaddy villages in Nyalkal mandal. The site is one kilometre away from the Karnataka border and 15km from Bidar town and the airport.

Collector Sangareddy Valluru Kranthi, TGIIC Patancheru zonal manager Rathan Rathod, Deputy Collectors Ravindar Reddy and Nagalakshmi, RDO Zaheerabad, Raju, Assistant Director (Survey and Land Records) Ilesh and others visited the place on Thursday. Since there were 1,000 acres of government land available, the revenue department would need to acquire another 1,000 acres from the local farmers. Speaking to Telangana Today, Rathod said the location would meet the twin challenges of keeping the pharmaceutical industries away from the State capital and also restriction of investment on the land acquisition. The land cost here was relatively low. He said that the land would be developed into plots by leaving 40 per cent of the land for amenities and infrastructure development. The rest of the



land would be allotted to industries that wanted to set up their units here. The location was also well-connected since NH-

161B passed close to the place while the Bidar Airport was 15 km away. He further said it was located 100 km away from ORR

at Patancheru. Rathod said the industries would provide employment to the locals at their own location.

Furniture and Fittings Skill Council announces major skill development projects



Hyderabad: The Furniture and Fittings Skill Council (FFSC) celebrated its 9th Foundation Day with an event that intro-

duced new projects to boost industry growth and skills, and the opening of FFSC Centre of Excellence (COE) in Hyderabad

by the Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Jayant Chaudhary. This COE, created through a partnership with the National Skill Training Institute (NSTI) and industry partners, is a big step forward for skill development in the sector, said Trishaljit Sethi, Director General of Training (DGT). Jayant Chaudhary praised the FFSC's unique approach and the important role of the Skill Ambassadors and Regional Skill Chapters in creating a strong skill ecosystem. He also launched the 'One Nation One Industry - Grow with #PowerOfSkills' campaign, which aims to expand FFSC's skill devel-

opment efforts and set up Regional Skill Chapters across the country. Venkataramana Gorti, Managing Director and Country Head of HOMAG became the new Chairperson of FFSC, while Nand Kishor Mistry, CEO of Swati Interiors, took on the role of Co-chairperson.

Rahul Mehta, CEO of FFSC, said, "Over the past four years, the FFSC has achieved remarkable growth, expanding our member base from around 40 to over 220, and engaging more than 1,500 companies, associations and academia as Skill Ambassadors."

'Swachandham-Pachandham' program from 5 August

Hyderabad: GHMC Commissioner Amrapali Kata called for the successful implementation of the 'Swachhadanam-Pachadanam' program scheduled to be held from 5 to 9 August. She held a tele-

conference with zonal and additional commissioners on Friday to discuss arrangements for the initiative. Officers across the departments will be roped in to implement the program in all wards of the city.

Any further delay in Census taking is perilous

When the Centre did not extend the deadline of June 30, 2024 to freeze administrative boundaries for the purpose of the Census, hopes were raised that the decennial Census operations, initially scheduled to begin in 2020 as a prelude to Census 2021, would at least commence in October 2024. It usually takes about three months after the boundaries are set, to make massive preparations for the field work. However, these expectations were belied when the Budget 2024-25 recently allocated ₹1,309.46 crore for the Census, a significant reduction from 2021-22 when ₹3,768 crore was allocated for the decadal exercise, thereby indicating that it may not be carried out even after the considerable delay. The next Census, therefore, continues to be on hold with the government yet to announce the new schedule. Conducting the Census on a priority basis is a must, as in the absence of a Census after 2011, a majority of our country's population is unable to access several schemes, benefits and services. Moreover, the implementation of the women's Reservation Act passed in the Parliament last year, reserving 33% of seats in Parliament and Assemblies for women, awaits the conduct of the Census.

It is imperative that sufficient provisions are made in the 2025-26 Census Budget so that the 2021 Census that has been postponed could be held at the earliest, in 2026, on completion of the first phase in 2025 that would include house listing and housing census and updating of the National Population Register (NPR). The preliminary arrangements for the Census, such as preparing updated maps and lists of administrative areas, pre-testing draft Census questionnaires, training of officers and core staff, who would train the large number of field staff in collecting the Census data digitally, i.e., on mobile app, planning the field work, logistics, budgeting have all been taking place in the Census Directorates in States and Union Territories for the past few years in anticipation of putting through a Census.

My visit to the Census Directorate of Tamil Nadu in Chennai and talks with the officials there have revealed that they are ready to undertake the task once the new Census date is fixed. All that is required is quick refresher training for them. The amount of ₹1,309.46 crore allocated in the 2024-25 budget could be utilised by the Census department to carry out several preliminary activities such as firming up of the enumeration areas, questionnaire finalisation, refresher training of the core staff in the proposed digital census, and tabulation plan. The Constitution (Eighty fourth Amendment) Act of 2001 was specifically made so as not to have delimitation of the constituencies till the first Census conducted after 2026. In the event of the Centre thinking in terms of having the Census in 2027 and utilising the population figures obtained from it for delimitation purposes, then the Census reference date should be announced soon, with the new deadline for the freezing of the boundaries of the administrative units by the State governments and Union Territory administra-



tion.

To create a comprehensive database of usual residents in the country, the NPR with details of persons usually residing in villages and towns and other rural and urban areas was first prepared in 2010 during the Houselisting and Housing Census phase of Census 2011. It was updated in 2015 incorporating changes due to birth, death and migration. This process was put through under the Citizenship Act, 1955. The NPR would be updated again during the House listing and Housing Census Operations (Phase 1) of the forthcoming

Census. The draft form of the NPR for the next Census has questions such as "mother tongue, place of birth of father and mother and last place of residence" — which were not in the NPR of 2011 Census prepared in 2010. The inclusion of the new questions has been opposed by some States and citizen groups as the NPR is the first step toward compilation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), according to the Citizenship Rules 2003. The Centre has however clarified that NPR data will not be used in the preparation of the NRC. The Centre has to make a decision whether to

retain or not the contentious questions in the NPR format to be updated in the first phase of the upcoming Census. There is growing demand for a caste-based census to be conducted by the Centre to precisely understand the economic well-being of the marginalised communities. In an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court of India on September 23, 2021, the Union Government had stated that a caste census (except that for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes done traditionally) was unfeasible, and "administratively difficult and cumbersome".

