

Attendance dwindles by 15-25 per cent in Telangana schools due to dengue, chikungunya

Hyderabad: A troubling trend seems to be unfolding in the schools across the State. Over the last one month, students' attendance in the schools is reported to have dwindled by 15 to 25 per cent, driven by a concerning uptick in dengue, chikungunya and viral fever cases this monsoon season. While schools in the city are reporting viral infections, it is more prevalent in the rural areas particularly in the places with poor sanitation and sparse healthcare facilities. As the incidences of the viral infections and fever are on the rise, parents are increasingly reluctant to send their wards to schools fearing their kids might catch a communicable disease.

"Generally, schools see 85 per cent attendance. However, given the viral infection cases, the attendance has dropped by 20 per cent in schools particularly in rural areas. A few days ago, three teachers of the same government school in Khammam got chikungunya," said Chava Ravi, general secretary, United Teachers Federation Telangana State. As per the statistics released by the Health department, 5,372 dengue cases have been reported

in the State till the last count on August 25. At 1,852, Hyderabad has reported the highest number of cases among all the districts followed by 471 dengue in Suryapet and 425 in Medchal Malkajgiri district. Similarly, 152 cases of Chikungunya cases were detected in the State with 61 alone in Hyderabad. These cases apparently rang alarming bells among school managements who initiated measures to ensure their students do not fall prey to the communicable diseases during this season. Some schools have sent out messages and emails to parents highlighting the importance of their ward's health safety and children in the school.

The school managements are requesting parents not to send their wards to schools, if they have symptoms from cold, cough or fever. According to Telangana Recognised Schools Management Association, to create awareness among students on vector-borne diseases, the private budget schools have been holding a series of activities like observing dry days on Friday, cleaning of water storage places and such spots that could turn breeding



ground for mosquitoes. "Monsoon is the time when communicable diseases spread and there is about a 10 to 15 per cent drop in attendance in this season. Since prevention is better than the cure, the schools are

organising various awareness activities including dry day on Fridays. As these are mosquito borne diseases we asked students to cover themselves fully," said S Madhusudhan, president, TRSMA.

Is it dengue or something else in Hyd?



Hyderabad: A peculiar medical mystery is unfolding in Hyderabad. Despite exhibiting classic dengue symptoms like soaring fevers, dropping plate counts and body aches, countless patients are returning negative for dengue tests. This puzzling trend has left caregivers and doctors in Hyderabad baffled and searching for answers. As a result of negative testing, such cases are recorded as 'suspected dengue' by the Telangana State Public Health department, but no attempt is underway to understand whether a different viral agent is responsible for triggering the rise of such dengue-like infections.

Till now, neither the Public Health de-

partment nor Directorate of Medical Education (DME) have yet launched any concerted attempt at unraveling this mystery. No blood samples of dengue positive patients have been collected for conducting a thorough genomic sequencing in city-based central government genetic laboratories to understand the viral agent, which could possibly be behind the infections. Frequent negative dengue tests are also causing individuals to assume that they do not carry any kind of viral infection. As a result, a large number of patients are not strictly adhering to the basic medication prescribed by the doctor for their infection, leaving the door open for complica-

tions at a later date.

There are two different kinds of dengue diagnostic tests that include NS1 and IgM tests and there is every possibility that sometimes these tests might be negative. According to experts in seasonal ailments, sometimes the timing of conducting the test may go wrong and that could lead to a negative test. Usually, dengue NS1 antigen can be detected after the third day of infections and IgM antibodies can be detected any 5 to 6 days. Senior physicians who are familiar with the dengue disease pattern in the two Telugu States caution individuals from ignoring basic medication and rest, which is prescribed by the caregiver. "Some of the patients utilize rapid tests to undergo

dengue tests and that also could be the reason for the large number of negative tests. However, please don't ignore dengue-like symptoms," doctors advised. Important advice from top doctors to dengue patients: • Avoid NSAIDs like aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, diclofenac etc. • Paracetamol is ideal to reduce fever. • Steroids have no role in treatment of dengue. • Hydrate properly. • Papaya leaf juice does not provide any relief. • Platelet or blood transfusion only if platelets drop less than 15,000 or 20,000. • Dengue tests are NS1 and IgM. • NS1 on day 2 of symptoms and IgM on test on Day 5. • Day 2 means second day of fever. • No use of antibiotics and anti-malarials in treating dengue

Revanth misled Rahul Gandhi also on loan waiver : Harish Rao

Hyderabad: Stating that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy of making misleading claims about the implementation of the crop loan waiver, BRS leader and former Minister T Harish Rao said it had caused confusion and frustration among the public and the farmers. In an informal chat with media persons at Telangana Bhavan, he said on Thursday that Revanth Reddy had misled even Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with his claims over the fulfilment of the debt relief promise made by the Con-

gress party. He offered to receive Rahul Gandhi on his visit to the State and show him the ground reality as far as the waiver was concerned in the Chief Minister's native village of Kondareddypalli. He emphasized that the Chief Minister's statements had not matched the actual disbursement figures, leading to trust deficit and lack of transparency. The way the Chief Minister sought to handle the loan waiver issue created a considerable amount of confusion and the farmers viewed it as a case of betrayal.

Investing in persons with disabilities

A recent Hindi movie, Srikanth, starring Rajkumar Rao, narrates the story of the industrialist Srikanth Bolla and his journey of overcoming the challenge of visual impairment. In the film, the people of Srikanth's father's village ask the family not to invest in the son's education or life in general. Many parents of children with some form of disability are similarly made to believe that their offspring are not worthy of investment. Persons with disabilities (PwDs) face social stigma, marginalisation in all sectors, and discrimination in education and employment; most importantly, they struggle for dignity. Educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure and support mechanisms and workplaces lack robust diversity policies that would give proper representation to PwDs.

Status of education and jobs The 2023 report by Nifty 50 constituent companies reveals that only five out of the 50 companies have more than 1% of PwDs on their rolls, with four of them being public sector companies. Similarly, data from the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People reveals that less than 1% of India's educational institutions are disabled-friendly, less than 40% of school buildings have ramps, and approximately 17% have accessible restrooms. A report of the Sarthak Educational Trust titled 'Accessibility and Inclusion in Higher Education in India' states that reservation is provided under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, in government jobs, and incentives in non-government jobs, but there is a clear lack of implementation. The lack of infrastructure combined with the lack of inclusive policies hinders the full participation of PwDs in society. Thus, it is imperative that both public and private institutions invest in the uplift of PwDs.

