

Telangana faces mounting retirement crisis amid growing fiscal pressure

Hyderabad: The Telangana government finds itself grappling with a burgeoning financial crisis, as escalating pension and retirement benefit liabilities cast a shadow over the State's fiscal stability. With pensions already straining the exchequer, projections suggest the situation will only worsen over the next five years, requiring an annual allocation of Rs.15,000 crore to Rs.16,000 crore to meet these obligations. Data from the Treasuries and Accounts department paints a grim picture. The number of retirees surged from 1,602 in 2023 to 7,995 in 2024, with the trend expected to continue. The figures for the next three years project 9,630 retirements in 2025, 9,719 in 2026, and 9,443 in 2027. This steady increase will place an enormous burden on the State budget, which is already stretched thin. The pension expenditure, tied closely to salary hikes implemented by the previous BRS government, has been on an upward trajectory over the past decade. Starting at Rs 4,210 crore in 2014-15, the pension budget doubled to Rs 8,217 crore by 2015-16. Since then, it has grown steadily, peaking at Rs 13,024 crore in 2023-24. However, it was reduced to Rs 11,641.38 crore

in the budget for 2024-25 and already Rs.10,069.45 crore has been disbursed till October this year, which indicates the requirement of fresh allocations for the next three months. The mounting costs come at a time when the State is struggling to meet even its current financial commitments, including the timely disbursement of pensions and retirement benefits. While no government pensioner received their retirement benefits over the last one year, the State government owes around Rs 2,000 crore to the retirees during this fiscal.

To clear the dues, the State government recently sought to mortgage TGIC lands and raise Rs 10,000 crore, of which Rs 2,000 crore will be earmarked for payment of retirement benefits alone. In fact, the clearance of arrears and retirement benefits was one of the top demands from the employees union representatives during their recent meeting with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka. The retirement benefits range from Rs.25 lakh to Rs.1 crore for the government employees based on their cadre and experience. At present, the pensions and



retirement benefits alone account for nearly 13 per cent of the revenue receipts. With fiscal pressures mounting, economic experts have questioned the sustainability of the government's policies, particularly its failure to address long-term financial planning. They

warn that unless the Telangana government adopts stringent fiscal reforms, including exploring alternative revenue sources and rationalising expenditures, the rising pension liabilities could trigger a deeper economic crisis.

Beneficiaries of crop loans above Rs 2 lakh await waiver



Mancherial/Nirmal: Beneficiaries of crop loans above Rs.2 lakh are waiting to receive the promised crop loan waiver. Addressing a Rythu Sadassu programme in Mahabubnagar on November 30, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had said that Rs.2,747 crore were released for waiving crop loans of 3.14 lakh farmers who had availed crop loan over Rs 2 lakh. He had also written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi stating that the State would soon be implementing the waiver for farmers who have a loan of above Rs.2 lakh, once they clear the amount above the Rs.2,00,000 limit. How-

ever, the ground reality presents a contradicting picture. Agriculture officials said 8,195 farmers were identified to be eligible for waiving off the loan of over Rs 2 lakh in Mancherial district. However, the waiver was yet to be implemented. Consequently, the beneficiaries are forced to wait for getting their accounts credited with the funds by the government. Similarly, 6,822 beneficiaries of the crop loan waiver were yet to benefit from the initiative in Nirmal district. Officials said that around 25,000 farmers availed crop loans over Rs 2 lakh in the district. A total of 13,343 farmers applied for the waiver. Their

wait is still continuing. Incidentally, around 170 farmers from Walegaon village in Bhainsa mandal claimed that they were denied the waiver due to unknown reasons. They had submitted representations to Collector Abhilasha Abhinav requesting her to take steps to consider their names for waiving the loans recently. Families of the farmers combined availed around Rs.4 lakh. However, no member of a family benefited by the initiative. Officials stated that waiving crop loans above Rs 2 lakh was being delayed to re-scrutiny of the beneficiaries. "A majority of

beneficiaries are found to be government employees and are from high income groups. The funds would be credited to the accounts of genuine beneficiaries once the process of re-verification is over," an official stated. It may be noted here that 55,778 farmers were benefited by the crop loan waiver worth Rs 462 crore under the three phases of the initiative in Mancherial district. A total 64,742 farmers were covered by the initiative in Nirmal district so far. The value of the crop loans waived in three phases here were pegged at Rs 588 crore.

