

Govt's media delegation for Musi study tour to Seoul comes under fire

Hyderabad: The State government's decision to send a team of journalists on a study tour to Seoul in South Korea has kicked up a fresh controversy, with many questioning the government's misplaced priorities. While the visit is aimed to study the Cheonggyecheon Riverfront Development in Seoul, questions are being raised over sending journalists rather than bureaucrats, engineers and experts, for the study tour. The delegation comprises a Parliament member, an MLA, the Information and Public Relations Commissioner, the Director of Media and Communications,

and 16 journalists from various media organisations. They will be in Seoul for four days excluding the travel period. People, especially netizens, are questioning why not even a single official, engineer and expert from town planning, urban development, tourism and other departments, was included in the team. Taking a dig at the government, BRS working president KT Rama Rao sarcastically complimented the State government for sending "a team of experts, environmentalists, hydrologists, engineers and bureaucrats" to study the Riverfront Development in Seoul. "I am sure



they will come back with excellent results and justify spending Rs 1.5 lakh crore (ap-

proximately USD 18 Billion) of public money," he said.

Telangana's GST collection growth shows sharp decline in September 2024



Hyderabad: In a worrying trend for Telangana's economy, the State's GST collections for September 2024 registered a meagre 0.78 per cent growth compared to the previous year – a stark contrast to the 33 per cent growth seen in September 2023 over its previous September 2022. This sharp decline raises concern over a broader slowdown in revenue growth.

Over the last three years, Telangana had enjoyed consistent double-digit growth in GST collections. In 2023, the State saw a 13 per cent increase in April, which surged to 33 per cent in September, showcasing a robust post-pandemic recovery. The trend continued throughout 2023, with overall growth rates maintaining a double-digit. However, 2024 tells a different story. While collections in April and May still showed a healthy 11 per cent increase, the momentum slowed significantly from June onward. By September 2024, the State could barely manage a 0.78 per cent growth.

The stark difference between 2023 and 2024 is particularly alarming. While September 2023 collections soared from

Rs.3,915 crore to Rs.5,226 crore in 2022, a substantial 33 per cent leap, 2024 saw a near stagnation, with collections at Rs.5,267 crore, a mere Rs.41 crore increase from the previous year. Economists point out that the sharp dip in GST growth could be a result of several factors, including weakening consumer demand, stagnant industrial growth and reduced private investments. The only sector that seems to be performing well was excise sales, which raises concerns about the government's ability to spur growth in other key sectors.

Reacting to this, BRS working president KT Rama Rao blamed the Congress government for Telangana's sharp economic downturn, attributing the decline to its "Bulldozer Raj" policies. He noted that the State's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections, which had consistently grown by at least 15 per cent year-on-year under BRS regime, had plummeted to less than one percent in September this year. "Telangana has gone from being a thriving State to now competing with Uttar Pradesh's economy. The State achieved the unimaginable feat of being in the last

position in GST collections with its destructive policies," he remarked. Rama Rao said the only sector showing growth in the State was liquor sales which speaks volumes about the government's priorities. He felt that the Congress had "special talent" to destroy a perfectly thriving economy like

Telangana. "I hope the Chief Minister has answers for this (economic collapse)," he posted on X. With GST collections being a key indicator of economic health, Telangana's stagnating growth indicates an urgent need for corrective measures to revitalise the State's financial trajectory.

Congress MP endorses BRS argument on STPs for cleaning Musi

Hyderabad: Call political oversight or anything, Congress MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy has literally endorsed what Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) has been arguing over Musi riverfront development project, especially with regard to ensuring flow of treated water in the river. During the second day of Seoul visit on Tuesday, the Congress MP from Bhongir visited the Seoul Water Treatment Plant. In a video posted on X, the MP is seen saying that the purpose of the visit was to learn how sewage was to be treated.

The MP explains that there are four treatment plants in Seoul and every day five million tonnes litres water is treated daily. "About 50 percent of treated water is released back into the river and 50 percent is used for drinking and other purposes," Kiran Kumar Reddy says in the video. The Congress MP's assertion has raised quite a few eyebrows among political circles here, as the BRS party leaders have been crying hoarse that the biggest part of River Musi rejuvenation works during the BRS rule was setting up 31 STPs at a cost of Rs 3866 crore. These STPs were under different stages of construction and are expected to be completed by this year end. Of these, a few commenced opera-



tions during the BRS tenure and a couple of them were inaugurated by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy recently. Making a detailed presentation on River Musi project and the works taken up by the past government, former MAUD Minister KT Rama Rao had even said once the STPs were made operational, Hyderabad would be the first city in South Asia to achieve this, ensuring no untreated water flowed into the Musi River. He had also explained plans to link the Godavari River to Musi through the Kaleshwaram project, permanently solving the wastewater issue. However, in sharp contrast to the BRS working president's presentation, the Congress MP claimed that the Chief Minister had set up the STPs and was working onto ensure flow of treated water in River Musi.

India's SDG focus and its human development issues

On September 9-10, 2023, New Delhi hosted the G-20 Summit, which resolved to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. On September 18-19, 2023, an "SDG Summit" was convened at the United Nations headquarters to follow up and review the implementation of the Agenda and the progress of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A "Summit of the Future" took place on September 22-23, 2024, at the UN headquarters to build upon the SDG Summit 2023 and its commitments by member nations. In this context, examining India's progress in human development since 1990, based on the UNDP's latest Human Development Report (HDR), is valid. As said by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in his book, *Development as Freedom*, 'development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy'. In his 'capability approach', the basic concern of human development is 'our capability to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value'. Freedom from hunger and ill-health on the one hand and gender and income equality, and access to quality education on the other hand lead to the achievement of human development, and, consequently, to sustainable development.

