

## Dredging for sand may give no remedy to silting reservoirs says officials

Hyderabad: The major and medium irrigation projects in the State have lost up to 25 to 30 per cent of their gross water storage capacity. This is attributed mainly to the process of increasing silt accumulation in the reservoirs behind the dams. As the problem is assuming serious proportion, moves are afoot for desilting projects in a big way calling global tenders. However, this is viewed largely as an initiative driven by the lure of potential revenue that can be generated from sale of the sand extracted from the projects. The government has no policy of its own that is relevant to the condition of the State projects and soils.

Erosion of soils is contributing substantially to the problem year after year. According to officials, the State must equip itself with a policy evolved by taking into consideration the factors pertinent to the basin concerned. The State government is thinking more in the lines of the national framework laid down by the Ministry of Jal Sakti for sedimentation management. But its methods must be State-specific. The approach that may be scientifically suitable for Godavari basin may not be relevant to its Krishna basin project, felt officials. Dredging of reservoirs would not

yield sand alone that could be sold. It yields huge quantities of silt and clay and their disposal is a serious issue. The silt removed from the catchment of one reservoir may turn out to be a much bigger problem for another reservoir downstream unless it is addressed with a scientific approach. The focus on revenue dimension alone may overshadow the environmental and community benefit aspects. Effective handling of the silt can be possible only by involving the industry that needs it as raw material, they added. Three projects – Sriram Sagar, Nizam Sagar and the Kaddam Project – have been facing the serious siltation problem for years. The gross storage capacity of the Sriram Sagar had dropped from 112 tmc to 82 TMC. The State had lost over 26 per cent of the benefits from the project.

This is more because of the increased human activity in the upstream catchment. Unless the silt removed by dredging is properly disposed, it would have a bearing in the storage capacity of the downstream projects in next few years. The gross storage capacity in Kaddam project, which is more than 50-years-old had come down by 50 per cent. The project can hold hardly 7.6 TMC of water now. The Nizam Sagar project which is over 100-years-old has an



effective storage capacity of 17.80 TMC as against its designed storage capacity of 25.6 TMC. The sedimentation problem was felt equally in Singur, Lower Manair and Mid Manair. It is high in Krishna basin projects including Nagarjuna Sagar and Jurala. Of the 33 medium irrigation projects, the sedimentation experience was high in Palemvagu project and Musi. The State is planning to have a realistic assessment of

the siltation by engaging agencies concerned. The negative impact of the desilting exercise has to be borne in mind before jumping into action. There was considerable growth in the fish spawning grounds in the State during the last ten years because of the extra focus paid to the irrigation sector. Measures should be taken to ensure that they remain intact, stressed irrigation experts.

## Drugs sold disguised as Ayurvedic medicine in Telangana says TGANB



The Narcotics Bureau officials found that the products were manufactured at big companies and marketed through online platforms.

Hyderabad: Seeking to stay a step ahead of the law enforcement agencies, criminals scout for newer methodologies to keep up with their activities. And now, those involved in drug smuggling have come up with a different modus operandi – supplying the drugs after labelling them as Ayurvedic medicine. The ganja or opium laced products packed as medicines are sold through online platforms to the consumers. The Telangana State Anti-Narcotics Bureau who got a tip off about such products being sold through online platforms, ordered a few of them and sent them to the laboratory.

“On examination, it was found the product contained certain banned drugs. We have identified more than two dozen such companies who are listing the products on the online platforms where the drug is sold in retail or bulk,” said a senior official of TSANB. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, a senior official of the TSANB went to Uttar Pradesh where most of these com-

panies are located and had a discussion with the local authorities there. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) was also informed about the developments. Due to the efforts, a company involved in manufacture of the products in UP was closed down.

The Narcotics Bureau officials found that the products were manufactured at big companies and marketed through online platforms. The police had registered a case in the city about the development against the companies, the courier partners and other persons linked to the manufacture and supply chain.

The main target of the ganja and opium laced products are the youngsters who are placing orders for the products through the website and making online payments. “It escaped attention because it was marketed as a medicinal product. However, on suspicion we sourced it, then examined the ingredients and found it contained different drugs like cannabis or opium,” said the official.

# Why IAS needs to be more specialised

Former Coal Secretary H.C. Gupta has been convicted in several cases of irregularities committed in the award of captive coal blocks to companies. He was chairperson of a screening committee that awarded the coal blocks to applicant companies without following the guidelines. The IAS association and many of his colleagues, individually, have come out in the open testifying to his character and integrity and argued that he should not have been convicted since he did not financially benefit and, hence, there was no corruption. Further, a senior IAS officer could not be expected to master the minutiae, they argue. Many agencies, officials and state governments involved in the process of scrutinising the applications did not do their due diligence.

Comment | In good faith?

Lawns have since been amended to ensure that an official can be prosecuted only if he stood to gain materially. Gupta's convictions rest on old laws that criminalise official action leading to illegal monetary gain for others without advancing public interest. But Gupta's conviction raises a question: Would a civil servant who had spent a lifetime in administrations relating to operating and managing coal mines, power plants and steel plants have been on top of the situation that Gupta apparently wasn't? Would a specialist have easily and quickly needed the lapses?

Diverse or all over the place?

The generalist system of IAS often throws up bewildering career graphs — a few years in Labour Ministry, some in shipping, a few more in power and fisheries, and finally tourism and retirement. As India grows and becomes a highly sophisticated economy employing cutting edge technology across sectors, shouldn't India's decision-making and policy-setting officials have specialised knowledge of their departments? The answer may well be yes, given that one of the key foundational requirements of the IAS is practically redundant. Independent India needed the steel frame. After the unification of princely states and British-ruled provinces, India's leaders needed a nation-building agency since forces driving apart the constituent elements of India were still strong. The British-era civil service system was retained but with Indians who could think nationally and in national interest while administering the country. But that is no more a big requirement. The Indian political and economic system has matured and acquired a unified identity. India hangs together and moves together on its own steam, and doesn't require a bureaucracy for that. A generalist but cherry-picked elite corps administering a nation is not uniquely Indian though. Singapore, for instance, chooses its future administrators and sends the best to Harvard University for training. Even in the private sector, generalists occupy top positions in highly specialised companies. Take John Rice, for instance. He has served in top positions in GE's divisions that are at the cutting edge of engineering. The only college degree Rice has, as per his LinkedIn profile, is a BA in History from Hamilton College in the USA. Technocrats in India's officialdom acknowledge that IAS officers are very bright, typically. They are sharp, ask the right questions to experts, and de-

velop their knowledge quickly. The IAS officer is not just a master of the government system. He knows all the rules and regulations as well as the nuances of how government works. But he also knows how to beat the system in its own game.

