

## Over 20 lakh acres of crops damaged in Telangana

Hyderabad: The recent spell of heavy rains have wreaked havoc in Telangana, causing severe damage to crops across the State. Though the initial estimates pegged the crop loss in around 4.15 lakh acres, sources said crops in over 20 lakh acres got destroyed due to the heavy rains and that the final figures would be announced only after completing the enumeration. Officials fear a significant decline in crop production during this season.

Among the hardest-hit areas are Mahabubabad, Mulugu, Khammam, Nalgonda, Nagarkurnool, Mahabubnagar, Hanamkonda, Bhadradi Kothagudem and Jangaon districts. The initial assessments indicate that the most significant losses are in paddy, cotton, and maize crops, with cotton facing a high risk as it was in the flowering stage, and standing water in the fields could lead to the plants turning red and drying out.

Agricultural scientists warn that the situation could worsen if the rains persist, especially for cotton cultivated across nearly 42.6 lakh acres in the State. The cotton cultivation dropped severely by nearly eight lakh acres in the State during the current Vanakalam (Kharif) season against normal sown area of 50.4 lakh acres. Officials also fear a significant decline in crop production during this season. Agricultural operations already took a severe beating with sowing operations taken up in only 1.1 crore acres against the season's normal sown area of 1.29 crore acres in Telangana. Of this, paddy



was being cultivated in about 48 lakh acres and cotton in 42.6 lakh acres. With the latest heavy rains, the officials said both these crops were likely to witness a fall in crop production. The incessant downpour caused widespread concern among farmers, with 85,323 farmers already reporting

significant losses across the State. Khammam district alone saw 46,374 farmers affected, followed by Mahabubabad with 18,089 and Suryapet with 9,227. Due to the adverse weather conditions and waterlogging, a majority of crops including paddy, cotton, maize, soybean, sorghum

and millets were facing an increased threat of pests which could affect the production further. The Agriculture department is assessing the damage, with a full report expected soon to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent of the losses.

## Man accused of black magic, lynched in Medak

Medak: In a shocking incident, a group of villagers lynched a man and thrashed two women on suspicion of performing black magic at Gollagudem village in Tekmal mandal on Monday late night.

Ramulu (58), a resident of Etigadda Mandapur in Kulcharam mandal, and the two women, Burujukinda Gangavva, a resident of Gollagudem, and Balamani, a resident of Bachepally village in Nizampet, are close relatives.

However, the villagers picked up an argument with the three of them accusing them of placing lemons at different places in the village on Monday night.

In a fit of rage, the villagers attacked

them indiscriminately with sticks and rocks. As none of the villagers came to their rescue, Ramulu succumbed to the injuries and died on the spot, while the two women sustained serious injuries. They were rushed to the government hospital in Jogipet for treatment.

Medak DSP Prasanna Kumar visited the place and asked the villagers not to believe in black magic.

He warned them that they would initiate stern action against the people who were spreading such rumours. The Tekmal police registered a case and the efforts were on to identify Ramulu's killers. Further investigation is underway.



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# Politicians, industrialists, film stars — in Hyderabad, long arm of the Hydra causes a stir

A sports village belonging to the brother of a former Congress Union minister, several structures built by a leading industrialist, and constructions by leaders across the political spectrum. These are among several “illegal” buildings that have been demolished by the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Monitoring and Protection Agency – known popularly as Hydra – in the two months of the body’s existence. Set up in July by the ruling Congress government to replace the Enforcement, Vigilance and Disaster Management wing of the government, Hydra is mandated to tackle illegal encroachment on water bodies in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits and surrounding areas. Since its formation, the body has been on a demolition spree, tearing down structures belonging not only to rival parties like the BRS, the BJP and the AIMIM, but also some Congress leaders such as Pallam Anand, brother of former Union Minister MM Pallam Raju. According to officials, from June 27 to August 24, Hydra razed 166 illegal structures and recovered 44 acres of encroached lake land.

For instance, on August 18, two buildings and several other structures at Anand’s luxury sports village Oro and several permanent and temporary structures belonging to industrialist G V Bhasker Rao, chairman and MD of Kaveri Seeds Co Ltd and ex-member of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, were demolished on the grounds that they were built on the fragile full tank level (FTL) area and buffer zone of Gandipet lake. While the FTL is the highest level that water in a water body can reach, a buffer zone is the protected area around this that’s kept clear of any development. Properties belonging to the BJP’s executive committee member C Sunil Reddy, who unsuccessfully contested last year’s Telangana assembly election from Manthani, were also demolished around Gandipet lake.

Bulldozers also brought down four structures belonging to AIMIM Bahadurpura MLA Mohammed Mubeen, five other constructions belonging to AIMIM MLC Mirza Rahmat Baig, and at least 16 temporary sheds that supporters of Khairatabad Congress MLA Danam Nagender had allegedly built in a public park at Nandagiri Hills locality of Jubilee Hills. Besides these, authorities also took down 54 temporary structures that BRS leader Ratnakaram Sai Raju had allegedly built in the FTL and buffer zones of Chintal Lake in Gajularamaram village. According to authorities, this freed up 3.5 acres of lake land.