Development and the SDGsThe Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the UNDP has three dimensions: long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy at birth); knowledge (expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling), and a decent standard of living (income per capita). All the three dimensions are much related to some of the key SDGs: SDG-3 (good health); SDG-4 (quality education); SDG-5 (gender equality); SDG-8 (decent work) and SDG-10 (reduced inequality). Clearly, countries aspiring to achieve sustainable development need to take appropriate measures to boost human development.

The HDR 2023-24 places India in the 'medium human development category' with a human development index (HDI) value of 0.644. India ranks 134 out of 193 countries. The HDI value was stagnant in 2019-20, at 0.638, and fell to 0.633 in 2021. It improved to 0.644 in 2022. In this report, some of India's neighbouring countries have better HDI ranks — Malaysia (63); Thailand (66); China (75); Sri Lanka (78); Indonesia (112); Bhutan (125), and Bangladesh (129).The HDR also presents interpolated consistent data which can be used to compare HDI values across years and countries. India saw its HDI value increase by 48.4%, from 0.434 in 1990 to 0.644 in 2022. As for HDI rankings, during 2015-2022, India improved by four ranks, while neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and Bhutan improved by 12 and 10 ranks, respectively. China improved by 18 ranks. India's human development initiatives lagged behind during 2015-22. One of the reasons for the slow growth is the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on dimensions of human development such as education and income.

Gender gapsThe HDR also presents the Gender Development Index (GDI) for 193 countries. It measures disparities in human development by gender. The report contains HDI values estimated separately for women and men, the ratio of which is the GDI value. The closer the ratio is to one, the lesser the gap there is between women and men. Among the 42 'medium human development countries' to which India belongs, there are only seven with low equality in HDI achievements between women and men. These countries, with absolute deviation from gender parity of more than 10%, are India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Uganda, Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Kiribati. India has one of the largest gender gaps in the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) a 47.8 percent points difference between women (28.3%) and men (76.1%). Female labour force participation rate in India is very low when compared to many countries, more so when one compares it with India's neighbouring countries where in China it is 53.6 %, Bhutan 53.5 %, and Bangladesh 39.2%.In the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)-2022-23, published by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, around 37% females of working age (15 years and above) were in the labour force in 2022-23; it was 23.3% in 2017-18. However, there is a huge gap in



female labour force participation in rural and urban areas. While the female labour force participation rate in rural areas increased from 24.6% in 2017-18 to 41.5% in 2022-23, there is only a marginal increase in urban areas (from 20.4% to 25.4%). This is a matter of concern that requires further research and in-depth study aimed at feasible policy initiatives.

Income inequalityIn addition to the gender gap in income, inequality of in-

comes is also on the rise. India is one of the countries where income shares held by the richest 1% is very high (21.7%) compared to Bangladesh (11.6%), China (15.7%), Bhutan (18.1%), and Nepal (9.7%). Income inequality in India is also higher than the world average of 17.5% and the South Asia average of 19.6%. Most importantly, income inequality is also higher than other regional groups such as East Asia and the Pacific (16.5%) and Europe and Central Asia (15.7%).

New study reveals stress worsens colorectal cancer

New Delhi: While stress is known to significantly contribute to the onset of various health issues, a new study on Sunday showed how stress can worsen colorectal cancer (CRC).A team of Chinese researchers showed that chronic stress disrupts the balance of gut microbiota, which then hastens the progression of CRC.By eliminating some gut bacteria and inducing stress, they found a particular bacterial species as a potential therapeutic target.The team from West China Hospital, Sichuan University of China, used an antibiotic cocktail — vancomycin, ampicillin, neomycin, and metronidazole — to eradicate gut microbiota. It was followed by faecal microbiota transplantation to find whether gut microbiota was necessary for chronic stress to fasten the progression of colorectal cancer.The results showed that while chronic stress increased tumour growth, it also decreased beneficial gut bacteria, particularly the *Lactobacillus* genus, — essential for a healthy immune response against cancer."Stress-related CRC progression can be attributed to a reduction in beneficial gut bacteria, as this weakens the body's immune response against cancer," said lead researcher Dr Qing Li from the varsity.*Lactobacillus* — being sensitive to vancomycin and ampicillin — was found depleted in both the



control and stress groups by the antibiotic cocktail.To further explore how *Lactobacillus* influences CD8+ T cell levels — which play a crucial role in the body's anti-tumour immunity — and CRC progression the researchers supplemented mice with *Lactobacillus* during chronic stress and observed reduced tumour formation."Through faecal analysis, we found that *Lactobacillus plantarum* (L.

plantarum) specifically regulated bile acid metabolism and enhanced the function of CD8+ T cells. This indicates how *Lactobacillus* may enhance anti-tumour immunity," Li said.The research showed potential for *Lactobacillus*-based therapies in treating patients, particularly those affected by chronic stress."Restoring beneficial bacteria in the gut, such as *Lactobacillus*, could strengthen the body's natural defences against colorectal cancer."

First regional workshop under the Panchayat Sammelan series on “Ease of Living: Enhancing Service Delivery at the Grassroots” held at NIRD&PR, Hyd

Government committed to transform every Panchayat into a hub of efficient, transparent, and responsive services: Shri Vivek Bharadwaj, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj

22nd October 2024, Hyderabad

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj organized the first regional workshop under the Panchayat Sammelan series on “Ease of Living: Enhancing Service Delivery at the Grassroots” today at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), Hyderabad. Shri Vivek Bharadwaj, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj participated as chief guest and inaugurated this workshop. Addressing the event, he emphasized that government is committed to transform every panchayat into a hub of efficient, transparent, and responsive services. Noting that Sammelan represents a key milestone in this ongoing process, Shri Bharadwaj stressed that effective service delivery with “seva bhaav” (spirit of service) is key to strengthening rural self-reliance and voluntary tax compliance. He also highlighted the direct correlation between quality service delivery and citizens willingness to pay taxes, enabling Panchayats to achieve self-reliance through self-generated revenue. Addressing the participants, Dr. G. Narendra Kumar, Director General, NIRD&PR, emphasized that Panchayat representatives and functionaries are tasked with driving positive change at the grassroots level. “By equipping the Panchayat representatives and officials with cutting-edge tools and knowledge, we are setting the stage for a governance revolution that begins from the ground up,” he added.

