

Strange forest phenomenon in Mulugu district: Experts to be roped in to probe

Hyderabad: Worried over an unusual phenomenon that led to widespread destruction in 500 acres in the Tadvai – Eturnagaram forest areas, with several thousands of trees being uprooted or destroyed, the Forest department is roping in experts from different departments, including National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Meteorological department and others to study and ascertain the reasons. As per preliminary estimates, the department said more than 50,000 trees could have collapsed in the region. While most of the damage was in a straight line, in some places the damage was in circles.

Soon after the rains recede, the department would also take up enumeration of each and every tree. This is mainly because the timber value has to be enumerated and measures have to be taken to sell the same in the prescribed procedure. "This was a rare phenomenon. There were many calamities in the past, but this time thousands of huge trees collapsed and lot of green cover was lost," a senior Forest official said. Though there

were no red sanders or sandalwood in the region, there was loss of huge trees. This apart, many valuable and rare species were also lost. Fortunately, not a single wild animal casualty was reported so far. On the reasons for such widespread destruction, the official said the trees in the region lack deep root system and mostly had shallow root system. As there was no strong anchoring support, many huge trees had collapsed. "To study this phenomenon and ascertain reasons more scientifically, experts from NRSC, Meteorological and others will be roped in. The study report will come in handy for future planning as well," the official said. Apart from the loss suffered, the department was also a bit worried over regaining the green cover. The destruction has covered nearly 500 acres and to regain green cover in such vast area, it would take a lot of time, they said. However, with sufficient moisture and nutrients available in the sub soil and River Godavari in close proximity, it should not be very challenging, the official added. Meanwhile, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development



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Minister D Anasuya said over one lakh trees were uprooted by a whirlwind in Mulugu, causing extensive damage in around 500 acres. "Thankfully, the villages

were spared by the grace of Sammakka Saralamma. Urging the Central government to investigate and provide reforestation with sufficient funding," she said on X.

School Students Host Art Exhibit on "Freedom and Its Diverse Perspectives"

The children at Cremon Montessori Life School, Mehdiapatnam organized an art exhibit, exploring the theme of "Freedom and Its Diverse Perspectives." The exhibit showcased the students' creative interpretation of the multi-faceted concept of freedom. "Freedom can mean a lot of things to each individual - from deciding things for yourself, to traveling alone; from moving out of the house, to gaining independence as a country from the clutches of an invader," said Cremon Montessori Directress Vinaya Devi. "Freedom can vary from person to person and range from big to small. Freedom also comes with limitations. With freedom comes responsibility." The young artists expressed their thoughts on freedom using diverse art forms, including paintings, poems, and installations. Their work ranged from a banner on human rights to an installation honoring women who fought for various types of freedom, and a wall painting tracing India's journey to overcome obstacles and reach its current state.

"The objective of the exhibition was for the children to understand and present that freedom can mean a lot of things to different people at different times and that freedom always comes with a set of limitations," the school added. "This was an initiative planned and executed by the children of Cremon Montessori Life school, and they innovatively exhibited it to the parents



and other guests." The art exhibit provided a platform for the students to explore the

multifaceted nature of freedom and its inherent responsibilities, encouraging them

to develop a deeper understanding of this fundamental human right.

Microplastics finally found in human brains, but that's not the full picture

Plastic is in our clothes, cars, mobile phones, water bottles and food containers. But recent research adds to growing concerns about the impact of tiny plastic fragments on our health. A study from the United States has, for the first time, found microplastics in human brains. The study, which has yet to be independently verified by other scientists, has been described in the media as scary, shocking and alarming.

But what exactly are microplastics? What do they mean for our health? Should we be concerned?

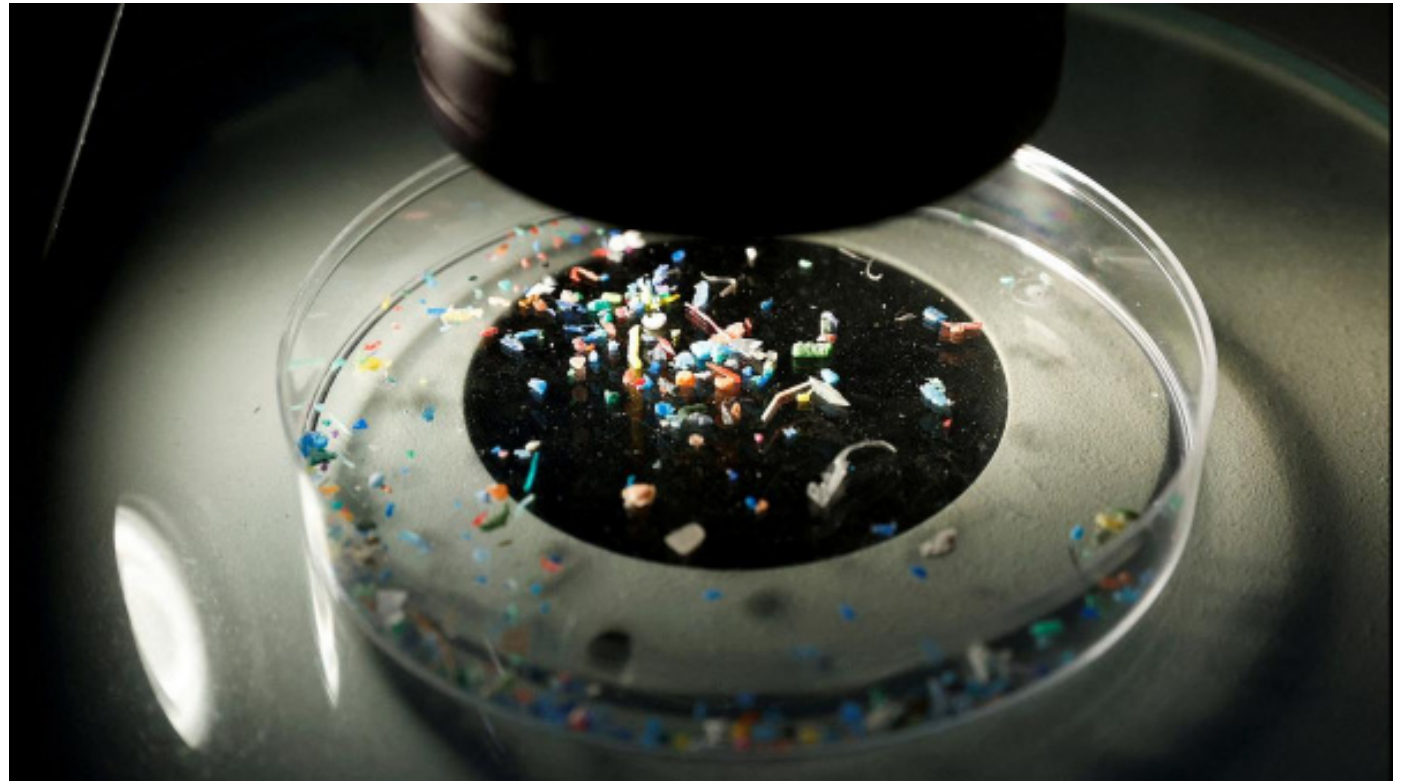
What are microplastics? Can you see them?