An early posting of an IAS officer is the District Collector where, before he or she has turned 30, the IAS officer learns to navigate all the rules and gets things done. It's often his or her first taste of government in its entirety and becomes a training ground for how to move the government machinery. Technocrats also acknowledge that the IAS is a fraternity. The IAS officer has a network and can call in favours from his friends and colleagues in other departments to get things done. The IAS officer often knows his or her limitations and, especially in highly specialised agencies, is wise enough to serve an ornamental function while letting the domain experts come close to making decisions and setting policies. But the officer makes the difference in terms of having the larger perspective of society, state and nation. The specialist is often bogged down in rules and develops fixed ideas. Domain experts in civil service

The fundamental premise of the IAS selection process may be valid today too: To draw in bright young people who have a keen grasp of India's history, political and governance systems, as well as current needs and challenges. The interview is designed to assess the personality of the candidate so she can be a leader. The IAS officer is expected to be a leader from day 1 of starting service. But the IAS is not a purely administrative service. It sets and implements policy although generalists argue that in practically all sectors higher positions are more administrative and managerial. The Vice-Chancellor of a university may be a well-regarded professor of economics. But as V-C he has to administer a range of departments and faculties. Various specialised all-India services have always served the country. The IAS today draws bright engineers, doctors, accountants, lawyers and others. D. Subba Rao's early college education was in physics. But, later in life as an IAS officer, he studied economics formally and went on to have a distinguished career as Reserve Bank of India Governor although the current Governor, Shaktikanta Das, is a history major. T.V. Somanathan who is slated to take over as Cabinet Secretary is a trained finance professional. Today, specialists are secretaries in space, atomic energy, science and technology, and earth sciences. The chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is ex-Officio Secretary of the Department of Science and Chairman of Space Commission. Why can't agriculture, fisheries, health, shipping, education or even public works departments have their own IAS type corps? The tenures of a typical IAS officer are too short to develop real depth and knowledge that would support the formulation of best policies and their implementation. Instead of a lateral entry to IAS that was botched by a recruitment process that declared them as "single" posts and denied reservations, developing specialised IAS branches may be a more workable and long-term solution.

Specialists and scams Meanwhile, among the guidelines that were proven to



have been violated in the coal scam was that the applicant companies were not evaluated and ranked on who fulfilled the various criteria and benchmarks. For instance, in one of the cases, the end use of a coal block was a steel plant. The rules say that the steel plant should be able to turn out 1 lakh tonnes of steel a year and the company that was awarded the coal block just did not have this capacity plant and wasn't going to be increasing its capacity to that level anytime soon. This would have been unearthed by a proper techno-commercial scrutiny. The rules say that the net worth of the applying companies applying for award of coal blocks should count in the ranking but, in one case, at least, the company had overstated its net worth and not supplied the annual statements of accounts to support its claims. Submitting these statements was a minimum eligibility requirement and not fulfilling it should lead to cancellation of the application, as per rules. Despite this, the

company was awarded the coal block. In defence of Gupta, it has been said that he, as chairman, was not the only decision-maker and that many other agencies, state governments and sections and departments were given the responsibility of evaluating the applications. And the number of applications was so high that he couldn't have possibly evaluated each of them. Courts have thrown out this argument. They have held that the non-compliance of guidelines was deliberate. And the award of a coal block was a highly important decision on the use of national resources. It may well be that coal or broader energy specialists heading the department would not have prevented a coal scam. The problem was not lack of expertise. But it is possible their professional pride would have been a deterrent against staying silent. Easy familiarity with techno-commercial evaluation of a steel plant would be a welcome skill set in today's Coal Secretary.

## Five Palestinians killed as Israel bombs Nur Shams camp in West Bank

Ramallah: Five Palestinians were killed in an Israeli bombing of the Nur Shams camp near Tulkarm in the northern West Bank, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The Ministry reported that the bodies were brought to Tulkarm Governmental Hospital following the attack. Israeli military spokesperson Avichay Adraee confirmed that an Israeli aircraft targeted "an operations room" in the Nur Shams area, Xinhua news agency reported. As tensions persist in the Gaza Strip, violence between the Israeli army and Palestinians in the West Bank has intensified. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported on Wednesday that Israeli airstrikes in the West Bank had resulted in an average of one Palestinian death per day in August.

Since the onset of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict on October 7, 2023, at least 128 Palestinians, including 26 children, have been killed in airstrikes in the West Bank, according to the UN. At least 19 Israelis have also died in Palestinian attacks during the same period, according



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to Israeli officials. The Nur Shams camp near Tulkarm has been the target of multiple Israeli army attacks. Fourteen people were killed in one two-day Israeli raid on Nur Shams in April, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent. In July, Israeli forces bulldozed the main street in Nur Shams during a raid that lasted 15 hours.

# PBPartners witnesses remarkable uptake of 73% in comprehensive motor policies sold in Hyderabad in FY 2023-24

PBPartners, a brand under Policybazaar Insurance Brokers, is setting new benchmarks in the insurance industry with its distinctive Points of Sale Person (PoSP) model. The company recently held a press meet in Hyderabad, highlighting the latest motor insurance buying trends in Telangana & AP and the remarkable growth witnessed in this segment. The event featured Mr. Amit Bhadoria, Associate Director and Sales Head, Motor Business, along with other senior leaders from PBPartners. In Hyderabad, Telangana, there has been significant growth in demand for comprehensive and modular motor insurance products. It is the largest revenue contributor accounting for 75% of the total. Within PBPartners' motor insurance segment, commercial vehicles make up the highest selling category at around 48%, followed by private vehicles at 35%. Telangana, as a key market, boasts an impressive 5,500+ agent partners, highlighting the region's crucial role in driving insurance adoption across South India.

Key highlights from the press meet: New trends and insurance buying behavior and trends in Hyderabad: Lately, there has been a significant increase in awareness around modular motor insurance protection and add-ons among people in Hyderabad, Telangana. The right blend of cutting-edge technology and the personal touch of agent partners has been a big contributor to the brands' success in this region.

"The heightened awareness among the people of Hyderabad has led to a significant uptake in the purchase of modular insurance plans like Pay As You Drive. We are deeply committed to expanding our presence in the South, particularly in Telangana and Hyderabad. Our goal is to reach even the most remote villages, ensuring that PBPartners is accessible everywhere. By 2027-28, we plan to establish close to 17-18 offices in South India, including cities like Vizag, Tirupati, Coimbatore, and others. With our new call center for AP & Telangana agent partners, we anticipate solid growth in motor insurance policies sold in the coming year. We are dedicated to supporting our agent partners in the South and making our services more accessible across these states. We will be inaugurating our Hyderabad office by the end of October." said Mr. Amit Bhadoria, Associate Director and Sales Head, Motor Insurance, PBPartners. Monsoon special expert tips and insurance add-ons to protect your vehicle: Mr. Amit added, "This monsoon season we have seen a significant up of 65% take in demand for add-ons like: Roadside Assistance and Engine Protection Cover. RSA cover, in particular, has become a rather popular add-on among women and millennials - underscoring the growing awareness around wholesome motor insurance offerings." Industry-first innovation through On-Demand Payout: PBPartners has simplified the payment process with their On Demand Payout feature, offering



instant payment withdrawals. With the help of this tool, agent partners can request payment whenever they close a policy sale, with funds usually processed the same day or the next. Mr. Anuj Agarwal, AVP - Motor Business, South India added "With our On-Demand Payout feature, PBPartners proudly reports that 70% of agent partners receive their payouts on the same day. At the end of every day, agent partners can access their funds, highlighting the effi-

ciency of this industry-first feature introduced in 2022. Currently, approximately 70% of our agent partners utilize this feature and 65% of monthly payouts and commissions are processed through it." PBPartners' 7-year plan envisions achieving and maintaining YOY business growth of 90-95%. This ambitious goal reflects PBPartners' commitment to sustained growth and excellence in the motor insurance sector."

