

Engineering management quota fee may be tripled in Telangana

Hyderabad: Engineering aspirants eyeing for a management quota seat in the private colleges may have to shell out triple the fee set for the convener quota from the next year. For instance, if a convener quota seat in a private engineering college is of Rs.1 lakh per annum, the management seat will be Rs.3 lakh. The move, which has the potential to impact thousands of students, comes as part of the Telangana Council of Higher Education (TGCHE) efforts to streamline the management quota admission process in private engineering colleges.

The TGCHE is planning to take over the engineering management quota admissions from the next academic year, aiming to increase transparency and fairness in the admission process. Permission to implement online admissions for the management quota besides tripling the fee for will be shortly sought from the State government. According to TGCHE senior officials, the engineering quota management admissions are being planned on the similar lines of the MBBS and BDS management quota seats via merit secured in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) UG. The medicine and dental seats in the private medical and dental institutions are being filled by the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences through the web-based counselling. Here the management quota fee is charged up to twice the fee set for the convener quota seat. Similarly, the category C (NRI) seats fee is up to twice the fee of the man-



agement quota seat. Currently, 70 per cent of the seats in the private engineering colleges are filled via the Telangana Engineering, Agriculture and Medical Common Entrance Test (TG EAPCET) by the TGCHE. The remaining 30 per cent of seats are

filled by the colleges' management by advertising in the newspapers. As per the rules, managements have to follow order of merit, starting with NRI candidates, JEE Main, TG EAPCET and intermediate scores not less than 45 per cent. However, so far,

these rules are just only on papers. Only a few colleges adhere to these rules. There has been long distance demand from different student organisations to regulate management quota seats in the private engineering colleges, which have been charging exorbitant fees from students.

Seasonal illnesses set to rise; Health officials urge precautions

Hyderabad: After a brief respite, seasonal ailments are all set to surge in Hyderabad and its surrounding regions due to changing weather conditions, public health officials have warned. With the drop in mercury levels and prevalence of chilly weather conditions during night and early part of the day, doctors have urged people to start taking basic precautions to avoid going down with sickness in the coming weeks. Post-Covid pandemic, the winter season from November to initial part of the year provides ideal conditions for the surge in cases of influenza, upper respiratory tract infections, lung diseases and viral fevers in Hyderabad. A large section of the population also struggle with allergies during winter but they continue to suffer due to lack of awareness about its treatment. The winter in Hyderabad is also triggers fresh bouts of Asthma during

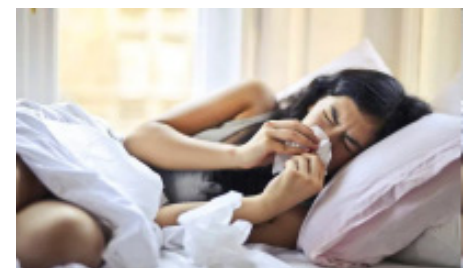
winters. According to Allergy and Asthma Network of India (AANI), winters are known to cause a 40 per cent rise in cases of allergies. A majority of these allergies are related to upper respiratory tract infections, doctors said.

"During winters, up to 80 per cent of allergic reactions are caused due to house dust mite and moulds. Essentially, during winter airways of the lungs tighten, resulting in more aggressive unpredictable Asthmatic attacks," says CEO of AANI and allergy specialist, Dr. Vyakaranam Nageshwar.

Just like last year, seasonal diseases experts are also anticipating a surge in cases of swine flu (H1N1), influenza and viral fevers during this winter. Typical instances of individuals struggling with seasonal flu and upper respiratory tract infec-

tions impacting nose, swelling of upper airways with associated cough with no fever or pneumonia among children and adults are expected to rise in Hyderabad, doctors warned. High risk groups including pregnant women, children and elderly with comorbid conditions can get their annual influenza vaccine shot after consulting with qualified doctor. It would be better for such individuals to wear a mask, in case they are venturing out. Ways to improve immunity during winter:

- Take one table spoon of sugar-free Chyavanprash in the morning
- Herbal tea with Tulsi, Dalchini, Kalimirch, Shnthi (dry ginger) once or twice a day
- Instead of sugar, natural jaggery or fresh lemon juice can be added for taste
- Mix turmeric (Haldi) with hot milk powder once or twice a day to beat
- Prefer warm water in case of cold
- Spice like Haldi, Jeera, Dhaniya, Lahsun can be added to



the diet How to bear Allergy and Asthma:

- Ensure windows and doors are closed to prevent chill breeze flowing in.
- Do not use your rugs or bed sheets for more than 15 days and wash them in hot water.
- Avoid getting up from bed in the early morning without socks and wear rubber footwear.
- Walking barefoot after waking up in a cold morning triggers sneezing.
- Don't discontinue inhalers and tablets.

How the Supreme Court cleared the decks for AMU to claim its minority status

The story so far: In a narrow 4-3 majority verdict, the Supreme Court on November 8, 2024, overturned its 1967 ruling in *S. Azeez Basha v. Union of India*, which had previously served as the basis for denying Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) its minority institution status. The majority verdict was penned by former Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud and endorsed by Justices Sanjiv Khanna, JB Pardiwala, and Manoj Misra. Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and S.C. Sharma dissented in separate opinions.

What constitutes a 'minority institution'?

Article 30(1) of the Constitution guarantees religious and linguistic minorities the fundamental right to establish and manage educational institutions of their choice. Article 30(2) further mandates that the state must ensure "equality of treatment" in granting aid to all educational institutions, regardless of their minority status. Notably, such institutions enjoy greater autonomy than most others. Under Article 15(5), they are exempt from providing reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and may reserve up to 50% of seats for students from their own community. In the landmark *T.M.A. Pai Foundation (2002)* case, the Supreme Court clarified that a 'minority' status should be determined based on the demographic composition of the concerned State, rather than the national population.

What is the background of the case?