We often consider plastic items to be indestructible. But plastic breaks down into smaller particles. Definitions vary but generally microplastics are smaller than five millimetres. This makes some too small to be seen with the naked eye. So, many of the images the media uses to illustrate articles about microplastics are misleading, as some show much larger, clearly visible pieces. Microplastics have been reported in many sources of drinking water and everyday food items. This means we are constantly exposed to them in our diet. Such widespread, chronic (long-term) exposure makes this a serious concern for human health. While research investigating the potential risk microplastics pose to our health is limited, it is growing.

How about this latest study?

The study looked at concentrations of microplastics in 51 samples from men and women set aside from routine autopsies in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Samples were from the liver, kidney and brain. These tiny particles are difficult to study due to their size, even with a high-powered microscope. So rather than trying to see them, researchers are beginning to use complex instruments that identify the chemical composition of microplastics in a sample. This is the technique used in this study. The researchers were surprised to find up to 30 times more microplastics in brain samples than in the liver and kidney. They hypothesised this could be due to high blood flow to the brain (carrying plastic particles with it). Alternatively, the liver and kidneys might be better suited to dealing with external toxins and particles. We also know the brain does not undergo the same amount of cellular renewal as other organs in the body, which could make the plastics linger here. The researchers also found the amount of plastics in brain samples increased by about 50% between 2016 and 2024. This may reflect the rise in environmental plastic pollution and increased human exposure. The microplastics found in this study were mostly composed of polyethylene. This is the most commonly produced plastic in the world and is used for many everyday products, such as bottle caps and plastic bags. This is the first time microplastics have been found in human brains, which is important. However, this study is a "pre-print", so other independent microplastics researchers haven't yet reviewed or validated the study.

How do microplastics end up in the brain?



Microplastics typically enter the body through contaminated food and water. This can disrupt the gut microbiome (the community of microbes in your gut) and cause inflammation. This leads to effects in the whole body via the immune system and the complex, two-way communication system between the gut and the brain. This so-called gut-brain axis is implicated in many aspects of health and disease. We can also breathe in airborne microplastics. Once these particles are in the gut or lungs, they can move into the bloodstream and then travel around the body into various organs. Studies have found microplastics in human faeces, joints, livers, reproductive organs, blood, vessels and hearts. Microplastics also migrate to the brains of wild fish. In mouse studies, ingested microplastics are absorbed from the gut into the blood and can enter the brain, becoming lodged in other organs along the way. To get into brain tissue, microplastics must cross the blood-brain-barrier, an intricate layer of cells that is supposed to keep things in the blood from entering the brain. Although concerning, this is not surprising, as microplastics must cross similar cell barriers to enter the urine, testes and placenta, where they have already been found in humans.

Is this a health concern?

We don't yet know the effects of microplastics in the human brain. Some laboratory experiments suggest microplastics increase brain inflammation and cell damage, alter gene expression and change brain structure. Aside from the effects of the microplastic particles themselves, microplastics might also pose risks if they carry environmental toxins or bacteria into and around the body. Various plastic chemicals could also leach out of the microplastics into the body. These include the famous hormone-disrupting chemicals known as BPA. But microplastics and their effects are difficult to study. In addition to

their small size, there are so many different types of plastics in the environment. More than 13,000 different chemicals have been identified in plastic products, with more being developed every year. Microplastics are also weathered by the environment and digestive processes, and this is hard to reproduce in the lab. A goal of our research is to understand how these factors change the way microplastics behave in the body. We plan to investigate if improving the integrity of the gut barrier through diet or probiotics can prevent the uptake of microplastics from the gut into the bloodstream. This may effectively stop the particles from circulating around the

body and lodging into organs.

How do I minimise my exposure?

Microplastics are widespread in the environment, and it's difficult to avoid exposure. We are just beginning to understand how microplastics can affect our health. Until we have more scientific evidence, the best thing we can do is reduce our exposure to plastics where we can and produce less plastic waste, so less ends up in the environment. An easy place to start is to avoid foods and drinks packaged in single-use plastic or reheated in plastic containers. We can also minimise exposure to synthetic fibres in our home and clothing.

OpenAI's ChatGPT hits 200 million weekly users

OpenAI's ChatGPT has crossed 200 million weekly users, a report from Axios shared, and was later confirmed by the AI company as well. Although there were doubts around whether OpenAI still held its first mover advantage in the generative AI space, the company has added roughly 100 million users in less than a year. Still, the Microsoft-backed AI firm faces competition from larger, legacy Big Tech companies that are now directing their resources and talent at generative AI, in an effort to stay ahead. While personal and business users have a huge variety of AI products to choose from as a result of this, regulators have expressed concerns surrounding antitrust issues and the safety of the advanced models being released.

