

Hyderabad-based teen mountaineer Ayush sets record with double attempt on Kang Yatse peaks

Hyderabad: At an altitude of over 6,000 meters, the twin peaks of Kang Yatse in Ladakh stand as a formidable challenge, even for seasoned climbers. For Hyderabad-based 15-year-old Ayush, however, these peaks, Kang Yatse-2 (6240m) and Kang Yatse-1 (6400m), were a test he eagerly embraced. Ayush's journey to the summit of Kang Yatse-2 began on August 23, after a gruelling four-day trek through the rugged terrain of the Markha Valley. After battling snowfall and icy winds for nine hours, he reached the summit of KY2.

"It was a tough climb," Ayush recalls and adds, "Navigating through rocky sections and the snow was exhausting, but I didn't want to turn back." After a 15-hour round trip, he became one of the youngest climbers to reach the summit of KY2.

Ayush's passion for mountaineering started at the age of 10, inspired by his father's trekking stories. Since then, he has completed several high-altitude treks, in-

cluding Sandakphu, Kedarkantha, and Bali Pass. In 2022, he attempted Kang Yatse-2 but was forced to turn back due to illness, fueling his determination to return stronger. "I had more determination this time because I couldn't summit Kang Yatse-2 in 2022. I didn't want to turn back again, so that helped me push through," he says.

Ayush set out to tackle Kang Yatse-1 just four days after summiting KY2. Despite enduring white-out conditions and treacherous terrain, he reached 6,050 meters before turning back for safety. "It was my first true expedition experience—sharing cramped tents and surviving on minimal food. The conditions were extreme, but it was all worth it," he says. "Being in the mountains makes you realize how small you are compared to the world. It's a humbling experience. I've also learned a lot from meeting experienced climbers, including those who've summited Everest. Talking to them has really helped me grow in this field," Ayush reflected. Looking ahead,



Ayush has set his sights on scaling the 7,000-meter Nun Peak in Ladakh in 2025. "Mountaineering has taught me so much

about patience and perseverance. I love pushing myself to new heights, both physically and mentally," he adds.

Eight new medical colleges in Telangana bring little joy as number of MBBS seats permitted remains low



Hyderabad: Despite getting permission for eight new government medical colleges in Telangana State, the Congress-led government could not capitalize on an opportunity to ensure that medical aspirants of the State had access to 800 MBBS seats this academic year. Instead, only 400 seats have been added for this academic year with the National Medical Commission (NMC) permitting 50 medical seats in each of the eight new medical colleges.

The oversight on the part of the Congress-led State government is in stark contrast to the recent round of NMC permissions for new medical colleges across India. Of the 44 new medical colleges from across the country that had applied for MBBS program to the Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB) of NMC, 11 new medical colleges received permission for 100 MBBS seats and another 10 received permission for 150 seats. It is not an impossible task to achieve 100 MBBS seats for

new medical colleges, which already happened in 2023-24 when the then BRS government established nine medical colleges and received permission for 900 MBBS seats at one go.

The nine districts where the new medical colleges in 2023-24 were established are Kamareddy, Karimnagar, Khammam, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Asifabad, Nirmal, Sircilla, Vikarabad and Jangaon. The State government had ample time to prepare for the groundwork for NMC inspections (that took place this March/April) by improving medical infrastructure and complete the recruitment process of manpower needed for new medical colleges. On its part, the then BRS government, way back in July, 2023, had issued orders to establish eight new medical colleges in Jogulamba Gadwal, Narayanpet, Mulugu, Warangal, Medak, Yadadri Bhongir, Rangareddy and Medchal-Malkajiri districts. This year, the Congress-

led State government just barely managed to get permission for the eight new medical colleges.

During its annual inspections, the NMC permitted only four medical colleges in the districts of Mulugu, Narasampet, Jogulamba Gadwal and Narayanpet. The inspecting teams were not happy with the medical infrastructure/manpower in the

remaining four medical colleges in the districts of Bhongir, Rangareddy (at Maheswaram), Medak and Medchal-Malkajiri (at Qutbullapur). In a face saving measure, in the final phase of inspections, the State government managed to get permission for the remaining four new medical colleges but with only 50 medical seats each.

Re Sustainability, Sharrp Ventures to collaboratively launch Plastics Circularity Initiative in Hyderabad, Raipur

Hyderabad: Re Sustainability and Sharrp Ventures, the investment office of the Harsh Mariwala family, announced their collaboration to launch a pioneering Plastics Circularity Initiative in Hyderabad, Telangana, and Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

The goals of this initiative are twofold – to increase the supply of very high-quality recycled polyolefins for the FMCG industry and to create sustained environmental and social impact.

Currently, the FMCG sector in India faces a critical challenge in sourcing high-quality recycled materials, which limits their ability to meet sustainability targets and reduce reliance on virgin plastics.

By capturing and processing 32,000 tonnes of waste and reducing 15,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions annually, this project aims to produce over 9,000 tonnes of superior recycled polymers each year, providing a reliable supply of these materials for various FMCG and other applications.

Over the next five years, this initiative intends to evolve into a nationwide, large-scale recycled polymers enterprise, reducing environmental impact and setting a new standard for responsible waste management practices. Hyderabad and Raipur have been strategically chosen for this initiative due to their unique demographics and waste management challenges.

The Food Security Act has revamped the PDS

During the discussion on the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013, there was nervousness about guaranteeing food security through the Public Distribution System (PDS). The nervousness stemmed from the poor record of the PDS — according to National Sample Survey (NSS) data, in 2011-12, at the all-India level, leakages were at 41.7%. The main argument in favour of continuing with the PDS was that States that had undertaken PDS reforms had witnessed major improvements. Between 2004-5 and 2011-12, several early reforming States saw a dramatic reduction in leakages: Bihar (from 91% to 24%), Chhattisgarh (from 52% to 9%) and Odisha (from 76% to 25%). With the same package of PDS reforms being mandated by the NFSA 2013, there was hope that more States could improve.

The NSS's Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) data for 2022-23 bears out this hypothesis. The HCES is the first large-scale nationally representative survey after the implementation of the NFSA 2013. It suggests that PDS leakages were down to 22% in 2022-23.