150% customs duty on lab chemicals alarms scientists

Three digits have thrown scientists across the country into a tizzy. Budget documents, made public earlier this week, show that the Basic Customs Duty on laboratory chemicals, a critical component of research, has been hiked to 150% from the existing 10%. Imported chemicals, reagents and enzymes come under the category of laboratory chemicals and are vital to experimental research across nearly every domain of scientific research. Most of them are niche products and can be expensive. The issue sparked outrage on social media with estimates by researchers that chemicals that usually cost ₹1,00,000 would now be bought for ₹2,50,000.

The Customs Department defines laboratory chemicals as "all chemicals, organic or inorganic, whether or not chemically defined, imported in packings not exceeding 500 grams or 500 milliliters and which can be identified with reference to

the purity, makings or other features to show them to be meant for use solely as laboratory chemicals." Santosh Chauhan, a scientist at the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), and who highlighted the issue on X, posted: "Please tell me this is a misprint...lab chemicals custom duty increased from 10% to 150%? How we do research (sic) and whether funding agencies will compensate by reducing expectations or providing more funds?" He also attached a picture of an email from Merck Life Sciences, a prominent supplier of specialty chemicals, that says rates of lab chemicals would now invite a 150% hike and those of 'plastics', a 25% hike from the existing 10%.

Several scientists to whom The Hindu spoke to, while perturbed by the rates, said that it was likely the number was a "misprint" or that exemptions would be made for chemicals specifically used for research

and development. Heads of scientific organisations said that "matters were under flux" and that it would be sometime before clarity could emerge. "This is quite a significant problem and we will be writing to the science secretaries for some clarification. It initially seemed like a misprint as most of the changes in customs duties for other items were in the range of 10% or 15% and this seemed like an outlier," said the director of a prominent lab affiliated with the Department of Atomic Energy, but who declined to be identified. "During Covid, we started to procure many more vital reagents and chemicals locally as the market dynamics changed. However, there are a vast number of chemicals that are necessary to research and must be imported because there aren't Indian manufacturers." Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, told The Hindu that the science ministries were aware of the issue and "it would be solved."

Versuni India's Preethi Zodiac Reaches a New High: Recognized as "The Most Powerful Mixer Grinder to Grind the Toughest Items" by Asia Book of Records and India Book of Records

Preethi Kitchen Appliances, a leading mixer grinder brand from the house of Versuni India, today achieved a milestone in Asia Book of Records and India Book of Records for its flagship and power-packed mixer grinder, the Preethi Zodiac. This recognition, acknowledging it as The Most Powerful Mixer Grinder to Grind the Toughest Items, is a testament to Preethi's dedication to innovation, quality, and performance. To showcase the impressive prowess of the Preethi Zodiac, the brand enlisted 120 influencers from diverse backgrounds to put the appliance to the ultimate test across four major cities: Kochi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad. These influencers took on the challenge of grinding various tough materials, from bricks and wood to spices and more. This rigorous demonstration of the Zodiac's capabilities not only highlighted its exceptional power and durability but also earned it widespread acclaim. The recognition underscores the product's unparalleled performance and reliability, setting it apart in the competitive market. The claim was verified by the Adjudicators from the India and Asia Book of Records, Mr. Vivek R Nair, and Mr. Sagayaraj, who announced the record. Commenting on the achievement, Mr. Gulbahar Taurani, Managing Director, and Chief Executive Officer at Versuni India Homes Solutions Ltd, said, "At Preethi, our commitment to consumers drives us to set benchmarks of perfection not only for ourselves but for the entire category. We are immensely proud to have the Preethi Zodiac recognized as The Most Powerful Mixer Grinder to Grind the Toughest Items by the Asia Book of Records and India Book of Records. This accolade is a testament to our relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation. When we created the Zodiac, our intent was to meet the consumer's need for a power-packed, reliable, and durable product that could make mixing, grinding, and blending easy and smooth. Over the years, Preethi has become a beloved choice for over a million consumers, known as a true kitchen powerhouse. Today's recognition not only affirms our claims but also reflects our dedication to maintaining the highest standards of quality and performance.

He further added "As a brand constantly innovating to meet evolving consumer demands and build stronger connections, we believe in continuously raising the bar for product innovation and consumer engagement. Today's achievement exemplifies this, showcasing the performance and efficiency of an everyday household appliance in an extraordinary way. The Preethi Zodiac effortlessly grinds the toughest ingredients to a fine powder, whether it's unusual items like brick and wood or everyday items like cinnamon or large amounts of batter. The success of the Preethi Zodiac indicates that we are on the right path. We will continue to innovate, leading the market with cutting-edge technology and unparalleled user experience." This Onam, Preethi is making celebrations extra special with a range of new products and enticing offers. To el-



evate the consumer's cooking experience, Preethi has introduced a new 1600W and two 2100W Induction Cooktops, featuring Triple MOV for 4KV surge protection, pre-set menus, and soft touch operations. These cooktops come with a 1-year product warranty and a 3-year coil warranty, starting at INR 2484. Additionally, Preethi has launched two new stainless steel gas stoves: the Glory (2 Burner) and Glory Plus (3 Burner). Starting at a price of INR 2500, the Glory stoves offer +68% thermal efficiency for faster cooking, and guard jet for a

consistent blue flame, sturdy pan support to accommodate all vessel sizes without the fear of falling or tipping, and ergonomic knobs for hassle free rotation. The Glory Plus also includes a removable drip tray for easy cleaning. Both models come with a 2-year product warranty and a 5-year body and burner warranty. Enhancing the festive spirit, Preethi is offering a free Laopala 15-piece dinner set worth INR 1550 with its premium 2 and 3 burner gas stoves including Power Duo, Valentino, Mira, Stylo Steel and Glam Steel, and a

12-piece dinner set worth INR 1250 with its mid-range gas stoves including Jumbo, Jumbo Max, Blaze, Sparkle, Luxe Pro and Gleam. Additionally, a free 3-piece Milton casserole set worth INR 1525 is available with select 750w and 1000w Zodiac mixer grinders including Zodiac Cosmo, Zodiac 2.0, Zodiac Glitter, Zodiac Stardust, and Zodiac Black. Staying true its commitment to consumers, Preethi continues to offer customers with lifelong free service across its entire product range to ensure a seamless and holistic brand experience.