In 1875, Muslim reformer and educationist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College in Aligarh to offer modern British education rooted in Islamic values to Muslims. In 1920, the Aligarh Muslim University Act (AMU Act) was passed, incorporating MAO College and the Muslim University Association into AMU. Under Section 23 of the Act, only Muslims were permitted to be members of the university's governing body, known as the Court. In 1951, this mandate for Muslim-only representation on the Court was abolished. A subsequent amendment in 1965 redistributed the Court's powers among other administrative bodies, with provisions allowing the President of India to nominate members to it. However, in 1967, the Supreme Court, in *Azeez Basha*, upheld the amendments to the Act, reasoning that AMU was neither established nor administered by the Muslim minority since it had been established through central legislation. This decision sparked widespread protests, ultimately leading to an amendment of the AMU Act in 1981, which officially recognised the university's minority status. In 2005, the university introduced a policy reserving 50% of seats in its postgraduate medical courses for Muslim students. This was subsequently challenged before the Allahabad High Court which struck it down on the ground that the university did not qualify as a minority institution as per the *Azeez Basha* ruling. In 2006, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court stayed the reservation policy and referred the case to a larger Bench. In 2019, a three-judge Bench headed by former CJI Ranjan Gogoi referred the *Azeez Basha* decision for re-

consideration by a seven-judge Bench. The matter stayed in limbo till October last year when Justice Chandrachud constituted a seven-judge bench to hear it.

What did the majority rule?

Justice Chandrachud, in an expansive interpretation of Article 30, affirmed that educational institutions established prior to the adoption of the Constitution are equally entitled to the protections granted under Article 30(1). He clarified that statutory enactments conferring legal recognition or status upon such institutions do not compromise their minority character, provided their foundational purpose was "predominantly" aimed at benefiting the minority community. The majority verdict further emphasised that an institution does not forfeit its minority character simply because its administration is no longer vested with the community. The judges reasoned that founders or the minority community might appoint individuals from outside the community to helm the administrative affairs, particularly if the institution seeks to focus on secular education. "This may be the case for professional colleges which offer specialised courses such as law, medicine, or architecture, where the founders may not possess the knowledge, experience, or insight necessary to manage or administer the institution personally," they added.

Accordingly, the majority overturned the longstanding *Azeez Basha* ruling, asserting that treating legal formalities for recognition or degree conferral as grounds to nullify an institution's minority status would constitute a breach of fundamental rights. However, Justice Chandrachud clarified that the onus rests on the concerned religious or linguistic minorities to demonstrate that the educational institution was primarily established for the benefit of their community to qualify for protection under Article 30(1). He pointed out that such an assessment of the "brain" behind an institution's creation could be conducted through a comprehensive review of documents, correspondence and historical records. Dismissing the Centre's contentions, the judges further declared that recognising an institution as one of national importance does not inherently diminish its minority character, as the national and minority attributes are "not at odds with each other nor mutually exclusive." They also refused to assign any weight to either the provision of religious instruction or the prominence of religious buildings, such as the St. Stephen's College church or AMU mosque, in determining an institution's minority status.

What do the dissenting opinions state?

Justice Kant primarily differed from the majority on procedural grounds, arguing that the two-judge Bench in *Anjuman-e-Rahmaniya v. District Inspector of Schools (1981)*, which had initially questioned the precedent set by a five-judge Bench in *Azeez Basha*, overstepped its jurisdiction by referring the matter directly to a seven-judge Bench. He reasoned that this undermined the Chief Justice's authority as the "master of the roster." While concurring with Justice Kant on procedural impropriety, Justice Datta questioned the legitimacy of



AMU's minority status, asserting that conferring such recognition after nearly a century would amount to "historical revisionism." Notably, he critiqued the lack of constructive discussions among the judges on the Bench, revealing that the draft opinions from Justice Chandrachud—later forming the majority judgment—were received late and underwent frequent revisions. In a likely reference to the majority ruling, Justice Datta remarked that judges should refrain from disregarding long-standing precedents in favour of judicial activism. Justice Sharma too concluded that initial support from a minority community does not automatically grant an insti-

tution minority status, particularly if the actual control vests with the government.

What happens next?

A regular bench, assigned by CJI Sanjiv Khanna, will now reevaluate AMU's minority character based on criteria set by the majority without being constrained by *Azeez Basha*. Meanwhile, the stay on the university's 2005 reservation policy will persist until a final determination is made. This reassessment is likely to have far-reaching implications for AMU's autonomy, its authority to reserve seats for Muslim students, and the broader discourse on minority rights in India.

Amid diversification push, Apple plans research subsidiary in India

New Delhi: Firming up its India presence as Apple diversifies its vast supply chain and research outside of China, the iPhone maker has set up a new research and development subsidiary in the country. The research and development facility would reportedly focus on research, design, testing and providing support to third-party manufacturers. The move to establish a R&D facility in India is significant as this will help the tech giant connect better with the local manufacturing ecosystem player, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and create India-specific products and solutions, according to industry players.

Apple currently have R&D facilities in the US, China, Germany and Israel. The company did not immediately comment on its India future plans regarding research and development. According to Prabhu Ram, VP-Industry Research Group, CyberMedia Research (CMR), just as China powered Apple's growth in the past, India is poised to do the same over the next decade.

"Key to this growth is not just retail and marketing, but also robust R&D operations. By focusing on India-centric R&D, Apple can fuel the next wave of innovation, catering to the aspirations of Indian consumers and beyond," Ram said. Apple is fast forwarding its manufacturing plans in India and Vietnam. Buoyed by the ease-of-do-

ing business and friendly local manufacturing policies, Apple's 'Make in India' iPhones are breaking all previous export records.

The company is set to open four more own-branded retail stores in India, according to its CEO Tim Cook. "We continue to be excited by the enthusiasm we're seeing in India, where we set an all-time revenue record. This has been an extraordinary year of innovation at Apple," said Cook during the quarterly earnings call (Q4 fiscal year 2024).