Understanding the data and methodology PDS "leakages" refer to the proportion of PDS rice and wheat released by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) that fails to reach consumers. Leakages are estimated by matching NSS data on household PDS purchases with "offtake" data reported in the Monthly Food Grain Bulletin of the Food Ministry.

During the reference period (August 2022 to July 2023), PDS ration card holders were getting NFSA grain (five kilograms per capita per month for "Priority" households and 35 kg per month for "Antyodaya" households). In addition, they got Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) grain till December 2022, when PMGKAY Covid-19 relief was discontinued. To arrive at the estimates presented here, offtake under NFSA including tide-over rations, Non-NFSA and PMGKAY is matched with HCES 2022-23 PDS purchase of (paid for and free) wheat and rice by households.

It is worth bearing in mind that these are estimates, the best possible with available data. Any mismatch between offtake and purchase is attributed to leakage, though there could be other reasons (transport losses, lags in supply and so on). For instance, the Table shows how lagging offtake by a month (July-June) yields a lower leakage estimate (17.6%), than if we match the offtake with the NSS reference period (August-July) — 18.2%. Both, however, are underestimates. Why underestimate? Some States run an "expanded PDS", providing PDS grain to non-NFSA beneficiaries using central contributions (for example, tide-over rations and non-NFSA allocations) as well as State contributions (for example, local procurement). For example, Chhattisgarh's food security act, passed in 2012, made the PDS quasi-universal using local procurement. The all-India leakage estimates of 17.6%-18.2% are underestimates, because they only take



into account central contributions, and not State contributions. There are 14 crore non-NFSA beneficiaries, of whom at the most six crore are supported entirely through State contributions. If we add the State's contribution for State-supported non-NFSA beneficiaries to total offtake, the all-India leakage estimate rises to 22%.

Impact of NFSA on PDS coverage One of the major PDS reforms included in the NFSA 2013 was an expansion of PDS coverage that was aimed at reducing exclusion errors, but had a 'spillover effect' on reducing leakages. In 2011-12, before the NFSA, less than 50% of households had ration cards, and the proportion of households getting anything from the PDS was around 40%. That was an improvement over 2004-05, when less than a quarter (24%) of households were accessing the PDS.

The improvement between 2004-5 and 2011-12 was driven by reforms in States such as Chhattisgarh and Odisha where the PDS coverage increased substantially in this period. For instance, in Chhattisgarh, there was a three-fold increase (from 21% to 63%) in the proportion of households using the PDS. According to HCES data, in 2022-23, the proportion of households buying from the PDS has increased further to 70%. In large part, this is the result of the rollout of the NFSA. In spite of the improvement in coverage, the Centre is falling short of the coverage mandated by the NFSA (50% of rural population and 75% of urban population), i.e., around 66%. Earlier work, based on administrative data, suggested that only 59% had access to the PDS as NFSA beneficiaries. Similarly, according to the HCES, out of the 70% who access the PDS, only 57%-61% have NFSA ration cards. The rest (roughly 10%) are non-NFSA beneficiaries. PDS reforms undertaken by

early reforming States such as Chhattisgarh and Odisha included a reduction in PDS prices, doorstep delivery of foodgrains, digitisation of records, deprivatising management of PDS outlets by handing them over to panchayats, and self-help groups. These reforms were incorporated in the NFSA 2013 (Chapter V). As mentioned earlier, by 2011-12, PDS leakage estimates in the early reforming States had already crashed. Since then, more States with high leakages have managed to reduce them. According to HCES 2022-23, it was 9% in Rajasthan, 21% in Jharkhand and 23% in Uttar Pradesh (all one-time basket cases).

Many believe that the integration of Aadhaar, especially Aadhaar-based biometric authentication (ABBA), led to the improvements in the PDS. Data from primary surveys, however, do not support this. Two surveys in 2017 in Jharkhand shed light on this issue. A study by Muralidharan, Niehaus and Sukhtankar found that leakages before the introduction of ABBA were already less than 20%. Drèze, Khera and Somanchi reported that the purchase-entitlement ratios (the proportion of entitlement that people actually purchased) in offline villages and ABBA villages were virtually the same — 94% and 93%, respec-

tively. Both surveys found little evidence of ghost cards. Somewhat puzzlingly, leakages in States where the PDS traditionally worked better have not experienced further improvements; in fact, in some, estimated leakages have increased (example, in Tamil Nadu from 12% in 2011-12 to 25% in 2022-23). In perspective The PDS is now a functional instrument of social policy, guaranteeing a modicum of food security to many.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, it formed the backbone of relief efforts, along with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. However, the PDS remains an endangered instrument of social policy, constantly subjected to "innovations". These include cash transfer experiments, door-step delivery to people's homes (in Delhi), and imposing inappropriate technologies (such as Aadhaar-based biometric authentication). Instead of expending energy on ill-conceived measures (such as the ongoing eKYC drive for the PDS) that can easily derail the PDS, scarce government capacity should be channelled to expediting the delayed Census, that is leading to the exclusion of over 100 million people. Other demands such as the inclusion of more nutritious items such as pulses and edible oil remain relevant.

SCR appeals rail passengers to use Rail Madad Help Line Number 139 for grievances

Hyderabad: The South Central Railway has appealed to the passengers to use "139", the Rail Madad Help Line, for all types of assistance/ grievances related to travel, as all help lines pertaining to Railway have been integrated into this single number. In a press release, the SCR said

this will help the rail users to overcome the inconvenience of multiple helpline numbers for different types of grievances and enquiries. The Helpline number 139 is available in twelve languages and passengers can opt for IVRS (Interactive Voice Response System), or directly connect to call-centre executive by dialling 139.

Yes, I want to become Chief Minister: Kumari Selja

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), September 11: The elections of Haryana assembly are not held yet and even the nomination filing process has not been completed, but seeing some positive response of the public in favour of the congress party, the claims for the Chief Ministership have started to come on. The Former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and his son, an MP from Rohtak seat, Deepender Hooda are already being projected as the first contenders. Also, another MP, a Rajya Sabha member, Randeep Surjewala's name is being flashed in the air. Now the General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, former Union Minister, and MP from Sirsa, Kumari Selja has said, "Yes, I want to become Chief Minister".