Rare shuttlecock mushroom found in Telangana's Kawal Tiger Reserve

Mancherial: In a significant discovery, Venkat Anagandhula, a Zoology research scholar from Osmania University recorded a rare fungus, *Clathrus delicatus*, commonly known as shuttlecock mushroom, during his study on the mycological diversity in Kawal Tiger Reserve in Telangana. "The discovery of the fungus species in the Kawal Tiger Reserve marks the first confirmed record of its occurrence in the Eastern Ghats, showing its geographical distribution. This finding assumed academic significance and ecological importance as *Clathrus delicatus* was

previously believed to be restricted to the Western Ghats Western Ghats spread in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and the western regions of the Indian subcontinent," Venkat claimed. The researcher opined that the discovery also challenged earlier assumptions regarding the habitat preferences and range of this rare fungal species and highlights the ecological uniqueness of the Eastern Ghats. The presence of the fungus in Telangana underlines the need for further systematic surveys of fungal diversity across India's underexplored regions, he observed.

A nuanced and compassionate understanding of Rohingya's flight is the need of the hour

The presence of Rohingya community within India is progressively becoming an issue of political blame-game and some political actors are busy pedalling mass anxiety without factoring in the complex multiplicity of vectors related to the issue, including the growing importance of the issue globally. Thus it is creating a situation where the presence of Rohingyas is becoming a manifestation of classic tale of poor and illegal immigrants in global north or global south as they are vilified and blamed for the rise in crime. They are dehumanised and subjected to dog-whistle tactics of mainstream politicians to induce mass anxiety. In Uttar Pradesh, in July 2023, the police had reportedly detained 74 Rohingya Muslims — 55 men, 14 women, and five minors — in 2023. Now, in Muslim majority former State of J&K, the BJP recently gave a new turn to the issue by appealing to J&K Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha to initiate a CBI probe into the rising number of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi settlers in J&K. It termed their settlement as a major "political conspiracy". They have accused the ruling National Conference government of protecting the settlers by providing them with power and water connections because they were members of a "particular community." The J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who assumed office only in October, 2024, urged the central government to formulate a clear policy to determine the fate of the Rohingyas in the Union Territory, terming the condition to be a 'humanitarian dispute'. He reportedly said, "The central government should decide what to do about them. If they can be sent back, they should be sent back. But if we cannot send them back, we cannot let them starve or freeze to death." Stating that the Rohingyas must be treated with "dignity", the Chief Minister said, "They are human beings and must not be treated like animals."

In the national capital, within the same time-frame as the Delhi Assembly elections approach, the AAP accused the BJP of orchestrating a conspiracy to bring and settle Rohingya refugees in Delhi. AAP leader Manish Sisodia had reportedly referred to Minister Hardeep Puri's social media post on August 17, 2022, where he reportedly announced the relocation of Rohingya refugees to EWS flats in Delhi's Bakkarwala area. In the social media post, Minister Puri had said, "India has always welcomed those who have sought refuge in the country. In a landmark decision, all Rohingya refugees will be shifted to EWS flats in Bakkarwala, Delhi. They will be provided basic amenities, UNHCR IDs, and round-the-clock Delhi Police protection." In this season of points scoring over Rohingya presence in India, multi-dimensional nuances related with the community both at the national, regional and global levels, including the historical context which has deep connections with India, are being ignored. A key argument in support of their deportation is that their stay in India may endanger national security. However, there is no evidence to this effect, a fact underlined by security officials, including in the sensitive region of J&K. The number of Rohingyas living outside, particularly in Bangladesh, as stateless population, is more than two million which is four times that of those who are in that country. As per the Arakan Project, in 2019-20, the approximate number of Rohingyas living in Bangladesh,