"We can't wait to bring four new stores to customers in India. We're passionate about education and believe technology has a vital role to play in both helping teachers to inspire their students and students to learn about the world around them," said Cook. The tech giant is on course to surpass the FY24 figures of exports from India, reaching over Rs 50,000 crore (more than \$6 billion) in the first six months this fiscal (FY25), according to latest industry data.

The iPhone exports from India surged to cross \$10 billion in 2023-24 from \$6.27 billion in 2022-23. Overall, the iPhone maker's India operations reached \$23.5 billion in value in the last fiscal (FY24). Apple assembled \$14 billion of iPhones in India in last fiscal, exported more than \$10 billion worth of devices.

Why the farmers alone are being made scapegoats?

Jag Mohan Thaken

Stubble burning always puts a damper on celebrations of Diwali festival for the farmers, especially residing in Punjab and Haryana. It is the harvest season for paddy just before the sowing of the next crop. Farmers have to vacate the land for the wheat showing immediately and they don't have much time to manage the straw of paddy just harvested. In order to quickly prepare their fields for the wheat crop, many farmers simply burn leftover plant debris after harvesting rice. The practice is known as paddy stubble burning. Due to the short period for stubble management and lack of readily available alternative means within reach of the farmers and no proper proportionate monetary help by the governments, the farmers have to adopt the old method of stubble burning. The surprising thing is that the governments do not seem seriously ready to resolve their problem, rather enforcing the farmers by inflicting the fine, depriving the farmers of MSP for the next two crops and lodging FIR against them. While stubble burning is a compulsive need for the farmers, it has become a noose around the neck for the government also. To control the menace of this practice by 'Rule(stick) in the guise of Rule', Haryana Agricultural department has issued a letter on October 17, 2024 for lodging an FIR and restricting the farmers, who burn stubble, from selling their crops in Mandis through the e-Kharid portal. "Farmers who burn or have burnt stubble during the current season i.e from 15-09-2024, an FIR should be registered against them and a Red entry should be made in their MFMB records restricting them from selling their crops in Mandis through the e-Kharid portal during the next two seasons, says the Department of Agriculture, Haryana". To give another hammer blow to the farmers, recently the central Ministry of Environment has also issued a notification to double the penalty amount on stubble burning. Now, a fine of ₹5,000 will be imposed on landowners with less than two acres, ₹10,000 for two to five acres, and ₹30,000 for those with more than five acres, if they adopt the stubble burning. The governments of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi will be required to implement these rules.

How Polluted Air affects health?

Around the Diwali festival season, every year, a thick smoke layer covers up the sky umbrella almost in all the areas of Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, especially the NCR region, making it very difficult even to breathe in due to the polluted air and atmosphere. Delhiites, being the most sufferers, create much hue and cry, and as the country governing authorities are sitting there, so the issue becomes more complicated and gets highlighted in all spheres. Dr Ashok Dhillon, Agricultural scientist, Ambala Agricultural Science Centre, says that due to burning of paddy residue, 70 percent carbon dioxide, 7 percent carbon monoxide along with gases like methane and nitrous oxide etc. get dissolved in the atmosphere

which is very harmful for human health as well as animals. World Health Organization (WHO), spreading awareness about the 'CLEAN AIR FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH', highlights – A child, who is exposed to unsafe levels of pollution, can face a lifetime of health impacts. Exposure in the womb or in early childhood can lead to: Stunted lung growth, Reduced lung function, Increased risk of developing asthma, Acute lower respiratory infections, Impaired mental and motor development, Behavioural disorders, Low birth weight, Premature birth, Infant mortality, Childhood Cancers, Increased risk of heart disease, Diabetes and stroke in adulthood. It adds that household and ambient air pollution cause more than 50% of acute lower respiratory infection in children under 5 years in lower and middle-income countries.

WHO further warns that in 2016, ambient and household air pollution caused 543,000 deaths in children under 5 years and 52,000 deaths in children aged 5-15 years. What a horrific crisis is hovering over the world, one can imagine easily! Is stubble burning the sole major factor of pollution?

Punjab farmers' front 'Bharatiya Kisan Union Ekta Dakounda', through its statement November 12, 2024, strongly condemning orders issued against the farmers, alleged that the authorities are ignoring the ground realities and ordering coercion on the farmers who produce only 4.4% of the pollution, while 95.6% are emitted by firecrackers, diesel generators, factories and transport. Instead of taking any action against the polluters, only reports are being sought about them. According to the instructions of the National Green Tribunal, it is the responsibility of the administration to arrange for the collection, transportation and consumption of straw. Neither the administration has fulfilled its responsibility nor the courts have taken any action against the administration. On the contrary, farmers are being made the scapegoat, which is a reprehensible act. Terming the centre government's allegations against the farmers as unscientific claims, All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) through its release to media on November 8, 2024, pleads that the claim that stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana is leading to air pollution in NCR is bogus, because air quality in these States, which should be more directly affected has been consistently lower than in the NCR. It is notable that vehicular pollution, pollution from factories and brick-kilns are going on unchecked and scientific studies point out that they are more responsible for the pollution in the NCR Region. AIKS adds that according to NASA's Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) data there reportedly has been a 51 per cent drop in the total number of farm fires between 2018 and October, 2024. Data shared by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) indicate that between 12th October and 21st October this year, on average stubble burning accounted for only 0.92 per cent of the PM2.5 (Particulate Matter 2.5) levels in Delhi. Clearly, the dominant reasons for



the pollution in NCR are vehicular emissions, emissions from factories, brick-kilns etc. If we analyse the NASA's data referred by AIKS, which show that there reportedly has been a 51 per cent drop in the total number of farm fires between 2018 and October, 2024, then why the AQI of Delhi and NCR has not lowered 51 %, if the stubble burning is the sole major factor for pollution?

Why the farmers alone are made scapegoats?