In an interview with a news channel, Kumari Selja said that she wants to become Chief Minister and questioned why a Dalit cannot hold that position. She is proud of being a Dalit and emphasized that reaching this stage has taken several generations. Some people get opportunities sooner while others later. There is nothing wrong in desiring to become Chief Minister, although the final decision rests with the high command. She said that she represents all communities and was elected by people from all communities in Sirsa. One cannot always stay on the back foot; opportunities to play on the front foot should also be available. Everyone has their own aspirations.

Selja said that the time has come for every Haryana resident to rid themselves of the BJP's 10 years of misrule. The 24 days of hard work by every Congress worker will turn Haryana's misfortune into prosperity. It is crucial for the party's dedi-

cated workers to stand with the Congress candidates immediately, so that a Congress government can be formed with a three-fourths majority in the assembly elections.

In a statement released to the media, Kumari Selja said that the people of the state are questioning the BJP about the 10 years of suffering they have endured. They are demanding accountability for the repeated pain inflicted upon them. The kind of opposition BJP leaders are facing in various parts of the state indicates that the BJP is headed towards a situation similar to before 2009. The former Union Minister said that today, BJP and its leaders have no achievements to showcase to deceive the people. For 10 years, the people of the state have witnessed a rise in crimes such as rape, theft, shooting, murder, and extortion, as well as unemployment. They have seen the decline of health, education, and transport services.

They have understood the lies and empty promises of the BJP and feel trapped in a web of online scams. Kumari Selja noted that there is an anti-incumbency wave in the state. People consider Congress to be the biggest alternative and are ready to hand over power. The same people who gave Congress 5 seats in the Lok Sabha elections are now determined to give Congress a three-fourths majority in the assembly elections, to teach a lesson to those who intend to overthrow the people's elected government. The former Union Minister said that the voting on October 5 will write a new chapter in Haryana. Farmers, workers, labourers, the poor, Dalits, backward classes, youth, and traders will together send Congress candidates to the assembly with a large margin. Selja



claimed that according to public sentiments, the Congress high command is also ready to witness this wave of change and take tough decisions that will set a precedent for a long time. Kumari Selja said that

with the election results on October 8, a fully stable Congress government will be formed in Haryana, which will work towards protecting and securing the interests of every individual in the state.

Week ahead of J-K polls, two militants killed in Udhampur encounter, ops on

The search parties retaliated, and during the exchange of fire, some militants were killed. The search parties retaliated, and during the exchange of fire, some militants were killed. (File Photo/PTI) AT LEAST two militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Khandara Top area of Basantgarh, in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district, on Wednesday afternoon. The incident comes a week before the first phase of polling in J&K on September 18. "Two terrorists neutralised in the ongoing operation at Khandara #Kathua by the Troops of Rising Star Corps. Operations in progress," the Army's Rising Star Corps said in a post on X. Khandara Top falls on the border of Udhampur and Kathua districts. Officials said the Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police personnel launched a joint combining-and-search operation from two directions — Basantgarh in Udhampur district and Machedi in Kathua district — follow-

ing information about the presence of four militants in the area.

The security personnel established contact with the militants at about 12.50 pm, when they came under fire, said sources. The search parties retaliated, and two militants were killed in the exchange of fire. This was the first successful operation in the Basantgarh-Machedi belt, where six security personnel have been killed in separate attacks since July 8. While four Army and one police personnel were killed in an attack in Kathua's Badnota village near Machedi on July 8, a CRPF officer was killed in Chill, in Dudu area of Udhampur, on August 19. Chill, the last village in Udhampur's Dudu sub-division, borders Kathua's Machedi area.

Police have so far arrested nearly a dozen people and claimed to have busted a terror module that facilitated the movement of infiltrators from Pakistan to the up-



per reaches of Kathua, Udhampur and Doda districts, by providing food and shelter. In the last two months, nearly a dozen people, including two Army Captains and seven soldiers, have been killed

in separate attacks in the upper reaches of Doda, Udhampur and Kathua districts. Three militants were also killed during an operation in Gandoh area of Doda district earlier.

Quality Assured: Benefits of Purchasing Branded Tea Packages

Tea is more than just a beverage; it's a cultural experience, a ritual that brings comfort and rejuvenation to millions of people worldwide. The significance of quality in tea consumption cannot be overstated, as it directly influences the taste, aroma, and overall enjoyment of the drink. With growing awareness of health and wellness, consumers are increasingly prioritizing quality over quantity. One of the most effective ways to ensure quality is by choosing branded tea packages. Packaging plays a crucial role in maintaining tea quality, protecting it from external contaminants while preserving its freshness of its taste over time.

What Does "Branded Tea" Mean?
The characteristics of tea, such as hygroscopicity, oxidation, adsorption, fragility, and variability, make packaging essential to prevent pollution and reduce deterioration caused by environmental changes. Branded tea refers to tea sold under a well-known and established name, often associated with certain standards of quality and consistency. These brands have reputations to uphold, compelling them to adhere to strict quality control measures. In the tea industry, standard practices include selecting the finest tea leaves, maintaining hygienic processing conditions, and using advanced packaging technologies to ensure the tea reaches the consumer in optimal condition. Branded tea companies typically source their leaves from specific regions known for high-quality production. These companies often establish long-term relationships with tea estates, ensuring a consistent supply of premium tea leaves. Furthermore, branded tea undergoes rigorous quality checks at various stages of production—from plucking and processing to packaging and distribution. This commitment to quality sets branded



tea apart from loose teass which may lack consistency in taste. **Benefits of Branded Tea Packages**
Consistency in Taste

One of the primary benefits of purchasing branded tea is consistency in taste. Tea connoisseurs appreciate the subtle nuances in taste from different regions and processing methods. Branded teas are known for maintaining consistent taste pro-

files, ensuring that every cup offers the same delightful experience. This consistency is achieved through careful blending and quality control processes, ensuring each batch matches the brand's established taste profile. **Quality Control**
Reputable tea brands invest heavily in quality control to meet the highest standards. This involves multiple stages

of testing, including checks for pesticide residues, contaminants, and overall leaf quality. By purchasing branded tea, consumers can be confident that the tea they are drinking has undergone rigorous scrutiny and meets the safety and quality standards set by the brand. This assurance is fundamental in an age where food safety is a growing concern.