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, the UAE and Malaysia was 9,47,000, 5,00,000, 3,50,000, 40,000, 50,000 and 1,50,000, respectively. Bangladesh hosts the maximum of number of refugees and they have come to the country in several phases. The most recent was in August 2017 as 720000 Rohingyas were expelled from Rakhine in Myanmar on account of the army's allegedly disproportionate use of force after attacks by the Arakan Rakhine Salvation Army on military's posts. The magnitude of the displacement in 2017 can be gauged from the fact that Maungdaw district, comprising the townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung, with a population of over 7,50,000 Rohingyas, witnessed a near-total exodus. The issue requires unpacking within its regional as well as broader context. Within the subcontinent, in actual terms, the presence of Rohingya is nothing new. They had been migrating from Myanmar in the last three-decades and the trigger for the migration of the Rohingyas is persecution. To understand the problems of statelessness of the Rohingyas, one has to factor in the contestations of history, identity, colonialism and conceptualisation of modern-day nationhood. Myanmar's version is that the Rohingyas came from Bangladesh to Rakhine and their language is Chittagonian, which has similarities with Bengali. Myanmar calls Rohingyas 'Bengalis', which goes against the universally agreed right of the community to 'self-identify'. It is said that the British, when they gained control of Rakhine, facilitated the flight of the Rohingyas as sharecroppers. The community contests this version. Its members affirm that they are native to Rakhine and have a distinct language. In this battle of versions, little attention is paid to the fact that till the British empire imploded in 1947-48 in Myanmar and India and new nation-states were created, including Myanmar and East Pakistan (which became Bangladesh in 1971), the border between the coastal Rakhine and neighbouring Bangladesh's Chittagong district was porous. The seeds of the exclusionary citizenship project in Myanmar, which directly impacted Rohingyas, were sowed by General Ne Win, a military dictator who ruled the country from 1962 to 1981. General Ne Win's administration identified 135 national races of Myanmar, excluding the Rohingya. Building on that, his successor President San Yu passed a citizenship law in 1982. The law recognised three categories of citizens, namely, citizen, associate citizen and naturalised citizen. Full citizenship is granted to the descendants of residents who lived in Myanmar prior to 1823 or were born to parents who were citizens at the time of birth. 1824 is the year when the first Anglo-Burmese war took place. Associate citizens are those who acquired citizenship through the 1948 Union Citizenship Law. Naturalised citizens are those who lived in Myanmar before January 4, 1948, the date of the country's independence, and applied for citizenship after 1982. Thus Rohingyas were stripped of citizenship rights in 1982 and thus started more than four decades of institutionalised discrimination and oppression. The 2008 Constitution drafted and promulgated by the military is still in operation and it has 135 national races enshrined. The authorities in Myanmar argue that the Rohingya are not a distinct ethnic group and that they are



'Bengalis'. However, facts demonstrate that the Rohingya were once part and parcel of the country's political and electoral landscape. A Rohingya leader, who had been a Member of Parliament, had even served as a federal minister in the early 1960s. Till 2010, the Rohingya even participated in national elections, though they were declared non-citizens in 1982. It was only in 2015 that the authorities took away their voter cards. Facing criticism, including at the Security Council and General Assembly, President Thein Sein and his successor Aung Sung Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy's governments often cited the national verification card (NVC) process as their commitment to grant citizenship to anyone who fulfilled any of the three criterion. However, there was a catch as the Rohingya could only declare themselves as 'Bengalis' as Myanmar does not accept the Rohingya as an ethnic group. The 2014 census failed to officially enumerate the Rohingya as they boycotted the exercise. The fact is that the anti-Rohingya narrative of several decades created a situation where even a seemingly democratic and liberal party like the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) exacerbated the situation of Rohingyas. The NLD oversaw two phases of violent expulsions of Rohingyas in 2016 and 2017. In the present context, keeping in mind the complicated and turbulent past, there is little doubt that the problem of Rohingyas has also coincided with a surge in territorial nationalism and Islamophobia that has swept across the globe. In Myanmar, the new official narrative promoted a binary history, which was internalised, including the idea of natives and foreigners, by the Burman Buddhist majority. In a country of multiplicities in terms of ethnicity and religion, internal strife became a way of life, including among adherents of Buddhist majority of different ethnicities such as Rakhine Buddhists as a result of the enforcement of the singular national vision of the majority. The Rohingyas, who are cent per cent Muslim and with their own ethnicity, stood little chance of being included in such a polity. The Myanmar military has often invoked the threat of Rohingyas to gain political legitimacy and the ruling political elite is always insecure about adopting a liberal, accommodating approach towards the Rohingyas as this would potentially invite the wrath of the majority.