The Indian education system needs an inclusive framework to promote PwDs. For instance, Harvard University in the U.S. has Local Disability Coordinators who are specialised in helping PwDs find accommodation in the city. Similarly, Stanford University in the U.S. has a robust institutional structure which includes providing support in housing and devices to PwDs. It also has a comprehensive resource centre that supports students with disabilities. Few Indian universities provide such impressive models. In 2023, Shiv Nadar University enumerated a disability support policy, which includes providing personalised support to students on a case-by-case basis, depending on the student's health condition every semester. Based on the nature and severity of the disability, the Dean of Academics decides measures for academic accommodation and the Dean of Students for other aspects. However, these measures are not institutionalised. Hence, they are not uniform, leaving a vast number of students from diverse backgrounds outside the walls of the university. Despite the University Grants Commission's draft accessibility and inclusivity guidelines for higher education institutions to ensure that admission announcements and advertisements are circulated in accessible formats, the presence of PwDs is not very encouraging.

In terms of employment, despite the legislative mandate of providing reservation for PwDs, and of drafting an equal opportunity policy detailing the measures pro-

posed by the establishment to ensure an inclusive work environment and prohibit discrimination at the workplace, employers have failed to do these. For the effective implementation of these rules, States should come forward and develop a compliance mechanism. For instance, a model from Brazil can be emulated, where companies with more than 100 employees must have PwDs comprise 2%-5% of the total workforce. In cases of non-compliance, the company may be subject to fines based on criteria such as its size and the number of times offences were repeated. Some countries have also developed incentive mechanisms. Japan, for instance, has developed a system of subsidiaries for employees who have some form of disability. Striving for dignity

The British artist, David Hevey, once remarked that "the history of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppressive and negative representation. This has meant that disabled people have been presented as socially flawed able-bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities". The identity of PwDs is eroded in several ways. PwDs are considered by many as pitiful or helpless. Many believe that PwDs can only be in relationships with one another. Disability in addi-



tion to belonging to a "lower" caste or a particular gender creates a double/triple burden on people. Sociologist Colin Barnes has argued that PwDs are "portrayed as objects of pity, violence, curiosity and ridicule, as burdens on society, sexually abnormal, and overall, as people incapable of community participation". This portrayal forms the basis of the societal attitude towards PwDs. Recently, three former cricketers mocked PwDs in a video that went viral after India won the World

Championship of Legends. Everyday struggles and the stigmatisation and mockery of PwDs reveals the inability of so-called "able-bodied people" to treat them equally with dignity. Abhishek Anicca in his book, The Grammar of My Body, writes, "My friends say disabled people can be negative. I agree. We are so negative that sometimes the able-bodied mind never reaches us. That distance is too far... It is thus those who are creating the distance [who] should bridge the gap."

The road to 2047 for Indian agriculture

India's centennial year of independence is still away, in 2047, but the goal of becoming a developed nation looms large. Achieving this requires a significant increase in per capita Gross National Income (GNI) to about six times the current level. This necessitates a comprehensive development approach, especially in agriculture. Transforming Indian agriculture depends on adopting sustainable practices that ensure long-term productivity and environmental health. Precision farming, genetically modified crops, and advanced irrigation techniques such as drip and sprinkler systems are leading this transformation. For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) has covered 78 lakh hectares, promoting water-use efficiency through micro-irrigation. The scheme's ₹93,068 crore allocation for 2021-26 underscores the government's commitment to sustainable water management. India's agricultural sector faces challenges, including climate change, land degradation, and market access issues. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), introduced in 2016, provides financial assistance for crop losses. With 49.5 crore farmers enrolled and claims totalling over ₹1.45 lakh crore, the scheme is a cornerstone of agricultural risk management. The Electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM), launched in 2016, integrates existing markets through an electronic platform. By September 2023, 1,361 mandis had been integrated, benefiting 1.76 million farmers and recording trade worth ₹2.88 lakh crore. This initiative improves market access and ensures better price realisation for farmers. Despite agriculture engaging nearly 46% of the workforce, agriculture's contribution to GDP is about 18%, highlighting a stark imbalance. If current growth

trends continue, this disparity will worsen: while overall GDP has grown at 6.1% annually since 1991-92, agricultural GDP lags at 3.3%. Under the Narendra Modi administration, overall GDP growth was 5.9%, and agriculture grew at 3.6%. However, this is insufficient for a sector so critical to the nation's socio-economic fabric. By 2047, agriculture's share in GDP might shrink to 7%-8%, yet, it could still employ over 30% of the workforce if significant structural changes are not implemented. This indicates that merely maintaining the current growth trajectory will not suffice. The expected 7.6% overall GDP growth for 2023-24 is promising. However, the agri-GDP's anaemic growth of 0.7%, primarily due to unseasonal rains, is alarming. Further, according to United Nations projections, India's population is expected to reach 1.5 billion by 2030 and 1.59 billion by 2040. Following the agricultural challenges, meeting the food requirements of this burgeoning population will be imperative. With an estimated expenditure elasticity of food at 0.45, the demand for food is expected to grow by approximately 2.85% annually, considering the population growth rate of 0.85%. India's real per capita income increased by 41% from 2011-12 to 2021-22 and is projected to accelerate further. However, the expenditure elasticity post-2023 is anticipated to be lower, correlating a 5% rise in per capita expenditure to a 2% growth in demand. The anticipated food demand will vary among commodities, with meat demand growing by 5.42% and rice demand by a mere 0.34%. To address these challenges, rationalising food and fertilizer subsidies and redirecting savings towards agricultural research and development innovation and extension services are

crucial. Several initiatives have been rolled out to bolster farmer prosperity and sustainable agricultural growth. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), launched in 2019, disburses ₹6,000 annually to farmers in three instalments. This scheme has already benefited over 11.8 crore farmers, offering much-needed financial support. Another critical initiative, the Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme, aims to optimise soil nutrient use, thereby enhancing agricultural productivity. Over 23 crore SHCs have been distributed, providing farmers with crucial insights into soil health and nutrient management. The government also championed the International Year of Millets in 2023, promoting nutritious coarse grains, both domestically and internationally. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, with a ₹1 lakh crore financing facility, supports the development and modernisation of post-harvest management infrastructure. Within three years, over 38,326 projects have been sanctioned, mobilising ₹30,030 crore in the agricultural infrastructure sector. These projects have created employment for more than 5.8 lakh individuals and improved farmer incomes by 20%-25% through better price realisation. Moreover, the Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas (SVAMITVA) initiative aims to ensure transparent property ownership in rural areas. As of September 2023, over 1.6 crore property cards have been generated, enhancing land security and facilitating credit access for farmers. The government's strategic planning for agriculture, leading up to 2047, focuses on several key areas: anticipated future demand for agricultural products, insights from past growth catalysts, existing challenges, and potential opportunities in the agricultural landscape.