Telangana govt to introduce new law for land registration, ownership

Hyderabad: Stating that the State government would take measures to overcome shortcomings in the Dharani portal and make it more simple and effective, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said the government would introduce a new law addressing land registration and ownership. Taking part in the short discussion on "Telangana land rights and reforms" in the State assembly on Friday, Srinivas Reddy said the new law would rectify the alleged shortcomings of the Dharani which was introduced by the previous BRS government. After making final changes in the Draft Bill, it would be placed in the next assembly session to give it legal sanctity, he said, adding that the gov-

ernment would place the new Draft Bill pertaining to Dharani on the website for three weeks for receiving suggestions from people. "The public consultation will address the issues and incorporate valuable feedback, so that the final implementation of the law is better and peoples' friendly," he said. The existing land rules from prior regulations and those from 18 different States were studied meticulously to develop the new draft law on land ownership and registration, he said, adding that the new law would provide relief and streamline the process for landowners. Dharani portal came into existence after huge exercise: Palla Rajeshwar Reddy:

BRS MLA Palla Rajeshwar Reddy

said if Dharani was full of flaws, why was the Congress using the 33 modules incorporated in the portal. Stating that Dharani was launched after a series of consultations, he said the initiative had benefited a large number of people in the State. "Even the Revenue Minister, who was in BRS then attended several meetings held to discuss Dharani," he recalled. Giving details of the Dharani exercise, he said in 2017, the BRS government took up LRUP (Land Records Updation Programs), under which 15,700 teams in 10,828 villages in 584 mandals examined the land records. "For taking up the exercise 10,809 revenue employees along with 24,000 VRAs and 535 surveyors examined the records in the villages and after taking the information,

The New India Foundation calls for applications Round 12 of the NIF Book Fellowships on Contemporary India

The New India Foundation is pleased to invite applications for the 12th edition of its prestigious New India Foundation Book Fellowships for research and scholarship about Indian history after Independence.

With an award of INR 18 lakhs to each recipient, the New India Foundation Book Fellowships provide editorial, legal, and administrative support, along with the opportunity to join the diverse NIF Community. Open to Indian nationals, including those residing abroad, these Fellowships are granted for a period of one year. Since its inception two decades ago, the New India Foundation has sponsored the publication of 34 critically-acclaimed, award-winning books across a wide range of topics detailing the trajectory of India after 1947.

According to Srinath Raghavan, Trustee, New India Foundation, "One of our objectives with the New India Foundation was to broaden the circle of people who write about India from a non-fiction perspective. We hope that the Fellowship will give an opportunity for people from a diverse range of careers and professions to write their book about India, because so many of us have different entry points into understanding this country." Fellowship-holders are expected to write original books. Proposals should be oriented towards publication, and outline a roadmap towards that destination. The Foundation is agnostic as regards genre, theme, and ideology: the only requirement is that the proposed works contribute to a fuller understanding of in-

dependent India. Thus, Fellowship-holders may choose to write a memoir, or a work of reportage, or a thickly footnoted academic study. Book proposals can focus on economics, politics, or culture, and can be either specific—like a single decade or region—or broad, covering a nationwide perspective. Applications open: 1st August 2024 Applications close: 31st December 2024 Applications can be accessed through the website www.newindiafoundation.org, and all queries may please be directed to info@newindiafoundation.org or yauvanika@newindiafoundation.org. Applicants are expected to submit a Book Proposal (up to 5000 words), a Writing Sample (up to 5000 words), and a CV.

Recent publications under the New India Foundation Book Fellowship include:

Neha Dixit's *The Many Lives of Syeda X* (Juggernaut 2024)

Sohini Chattopadhyay's *The Day I Became a Runner* (HarperCollins 2023)

Arupjyoti Saikia's *The Quest for a Modern Assam* (Penguin 2023)

Abhishek Choudhary's *Vajpayee* (PanMacmillan 2023)

Manoj Mitta's *Caste Pride* (Westland 2023) Savithri Preetha Nair's *Chromosome Woman, Nomad Scientist* (Routledge 2023) A full list of published books and Fellowship proposals can be found on the New India Foundation website.

HDFC Bank Shares an Important Message to Caution Against Investment Frauds



We understand your world

HDFC Bank, India's largest private sector bank, has advised its customers to be cautious against fraudulent trading platforms that offer investment opportunities mostly through social media platforms. The aim is to increase awareness about potential investment frauds to safeguard customers.

In cases of investment frauds, fraudsters are seen to typically promise unusually high returns on investments in stocks, IPOs, cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, etc.

This involves the creation of fake automated investment platforms or apps where victims get to view fake dashboards indicating high returns in investments. Such platforms are also seen promoted on social media inviting persons to join these high return investment schemes, which are in fact bogus. Fraudsters typically exploit people through social engineering tactics, however being cautious and transacting only after due diligence, will help safeguard against fraudsters. Cautioning on this fraud, Mr. Manish Agrawal, Executive Vice

President – Credit Intelligence and Control – HDFC Bank, said, "We are seeing an increase in the number of cases of investment frauds and want to help create a wider awareness and knowledge about the issue, so that the consumers can avoid falling prey to these deceptive schemes. While the Government, Banks and regulatory bodies are taking steps to curb these frauds, individual vigilance and awareness play a very important role in avoiding falling prey to illegitimate schemes." Tips to protect yourself from investment scams: Due Diligence Before Investing: Do proper research about the company or individual offering the investment, their track record, and legitimacy. Invest through registered brokers only. Investment Offering High Returns: Exercise caution with unsolicited investment opportunities that promise unusually high returns with minimal risk Online and Physical presence: Ensure the entity through which an investment is invited, has an official website, valid contact number, and a physical address. Sense of Urgency:

Do not feel pressured with claim of the investment opportunity being for a limited time or exclusive. These tactics are aimed at pressuring victims to act quickly and preventing them from conducting thorough research.