The exercise isn’t limited to Hyderabad alone. According to sources, BRS leader and Jangaon MLA Palla Rajeshwar Reddy has received a notice following a police complaint from the state’s irrigation department that some educational institutions he runs have encroached on Nadam lake in Medchal-Malkajgiri district. Meanwhile, a farmhouse taken on lease by BRS working president and former minister KT Rama Rao in the catchment area of Himayat Sagar and Osman Sagar in Ranga Reddy district could also face demolition, officials said. Hydra officials claim that while in some cases, the alleged encroach-

ers built permanent facilities such as restaurants and amusement facilities, others erected temporary structures for personal use. On its part, the government claims that the drive is only aimed at clearing encroachments in FTL areas and buffer zones around Hyderabad’s lakes. “There is no partiality or targeting in this exercise. Whoever has encroached will face the long arm of Hydra,” Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka told The Indian Express. But the Opposition claims that leaders are being selectively targeted. In a post on X last week, BRS spokesperson Manne Krishank alleged that buildings that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy’s brother Anumula Tirupathi Reddy owns in Hyderabad’s Durgam Cheruvu also stands in the FTL zone. “Congress MLA Vivek Venkatswamy and Revenue minister Ponguleti Sreenivas Reddy own farmhouses near lakes, will they be demolished too?” his post asked. With questions being raised, the Revanth Reddy government on Wednesday and Thursday issued notices to the CM’s brother, A Tirupathi Reddy, over properties he owns near the Durgam Cheruvu lake in Madhapur in Cyberabad area. The demolition notices were issued by Revenue department officers to several property owners, including Tirupathi Reddy’s residence and offices located in the Madhapur Amar Cooperative Society. The notices stated that the structures must be removed within a month. At least six



other residential societies and commercial areas abutting the lake have been issued notices. The notices were issued under the Telangana Water, Land and Trees Act. The CM’s brother, in a statement, said that when he had purchased the properties in 2015, he was unaware that it was on protected lake land. “If the government finds that my properties are in the FTL, I have no objection to authorities demolishing them. I will cooperate,” he said. Meanwhile, AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi, whose Fatima Owaisi College at Bandlaguda too has come under fire for alleged violations,

has claimed that government buildings such as GHMC’s headquarters also stand in the FTL zone. “Would the government demolish these too?” he asked last week. Despite the criticism, Hydra’s actions have found support among activists and environmental protection groups, with several city residents participating in a “Save Lakes, Save Lives” around Gandipet lake last weekend. “After the demolition of the N-Convention centre, we have started receiving dozens of complaints about encroachments of lakes and ponds from ordinary people,” one Hydra official said.

## ‘India is an economic powerhouse, time has come to see it more active in Latin America’: Chile Foreign Minister

On a three-day visit to India, Chile’s Foreign Minister Alberto van Klaveren held a meeting with External Affairs minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday and discussed bilateral cooperation in trade and investment, agriculture, critical minerals, defence and space among other issues. In an interview with Shubhajit Roy, van Klaveren talks about the possible investment opportunities for India in lithium and copper deposits in Chile, exports of mangoes and medicines from India, balancing between China and other powers, and India’s role in the Russia-Ukraine war. Edited excerpts: I had not had the opportunity to meet him before, so obviously, I was very impressed by his personality, and we had a very good meeting, concentrating on bilateral issues. We expressed our interest in strengthening ties with India. And we also took notice of India’s interest to strengthen relations, not only with Chile but also to mark its presence in Latin America in general. Areas of cooperation between India and Chile

India is a very attractive and relevant market for Chile. We are already increasing our trade with India, especially in two sectors — which are very characteristic of our economy — minerals, especially copper, and agriculture. We are exporting several agricultural products to India, especially nuts, wines and some other agricultural products. But we want to increase the variety of our products in India. We also had

a meeting with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and we expressed our interest in deepening our commercial ties with India. With the External Affairs Minister, we also talked about cultural exchanges, defence relations, science and technology, and space. So it’s a variety of issues which we touched upon.

We explained our national strategy for lithium, which was adopted last year, and we also explained the possibilities for Indian investments in the lithium sector, especially participating in tenders of the new lithium deposits, which are being opened by the government. Obviously India expressed interest in lithium, which is considered a critical mineral, and which also plays a very important role in terms of the plans for electromobility in India and also for the fabrication of EVs (electric vehicles), especially smaller EVs. I think that’s also an area in which both countries can cooperate much more. Our copper deposits are open for investment. So there is a possibility of Indian companies participating in the tenders, which are being presented by the government. Agriculture cooperation and India’s presence in Chile’s medicine market

We talked about the possibility of cooperation in the agricultural sector. Chile is advanced in some areas in agriculture and those are possible areas of cooperation between both countries. India exports

specially manufactured products and medicines. There is a possibility of expanding the Indian presence in the medicine market in Chile. There are also some joint ventures in the pharmaceutical sector between the Indian and Chilean companies. India could expand its presence in terms of medicines in our market as part of trade negotiation. So, on one hand, we could expand our agricultural offer in India, and on the other hand, India could also win from better market access for its medicines. And from the Chilean side, the products we are looking at, beyond nuts and wine, are fruits in general. We have the advantage of being an off-season exporter because of the difference between our seasons — we are in the southern hemisphere. So there are several fruits which could be exported... Also from India to Chile, mango, for instance, and other more tropical products which are not produced in our country (can be exported).

On defence cooperation

There is interest. There is a very dynamic defence industry in India, and probably more can be done to promote the Indian defence industry in Chile. We invited our Indian colleagues to promote the participation of the Indian defence industry in the different defence fairs, which take place in Chile, and also to develop a more direct relationship between our ministries of defence.

# Youth for Anti-Corruption Honors Honest Government Officials in Telangana



The Youth for Anti-Corruption, a renowned NGO working towards a corruption-free society in the Telugu states for the past fourteen years, recently organized an event to honor honest government officials who have worked diligently and with integrity. The program, held at Haritha Plaza in Begumpet, Hyderabad, was chaired by Youth for Anti-Corruption Organization Founder Rajendra Palnati and attended by several eminent guests, including former CBI JD Lakshminarayana, former IAS Akunuri Murali, renowned music director RP Patnaik, Chanchalguda Jail Superintendent Shivakumar Goud, and former MLA Bakkani Narsimhulu.

During the event, former CBI JD Lakshminarayana emphasized the need for political and election reforms to eradicate corruption, stating, "If politics improves, society improves. Election reform and political reforms should be brought. Only then can corruption be eradicated." He also stressed the importance of cultivating honesty from an early age, saying, "Honesty should be cultivated in school, home and temple." Akunuri Murali, a former

IAS officer, highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in the government, urging citizens to question corruption and hold authorities accountable. "Governments should make every information available to the public," he said.