Edelweiss Life records its highest-ever Claim Settlement Ratio of 99.23% in FY24

Underscoring its focus on customer centricity, Edelweiss Life Insurance has reported a Claim Settlement Ratio of 99.23% for the financial year 2023-24, the highest ever in company's 13-year history. Sumit Rai, MD & CEO, Edelweiss Life Insurance said, "Claim Settlement Ratio is an important marker of customer centricity; it is our ultimate moment of truth. It denotes whether the company will stand with your loved ones in their hour of need. We are extremely proud of this milestone, and it is proof that we are 100% customer-obsessed." Through the years, the life insurer has been focused on improving the back-end processes including underwriting and advisory to enhance its Claim Settlement Ratio. It has brought down the overall TAT for claim settlement and arrested inci-

dences of bad claims through a meticulous fraud prevention process.

By driving a risk-conscious culture among its salesforce through the Certified Risk Assessor (CRA) program, the life insurer has created pseudo-underwriters among its frontline staff to improve quality of customer acquisition. This includes identifying risk at sourcing or post issuance stage. T

he company has also brought down incidences of bad claims by leveraging AI & ML-powered fraud prevention model. "A bad claim is of significant concern to not only the insurer but also a genuine customer because they ultimately bear the financial burden of such activities. So, fraud prevention has been a focus area for us; we have leveraged automation and sev-



eral other initiatives to identify and arrest such cases. In FY24, we saved nearly Rs. 143 crore through fraud prevention at sourcing and claims stages. We believe these are necessary steps towards offering the best customer experience – be it

offering best solutions in the market or post-sale service – to our policyholders," Rai said. The life insurer remains steadfast in its commitment to improve on its customer experience, especially at critical stages like claim settlement.

HDFC Bank Launches GIGA

A Complete Financial Suite of Products for Gig Workers

HDFC Bank, India's largest private sector bank, today launched GIGA – a complete financial suite of products and services designed especially for gig workers/freelancers.

As a start-point, the Bank conducted an in-depth consumer research study to understand the needs of freelancers, based on which, it has launched GIGA – a digital-first programme offering a host of customised products and services to address the requirements of freelancers. The gig economy stretches across the continuum of white-collar professionals such as management consultants, software programmers and designers, architects, investment advisors to grey collar workers that carry specific vocational/technical expertise to blue collar and pink-collar workers that comprise delivery partners and care givers. Ms Sunali Rohra, Head – Gig Banking, Start-Ups and Government & Institutional Business, HDFC Bank said, "We are delighted to launch a comprehensive suite of financial products designed to meet the manifold needs of various freelancer segments. Our products include a specialised savings account, current account, debit cards, credit cards with very specialised offers, health insurance for as little as Rs 20 per day, and flexible investment products where they could "invest when they can and how much they can" instead of a traditional SIP, and custom retail asset products. Income and independence is what is driving people to adopt this way of life, which of course has been powered by the growth of the digital ecosystem and to a large extent the trend of remote working."

Estimates peg the number of gig workers at 30 to 50 million in India and the segment is only growing.

Offerings under GIGA*:

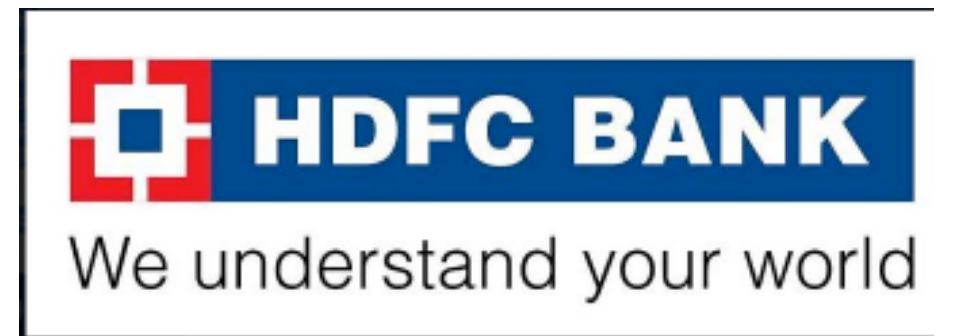
- Flexible GIGA Savings Account – The GIGA account gives freelancers the choice of maintaining a quarterly balance (Rs 10,000 for metro/urban and Rs 5,000 for semi-urban/rural accounts) or using

options such as starting their investment journey with a systematic investment plan / fixed deposit / recurring deposit etc.

- GIGA Business Debit Card with accelerated cashback on spends and customised offers comes with the account. It also provides complimentary personal accidental death cover of up to Rs.10 lakh.

- Exclusive GIGA Business Credit Card specifically designed for freelancers with an interest-free credit period of 55 days, and an accelerated rewards programme.

- Curated offers on GIGA Cards: A bouquet of value-added offers especially designed to help freelancers in their work is also being included on both GIGA Debit and Credit cards. Developed in conjunction with both domestic and international



partners, the offers address many of the needs identified through consumer research. At launch these will include preferential deals on co-working spaces (wework and Awfis); upskilling and learning (Harappa, 42 Courses and The Designer's

Class); book-keeping, accounting and taxation (Zoho, LegalWiz and India Filings); health & wellness (Earthful, Frido and Reboot Wellness); and membership discounts from gig platforms (Truelancer and Refrens) along with other offers.

French authorities issue preliminary charges against Telegram messaging app CEO Pavel Durov

French authorities handed preliminary charges to Telegram CEO Pavel Durov on Wednesday (August 28, 2024) for allowing alleged criminal activity on his messaging app, and barred him from leaving France pending further investigation.