Earlier in his opening remarks, Shri Alok Prem Nagar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, highlighted various digital interventions including ServicePlus of NIC and RapidPro of UNICEF. governance and effective knowledge dissemination across diverse linguistic communities.

Shri Lokesh Kumar D. S., Secretary,



Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Department, Government of Telangana thanked the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for organising this workshop in Hyderabad. This workshop, was organised as a the first in a series of four regional workshops under Panchayat Sammelan. The primary

objective of this programme focused to deliberate on innovative approaches and share experiences for enhancing service delivery at the grassroots level. Representatives from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, and Odisha participated in this

workshop and shared their insights on challenges and opportunities in service delivery. Panchayat Sammelan provided the participants with enhanced knowledge and actionable strategies to enhance the governance and service delivery mechanism at the Panchayat level.

Manugur-Ramagundam railway line works to pick up momentum

Kothagudem: The works related to proposed Manugur-Ramagundam new broad gauge railway line set to be expedited with the Central government authorising revenue officials in the State to perform the functions of competent authority. According to the gazette notification issued by the Centre on this October 16, sub-Collector, Kataram, revenue divisional officer, Bhupalpally and additional Collector (revenue), Peddapalli would be the competent authority to carry out the process of land acquisition. Kataram sub-Collector would be looking after land acquisition in Malharrao and Kataram mandals, Bhupalpally RDO would monitor Ghanpur and Bhulpally mandals in Bhupalpally district. Similarly, the additional Collector would look after land acquisition in Mutharam, Manthani, Ramagiri, Kamanpur and Peddapalli mandals in Peddapalli district. The 207.80 kilometre

railway line granted special railway project would connect Manugur in Kothagudem district and Ramagundam in Peddapalli district. The railway line, referred to as the coal corridor, would serve as a vital supply chain as it connects coal belt areas in Telangana to industrial regions across the country. Once the construction of this line is completed, it will become easier to visit Sammakka and Saralamma gaddelu at Medaram in Mulugu district as the railway line passes through Tadvai. As it ensures rail connectivity to Mulugu and Bhupalapally districts industrial development would be accelerated. It might be noted that the railway project was proposed in 1999. The Centre reconsidered the project and sanctioned it in the year 2013-14 with an initial cost of Rs. 1,112 crore and revised cost of the project is set to be Rs. 3600 crore.



LEAD Group Recognises Schools and Their Leaders as Pillars of India's Education at the 2023 Shiksha Awards Conducts Masterclass on School Leadership



India's leading School Edtech company LEAD Group successfully concluded the second year of the Shiksha Awards, one of India's biggest school awards programs. Shiksha Awards by LEAD Group recognises and celebrates exceptional schools and school leaders whose unwavering dedication to educational excellence is transforming student learning in India. These are schools that, irrespective of location or size, have successfully implemented NCF-aligned multimodal learning in their classrooms through meticulous preparation, teaching, assessment and remediation; are building student confidence; and have improved parental involvement in student education through multiple initiatives including student-led conferences.

The event also featured a masterclass on School Leadership by Sumeet Mehta, CEO and Co-Founder, LEAD Group. More than 2200 schools and 29000 teachers participated in the 2023 Shiksha Awards. D. Shoba Reddy, School Owner and Principal of Sri Kakatiya Public School and Sri Kakatiya High School in Tirupati, along with Reddy Jayachandra, School Owner of Sri Viswam Public School in Tirupati, were among the winners of the 2023 Shiksha Awards. Other winners included LEAD partner schools in Vijayawada, Kadapa, Kakinada, Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, and Guntur. Sumeet Mehta, CEO and Co-Founder, LEAD Group, said, "Schools are the foundation upon which our nation's future is built and the annual Shiksha Awards celebrates the relentless pursuit of providing quality education by the best of these institutions. My heartfelt congratulations

to all the winners, who are shaping the future of education, one student at a time! Their efforts exemplify how innovation and commitment can transform learning outcomes for every student, and we look forward to celebrating more changemaker

schools in the next edition." Shiksha Awards by LEAD Group focuses on recognising India's changemaker schools that are future-focused and committed to educational excellence. Over the course of a year, participating schools keep track

of their progress on various metrics and vie with each other to do better. These metrics range from teacher preparedness to the use of technology in classrooms to ensure effective multimodal education and parental engagement.

CareEdge announces entry into Global Scale Ratings with launch of Sovereign Ratings for 39 Countries; Assigns BBB+ Rating to India.

CareEdge Global IFSC Ltd, a subsidiary of CARE Ratings Ltd, one of India's leading credit rating agencies, has today unveiled its report on Sovereign Ratings of Global Economies, assigning sovereign ratings to 39 countries. The rating agency has assigned long term foreign currency (LTFC) rating of CareEdge BBB+ to India. With this, CareEdge has become the first Indian credit rating agency to enter the Global Scale Ratings space, through its subsidiary, CareEdge Global IFSC Limited.

CareEdge Global has assigned a long-term foreign currency rating of BBB+ to India, based on the resilient post-pandemic rebound of the Indian economy and increased focus on infrastructure investment. The outlook also factors the projected lowering in the general government debt, albeit gradually, aided by healthy nominal GDP growth and continued focus on fiscal consolidation. CareEdge projects general government debt to GDP to reduce to 78% by FY30 and further to 73.5% by FY35 from around 80% level currently. However, it believes that the still elevated general gov-

ernment debt and weak debt affordability remain the key credit constraints.