Music director RP Patnaik commended the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization's efforts, stating that it is difficult to find genuinely honest people in government departments, and the organization's recognition of such individuals is highly commendable. Chanchalguda Jail Superintendent Shivakumar Goud appreciated the organization's thoughtful and innovative programs, saying, "To make a good society, we need good people. Good people should have recognition, and the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization is giving that recognition." During the event, the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization honored 16 honest government officials from various departments, including the Telangana Agriculture University Vice Chancellor, R&B Chief, retired Joint Collector, Superintendent General Hospital, and others. 10 officers names and designations:



nation:

V. Praveen Rao- Ex vice chancellor, Telangana Agriculture University, Dr. Ramakisha - Govt Medical College Principal. M. Madhav Reddy - Retired GM at Bank of Baroda, A. Nagendra -Retired Joint Collector, B. Karuna - AO Agriculture, Amresh Kumar -Retired ADA, Jaswanth Kumar - Retired R & B chief engineer, Y. SrinivasRao - Retired Deputy Director, Ashok - ADE Hyderabad and GVS Prasad - Retired Section Officer at Consumer Forum." Youth for Anti-Corruption organi-

zation is always ahead for a good change in the society," said Rajendra Palnati, the Founder of YAC. "We have collected the details of the officers who have worked ethically and honestly from the last three to four months across the state of Telangana and honored them with the name of Atmiya Satkaram." The event was attended by a diverse group of participants, including Dr. Sravanti, Dr. Snigdha, Lakshmikala, YAC Media Secretary Jayaram, and others, who all contributed to the success of the program.

# IC 814 web series row: Row over names of hijackers in Netflix series “The Kandahar Hijack”



Netflix's latest web series IC 814: The Kandhar Hijack flew into a patch of turbulence early this week when several social media users expressed outrage over the names of the four hijackers in the critically-acclaimed series. Responding to the outrage, the Information & Broadcasting Ministry summoned Monika Shergill, the content chief of the OTT platform. A public interest litigation has also been filed before the Delhi High Court by the president of an outfit called 'Hindu Sena'. The plea alleged that the series distorts the religious identities of the hijackers by naming two of the five hijackers as Bhola and Shankar and sought revocation of the certification of the series. Directed by Anubhav Sinha, the six-episode series depicts the hijacking of IC-814 flight on December 24, 1999, moments after it took off from Kathmandu for Delhi. The Airbus 300 was diverted to Amritsar, Lahore, Dubai, and finally to Kandahar in Afghanistan, which was under Taliban control. After six days of intense negotiations, the hijack culminated with the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government releasing three dreaded terrorists, Masood Azhar, Omar Saeed Sheikh, and Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar, in exchange for the safety of the passengers and crew on board.

The series is partly based on Flight To Fear, a first-hand account of the events by the pilot of the plane Captain Devi Sharan that he wrote with journalist Srinjoy Chowdhury. A disclaimer describes it as a work of fiction set against the backdrop of certain real-life events. The contention over the names of the hijackers emanates from

the creative liberty taken by the makers of the series not to explicitly make it clear that the terrorists used codenames during the hijack and see it as a piece of information that goes without saying.

Several journalistic accounts of the period clarify that the hijackers used aliases. They cite a press release of the Union Home Ministry issued on January 6, 2000, that disclosed the names of the hijackers as Ibrahim Athar, Shahid Akhtar Sayeed, Sunny Ahmed Qazi, Mistri Zahoor Ibrahim, and Shakir and confirmed the aliases used by them. "To the passengers of the hijacked plane these hijackers came to be known respectively as (1) Chief, (2) Doctor, (3) Burger, (4) Bhola, and (5) Shankar, the names by which the hijackers invariably addressed one another," the press release read. It seems the distinction is clear to some of those outraged and they appear more concerned about the future when the details of the hijack fade away from public memory. BJP leader Amit Malviya wrote on X, "The hijackers of IC-814 were dreaded terrorists, who acquired aliases to hide their Muslim identities. Filmmaker Anubhav Sinha, legitimised their criminal intent, by furthering their non-Muslim names. Result? Decades later, people will think Hindus hijacked IC-814." Though the series doesn't explicitly spell out that Bhola and Shankar are code names, it does unmask Chief when the negotiation threatens to hit a dead end. In a post on X, journalist Neelesh Misra, who also penned a book on the subject, said Chief was the

brother of Masood Azhar. In the context of the narrative, Bhola and Shankar are mi-

nor players and are addressed by their code names only once in six episodes.

## DGP lauds police for rescuing Chenchu tribe members in Dindi Mandal

Hyderabad: Director General of Police (DGP) Telangana, Dr. Jitender commended police personnel in Nalgonda, Nagarkurnool districts, who along with the Fire department successfully rescued ten Chenchu tribe members of Gonaboinapally village, Dindi mandal who were stranded in the floodwaters of the Dindi River.

The stranded members of Chenchu tribe, all residents of Gonamoni Pally village in Dindi Mandal, were trapped at Dindi canal due to rising water levels caused by heavy rains. The prompt action by the authorities ensured the safe evacuation of all those affected with the help of fishermen and their boats. The collective efforts of the police and fire department teams have been widely appreciated, demonstrating their commitment to ensuring the safety of all citizens during this challenging monsoon season, said Dr. Jitender.

The DGP appreciated the Medak district Quick Response Team (QRT) police, along with village youth, who risked their lives to rescue a person swept away by flood waters. This incident occurred near



the Gunduvagu stream under the Tekmal police station limits of Medak district.

As the stream was overflowing, Ramavath Nandu was trying to cross a bridge near the Gunduvagu stream under Tekmal police station limits when he was swept away by the water. As he was being swept away, he managed to hold onto a rock in the stream. Noticing this, Medak district QRT district member Home Guard Mahesh and two other youth reached the middle of the culvert with the help of a rope and successfully rescued the man from the floodwaters using the rope.

# Do AI agents foretell the next wave of autonomy or liability? | Analysis

Assistants based on artificial intelligence (AI), such as Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa, have been around for more than a decade. An AI assistant can be defined in many ways. According to an April 2024 report, Google DeepMind defines "an AI assistant ... as an artificial agent with a natural language interface, the function of which is to plan and execute sequences of actions on the user's behalf across one or more domains and in line with the user's expectations".