Madrasas 'unsuitable' places to get proper education, child rights body tells SC

India's child rights body has told the Supreme Court that the education imparted in madrasas "is not comprehensive and is therefore against the provisions of Right to Education Act", and that textbooks in these institutions teach about the "supremacy of Islam". The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) also claimed that the Taliban was "influenced by the religious and political ideologies" of the Darul Uloom Deoband Madrasa of Uttar Pradesh.

The NCPCR was making a written submission to the court which is seized of a clutch of appeals challenging the Allahabad High Court order which had declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 "unconstitutional" on the ground that it violated "the principle of secularism" and fundamental rights under Article 14 of the Constitution. On April 5, a Supreme Court bench presided by Chief Justice of India D

Y Chandrachud stayed the High Court's order.

The commission, in its submission, said a Madrasa is an "unsuitable" place to receive "proper education". "...they do not only render an unsatisfactory and insufficient model for education but also have an arbitrary mode of working which is wholly and in absence of a curriculum and evaluation procedure as laid down under Section 29 of the Right to Education Act, 2009."

They work "in an overall violation of the Constitutional mandate..." it said. Though the RTE Act exempts madrasas from its purview, the children studying in them "have never been exempted from the ambit of Article 21A of the Constitution of India in any judicial decision or constitutional interpretation", it said.

"The denial to extend the right to education to children by these institutions with minority status not just deprives the children of their most important fundamental



right to education but... snowballs into depriving them of their fundamental right to equality before law," the commission

said. The commission called the Uttar Pradesh Act "a depriving tool" for children studying in minority institutions.

Hyderabad Legal Luminary S Dwarakanath Appointed as Additional Solicitor General at Supreme Court

The Union government has appointed S Dwarakanath, a Senior Advocate at the High Court of Telangana, as an Additional Solicitor General to represent the Centre before the Supreme Court of India.

The Appointment Committee of the Cabinet approved the appointment of S Dwarakanath, along with five other senior advocates, for a period of three years. S Dwarakanath, a highly respected and experienced legal professional, comes from a lineage of distinguished lawyers. His father, the late S Dasaratharama Reddy, served as a judge in the High Court of the then United Andhra Pradesh, laying the foundation for the family's legal practice. This tradition was continued by S Dwarakanath's uncle, the late P Srinivasa Reddy, and is now guided by S

Dwarakanath himself. An alumnus of HPS Ramanthapur, S Dwarakanath has been appointed to the prestigious position of Additional Solicitor General at the Supreme Court, underscoring his legal expertise and the government's confidence in his ability to represent the Centre effectively in the highest court of the land.

The Union government has also appointed five other senior advocates as Additional Solicitor Generals, including Ms Archana Pathak Dave, Satya Darshi Sanjay, Brijender Chahar, Raghavendra P Shankar, and Rajkumar Bhaskar Thakare (Raja Thakare).

The team of law officers will be led by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, while Senior Advocate R Venkatramani serves as the Attorney General for India.



A month after the RG Kar incident, Kolkata is a city at the barricades

Everywhere in Kolkata, there are barricades – the mini barricades that can easily be jumped over in markets and street corners, the formidable 7-foot-tall barricades in front of government buildings, and the bamboo barricades that no one takes seriously. But during major rallies, even the most formidable of these barricades come down – as has happened several times since August 9, when the city rose in protest against the rape and murder of a doctor at R G Kar Hospital.

The city has seen more than 300 major rallies over the last month, many of these midnight events organised by women, for whom the incident of August 9 had rudely challenged their faith in their city. Kolkata now is a city that's standing vigil, pushing against the barricades. On September 9, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee chastised the protesters for not going home. "If you are out on the roads every night protesting, a lot of people get disturbed too... It has been more than a month, I would urge you to return to festive spirit," she said at a meeting. The irony of the Chief Minister's remarks wasn't lost on anyone, coming as they did from someone whose road to power was paved with protests and demonstrations, from Singur to Nandigram and Lalgarh.

Junior Doctors during a protest rally to Swastha Bhavan in Saltlake, Kolkata in connection with rape and murder of a junior doctor in RG Kar medical college and hospital. (Express Photo) Junior Doctors during a protest rally to Swastha Bhavan in Saltlake, Kolkata in connection with rape and murder of a junior doctor in RG Kar medical college and hospital. (Express Photo) Though Kolkata has reclaimed the protest tag it earned during the Left era of 1990s, this time the anger is more visceral, real. The leisurely 'Cholche na, Cholbe na' (We won't let this happen) that rang through the city every time the trade unions struck work has given way to a more ur-

gent "Bichar Chai!" (We want justice).

"It is the worst of times, it is the best of times for Kolkata," says Prachetash Sammadar, 40, a financial consultant, of the spontaneous protests that have broken out across the city. Though Kolkata has reclaimed the protest tag it earned during the Left era of 1990s, this time the anger is more visceral, real. (Express Photo) Though Kolkata has reclaimed the protest tag it earned during the Left era of 1990s, this time the anger is more visceral, real.

On September 8, his mother Mousumi Sammadar, 73, a retired school teacher, walked from South Kolkata's Kalighat to Rashbehari Avenue, despite her aching knees. "She was not sure if she would be able to make it, but she did. My heart swells with pride and love when I see my mother and hundreds of other senior citizens of my city out there, walking mile after mile, raising their voices against the systemic wrong," says Prachetash. He claims these protests are unlike anything the city has seen before. "I have always known my mother to be a politically conscious woman. But for as long as I can remember, I have never seen her go out and be part of michil (protest marches)," he adds. Abdul Razzaq, who owns a cosmetics stall in the bustling New Market area of Kolkata, one of the main shopping destinations in the city, is hoping the city will move on but doesn't want people to forget.

The city has seen more than 300 major rallies over the last month, many of these midnight events organised by women. The city has seen more than 300 major rallies over the last month, many of these midnight events organised by women. "People are not in the mood to shop at all. Usually, during this festive season, I earn around Rs 10,000 a day. But this time, I have barely earned half that amount. This weekend, sales picked up a bit and I am desperately hoping that the mood of the city shifts. But I also don't want people to forget what hap-

pened. So I am feeling guilty," says the 24-year-old Dipak Chatterjee, 57, a building contractor in North Kolkata's Bangur Avenue, says it's heartening that the protests have managed to stay largely apolitical. "As much as the ruling party would like to dismiss these protests as politically motivated, this is spontaneous and I haven't seen anything like this before," he says.