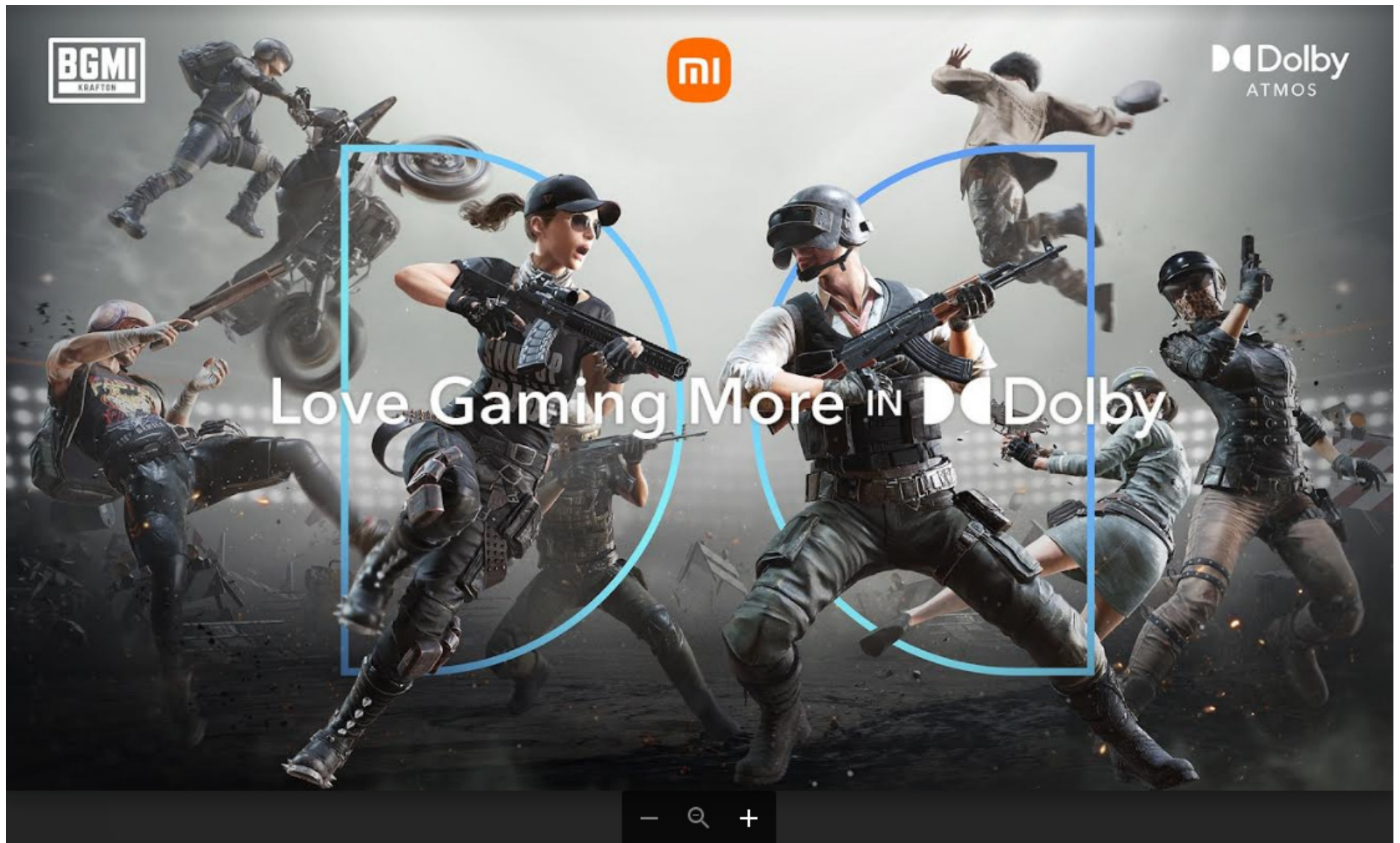
To that end, OpenAI and Google/Amazon-backed Anthropic are both cooperat-

ing with the U.S. Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute at the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) so that the organisation can access their newest models before public release.

The institute will look at safety recommendations for the new models, and also work with the U.K. AI Safety Institute.

"Safety is essential to fueling breakthrough technological innovation. With these agreements in place, we look forward to beginning our technical collaborations with Anthropic and OpenAI to advance the science of AI safety. These agreements are just the start, but they are an important milestone as we work to help responsibly steward the future of AI," said Elizabeth Kelly, director of the U.S. AI Safety Institute, on the website.

Dolby Atmos Arrives in BATTLEGROUND MOBILE INDIA To Bring Immersive Audio to the Battleground



Users of Dolby Atmos-enabled Android mobile devices across the country can now experience an immersive gaming experience with Dolby Atmos in the Arena Mode or TDM Mode

KRAFTON, the makers of BATTLEGROUND MOBILE INDIA (BGMI), India's most-loved battle royale game and Dolby Laboratories, a leader in immersive entertainment experiences, are pleased to announce that Dolby Atmos® immersive audio is now available in BGMI Arena or Team Death Match Mode, placing life-like sound at the forefront of the gaming experience. With this collaboration, users of Dolby Atmos-enabled Android mobile devices in India will be able to experience BGMI in Dolby Atmos, allowing mobile players to love their favorite game even more with Dolby.

Sedharth Merrotra, Head of Business Development, KRAFTON India, said, "Sound is a transformative element in mobile gaming, and we are absolutely thrilled to introduce the groundbreaking Dolby Atmos immersive audio experience to BGMI. Dolby Atmos will significantly boost the gaming experience, offering players much deeper engagement. At KRAFTON, our passion for pushing the limits of mobile gaming drives us to explore and integrate the latest innovations. We are excited to see our players' reaction and look forward to delivering more such experiences in the future."

"We are thrilled to bring Dolby Atmos immersive audio to BGMI, one of the most popular mobile games in India," said Sameer Seth, Director Marketing – India, Dolby Laboratories. "With Dolby Atmos, players will feel like they are at the center of the action as combat sounds come alive, allowing them to pick up subtle details in their surroundings and utilize these to their advantage. Our collaboration with KRAFTON and device makers like Xiaomi ensures consumers with easy and seamless access to this fantastic Dolby Atmos gaming experience on their mobile devices."

Anuj Sharma, CMO Xiaomi India expressed his views on the mobile gaming experience, "Gaming has become a significant passion for the Indian audience, with consumers now seeking immersive, true-to-life experiences on their smartphones. Xiaomi is excited to partner with Dolby and KRAFTON to elevate the mobile gaming experience to new heights. By integrating Dolby Atmos into BGMI on Redmi Note 13 Pro+ 5G, we're bringing gamers closer to the action, making every moment more vivid and thrilling than ever before." Sound is a core element of gaming, and BATTLEGROUND MOBILE IN-

INDIA takes its audio to new levels with Dolby Atmos. With Dolby Atmos, players will hear the battlefield come alive all around them with crystal clear detail. They will also be able to hear potentially game-changing sounds with pinpoint accuracy – like the

movement of footsteps of an opponent creeping up on them. Together with vast soundscapes that completely immerse each player, Dolby Atmos will turn each BATTLEGROUND MOBILE INDIA match into a hyper-realistic gaming experience.