The Myanmar leadership, be it the military or political, consistently deny the claim

that they are anti-Muslim. They cite the recognition of the Kaman Muslims as one of the indigenous ethnic groups listed in the Constitution. In the post-2010 elections — catalysed by many variables, including the availability of greater right to free expression in the backdrop of the ongoing democratic transition that also unleashed old stereotypes against the Rohingya in the public domain — the citizenship project played out differently on the ground. In 2012, a case of sexual violence and murder of a Rakhine Buddhist woman sparked off inter-communal violence in Sitwe, central Rakhine, that led to internal displacement of both communities, including 1,20,000 Rohingya. Belying the claims of the authorities, the animosity against the Rohingya had morphed into Islamophobia across the country and not just Rakhine. Extremist Buddhist monk Wirathu became a symbol of hate as he peddled vitriol against the Muslims. Islamophobia became the trend among the vast swathes of the Buddhist community. A number of inter-communal riots took place across the country in 2013. In Meiktila, situated in central Myanmar, more than 40 people were killed. There was inter-communal violence in Yangon and Lashio of Shan state, situated in the north. The ruling political elite become even more rigid and shunned any accommodation. In fact, when the then United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres, who is now the UN Secretary-General, met President Thein Sein in July 2012, the President stated that his government was prepared to hand over the Rohingya to the UNHCR and then they can resettle the ethnic group in any third country "that are willing to take them." Coming to the subcontinent, more than twenty-three-years ago, the author remembers, while reporting for this paper, it was common for the Border Security Force (BSF) to send press releases about the arrest of "Myanmarese" citizens. Many times, political reporters were taken to meet "Myanmarese" along the India-Pak international border in J&K and there was no mention of their Rohingya identity. In the press release, there was explicit mention of the fact that they were caught by the BSF for crossing over to adjoining Sialkot district of Pakistan which adjoins the plains of J&K. The issue got little notice nationally as there was an acceptance to the fact that they were attempting to crossover to Pakistan as desperate economic migrants with the purpose to migrate to the Middle East.

Lions club meeting at Novotel

Lions are serving the world in need

Everywhere we serve, every time we give, we bring kindness and compassion, change and hope & we make our mark on the lives we touch, the communities we serve and the world we share. - International President Fabricio Oliveira

The city will play host, once again, after 15 years, to the most popular, Lions 52nd ISAME Forum 2024. 1600 delegates from 20 countries are expected to join this great event. To be held at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, from 19th to 21st December, high profile delegates attending the Forum will get another opportunity to experience the passionate hospitality, we

Hyderabadis, are known for.

The International President among many other prominent Lion leaders, from across the globe, participated today ISAME stands for India, South Asia, and the Middle East. A.P. Singh, International First Vice President, an Indian who will lead the world as our President during 2025-26, will inspired our delegates to join the world at our LCI Convention at Orlando, during July 2025, Past International Director, Sunil Kumar R, who is currently the Global Action Team Leader, has been designing this event for over a year to get Hyderabad, once again emerge as a great Convention Centre.



Toyota Kirloskar Motor Organized Telangana Grameena Mahotsav – A Rural Customer Connect Initiative in Collaboration with its Dealer Partners



Telangana: Toyota Kirloskar Motor, in line with its commitment to enhancing customer reach and connect, is organizing "Telangana Grameena Mahotsav" in collaboration with its authorized dealers across Telangana. brings Toyota's comprehensive range of products and services closer to customers, ensuring convenience and accessibility at prominent locations of the Telangana region. The initiative, hosted by Harsha Toyota, Kakatiya Toyota, Mody Toyota and Fortune Toyota, is taking place at prominent locations such as Mahboobnagar, Mahabubabad, Jangaon, and Chevella. The Telangana Grameena Mahotsav is designed to provide customers with integrated experience covering sales,