People hit the streets in Kolkata and other parts of the state to a call of protest against RG Kar Medical college rape and murder from 9pm to 9pm and 9 mins (I 'noi noi nio' no no no in Bengali). People use cell phone lights in Kankurgachi as part of the call. People hit the streets in Kolkata and other parts of the state to a call of protest against RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case from 9pm to 9pm and 9 mins (I 'noi noi nio' no no no in Bengali). People use cell phone lights in Kankurgachi as part of the call. On September 4, a day before the scheduled hearing of the case in the Supreme Court (which was later postponed), Chatterjee visited RG Kar College at about 10 pm with his 20-year-old daughter to register his protest. There were thousands like him that night. "We were overwhelmed. Every street corner had a shrine. There were women taking out marches late into the night. I was glad I did this with my daughter," he says.

South Kolkata's Jadavpur 8B bus stand has been the protest hub for the past few weeks. From students to activists, hundreds of people have been squatting here and made it their home for the Reclaim the Night protests. Sharanya Agarwal is at the bus stand to fight for her husband, a doctor at Kolkata's National Medical College. "We still have hope that despite the opposition of the ruling party, this people's movement will overcome everything. We are still hitting the roads in that hope. The Supreme Court is still hearing the case, let's see what happens, things may change at the last moment, but we will not stop protesting till

we get justice. This protest will continue," she says. On September 8, Sunil Mahato, 58, was among a group of rickshaw pullers who were part of a rally in Central Kolkata. "I am here for my wife, daughter and sister who are back home in Bihar. We are all here as one. We will not stop till that poor girl gets justice," he says.

Football fans display a tifo at Salt Lake Stadium to protest against the alleged rape and murder of a junior doctor at RG Kar MCH during the Durand Cup final match between North East United FC and Mohunbagan Super giant. Express photo by Partha Paul. Football fans display a tifo at Salt Lake Stadium to protest against the alleged rape and murder of a junior doctor at RG Kar MCH during the Durand Cup final match between North East United FC and Mohunbagan Super Giant. At a rally of domestic workers at Jadavpur in south Kolkata, Shyama Shikari, 42, made her first public speech in front of hundreds. She claims she was nervous but she "had to speak". "I am raising a daughter too. I wanted her to be a doctor. But now I don't. What if she were to meet the same fate?," she says. On September 8, Rishav Basu, 22, who graduated from college recently, participated in a rally of food delivery app riders to demand justice for the RG Kar victim. "I don't think now is the time to take political sides. We are all here to be a part of something bigger than us," says Basu. It's midnight at Shyambazar 5-point crossing, a junction that connects Kolkata with its far-flung suburbs. On regular days, people would stop by this late in the night only to make it in time for the last few servings of Golbari Mutton, one of Kolkata's iconic eateries. But for a month, things have been different. The shop is metres away from R G Kar Hospital, the epicentre of the protests. On a Sunday night, thousands of cellphones are held up in the middle of the road for an impromptu dance performance, which will be followed by a poetry recital.

The dark side of gold

The Peruvian photojournalist Marco Garro, 42, has powerful first-hand testimony on the former. It all began for him with an assignment for the newspaper Peru 21, in 2006. Travel to the mining towns in the Andes and report on the lives of their residents, he was told. Initial research indicated that residue from mines was being mismanaged, causing symptoms of lead poisoning. When he arrived in the mining town of Cerro de Pasco, 14,000 ft above sea level, he saw stunted, severely anaemic children with frequent nosebleeds. In some mines, lead was also being mined. The residue was being dumped around population centres. Contaminants were leaching into groundwater, particularly in the monsoon, and in summer, wind carried the contaminated dust into homes. Exploitation took wild forms too. In one practice common in informal, artisanal mines, miners worked without remuneration for a period and were then given three to five days to recover their pay from the mine, in the form of as much gold as they could find. "It's a kind of modern slavery," Garro says, adding, "I was surprised to discover the extent of how these territories, which sustain the country's economy, bear the brunt of it all." Peru, the world's eighth-largest producer, produced 128.8 tonnes of gold in 2023. India's imports from this country in the first half of 2024 alone rose 81% year-on-year, to \$1.47 billion.

Garro says he looked for signs that any of this wealth was ending up in the communities that made the mining possible and found few signs that they benefited. Instead, it was eroding ecosystems. Many of the gold mines in the Andes are polluting the nearby lakes that local communities depend on. Even considering how dependent the Peruvian economy is on mining in general, and gold in particular, what he saw made him wonder, he says, "Was it more important to extract gold and destroy these unique environments?" In 2018, Garro turned some of what he saw into a photo project titled *The Gold We Inherited, the Gold of Our Dreams*. It traced Peru's rich, devotional history with gold, and its evolution into today's hypercapitalist levels of trade and export. "Although it has remained one of the most coveted objects of civilisation throughout time, its meaning has changed for the societies that have used it," he says. "It has lost its mystical connotation and become a medium of exchange, money and power." In India, Mridula Ramesh, founder of the Sundaram Climate Institute and author of *The Climate Solution*, says she heard a shocking story from her mother, who grew up near the Kolar Gold Fields in the early 1940s. As children, she told Ramesh, she and her siblings played near open cyanide pits. About 100 km from Bengaluru, the town of Kolar was once home to the world's second-deepest gold mine. When it shut in 2001, amid shrinking profit margins, it had been active for 121 years. In a process called cyanide leaching, metal cyanide was used here, to separate gold from its ore. The resulting effluents were dumped in heaps, locally called cyanide mounds, potentially contaminating groundwater. "What worries me today is that, as artisanal mining (informal, small scale operations that use minimal machinery) picks up, those

who work at such mines and live around them may not get any substantive protections and will thus suffer the consequences that such miners face globally," Ramesh says. Meanwhile, gold remains an integral part of dowry, and this can have fatal implications. In her book *The Climate Solution*, for instance, Ramesh writes of a 2014 study in which economists from University of Virginia and Tufts University, US, examined data from more than 500 districts in India over a decade to find that whenever rains fell by a standard deviation in a district, dowry deaths rose by 8% on average in that district. Farm losses translated directly into demands for more dowry and the eventual killing of brides so that men could remarry and bring more gold home. The groom's family saw this as a form of income smoothing, the researchers found. "This is a horrifying yet impor-



tant way to understand how the rising price of gold, coupled with a changing environment, can link with personal disaster," Ramesh says.