Both free-speech advocates and authoritarian governments have spoken out in Mr. Durov's defence since his weekend arrest. The case has also called attention to the challenges of policing illegal activity online, and to the Russia-born Durov's own unusual biography and multiple passports. Mr. Durov was detained on Saturday at Le Bourget airport outside Paris as part of a sweeping investigation opened earlier this year, and released earlier Wednesday after four days of questioning. Investigative judges filed preliminary charges Wednesday night and ordered him

to pay 5 million euros bail and to report to a police station twice a week, according to a statement from the Paris prosecutor's office. Allegations against Mr. Durov, who is also a French citizen, include that his platform is being used for child sexual abuse material and drug trafficking, and that Telegram refused to share information or documents with investigators when required by law. The first preliminary charge against him was for "complicity in managing an online platform to allow illicit transactions by an organised group", a crime that can lead to sentences of up to 10 years in prison and 500,000 euro fine, the prosecutor's office said. Preliminary charges under French law mean magistrates have strong reason to believe a crime was committed but allow more time for further investigation.

David-Olivier Kaminski, a lawyer for

Durov, was quoted by French media as saying "it's totally absurd to think that the person in charge of a social network could be implicated in criminal acts that don't concern him, directly or indirectly". Prosecutors said Mr. Durov is, "at this stage, the only person implicated in this case." They did not exclude the possibility that other people are being investigated, but declined to comment on other possible arrest warrants. Any other arrest warrant would be revealed only if the target of such a warrant is detained and informed of their rights, prosecutors said in a statement to the AP. French authorities opened a preliminary investigation in February in response to "the near total absence of a response by Telegram to judicial requests" for data for pursuing suspects, notably those accused of crimes against children, the prosecutor's office said.

BankersKlub disrupts financial advisory landscape in India, launches innovative tech-enabled aggregator platform for corporate finance solutions



BankersKlub, an innovative fintech start-up redefining financial advisory with seasoned bankers, announces the launch of its tech-enabled aggregator platform. It facilitates a wide range of strategic corporate financial advisory services and solutions to small businesses, MSMEs, and startups by connecting them with retired bankers.

With an aim to streamline the process of securing debt funds for businesses, and to introduce transparency with cost-effective flat pricing, BankersKlub announces enabling companies to raise debt fund up to INR 100 Cr at a flat success fee of INR 50 Lacs. This will benefit businesses significantly by saving their cost with a predictable cost structure. The platform also creates additional earning opportunities for retired bankers by giving them 75% of the fixed success fee for every successful debt fund raise, alongside a monthly consultancy fee. As a part of the launch, BankersKlub also introduces its flagship product, the Financial Wellness Report (FWR), a powerful tool designed to analyse any given industry and business, providing actionable recommendations for any kind of financial advisory. Seasoned bankers who understand the intricate requirements of lending institutions, meticulously prepare this Report, and the accompanying Scorecard backed by data-driven KPIs that matter most to lenders. Thus, it en-

ures a faster turnaround for businesses seeking funding. By leveraging BankersKlub's Financial Wellness Report, its proprietary Scorecard, and the investor network, these experienced bankers are equipped to deliver optimal financial solutions, ensuring businesses sail to new heights.

BankersKlub is not only about facilitating corporate financing but also about building an ecosystem and contributing to the nation's economic growth. The platform's focus on redeploying skilled human capital aligns with the Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat movement, boosting access to credit for MSMEs, and enhancing GDP by tapping into the expertise of Indian advisors for both domestic and global corporations.

Gracing the launch event, Dr. Charan Singh, noted economist and Chairman of Punjab and Sind Bank said, "Redeploying retired bankers is crucial for preserving and leveraging their wealth of banking and financial expertise, beyond their retirement age at 60. BankersKlub is taking a groundbreaking step by creating a platform that channels this invaluable human capital, at present being wasted, towards supporting businesses in navigating complex financial challenges. Ultimately, this will contribute to the growth and stability of our economy and meet the needs of booming businesses" While talking about the launch,

Rajat Chopra, Founder & CEO, BankersKlub said, "Our platform will not only change how corporates secure debt but will also infuse unmatched transparency and efficiency into the process. In addition to our range of unparalleled services, our standard pricing of a Flat Success Fee will significantly reduce costs, compared to current industry standards. Our aim is to equip businesses with seasoned bankers providing an end-to-end digital journey of the transaction with real time tracking. Additionally, our FWR, equips lending institutions with insights that they

need to make informed decisions and grow."

Through the BankersKlub web application, businesses can search and hire seasoned bankers with a wealth of experience best suited for their requirements, connect effortlessly with the selected specialist, achieve financial goals by collaborating with the advisor, and overcome their financial challenges to drive business growth. It makes access to a wide range of services, including debt and equity fund raise, available to all.

Telangana braces for heavy rains as IMD issues orange alert till September 2

Hyderabad: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert across Telangana, warning of extremely heavy rainfall till September 2. Meanwhile, Hyderabad is under a yellow alert, anticipating moderate rains and thundershowers over the weekend. Weather experts indicate that there would be a shift from recent nighttime downpours to more persistent daytime rainfall. This change is expected to bring cooler, breezier conditions across the state. Intense downpours are anticipated in the northern, central, and

eastern parts of Telangana. For Friday, the IMD has issued an orange alert for very heavy rainfall in Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulugu, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Khammam, Mahabubabad, Warangal, and Hanamkonda districts. A yellow alert for heavy rain is also in effect for Adilabad, Kumuram Bheem Asifabad, Mancherla, Jagtial, Karimnagar, Nalgonda, and Hyderabad. Saturday's forecast extends the warning to districts including Nizamabad, Jagtial, Rajanna Sircilla, Bhadradi Kothagudem.

Village Development through Say trees.