• Red Flags: Be alert to common red flags, such as guaranteed returns, lack of transparency in investment strategies, or refusal to provide detailed information about the investment. Report Suspected Scams: Report any suspicious call/message on the Chakshu portal on www.sancharsaathi.gov.in In the event that a person becomes a victim of any online fraud, they should immediately report the unauthorised transactions to the Bank in order to get the payment channel blocked, i.e., Cards/UPI/Net banking to safeguard against future losses. Customers should also file a complaint by calling 1930 helpline number started by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) as well as submit a complaint on National Cybercrime Reporting Portal <https://www.cybercrime.gov.in>

Trial run of Sitarama project Pusugudem pump house successful

Kothagudem: The trial run of Sitarama Lift Irrigation Project (SRLIP) second pump house at Pusugudem of Mulkalapalli mandal in the district conducted successfully.

It might be noted that the pump house was fitted with motors procured from China and a Chinese team arrived here recently to prepare the motors for the trial run, which was conducted on Thursday night.

The trial run of the first pump house at BG Kothur village of Aswapuram mandal in the district was conducted successfully in June last week. Former chief minister K Chandrashekhara Rao initiated Sitarama

project to irrigate 10 lakh acres with an estimated cost of Rs.17, 000 crore. The BRS government has already completed the construction of the pump house and more than 70 percent works of the canals. The State government was making efforts to fill Wyra reservoir through the Enkoor link canal to supply water to agriculture fields in Sathupalli and Wyra area.

The trial run of the third pump house at Kamalapuram in the mandal would be done soon. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy was expected to launch supply of water in the second week of August if everything goes according to the plan, officials said.



Hyderabad Aviators Society Celebrates 18 Years of Fostering Aviation Networks



The Hyderabad Aviators Society proudly hosted its 18th Annual Aviators Meet on August 1, 2024, at the Audi Showroom in Madhapur, Hyderabad. This year's event brought together around 150 aviation enthusiasts under one roof, celebrating the rich history and promising future of the aviation industry.

Founded 18 years ago by Captain Anil Kumar, the Hyderabad Aviators Society has served as a vital platform for professionals in the aviation field to connect, share experiences, and foster collaboration. This year's meet featured participants ranging from young aviators at the beginning of their careers to seasoned professionals who have served in the industry for

five decades, showcasing the diversity and breadth of the aviation community. Captain Anil Kumar expressed his pride in the growing community, revealing that the association now boasts around 600 members compared to just 50 in its inaugural meeting. He emphasized the society's mission to unite aviators not only within Hyderabad but also across India, with plans to establish similar associations in cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru as part of a broader vision for a unified Indian Aviation Association.

We are delighted to see the strong turnout today and to have the opportunity to connect with both emerging talents and veterans in the industry. This meet is not



just about networking; it's about learning from one another and building a stronger aviation community," stated Captain Anil.

The event featured insightful talks from distinguished individuals in the aviation sector, including Captain Marc Neal, the Co-founder of the association, and renowned aviation historian Anuradha Reddy, who shared valuable perspectives on the evolution of aviation.

Anuradha also presented her book dominions of aviation in Hyderabad, highlighting the importance of preserving aviation history. The gathering was not just about discussions; it also featured engaging entertainment, including live music and a magic show, ensuring a festive atmo-

sphere for all attendees. Esteemed aviation professionals, including Captains Kishen, G. Prabhakar Rao, D. Sharat, Sunil Kumar, Anil Rao, MS Reddy, V.H. Ram, Reza, Minocha, Dr. Mani, Dr. Shashidhar, Bharat Reddy, graced the event, underscoring the society's commitment to inclusivity across various aviation disciplines, including pilots, cabin crew, engineers, and military personnel.

As the Hyderabad Aviators Society continues to grow, it remains dedicated to fostering connections, sharing knowledge, and celebrating achievements within the aviation sector. The society looks forward to another 18 years of success and unity among aviators.

POCO Launches M6 Plus 5G and Buds X1: Unleashing Power, Style, and Immersive Sound Experience

POCO, a brand synonymous with rapid growth in India's consumer tech space, today introduced the POCO M6 Plus 5G, a compelling addition to its M-series lineup. Building upon the success of the M6 Pro, the M6 Plus 5G features a premium glass with ring flash design, a 108MP camera with 3X in-sensor zoom, and the Snapdragon 4 Gen2 AE processor. POCO also introduced the Buds X1, equipped with 40dB Hybrid Active Noise Cancellation and customizable audio settings for a personalized listening experience. The launch promises to surpass expectations of discerning and tech savvy Gen Zs who are constantly looking out for an elevated experience that combines power and style. POCO's approach has been centered around inspiring and challenging the younger generation, particularly Gen Zs to deliver unrivaled experiences through its unique design philosophy and product features. The brand has successfully disrupted industry norms exceeding expectations and setting new standards for excellence at unbeatable price propositions. With the introduction of the POCO M6 Plus 5G and Buds X1, POCO remains dedicated to providing exceptional value in the ever-evolving budget smartphone segment, reinforcing its commitment to innovation and cus-

tomers satisfaction.

Himanshu Tandon, Country Head of POCO India, shared his excitement about the launch and said, "At POCO, our mission is to make high-performance and premium experiences available to everyone. The M-series has consistently challenged expectations, and the M6 Plus 5G continues this tradition, fully reflecting our vision. The M6 Plus 5G and Buds X1 are crafted for those who seek top-notch performance and style without breaking the bank. We believe these products will revolutionize the market, setting new standards for features in this category." POCO M6 Plus 5G Performance & Storage At the heart of the POCO M6 Plus 5G lies the powerful Snapdragon® 4 Gen 2 AE processor. This advanced 5G chipset, built on a cutting-edge 4nm process, unlocks a new level of performance in the M-series. Experience blazing-fast clock speeds up to 2.3 GHz, achieving an impressive AnTuTu (V10) benchmark score of approximately 460K. The M6 Plus 5G also boasts faster UFS 2.2 storage and up to 16GB of RAM, including 8GB of virtual RAM, for effortless multitasking and a buttery-smooth user experience. Display & Design The POCO M6 Plus 5G features the segment's only dual-glass design and a new ring flash,