## How to Decode Adulteration in Tea: What Every Consumer Should Know- by Dr. Addu Kiranmayi, Nutritionist, Tata Tea Gemini

Tea is more than just a drink; it's a ritual steeped in history and a source of comfort for millions around the world. However, as we sip from our cups, we often take for granted the purity and authenticity of what we're consuming. The issue of adulteration in loose tea has emerged as a significant concern, threatening to undermine the quality of this beloved beverage. Understanding the risks associated with adulteration and learning how to recognize genuine loose tea is crucial for ensuring an authentic and safe tea experience.

Understanding Adulteration in Tea Adulteration in tea involves the addition of harmful substances to tea leaves, often with the intent to enhance the tea's appearance with respect to color or flavor. This deceptive practice may include the use of unauthorized colors, flavors, or even other plant materials, which may make the tea seem more appealing to the untrained eye or nose. However, these additives not only undermine the tea's purity but also pose significant health risks. For instance, synthetic colorants like carmine, brilliant blue, sunset yellow, and tartrazine are sometimes added to damaged or lower-quality tea leaves to improve their appearance. These substances, however, are not permitted and can be harmful when

consumed. The Tea Board of India has been proactive in raising awareness about these adulteration practices. The Board has emphasized the dangers posed by chemically colored teas, which have unfortunately gained a foothold in the Indian market. The use of synthetic dyes in tea is strictly prohibited, as per regulations, yet they continue to be a concern. These adulterants are often used to treat tea leaves that have been damaged during processing, making them appear more marketable, despite their lack of nutritional value.

### Why Are Colors added to tea?

The primary reason for the use of additives and coloring agents in tea is to treat leaves that have been damaged during the tea-making process. According to the Tea Board of India, these damaged leaves are of low quality, and to make them marketable, additives are added to enhance their color. However, these additives do not add any nutritional value to the tea and are strictly prohibited due to their potential health risks. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has made it clear that the use of coloring substances in tea is not allowed. The treatment of tea with coloring agents falls under the category of adulterants, and such practices have become a matter of serious concern.

Recognizing Adulterated Tea Through a Simple Cold Water Test A simple yet effective test can help reveal the authenticity of loose tea. Place a small amount of tea in a clear glass of water. Genuine tea leaves will gradually unfurl and expand, releasing their natural color slowly as they infuse. If the tea leaves remain unchanged or if the water quickly turns an unnatural color, this could be a sign of added artificial colorants or other additives. A proper infusion should result in clear water with visibly expanding tea leaves that change in texture as they steep. Loose Tea vs. Packaged Tea Loose tea, especially when purchased from unverified sources, may pose a greater risk of adulteration. Its bulk sale and lack of detailed labeling make it harder to assess quality and authenticity. In contrast, reputable packaged tea brands typically invest in rigorous quality control measures to ensure their products are genuine. These brands



often provide comprehensive information about their sourcing and processing practices, offering consumers greater confidence and transparency in their purchases.

# MERU- JMUN 2024: EMPOWERING GLOBAL VOICES FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

The first edition of the Junior Model United Nations Conference, hosted by Meru International School, Tellapur Branch, was an immensely enriching event that brought together students from Grades 4 to 8 from around 20 different schools across Hyderabad. This colloquium fostered inclusivity, diversity, critical thinking, and individuality.

On 30th August, 2024 the event commenced with an electrifying opening ceremony, replete with music, dance, and more. The venue, decorated with flags from around the world, symbolized the unity and diversity that MUN stands for. The ceremony began with a warm address by the Principal of Meru International School, who welcomed the young delegates to this auspicious event. The gathering was then addressed by the visionary Founder Director of Meru International School, Ms. Meghana Gorukanti Jupally, whose inspiring words truly motivated the delegates to give their very best.

The Chief Guest for this stimulating event, Ms. Emilia B. Smith, Public Diplomacy Officer at the U.S. Consulate General, Hyderabad, addressed the gathering and shared valuable insights about the world of diplomacy. Her inspirational and thought-provoking words resonated with the delegates and set a positive tone for the event. The delegates also heard from the Secretary General, who inspired them to think rigorously and speak meticulously about the issues they would be facing. As each member of the Secretariat and Ex-



ecutive Board was introduced and presented with their gavels, it was clear that each participant—host or guest—was ready to give their best and learn from this experience.

The Committees for the first edition of

JMUN at Meru International School, Tellapur, consisted of UNHRC, UNEA, WEF, WHO, MOM, UNICEF, and Lok Sabha. Around 200 students engaged in conscientious debates, discussing issues of global importance, proposing innovative

solutions, and collaborating to ensure the common good. As Meru International School reflects on this transformative event, it is clear that Meru-JMUN 2024 has empowered the voices of tomorrow, paving the way for a more informed and engaged generation of global citizens.

## Toyota Kirloskar Motor Partners with Union Bank of India to Offer Comprehensive Vehicle Financing Options

In its continuous effort to enhance customer experience and streamline car ownership experience through innovative solutions, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) today announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Union Bank of India to enable comprehensive and accessible vehicle financing solutions. The partnership aims to offer innovative and attractive solutions curated to meet the evolving needs of the customers and making Toyota vehicles more accessible than ever. Key highlights of the partnership:

**Enhanced affordability and accessibility:** The partnership will allow customers to enjoy up to 90% financing on the on-road price of any Toyota vehicles purchased for private use, exempting them from any foreclosure, or part-payment charges. **Flexible Financing under Union Vehicle Scheme:** The financing options under the Union Vehicle Scheme for private vehicle will aid customers to opt for flexible tenures up to 84 months with competitive interest rates starting from 8.80% per annum at present. **Flexible Financing under Union Parivahan Scheme:** The financing option under the Union Parivahan Scheme for commercial vehicle will aid customers to opt for flexible tenures up to 60 months with competitive rates. **Broad Reach and Accessibility:** Union Bank's extensive network will provide all Toyota customers with easy access to fi-

ancing options nationwide. Speaking about the new customer initiative, Mr. Sabari Manohar, Vice President, Sales-Service-Used Car Business of Toyota Kirloskar Motor, said, "We are delighted to partner with Union Bank of India for enhancing vehicle financing options across the nation. This collaboration signifies our dedication to providing exceptional customer experiences by simplifying and making vehicle financing more accessible. Our goal is to streamline financing options, offer seamless experiences, and provide timely support to make the vehicle purchase process enjoyable. As an organization dedicated to customer satisfaction, our primary focus is on meeting the dynamic needs of the market. We achieve this by continually introducing innovative products and services that enhance the ownership experience. Through the latest partnership, our aim is to broaden reach and extend support to more customers nationwide, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, in their pursuit of owning a Toyota vehicle." Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Arun Kumar, General Manager, Union Bank of India, said, "As one of the largest Public Sector Banks, we are delighted to partner with Toyota Kirloskar Motor. The MoU is surely a big step towards providing financing solutions to a vast array of customers, nationwide. Union Bank of India's robust presence across India complements this

partnership and we are confident that our digitized loan procedures will enable customers aspiring to purchase a new Toyota vehicle with utmost ease and convenience.

Our commitment is to streamline the auto finance process, thereby enriching the customer experience in terms of both product and service."

## Indian Immunologicals Limited in collaboration with CIBA-ICAR to produce vaccines for fish

Hyderabad: Hyderabad-based vaccine manufacturer Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL) on Thursday announced partnership with Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture (CIBA), Chennai, an Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR) institution, to commercially develop a recombinant monovalent viral nervous necrosis vaccine for finfish, which has been originally developed by CIBA.

Viral nervous necrosis (VNN) or viral encephalopathy and retinopathy (VER) is an acute viral disease affecting several species of marine, brackishwater and freshwater fishes. The disease causes up to 100 per cent mortality in larval and early juvenile stages. Adult fish when infected, is asymptomatic but can transmit the virus to the offspring through eggs and gonadal fluids. Dr K Anand Kumar, MD, IIL, said, "we are the first in India to get to fish vaccines



and are covering different kind of fishes and culture conditions." Viral nervous necrosis is a major threat for brackishwater aquaculture. The VNN vaccine developed by CIBA can prevent vertical transmission of the disease to the offsprings and prevent mortality in fingerlings.

# Why the employees' unions are denouncing the Centre's Unified Pension Scheme?

Chandigarh(Jag Mohan Thaken):The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on 24th August, 2024, approved a new pension scheme named the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for the government employees claiming it a very beneficial scheme. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman states that the newly launched Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) is a new pension scheme, not a rollback of NPS, and is designed to benefit government employees without burdening the government. Clarifying the objections raised the FM says, "It is not a rollback... it is different from OPS and NPS. It is clearly a new package. UPS is better and will satisfy most government employees. It is tailored in such a fashion that every calculation fits and even the government is not burdened too much." She expresses hope that most of the states would adopt UPS "as it has a lot of benefits for employees".

But why the employees' unions are not satisfied with this newly launched scheme? Why they are disapproving this?

Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) denounced the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) approved by Union Cabinet on 24.8.2024 as another dubious desperate effort to deceive the Govt employees of their due full right to Old Pension Scheme known as OPS. CITU urges for restoration of old Pension Scheme.

Let us see- What the newly launched UPS is?

As claimed by the government, the salient features of the UPS are: Assured pension: 50% of the average basic pay drawn over the last 12 months prior to superannuation for a minimum qualifying service of 25 years. This pay is to be proportionate for lesser service period up to a minimum of 10 years of service. Assured family pension: @60% of pension of the employee immediately before her/his demise. Assured minimum pension: @10,000 per month on superannuation after minimum 10 years of service. Inflation indexation: on assured pension, on assured family pension and assured minimum pension. Dearness Relief based on All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (AICPI-IW) as in case of service employees. Lump sum payment at superannuation in addition to gratuity. 1/10th of monthly emoluments (pay + DA) as on the date of superannuation for every completed six months of service and this payment will not reduce the quantum of assured pension.

Why the employees' unions are negating the new scheme?

Criticizing the UPS, in a release issued by Tapan Sen, the General Secretary of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the union states that the Old Pension Scheme was non-contributory and with assured pension existing as per Central Civil Service Rules 1972 now 2021. A. B. Vajpayee led NDA Govt had introduced the National Pension Scheme (NPS) in 2004 surreptitiously through an Executive Order for those recruited from 1.1.2004. The central and state Govt employees and central trade unions opposed it from that day and were on path of struggles against it urging for restoration of OPS. The Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority Act

2013 notified in February 2014 enabled statutory basis for the NPS. CITU further adds the unprecedented struggles by the Govt Employees for restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and the whole hearted support rendered to such struggles by the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Federations could compel the arrogant BJP regime to shift from its arrogant stance of sticking to NPS, but the package offered by it in the name of so-called UPS reflects the same deceptive ploy of depriving the Govt employees of their legitimate dues on account of pension. Several State Govts also reverted back to the OPS and were urging for their share of state Govt Employees contribution to PFRDA to be refunded to their State Govts. Modi Govt had rejected all of such requests of State Govts which reverted back to OPS. It was countered by the relentless struggles of employees and trade unions. Hence this dubious attempt of deceptive UPS is made by Modi led ND Alliance Govt. The Finance Secretary T. V. Somanathan Committee recommendations to study modifications in NPS, which was also boycotted by several Employees federations, are used for this desperate attempt of UPS - a cocktail of NPS and truncated OPS is approved by the Union cabinet.

The employees' union says the Modi led ND Govt with its neo liberal pursuit of safeguarding the interests of speculative crony capital has come with this UPS with some modification of benefits with additional contribution of 4.5% from the Govt only to further its investment of pension funds of Rs. 10,53,850 crores called Asset under Management (AUM) of total 99,77,165 employees under NPS as on by 31.7.2024 in the share market. Quoting the example of Andhra Pradesh government, CITU reminds that the previous Andhra Pradesh State Govt had proposed similar or somewhat better than UPS in place of NPS in the name of Guaranteed Pension Scheme (GPS) with 50% of last drawn pay as pension for minimum 10 years of service with defined contribution and purchase of 40% annuity, which was correctly rejected by all the State Govt employees of AP urging for nothing short of OPS. Now the Union Govt has come with similar rather less beneficial scheme with some modifications in NPS which should be also aptly rejected by vast majority of the employees urging for nothing less than OPS.