Punjab governor Gulab Chand Kataria, presiding over an international conference at Punjab Agricultural University on November 12, 2024, said that it was wrong to blame only farmers for the air pollution. He underscored the need for ensuring crop residue management (CRM) machinery to farmers in sufficient numbers in order to curb stubble burning incidents. "The farmer won't give up paddy unless he is given a crop that yields more profit (than paddy). They put in so much hard work; they need profit. Farmers have no choice. They have to sow wheat in time," he said. Kataria added that the state government and centre have tried to make residue management machines available but it is still far from the number of machines required to deal with the issue. The All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) alleges that while the urban rich and capitalists are not being fined and little is being done to regulate the proliferation of vehicles, the poor farmers are being targeted for their role in the historic farmers' struggle against the pro-corporate Farm Acts as well as the electoral set-back for BJP in the rural areas. In fact, the farmers through Agro-forestry and protection of green cover are doing an ecological service to the nation and the BJP led Union Government is punishing them. Former Union Minister and the Gen-

eral Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, Kumari Selja, also alleges that instead of working in the interest of the farmers, the BJP government is focused on oppressing and exploiting them. Kumari Selja adds that following strict remarks from the Supreme Court on the issue of air pollution caused by stubble burning, the central government has now taken out its frustration on farmers by deciding to double the fine for stubble burning. In a statement released to the media, she said that stubble burning is not a recent issue; it has been happening for years. There is no doubt that stubble burning increases air pollution. The government should create a system so that farmers do not have to burn stubble. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has also strongly criticised the Central Government's decision to double the fine for stubble burning. AAP senior leader and spokesperson Neel Garg said that the Punjab Government had sought Rs. 1200 crore from the Centre to tackle this issue and reduce incidents of stubble burning by providing financial incentives to farmers to discourage the practice. He questioned why the Centre had refused to provide this assistance if they were genuinely concerned about stubble burning? If the Centre had provided the requested financial support, these incidents would have dropped even further. However, instead of offering help, the Centre has imposed a fine. Haryana Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shyam Singh Rana has said that the State Government is promoting the use of straw as manure by encouraging farmers to incorporate it into their fields. He added that attributing the rising pollution in Delhi solely to stubble burning is misguided. He advised the Delhi government to implement concrete measures similar to those in Haryana.

Continental Hospital Launches Innovative Diabetes Support through India's First Diabetic WhatsApp Channel



In celebration of World Diabetes Day, Continental Hospitals successfully hosted a diabetic awareness session, bringing together leading experts in diabetes care and launching India's first-ever diabetic support channel on WhatsApp. A groundbreaking initiative designed to offer continuous guidance, support, and education to diabetes patients. The session focused on empowering individuals with the knowledge and tools they need to take control of their health and manage diabetes effectively. Dr. Guru N. Reddy, a renowned gastroenterologist, founder and chairman of Continental Hospitals, highlighted the growing diabetes epidemic. Over the past 30 years, from 1990 to 2024, the prevalence of diabetes has significantly increased, with 12-24% of women and 11-23% of men in India now affected. Globally, the number of diabetes patients is projected to be between 25 and 30 crores, and India alone has the highest number. Dr. Reddy cautioned that diabetes often progresses silently, which makes it par-

ticularly dangerous. Only one in two individuals with diabetes are diagnosed, while the rest remain under the radar, with silent diabetes progressing unnoticed. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to severe complications, including heart attacks, liver issues, vascular diseases, and ulcers, and may even pose a greater health threat than cancer due to its wide-ranging impact on overall health. Highlighting the significant economic burden, Dr. Reddy noted that managing diabetes can consume up to 25% of household income. He also pointed out that diabetes is a multifactorial condition, where effective management requires addressing not just blood sugar levels but also factors such as stress and conditions like fatty liver that can contribute to insulin resistance. Dr. Reddy stressed the importance of a comprehensive internal medicine approach to diabetes management, which goes beyond simply controlling blood sugar levels and includes a holistic approach to overall health. Adding Dr. Sunil Epuri, a senior endocrinologist, emphasizes the importance

of understanding diabetes not as a fleeting illness like dengue or malaria but as a lifelong commitment, much like a marriage. He highlights a startling statistic: 50% of diabetes patients are unaware they have the condition. Dr. Deepika Patel, Consultant Endocrinologist, pointed out that the number of young patients with diabetes has increased, largely due to a lack of physical activity and high carbohydrate intake. She advised early detection through regular blood checks, especially if there is a family history of diabetes, to facilitate early medication and reduce risks.

Dr. Varun Kommalapati, Consultant Orthopedics & Foot and Ankle Surgeon, a specialist in diabetic foot care, stressed the significance of foot care in diabetes management. He explained that diabetic patients can suffer from damaged blood vessels, leading to poor circulation and complications, even if the wound appears superficial. He cautioned that even a small wound can cause severe internal damage to the bone, underscoring the importance

of regular foot checks and proper care to prevent infection and further complications. Dr. Rahul Konduri discussed diabetic neuropathy, explaining how nerve damage caused by diabetes leads to a loss of sensation in the feet, making it difficult for patients to detect injuries. He noted that poor blood supply to the vessels exacerbates the condition. Dr. Konduri emphasized that up to 50% of diabetics are at risk for neuropathy, and maintaining blood sugar control is crucial in preventing and managing this complication. The launch of the WhatsApp channel is a significant milestone in expanding access to continuous diabetes care, as it enables users to receive real-time updates, tips, and personal consultations right at their fingertips. This initiative reflects Continental Hospitals' ongoing commitment to providing high-quality, accessible, and patient-centric care, ensuring that people living with diabetes have the resources they need to manage their condition effectively and improve their quality of life.

Cinépolis India's 'Let's All Go To Cinépolis' Initiative Returns, Bringing Joy to Thousands of Underprivileged Children with a Special Screening of Chhota Bheem ?????

Hyderabad: Cinépolis India, the first international cinema exhibitor in the country, recently completed another successful edition of its beloved CSR initiative, Let's All Go To Cinépolis. On 11th November 2024, at 11:30 am, Cinépolis locations nationwide opened their doors to more than 10,000 children from underprivileged backgrounds, offering them the magic of cinema through a special screening of Chhota Bheem, presented in both Hindi and Telugu.