Starlink backtracks, complies with order blocking X in Brazil, says regulator

Elon Musk's satellite broadband firm, Starlink, on Tuesday said that it is complying with Brazil's top court order to block access to social media platform X in the country, a day after informing the country's regulator it would not obey the order. Starlink had emerged as a fresh battleground between Musk and Brazil, as top court judge Alexandre de Moraes ordered the freeze of the company's accounts for possible use to pay fines owed by X, which is also owned by Musk. "Regardless of the illegal treatment of Starlink in freezing of our assets, we are complying with the order to block access to X in Brazil," Starlink, which has more than 200,000 customers in the Latin Ameri-

can nation, said in a post on X. On Monday, Brazil's telecom regulator Anatel said it had been informed by Starlink that the Musk-backed company would not obey Moraes' order for all internet providers to block domestic access to X. Anatel representative told Reuters, however, that Starlink had backtracked and informed the regulator on Tuesday it would conclude the blocking within hours. Anatel verified Starlink has already started to cut access to X in Brazil. X has been blocked in Brazil since last week after Moraes ordered all telecom providers in the country to shut down the social media platform for lacking a legal representative in the country,

MG Windsor, India's First Intelligent CUV to Offer Business-Class Comfort with 'AeroGlide' Design

MG Windsor will be launched on September 11, 2024

JSW MG Motor India has unveiled the 'AeroGlide' design in its anticipated and brand-new MG Windsor - India's first Intelligent Crossover Utility Vehicle [CUV], today, through a video release. This ultra-modern design seamlessly integrates advanced aerodynamics with superior craftsmanship, raising the driving experience to next level of comfort and refinement, embodying business class travel. The AeroGlide design embodies the art of aerodynamic excellence, meticulously crafted to ensure that every journey in the MG Windsor is as smooth as it is luxurious.

It draws inspiration from the seamless elegance of business class travel, and the Aero aspect of the design ensures that the vehicle glides effortlessly through the hustle and bustle. This focus on aerodynamics not only contributes to enhancing the Intelligent CUV's performance but also provides a refined commute for all occupants. Built on a dedicated EV platform, the MG Windsor will underpin a long wheelbase, which is not only segment leading, but also comparable to vehicles one segment above, ensuring ample cabin space for a relaxed drive experience.

The brand-new Windsor draws inspiration from the iconic Windsor Castle in the UK that is an architectural masterpiece and is a symbol of royal heritage. The MG Windsor demonstrates meticulous craftsmanship and commitment to excellence.

much like the legendary castle does too.

CUVs are progressively relevant to India with the evolving road network and infrastructure. Being the first Intelligent CUV, the Windsor promises to offer a perfect blend of aerodynamic design and spacious interiors, making it ideal for everyday use. It is versatile, ensuring that families can travel in ample comfort, whether it's for daily commutes or weekend getaways. The vehicle's higher ground clearance allows for better navigation over potholes, speed bumps, and uneven surfaces, all translating into a smoother and more comfortable drive.

Link – [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U5C0ygJDE1fs4u6ZM9esnD_uphG61nYC/viewAbout JSW MG Motor India](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U5C0ygJDE1fs4u6ZM9esnD_uphG61nYC/viewAbout%20JSW%20MG%20Motor%20India)

SAIC Motor, a global Fortune 500 company with a presence in over 100 countries and JSW Group (India's leading conglomerate with interests across B2B and B2C sectors) formed a joint venture - JSW MG Motor India Pvt. Ltd. in 2023. The joint venture aims to build a smart and sustainable automotive ecosystem while continuing to stay focused on developing a diverse portfolio of vehicles to give car buyers better access to advanced technologies and futuristic products with attractive value propositions. JSW MG Motor India Pvt. Ltd. is committed to introducing world-class technology, strengthening the manufactur-



ing landscape, best of innovation across its business operations, and generating

significant employment opportunities through extensive localisation.

Telangana Shooters Shine at 0832 India Open Shooting Competitions, Bag Multiple Golds



The "0832 India Open Shooting Competitions - 2024," held by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) from August 18th to August 28th in Goa, saw a remarkable turnout of participants, including a strong representation from Telangana State. This year, over 225 shooters from

Telangana State participated across various rifle and pistol shooting events, spanning categories from Sub-Youth to Super Masters, in both National and Civilian Competitions, as well as individual and mixed team events. The Telangana Rifle Association (TRA) has played a pivotal role

in nurturing and promoting shooting sports in Telangana since 2014. Under the dynamic leadership of Mr. Amit Sanghi, TRA's President and also NRAI Vice-President, the association continues to foster talent and elevate the shooting sport within the state. We are incredibly proud to announce that several talented shooters from Telangana have excelled at the recent competition, bringing home prestigious laurels and showcasing exceptional skill and dedication. Their outstanding performances not only reflect their hard work and determination but also bring honor to our state. Congratulations to these remarkable athletes for their impressive achievements!

Mr. Raiyan Faisal Yousufuddin won the Gold Medal in the 50M Rifle Prone Junior Men Individual category with a score of 580/600.

Mr. Gopala Krishna Kalagara earned the Bronze Medal in the 10M Pistol Master Men (ISSF) Individual event, scoring 551/

600. Mr. B. Shankar achieved the Silver Medal in the 25M Standard Pistol Master Men Individual category, with a score of 257/300.

Mr. Manideep Jetta excelled by securing two Gold Medals: one in the 50M Rifle 3P Men Individual and another in the 50M Rifle 3P Junior Men Individual, with scores of 570/600.

Ms. Chennupalli Pranathi clinched a Silver Medal in the 50M Rifle 3P Women Individual and a Bronze Medal in the 50M Rifle Three Position Championship Junior Women Individual, scoring 560/600. Ms. Arcita Karar achieved Gold Medals in 10M Air Pistol Junior Women Individual and Team categories, with a score of 367/400. The Telangana Rifle Association is proud of its shooters' achievements and looks forward to continued success in future shooting competitions. Congratulations to all the medalists and best wishes for their future endeavors.

Alert auto driver foils kidnap attempt

Hyderabad: An alert auto driver foiled an attempt by a man to kidnap three children here on Wednesday. The children, two boys and a girl, residents of Gachibowli were on their way to school when a stranger approached them and convinced them to accompany him saying he would drop

them at school. Believing the stranger, the trio sat in the auto rickshaw, but became suspicious when the auto was going on some other route. Noticing that the children were confused and worried, the auto driver stopped the vehicle and informed a local traffic constable about the issue.

Philips' New Smart Iron Takes Center Stage in Delhi and Mumbai with #BurnTheShirt Challenge

Versuni India, a leader in the domestic appliances industry and home to legacy brands Philips Domestic Appliances and Preethi, today announced the launch of India's smartest steam iron DST 8040. Staying true to its vision of being a challenger brand in the industry, Versuni India called out to consumers across Mumbai and Delhi to take on the #BurnTheShirt Challenge with the focus of offering consumer an experience of their industry first innovation which guarantees no burns, at Cromā and Vijay's flagship stores.