service (Toyota Service Express offering car service) and used car solutions (car exchange offers) and vehicles along with exclusive spot booking benefits of up to 10,000. Visitors can explore popular Toyota models, including the Urban Cruiser Taisor, Glanza, Urban Cruiser Hyryder, Rumion, Innova Crysta, among others, tailored to meet diverse needs and preferences. *Offer Highlights on Toyota Models: Urban Cruiser Taisor: Benefits up to 1,16,500/-Glanza: Benefits up to 1,38,000/-Urban Cruiser Hyryder: Benefits up to 1,38,000/-Rumion: Benefits up to 98,500/- Innova Crysta: Benefits up to 1,20,000/- Fortuner and Hilux: Special benefits available(*These offers are provided by Harsha Toyota, Kakatiya Toyota, Mody

Toyota and Fortune Toyota across Mahboobnagar, Mahabubabad, Jangaon, and Chevella regions only)

The Telangana Grameena Mahotsav represents Toyota's continued focus on customer centricity, providing them with the opportunity to experience its world-class vehicles and services firsthand. Toyota and its dealers welcome the customers across Telangana to visit the ongoing Grameena Mahotsav, explore its offerings, and make the most of exclusive benefits. In line with Toyota's commitment to "customer first approach" and creating awesome buying experience, customers' in rural and semi urban areas can avail the new initiative of T DELIVER (Awesome New Car Delivery

Solution), which brings unique last mile logistics of new car delivery via flatbed trucks, ensuring the vehicles reach their final Toyota touch point in brand new condition with out being driven on the road.

YouTuber Prasad Behera arrested for harassing co-actor

Hyderabad: The Jubilee Hills police have arrested prominent Telugu YouTuber, actor and writer Prasad Behera following a sexual harassment complaint made by a co-actor.

Former CBI JD Lakshminarayana Celebrates the Sacred Role of Farmers in Nation Building

Telangana: In a powerful recognition of the contributions of farmers, former CBI Joint Director V. V.V. Lakshminarayana stated, "In this world, the true God is the farmer. There is no VIP greater than farmers," during his visit to Lakshampur Village in Jagityal District. Addressing a gathering organized by the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization, he spotlighted the vital role that farmers play in society and the economy. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's words that a country's development is intrinsically linked to the development of its villages, the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization annually honors village panchayats that exemplify progress while upholding ethics and integrity. This year, they recognized farmers who are embracing organic farming techniques and modern agricultural practices. He further urged the transition to organic farming and the importance of food processing, advocating that what is produced locally should be enjoyed globally. "Without farmers, there is no country, there is no world," he asserted, calling for legislative changes to support the agricultural community. The event also included distinguished attendees such as Ashok Kumar - Retired Agriculture Assistant Director, Govt of Andhra Pradesh, Youth for Anti-Corruption founder Rajendra Palnati,



YAC media secretary G Jayaram, Komati Ramesh Babu, Pradeep Reddy, G. Hariprakash, B. Rajesh, Former Producers Organisation Chairman Pannala Tirupati

Reddy, Ganga Reddy, various members of the YAC team, and Lakshampur villagers. As the meeting concluded, Lakshminarayana committed to advocating for Lakshampur vil-

lage in future discussions, encouraging representatives from around the world to recognize and appreciate the vital role of farmers in shaping a sustainable future.

Victoria University of Wellington leading the way with first-of-its-kind chair in generative AI

Hyderabad: Generously supported by alumnus, finance and tech expert Bob Dykes, the University is poised to further cement its leadership in the AI field with the establishment of the Bob Dykes Chair in Generative Artificial Intelligence. This pioneering role will provide exceptional leadership in generative AI (Artificial Intelligence), helping to build Aotearoa New Zealand's capacity in the field. The Chair will mentor future leaders, promote interdisciplinary research, and foster collaborations among researchers, entrepreneurs, and international experts. By involving students, staff, and startups, the aim of the Chair is to create a dynamic ecosystem that transforms businesses across the globe, while exploring innovative generative AI applications to ensure Aotearoa is positioned at the forefront of global advancements. Generative AI, a branch of artificial intelligence focused on creating new content by learning patterns in existing data through self-analysis, holds immense potential for innovation. For example, new molecular developments in medical research and developments in energy, such as new battery composition and other energy designs. AI's rapid advancement has raised critical questions about ethics, intellectual property, and societal impacts, challenges this Chair will be uniquely positioned to address. Vice-Chancellor Nic Smith says the new Chair marks a significant milestone for both the University and Aotearoa New Zealand. "Generative AI is reshaping industries and society at an unprecedented pace. The Chair will provide unique leadership in equipping the next generation of researchers and innovators to respond to the rapidly evolving challenges and