This year's celebration took place across 47 Cinépolis locations, bringing the joy and inspiration of cinema to children across India. The event, organized in collaboration with Round Table India, was a heartwarming experience that embodied Cinépolis India's commitment to inclusivity and community support.

"We believe in the power of cinema to shape dreams and ignite the imagination. Through Let's All Go To Cinépolis, we aim to bring smiles and inspiration to children across India. This initiative is a true reflection of our commitment to giving back to the community and making cinema accessible to everyone, especially young dreamers," said Mr. Devang Sampat, Managing Director, Cinépolis India. Chaitanya Dev Singh, President, Round Table India, said, "Our partnership with Cinépolis on this initiative brings boundless joy to children across the country. We're thrilled to continue bringing happiness and unique experiences to children who rarely have the opportunity to visit the cinema." Since 2014, Let's All Go To Cinépolis has reached tens of thousands of children, igniting joy and enriching their lives. The ini-



tiative has grown in size and impact each year, with last year's event alone touching

over 9,600 young lives. Through carefully selected films that entertain and inspire,

Cinépolis aims to provide children with memories that last a lifetime.

The CKM syndrome as the price of modernity

Cardiovascular Kidney Metabolic (CKM) syndrome, an alarming, intricate interplay of lifestyle and the influence of globalisation on health, is fast becoming a silent, global killer. It begins insidiously, often marked by a gradual rise in body weight and waist circumference that soon escalates into obesity, setting off a chain reaction in the body. Major organs such as the heart, the kidneys, liver and blood vessels bear the brunt, leaving those affected vulnerable to a startling risk — premature death. In Tamil Nadu, a State known for its strong public health framework, the markers of well-being, i.e., life expectancy, infant and maternal mortality, and deaths from infectious diseases, fare better than the national average. Yet, even here, a troubling transition is underway. The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) report starkly illuminates the mounting burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which account for 69% of premature deaths and 68% of years lost to disability.

According to the 2020 Tamil Nadu STEPS survey (the World Health Organization's step wise approach for NCD surveillance), 28.5% of participants were overweight. Further, 11.4% had obesity, 33.9% had hypertension and 17.6% had diabetes. This epidemic echoes the find-

ings of the National Family Health Survey (2019-21), which places India's diabetes prevalence at 16.1% and obesity at a staggering 40.3%. Compounded by low awareness and poor glycemic control, especially among poorer communities, the result is an alarming public health crisis. In addition, hypertension — affecting 24% of men and 21% of women — remains inadequately managed, with less than one-fourth achieving target blood pressure control. A new paradigm is essential. Without a shift in approach, the impact of the CKM syndrome on middle-aged individuals and on the economy at large will only deepen. Health economics, the cost of CKM

Tamil Nadu's health expenditures tell a sobering story. Nearly ₹1,200 crore is spent annually on insurance premiums under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS), covering 1.4 crore families. Topping the list of claims are coronary angioplasty and dialysis, which are both stark outcomes of the CKM syndrome. Meanwhile, the private sector has seen insurance premiums soar, tracking the rise in NCD cases over the past decade. While the aim of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is also to reduce NCD deaths by one-third by 2030, the current trends of rising obesity, diabe-

tes, and hypertension rates threaten not only those goals but also the health budget and the economy as a whole.

Need for integrated clinics The American Heart Association recently laid emphasis on the importance of integrated care for CKM calling for a shift from segmented care to unified, simultaneous management of risk factors. Rather than isolating diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and kidney disease, the association argues that health professionals should view them as symptoms of a broader metabolic condition. Today's management models miss key opportunities for optimal, holistic risk assessment. Patients with multiple affected organs may see separate specialists for each issue, leading to fragmented care, drug interactions, repeated visits, and, ultimately, a loss in wages and productivity. An integrated clinic could address these issues, with a multidisciplinary team of a diabetologist, cardiologist, nephrologist, dietician and physiotherapist working together. Public health teaching hospitals could make this a reality, acting as centres for training medical students and expanding the model to secondary- and primary-care levels.

Tamil Nadu's health efforts begin early. For pregnant mothers, the State's

Muthu Lakshmi Reddy scheme provides direct cash transfers and nutrition kits, a step toward addressing low birth weight (a known precursor to future diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease). Could the inclusion of protein-rich foods such as two eggs a day for mothers from the fourth month of pregnancy, further improve outcomes? For the next generation — preschool through secondary schoolchildren — regular weight and obesity screenings could identify high-risk individuals early. Since the 1960s, rice, which is a high glycemic food, has been widely accessible through the Public Distribution System (PDS), transforming the nutrition landscape. But this staple, while sustaining the population, has also contributed to obesity. In response, partial replacement of rice in the PDS with millets is essential.

In addition, replacement of common salt with low sodium salt can be considered as a pilot project as there is enough evidence for reduction of hypertension with low sodium salt in clinical trials. But there must be caution in people with heart or kidney ailments and where common salt is preferred. The lifestyle of today, which is marked by long work hours and night shifts, has been called "the gift of globalisation", for better or worse.

What are the costs of population decline?

The story so far: The Chief Ministers of both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu expressed concerns about the low fertility rates in their States recently. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has said that he planned to introduce legislation to incentivise more children per family.

What is the current demographic situation, especially in the southern States?