According to CareEdge Global, India's credit assessment gains from its large and diverse economic structure as well as its healthy growth performance. CareEdge expects GDP growth in the range of 6.5-7% in the next few years. Additionally, India's high foreign exchange reserves and low levels of external debt contribute to a favourable external position supporting its overall credit profile. However, these positives are balanced against high general government debt and weak debt affordability. The country has a low per capita income and high oil import dependency (~85%), which increases its vulnerabilities arising from global oil price shocks. Speaking on the occasion, Mehul Pandya MD & Group CEO, CareEdge said, "This is a significant milestone for us in our journey towards becoming a global knowledge-based institution. As India's economic influence grows, it is both timely and appropriate for an Indian company to enter this domain. We are conscious of the

significant responsibility that comes on our shoulders with this foray and are fully committed to provide independent and unbiased assessments. CareEdge Ratings brings with it a nuanced understanding of emerging economies - a perspective that is invaluable in today's complex global economic environment.

BRS pays tributes to Kumram Bheem on birth anniversary

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao paid tribute to the legendary Gond tribal leader Kumram Bheem on his birth anniversary on Tuesday, remembering his fight for "Jal, Jangal, Zamin" (water, forest, land) and the rights of the weaker sections. He said Kumram Bheem's struggle inspired the Telangana statehood movement.

Why cornea donation for hospital deaths is the need of the hour: Here's what lies behind a new govt plan

With corneal blindness becoming one of the leading causes of blindness in the country, and one which can be rectified by transplanting the dome-shaped layer of the eye with another healthy one, the Health Ministry has decided to give a big push to cornea donation. It is considering an "opt-out" method, whereby anyone who dies at a hospital will be presumed to be a cornea donor unless they (while alive) or their families register their dissent. At present, India follows an opt-in system for harvesting any organ — including tissues like cornea — from deceased donors, meaning the patient (while alive) and their family members have to consent to the donation much before. "Experts were of the opinion that the opt-out method — where everyone who dies in a hospital is presumed to be a donor — is likely to increase the number of corneal donations. This suggestion has been accepted in principle" said an official. The proposal, the official added, is being considered by legal teams as this would require changing the current law governing organ and tissue transplantation in the country.

Why is this necessary?

The move is aimed towards increasing the availability of corneas. First, corneal blindness is the most common cause of blindness in the country among those under 50, accounting for 37.5 per cent of all cases. For those above 50, it is the second-most common reason — after cataract — accounting for 8.2 per cent of the blindness among them, according to the National Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness Survey conducted between 2015 and 19. India adds about 50,000 new cases of corneal blindness each year, according to the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology. Second, there is a scarcity of donated corneas in the country. We need 100,000 corneal transplants a year to reduce the burden of corneal blindness. However, about half this number is collected each year.

How many cornea donations does the country see?

Before Covid-19, the country had registered 65,417 donations in 2019-20. However, post the pandemic, the numbers went down to 32,414 in 2022-23, according to data from the National Programme for Control of Blindness & Visual Impairment (NPCBVI). Collection was the highest in states such as Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Kerala, collecting 5,839, 2,549, 4,279 and 1,345 donations respectively in 2022.

Why was a push given to cornea donation?

There are several reasons. First, cornea is a tissue that does not need blood supply unlike other organs and can be harvested up to six hours after death. Two, cornea can be easily harvested by technicians even at home, meaning most hospitals will be able to do it. Three, harvesting cornea does not change any facial features of the deceased, an issue that bothers the family. Four, corneas are not necessary for collecting evidence in a medico-legal case. "From the point of view of medical professionals and those waiting for cornea

transplant, an opt-out method is beneficial," says Dr Radhika Tandon, professor of ophthalmology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), who was one of the experts consulted. "It is likely to increase the number of donations while preserving the autonomy of the deceased and their family members by allowing them the choice to opt out. But, of course, people may be hesitant or emotional and that needs to be looked into," she adds.

Who benefits from cornea transplant?

Patients with conditions that lead to weakening of the cornea, its thinning and change in shape may require a cornea transplant. Those with degenerative conditions — such as conditions that impact the functioning of the cell lining of the cornea — may also need a transplant. Most importantly, people whose cornea is damaged due to an injury or an infection that does not respond to antibiotics stand to benefit.

Can we improve utilisation of donated corneas and cut waiting lists?

Dr Tandon says there is a need to create a country-wide network of eye banks and retrieval centres so that corneas that may not be usable for patients in one centre may be used in another. "Higher centres that use newer techniques may be able to utilise corneas effectively. Also, certain corneas that cannot be used in many cases may be good for utilisation in emergency cases. So, if there is a network, the corneas can be sent to centres that receive



such emergency cases."

In addition, centres like AIIMS have also developed processes to divide a cornea and use one to treat two or three patients. The National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) is working to set up a national registry and coordination network on the lines of what already exists for other organs. "At institutional level, eye banks may be maintaining waiting lists but we are trying to streamline the process on a national level. This will improve

utilisation of the corneas as well. A process similar to what is followed for other organs is being set up for corneas too, where the hospital that has harvested the tissue will have the first right over it. If there is no patient, it will be shared with other hospitals in the state, then others in the region, and finally other regions of the country," the Health Ministry official clarified. The government is also mulling developing a cheaper, indigenous medium for preserving the cornea.

When vs what you eat: Find out if one matters more than the other

The question of whether the timing of meals is more important than the nutritional content is confusing for many looking to better their health. While much emphasis is traditionally placed on what we eat, experts suggest that when we eat may play a crucial role in our overall health and well-being. How timing of meals influence metabolic processes? Dietician Anushree Sharma agrees that the timing of meals does affect the metabolic process of the body. "Our body functions in the same way as the sun. In the morning, the body has a high BMR (Basal Metabolic Rate) and as the sun begins to set, the BMR of the body reduces."