making it the only 5G phone in its category with these specifications. This combination adds a touch of sophistication to its overall aesthetic. With its slim profile measuring just 8.32mm in thickness, the device features Corning Gorilla Glass 3 protection and boasts an IP53 rating for water and dust protection. The device boasts the largest display in its segment for a 5G phone, featuring a 6.79" LCD with a 2400x1080 FHD+ resolution. This ensures an immersive viewing experience. The screen-to-body ratio of the POCO M6 Plus 5G is an impressive 91.20% and supports a high refresh rate of 120Hz AdaptiveSync, a touch sampling rate of 240Hz that ensures smooth and fluid scrolling, animations, and overall efficient performance. The POCO M6 Plus 5G boasts TÜV Rheinland low blue light certification, guaranteeing enhanced eye comfort, safety, and top-notch display quality for extended usage. The device comes with a Fast Side fingerprint sensor seamlessly blending security and convenience. Weighing in at 205g, the POCO M6 Plus 5G strikes a balance between portability and a substantial feel. Market Availability and Price The POCO M6 Plus 5G and POCO Buds X1 will be available in the Indian market starting 5th August 2024, at 12 PM on Flipkart.



M6 Plus 5G comes in three attractive color variants: Ice Silver, Misty Lavender, and Graphite Black. The device is priced at INR 11,999* for the 6GB+128GB storage variant and INR 13,499* for the 8GB+128GB storage variant.

India's open ecosystems face an unusual threat: trees

Increasing tree cover is often seen as a positive outcome of biodiversity conservation, and a much-needed effort to combat climate change. What happens, then, if tree cover increases in areas that historically hosted a different habitat? In a study published on June 5 in the journal *Global Change Biology*, scientists of the Universities of Witwatersrand, Cape Town, and Oxford reported that more trees in open ecosystems like savannahs and grasslands have substantially reduced the number of native grassland birds. In the African Savannah in particular, the population of grassland birds has declined by more than 20%.

Many become one. Grasslands and savannahs are biodiverse habitats in tropical and temperate regions throughout the world. They cover nearly 40% of the earth's total landmass, and are home to many endemic and at-risk species of plants and animals. From megaherbivores like elephants, rhinoceroses, and buffaloes in Africa and Asia to grassland birds like the bustards, floricans, and grouse of the Himalayan grasslands and American prairies, open ecosystems have it all. However, we are rapidly losing them.

Activities threatening them include the conversion of grasslands, intensive agriculture, loss due to erosion, large-scale development projects, overgrazing. But lurking among these usual suspects is also a highly unusual one: trees. The increase of tree and shrub cover is called woody encroachment — and it is widespread across most ecosystems. Woody encroachment entails the conversion of open habitats to habitats with greater tree cover and/or shrub density. The end result is the homogenisation of an ecosystem, meaning a diverse, multi-layered ecosystem turns into a uniform layer of woody plants.

This is a dire prospect because open ecosystems are characterised by a grassy understory and a scattering of native tree species. They are generally maintained by certain natural as well as human activities like grazing and fire, which are called disturbance regimes because they work in tandem to limit the growth of tree species. But once these regimes are disrupted, trees have the calm they need to establish themselves and start woody encroachment. When trees have ill-effects, a higher concentration of carbon dioxide in the air due to ongoing climate change also encourages deep-rooted woody plants in grasslands to proliferate. "Increased atmospheric CO₂ is likely to promote trees over grasses because the C₃ photosynthetic pathway used by trees is favoured under high CO₂ conditions," Jayashree Ratnam, programme director, Wildlife Biology and Conservation at the National Center for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru, said. "Once trees become dominant in a system, they may further suppress grasses through shading and fire suppression." Dr. Ratnam studies the biophysical and anthropogenic drivers of tropical savannah and rangeland structure and function and forest-savannah transition zones. Woody



encroachment is widespread worldwide. Many studies have unearthed evidence of different drivers of encroachment in different continents. Fire suppression and fragmentation dominate in the South American grasslands whereas more carbon dioxide and variations in rainfall do so in Australia and Africa. Inside and outside parks closer home, in India, grasslands occur across different climatic regimes: the country's west sports arid grasslands; floodplain grasslands dot the Himalayan landscape; and the high-altitude Shola grasslands crown the Western Ghats, to name a few. In the Himalayan foothills, the tall, wet grasslands are biodiverse habitats inhabited by iconic species such as Indian one-horned rhinoceroses, swamp deer, Bengal floricans, swamp grass babbler, and some other endemic species. These grasslands are highly threatened, not least because previous damage has broken them up into fragmented patches in a sea of forests, agriculture, and other human-derived habitats. Such fragmentation leaves these patches even more vulnerable than before.

Most of today's wet grasslands occur inside protected areas such as national parks and sanctuaries. Yet woody encroachment is rampant inside these parks as well, as a February 2023 study by researchers from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Kolkata; Hainan University in China; and the Durrell Conservation Trust in the U.K., reported. Using data from remote-sensing satellites, they uncovered overwhelmingly high woody encroachment in several national parks in India and Nepal over the last three decades. The cover of grassland habitats had shrunk by 34% while tree cover in these places had increased by 8.7%. The human hand

Woody encroachment is a direct re-

sult of human-driven factors that are changing the disturbance regimes open ecosystems need to thrive. The suppression of the practices grasslands need to thrive stem from colonial conservation and management policies. Colonial officers in tropical countries were known to regard open ecosystems as "wastelands" because they took up space in which trees could grow instead, and provide timber. The classification allowed these habitats to be converted to plantations as well as provided ground for the colonial government to criminalise communities that practised grazing and fire management. A different colonialism threatens open ecosystems today: instead of timber, many see trees as providers of carbon sequestration potential, and open ecosystems as encroachments that deprive humans of access to this potential. Refusing to acknowledge the historical presence of grasslands and savannahs have also led to the ongoing failure to protect them. Woody encroachment in open ecosystems has altered biodiversity in myriad ways. There has been a big decline in grassland birds due to woody encroachment. In the southern African countries of South Africa, Eswatini, and Lesotho, scientists used citizen science data from the 'South African Bird Atlas Project 2' to find a dramatic decline in the population of open ecosystem birds. Of the 191 species they analysed from 2007 to 2016, declining population trends prevailed in 121. Of these, the decline of 34 species correlated with woody encroachment. A six-year-old cheetah in the Masai Mara Savannah cautiously approaches prey hiding amid the grass. Under Project Cheetah, some of the next batch of cheetahs from Africa may be sent to a cheetah-breeding and conservation centre in the Banni grasslands, The Hindu reported on July 25. A six-year-old cheetah in the Masai Mara Savannah cautiously

approaches prey hiding amid the grass. Under Project Cheetah, some of the next batch of cheetahs from Africa may be sent to a cheetah-breeding and conservation centre in the Banni grasslands,