Rudraneil Sengupta writes on India at the Paralympics

Sheetal Devi takes aim. Her left eye is shut, her right eye calm and flat on the target, the eyebrow raised just a bit. The fletching of the arrow rests on her lips, the bow is held in place by her right foot, which arches over the frame like a ballet dancer's. She releases the arrow, which buries itself into the black dot at the centre of the target with a satisfying thunk. The crowd gathered at the formal gardens of Les Invalides in Paris erupts in joy. A new sporting hero was born at the 2024 Paralympics. The France and Barcelona footballer Jules Kounde posted a clip of Devi hitting the bullseye, alongside a starry-eyed emoji.

Devi is 17. She was born with severely underdeveloped arms, the result of a rare medical condition called phocomelia. That didn't stop her from climbing trees as a child, and climbing trees gave her the phenomenal strength and agility needed to be an archer without arms. In Paris, Devi missed out on an individual medal, losing by a solitary point in her quarterfinal encounter. She did team up with 39-year-old Rakesh Kumar later, to win the team bronze. But anyone who has watched her in action knows this: there is something deeply thrilling and intensely cathartic about watching her shoot. The ease and grace with which she goes about her process, the economy of movement, the power she generates, mark her out as a future star. Devi and Kumar's bronze was one of eight medals won by Indian Paralympians that day, in an extraordinary spree for India.

Let that sink in: In roughly 10 hours of competition, on September 2, India won eight medals. That's more than the country has managed at any single edition of the Olympics. In all, India has won 15 medals at this Paralympics, including three golds. That is as many medals as India had won in its entire Paralympic history before Tokyo. The pre-Tokyo tally stood at 12; in Tokyo, India won 19.



Indian para-athletes have been on an unprecedented rise ever since, not just winning medals but doing so repeatedly. Avani Lekhara, a 22-year-old paraplegic, defended her Tokyo gold in the air-rifle range, becoming the first Indian woman to win two gold Paralympic medals. Sumit Antil, 26, that extraordinarily powerful javelin thrower, broke the world record

in his category thrice to take the Tokyo gold; in Paris, he broke his record twice more, and won gold again. Two things have stood out as I have learnt more about these young men and women. First, many were injured in road accidents. Lekhara was 11 when a car crash caused grievous spinal damage; Kumar contemplated suicide to reduce the difficulties his family faced after his spine was damaged in a car crash.

It is yesterday once more as nostalgia overwhelms the Bollywood box-office

Mohit Kumar, a 35-year-old business executive in Noida, is impulsively scrolling on a ticketing app on his mobile to find the right film to watch with his spouse over the weekend. After a point, they are stuck between Imtiaz Ali's *Laila Majnu* and Madhavan's *Rehna Hai Tere Dil Main* for the 8 p.m. show. No, this isn't time travel. The two films, released in 2018 and 2001 respectively, are screening at Noida's popular Cinepolis multiplex for four shows each. Interestingly, Akshay Kumar's *Khel Khel Mein* and John Abraham's *Vedaa*, the two latest releases have gotten only four and three shows respectively in their second week and none have a prime time slot. It is yesterday once more at the box office as a slew of old films are being re-released to keep the cinemas populated after the pandemic sent the industry into a downswing. The trend started when PVR INOX released Imtiaz's *Jab We Met* on Valentine's Day this year. According to Kamal Gianchandani, CEO of PVR INOX Pictures, they were surprised by the massive response to the film despite it being available on a streaming platform and a regular feature on satellite channels. The response led to Imtiaz's other romantic sagas, *Rockstar* (2011) and *Laila Majnu* also making a comeback on the big screen.

The latter, based on the classic love tragedy, saw long queues when it was re-released in Srinagar. Soon the word spread and the film which made just over ₹2.5 crore at the box office when it was first released in 2018, has already secured around ₹5.5 crore in its second coming with Mr. Gianchandani saying the business is as good as a new film in many centres. "Rockstar and *Laila Majnu* behaved just like brand new films at the box office. The surge showed that people continue to enjoy the theatre experience. New films continue to be the staple, they are the main food but old films are doing much better business than they used to do in the past and we want to capitalise on it," he says. As the word spread, many films belonging to different genres and sensibilities made a return. While some are accompanied by PR buzz, many are being discovered through the Bookmyshow roster. For instance, the return of *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) made news but *Saajan* (1991) was scheduled without the fanfare. The comeback of *Lakshya* (2004) was celebrated whereas *Raja Babu* (1994) made a quiet entry into the multiplex as part of a comedy festival. If PVR INOX has found a business in classic romance, Miraj Cinemas, for now, is increasing footfalls with cult crime stories. Recently, the chain released the two parts of Anurag Kashyap's *Gangs of Wasseypur* in one go. Amit Sharma Managing Director, Miraj Entertainment Limited says the film made ₹50 lakh in the first week of its re-release. "It is a healthy start considering in its first week, it was exclusively released in Miraj Cinemas."

There are multiple reasons behind the resurgence of previously released films. Mr. Sharma states that those who loved Mirzapur would want to watch the mother of such content, while Mr. Gianchandani reasons films that were slightly ahead of their time are resonating with the youth of today. But the bottom line, that most stake-



holders agree upon, is that there is a dearth of new and quality content. This year, there have only been two instances where there was more than one big release in a week. On the Eid weekend, both *Bade Miyan Chhote Miyan* and *Maidaan* delivered below par performances and among the Independence Day releases, only *Stree 2* brought cheer to the business. An old hand remarks that post-COVID the situation is such that both the audience and the makers are identifying with horror comedies, referring to the success of *Bhool Bhulaiyya-2*, *Munjya*, and *Stree 2*.