opportunities AI presents." "It is a bold step forward, and a wonderful achievement for the University, New Zealand, and the wider global community." The Chair will bring together a multidisciplinary group of expert advisors from government, university, industry, and user communities. It will foster close collaborations with New Zealand's AI Forum and other key stakeholders to provide strategic insights and recommendations on AI policy, ensuring that government initiatives align with the latest technological developments. Dean of Science, Professor Nicola Nelson says

this Chair positions the University to guide New Zealand into a future shaped by generative AI. "Our leadership in the field is already highlighted by a number of experts on staff, as well as our offering of New Zealand's first undergraduate major in AI." The Bob Dykes Chair will provide the critical leadership needed to deepen this expertise, serving as a visionary leader in generative AI and ensuring Aotearoa New Zealand not only harnesses its transformative potential but also emerges as a global frontrunner." Bob Dykes says he is pleased to help the Uni-

versity create this opportunity for students and researchers to have a leading position in Generative AI. "I have benefited immensely from my education at Victoria University and would like to ensure future generations are well grounded in this new technology, which will change so many aspects of our economies and lives in the near future".

Mr Dykes' generous donation will fund the Chair's salary for the next three years. A recruitment process will begin shortly, with the new Chair expected to start in 2025.

Failing PDS beneficiaries in Odisha

In November, three women died after consuming gruel made of mango kernel in Kandhamal district of Odisha. The tragedy has brought issues surrounding the implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013, in the State into the limelight. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Odisha is facing criticism for stalling the public distribution system (PDS) on technical grounds, leading to deprivation among marginalised communities. In 2001 too, 24 Adivasis lost their lives in Rayagada district due to the same reason. The fact that hunger deaths are re-emerging in Odisha after more than two decades is telling.

Mandipanka village in Kandhamal, where the recent tragedy took place, is dominated by the Kandha Adivasi community. The area is plagued by poverty and deprivation with limited welfare interventions. The inhabitants primarily depend on agriculture

and forest produce to eke out a living. Many men from the village also migrate to other States for employment. During the monsoon, starting from July, as livelihood options come down, people in Mandipanka, as in other remote areas of Odisha with Adivasi populations, become dependent on the PDS apart from traditional food that is stockpiled during the summer months. Traditional food items, such as gruel made from mango kernel, are consumed by Adivasis in this region during times of acute food shortage. Sometimes, due to improper storage, food items that are preserved for months become toxic for consumption. After the BJP government took charge in June, it decided to further digitise PDS. This included making e-KYC mandatory for PDS beneficiaries, which led to delays in distribution. The people of Mandipanka claimed that they had not received their PDS rice for three months. With no other life support system and out of hun-

ger, some families began preparing gruel from mango kernels to eat with some stored fermented rice. Unfortunately, according to officials, the food was fungus-infected. Three women died while receiving treatment.

According to statements of Odisha ministers and the district administration, the victims are to blame for their food practices and improper storage. This is despite findings that acute hunger among the Adivasis in this region compels them to resort to substitute food such as mango kernels gruel.

It is also concerning that all those who had consumed the infected gruel were women. In rural belts, women often eat inferior food within the family, due to prevailing sociocultural factors; this affects nutrition. The absence of a focused policy intervention for women in this district is particularly concerning, as about 49% of women in the age group of 15-49 years in Kandhamal are anaemic.

How would a carbon market function? | Explained

The story so far: COP29, the ongoing climate conference in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, has given a fillip to the idea of using carbon markets to curb carbon emissions by approving standards that can help in the setting up of an international carbon market as soon as the coming year.

What is a carbon market?