What are AI agents?

The next-generation AI assistants are called AI agents (AIA) and are set to surpass their predecessors in ability as well as efficiency. AIAs can be broadly classified into three categories. Reactive agents are first-generation AI agents developed to respond to specific inputs or commands. They follow predefined rules and perform tasks limited in scope as they can't learn anything new and lack the ability to adapt. Learning agents were enabled by machine learning, which enabled them to learn from experience. They have better abilities, such as pattern detection and data analysis, and can improve their performance over time. Finally, cognitive agents can reason, analyse, and plan. They have cognitive skills because they can learn from their environment, and adapt and make decisions based on algorithms and their own 'knowledge'. These agents use techniques including natural language processing, computer vision, and deep learning to perform tasks. The present generation of AIAs are cognitive agents. AIAs can perform multiple functions as users' agents or autonomously (that is without instructions or user intervention). They can be integrated with the 'internet of things', allowing them to connect with multiple devices and their sensors and collect and analyse data in real-time.

Cognitive AIAs can also 'understand' human speech and language and with this skill can perform tasks that require multiple proficiencies. For example, they can plan a trip after listening in on a user's phone calls and reading their emails, understanding their preferences, and parsing their previous travel experiences. Recently, a Bengaluru-based startup launched an AIA that could autonomously handle items in a warehouse. It receives inputs as voice commands and responds with real-time decisions. Companies and research facilities have also deployed AIAs to drive autonomous vehicles and to guide financial investments and treatment plans. A tool called Orby AI automates repetitive tasks while 4149 AI collaborates with humans inside apps like Slack and Notion to improve their productivity. In sum, cognitive AIAs are not limited to their training data, are able to acquire new knowledge without human intervention, and can integrate with other systems. In turn, they enable personalisation by tailoring their responses to users' preferences and needs. But in doing so, cognitive AIAs also pose many risks.

Challenges posed by AIAs In particular, cognitive AIAs highlight concerns over accountability, liability, and responsibility. Humans' increasing reliance on AIAs may

also render them more vulnerable. For example, when an AIA plans a user's travel, it accesses and digests vast amounts of information about the user's plans, schedule, and financial instruments. In turn, the companies that build and offer such AIAs to users must explicitly protect users' privacy. Since AIAs can learn and adapt, they can also develop and use hindsight. Such hindsight might remain sensitive to users' needs as well as moral principles; prioritise users' safety; and be able to navigate the responsibility to be of help without getting in the way of human autonomy and creativity. Developers must also incorporate mechanisms that protect the AIAs from being manipulated by malevolent actors, or at least keep the manipulated AIAs' effects from affecting users' data. On agency and liability

Even as people adopt AIAs to help with more and more tasks, many unresolved legal and ethical issues persist. We obviously need better safety measures but they alone won't suffice. Since AIAs can be manipulated for malicious purposes, we need to constantly monitor them so they don't harm the user, which in turn raises important questions about accountability that law and regulations must answer. For example, in the absence of a legal recognition of AI's personhood, the law won't admit AIAs' intentions as being distinct from the user's intentions. In fact, while we call them "agents", AIAs possess no agency in the eye of the law. However it's possible to argue that their liability lies with its maker or a corresponding service provider. For example, earlier this year, a court held that Air Canada was liable after a Canadian



man sued the airline for being misled by a chatbot on the airline's website about air fares. Similarly, Yale University legal scholars Ian Ayres and Jack Balkin argued in a June 2024 article, "Holding AI agents to objective standards of behaviour in turn means holding the people and organisations that implement these technologies to standards of liability and reasonable care. A legal regulation of AI may require companies to internalise the costs of the risks they impose on society."

Similarly, Catrin Misselhorn, who studies the philosophy of AI at the University of Gottingen, contended in a 2022 book that it's unfair to expect AIA users to assume all the responsibility for an AIA's misdeeds and that part of the blame lies with the pro-

grammers whose algorithms guided the AIA's decisions. Even more fundamentally, Erez Firt, of the University of Haifa and Israel Institute of Technology, wrote in a February 2024 paper that even 'artificial moral agents' with sufficient autonomy and an understanding of human morals shouldn't be expected to develop human morals themselves. Taken together, it should be clear that in many ways the issues surrounding the regulation of AIAs can't be separated from those surrounding the regulation of AI itself. With AIAs being developed for more labour-intensive sectors, we need a nuanced approach to address responsibility and liability on their part. Neethu Rajam is associate professor of intellectual property and

## The churn in Bangladesh

It is barely a month since Sheikh Hasina resigned as Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The country has since experienced considerable flux, as the interim government settling in after the dramatic ejection of a powerful leader. Amid reports of attacks on minorities, chief adviser to the interim government Muhammad Yunus told the nation in a recent televised address, that citizens of Bangladesh will not be discriminated against, based on their religion or political beliefs. Some civil society groups within Bangladesh have been urging foreign, especially Indian, media to refrain from exaggerating and sensationalising sporadic instances of such attacks, contending it could make religious minorities more vulnerable.

Our correspondent Kallol Bhattacharjee, who travelled to Dhaka to report on the evolving developments and political contours, reported on the Janmashtami festival being celebrated in crisis-hit Bangladesh. The lifting of the ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, and "all associated organizations" was another significant development last week.

Our colleague spoke to prominent political actors and policy experts whose views help us better appreciate expecta-

tions in the country. In an interview to The Hindu, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, general secretary of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), said India should extradite former PM Hasina. "Now we need to re-start relation with India at a fast pace. We always wanted a functional relationship with India," he said, adding: "Unfortunately, there has been no direct communication from the Indian side so far." Policy analyst Major General A.N.M. Muniruzzaman (Retd.), who heads the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), said India must engage with all sides in Bangladesh. Just as the country grapples with major political shifts, it witnessed a grave human tragedy in a fire that began on August 25 in one of the largest tyre factories of Bangladesh. Located in the industrial township of Narayanganj near Dhaka, the Gazi auto tyre factory of Rupshi, owned by Golam Dastgir Gazi, chairman of the once powerful Gazi group, is well known in the area, writes Kallol Bhattacharjee in this spot report.