Apart from Akshay Kumar, big stars are avoiding yearly exposure. Even their younger counterparts in the big league are taking long breaks between two releases. The charm of issue-led films has faded and big-budget spectacles have been pushed back by the pandemic. Insiders say that small, content-rich films like *12th Fail* and *Laapata Ladies* have found an audience because they are backed by big production houses that have the money to generate awareness about the film. However, films like *Joramand Gulmohar* that betray an independent tone still don't fit into the matrix. The south provides a more steady supply of big-screen entertainment but as Mr. Sharma points out Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam films usually have a four-week window before they release on a streaming platform. "So, if a person misses the film in the first weekend, he is prepared to wait for the OTT release. With Hindi films, the gap is eight weeks. It is not an ideal situation but still gives a film some breathing space in theatres." In this scenario, bringing back films that didn't get a proper theatrical run when they were first released or those that are not available on YouTube and streaming platforms makes sense. For instance, the deeply layered folk horror drama *Tumbbad* is returning to turnstiles next week. So does Riteish Deshmukh and Genelia D'Souza's romance drama *Tujhe*

Meri Kasam (2003). Seasoned distributor Joginder Mahajan says that contrary to perceptions, the trend is actually driven by audiences in the age group of 15-35. In the distribution circuit, the sense is that the cinema business is cyclical and that after watching dark themes, the youth is seeking out family entertainment with a dash of 1990s nostalgia. On the revenue front, Mahajan, the general secretary of the Motion Pictures Association, fondly talks of times when films returned for several reruns. He has been testing the interest of the public in smaller centres by releasing money spinners of the 1980s and 90s with moderate success. Last week, he says, Govinda's *Aankhen* (1993) made ₹1 lakh in a week in three single theatres in Agra despite heavy rain outside and *Stree 2* in multiplexes. "We have been advising multiplexes to re-release old films but they would not listen. In corporate culture, that has taken over the film exhibition business, the personal touch doesn't matter. They have realised the value of the maxim old is gold on their own after suffering a dip in business." While the distributor's share of

revenue is 50% for new releases, it is 30% for previously released films. But Mahajan says his fraternity sees this as an opportunity to add a few more lakhs without spending anything on publicity. As tickets for older films are more modestly priced, they are proving to be a more affordable entertainment option for families. This has given multiplex chains a tactical insight into the spending pattern. A lesser-ticket price can bring more numbers.

This has already been reflected in the surge in occupancy to 60-70% on National Cinema Day where ticket prices were as low as ₹99. Recently, for the first time, PVR INOX slashed ticket rates for a weekend with tickets priced at ₹99 on Friday and ₹199 on Saturday and Sunday. Mr. Gianchandani says it is an attempt to target specific segments of society. "We want to bring in people who have not been to theatres for a long time and encourage families to come back." More families mean more food and beverage business. It goes without saying that it is the money spent during the interval that keeps the show running.

Instant stock market withdrawals now available on INDmoney

Mumbai: Money management startup INDmoney on Thursday announced UPI-based instant withdrawals for investors from their stock trading accounts on its platform. The feature enables users to withdraw their funds into their savings accounts instantly, even if they are trading on the same day, addressing a key problem for stock investors while boosting liquidity by ensuring real-time trade settlements. The feature allows investors to withdraw money up to ₹1 lakh on the same day. Investors will get instant withdrawals in their bank accounts regardless of their trading

activity. "Instant Withdrawals aligns with our commitment to simplifying financial management and ensuring our users have immediate access to their funds when they need it the most," said Ashish Kashyap, Founder of INDmoney. The 'Instant Withdrawal' service is initially made available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on trading days. In the coming months, the startup plans to extend this service to operate 24x7. In May, online brokerage platform Zerodha announced to let customers instantly withdraw up to ₹1 lakh daily between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., at no additional cost.

Vijayawada floods: surviving the wrath of 'sorrow'

Hari Priya, in her night dress, anxiously sobs in silence as she sits with her toddler in her arms on the footpath of a flyover overrun by a crowd, chaos, and despair. With her phone running out of battery, she waits there helpless in the hope of finding her husband and elder daughter, who got separated in the swarm of flood victims that thronged the place to grab water food packets being distributed at a truck. On seeing her, Nagesh, who was carrying a sackful of buttermilk packets, stops to give her a few packets. He says his family and neighbours in Ajith Singh Nagar could not come out as the roads were inundated by the flood water. "I am taking the buttermilk to give it to whoever needs it in my colony," he says. September 2, 2024, was just another Monday for most people in Vijayawada, the capital region of Andhra Pradesh. The markets bustled as people who had been cooped inside their houses for two days due to heavy rain that lashed the city on Friday and Saturday came to buy essentials. Most parts of the city were getting back to normal.

Only 7 km away, the situation was anything but normal. From 7.30 a.m. onwards, hundreds gathered around a truck, where food, milk and water were distributed for free, on the Ajith Singh Nagar flyover that connected the submerged colonies to the other parts of the city. Most of them had nothing to eat or drink for the past 24 hours. "I tried to get a food packet but in vain. The men who stood at the front managed to grab every food packet thrown at us by a volunteer from the truck; I could only get my hands on just two packets of buttermilk," says Hari Priya, a daily wagger, sweating despite the cold weather. Carrying a toddler in one hand and a stick in another, she waded through more than waist-deep water to reach the flyover from her house in Ajith Singh Nagar, which was inundated. "There is no food at home for the children and no drinking water. When we learned that food was being distributed here, we had to dare to step out," she says. "We do not have any cash or jewellery with us. We are only worried about lives," says Hari Priya who lives in a small rented room with nothing but a cot and cooking essentials. Nagesh, on the other hand, says his loss is in the tune of lakhs as his three bikes, a car, furniture, cash, jewellery, and appliances got damaged by the flood fury. "I don't know who will pay me for my loss. But people at my place need food and drinking water first," he says. On the flyover, strewn with spilt rice, milk, slippers, plastic covers, and water bottles, people, most barefoot and in their night dresses, ran helter-skelter for food, water, and medical help. Pregnant women, women who had just had delivery, children, and elderly persons walked from the inundated end of the flyover to the other, around a kilometre, for help. While some reached there by boats deployed by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the others waded through waterlogged roads on foot. Never-seen-before devastation With the deluge unleashing a never-seen-before devastation on the colonies built on the

flood plains of Budameru in Vijayawada, the Andhra Pradesh government immediately sent 22 lakh food packets to be distributed to people in flood-hit colonies on September 3. On September 4, they reached around 18 lakh food packets. While parts of the Central Assembly constituency in Circle 2 of the city were the worst hit, more than 50% of the nearly 4 lakh people living in the 14 divisions were victimised. The total number of people affected in the city, including some from the West constituency, is estimated to be nearly 3 lakh. As many as 32 people are estimates to have died so far.