The Central Employees Union explains that the UPS is based on the continuity of 10% contributions by the employees with the Government contribution increased to 18.5% from present 14%. While in NPS the subscriber can take 60% and has to invest 40% in an annuity and get pension, under UPS entire pension wealth will have to be foregone to the government. In lieu of which government will give 10% of the employee emoluments i.e., basic pay plus DA for every completed six months of service. For 25 years of completed service the employee will get 5 months emoluments and for 10 years of service will get 2 months of pay on retirement as benefit in addition to gratuity. In UPS, employee will get 50% of 12 months average basic pay as pension on normal retirement at the age of 60 with the completion of 25 years of service, effective from 1-4-2025 that is for

those retiring on 31-3-2025 but not applicable to those retired before it. In OPS for 10 years of service 50% of last month's pay is pension and for voluntary retirement after 20 years of service employee gets 50% of pay as pension. The Union further adds that employees with service less than 25 years will get proportionately lesser pension in UPS. Employee with 20 years of service will get only 40% of 12 months average basic pay as pension. For 10 years of service employees will get only 20% of average basic pay as pension. In case of proportionate pension for less than 25 years up to 10 years a minimum pension of Rs 10,000 is proposed by government. While Minimum pension in OPS is Rs 9000 plus DA (which as on 1-4-2025 will be 57% that is Rs. 5130) so minimum pension as on 1-4-2025 will be Rs.14,130. Hence the proposed Rs.10000 pension is half of that of OPS. For less than 10 years of service at the time of superannuation employee is not eligible for any pension. Criticizing the family pension under newly launched scheme, CITU states that under UPS family pension is 60% of pension i.e., 60% of 50%. It means 30% of last pay for 25 years of service at the time of superannuation. For employee with minimum pension of rupees 10,000 it will be 60% of it, i.e., Rs 6000. Minimum pension of rupees Rs 10000 applies only to superannuation and not for family pension. But under OPS family pension is 50% of last pay if the pensioner dies before 7 years after retirement or before 67 years of age. There after family pension will be 30% of last pay. Minimum pension as on 1-4-2025 will be Rs.14130. But in UPS minimum family pension will be only Rs 6000.

Raising doubts the employees' union says that DA/DR will be given to assured



pension or minimum pension or family pension based on the Consumer price index as in the case of serving employees. Whether they will start a new base index from 1-4-2025 or they will grant the same percentage of DA/DR as for serving and OPS pensioners are not yet spelt out? In OPS if the pensioner or family pensioner completed 80 years of age additional pension of 20%, for 85 years 30%, for 90 years 40%, 95 years 50% and 100 years 100% is given with Same DA for additional pension also. In UPS this additional pension is not available. In OPS pension/family pension/minimum pension is revised whenever pay commission is implemented while there is no such assurance under UPS. Commutation of pension i.e., withdrawal of 40% pension in advance available in OPS is not available in UPS. For those employees who die or become invalid becoming all class unfit in NPS, OPS is applicable to them already. Employees can opt to UPS or NPS, once opted will be final. The union further raises eyebrows that there may be many more shortcomings in UPS which may be known after the full text of UPS is notified. Completely Denouncing the UPS, the trade union CITU urges the Union Govt to restore the non-contributory defined assured Old Pension Scheme. CITU also called for extending full support to the Govt employees struggle for restoration of OPS.

## A year after violence, why NIT Manipur has no Kuki students on campus

OVER A year since sectarian clashes tore through Manipur, the campus of the state's premier engineering college, the National Institute of Technology, is without a single Kuki-Zo student. On May 17 this year, the Supreme Court facilitated the transfer of 38 Kuki students to other NITs across the country. The court's order states that "the displaced students who seek to avail of classes at any other NIT would be permitted to do so after taking their individual preferences, subject to administrative exigencies."

While the verdict meant that the Kuki students who fled during the violence would never be back on the campus of their home NIT, Registrar Kumukcham Tomba Singh confirmed that there have been no Kukis among the new admissions this year and the last. "We have had two fresh batches since last year's violence, but no Kuki student has joined us," said Singh, adding that the college takes in 216 students every year, of whom around 50 per cent are from outside the state.

manipur nit NIT Registrar Kumukcham Tomba Singh confirmed that there have

been no Kukis among the new admissions this year and the last. According to the NIT website, the institute currently has 819 students in its UG and PG courses - 421 from within the state and 397 from other states. Until the Supreme Court confirmed the Kuki students' transfer, they attended classes online while the rest of their batchmates returned to the campus when it reopened in August last year. On May 3 last year, longstanding tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur spiralled into violence, which claimed at least 226 lives over the past year. While the hill districts of the states are largely Kuki-dominated, the Valley, including capital Imphal where the NIT is based, has a substantial Meitei population. On May 3, as violence raged in Imphal, with Kuki homes as the target of violence, the Kuki students on campus fled, some to the homes of government officials nearby and the others to the camp set up by the Manipur Police's 1st Battalion Manipur Rifles (1st MR) roughly 6 kilometres away. One of the Kuki students who reached the 1st MR camp on May 3, said, "

# Reclaiming streets is not enough

The recent rape and murder of a resident doctor in India's "safest" city, Kolkata, is yet another example of how crimes against women continue unabated — whether in places of work, at home, while commuting, or in public spaces. In response to the outcry following the gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in 2012, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, made several changes to sexual crime laws and investigative procedures, including broadening the definition of rape and enhancing punishment. Fast-track courts were strongly recommended as a measure to ensure speedy justice. The Nirbhaya Fund was announced with a ₹1,000 crore corpus, to implement initiatives to ensure women's safety. However, it has primarily been used for installing CCTV cameras and deploying more police personnel.

It is clear that legal protections have limited impact on crimes against women. It is important then to rethink how the state of our urban spaces inhibit women's safety, and why episodic outrage and over-dependence on laws alone will continue to fail women and their right to spaces.

India's cities have traditionally been designed for and by men. This is made clear by the fact that there is more concern for car parking than for toilets or feeding rooms for women. The female labour force participation rate in urban areas is an abysmal 25.2% (April-June, 2024). Despite skills and education, many women struggle to enter the formal job market. With the current policy focus on women-led development, it is crucial to emphasise that our cities are in dire need of infrastructure to support and facilitate women's labour in its diverse forms. Data reveal that most women, in the absence of resources, depend overwhelmingly on walking and accessible public transport for commuting. Women make multiple trips a day, tied to their care responsibilities, navigating the hostile urban infrastructure. Wider roads and flyovers are increasingly prioritised in cities, neglecting women's needs for safe streets, sidewalks and public transit. Even metro systems, touted as the panacea to all urban woes, exclude the vulnerable, especially working class women. Women, particularly those living independently, often struggle to find affordable and safe housing in cities, which hinders their pursuit of urban livelihoods. The impact of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban on access to housing and shelter for women is minimal. The lack of care infrastructure in cities forces women to shoulder the burden of childcare, elderly care, and care of the sick, restricting their ability to fully participate in city life. While the Swachh Bharat Mission has made some difference in providing services to women, a lot more must be done. Lack of access to water and sanitation translates to an additional burden on women. From a policy perspective, engendering urban planning is key. To ensure cities which work for women, it is essential to review planning laws. Women don't want cities to be merely friendly, they want cities to be efficient, just, safe, and rightfully theirs to use. Ministries must take the lead in broadening the policy frameworks from an urban inclusion perspective and not just from the perspective of women's welfare. Governments need to



formalise women-dominated informal work, create livelihoods closer to homes, and invest in care infrastructure. Any radical re-imagining of the urban space is impossible without women's participation and representation in policy and decision-making. Allocation of resources to support cities for women remains dismal. It is essential to promote and review gender budgeting mechanisms to benefit women, using it for women-centric cities that safeguard their rights, and not to be diverted to other use.