Neighbourhood matters

Polls in Sri Lanka: Three weeks ahead of Sri Lanka's crucial election National Security Adviser Ajit K. Doval met prominent Presidential aspirants, apart from political leaders representing the island

nation's Tamil and Muslim minorities in Colombo. As part of our pre-election ground reports from different parts of the island, we spoke to Sri Lanka's Malaiyaha (hill country) Tamils, whose Indian ancestors were brought to the island by the British two centuries ago. What are their poll aspirations? Ties with Pakistan: More than 60% of Indians and more than half of all Pakistanis surveyed believe the two countries cannot have friendly relations in this decade, says a new survey by the Centre for Policy Research (CPR)-C Voter that looks at the attitudes of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis on a number of political, economic and foreign policy issues, Suhasini Haidar reports. As far as Pakistan is concerned, the age of "uninterrupted dialogue" has ended, said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at a recent book launch, sharing New Delhi's view of ties at the moment. The government also confirmed last week the receipt of an invitation from Pakistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Heads of Government meeting in Islamabad on October 15-16. However, the Ministry of External Affairs said it did not have a decision yet on whether India would participate and at what level that would be. Top 5 stories we are reading this week: 1. Retired diplomat T.S. Tirumurti writes on India's neighbourhood watch, past and present

# A citizen in waiting

'Thanal', meaning shade, is a non-descript house in the suburban Ukkas Motta, located about eight km from Thalassery in Kerala's Kannur district. Rasheeda Bano, a 52-year-old woman, has lived there since 2008 and is painfully aware of the mischievous tag it carries as 'Pakistani house'. Her efforts to get rid of it have not borne fruit yet; she's still fighting for Indian citizenship. Bano was born in 1972 in Karachi, to parents of Kerala origin, who were small-time tobacco and pan masala vendors. After completing her Plus Two, she married a Malayali trader Mohammed Maroof, who was settled in Pakistan. But the family struggled with financial instability, prompting them to sell their property and move to Kerala in 2008.

Her battle to secure Indian citizenship for herself and her six children began soon after her arrival. The onus was entirely on her to earn citizenship for her and six of her children, four daughters and two sons, as her husband left for Dubai soon after they arrived in Kerala. "I never imagined that getting citizenship was such a tormenting task. And I'm fighting for it all alone, living all the while on an extended visa. More than 20 visits made to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi to secure multiple clearances, countless paperwork, and verifications by the local police have all put me in distress," says Bano, clutching three of her grandchildren. While her three older children — Afshan, Sadiya and Kasim — secured Indian citizenship with relative ease as she was able to collect and submit all necessary documents in a timebound manner, her younger daughters, 28-year-old Sumaira and 26-year-old Mariam, faced significant challenges, resulting in a prolonged legal fight. In July 2024, after a four-year legal battle, the Kerala High Court directed the Union government to grant them citizenship. "But there is no end in sight for my plight as I am continuing with the procedures again to secure citizenship for me and my youngest son Ismail," she says. The years of relentless struggle haven't diminished her zeal. Bano is determined to attend communicative English classes to improve her language skills so that she can interact fluently with officials. She took a few short-term courses in counselling and psychology as well to improve her mental abilities. Ever since her arrival at Ukkas Motta, she has been doing sundry jobs like tailoring and catering to make a living. All her children except Ismail, 22, are married off. Bano says she scrimped and saved money to raise the children and fight the cases. Amidst social ostracism and criticism came the High Court order as a beacon of hope. The court asked the Centre to grant Sumaira and Mariam citizenship considering the no-objection certificate issued by the Pakistani authorities. While the Centre had decided to grant them registration as citizens under the Citizenship Act of 1955, the family failed to secure renunciation certificates from the Pakistan government. "Although we approached the Pakistan High Commission multiple times, they rejected our application in the absence of original passports. We had surrendered the passports when the two children were minors. As the Pakistani authorities could not trace the old documents, they refused to give renunciation certificates," recounts Bano. The order passed by Justice T.R. Ravi came as a



huge relief to the struggling family. The court observed that the requirement for renunciation certificates could only be treated as a rule of evidence and not as a substantive requirement. The court also found that the other documents submitted by the petitioners were sufficient to show that they had renounced their Pakistani citizenship. The Centre was, therefore, asked to issue orders for registration of their citizenship in three months.

"We are happy that our mother's determined fight has finally succeeded. You cannot imagine our excitement in waiting for the original citizenship certificate in the wake of the favourable court order," say Sumaira and Mariam, who faced several roadblocks in continuing their education upon the family's arrival in India. They are hopeful that their youngest brother Ismail will also get citizenship sooner than later. Mariam, who has resumed her degree course, recalls that the family was going through social isolation and insults on account of the delay in securing citizenship. "Our marriages were delayed too because of the Pakistani label and the treatment as 'anti-nationals'. We won only because of the steadfast fight of our mother. The struggle is worth being made into a film," she adds. Sumaira, too, attests to her mother's singular focus in her fight for justice. She says people awaiting citizenship now seek Bano's counsel. "We had no steady income for survival. She did sundry jobs to raise the money for all expenses," she says. Bano says the amendment to some old rules and the addition of rigid regulations delayed the process of citizenship for Sumaira and Mariam. She feels