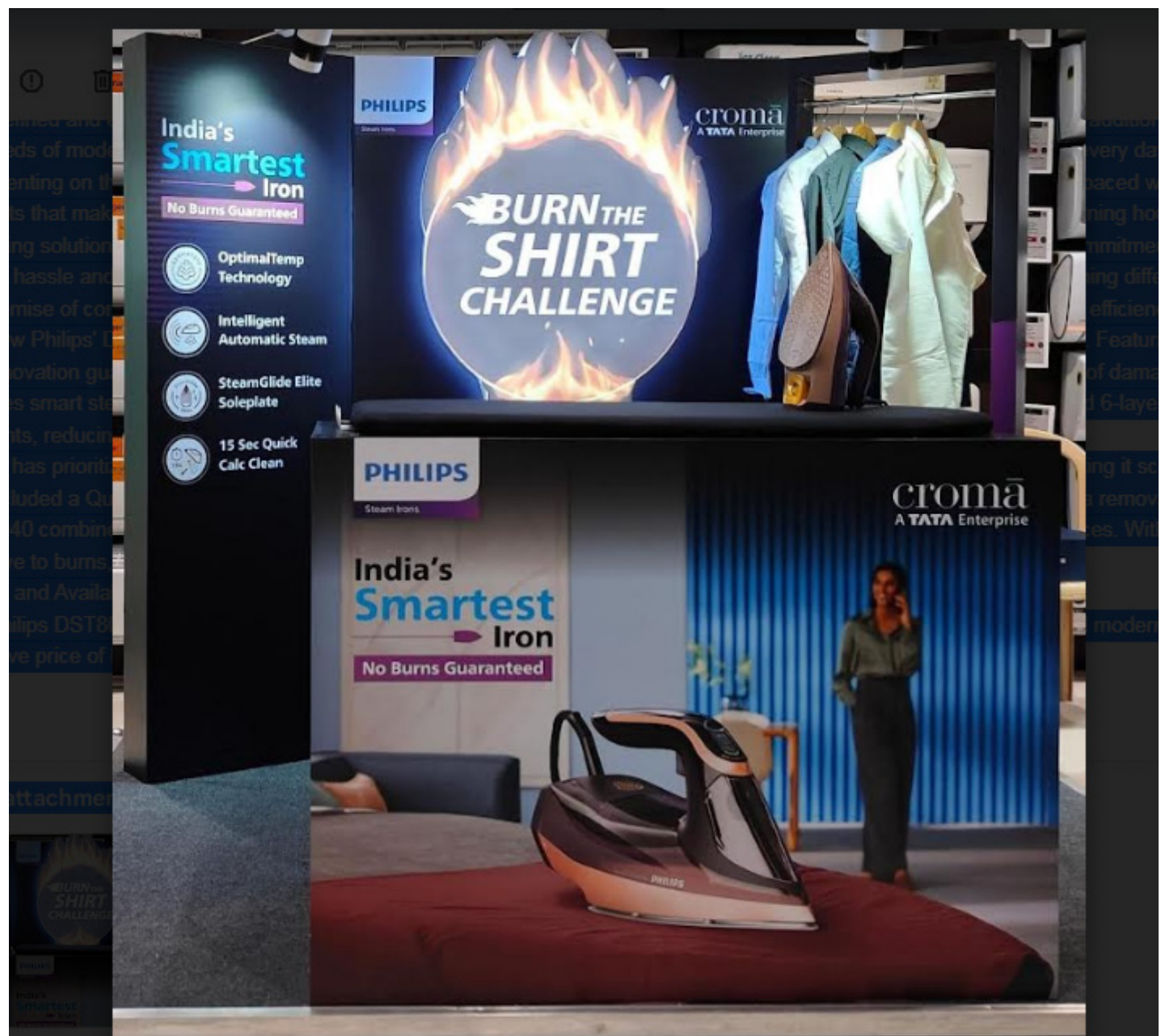
Focused on transforming the consumer's everyday ironing experience, Philips introduced its patented OptimalTEMP technology over a decade ago, guaranteeing no burns. Over the years, they have refined and elevated their offerings to provide consumers with comfort, ease, and hassle-free experiences. The latest addition to Philips' garment care lineup, DST8040, is designed to meet the needs of modern households with smart, user-friendly features. It stands out with its unique and sleek design, making every day ironing a breeze.

Commenting on the launch, Pooja Baid, Chief Marketing Officer of Versuni India Home Solutions Ltd, said, "In today's fast-paced world, as consumers juggle multiple tasks, they need reliable products that make everyday tasks easy and efficient.

At Versuni, we constantly strive to reinforce our brand promise of 'turning houses into homes' by understanding consumer pain points and delivering solutions that enhance their everyday experiences. Our latest innovation, DST8040, is a true reflection of this commitment. With intuitive features and smart sensors, it makes everyday ironing hassle and stress-free. To launch such a smart product and increase consumer trust, we knew we had to do something different, and our #BurnTheShirt Challenge is exactly that. Built on the premise of consumer centricity and fueling the emotion #ForTheLoveofClothes, we wanted to showcase the power and efficiency of our new industry first product in an engaging way."

The new Philips' DST8040, is the ultimate smart iron designed to revolutionize the consumers everyday ironing experience. Featuring the brand's unique OptimalTEMP Technology, this industry-first innovation guarantees no burns on all types of fabrics, allowing users to effortlessly iron various garments without fear of damage. Equipped with the advanced DynamIQ Technology, it provides smart steam that automatically adjusts to the detected motion, ensuring effortless and efficient ironing. Its patented 6-layer Solgel coating delivers the best gliding experience on all garments, reducing friction and making ironing a breeze.

Philips has prioritized durability with improved, harder materials in the soleplate, offering five times more durability and making it scratch and wear resistant. For added convenience, the brand has included a Quick Calc Release technology which allows calc deposits to flake away easily and collect automatically in a removable container, making cleaning and main-



tenance simple. The DST8040 combines intuitive features, smart sensors, and a durable & sleek design to transform everyday ironing experiences. With zero settings and auto shut feature, consumer can now

say goodbye to burns, guesswork, and maintenance hassles and embrace the future of ironing with the Philips DST8040. Pricing and Availability: The Philips DST8040 will be available on the

official Philips Domestic Appliances website, as well as on D2C, Amazon, and modern trade stores including Reliance, Cromā, and Vijay Sales, at an attractive price of INR 14,295.

RS Praveen Kumar urges State to reconsider its decision to shutdown 24 sports academies

Hyderabad: BRS leader RS Praveen Kumar on Wednesday condemned the Congress government's decision to shutdown all the 24 social welfare sports academies, shattering the dreams of many aspiring athletes from marginalised communities. The academies, which were established under former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao's administration, aimed to nurture raw talent from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"Today is another sad day for Telangana. The government has fired all the coaches en masse, effectively shutting down the academies that were chiseled to create sports prodigies from marginalised

communities," Praveen Kumar posted on X. He raised concern over the impact of this decision on young athletes, who had hoped to rise from poverty through sports. In videos circulating online, children from these academies can be seen pleading with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to reinstate their coaches. Praveen Kumar also tagged AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress Lok Sabha leader Rahul Gandhi and questioned the party's integrity, pointing out the hypocrisy of the party's stance. He said while Rahul Gandhi held the Constitution in one hand, with promises to safeguard it, Revanth Reddy was demolishing the dreams of marginalised



sections which the very same Constitution promised which had promised to support them. "In Haryana, you glorify athletes like Vinesh Phogat, but in Telangana, you are killing the dreams of poor girls aspiring to become the next Vinesh or Babita."