Kappatralla village is located 60 kilometers from Kurnool district in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The village was extremely backward and resembled a desert due to lack of development. For the past 40 years, the village was plagued by factional violence, disputes, and group politics, leaving it underdeveloped. In 2014, the then District SP, A.K. Ravi Krishna IPS, adopted the village. He visited the village, assessed the situation, and created a plan for its development, staying in the village day and night to connect with the residents. As part of the development initiatives, he established a Sri Shakti Bhavan for women, a Zilla Parishad High School for students, CC roads, a community hall, an Andhra Pragathi Grameena Bank, and a free mineral water plant. Say Trees Environmental Trust, Bengaluru, approached A.K. Ravi Krishna IPS and, with his permission, took up the task of village development. They distributed free fruit saplings such as mango, custard apple, tamarind, fig, coconut, red sandalwood, guava, gooseberry, mahogany, and pomegranate to 150 farmers for cultivation on 300 acres. The crops were grown using a five-layer model of farming, and farmers were given necessary training for financial empowerment. Intercrops were also planted, and the farmers were encouraged to adopt natural farming methods. Say Trees, along with the farmers, has been actively working on environmental conservation in the village. The farmers are very happy with this initiative. A 10 metric ton solar cold storage unit was built for Rs. 18 lakhs in the field of farmer Chintamanu Ravikumar for storing fruits, vegetables, and leafy greens. Additionally, a biogas plant was set up in the premises of C. Sivalingappa's house in the village. Say Trees has been tirelessly working for the overall development of the village, supporting the farmers in every possible way to improve their livelihoods.

What is the Agroforestry Model?



Agroforestry integrates trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes, offering a sustainable solution to enhance productivity, biodiversity, and resilience against climate change. By adopting agroforestry practices, farmers can improve soil health, reduce erosion, and diversify their income sources

through the production of timber, fruits, nuts, and other tree products. This approach not only enhances crop yields by improving microclimates and providing windbreaks but also promotes ecological balance by supporting a variety of wildlife habitats. Additionally,

agroforestry systems sequester carbon, contributing to climate mitigation efforts. Engaging farmers in discussions about agroforestry helps them understand its benefits, share best practices, and collaborate on strategies for successful implementation.

Several organizations have contributed to the development of Kappatralla village. When farmers prosper, the country prospers. As part of this effort, Say Trees has been particularly instrumental in economically empowering farmers by providing them with free fruit saplings, a biogas plant, a 10 metric ton solar cold storage unit, and farming tools. Their services have been immensely beneficial to the village.



Former District SP, A.K. Ravi Krishna IPS, adopted Kappatralla village and transformed it into a model village. He eradicated factionalism and developed the village with lush green fields and fruit orchards. I consider it a privilege to have contributed to this development.



We are transforming Kappatralla village into a horticulture hub, providing all necessary facilities to farmers to establish good livelihoods and helping them achieve economic prosperity. By 2028, with the support of IPS officer A.K. Ravi Krishna, who has adopted this village, we are planning to develop it into a model farming village.

Reality of reel life, exploitation as a structural problem

The Justice K. Hema Committee report, which was released by the Kerala government on August 19, 2024, has ignited a debate on the issues faced by women in Malayalam film industry. The committee, which was formed in 2017, had submitted its report to the government in 2019. A redacted version of the report has now been put up in the public domain. Though it addresses the issues faced by women in the vernacular films, the issues transcend these boundaries. Broadly, the report deals with two categories of issues. The first is the sexual exploitation of and assault against women in cinema. The report says that women are often required to exchange sexual favours for opportunities and those women who refuse to 'co-operate' are sidelined from the industry at the instance of powerful men. The second is discriminatory practices against women and a lack of even basic facilities. The report has facilitated a long overdue discussion on the lack of gender equality for women at the workplace. The brutal incident of the rape and murder of a doctor at a hospital in Kolkata also reinforces the need for this conversation.

Culture of assaultThe concerns raised in the Hema Committee report are disturbing, yet are not surprising. They are an extension of the problems women face in a conservative, patriarchal society such as ours. Women are burdened by stereotypes and expectations about how they should behave. This is why it is problematic to consider instances of sexual assault on women as isolated. Viewed this way, rape must not be considered only as a crime committed by a bad man but as a culmination too of the social practices which deem the consent of women to be practically irrelevant. A rigid individualistic approach to sexual assault often distracts attention from this reality. Ranging from what to wear and what friends to have, individual choice is too often stolen from women. Rape is the crudest manifestation of this approach — not considering women as persons of autonomy and dignity. The normalisation of objectification and gender stereotypes has a central role in perpetuating sexual assault against women. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 31,516 cases of rape are reported in 2022 in India — a reported rape in every 16 minutes. Workplace harassment is another reflection of this culture of assault.

In the context of workplace assault, in Vishaka and Ors vs State Of Rajasthan and Ors (1997), a writ petition was filed to enforce the rights of working women against sexual harassment. A series of guidelines was prescribed by the Supreme Court of India — a unique kind of judicial legislation — to prevent workplace harassment. These included duties on the employer to prevent assault as well as the constitution of a complaint redress mechanism for aggrieved persons. It took more than 16 years thereafter for the legislature to enact The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. A notable feature of the legislation is that it provides for the constitution of an internal complaints commit-

tee (ICC) which can be approached by the aggrieved woman. The definition of 'workplace' in section 2(o) of the Act is broad enough to take in the film industry as well. The Justice Hema Committee report has however indicated that the ICC is not suitable for women in the film industry. It is argued that there is a likelihood of the abuser or the employer influencing ICC members. The committee, therefore, pleads for an independent forum constituted by the government to deal with the problems faced by women in cinema. However, this is a problem that any ICC faces and is not unique to the industry. While additional safeguards of accountability might help alleviate the problem, the suggestion to completely overlook the complaints redress mechanism formulated by a parliamentary legislation seems unwise. Registration of crimes

Many have questioned the lack of a registration of crimes pursuant to the committee report. They ask why an investigation is not initiated and why the accused cannot be brought to justice. The concern is sensible. The report is a modified version which redacted the names of survivors and the culprits. Masking the names of survivors is done in recognition of the principle of survivor anonymity, a well-accepted norm in criminal jurisprudence on sexual assault. Anonymity will remain intact during the investigation and prosecution as well. In Nipun Saxena vs Union Of India (2018), the Supreme Court explained the importance of penalisation of the disclosure of the name and the identity of the survivors of sexual offences as mandated in Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, which is now reiterated in Sections 72 and 73 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Since the provisions are substantially the same, the ratio of the judgment in Nipun Saxena would govern the field. In the judgment, the Court said that the object of the provision is to protect survivors from hostile discrimination and future harassment. This being the law of the land, the Kerala government must take a proactive role in the matter after sensitising itself in the matter.