that there should be a special help desk at district Collectorates to facilitate such services. Bano says it's the absence of a birth certificate that's holding up her own citizenship application "although it was approved provisionally several years ago". It is also required under the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 for securing citizenship for Ismail, who's now pursuing MBA in distance education mode, she maintains. Bano's 78-year-old mother is a kidney patient who needs dialysis every week. "One of my grandchildren is autistic who has also undergone liver transplant. It took several years for my children to familiarise with Indian culture after their arrival from Pakistan. We are in the middle of extreme crises but the fight for proving our identity as Indians must move on for survival in this land," she affirms. Lack of government assistance or permission to own property is the biggest challenge faced by Bano. The house where she resides belongs to one of her relatives. Any property transaction will be possible only on production of the citizenship certificate. The family survives on the modest income from a textile shop run by Bano's son Kasim at Nadapuram, some 25 km away. "My biggest relief is that I have never faced any humiliating experience from any police officers. They were all compassionate after seeing my genuine struggle along with my children," says Bano, going on to name a few who stood by her. But she can't say the same about the officials at the Pakistani mission who remained apathetic. M. Sasindran, the lawyer who appeared for the family at the Kerala High Court, says the court understood that it was impossible for Bano's daughters to present citizenship

renunciation certificates from Pakistan. "The court found that there were no reasons to object to their citizenship in the name of impossible things and technicalities ignoring the fact that they had been staying here for several years after giving up Pakistan citizenship," he says. Many people from the northern parts of Kerala went to Pakistan immediately before and after Partition expecting a better life. But many of them rued their decision later and sought to return. Sasindran is arguing a few more such cases. In 2011, the Kerala government had recorded the total number of Pakistani citizens of Kerala origin as 248. Of this, 189 persons were from Kannur, Malappuram, and Kozhikode districts, according to the data from the Foreigners Regional Registration Office in Kozhikode. Kannur, with 131 such people, had the highest number. Many of them died while awaiting citizenship, say police officers. Mullappally Ramachandran, former Union Minister of State for Home, says it was during his tenure that a meeting of about 100 such people was arranged for the first time in Kerala at Vadakara, the constituency he represented, in the presence of senior Central government officials. "The goal was to address their concerns. I did everything possible, including long-term visa permission and the cessation of deportation measures for them, as they were seemingly caught between the devil and the deep sea. Elderly people and those suffering from serious ailments were there in the group," Ramachandran recalls. "I took up their case at the request of E.T. Mohammed Basheer, MP. I was of the view that none of them went to Pakistan with a guilty intent. There were multiple reasons for their departure," he says.

# What does Himachal Pradesh's Bill raising women's minimum marriage age entail? | Explained

The Himachal Pradesh Assembly on Tuesday (August 27, 2024) passed a Bill raising the minimum marriageable age for women from 18 to 21 years. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2024, was passed by voice vote on the first day of the two-week monsoon session. It seeks to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (2006 Act) to advance gender equality and encourage higher education among women. The Bill was initially introduced in the Vidhan Sabha during the Budget session in February but could not be passed then. Earlier, in June, a central bill that aimed to bring uniformity in the minimum age of marriage for men and women lapsed with the dissolution of the 17th Lok Sabha. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2021 and was subsequently referred to a parliamentary standing committee for review. However, despite receiving multiple extensions, the 31-member committee failed to table its report.

Why was the Bill passed?

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu told The Hindu that the passage of the Bill clearly demonstrates the Congress government's commitment to advancing the welfare of women. "We are the first State in the country to enact the legislation to increase the marriage age of girls to 21. The Congress has always been at the forefront to work towards the betterment of women," Mr. Sukhu said.

Tabling the Bill in the House, Health, Social Justice, and Empowerment Minister Dhani Ram Shandil highlighted that early marriage obstructs girls' education and limits their potential for progress in life. He noted that the proposed amendments to the 2006 Act aim to reduce instances of early pregnancies and motherhood, which adversely affect women's health. "In today's world women are progressing in every field. The early marriages, however, act as a hindrance not only in the progress of their career but also in their physical development. In order to provide for gender equality and opportunities to obtain higher education, it has become necessary to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls. Thus, it is proposed to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and other related Acts in their application to the State of Himachal Pradesh and increase the minimum age for marriage for girls to 21 years," the Bill stipulates.

What are the key provisions?

Currently, Section 2(a) of the 2006 Act defines a "child" as someone "who, if male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if female, has not completed eighteen years of age." The Bill removes this gender-based distinction, redefining a "child" as "a male or female who has not completed twenty-one years of age." The Bill also extends the time period for filing a petition to annul a marriage. Under Section 3 of the 2006 Act, an individual who was a minor at the time of marriage can file for annulment within two years of attaining majority—before turning 20 for women and 23 for men. The Bill

extends this period to five years, allowing both women and men to file petitions before they turn 23, in accordance with the new minimum marriageable age of 21 years. A new provision, Section 18A, has also been introduced to ensure that the Bill's provisions take precedence over all other existing laws. This means that the new minimum marriageable age for women will apply uniformly across Himachal Pradesh, regardless of any conflicting laws or religious and cultural practices.

Why will the President's assent be required?

The Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution outlines subjects on which both the central and state governments can legislate. Entry 5 of this list deals with the subject of marriage and divorce enabling both the Centre and states to enact laws to regulate child marriages. After a Bill is passed by a State Legislative Assembly, it is presented to the Governor for assent. Under Article 200 of the Constitution, the Governor can exercise four options—to grant assent, withhold assent, return the Bill to the Assembly for reconsideration, or reserve it for the President's consideration. A Bill can be reserved for the President's consideration only if the Governor believes that it could undermine the authority of the High Court. In this case, Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla's assent would typically suffice to enact the Bill into law. However, since the Bill introduces a different minimum marriageable age for women, its provisions will be deemed inconsistent with the 2006 Act—a law enacted by Parliament. This potential conflict brings Article 254 of the Constitution into play. According to clause (1) of this provision, if a State legislature enacts a law on a subject covered by the Concurrent List that is "repugnant" to the provisions of an existing central law, then that repugnant or inconsistent portion of the state law will be considered "void". However, if the State legislation is reserved for the President's consideration and receives his or her assent in accordance with clause (2) of Article 254, then its validity can be upheld. With the President's assent, the state law will take precedence within the State and override the provisions of the central law in their applicability to the State only. Thus, for the Himachal Pradesh Bill to come into force, the Governor must reserve it for President Droupadi Murmu's consideration, who must then decide to give her assent to the Bill.

What do experts have to say?