Should newlyweds live on their own for the first few years of marriage?

While living independently can help newlyweds learn to adjust and bond better, it also presents its own set of challenges and might not be a guaranteed solution for a successful marriage. Experts say living independently at least for a while after the wedding can help a couple bond better and learn adjustment. (Photo: A still from Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham) When Dipika Singh, a 49-year-old learning facilitator and content creator, posted a Reel on Instagram on why newlywed couples should consider moving out of the family home and living independently, a storm erupted in the comments section. Many people, especially women, agreed with her reasoning and felt understood/heard. On the other hand, several others challenged her unconventional suggestion and asked her if she would let her son move out after he gets married. But that's not the point. The point is what she highlighted in the clip, that living independently at least for a while after the wedding can help a couple bond better and learn to adjust. She essentially shared her story and expressed how many modern couples can possibly benefit from the same. When a couple lives on their own, two things happen - one is the adjustment. Both of you learn to adjust equally. "In case the girl moves in with the boy's parents, which is what generally happens in our country, all the adjustments have to be made by the girl because she's moving into a place that is already set. A certain kind of food is cooked, the decor is done, and everybody has a certain way of life. The boy doesn't need to make any adjustments," she added. "The girl needs to make adjustments, and that leads to a lot of angst. In our case, both of us had to adjust. I wanted a reading corner, he wanted a gaming corner. I wanted a desi living room, he wanted a contemporary living room. So, we had to meet midway and that helped our relationship," Dipika said. She went on to add that this move improves bonding, as couples have to resolve conflicts without outside interference, unlike in a joint family setting where others may comment or take sides. "Most couples move in with the boy's parents, and I think that's not fair. And I think that every couple should be given the choice to stay separately, at least for some time," she added. Take note of 'at least for some time.' She didn't ask anyone to abandon their parents forever and never return to them even when they are in need. As per tradition, the woman leaves behind her parents and family home after the wedding nuptials and moves in with her husband's family. The family and the husband continue living the life they were leading, but now with a new member added to the clan. This new member has to learn how that home is run and mould herself accordingly, at least initially. And then, let's not forget the expectations that the in-laws have from the 'bahu'. 'Now that she is here, she will take care of the household' - this mentality doesn't even spare the working bahu a lot of times. Of course, there are exceptions. Not all families function like that in the 21st century.

Can living independently help newlyweds?

Meanwhile, relationship and mar-



riage counsellors support the idea of newlyweds living separately but also add that it cannot guarantee a great marriage. With only two people in the relationship, it can greatly reduce the stress of taking care of other people's needs. They become more responsible and aware of creating and managing a home together. "Living independently teaches responsibility - not just in terms of being married, but in managing household tasks and dividing responsibilities. This can include everyday chores or even leisure activities that couples can do as a team," adds Dr Nisha Khanna, a Delhi-based psychologist and marriage counsellor.

Experts add that this move can also lead to men being more understanding and adjusting. That 'Raja beta' conditioning is real, after all. "For instance, when both partners are working, they need to share household duties equally, but when one partner is focused on earning outside the home, expecting them to manage an equal share of household tasks can be unrealistic," adds Dr Khanna. Living independently can also give couples personal space to build intimacy. "In joint families, individual space can be limited, and there might be frequent intrusions by family members, leading to boundary issues," highlights Dr Khanna. "Living separately helps couples create a healthy, emotional dependency on each other which helps them build intimacy in the relationship. They can create a lifestyle that suits both of them without the judgment of another family member, little things like making breakfast for one another, sleeping late, having friends over, etc.," says Ruchi. Not a bed of roses Already thinking of dancing with your partner while cooking a meal together, or a cosy movie night in the living room? Hold on. While not staying with in-laws can bring you together as a team and strengthen the bond, there are several things it cannot help with. Several challenges also await, that go beyond the raised eyebrows of society. Emotional dependency on family

can make this move feel challenging. "Living far away can also mean not getting support in finances, food and raising children especially if both partners are working. This could lead to increased stress and fatigue, taking a toll on both," says Ruuh. Furthermore, this separation can sometimes lead to detachment, especially if one partner has unresolved emotional issues, such as childhood emotional neglect. "Whether living with family or independently, personal issues need to be addressed individually. Sometimes, one partner may not be expressive or might depend heavily on family members. That can lead to homesickness or difficulty adjusting to living separately," adds Dr Khanna. "Living separately might lead to heightened expectations from in-laws during visits or family gatherings. The couple might feel pressured to overcompensate during these times, leading to stress and potential conflict," says Ruchi.

Modern couples are doing it IRL. Nevertheless, many modern Indian working couples are already embracing the idea of living independently - both by choice and by situation. Delhi-based professional Tanisha (name changed on request), who got married a year ago, lives with her husband in Delhi while their parents live on their own in West Bengal. Her husband, who works from home, moved to Delhi from Bengaluru for her. "We met on a matrimony platform. The fact that we don't live with a set of parents has definitely helped us bond better and know each other better. We dearly love them, and they love us too. And the fact that he is the only child but is still away from his parents has not been a cause of concern for them. He was anyway away in Bengaluru because of his work previously. My in-laws are quite understanding and do not expect me to quit my job and settle in with them," she tells India Today.

"We often visit each other and stay connected through daily calls. In case there

is a situation when they need us to stay with them, we can always work it out. But currently, they are taking good care of themselves while we are also working on our marriage. The same also holds true for my parents, who also live on their own. Whenever we need each other, we are just a call or a flight away. So, it is a win-win I feel," she adds. Living independently doesn't necessarily mean different cities. At times, it is just the same society but a different building, or the same building but different floors. "I stayed with my husband and in-laws' at their home for the initial one year of marriage. My in-laws are nice people, but still, I suffered a lot mentally adjusting to the household and it made me bitter towards everyone, including myself. When I couldn't take it anymore, my husband and I rented an apartment within 2 minutes' walking distance. The decision was very difficult to make and raised many eyebrows, but it was the best one we took," Shravya Bhat wrote in the comments section of the viral Reel. "Now my relationship with my in-laws is so much better. We spend time at both places and take care of their needs while protecting our sanity. Living separately does not necessarily mean separation. You can live separately and be present for ageing parents. This doesn't make you bad children," Bhat added. A woman's comment on how moving out of the family home improved her relationship with her husband and her in-laws. This debate comes at a point when experts notice a significant rise in cases of separation and marriages falling apart in the modern setting. The reasons vary from issues with emotional and physical intimacy, and inequality in relationships in context to sharing household duties, gender roles, finances and independence. "Interference from extended family members also is a significant reason for marriages falling apart," says Ruchi. Lack of healthy time spent together in a stress-free environment where the couple can bond, communicate and empathise with one another is another.