Chief Minister responds Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and other Ministers have visited the affected places. "I want to reach every person (affected). Justice has to be done for everyone. The first priority for us is to give food to everybody. For this, we are going to operate tractors and deploy volunteers." Former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and leaders of other opposition parties also visited the affected places and pledged their support to the people there. Two days of extremely heavy rain (300 mm) in 36 hours in the city and surrounding areas of the district did more damage than inundating the roads—it increased water levels in streams and rivers. "Until 8.30 a.m. on Sunday, there was no water outside. My husband was to leave for Chennai. The train was at 10.45 a.m., but within 15 minutes, the water level reached two feet high. And within an hour or two, there was water six feet high around the house," Sridevi, an accounts manager at a private firm in Hanuman Junction, recalls. Her family, which has lived in Andhra Prabha Colony since 1986, says floods are not new to them. "Our house is built on an elevated area. But, still, water came in," she says. An official from the Irrigation department, who spoke on condition of anonymity, says it was the first time the city had been flooded since 2009. Yet, in 2009, the damage was not this great. "The discharge at the Velagaleru regulator, built on Budameru rivulet, was 26,000-27,000 cusecs as of August 31 evening. Of them, 15,000 cusecs were let into the Budameru Diversion Channel (BDC), and the remaining were let into the original course," the official says. Rains in Budameru catchment areas, such as Khammam in Telangana, added to the problem, as streams originating in these places joined the surging waters of the Budameru rivulet, which passes through the heart of Vijayawada, he adds. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director S. Stella, extremely heavy rainfall, floods, heat waves and thunderstorms are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

Relief operations After the flood water was discharged through the regulator on Saturday (August 31, 2024), inundation of the colonies built close to the BDC or the original course on the flood plain, such as New and Old Rajarajeswari Peta, Vambay Colony, YSR Colony, Ajith Singh Nagar, Payakapuram and Bhavanipuram, among other areas of the city, were inundated by



Sunday afternoon. The NDRF personnel helped thousands of stranded people by distributing food and medicines. "We have made countless trips to the flooded areas and rescued many pregnant women, elderly, livestock and pets," said a group of personnel while taking a rest on the bus. However, many decried that the NDRF boats did not reach the smaller lanes.

To tackle this problem, the State government roped officials from the AP FiberNet to use drones to deliver food to places the boats could not reach. By Tuesday evening, 40 drones had made nearly 150 trips, carrying seven to eight boxes of food packets a trip. One of the worst-hit areas is YSR Colony, where 40,000 people live in apartments provided by the government. "While we had provisions, our neighbours in the same apartment received relief material right from Sunday. However, those at the back could not, since the boats could not reach them," says Parameswar, an auto driver. "We saw many boats approaching our lanes, but none came to our house. There was a lot of confusion. The officials also did not know where to go or whom to help. We had to wait 10 hours to get my parents and in-laws a boat. We had all the provisions, but there was no water supply due to a power cut. That is why we had to move out," Sridevi says. At such a time of despondency, many Good Samaritans rose to the occasion and helped the victims by distributing free water, buttermilk, and other items. "This is my city. I could not look away when the place I call my home was suffering," says Siva Prasad, a samosa vendor who spent ₹2,000 every day to buy water for people.

Most of the inundated areas are home to daily wagers and low-income people. The government built many apartments in the new RR Peta to rehabilitate the homeless and those from financially weaker backgrounds. Until September 4, people in Old and New RR Peta were yet to receive help, said Hero Sankar, trapped in an apartment, along with 200 others, in the New RR Peta over a phone call. "We have run out of provisions, and there is no water supply," he said, adding that they were using floodwater in washrooms and boiled tank water to drink. Sankar, now a vendor, used to live near the Krishna river bank

until 2009. Then, he was rehabilitated to this colony. "My three grandchildren, a 3-month-old, a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old, are alone with their mother. I was not allowed to go there. I was told the water level was too high to wade through. I cannot help but wait here for help to come," said Durga Bhavani, the maid who left the children at home to leave for work at Chitti Nagar. Like Durga Bhavani, many daily wage workers sat outside restaurants and shops at the foot of the flyover, waiting for their loved ones. They had to spend the night on the restaurant's stairs. "Floods are not new. But the severity has increased," says Mruthyanjaya Rao, an environmental activist who has studied Kolleru Lake for years. He says the illegal encroachments on the flood basins and Kolleru are to be blamed for the floods. Sorrow of Vijayawada Budameru, originating in the NTR district, is one of the feeder rivers for the Kolleru Lake, a Ramsar site. It courses through Gannavaram, Gudivada, and Kaikuluru before joining the Kolleru Lake, where illegal fish tanks have come up in thousands of hectares. "Now, what seems to have happened is that the flood water, which surged through these places, entered the city, and its flow was obstructed due to unauthorised apartments on its way, leading to the slowing down of the flow and thereby inundating the colonies. If the path were clear in Vijayawada, the flow would have been obstructed similarly by fish tanks. In the latter case, the Kolleru would have submerged," he explained. Budameru has acquired the title of 'Sorrow of Vijayawada' because it is not the first time that it has caused misery to people. However, officials have admitted that it was the first time after 2009 that a devastation of such a huge scale has occurred. Encroachments, which have been happening since the 1960s, have changed the course of drains and rivulets, inundating habitations on their way. As the chaos of the day silences into despair, 74-year-old tea seller Nageswar Rao, who has been living in Ramakrishnapuram on the banks of Budameru for decades, worries how he can recover the loss of over ₹1 lakh he incurred after his house got washed away in the floods. "I will go back to my house after water recedes. It is only here that I can afford the rents," he says.