Child and women's rights activists have long opposed raising the minimum age for marriage. They argue that the existing provisions of the 2006 Act are frequently exploited by disapproving parents to penalise daughters who pursue inter-caste or inter-religious marriages against familial wishes. In a patriarchal society, increasing the minimum marriage age may further entrench parental control over young adults. Author and activist Madhu Mera previously told The Hindu that raising the minimum marriage age for women to 21 years could upend young lives in a



web of criminal prosecutions. "In our research at Partners for Law in Development, we looked at 10 years of use of the child marriage law. Overwhelmingly, the law was used by parents against eloping daughters. It has become a tool for parental control and for punishment of boys or men whom girls choose as their husbands. An increase in age to 21 years would mean further persecution of girls right up till 21 years," she said. Such a legislative reform could also leave a vast majority of Indian

women who marry before the age of 21 years without the legal protections that the institution of marriage otherwise provides. It is also likely to endanger the life and liberty of the marginalised communities exposing them to further brutal policing.

The 2008 Law Commission Report recommended setting a uniform age of marriage for both men and women at 18 years. The National Human Rights Commission in 2018 too proposed a similar reform.

## Bulldozer politics to divert attention from farmers' protests, health crisis, rapes and murders

Hyderabad: Using HYDRAA and its bulldozers, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy might be standing and feeling high on a pile of debris left by the demolitions, but what is slowly emerging from the dust left behind is a strategy to divert public attention from what is actually happening in Telangana. Even as television news channels, YouTubers and the media devote more space and time to HYDRAA, what is not being given much of the prime time or space is the surging number of fevers, with the State facing a health crisis. What is not shown on screens are the tears of farmers who ran to banks on hearing Revanth Reddy's speech before the elections last year to take loans, only to find themselves running to banks again to check why they did not get the promised loan waiver.

What is not being counted is the number of increasing attacks on women and children, and also the gruesome murders, many of them with political overtones. What is being ignored are the continuing protests by the unemployed, whose frustrations were exploited by the same party before the elections, with the delay in recruitments rubbing in the salt further. What is being forgotten are the frequent power supply disruptions. Of course, that was not the government's fault, but mischief by lizards and squirrels.

Most importantly, when the drama is all about HYDRAA, who is talking about the Six Guarantees now? And that, apparently, was what the bulldozers were for.

Nobody is asking whether the State



government was depositing Rs.2,500 into bank accounts of all the women in the State. Nobody is talking about the Rs.4,000 monthly honorarium for the unemployed. Nobody is talking about how Rythu Bharosa is being delayed even as the crop season is nearing an end. There is no news on what happened to Dalit Bandhu. What about the Rs.500 bonus for paddy, or the Indiramma Indlu scheme, which was in fact launched and then forgotten. Remember the Warangal Rythu Declaration, the Chevella SC/ST Declaration, Minority Declaration or the Kamareddy BC Declaration? The deteriorating law and order situation, the closing down of about 43 tribal welfare schools which were the only source of education for tribal children in remote and agency areas, the non-payment of salaries to several government employees and contract staff who keep the machinery running, all have been pushed under the carpet cleverly by the bulldozers. By citing the Bhagavad Gita and taking Lord Krishna's name while issuing notices to relatives and partymen, Revanth Reddy has used the attention diversion tactic with great effect.

# Dhangars in search of legal pastures | Pastoralists versus policy

Sitting quietly on a worn nawar palang (rope cot) in a makeshift camp on the outskirts of his village, Babu Hanumathe Kolpe, a shepherd who is roughly 65 years old, speaks of a life spent at the mercy of villagers and forest officials. The sun has weathered his clothes — a white dhoti and kurta, with a long pancha (length of cloth) draped over his shoulder. It has aged his Gandhi topi that rests atop his thick, white hair. His appearance and demeanour tell the story of a lifetime spent in the fields as a nomad, tending sheep, foraging in the forest, leading a life to the rhythm of nature. Kolpe's eyes, however, tell a different story — of worry, loss, and uncertainty. As he talks about the pain of not having a safe place and the plight of his flock that are his livelihood, his legacy, and his connection to the land, his voice is tinged with sorrow. "We watch our lambs die, four or five a day," he says. There are many problems: the lack of green fodder is one. Another is the weather itself. "It's difficult for them to survive a monsoon. It rains non-stop and the water enters their lungs," he says. Kolpe is a native of Hivarkhed near Khamgaon town in Buldhana district of Maharashtra. Despite having a house in the village, he, his sons and their families, and the over 300 sheep, live on the outskirts, in a shevni, a temporary shelter with blue-and-yellow tarpaulin covers held aloft by bamboo sticks.

The Dhangar community, to which Kolpe belongs, has herded sheep for generations and roamed the land with its flock. It is on the Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT) list in the State, but the Centre categorises the community as Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Now, according to the community members, their tradition is under threat for various reasons, including the lack of support from government agencies. The Forest Department's decades-old ban on grazing in protected areas has left Kolpe, and thousands of Dhangars like him struggling over the years. "We've always relied on these lands, but the forest officials tell us we can't graze our livestock in our jungles. Where else can we go?" he says. Frustrated by the enforcement of regulations, hundreds of Dhangars marched to the Sub-Divisional Officer's office in Khamgaon on August 12, demanding the establishment of 'grazing corridors' for their sheep and goats. The community initially voiced these concerns in October 2022 by sending 12,000 postcards to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputy Devendra Fadnavis, highlighting the urgent need to restore traditional grazing lands. However, despite their previous efforts, progress has been minimal, leading to the recent march, which was led by a PhD scholar from the University of Edinburgh, Saurabh Hatkar, 30, who heads the Mendhpal Putra Army (army of the sons of shepherds). The Dhangar community has herded sheep for generations and roamed the land with its flock.