After decades of family planning policies seeking to slow population growth, India has been waking up to the fact that the success of such policies is also leading to an increasingly ageing population. This is not a uniform phenomenon — southern States, as well as smaller northern States have seen a much sharper decrease in total fertility rates, defined as the average number of children born to women during their child-bearing years. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, for instance, recorded fertility rates of 1.4 between 2019 and 2021, according to data from the Office of the Registrar General of India, while Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh had fertility rates of 1.5. At the other end of the spectrum are Bihar, with a fertility rate of 3, Uttar Pradesh (2.7), and Madhya Pradesh (2.6). States with lower fertility rates have largely developed faster, but are now faced with the spectre of a rapidly ageing population. The India Ageing report published by UNFPA last year used Health Ministry data to show that while the share of India's elderly population is projected to rise from 10.1% in 2021 to 15% by 2036, the demographic transition is more advanced in some States. In Kerala, senior citizens accounted for 16.5% of the population in 2021, a figure that is set to rise to 22.8% by 2036; T.N.'s elderly will make up 20.8% of its population in 2036, while it will be 19% in Andhra Pradesh. In Bihar, on the other hand, only 7.7% were elderly in 2021, and this is projected to rise to just 11% in 2036.

What is the likely economic impact?

"India's demographic transition is much ahead of its socio-economic transition... To understand the impact of this, the most important indicator is not the proportion of the elderly population, but rather the old age dependency ratio, that is, how many older people are there for every 100 people of working age, between 18 to 59 years," says Srinivas Goli, an Associate Professor at the International Institute for Population Sciences. "When this ratio goes above 15%, that is when you have the onset of an ageing crisis." A number of States have already crossed this point, according to projections by the National Commission on Population, with Kerala having an old age dependency ratio of 26.1 in 2021, followed by Tamil Nadu (20.5), Himachal Pradesh (19.6), and Andhra Pradesh (18.5). This means these States' window of opportunity, to reap the demographic dividend of economic growth from a large number of young workers unburdened by the economic and health demands of a



large number of minor or elderly dependents, has already closed. Health expenses are likely to rise significantly in States with ageing populations. One analysis of NSSO data, in a study on demographic diversity by Tulane University's K.S. James and IIPS scholar Shubhra Kriti published by The India Forum, shows that the southern States, with just one-fifth of India's population, spent 32% of the country's total out-of-pocket expenditure on cardiovascular diseases in 2017-18, while eight Hindi belt States with half the country's population, spent just 24%. The solution proposed by the Chief Ministers of increasing the fertility rate is also likely to reduce women's participation in the labour force, which will also hurt their economies. Southern politicians have also raised concerns with the Finance Commission that while their successful economies have pumped in higher tax revenues to the central pool, they get a diminishing share of the central pie of resources due to their slowing population growth.

What are the political implications?

Uneven population growth is set to shake up the federal structure, with the current freeze on the number of seats in Parliament set to expire in 2026, after which a new delimitation exercise will change the representation that States have in the Lok Sabha. The study by James and Kriti estimated that Uttar Pradesh is likely to gain 12 seats, followed by Bihar (10) and Rajasthan (7), while Tamil Nadu is set to lose nine seats, followed by Kerala (6) and Andhra Pradesh (5), due to their falling share in national population.

What are the solutions being considered?

The southern CMs seem to be advocating pro-natalist policies by incentivising women to have more babies. "This has not been a very successful approach internationally. Educated women know they are not reproductive machines, and forced fertility will not work, nor will incentives that do not recognise what families actually need," says Dr. Goli. He recommends changes in work-family policies, with paid maternity and paternity leaves, accessible childcare, and employment policies that reduce the "motherhood penalty". He notes that States and nations with better gender equity are better able to maintain fertility

rates at sustainable levels, as women are more likely to have children if they will not be deprived of economic independence while doing so. Another approach is to increase the working lifespan and thus reduce the old age dependency ratio. The southern States are already magnets for economic migrants. However, Dr. Goli points out that though these migrants make social security demands of their destination States, they continue to be counted in their home States for political and financial distribution purposes, leaving southern States in a difficult tangle.

Soon, Bitcoin may touch \$1,00,000, thanks to Trump's crypto regulations

New Delhi: World's biggest cryptocurrency Bitcoin is heading towards \$1,00,000 amid President-elect Donald Trump's pro-crypto stance and promise for clearer cryptocurrency regulations. On Tuesday, the Bitcoin price was hovering around \$87,880 apiece. Bitcoin price has surged about 30 per cent since the US election. According to Nigel Green of deVere Group, "Bitcoin could hit \$100,000 by the end of January 2025 after Donald Trump takes office".

The bullish prediction from Green comes after the cryptocurrency has experienced a staggering 93 per cent price rise year-to-date. "We expect that this is just the beginning, with the cryptocurrency set to break more records under an incoming Trump administration. President-elect's crypto-friendly stance signals a transformative moment for Bitcoin and the broader

digital asset market," said Green. Trump administration has a clear mandate to regulate crypto constructively, and his plan to elevate Bitcoin to a strategic asset class is a powerful endorsement. "This is the most significant tailwind we've seen for Bitcoin since its inception. With inflation concerns on the rise amid looming economic policy shifts, Bitcoin's role as a hedge against eroding cash value is also gaining traction," he mentioned. While inflation pressures have eased with recent rate cuts globally, the Trump administration's ambitious spending plans and potential tariffs could quickly reignite upward pressure on prices. This inflationary backdrop is encouraging investors to turn to Bitcoin as a safeguard against diminishing purchasing power, said the deVere Group CEO. According to Raj Karkara, COO, ZebPay, as more investors turn to Bitcoin, we anticipate this momentum could continue.

How will Trump treat illegal Indians?

The story so far: On October 22, 2024, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) flew a "large-frame charter removal flight" to repatriate Indian nationals "who did not establish legal basis to remain in the United States." Royce Murray, assistant secretary for Border and Immigration Policy at the DHS, said the U.S. had repatriated over 1,100 Indian nationals in the previous fiscal year.

Why were the Indians repatriated?

The U.S. officials maintain that they want to deter "irregular migration" to the U.S. from India among other countries, and that the charter flight was in addition to the regular removals that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement department carries out through commercial flights. The flight was aimed at showcasing the strong will of the then poll-bound Joseph Biden administration to enforce immigration laws and deliver "tough consequences for those who enter unlawfully."