The right to privacy is an integral part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution (Puttaswamy, 2017). The statements were given by several victims in the belief that this anonymity will be maintained. The right to decide whether to pursue a criminal case does lie with the victim. It is true that in our criminal justice system, the state initiates prosecution against the accused, arguing and conducting the case on behalf of the victim. However, even if the state investigates the crime, it becomes quite difficult to prove a crime without the cooperation of the victim. Why survivors are often reluctant to pursue complaints in the case of sexual assault is important for us to recognise. A society which looks at survivors of sexual assault, with misguided empathy and disgust, instead of support and trust, probably has no moral standing to demand that the survivor must necessarily launch the complaint. We all share collective responsibility for manufacturing this status quo. More-

over, trials in sexual assault cases take years to complete, which are attributable to the high degree of judicial pendency in our country. Bear in mind that the Hema Committee was formed after the sexual assault allegation against a leading Malayalam cinema actor, the trial of which is not yet completed. Survivors also fear potential retaliation from the abuser and others, in terms of refusal to give them work, and being branded as 'problem-makers.' Structural reformsThe accusations in 2017 against Harvey Weinstein, the American film producer, had eventually led to the #MeToo movement which received

global attention. The findings in the Hema Committee report must pave the way for structural reforms, for which the government must take an effective lead. The difficulties faced by women in the industry, particularly those in the lower strata as opposed to the lead actresses deserve acknowledgment. From the lack of adequate sanitation facilities to hostile bias, every issue needs comprehensive study and resolution. More importantly, the report will accelerate the Indian woman's struggle against workplace discrimination by equipping her with an emboldened awareness.

Poor sleep may lead to weight gain and cholesterol problems: Study

New Delhi: People who sleep poorly are likely to experience greater levels of fatty triglycerides — a type of blood cholesterol — and abdominal fat that can increase the risk of stroke, heart disease, and other health issues, according to research.

The study, led by Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) in the US, finds that maintaining sleep hygiene, such as putting your screen away at night or going to bed when you're exhausted, can make a person healthier. The study builds support for the importance of good sleep habits. Good sleep habits, such as putting your screen away at night or going to bed when

you're tired, can help to promote good overall health, said Brooke Shafer, a postdoctoral researcher at the Sleep, Chronobiology and Health Laboratory at the OHSU School of Nursing. The findings were published in The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism. Thirty persons were recruited for the study, with an equal number of males and women. With a body mass index (BMI) of more than 25, each of them was classified as overweight. Each participant's time difference between the onset of melatonin — a hormone that the brain produces in response to darkness — and average sleep timing was measured by the researchers.



Frequent mass wasting in Tibet a cause for worry in India

A new study on the high frequency of mass wasting events in the Sedongpu Gully of the Tibetan Plateau since 2017 and the rapid warming of the area, which rarely experienced temperatures beyond 0° C before 2012, could be bad signs for India, specifically the country's Northeast. A geological event, mass wasting is the gravity-influenced movement of rock and soil down a slope. A gully is a landform created by erosion from running water, mass movement or both.

The Sedongpu Gully, in the catchment of the Sedongpu glacier and its valley, is 11 km long and covers 66.8 sq. km. It drains into the Yarlung Zangbo, or the Tsangpo River, near where it takes a sharp turn — called the Great Bend — while flowing around Mt. Namcha Barwa (altitude 7,782 metres) and Mt. Gyala Peri (7,294 metres) to create a gorge 505 km long and 6,009 metres deep. This is one of the deepest gorges on the earth. The Great Bend is close to Tibet's border with Arunachal Pradesh, where the Tsangpo flows as the Siang River. In Assam further downstream, the Siang meets the Dibang and Lohit to form the Brahmaputra, which flows as the Jamuna in Bangladesh.

The study, authored by Weile Li and six others associated with China's Chengdu University of Technology, was published on August 2 in the Journal of Rock Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering. According to their paper, more than 700 million cubic metres of debris have been mobilised in the Sedongpu gully catchment since 2017. The combination of long-term warming and intense local shaking due to earthquakes has greatly enhanced landslide activity in the area. The impact on humans has been low because it is so remote. However, environment scientists in Assam said the study underlining landslides was ominous for areas hundreds of kilometres downstream. The threat has been accentuated by big dams such as the 510-MW Zangmu on the Tsangpo and India's planned projects on the Siang. "China plans to set up a 60-gigawatt project on the Tsangpo, which will [have] thrice the capacity of the Three Gorges project on the Yangtze, the world's largest hydropower plant," said Partha Jyoti Das, the head of the Water, Climate, and Hazard Division of Aaranyak, a Guwahati-based biodiversity research organisation. "This region is characterised by enormous geophysical instability and experienced the 8.6-magnitude Assam-Tibet or Medog earthquake in 1950, one of the biggest of the 20th century. The 6.4-magnitude Nyingchi earthquake hit the same region in November 2017."

"The Sedongpu study has serious implications for the Tsangpo-Siang-Brahmaputra-Jamuna, especially in India and Bangladesh. The most direct consequence could be the addition of major amounts of sediments to the course of the river, already one of the most sediment-laden rivers of the world," he said. The Brahmaputra carries more than 800 tonnes of sediment at Pandu in Guwahati, becoming more than a billion tonnes at Bahadurabad in Bangladesh. Dr. Das said

increasing sedimentation may make the river more intensely braided in the Assam plains, which could lead to more bank erosion. "The sedimentation can elevate the river beds more, accentuating flood hazards. Further, the channels of the river in Assam and Bangladesh may get choked with sand and silt in the lean season making navigation difficult and affecting livelihoods related to fishing," he said. The Sedongpu study examined the patterns of landslides in the gully catchment using satellite data from December 1969 to June 2023. From 149 satellite images, they identified 19 large mass-wasting events or event groups they divided into three sub-patterns: ice-rock avalanche (IRA), ice-moraine avalanche (IMA), and glacier debris flow (GDF). A moraine is a mass of rocks and sediment deposited by a glacier. The debris from the IRAs temporarily blocked the Tsangpo and tributary Yigong. "The breaching of the blockages leads to catastrophic flash floods in the downstream areas such as the ones in Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang and Assam's Dhemaji district in 2000. These floods were triggered by the outburst of a dam created on the Yigong by the glaciated debris and rock materials generated during a huge landslide," Dr. Das said.