About 20 km away, in Nandri village, Buldhana district, Dilip Murlu Hatkar, another shepherd with over 400 sheep, says the ban isn't just a rule — it's a daily battle

for survival and a threat to their very existence. "The officials treat us like outsiders. They impose hefty penalties (at least ₹300 per sheep), and when we fail to pay, they seize and auction our flock," he says. The shepherds in the region live in constant fear of losing more sheep. For over nine months in a year, the pastoralists travel for more than 400 km in the region in search of fodder for their livestock and return home before the onset of the monsoon. They face a similar problem from the forest officials as they wander, but it increases when they halt for a longer period during the monsoon. "We are on the road for most of the year, facing hurdles and when we reach home, the struggle intensifies. We can't go far, because of the rain, and forest officials don't allow grazing. As a result, the sheep succumb to illness or starvation," says Subash Bichkule from Antraj village, who has over 200 sheep and goats. Empty medicine bottles are seen at the makeshift camps. Seated on a palang covered with a gongadi (a rough all-weather shawl made out of sheep wool), he says protecting the flock from snakebites, jackals, leopards, and other wild animals is a different task altogether. "Homecoming is scary for us," he says with frustration. The nomadic lifestyle also restricts the community's access to education and health care. Officials claim they're simply following the rules. State Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar refutes allegations about restrictions on livestock grazing in forest areas. "There is no outright ban on Dhangars grazing their sheep or goats on forest land. Although it technically violates forest laws, we usually overlook it and allow them access on humanitarian grounds," he says.

However, he adds that shepherds are strictly prohibited from grazing their livestock in the forests between June and September, as this is the critical regeneration period when new plants are most vulnerable. "They are advised to graze their livestock on revenue land instead." He says this practice isn't unique to Maharashtra, and that many States restrict grazing during the monsoon, when sprouts and inflorescence emerge. "If we allow grazing during this time, there will be no new plants in the forest, which would severely impact the ecosystem," he says. The Indian Forest Act, 1927 prohibits cattle grazing, and pronounces a penalty of up to ₹500 in addition to compensation for damage done to the forest, which will be determined by the area's forest officer. As per Rules 13 and 14 of the Maharashtra Forest Rules, 2014, pasturing of cattle in forests is prohibited except in areas specially assigned, and always under a permit. However, the State government may give pastoralists permission, keeping in mind "the safety and the maintenance of forests in perpetuity". The Forest Rights Act, 2006, also known as the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, permits traditional activities such as grazing. However, while the Dhangars are classified as a nomadic tribe in Maharashtra, they do not have ST status, which is accorded by the Central government.



Saurabh says the Forest Department issues grazing passes for a dedicated area during the migration period — between November and May — which is of "no use" to them. "We are used to migration and cannot stay at a place for long. It's in our DNA. Even during the monsoon, members of our community look for a reason to venture out," he says. The Dhangars hold significant electoral influence in western Maharashtra, Marathwada, and pockets of Vidarbha and north Maharashtra. The second-largest community in the State after the Marathas, the Dhangars constitute 9% or 1.5 crore of the State's population as per the 2011 Census. They wield substantial voting power in at least seven Lok Sabha seats and about 40 Assembly segments, including high-profile constituencies such as Baramati, Daund, Shirur, Indapur, and Sangola, which are strongholds of the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) led by Sharad Pawar. The community's latest demand for grazing corridors unfolds in the context of the Assembly election, which is due later this year. The Dhangars also play a key role in the Bharatiya Janata Party's Ma-Dha-V strategy, aimed at consolidating the Malis (Ma), Dhangars (Dha), and Vanjaras (V). This political formula, developed by the party in the 1980s, is designed as a foil to the traditional Congress vote bank of Marathas, Dalits, and Muslims. "The country's economic policy is deeply rooted in animal husbandry," says Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP) chief Mahadev Jankar, who is an MLC and leader of the community. Reflecting on his tenure as Minister for Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development (July 2016 – November 2019), he says Maharashtra had to import mutton, eggs, fish, and milk from Telangana, Gujarat, and West Bengal, and noted that the situation remains unchanged. He argues that allowing livestock grazing in the State would boost meat production. "Ignoring our legitimate demands could have serious political consequences in the upcoming Assembly election," he warns. In addition, Jankar, whose RSP is part of the ruling Mahayuti alliance, called on the State government to issue gun licences to shepherds for self-defence against wild animals. "Our people often venture deep into the forests in search of better pastures, where they face attacks from bears, wild boars, leopards, and other big cats. To protect

themselves, the Maharashtra government should grant them gun licences," he says, quickly adding that if anyone misuses them, then legal action should be taken.

According to Saurabh, nearly 70% of grazing areas in Buldhana have diminished over the years. He attributes this loss to various factors, including the designation of land as 'protected' under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, conversion to farmland, and development activities. He cites the 1996 establishment of the Dnyanganga Wildlife Sanctuary, which borders his home village of Nandri, as a significant example. "Since the sanctuary's creation, conflicts have frequently risen between shepherds and Forest Department officials over access to traditional grazing lands," he says. Saurabh explains that Dhangars have followed traditional herding routes for generations, but suddenly in the 1990s, the department began designating protected forest areas. As a result, their movements have been increasingly viewed as encroachments. This is a threat to their future. "The Forest Department has constructed barriers along these traditional paths, and we are now seen as intruders," says Saurabh, who is an engineer by education. His doctoral research is on the lives, livelihoods, and identities of the shepherd community. He argues that tribes have co-existed with forests for centuries, travelling these routes repeatedly. "All we ask is to be permitted to continue doing so. We should be allowed to practise our traditional livelihood, which is also diminishing." When the Dhangars migrate, the men tend to the sheep, while the women manage the lambs. Women also cook, fetch water, collect fodder for the oxen, and care for the children. "The burden on us is twice as heavy," says Jiabai Hatkar, 70, adjusting her sturdy traditional silver bangles at Nandri. "At the makeshift camps set up each week during migration, we handle most of the responsibilities. Protecting the lambs from wild animals and even dogs is a major challenge," she says. When the men get back with the sheep, the women identify the mothers and give the lambs to them, to suckle. Bichkule's wife Sulabha shares Jiabai's sentiments. "We also need to forage for firewood in the jungle for cooking. This has always been our way of life — I saw my mother and grandmother doing this,