The global tourism boom is shifting to Asia

Tourism is back, at last. This year the number of trips abroad is expected to overtake levels reached in 2019. Spending by travellers, too, is projected to exceed what was shelled out in 2019, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (wtcc), a trade body. Cruising is afloat again. The return of mass tourism has sparked protests in Western hotspots such as Barcelona and Majorca. Talk to a hotelier or a travel agent, though, and the real action is further east. Travel to Asia had been slower to recover from the covid-19 pandemic than in the West. Strict quarantine measures from China to Malaysia were in place for longer than in Europe or America, keeping the number of tourists down. Now, however, business on the continent is roaring back. The number of travellers arriving in Asian countries is set to surge by a third this year, according to the WTTC, more than in any other region (see chart). Even as business in the rest of the world stabilises, industry bosses are touting rapid growth in Asia. On August 6th Michael Glover, the finance chief of IHG, a hotel group, pointed to its booming business in Thailand and Vietnam. On August 7th Mark Galardo, an executive at Air Canada, a carrier, said that new routes to Seoul and Osaka were performing "exceedingly well".

Westerners are turning up in droves. The number of trips Americans took to Asia doubled last year. The dollar, which has appreciated strongly against Asian currencies, is part of the explanation. Catherine Heald, the boss of Remote Lands, a travel agency for the rich, notes that more of her clients are scuba diving off Indonesia's Komodo island, temple-hopping in Japan and taking gastronomic excursions across Thailand. The range of destinations and activities is widening. Well-heeled tourists can travel aboard the recently redeveloped Eastern & Oriental Express through Singapore and Malaysia, run by Belmond, the hotels business of LVMH, a French luxury giant. Over 500,000 hotel rooms were under construction across Asia as of June, up by over 4% from last year. Getting to Asia is also becoming easier, with home-grown and Western airlines increasing the number of flights to and from the continent. British Airways, for instance, is relaunching flights to Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. The biggest boost to Asian tourism, though, is coming from the region's own travellers. Chinese consumers have begun to holiday abroad again, with international trips forecast to double this year compared with 2023, according to Oxford Economics, a research firm. Even then, the number of trips will be below pre-pandemic levels, leaving plenty of room for growth. Much of the travel by Chinese tourists will happen within their neighbourhood. Three-quarters of the flights that left China last month went to East and South-East Asia. Thanks to rising disposable incomes, India's consumers are also heading overseas in growing numbers. They spent close to \$20bn on foreign trips in the year to March, more than three times the amount they spent five years ago. Many also prefer to travel closer to home, not least because of looser visa restrictions in the region. As incomes rise, Indian tourists will only become bigger spenders. The WTTC reckons that by the end of the decade only Americans and Chinese will



spurge more on overseas travel than Indians. Asia's travel boom is just beginning. To

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On the controversy over lateral entry into the civil services | Explained

The story so far: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) had withdrawn its advertisement pertaining to lateral recruitment for 45 posts of Joint Secretaries (JS), Directors and Deputy Secretaries (DS) in the government. This follows objections raised by coalition partners and the Opposition as well as the intervention of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) about the need for reservation in such lateral recruitment.

What is merit versus spoils system?

Merit system entails appointments to government posts after a rigorous selection process by an independent authority. In India, this commenced in the year 1858 when the British introduced the Indian Civil Service (ICS) to select officers for administering the country. After independence, the UPSC conducts exams to select officers for IAS, IPS and other central services. The merit system is aimed at building career bureaucrats who are expected to function without any political leanings and provide independent advice to the incumbent political executive. The spoils system on the other hand works on the adage 'to the victor belong the spoils.' It is a system where the incumbent political executive appoints its supporters to various posts in the government. It has its origins in the U.S., and continued until 1883 when it was replaced largely by a merit system. At present, out of more than 2.8 million federal government posts, only around 4,000 senior posts are directly appointed by the President.

What is lateral entry?

IAS and other central service officers with more than 15 years of experience are generally posted as JS to head various

departments. It is a cutting-edge post where the officers prepare cabinet notes, handle parliamentary questions, liaise with officers of other ministries and State governments. Lateral entry is when executives from the private sector, public sector undertakings and academia are appointed to senior and middle management positions in the government. There have been instances of lateral entrants who were technocrats being appointed at secretary level posts since independence. Notable examples include former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia, agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan etc. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005) and the NITI Aayog in 2017 had also recommended lateral entrants to bring specialised knowledge and skills into governance.

What are the pros and cons?

Lateral entry brings with it certain tangible benefits. First, it brings much needed specialisation for niche areas of governance like emerging technologies, semiconductors, climate change, digital economy, cyber security etc. Second, it results in infusion of fresh ideas from experts to reinvigorate the system. Third, it also has the potential of making career bureaucrats more responsive thereby bringing in a positive change. However, it has its own set of significant limitations. The domain expertise and specialisation of IAS officers is their field experience that is hard to match by outside entrants. There can be coordination issues with career bureaucrats. It may also result in opaqueness and conflicts of interests while hiring recruits from private sector.

What can be the way forward?

Notable lateral entrants in the past have been appointees at the secretary level which is the highest position in government departments. At this level, the lateral entrant will be capable of influencing policy decisions. Their performance will also be subjected to greater scrutiny. Even if appointments are to be made at more operational levels of JS, Directors and DS posts, it should be in line with public policy. In his book *The Tyranny of Merit*, political philosopher Michael Sandel discusses the flaws of placing too much emphasis on merit without pursuing equity. Hence, appointment at these levels should coalesce technical competence with reservation and social justice. Therefore, the intervention from the PMO in the recent episode is welcome. However, excessive focus on lateral entrants is missing the larger picture. The issues plaguing the system cannot be set right with just a handful of lateral recruits. While there can be genuine grievances about the red-tapism, inefficiency and corruption in administration, it is equally true that career bureaucrats work in a challenging environment. Since governments deal with public money, the system is bound by a plethora of rules. Government performs various roles where the objectives are intangible, which the private sector would not do. Compounding these operational challenges is excessive political interference. A merit system being morphed into a spoils system is a serious threat to Indian bureaucracy and various institutions headed by career bureaucrats. Autonomy of career bureaucrats is essential for their effective functioning.