The designated physical spatial allocations must be made in city plans to provide space for women's livelihoods, care, housing and leisure. For a scalable city-level implementation, gender inclusion frameworks along with a new national scheme for women in urban areas should offer actionable steps for gender mainstreaming. Women's access to their haq (right) and hissa (share) in the urban is a definite step to build cities where women live, work and thrive, without fear. The notions of safety and protection, and

the oft-used language of 'daughters', 'sisters' and 'mothers' do little to enable women to achieve empowerment. The way we plan, design, build and use our cities, in brick and mortar, in policy and practice, in labour and leisure, needs to change. Reclaiming the streets in protest is not enough. We must reclaim cities in their entirety. Deeksha is a social researcher and Aravind Unni is an urban practitioner and a member of the National Alliance for People's Movement-SHRAM (Urban Forum)

## Bail for K Kavitha: Time to review PMLA's draconian provisions

A clutch of recent Supreme Court judgments has established that the principle "bail is the rule, and jail is the exception" shall apply to special laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) or the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA). In the case of B R S leader K Kavitha too, the court observed on Tuesday, "Undertrial custody should not turn into a punishment". Earlier, a Delhi Court pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for using the stringent sections of PMLA to summon private doctors and record their statements. It said, "Strong leaders, laws and agencies generally come back to bite the very citizens they vow to protect." Another court in Mumbai reminded the ED of its constitutional obligation to ensure expeditious trial. The court granted bail to two accused, incarcerated since October 2020. Of course, the SC has held that money laundering is a serious crime, which promotes other offences. However, a slew of judgments by PMLA courts on the ED's functioning require serious review.

In 1998, India signed the UN Declaration at the Special Session on 'Countering the World Drug Problem' and on the 'Need to Combat Money Laundering'. But little did one know that the issue would precipitate a political maelstrom 25 years later. The ED stands amidst a sharply divided polity and is often seen as biased against

the Opposition. The Supreme Court is due to review some sections of the PMLA later this year, especially in the context of its verdict in Madan Lal Choudhary (2022), which upheld the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the PMLA. It justified the non-disclosure of the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) on the grounds that it's an internal document and disclosing the details in it can adversely impact the investigation. To be fair to the ED, the PMLA has been framed in consonance with the directives of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an intergovernmental organisation formed to combat money laundering and terror financing. Most countries have laws similar to India. It is, however, known the world over that tough laws have no direct correlation with falling crime. Yet, amendments to PMLA give seemingly unbridled powers to the ED. In 2012, the definition of money laundering was broadened to include concealment, acquisition, possession, and use of proceeds of crime as criminal activities. In 2015, the definition of proceeds of crime was extended to assets in India if the act of laundering was conducted abroad. The 2018 amendment revived the twin conditions for bail under Section 45, making it incumbent upon a court to satisfy itself that a crime was committed or the accused was unlikely to flee. But the coup de grace was

delivered by the 2019 amendment that gave the ED almost unbridled powers of summons, arrests, raids and attachment of property. Money laundering also became a standalone offence, rather than a "connected schedule" offence. It authorised the search and seizure of property and persons on the basis of a simple warrant by an appropriate authority, without the registration of an FIR or a chargesheet. Have the changes in law made a difference to ED's performance? In terms of the number of cases registered and assets attached, the ED in the NDA regime beats the UPA years hollow. The return of confiscated assets worth Rs 15,000 crore to public sector banks is a great achievement. Against 1,797 cases in 2005-14, 5,155 cases were registered in 2014-23. In the same period, the value of assets attached went up from Rs 5,086 crore to Rs 1.2 lakh crore. But only 25 cases have gone through the court processes; 24 of them resulted in a conviction. While these numbers may bring cheer to the ED and government, a plethora of issues raise concern. Is PMLA a draconian piece of legislation or is it that the ED does not provide a level-playing field? Politicians have been implicated in only 3 per cent of the ED cases, but more than 90 per cent are from the Opposition. Those who have shifted from the Opposition to the ruling side find their cases being put in cold storage.

# Crime, health-worker safety and a self-examination

The year 2017 saw heated protests by resident doctors in Maharashtra, following a series of vicious attacks on medical personnel in rather quick succession — as is invariably the case with sensationalised criminal offences. Despite the magnitude of the problem, the solution was straightforward and run-of-the-mill. It meant bolstering security in public hospitals and strengthening legal instruments to bring the malefactors to rapid justice. Similar incidents came and went, with much happening during the COVID-19 pandemic. The knee jerk responses too continued. One is hard-pressed to recall any conspicuous precedents of swift justice.

It is the case of the grisly death of a promising resident doctor in Kolkata that has taken the country by storm and that has spurred the Supreme Court of India to take suo moto cognisance of the happening. However, emerging answers to the issue continue to remain reflexive and simplistic, and possibly reflect an incomplete understanding of the malady beneath. In its proceedings on August 20, the Court decreed the constitution of a national task force to work out measures to strengthen hospital safety. Improved infrastructure and closed-circuit television surveillance, a greater security presence at hospitals, and safe night transport are reportedly some areas that will receive attention. In the same vein, the West Bengal government has announced the 'Rattier Saathi (night companion)' programme aimed at improving the safety of women working in night shifts, particularly in medical colleges and hospitals. While such initiatives are critical, they implicitly conflate this issue with archetypal health worker violence, which is initiated by disgruntled patients due to perceived poor health-care services, or women's safety at large. What lurks underneath is the much more insidious problem of corruption of criminal proportions.

Conventional answers to health worker violence, such as improving hospital security and newer legislation, have miserably failed in tackling the problem over the years. These include reasons such as underfunding which are no different than why our health systems continue to remain frail in general. But the extent to which corruption contributes to the overall loss of lives has been vastly under-appreciated. If emerging accounts are anything to go by, there is a strong likelihood of deep-rooted, organised corruption having contributed to the gruesome crime in question, not to mention other incidents and the steady erosion of public health services that may have hitherto gone unheeded. The fact that this concerns an apex health-care institution in an already underfunded state public health system is acutely disconcerting.