"Succession of woody species changes the soil conditions, which changes the grass species and faunal association. Woody species invite increased predation especially of the specialist birds' nests," Hem Sagar Baral, a noted ornithologist and former head of the Zoological Society of London (Nepal chapter), said. For similar reasons, woody encroachment brought down the population of grassland specialist rodents in the Banni grasslands of Kutch. These species also incurred a survivability penalty: the grass allowed them to hide from predators, but as trees cropped up, they spent more time keeping vigil and less time feeding. Woody encroachment in grasslands has also received a leg-up from large-scale tree plantation programmes. In the Banni grasslands, studies have found that the spread of the invasive species *Prosopis juliflora* — which the Gujarat Forest Department planted from 1961 to combat desertification and provide firewood to communities — have since then transformed swaths of the grasslands into a *Prosopis* woodland. In fact, most of India's open ecosystems have stories to tell of ruin led by artificially introduced plants. In the Shola grasslands, eucalyptus plantations have run amok, whereas the Malabar silk-cotton tree has been running riot in the wet terai grasslands of the Himalaya. To combat the increasing threat of woody encroachment to grasslands, it is imperative we first develop more evidence of their impact. Many studies have revealed the adverse effects of woody encroachment for biodiversity in grasslands, yet they are also the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Where are the young pundits who can inform and entertain?

Listening to Stuart Broad, England's latest television pundit, during the West Indies series showed how far behind India are in this crucial area of the game. A match can be watched only by a few thousand spectators; a telecast has an audience in the millions. To inform and entertain could well be the expert's motto. Broad brings to his assessments recent knowledge of both the players and the game's changing perspectives. India haven't had a recently-retired addition to their commentary team, with the exception of Dinesh Karthik. And Karthik came via England where he was a big hit when he started out. Harsha Bhogle, who began in the 1990s, has been bringing to us his passion for cricket and the sheer joy of watching it. He positioned himself as the eyes and ears of the average spectator, leaving the so-called experts to analyse and criticise. Except that Indians in the box seldom do the former and never do the latter. One reason Indian commentators tend to be bland is that anything critical about players or selectors or the Board of Control for Cricket in India is ironed out when they sign the BCCI contract. There is no room for dissent. The Justice Lodha panel, constituted by the Supreme Court to clean up Indian cricket, had condemned the BCCI for this lack of objective commentary. We expect our commentators to be jingoistic and uncritical, and thus cut off their objectivity at the knees.

In 2016, when Bhogle was sacked apparently because he had criticised some senior players earlier and had had words with a BCCI official, even Amitabh Bachchan got into the act condemning Bhogle in a roundabout way for being unpatriotic. A player complaining about a commentator is taken seriously. Sanjay Manjrekar was sacked after calling Ravindra Jadeja a "bits and pieces" player. He returned after writing a letter of apology to the BCCI which said among other things, "I will be happy to work as per the guidelines laid by you... If unwittingly, I have offended anyone I would be happy to apologise to the concerned party." This is the atmosphere in which Indian commentators work — not surprisingly, Ian Chappell turned down an offer to work here. Touch with the game. Yet, the BCCI advisory does not justify blandness. Dinesh Karthik talks a good game with authority and humour, two elements that seldom go together in the others. The fact that he is a recent player suggests there is something to be said for youngsters who are in touch with a game that is changing constantly.

Take Broad. Asked about England fast bowler Mark Wood being unlucky in a spell, Broad explained that coaches now look beyond bowling figures to determine effectiveness. The modern concept (at least in the England dressing room) is "expected wickets" based on the quality of deliveries bowled. You can have a great bowling spell and yet go wicketless; or a bad one and pick up three wickets. By the new reckoning, bowlers don't get discouraged, and taking wickets is anyway a morale-booster. This is not a psychology known beyond the dressing room, and it took a recent player to air it. Youth and experience

commentary box too benefits from a mixture of youth and experience. And — if the BCCI will allow — a maverick. Perhaps someone like Virender Sehwag who can be a surprise here too. When he is in the mood, Sunil Gavaskar can be engaging and share the benefits of his vast experience. He is probably the Indian to have seen the most amount of Test cricket, perhaps international cricket overall.

That's some six decades of playing and watching the game at the highest level around the world. Briefly before he moved on, Sourav Ganguly brought to the box a freshness and an original perspective. When a fielder once indicated he was unsure of a catch, he observed drily, "If he asks, then it's not out." In Indian cricket, those who speak well do not understand the game well enough; and those who know the game well often can't express themselves. There is too the pressure of



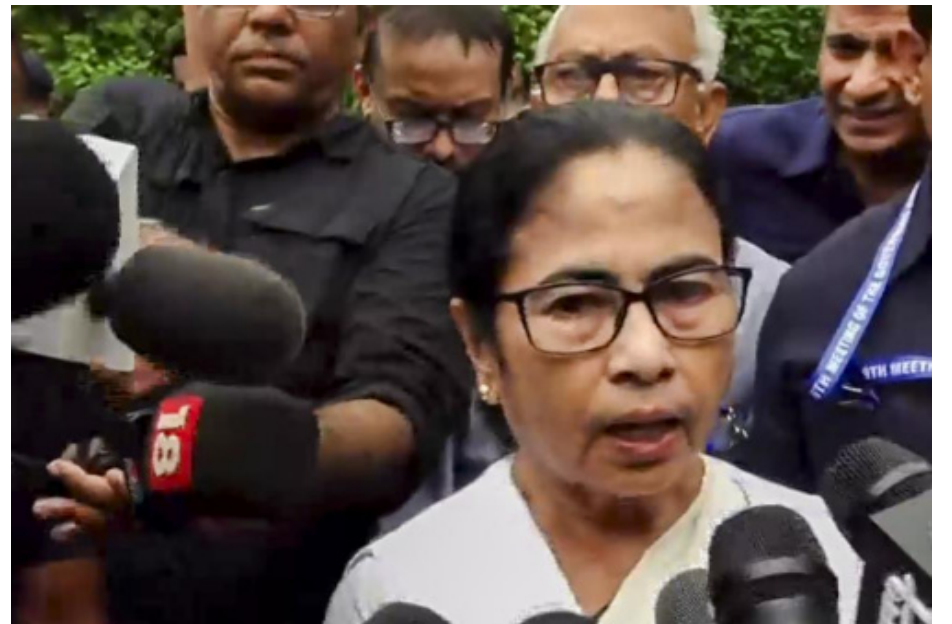
having to talk continuously. Is that what viewers want or do commentators just as-