Several FIRs filed against Malayalam film personalities: SIT's work has only just begun

Malayalam cinema has produced films like *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Veyilmarangal* that address gender-based violence and sexual oppression. However, it is ironic that the actors who bring these roles to life have had to often face the same violence that their characters confront. Unlike in the movies, fighting such oppression has real consequences for them, often resulting in informal bans and the loss of job opportunities. The Hema committee report has blown the lid off rampant cases of sexual harassment and exploitation in the state's film industry. Shaken by the revelations in the report, the Kerala government constituted a Special Investigative Team (SIT), which has received over 20 complaints from women in Malayalam cinema accusing prominent actors of sexual exploitation. Headed by G Sparjan Kumar, the team comprises DIG S Ajeetha Begum; SP of Crime Branch (HQ), Merin Joseph; AIG of Coastal Police G. Poonkuzhali; Assistant Director of Kerala Police Academy, Aiswarya Dongre; AIG Law and Order, V. Ajith and SP Crime Branch, S. Madhusoodanan.

The 235-page report by the expert committee constituted by former Kerala High Court judge Justice K. Hema was released on August 19. The report, which features a three-member committee with Hema as the chairperson, along with cine artist T. Sarada and retired IAS official K. B. Valsalakumari, sheds light on the distressing situation of women in the state's film industry. In 2017, a reputed actress was subjected to sexual assault. Formed in the same year to support the survivor, the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) has played a critical role in addressing sexual harassment in the industry. It persuaded the formation of the Hema committee and the release of the report. Nine FIRs have been filed until now, according to a SIT team member. A West Bengal-based female actor filed an FIR against director Ranjith concerning an alleged incident of sexual exploitation in 2009 under IPC section 354 (assault or criminal force on a woman with intent to outrage her modesty). The second FIR, based on accusations of a young woman actor, has been filed against actor Siddique under IPC sections 376 (rape) and 506 (criminal intimidation). An FIR has also been lodged against actor and CPI(M) MLA from Kollam, Mukesh, based on a complaint by actress Minu Muneer. Another FIR has been filed against actor Jayasurya, based on the same actress's complaint, under Section 354. The industry is currently rocked by mass resignations of high-profile artists. Filmmaker Ranjith stepped down as chairman of the state-run Kerala Chalachitra Academy while actor Siddique resigned as general secretary of AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Artists). All the 17 members of the AMMA's executive committee, including president and senior actor Mohanlal, have submitted their resignations. "The fact that the SIT has more women officials is encouraging victims to come forward to complain. As the number of cases is increasing, we will be expanding the team," a SIT member, seeking anonymity, told HT. The team has reached out to the victims who have posted their ac-



counts of exploitation on social media. "Kerala government will offer the protection they need," the member added. From a legal standpoint, SITs are generally trusted to conduct unbiased investigations. "In cases such as these, a consistent system and a thorough approach are essential. If the investigation were handled by local police, with multiple officers questioning the witnesses, it would create discomfort for the latter. Additionally, involving multiple officers can make the case more fluid, increasing the chances of acquittal," said Jacob Punnoose, retired director general of police, Kerala. These cases are transferred to the SIT after being registered at relevant police stations. "The SIT plays a crucial role, as the nature of the violence demands that the investigation be conducted by senior police officials who have a better understanding of the industry," said J. Sandhya, an advocate advising the WCC.

The way forward The Kerala government, which delayed the release of the Hema Committee report, has taken the first step towards addressing the serious concerns by forming the SIT, making it the first state in India to address the plight of women in the entertainment industry. Many women are coming out with painful stories. Kerala police should look at them with great seriousness and provide help wherever needed," Bina Paul, film editor and a member of WCC said. "It is an unconventional industry with unconventional problems. The best takeaway from the Hema committee report and the SIT should be to formulate a policy for the entertainment industry, after consulting experts," said Archana Padmini, an actor and WCC member.

How effective are SITs? "A SIT is constituted to investigate matters of public interest. The good thing about it is the fact that the investigation can be monitored by citizens, unlike in routine cases," said a

veteran journalist who has been writing on the subject for three decades. The Kerala government has constituted SITs for many high-profile cases in the past including the solar scam, the Jisha murder case, the Kevin Joseph murder case and the Koodathayi cyanide murders. "While SITs proved to be effective in cases such as Kevin Joseph and Koodathayi cyanide murders with investigation speeding up and arresting the accused, the SIT for solar scam was politically influenced," said a

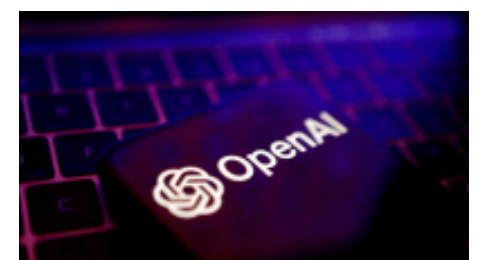
retired police official, seeking anonymity. The state government has formed the SIT to assuage prevailing sentiments and to demonstrate that it is serious about addressing the problems revealed in the Hema committee report. The SIT has created an environment where women feel more encouraged to come forward and lodge complaints. However, the true impact will only be measured over time, as these efforts need to be translated into meaningful change within the film industry.

Apple, Nvidia in talks to join OpenAI funding round, reports say

Apple and chip giant Nvidia are in talks to invest in OpenAI as part of a new fundraising round that would value the ChatGPT maker above \$100 billion, according to media reports on Thursday. The news comes a day after the Wall Street Journal reported that venture-capital firm Thrive Capital would invest around \$1 billion in OpenAI, leading the funding round.

Apple and OpenAI did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment, while Thrive Capital, Nvidia and Microsoft have declined comment. OpenAI has become increasingly important to Apple's artificial intelligence strategy, with the iPhone maker bringing the AI firm's chatbot, ChatGPT, to Apple devices in June as part of "Apple Intelligence."

Apple was also reported to gain an observer role on OpenAI's board. Microsoft, OpenAI's largest strategic investor with over \$10 billion invested, is also expected to participate in the funding round, according to the report. The exact investment amounts from Apple and Microsoft remain undisclosed. OpenAI's high valuation is a



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result of the AI arms race it sparked with the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022, prompting companies across industries to invest billions in the technology to stay ahead of the competition and capture market share. The Sam Altman-led firm was reportedly valued at \$80 billion in February after completing a deal where the company would sell existing shares in a so-called tender offer led by Thrive Capital.