The World Health Organization estimates that corruption claims nearly \$455 billion annually worldwide, more than what it would cost to extend universal health coverage to all. In a good part of the developing world, corruption rather than a lack of funds is what majorly contributes to health-care crises and poor health outcomes. While often sensationalised, the discourse on medical corruption in India



has largely concentrated on private losses and malfeasances, while its criminal dimensions have been largely underappreciated. Human resource-intensive health-care systems provide rapid breeding grounds for expansionary corruption, including the worst forms of sextortion, particularly in political systems where underfunding and poor oversight run rife. In such circumstances, it is hard to conceive how much help would realistically accrue from merely improving the state of health workers' security and hospital infrastructure, even if they are somehow adequately implemented. Being painfully galvanised to the fact that medical corruption can claim the lives of health-care workers in addition to that of patients serves to indicate that the public health system and its drivers may be up for a rigorous self-examination. Speedy delivery of justice in the Kolkata case is inarguably paramount, for nothing else said or done can ever serve as a consequential deterrent. Needless to say that we have traditionally fallen short in this respect, and the ramifications are for all to see. More steps are needed.

But the national task force has a job that is arguably more monumental than simply recommending safety measures — which is to devise a potent road map to prevent and arrest medical corruption, particularly in the public sector. Certainly, this cannot be approached solely by a team of medical doctors.

It requires expert inputs from public health, medico-legal, and other allied competencies, besides meriting the participation and the sanction of the larger governing and administrative community. And, the strategies so devised have to look much beyond instituting yet another novel legislative tool. Apart from reforms centering on administrative transparency, accountability, and oversight, effective whistle-blower

reporting and protection mechanisms and thorough digitalisation of public management systems are crucial. The need for ombudsmanship and other instruments to minimise political intrusion and manoeuvring cannot be overstated. Inspiration may be drawn from how fellow nations such as Brazil continue to battle po-

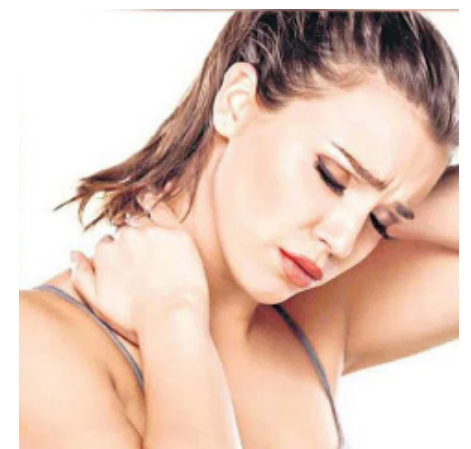
litical corruption in medicine. Much also remains to be done in the way of modernising the typical 'control and command' Indian public hospital, which remains steeped in anachronistic ways. While efficiency reasons for such a modernization abound, their pressing moral and regulatory bases have glaringly presented today and can no longer be overlooked.

## Clinical joint diseases in neck, shoulders may be due to vitamin D deficiency: Experts

Hyderabad: Vitamin D deficiency could have a direct link to the development of clinical joint disease, commonly in shoulder and neck joint, according to a study by sports medicine specialist from Hyderabad, Prof. Maj. Dr. S. Bakhtiar Choudhary.

The study titled "Association of Vitamin D Deficiency with Frozen Shoulder Syndrome and Repetitive Strain Injury on Spine", which is under publication, says that incorrect and inadequate nutrition on a long-term basis cause micro-nutrient deficiencies, which in-turn led to sub-clinical joint disease, commonly in shoulder and neck joints. "We get around 20 per cent Vitamin D (D2) from our diet.

But need 80 per cent of Vit D (D3) from direct exposure to sunlight (exposure to ultraviolet B rays). Urban pollution, UV sensitivity, use of sunscreen, dark skin, clothing, and staying indoors prevent direct contact with the sun for the majority of the time. People do not know these facts and remain under the false assumption that they are adequately exposed to sunlight," he said.

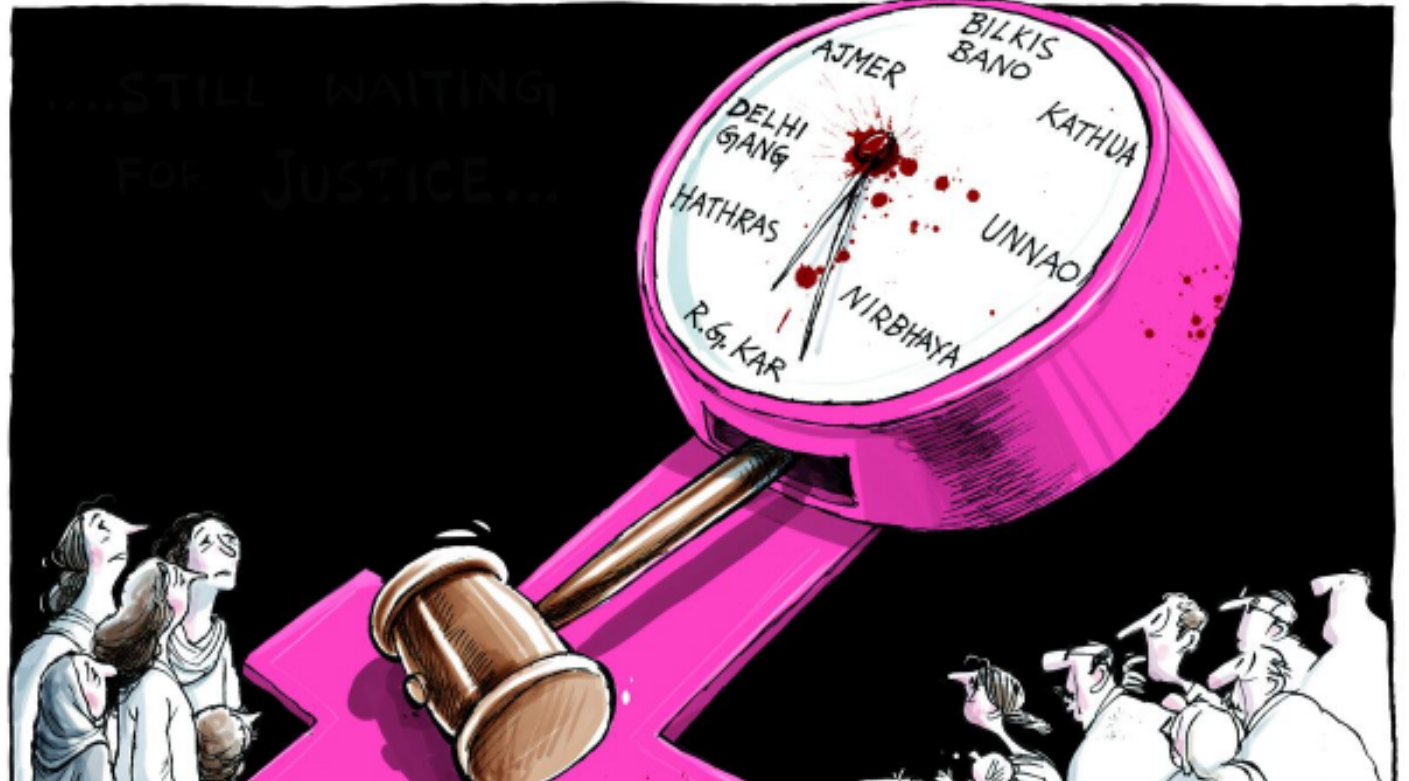


Urban pollution, UV sensitivity, use of sunscreen, dark skin, clothing, and staying indoors prevent direct contact with the sun for the majority of the time. People do not know these facts and remain under the false assumption that they are adequately exposed to sunlight," he added

# The heavy shackles of fear and vigilance

The brutal rape and murder of a woman doctor in Kolkata has led to the country finding itself, once again, engaged in a deep conversation on the safety of women in India. Women across the country face a spectrum of aggressive behaviours and violence — from sexual harassment and dowry-related deaths to rape and domestic violence. While the physical impact of violence against women is acknowledged by both the state and society as visible and tell-tale signs on women, there is considerably less focus on its psychological and behavioural consequences. This oversight means that while the physical and explicit acts of violence may provoke immediate and visible responses and draw public attention, the enduring psychological impact remains difficult to measure and often goes unnoticed and unaddressed.