Lull before hyperactivity The Sedongpu study noted that the earliest mass wasting event in the area occurred from 1974 to 1975 and satellite images thereafter indicated no catastrophic events until 1987. Two IMAs happened from 1998 to 2000 and the gully remained quiet again



from 2001 to 2017. "The gully entered a very active period [in] 2017 with a large IRA from October 20-27 temporarily blocking the Yarlung Tsangpo," the paper said, underlining the Nyingchi earthquake — its epicentre was 8 km from the gully's edge — that disrupted the stability of the rocks and glaciers. Three successive GDFs followed from November to December 2017 and two catastrophic IRAs occurred "unexpectedly" in 2018 to completely block the Tsangpo and form another gully more than 300 metres deep. "After these events, the Sedongpu gully entered an intense erosion period... Overall, among the 19 events, 13 were concentrated after 2017, accounting for 68.4% of the total," the paper said. The geoscientists said the bed-

rock of the Sedongpu basin consists mostly of Proterozoic marble and the conditions indicate its land surface temperature ranges from -5° to -15° C, rarely exceeding 0° C before 2012. Data from the nearby weather stations at Bomi and Linzhi revealed that the annual temperature in this area increased at rates of 0.34° to 0.36° C during 1981-2018, which is higher than the global average. "It is high time we undertook similar studies to monitor the status and trends of geophysical events leading to landslides, rockfalls, and other erosional processes that could affect the geomorphic and hydrological regime of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries apart from attending to sediment management," Dr. Das said.

China's Didi in talks to sell smart auto assets to state-backed NavInfo's unit

China's Didi Global is in advanced talks to sell its smart driving and cockpit assets to state-backed digital mapping firm NavInfo's unit, as the ride-hailer focuses on its core business after a bruising regulatory crackdown, three sources said. Didi plans to sell the assets to AutoAi, a provider of intelligent cockpits-related software and hardware, in exchange for a stake in AutoAi, said two of the sources.

China's largest ride-hailer expects to pull back significantly from the ultra-competitive electric vehicle market with the deal, which will value the assets at close to 500 million yuan (\$70 million), said the two people. Electric vehicle (EV) makers are competing fiercely in a consolidating Chinese market and are seeking new technologies such as smart cockpits and autonomous driving to appeal to consumers.

Didi sold its EV development business to Chinese EV maker Xpeng a year ago in a deal worth \$744 million in exchange for a roughly 3.25% stake in the vehicle maker. That accounted for the bulk of its EV-related assets, said the three sources. The deal with AutoAi could be announced in the coming days, they said,

declining to be identified as the information was private. Didi, NavInfo and AutoAi did not respond to requests for comment.

As part of the deal, Didi also plans to invest more than 200 million yuan in the currently loss-making AutoAi, also known by its Chinese name of Siwei Zhilian Technology, said two of the people. The deal will help Didi forge a deeper partnership with AutoAi and NavInfo, one of China's top internet mapping firms, to explore strategic cooperation in a number of areas including ride-hailing and intelligent driving, they said.

Didi's road to recovery Shenzhen-listed NavInfo, which offers services such as high-definition maps and navigation solutions to automakers and internet firms, provides mapping-related data and technical support to Didi. NavInfo, which counts BMW and Mercedes Benz among its automaker clients, has also been competing with Baidu and Tencent as a major supplier of mapping data and other software solutions. The smart driving and cockpit assets its unit is acquiring from Didi are set for mass production, said one of the people. The asset sale and the investment,

if completed, would see Didi become the second largest shareholder of AutoAi, added another of the people. Spun off from NavInfo in 2018, AutoAi currently counts the parent as its biggest shareholder with a 30% stake, followed by a unit of Taiwanese chip design giant MediaTek with a stake of nearly 20%, as per the Chinese corporate registry. Didi had previously pushed ahead with an EV-making project, code-named "Da Vinci", which used to house about 2,000 employees, and had ambitions to move into manufacturing, sources have said. It invested more than 10 billion yuan in the EV business which includes the development of vehicles, smart driving and smart cockpit since the project's inception in 2021, said two of the sources. Didi has in recent weeks informed potentially impacted employees, most of whom are based in Beijing, about the impending AutoAi deal, said the sources, with one source adding that about 200-300 people would be affected. Last year's divestment was Didi's first major transaction since its apps returned to domestic app stores in early 2023 after a regulatory crackdown on its business that forced it to delist from the U.S. in 2022.

What did Justice Verma panel say on death penalty for rape? | Explained

The story so far: After the brutal rape and murder of a doctor on duty at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9, there has been a clamour of voices seeking the death penalty for the accused. The Justice J.S. Verma Committee recommendations, which led to the amendment of criminal laws in 2013, had specifically said it was not inclined to recommend the death penalty for rape even for the rarest of rare cases. "...seeking of [the] death penalty would be a regressive step in the field of sentencing and reformation," the committee pointed out.

What did the Union Cabinet decide?

The Union Cabinet did not take the recommendation on the death penalty when it cleared an ordinance on sexual assault in 2013, and signed the criminal amendments into law. The committee to amend criminal laws was set up after the gang rape of a paramedic student in Delhi on December 16, 2012. Led by Justice J.S. Verma (retired), the committee submitted its recommendations on January 23, 2013. One of its key suggestions, that the death penalty does not necessarily act as a deterrent against such crimes, was overlooked. Key amendments were brought in to provide the death penalty for rape that led to death of the victim or reduced her to a persistent vegetative state (Section 376A of the Indian Penal Code) and anyone found guilty of rape more than once (Section 376E). In 2018, further changes introduced death as the maximum punishment for every participant in a gang rape when the victim is less than 12 years old (Section 376DB), and life-long imprisonment if the victim is less than 16 (Section 376DA). Under the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, punishment for rape is laid down in several Sections including 64, 65 and 70(2), which notes the punishment for gang rape of a woman under the age of 18 is the death penalty.

What did the committee recommend?

The Justice Verma Committee provided for enhanced sentences for rape, increasing it from 7 years to 10 years, 20 years, and life, but "short of death". "Whoever causes the person to be in a persistent vegetative state, shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than twenty years, but may be for life, which shall mean the rest of that person's natural life," it noted. The committee pointed out that "there is considerable evidence that the deterrent effect of death penalty on serious crimes is actually a myth. According to the Working Group on Human Rights, the murder rate has declined consistently in India over the last 20 years despite the slowdown in the execution of death sentences since 1980."

What was its stance on marital rape?