She mentions, "At night we, as dieticians, ask patients to eat early or before 9, or to eat light because when we sleep our organs also rest and the BMR slows down. Also, the body undergoes reconstruction and repair." If we consume heavy meals, she says, our body's energy is diverted towards the digestion of food, and hence full reconstruction and proper sleep cannot be attained. As a result, the food is also not digested completely. Prachi Mandholia, clinical nutritionist, concurs, adding that while both factors are important, "the quality of the food you eat determines the nutrients available for metabolic processes, while meal timing can modulate how effectively those nutrients are utilised."

Rohit Waghmare, nutritionist at



MultiFit, tells indianexpress.com, "Enjoying food at irregular times or late in the evening will play havoc with your internal clock and harm your health, and it will prevent you from having a good night's sleep."

Mandholia echoes this. "The body's metabolism is regulated by circadian rhythms, which are influenced by the light-dark cycle. Eating late into the night can disrupt this circadian rhythm and lead to metabolic inefficiencies like insulin resis-

tance, hormonal imbalance, weight gain, melatonin dysregulation and more," she asserts. meal, time, eat Eating late into the night can disrupt this circadian rhythm (Source: Unsplash) Are specific times of day that are more beneficial for eating certain types of food?

Waghmare says, "Yes, absolutely. Consuming carbohydrates in the early parts of the day, rather than at night, is likely to support weight management, fat loss, and metabolism."

We have to go all the way back to Karpov and Kasparov on the top two boards to find something like India's dominance: Peter Svidler

Peter Svidler won the Chess World Cup in 2011, was a part of five Russian Olympiad-winning teams, coached R. Praggnanandhaa ahead of the Candidates tournament in Toronto this year, is a former World No. 4 and a commentator when he is not playing. But he is not your usual top Russian Grandmaster; he is an ardent cricket fan. Excerpts from Svidler's interview with The Hindu during the Tech Mahindra Global Chess League in London earlier this month:

Your thoughts on the Global Chess League?

I experienced the other side of it. Last year I was doing the commentary, and this year I got drafted into play. I understand what the league is based on, being a cricket fan. I don't know if it is going to be as big a hit as the IPL, but if that happens, it will be fantastic for chess. The calendar is quite busy, but this will be a very prominent part of the calendar. It has a carnival feel to it, while also being incredibly strong. And this is a combination of things that has proven to work in other sports. I welcome every new project, because I think the more chess, the better.

How do you view the league's time control with no increment?

I am old enough to have started playing with analogue clocks, so it is not exactly an alien concept, but obviously we have moved away from it. I understand the decision-making behind it. Because of television, you want to have a much clearer idea of how long a match takes, and you also want excitement and things happening at the end of it.

The last major tournament before the Global Chess League was the Chess Olympiad in Budapest. Were you surprised by India's twin gold and the men's team's dominance?

They were clearly going to be one of the two, three main favourites. I was doing commentary on the Olympiad, and I think by round four, we were definitely saying between ourselves, maybe even on air — who is going to take points off these kids? Like, it just didn't seem like they could be stopped. The double is very historic. The women were not as dominant as the men.

No, it is not a surprise anymore. I think a team with this line-up, knowing what we know about these guys, and the moment you realise the United States is not playing as well as maybe you would have expected that they would, become the obvious favourites for the title because there are no weaknesses; just five very strong boards. Serial winner: Svidler was a part of five Russian Olympiad-winning teams between 1994 and 2002. It was one of the most dominant performances in the history of the Olympiad... Definitely. We probably will have to go all the way back to the Olympiads where the Soviet Union played [Anatoly] Karpov and [Garry] Kasparov on the top two boards to find something like that.

You were part of five Russian teams that won the Olympiad gold.

I began playing at the Olympiad in 1994. In 1996 at Yerevan, we played kind of similar to what India did at Budapest. It



didn't seem like we were likely to drop points.

You worked as a coach with R. Praggnanandhaa ahead of the Candidates. How did you find the experience?

It was something new for me, as I hadn't really coached until I started working with Pragg. But it has been a joy because he is a very strong chess player, and he is also extremely pleasant to be around. It kind of mattered for me because I think there needs to be a human connection, like working for somebody you don't particularly like is not advisable. He is just such a sunny kid, cheerful, kind and just a joy. Strong connection: Svidler enjoyed his time coaching R. Praggnanandhaa, describing the Indian as 'a sunny kid' who is 'just a joy' to be around. Strong connection: Svidler enjoyed his time coaching R. Praggnanandhaa, describing the Indian as 'a sunny kid' who is 'just a joy' to be around. You have played the Candidates three times and finished third in 2013. In the generation I was part of, the people who did get a shot at the World title are probably sort of slightly above me in the pecking order. So, I think I am okay with my career. One of the highlights of which was winning the World Cup in 2011?

Yes, of course. I tend to enjoy those [knockout] tournaments. You must be the only top chess player from a non-cricketing country that follows cricket. How did it all begin? Nigel Short introduced me to cricket. I was in Greece where we were working on chess, and then at some point he told me, 'No, enough of this, yeah, let's go watch something you've never watched before.'

And you liked what you saw?

I was kind of instantly hooked.

What did you first like about cricket?

It is hard to describe. The first match I watched, along with Short on TV, was India versus Pakistan in the 1999 World Cup.

You could not have got something

bigger than that.

Yes, I think this is why I love the game, because of my first experience of it. I didn't know the rules, I didn't know anything, but the feeling of spectacle was just so obvious.

Do you enjoy all formats of cricket?

Yes, I have grown to enjoy the T20s as well. I mean, it took me a long time to convince myself I am supposed to take T20s seriously, but I do enjoy them as well now. But still if I have a choice, I would watch a good Test match over anything else. I love the drama, the technique. The sense of the build-up of narrative over five days is really... I don't know if anything compares to it. It is very, very special because, yeah, you get to see samples of life within a Test match. Of course it needs to be a good match.