sume that is what they want? Perhaps we need more research on this.

A tale of three Chief Ministers

The 9th governing council meeting of the NITI Aayog on July 27 in New Delhi was boycotted by Chief Ministers of the Opposition INDIA bloc, barring West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who joined it and later walked out. Of the two Chief Ministers who are critical partners in the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar did not turn up, while his Andhra Pradesh counterpart N. Chandrababu Naidu actively participated in the deliberations. The walk out, absence, and participation, respectively, of Ms. Banerjee, Mr. Kumar, and Mr. Naidu are instructive of the political culture they promote and benefit from, which in turn is tied to the fortunes of the three States they lead.

Each Chief Minister had seven minutes to speak. Ms. Banerjee wanted to speak out of turn, and speak early, since she wanted to return to the State in the afternoon. In alphabetical order, West Bengal would have come much later. Her request was granted. Once seven minutes was over, a screen before her showed that time was up, as it happened with all the others before her. Several Chief Ministers had sought more time to speak, which was allowed, but Ms. Banerjee left the meeting in a huff. "I have come out boycotting the meeting. Chandrababu Naidu was given 20 minutes to speak. The Chief Ministers of Assam, Goa, and Chhattisgarh spoke for 10-12 minutes," she told reporters. Mr. Naidu spoke for 22 minutes — 15 minutes more than the allotted time — and ignored a note from his own Chief Secretary about the overshot. He elaborated on the developmental challenges before his State and the country, and also the demographic challenges before the country. Mr. Kumar, who did not attend the meeting, met Janata Dal United leaders from Jharkhand in Patna on the day. According to one account, he was under the weather. Ms. Banerjee



did not want to join the INDIA boycott as her politics is dependent on her maintaining her position as the sole opponent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Bengal, which in turn is portrayed as anti-Bengal. So, she turned up and made it a solo show of grandstanding. Mr. Naidu has a reputation of being forceful and persistent in dealing with the Centre. A Minister in the A.B. Vajpayee government, which was then supported by Mr. Naidu's Telugu Desam Party as the current Modi government is today, would recount how Mr. Naidu would pursue his requests. He would not take no for an answer for a meeting request. Mr. Naidu, who was then the Chief Minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh, would make himself available anytime for the meeting. "No ego, always flexible and persistent in requests for the State," says a senior official who has seen Mr. Naidu's functioning over the years. Mr. Kumar's

absence betrays a lack of interest in governance that percolates from the highest authority to all levels of the administration. Bihar needs Central assistance, arguably more than any other State. The state capacity in Bihar alarmingly low, and its governance should give its administrators sleepless nights. In recent weeks, a dozen or more bridges have collapsed in the State. A recent report of the Comptroller and Auditor General noted that Bihar "spent only ₹2,35,176.84 crore (77.95% of the total Budget) and surrendered ₹20,526.71 crore (30.86%) of the total savings of ₹66,509.62 crore," for the FY2022-23. The State could not make use of one third of the money it had. Of what it managed to spend, its bridges stand — or fall — in testimony to how the money was spent. Bihar needs to expand its capacity and use the advantage of a friendly government at the Centre to pull itself up from its current situation. But that is unfortunately not happening.

A star in the making — the story of Abhishek, a special talent

Everyone knows the iceberg analogy — you know, the one where what you see is just 10 per cent and the rest is under water, hidden in plain sight, unknown and unappreciated? Abhishek's career that has rocketed with the Indian men's hockey team in the last two years has been something similar. The 24-year old has been one of the fastest growing stars in a team in transition post Tokyo Olympics but if he seems indispensable to India's goalscoring hopes and, by extension, medal fortunes in Paris, it's got a lot to do with 16 years of grind before the youngster finally broke through.

"The senior India team spot has been around for the last two years, since I was first named in the camp in 2022 (he made his India debut the same year, during the FIH Pro League in South Africa). But it has been a long journey — almost 18 years — from when I first picked up the stick. The first 10 years were spent on grass before I went to the National Hockey Academy (in Delhi, under MP Ganesh). I got selected for the junior India team but then was out for three years, too old for juniors and not ready for the seniors. That was the period I spent getting better with my organisational team, Punjab National Bank before the national side call-up," he mumbles. The iceberg example extends to the entirety of Abhishek's existence. He is deceptively calm off the field. He whispers and mumbles more than he speaks, tries to avoid eye contact as much as possible, smiles a lot and prefers actions to words. The braces he wears only add to the effect. Sitting down for an interaction, his entire body seems ready to fold into itself and disappear. On the field, he's a different beast, unleashed. On the field, he is lightning quick on his feet, with impeccable control of the ball and ability to judge the right angles to push through inside the circle. Off the field, he is deceptively calm. He whispers and mumbles more than he speaks, tries to avoid eye contact as much as possible, smiles a lot and prefers actions to words. The Olympics, like every Indian sportsperson, has been the recurring dream forever.