In the absence of adequate structural protection by the state and the society, the onus of one's safety often falls on women themselves. As a result, women in India are forced to live in a state of perpetual vigilance, constantly evaluating their surroundings for potential threats in public and private spaces. This state of constant alertness, deeply ingrained in the psyche of women, learnt and imbibed from a young age, then becomes both necessary and exhausting. What makes this situation even more troubling is that this vigilant state has become so deeply embedded in daily life that it is often perceived to be the norm, to an extent that women often struggle to find the language to articulate the discomfort and mental labour it entails. Women become accustomed to living in this heightened state of awareness, and the psychological strain it creates often goes unrecognised — by themselves and by society. This unspoken burden profoundly shapes how women interact with the world, perceive themselves, and engage with society. This constant need to assess and anticipate potential threats curtails her freedom to explore new places, to take risks, and to connect with others. This strips women of simple pleasures such as leisurely observation, spatial connection, and the ability to dwell in the moment. It even impacts career choices to personal relationships. Many women, for instance, decline job opportunities that require late-night travel or hesitate to move to new places without ensuring a strong support system. The simple pleasure of a leisurely walk in the park is overshadowed by a constant awareness of potential threats. These decisions, though grounded in rational concerns for safety, can significantly restrict their personal, material and psychological growth. There are also intergenerational effects as this burden is often passed on from mother to daughter, who is taught to be cautious and adjust her behaviour to stay safe. This reinforces the idea that individual women are responsible for their own safety, rather than society taking collective action to create safer environments. As a result, women are expected to adapt their behaviour. These protective measures, thereby imposed by families and communities, which restrict a woman's mobility and freedom, also become violence. The vigilance also creates a dissonance between how women live and how they wish to live. As a woman and a teacher, I find myself grappling with this conflict daily. I encourage my young female students to be brave,



to challenge patriarchal limitations, and to live freely. Yet, I find myself waiting for a male family member or friend to accompany me on a late-night trip, for example, a choice that feels at odds with the empowerment I advocate. Women are frequently forced to navigate this duality: advocating for empowerment while simultaneously adapting their behaviours to mitigate risks associated with their safety.

It is worse for the disadvantaged Caste, class, and religion add complexity to the burden of vigilance women must bear, with marginalised women facing intensified discrimination and prejudice. For them, threats are not only gendered but also rooted in societal hierarchies. While women from privileged caste and class backgrounds may have access to relatively safer environments, such as gated communities and private transportation, they are still not immune to harassment and violence. However, women from disadvantaged groups face more immediate and pervasive dangers, often lacking institutional support to address safety concerns. These women, therefore, have no choice but to navigate environments where exploitation and abuse are constant threats, highlighting vulnerabilities often overlooked by society and the state. Impact on society

When women are forced to prioritise safety over curiosity, and vigilance over exploration, they are denied the full spectrum of the human experience. The world, instead of being a place of wonder and discovery, becomes one of danger and caution. This not only limits their experiences but also deprives society of the contributions and innovations that could flourish if women were free from this constant burden.

The unseen and unspoken burdens that women carry; the emotional strain, psychological fatigue, and the loss of joy and freedom are as significant as any physical injury. Recognising and addressing this burden therefore is essential for building a more equitable society where women are not only safe but also free to live without the constant shadow of fear. However,

to challenge this requires a fundamental shift in how we think about safety and violence. In a society that often equates violence against women solely with visible, physical harm, it is crucial to broaden our understanding to include the less tangible, yet equally damaging, forms of violence. Women should not have to choose between their safety and their freedom. State and societal measures should not restrict women's freedom any further

under the guise of ensuring safety. The challenge is not merely about liberating women from the constraints of fear and vigilance. It is about unlocking the full potential of half our society. To achieve this, we must acknowledge that the burden of perpetual vigilance imposed on women is not a natural or acceptable state but a form of violence in itself. This shift in perspective will allow everyone to live, thrive, and contribute equally, free from the constraints of safety concerns.

## Study finds high-risk HPV in men linked to infertility

New Delhi: Human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted virus, can decrease the sperm quantity and quality in men leading to infertility, a study confirmed on Friday. Researchers from Universidad Nacional de Cordoba in Argentina showed that men are very susceptible to HPV infections and have major problems such as the increased risk of genital warts and malignancies of the mouth, throat, penis, and anus. But the top problem is being rendered infertile.

The study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology*, showed that men infected with high-risk HPV genotypes show evidence of sperm death from oxidative stress and an impaired immune response. The study "demonstrated that genital HPV infection is highly common in men and that, depending on the viral genotype that is causing the infection, the impact on sperm quality and semen inflammation might vary," said Dr. Virginia Rivero, a professor at the varsity. "Male fertility and the immune system's capacity to fight off infection seem to be more negatively impacted by high-risk HPV genotype infections," Rivero added.

HPV infections had been most common among women, leading to cervical cancer risk in 95 per cent of cases.

However, a recent study in the journal *The Lancet* showed that 1 in 3 men over the age of 15 are at least partially infected with genital HPV, and 1 in 5 have some infection with high-risk, or oncogenic, HPV strains. The latest study focussed on 205 adult males in Argentina who visited a urology clinic for evaluations related to reproductive health or urinary tract problems between 2018 and 2021.

Nobody had received an HPV vaccination. Nineteen percent of the individuals tested positive for HPV, of which twenty men were found to have high-risk HPV (HR-HPV) and seven to have low-risk HPV (LR-HPV).

There was no discernible variation in the groups' semen quality according to routine semen analysis. Nevertheless, additional high-resolution examination demonstrated that males who tested positive for HR-HPV had considerably fewer CD45+ white blood cell counts in their semen and higher levels of reactive oxygen species (ROS), which can harm sperm. "We concluded that men infected with HR-HPV, but not LR-HPV, show increased sperm death due to oxidative stress and a weakened local immune response in the urogenital tract," said Rivero, suggesting that HR-HPV-positive men could have impaired fertility.