Have you watched a Test from the ground?

Yes, the final Test of the 2005 Ashes. It rained for most of the day, so we didn't get to watch much cricket, but as occasions go, it was pretty decent.

The cricketers you like to watch in particular... I love spinners. I have watched Shane Warne bowl a couple of times [in international cricket]. I also watched him play for Hampshire in the final of the one-day competition here. I have also enjoyed watching Muttiah Muralitharan bowl.

As for the batters?

It is kind of weird because I always liked Michael Atherton, maybe because of his writing, because I haven't actually watched him live very much. And because of how much I enjoyed his writing and his commentary, I was kind of drawn to this idea of like a proper opener who digs in. I have watched his videos, I don't think I've ever seen him bat live. These days, your favourites bat in different styles, like Yashasvi Jaiswal.

By 2030, India to have 1.2 billion smartphones, 641 million 5G subscribers

New Delhi: India is projected to have 1.2 billion smartphone connections by 2030, with half of the users on 5G smartphones, according to a new report. According to global mobile network body GSMA, the country is projected to have over 641 million 5G subscribers by 2030, growing at 49 per cent. "India will see an unprecedented growth in the number of 5G mobile subscribers, and an explosion of data usage in the next six years," according to GSMA Intelligence projections. This stupendous growth in 5G subscribers will also lead to a huge expansion of data consumption, impelling Indian telcos to make large investments. The data consumption per subscriber is

likely to grow at a CAGR of 15 per cent between 2023 and 2029, to reach 68 GB per month per subscriber in India. In the Asia-Pacific region, India and Indonesia are uniquely positioned to leverage digitalisation to drive economic resilience, job creation, and innovation. According to the latest GSMA 'Mobile Economy Asia Pacific 2024 Report', India is projected to have 1.2 billion smartphone connections by 2030, while Indonesia is expected to reach 387 million connections by the same year, said the organisation. Furthermore, mobile technologies and services generated 5.3 per cent of GDP across the APAC region in 2023, contributing \$880 billion in economic value, and supporting approximately 13 million jobs across the region.

Living with sirens and uncertainty in Ukraine

On a clear, bright morning in late August, Megan D'Souza, an Indian student at Ukraine's National Pirogov Memorial Medical University, Vinnytsya, stood in front of a hotel overlooking the Sophia square in Kyiv, the capital. With her stood a few hundred Indian students from the university, all eagerly waiting to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was visiting for a day. This was his first trip to the east European country since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. "This is a historic visit by an Indian Prime Minister and we are part of history," D'Souza said. Slogans of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' rent the air. While the mood was jubilant at the hotel, elsewhere, there were signs of a country at war. Kyiv was under curfew every day from midnight to 5 a.m. The streets emptied out past 11 p.m. Crowded areas were blocked at night. Barricades had been erected in front of complexes, and barbed wires encircled important buildings. Several buildings contained bomb shelters. Vinayak Niwas, a 26-year-old student from Bihar, explained, "While basements of buildings, shopping malls, and parking areas have been converted into shelters and furnished with basic amenities, there are also Soviet-era bunkers around. Those were built to withstand heavy bombardment and allow people to seek refuge for longer." Staff in hotels gave directions to shelters as part of their routine instructions. Statistics vary on the number of deaths in Ukraine since the war began. Ukrainian officials have said Russian "invaders" had killed more than 12,000 civilians, including 551 children, while the London-based Action on Armed Violence charity reported that 7,001 people had been killed as of September 23, with more than 20,000 civilians injured.

Russia's invasion has displaced millions of Ukrainians and destabilised the economy. According to the European Parliament, "More than 6.4 million Ukrainian refugees were registered worldwide and there are close to 3.7 million internally displaced people (the two groups together representing 23% of Ukraine's pre-war population)." The Russian bombardment has equally affected millions of people of other nationalities who study and work in the country. Among them are Indians — mostly students, businesspersons, and those who married locals and have settled in Ukraine. At a crossroads when the war broke, Niwas said the situation in Vinnytsya, about 270 kilometres by road from Kyiv, was "completely chaotic." He recalled, "I felt the vibrations when the first bomb hit the ground a couple of kilometres from us." In February and March 2022, around 22,500 Indian nationals were evacuated from Ukraine. Of them, 18,278 were brought back to India under Operation Ganga, an evacuation mission carried out by the Indian government. Most of them were students.

Shrujan Laxmikant Mehta, 23, from Somnath, Gujarat, was evacuated through Romania. "Along with others, I travelled by bus, waving the Indian flag," he said. Mehta returned to Ukraine via Poland in

2023. Many students who are pursuing medicine in Ukraine said they had moved because an MBBS course is expensive, even prohibitive for many, in India. According to education consultancy sites and students, the fees for a MBBS course at a government medical college in India is ₹10,000-₹50,000 per year. But at a private medical college, it can range anywhere between ₹3 lakh and ₹25 lakh per year. Others said that these are lower estimates and that the actual cost can be several lakh rupees higher. To add to the problem of costs is the challenge of intense competition. Of the 17 lakh students who appear for the medical exam every year, only about 80,000 students secure admission for an MBBS course, as per a September 2022 report by Mumbai-based investment consultants, Anand Rathi Advisors. "The limited number of seats and a high minimum threshold for government colleges coupled with lofty fees is compelling students to pursue medical education in foreign countries. China, Ukraine, the Philippines and Russia account for 60% of the student outflow from India each year," the report stated.