A carbon market is a market that allows the buying and selling of the right to emit carbon into the atmosphere. Suppose a government wants to limit the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere. It can issue certificates called carbon credits that allow the holder of the certificate to emit a certain amount of carbon into the atmosphere. One carbon credit is equivalent to 1,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide. By limiting the number of carbon credits that are issued, governments can control how much carbon is released into the environment. It should be noted that anyone who doesn't hold carbon credits to their name would not be allowed to emit any carbon into the atmosphere. Carbon credits were first used in the 1990s in the U.S., which introduced the cap-and-trade model to control the emission of sulphur dioxide. Individuals and firms that hold carbon credits but don't actually need them for any reason can sell their credits to interested buyers. The price at which these carbon credits are traded is determined by market forces, which in this case are the supply of carbon credits and the demand for these certificates. A carbon market can also include the trading of carbon offsets. In this case, a business that pollutes the environment for example, can purchase carbon offsets sold by an environmental NGO that promises to plant trees that suck a certain amount of carbon emissions out of the atmosphere for each offset that it sells.

What is good about carbon markets?

Pollution of the environment and climate change caused by carbon emissions is a classic case of what economists call an externality. An externality is caused when the cost of an economic activity is not properly accounted for (or internalised) by the market price system due to the absence of well-defined property rights. For example, a business that uses raw materials such as iron will have to pay the supplier who owns the iron to be able to procure and use it, thus incurring a certain cost. But when the same firm emits carbon into the atmosphere, it doesn't usually have to pay any money to anyone. In other words, firms are generally able to emit their waste into the atmosphere for free. This of course leads to unhindered pollution of the atmosphere as firms in this case have no financial incentive to curb their carbon emissions. Carbon markets in which the right to pollute is traded for a price can solve the problem by imposing a certain cost on firms for polluting the atmosphere, helping to curb emissions in the process.

The intersection of standardised accounting frameworks and technological advancements has improved the ability of corporations to monitor and report their carbon emissions. While, this is difficult for the vast majority of small businesses in the developing world, particularly in accurately capturing

supply chain emissions, ongoing developments, like real-time data tracking of the energy sector, continue to enhance the granularity and reliability of corporate carbon accounting. However, corporations have preferred a voluntary reporting system, like the Carbon Disclosure Project. They have been loathe to government interventions limiting carbon emissions, arguing that such budgeting may lead to output restrictions or rise in costs. They also point to varied production processes, some that might have diverse supply chains that might make it difficult to find the optimal carbon budget for their facilities. Large multinational corporations such as ExxonMobil and General Motors have advocated for carbon markets that allows free trading of carbon credits among firms at a price determined by market forces, that would allow these firms to purchase carbon credits from other firms, which don't need them as much. This they say, helps allocate carbon credits more efficiently than government diktat.

What can go wrong?

Even when there is a functioning carbon market, a government that is not very keen on reducing emissions may increase the supply of carbon credits and drive down the price of the right to pollute, leading to no



noticeable drop in emissions. Others may keep a strict cap on the supply of carbon credits but allow firms to cheat by allowing them to illegally emit carbon. The success of carbon offsets also depends on the degree of personal incentive that firm owners possess to care about carbon emissions, which may often be very little. Critics claim that firms that purchase carbon offsets often do it for the sake of virtue signalling and may have little incentive to ensure that their in-

vestments in these instruments are actually helping offset carbon emissions. Meanwhile, other critics have raised more fundamental questions regarding how exactly a government would be able to arrive at the optimum supply of carbon credits. They argue that politicians, who do not incur any personal economic cost when they legislate emission reductions, may restrict the supply of carbon credits more than what is really necessary, leading to slower economic growth.

How Mamata is trying to usurp BJP's campaign ahead of 2026 polls

The chief minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, recently announced that the Jagannath Temple, which is being built in the coastal town of Digha in East Midnapore district on the lines of the Jagannath temple in Puri in Odisha, would be inaugurated on April 30, 2025. Banerjee has also announced that the skywalk leading to the famous Kalighat temple in Kolkata, for which final preparations are going on, will also be inaugurated next February. With assembly elections in West Bengal due in 2026, these moves by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief, Banerjee, are being seen by political experts as an attempt to counter the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Hindutva politics.