What are the ways in which irregular Indian immigrants try to enter the U.S.?

Indians who try to enter the U.S. unlawfully generally try to use the southern U.S. border with Mexico and the Canada-U.S. border in the north. The pressure is more on the Mexico-U.S. border as several Latin American or central American countries like Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala are known to provide visa-free entry to U.S.-visa holding Indians for a period of time. Using this facility, some people try to stay for extended periods of time in these countries that are known for their porous borders and easy travel to the Texas border by using dangerous human trafficking agents and organisations. India has a large number of agreements for visas with these countries that allow for extended stays for Indian citizens. For example, Peru is among those that waives visa requirement for Indian nationals for business and tourism purposes for one or more stays totalling up to 180 days per year, provided that they hold permanent residence or a visa valid for a minimum of six months for Australia, Canada, U.K., the U.S., or any Schengen country.

From which States is there a high rate of irregular immigration?

The latest flight from the U.S. that carried the Indian nationals landed in Punjab, an U.S. official told the media, indicating that most of the people on board that special flight hailed from Punjab. The Hindu had reported in November 2023 that from November 2022 to September 2023, a record number of Indians — 96,917 — were arrested while crossing illegally into the U.S., according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (UCBP) data. The number of Indians trying to enter the U.S. has witnessed a five-fold rise since 2019. Available data indicates that Gujarat has been supplying half of the total illegal immigrants trying to enter the U.S. There have also been several instances of deaths of people while trying to cross the border. In a well-documented case, a family of four — Jagadish Patel, Vaishaliben Patel and their two children, Vihangi and Dharmik, froze to death as they tried to cross from Canada into the U.S.

What is meant by lawful immigration to U.S.?



There are various legally accepted processes through which Indian citizens immigrate to the U.S. Every U.S. fiscal year (October 1 to September 30) around 1,40,000 employment-based immigrant visas are made available to qualified persons under the provisions of U.S. immigration law. Employment-based immigrant visas fall into five "preference categories". In certain cases, spouses and children are allowed to join the applicant. The professionals who fall in the first three categories are persons with extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business or athletics, outstanding professors and researchers with adequate experience, multinational managers and executives. Professionals holding advanced degrees and persons of exceptional abilities can also apply for immigrating lawfully to the U.S. Skilled workers, professionals and unskilled workers who can fill positions after two years of training also fall in this range. The fourth category is 'Certain Special Immigrants' that includes professionals who work with broadcast media in the U.S., certain employees or former employees of the U.S. government as well as people from conflict zones like Iraq and Afghanistan (translators/interpreters). The fifth category includes investors who can launch foreign commercial enterprises in the U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who is known to have used expressions like "poisoning the blood" on the issue of immigration, has not targeted Indians. In fact, during the closing part of his campaign, he even spoke for protection of the Hindu minority community in Bangladesh which appealed to Indian-origin voters in the U.S. That apart, Vice-President-elect J.D. Vance's wife Usha Chilukuri Vance is of Indian origin. The greater part of his focus on immigration has been turned towards the cross-border flow from Latin American countries. However, anti-immigration measures under him will be uniformly implemented and is likely to hit Indian immigrants too.

What was Trump's policy on immigra-

tion during his first term?

During his first stint (2017-2021), President Trump had increased the rate of denial of H1B visas to Indian professionals. Mr. Trump had issued a "Buy American and Hire American" executive order on April 18, 2017. Subsequently, the Foreign Affairs Manual included a directive to consular officials to keep the executive order in view while deciding on granting of a visa. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), under President Trump, denial of H1B visa for initial services grew rapidly from 13% in 2017 to 21% in 2019. There were also allegations that U.S. consular officials were making it extremely difficult for Indian companies to transfer employees from India to the U.S. under the L1 visa category. During his first term, Mr. Trump had given the slogan of 'Build the Wall' in the southern border of the U.S. with Mexico. In the just-con-

cluded presidential election, he focused on stopping illegal immigration and deporting foreigners who are staying in the U.S. illegally — the number being touted to be in the region of 11 million. Mr. Trump has delivered a series of speeches on how he plans to deal with this problem which is presumed to affect the job market in the U.S. He has declared that the National Guard will be deployed to deport illegal overstayers and that he might even invoke the 1798 Alien Enemies Act. However, there is little clarity about how Mr. Trump would address immigration-related concerns that his supporters have displayed during the campaign. In addition, his anti-immigrant stance will clash with the economic policy of his tech czars who want to access the Indian market. It will be ironical if the Trump presidency opposes the entry of people from markets favoured by Trump-friendly business tycoons.

Vistara flies into sunset as its last flight takes off to Singapore

New Delhi: After operating for nearly 10 years, full service carrier Vistara flew into the sunset on Tuesday early morning operating its last flight from the national capital to Singapore. Vistara — a joint venture between Tatas and Singapore Airlines — has now merged with Air India, creating an enlarged entity that is now the country's largest international carrier and second-largest domestic carrier. UK115 flight from Delhi to Singapore was the last flight of Vistara with the code 'UK' while UK986 from Mumbai to Delhi was the carrier's last domestic flight. Starting a new chapter in India's fast-growing civil aviation space, the merged entity operated its first flight with the code 'AI2286' from Doha to Mumbai.

In the domestic sector, the integrated entity's first flight AI2984 took off from Mumbai to Delhi. All the four flights landed

at their respective destinations early in the morning on Tuesday, according to information available on the flight tracking website Flightradar24.com. According to an official, the two airlines have been merged, passengers are being issued Air India boarding passes and check-in counters of Vistara at airports have become that of Air India. The code 'AI2XXX' is being used for Vistara flights that are being operated by Air India post the merger to help passengers identify the Vistara flight at the time of booking. On Monday, an official said the integrated entity will be operating services on 103 domestic and 71 international routes. With the merger, first announced in November 2022, Singapore Airlines will have a 25.1 per cent stake in the integrated entity, which will operate more than 5,500 weekly flights on local and international routes.