Students said that Ukraine, Russia, and other Central Asian countries have emerged as popular choices for them to pursue medicine as an MBBS course in these countries is affordable. The average annual tuition fee of medical education in Ukraine is around 2 lakh Hryvnia or UAH (₹4.2 lakh). "Since universities in the European Union have the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), a standard means to compare credits, we can easily get admission into good postgraduate colleges and get jobs in Europe," Mehta said. "Also, the qualifying ratio of the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination, which is required for foreign degree holders to practise medicine in India, is also very good for Ukrainian universities," he pointed out. In February-March 2022, the students who returned to India had two options: they could either seek transfers to universities in other countries or wait until it was safe to return to Ukraine. Getting a transfer to a university in India was out of the question as the National Medical Commission Act, 2019, does not permit students to migrate from foreign universities to India. Tanmaya Lal, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, said that the Ukrainian Medical Council facilitated the transfer of some students who had returned to India, to other universities and countries.

But many others had to figure it out on their own. To obtain transfers to universities in Europe or Central Asia, the students had to either begin their course from scratch or pay extra, said officials. While it was relatively easy for students in the first few years of their course to restart elsewhere, for those in the fifth and sixth year, it was a difficult call to take. "When I was in India, I would write at least 50 emails a day just begging various universities to take me in," recalled D'Souza, who is in the final year of her course. She wrote to universities all over Europe which had an ECTS. "No one was willing to take me. And even if they



were willing, I would have had to start from the beginning, which was not an option for me. It was really hard. I came back to Ukraine not only because it was hard to get transfers elsewhere but also because this was the cheaper alternative," she said. While some students said they had moved to Hungary and even secured full scholarships, they had to start their course once more. Samarkand State Medical University in Uzbekistan, for instance, accommodated more than 1,000 Indian medical students from Ukraine after the Indian Embassy in Ukraine reached out to them. "We evaluated the requirements of such students and decided that enrolling them with a semester back would be a viable option to provide equivalence," said Zafar Aminov, the Vice Chancellor, speaking to the media earlier.

In 2022, the National Medical Commission of Ukraine issued a notice allowing a mobility programme for those students affected by the war. Under this, the Odessa National Medical University found a partner institute in the Georgia National University SEU, the only university which took part in the programme from Georgia, according to Ashu Rawat, Founder and Director, Leader Education, based in Odesa. Under the mobility programme, students could complete the remainder of their degree in Georgia and obtain the degree from their original university upon completion. "Around 200 students took this option. It was a very successful programme," Rawat said. During a media interaction on August 23, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar acknowledged that some students have come back to India since the evacuation due to academic compulsions. He said there are 2,000-2,500 Indian students in Ukraine at present. "If you're asking us what advisory we would give them, we would still urge caution, because you can see there is a conflict on. I mean, it depends, again, on the place, on the city. But our hope is that this conflict will come to an end, life will return to normal, and that we will see the full return of Indian students in due course," he added. The journey back to Ukraine was not only dangerous, but also difficult for students like D'Souza. There were two ways of re-

turning to Ukraine: via Poland or through Moldova. Obtaining a Polish visa was challenging for many in the early days of the war. Mehta managed to get it, but many others could not. "The biggest issue that the students who wanted to return in the early days faced was lack of connectivity and communication," said Rawat. While Moldova did issue e-visas for Ukraine, it stopped when the war began as it struggled to cope with the growing pile of applications. Plus, the country had security concerns. "At that point, there was no Moldavian Embassy in India," said Rawat. "There were also attempts by middlemen to get money from the students by promising to secure visas for them," he added. In April 2023, Moldova announced that it would open an embassy in India. The Moldovan Ambassador arrived in India in June 2023. This helped many students get a Moldovan visa. Lal said, "Around 2,100 Indian students are enrolled with the Ukrainian universities at this stage. Of them, over 1,000 Indian students are pursuing studies in person in Ukraine." Increasing expenses Ever since she returned, the situation has "not been bad," said D'Souza. "Yes, we hear the siren at least six times a day and we have water and electricity cuts. But I have only a year to go before I finish the course, so it's fine." Several students complained that the prices of utilities have increased. While the tuition fees have remained the same, university hostels have hiked their fees, they said. "When I came to Ukraine in 2019, the hostel fees every month was 800 UAH, which is about ₹1,600. It was increased to ₹1,000 UAH (₹2,030) last year. Then, it became 1,850 UAH (₹3,760) per month," one student said. "The prices of daily essentials such as rice, oil, and eggs have also increased. So, our expenses have doubled." The students said they raised these issues with the management, which simply shrugged and declared that it was helpless given the ongoing conflict. The students said they still preferred to stay in university hostels, which are safer and more convenient than apartments. "As there are power and water supply cuts, an induction stove at my university hostel — there is one on each floor — works for only three hours a day.

Managing Chennai monsoon

Over the past few years, Chennai has continued to receive unprecedented rainfall during the annual northeast monsoon. Sudden bursts of increased rainfall, with large volumes of water in very short spans, often result in urban floods, revealing the city's vulnerability. Confronting the challenges of climate change, Chennai needs to find a solution that primarily enables its water reservoirs to absorb, store or recharge groundwater. The focus shifts to the imperatives of organised urban planning and the need to protect and rejuvenate Chennai's water reservoirs — Pallikaranai marsh, Ennore creek and other large reservoirs such as Chembarambakkam lake and Red Hills lake. The organic and rapid growth of the city has disrupted the natural hydrological cycle with the expansion of concrete and tar-paved surfaces, indiscriminate constructions and felling of trees and vegetation. Environmentalists suggest that this could be some of the many reasons behind urban floods, besides augmenting the capacity of the three rivers and their reservoirs — Adyar, Cooum and Kosasthalaiyar. The city requires a new imagination of its relationship to the unpredictable monsoons, the sea, and its water reservoirs. Over the last three decades, Chennai has been at the forefront of rainwater harvesting. The Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) provides detailed information about water harvesting and its relationship to floods. These are open-source documents that can be accessed online. (www.cmwssb.tn.gov.in/rain-water-harvesting) Chennai's history indicates that well-designed rainwater harvesting systems, following safety standards, can substantially absorb excess rainwater and minimise the adverse impact of floods. Public awareness on waste disposal, preparedness and water conservation practices are essential to address climate-induced calamities and build resilience.