The Verma Committee recommended that the exception to marital rape be removed, pointing out that "a marital or other relationship between the perpetrator or victim is not a valid defence against the crimes of rape or sexual violation." Concurring with the judgment of the European Commission of Human Rights in *C.R. vs U.K.*, the Verma Committee endorsed the

conclusion that a rapist remains a rapist regardless of his relationship with the victim. The Union government did not go by this recommendation and refused to criminalise marital rape. Under the BNS, exception 2 of Section 63 states that "sexual intercourse or acts by a man with his wife, the wife not being under 18 years of age, is not rape."

What about gender rights?

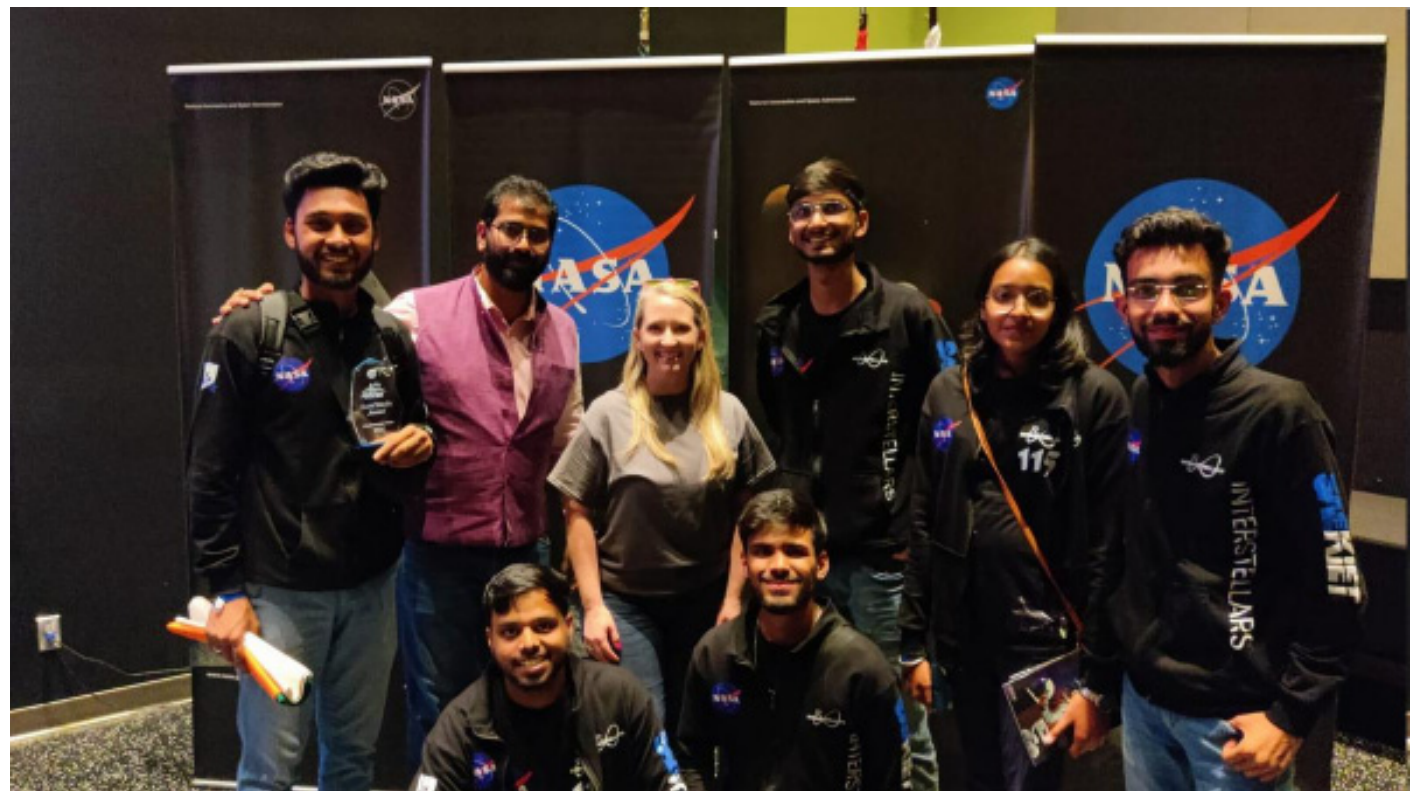
The Verma Committee pointed out that "the ethos of empowerment of women does not limit itself to political equality, but also extends, in equal terms, to social, educational, and economic equality. If true empowerment of women were to mean anything, it is necessary that law, as well as public policy, must be capable of engaging substantially with women's rights, opportunities, acquisition of skills, the ability to generate self-confidence and insist on total equality in relationships, both with society and the state." The correction of



social mindsets of its gender bias depends more on social norms, it observed, noting that "the deficiency has to be overcome by

leaders in society aided by the necessary systemic changes in education and societal behaviour."

Yatarth Vaish on participating in NASA's Human Exploration Rover Challenge (HERC)



As I stood amid the bustling activity at NASA's facility, watching our lunar rover take shape, I couldn't help but marvel at how far we'd come. Just months ago, this dream seemed distant, but here we were: a team of Indian students competing in NASA's Human Exploration Rover Challenge (HERC). Our journey began in August 2023 when we formed a new team, mostly third-year students from various departments from the KIET Group of Institutions: Tuhin Srivastava, Vaibhav Raj Chandel, Suvash Tripathi, Sajal Bhilatia, Aditya Agarwal, Ankit Parihar and Aadi

Kumar. We started with design discussions, progressing to fabrication, often working through the night to ensure everyone learned the ropes. The challenge? To build a human-powered rover capable of traversing simulated lunar and Martian terrains. Every aspect — from design to testing — had to be student-led. We poured over designs, analysed data, and conducted rigorous tests across our college grounds, pushing our creation to its limits. Our efforts paid off when we arrived at NASA. Our rover, weighing just 52kg, was the second-lightest among all entries; a feat we took immense pride in. The com-

petition itself was a whirlwind of activity. We assembled our seven-foot rover from the configuration of a five-foot box to its workable state in just 24 seconds (allotted time two minutes); a puzzle that tested our problem-solving skills. On the third day, Nature threw us a curveball with a hurricane but our rover performed admirably post-interruption, completing the track in just over six minutes, well within the simulated eight-minute "oxygen supply" limit. The real test came when we faced unexpected breakdowns. Mud from the rain caught us off-guard, and our rover suffered a major malfunction during the first run.