Giving shape to India's carbon credit mechanism

The Conference of Parties-29, from November 11 to 22, 2024, in Baku, Azerbaijan, is about to shift focus to the heated discussion on the aspect of climate finance again. An essential component of this discussion will be the carbon credits framework and disagreements over it between developed and developing countries. India updated its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2023 to underline, among other things, the establishment of a domestic carbon market as a part of its climate strategy. The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act of 2022 provided a statutory mandate for such a Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS). Through this, India aims to align its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement with broader economic goals. Yet, for the market to truly support these objectives, it must be meticulously designed to ensure credibility, efficiency, and fairness. From global experiences, India must incorporate two pivotal lessons in its carbon market framework for long-term success.

At the heart of any carbon market lies the integrity of its carbon credits. The global experience has seen the repercussions of inadequate accountability in credit generation, leading to instances of greenwashing. This issue is pronounced in the voluntary carbon market (VCM), where investigations have exposed overstatements of project benefits, especially within the forestry sector. A similar risk is feared in India's voluntary carbon market operationalised under the Green Credit Programme (GCP). The tree plantation guidelines released by the government under the GCP were criticised for perpetuating greenwashing by encouraging non-scientific tree plantation. It is also feared that under the CCTS, projects may fail to ensure "additionality", a critical measure ensuring that emission reductions exceed those of a business-as-usual scenario. To navigate these challenges, India must enforce rigorous protocols to verify the authenticity of generated carbon credits. A proposed national registry would be a robust mechanism to track carbon credits and address potential double-counting issues. Additionally, independent third-party verifiers can play a crucial role in assessing the additionality and permanence of carbon reduction projects. By emulating international best practices from entities such as the IETA or Gold Standard that have greatly emphasised the generation of carbon credits, India can cultivate a high-integrity market, attracting domestic and global investors.

India's carbon market must also harmonise with international carbon trading mechanisms, notably Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. Article 6.2 facilitates countries in achieving their climate objectives through Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs), making compliance a critical aspect for participating nations. The Article 6 rulebook, finalised at the COP26 summit in Glasgow, outlines how countries can engage in carbon trading while upholding environmental integrity. For India, this means incorporat-

ing mechanisms to prevent the double counting of credits, a crucial step to maintain the credibility of global emission reduction efforts. India can align its market with domestic and international standards by integrating transparent systems for accounting emissions reductions and carbon credit transfers. Such alignment and a focus on global best practices will enable India to contribute to global emissions reductions while actively safeguarding national interests. One of the critical aspects is ensuring environmental integrity, specifically under Article 6.2, which establishes a framework for countries to cooperate on climate mitigation efforts through international carbon markets. The World Bank's "Ensuring Environmental Integrity under Article 6 Mechanisms" report emphasised maintaining robust environmental integrity within carbon markets, especially under the Paris Agreement's Article 6 framework. It highlights that carbon markets risk double-counting emissions reductions without stringent safeguards, which can dilute the credibility of climate commitments. The report stressed that high governance, verification, and accountability standards are necessary to avoid "low-quality" carbon credits from entering the market.

Ensuring transparency is one mechanism to ensure compliance and conformance with such standards. To enhance transparency and uphold environmental integrity within India's carbon credit system, it is imperative to have comprehensive disclosure of project details, including



carbon reduction techniques, benchmarks and third-party verification reports, on a centralised, easily accessible platform. Ensuring that projects adhere to stringent additionality criteria guarantees that the credits reflect real, additional emissions reductions. Regular audits are essential for verifying the sustainability of these projects. Oversight by independent auditors approved by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) in India is crucial, alongside real-time tracking of credit transactions to boost accountability and provide insights into the type of projects and their environmental impacts. The Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative (VCMI) framework introduces a tiered system for companies to assess carbon credit claims. This is to en-

sure the credibility of carbon offset claims, aiming to enhance market transparency. However, implementation faces challenges, especially within India's CCTS initiatives, due to potential transparency issues and the high costs of establishing monitoring, reporting, and verification systems. These costs could deter smaller projects initially. India's carbon credit mechanism, albeit nascent, demands stringent enforcement and an alignment with international and domestic realities to be effective. By focusing on transparency and integrity, India has the opportunity to not only provide for a more mature carbon market but also to stimulate its climate finance aspirations, paving the way for practical, sustainable development.

Urban consumers prefer smart snacking over traditional snacks in India: NIQ study

Mumbai: As urban consumers increasingly seek health-oriented products, smart snacking in India has grown 1.2 times faster than traditional snacks, according to a report on Tuesday. About 63 per cent of surveyed consumers seek innovative and healthy snacking options while 50 per cent read ingredient labels to understand nutritional value, according to the report by consumer intelligence company NielsenIQ (NIQ). One in five snacks now has a health connotation in the country. "This segment is growing 1.2 times faster than traditional snacks in terms of value, presenting opportunities for brands to innovate in health-focused products and leverage the consumption trend," said Sonika Gupta, Executive Director, Customer Success India at NIQ. In consumer tech, the trend toward health-focused products is evident. Fitness wearables experienced a 59 per cent volume growth, while hot air fryers grew by more than 100 per cent, signalling broader health-conscious behaviour. India's snack and confectionery industry ranks second in market size across Asia-Pacific, is transforming as urban consumers increasingly seek health-oriented products. The rise in lifestyle diseases has driven Indian consumers to opt for snacks that align with their



health goals. Study showed that 84 per cent of surveyed urban Indian consumers exercise daily or regularly to keep fit and 48 per cent use a fitness or exercise app. Smaller, emerging players are challenging established players with competitive offerings, with single-serve packs driving demand and growing 60 per cent faster in smart

snacking due to mainstream pricing strategies. The smart snacking segment's growth is fuelled by consumption rates twice that of the general snacks market. The consumption preference is driven by small convenient pack sizes that have demonstrated 60 per cent higher growth compared to traditional small packs in the snacking space.