In the face of heavy rains, residential complexes and institutions have begun to construct rainwater harvesting wells, as well as renew existing ones that have been defunct. The initiative, however, needs to be more widespread recognising its intrinsic benefits. It is a pragmatic indication to new apartment complexes, to be more diligent and provide for well-designed rainwater harvesting pits that collect excess rains to permeate the soil. The CMWSSB guidelines suggest that water collected from the terraces can be directed through a filtration process into storage tanks. While it can considerably reduce the floodwaters, it assures a long-term water security to Chennai. Integrating these aspects into the Third Masterplan, presently under preparation by the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, could strengthen the city's capacity to address urban floods. It has several other ancillary benefits such as reducing urban heat, recharging groundwater, and minimising the ingress of brackish seawater. Apartment complexes that have recharged groundwater, through rainwater harvesting, have discovered an improvement in water quality. Over the past decades, innumerable studies by CMWSSB have indicated the effectiveness of rainwater harvesting in reducing flood water volume and stopping water logging of roads. Large education campuses can



contribute to augmenting and recharge of groundwaters. However, it's a greater challenge to address and mitigate the impacts of such cataclysmic rains.

Public awareness about designing permeable, porous pavements and surfaces can encourage and allow rainwater to infiltrate the soil and recharge groundwater naturally — urban parks and gardens, porous pavements, retention wells, and green roofs. Permeable pavements and surfaces have had a significant impact on reducing urban heat as well. While much of these details are known, their dissemination could ensure effective adoption. Drawing from urban lessons of medieval Madras, these elements of rainwater harvesting can be combined with Chennai's road network and its stormwater drain system — to assist in the natural flow of water into rivers and rejuvenate the lakes and other water reservoirs, through a natural process. Stormwater channels have also been equipped with filtration and recharge wells in the city today. A pragmatic neighbourhood approach, scientifically undertaken, ensuring surface and drain slopes and levels, requires a monitoring committee, including neighbourhood citizen groups, to coordinate the efforts. Digital technologies and apps, documenting citizen data of inundation, flooding, and other issues can empower a citizen-based participation and aid the planning process, providing local data. Low-lying areas would undoubtedly require more concerted efforts in infrastructure investments and planning.

The impetus to creating urban green spaces, accessible to all, is imperative, for several reasons. During earlier natural calamities, the Greater Chennai Corporation had invited environmentalists and citizen groups to draw up ecological guidelines for tree-planting. Protecting natural ecosystems and biodiversity, regions like the Guindy deer-park and Vandalur area, and other local parks act as natural flood regulators as well. Rejuvenating untended parks, Open Space Reservation lands and other derelict zones would consolidate these nature-based solutions considerably. The flood mitigation process would require a constant monitoring and maintenance of stormwater drains. In the present scenario of Chennai's growth, nature-

based solutions (through the creation of new green spaces and rejuvenation of natural water reservoirs) can support a natural "stormwater management". Several studies have demonstrated the contribution of such nature-based solutions (if appropriately designed) in complementing the urban drainage system. The need for an integrated database system with early-warning systems has to be implemented to coordinate efforts.

Information on rescue, evacuation, helplines, relief measures, hospital support, and other relevant information have augmented such extreme predicaments. Areas with incomplete canals, or roads under construction have been the most affected. However, on a positive note, the early warning updates received by citizens provided adequate time to evacuate to safety. Several parts of Chennai continue to battle the

receding floods, inundating low-lying areas. Prioritising vulnerable communities and neighbourhoods for infrastructural remedies is imperative. In the long-term, flood mitigation measures have often influenced the microclimate, and have the potential to make the city cooler and more liveable. Citizen groups can participate in urban neighbourhood discussions to suggest local observations. Community groups monitoring stormwater canals adjacent to their homes have informally emerged in Chennai since the last decade. If these volunteer efforts by citizen groups can be supported in the planning process, the city can chart a resilient road map to cope with natural calamities. The writer is the founding Principal Architect of Artes Roots Collaborative, involved in the intersections of climate change, social landscapes, environment and habitat.

Air India says Vistara in-flight experience to continue post-merger

New Delhi: Air India on Friday said Vistara routes and schedule as well as the in-flight experience will continue and the flights operated with Vistara planes will have the code 'AI2' post-merger. The merger of the two full service carriers is scheduled to be completed on November 12, following which Singapore Airlines will have a 25.1 per cent stake in Air India.

Vistara is a joint venture between Tata Group and Singapore Airlines. Post the merger, the vintage 'Maharaja' will be retained through the frequent flyer programme of the integrated entity. "The existing members of Club Vistara will be seamlessly transferred to Air India's Flying Returns program. With this merger, Flying Returns will also evolve into an all-new avatar 'Maharaja Club,'" Air India said in the statement.

Reiterating that the experience offered by Vistara will continue for customers post-merger, Air India said Vistara will be identified by a special four-digit Air India code beginning with the digit '2'. "For

instance, UK 955 will become AI 2955 helping customers identify them while booking... after November 12," the statement said. Further, it said the routes and schedule operated by Vistara aircraft will continue to be the same, alongside the airline's in-flight experience that includes the product and service such as menu and cutlery on the Vistara aircraft.

There are concerns in certain quarters on whether Vistara passengers will continue to get the same services such as now, post-merger as Air India, which is in the transformation phase, has been facing certain service issues in recent times. Air India, on October 2, also said that Vistara experience will remain post-merger. On Wednesday, Vistara Chairman Bhaskar Bhat said the integrated entity will share the best practices of the two airlines and the livery of Vistara will stay for sometime. The Air India-Vistara merger, announced in November 2022, will also see Singapore Airlines acquiring a 25.1 per cent stake in the merged entity.