Two years in the national set up has also taught him the ridiculous demands of professional excellence. "I have learnt to respect and stick to the team's structure, play to the plan. The more you deviate from it the more mistakes you will make," he says. Lightning quick on his feet, with impeccable control of the ball and ability to judge the right angles to push through inside the circle, Abhishek undergoes a transformation that's hard to believe. There is a confidence he oozes and a presence that forces the public to follow his movements. He is a lot more vocal too, but always level-headed. The one aspect common to both his selves is his clarity of thought. "I am not an introvert," he protests with a laugh, genuine but still muted. "Honestly, I did not expect big things when I first came into the national set up. I only thought of making the core group of 33, may be play a few test matches, you know, ease into the side and gradually grow. That would have been enough for me. I have been lucky to get a

chance to play important games soon after joining the camp. Coach Graham Reid trusted me and gave me opportunities and I am thankful to him for taking the punt on me. I have learnt a lot, got a lot of experience with this group," he admits.

Luck, in fact, is a word Abhishek uses liberally, but there is no denying that he has put in the hard yards to earn it. As the saying goes, the harder you work, the luckier you get. Abhishek is an example of it. Whether it was starting in the sport watching a friend and then sticking to it even after the latter quit or working on his fitness to build up strength or learning from the bench, Abhishek has plugged away, stubbornly, to be where he is. The 32 goals in 74 games are testament to it. "Haan zidd to bahut hai, jo karna hai wo karna hi hai, chahiye to chahiye (yes there is stubbornness, what needs to be done has to be done). That has always been my mindset. It's now the same for a medal at Olympics, even though I know it will not be easy. To do whatever it takes — marna pade, katna pade, khoon aye, sar phoot jaye (die, bleed, break bones) — the end result is to score goals, win matches," he says quietly, softly, and that's when you realise the lanky kid is a lot tougher than he looks.

It's also a measure of his quiet, ambitious confidence that the first time he wore the India jersey, as part of the Under-18 Asia Cup squad, it was a surreal moment that, instead of feeling like an achievement, made him realise it was only the beginning. "I was at the NHA in 2016, all of a sudden there were trials and just like that, my name was in the team and I got my first India jersey. It was surreal — you know, I had been playing hockey for 10 years at that point of time and it was the one thing I had been dreaming of, wearing India colours, playing for the country, and snap, it just happened. You know how you feel sort of blank when you work hard for something all your life and then it happens overnight?" "But once I actually wore it, it did not feel like an achievement — it felt like the beginning of a very long road, on which this was but the first step. That jersey was not a target achieved, it was when I first started dreaming big. You also need luck, first to get a chance and then to make sure you use that chance well. There are many, many good players; not everyone can go to the top," he insists, staring at the floor, clearly present but distant, far from the sylvan surroundings of the SAI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, perhaps at the Major Dhyani Chand National Stadium in the national capital.

Still then, the dreams were more modest, more middle-class — play a few years, get good enough to land a government job, ensure financial security for the family. "Wo bachpana tha (that was childishness). Hockey is now my passion, an obsession. If I don't train once, the entire day feels incomplete. The more I played, the more mature I became, the dreams got bigger — first to get into national camp, then play for India, then go to the Olympics, then get a medal there. The first three have been ticked, I am hopeful of getting the last one



in Paris," he said. The Olympics, like every Indian sportsperson, has been the recurring dream forever and making the Paris squad is but an incomplete motif. "Medal is the main thing, then only the dream will be complete. Warna Olympians to desh me bahut hain (there are many Olympians in India)," he states simply.

Rigorous demands The two years in the national set up has also taught him the ridiculous demands of professional excellence. "There is a hierarchy in domestic hockey, the coach is paramount, fitness is inconsistent and personal preferences matter a lot. When you come to the national camp, it's a complete different world — more professional, more intense. Your performance is in front of everyone and that's all that matters. The small and big moments, the sheer physical and mental fitness levels, the focus, everything is very different." "In these two years, I have learnt to respect and stick to the team's structure, play to the plan. That's what you have worked for and worked on, the more you deviate from it the more mistakes you will make. The small things matter and I am lucky to have a group with me that treats you like family," he explains. Talk veers to his entry into a camp where some players had careers as long as his entire existence on Earth and Abhishek admits there was diffidence, a remnant of his domestic days when respect for seniors was a big thing. "When I came in the beginning, I did not know anything. As a youngster walking into a dressing room or the mess with players like Sree

bhai and Manpreet paaji and Harmanpreet paaji, there was a nervousness. "I only wanted to stay disciplined and focus on my work, do whatever I was being told and keep self belief. I also used to wonder if I should wish the seniors, you know, what if they got angry if I don't behave properly. But my first coach, Shamsheer Singh, was always there to back me and the seniors have been super supportive. He was the one who told me that every chance I get will be both a test of my abilities and an opportunity to prove myself, it is all about making the best of what you get," he admits. The spotlight on scorers can work in funny ways but Abhishek appears unperturbed. "It is neither a pressure nor a responsibility. As strikers, we have the freedom to go there, take risks and try scoring because we know that even if we make mistakes, there are others at the back. It is more difficult for the defenders because their one error can prove costly, so the pressure is all on them." The basics have been done, the plans made, the combinations decided. As Paris looms, the focus is now on the intangibles — the unsaid connection between players that is so important at the elite level. "We are working more on actions inside the circle. The most important thing is connection — understand each other and their game, create space for each other, have faith in each other. Under pressure, those will be the make or break moments." If his journey so far is any indication, pressure is the last thing that will break the kid from Sonapat.

Air turbulence to rise due to climate change

Between 1980 and 2021, instances of planes experiencing clear air turbulence increased by 60-155 per cent across regions in the Northern Hemisphere, according to a new research. As climate warms, researchers cautioned that the invisible, unpredictable form of air turbulence is expected to occur more often in most northern mid-latitude regions, thereby impacting aviation.

Clear air turbulence is seen to happen near fast-moving, west-to-east air currents, or 'jet streams,' in the upper troposphere — the region in the Earth's atmosphere where commercial planes fly, about

10-12 km or 32,000-39,000 feet above ground. Planes passing through such jet streams can experience "spikes of volatile, upwards-moving air" called vertical wind shear, thereby causing turbulence. The researchers explained that in a warmer climate, energy in the atmosphere will be more, thereby increasing the speed of jet streams and the number of vertical wind shears. This meant that with each degree of global warming, the likelihood of planes encountering clear air turbulence will increase. Clear air turbulence also hits an aircraft unexpectedly, as unlike other,