"The temple would be inaugurated on Akshaya Tritiya on April 30, 2025. The date has been fixed by priests. The first rath yatra will be held next year. I will be contributing ₹5 lakh to purchase the broom, made of sandalwood and gold, for the Rath Yatra," Banerjee told reporters in Digha after inspecting the construction work on December 11. While the foundation stone for Jagannath Dham was laid in 2019, just before Covid-19 pandemic struck, the construction started in mid-2022. The state has already spent around ₹250 crore on the temple project. Officials said that while 90% of the construction work, including the marble statues of Lord Jagannath, Balaram and Goddess Subhadra, has been completed, work on the neem-wood statues is under process.

"This is definitely an attempt by

Banerjee to counter the BJP's Hindutva politics with an eye on the 2026 assembly polls. This would, to some extent, take the sting out of the saffron attack. The BJP knows this very well and this has irked the party with senior leaders criticising the move," said Biswanath Chakraborty, professor of political science at the Rabindra Bharati University. BJP legislator and leader of the opposition in the state legislative assembly Suwendu Adhikari opposed the construction of Jagannath Temple in Digha, saying that as per the Constitution, state funds cannot be used to construct any institution of a particular religion. Both the Kalighat temple in Kolkata and the Jagannath temple in Puri are revered by millions of Bengali Hindus. While the Jagannath Temple in Puri is one of the char dham set up by Adi Shankaracharya, the other three being Dwarka, Badrinath and Rameshwaram, the Kalighat temple is one of the Shakti peeths. This is not the first time that Banerjee has attempted to appropriate BJP's religion-focussed campaign planks. Starting from constructing a skywalk leading to the Dakshineswar temple in October 2018, ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and announcing a monthly allowance of ₹1,000 and free housing for Hindu priests, the TMC-government provides financial assistance to clubs organising Durga Puja every year.

"Both Banerjee and the BJP leaders know for sure that the minority vote won't go in favour of the BJP. Now the TMC supremo is trying to nibble into the BJP's Hindu vote bank. One also has to see the timing. With

the attack on Hindus in Bangladesh, the BJP made an attempt to ride the wave of Hindu sentiments. But Banerjee's announcement has managed to disarm it to a large extent," said Rabindranath Bhattacharya, professor of political science at Burdwan University. Top BJP leaders including Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have repeatedly accused Banerjee of minority appeasement during their election campaigns ahead of the 2021 and 2024 assembly and Lok Sabha polls. In March 2020 the BJP's Bengal unit had even tagged Banerjee as 'anti-Hindu' in a symbolic charge-sheet that was released by the party.

"The minority vote bank is Mamata Banerjee's shield. But after the attack on minorities in Bangladesh, Hindus are getting united. She knows very well that if the Hindus, who form 70% of the vote bank in West Bengal, unite then she will have no chance. Hence, she is now trying to woo the Hindus. But this won't have any impact as people have seen her actual face when she wore a hijab while attending an iftar party," said Rahul Sinha, BJP leader. "The BJP had earlier spread the propaganda that the TMC government was opposed Durga Puja. The UNESCO's heritage tag for Durga Puja proved them wrong. The TMC is tolerant to every religion. That's why we have Durga Puja carnival and Christmas Carnival and the chief minister goes to attend iftar parties," said Jay Prakash Majumdar, TMC state vice president and spokesperson.

Pakistan at the UNSC, the points of its compass

Pakistan's entry is significant in that, effectively, half of the 10 elected members of UNSC will be from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Those elected for 2025-26 were Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. They will replace Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland as their terms end on December 31. The new members will join Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia, who are existing non-permanent members. Afghanistan will be a natural focus with Pakistan sure to use its Council stint to repair its frosty relations with the Taliban. In this, it has Russia and China to readily assist it in the diplomatic rehabilitation of the Taliban. With the OIC countries, one hopes that the Council gets all the support it needs for a ceasefire in Gaza to salvage from the rubble whatever is left of the Palestinian cause and stabilise the region. Peacekeeping is another of Pakistan's stated priorities given its role as a major troop contributing country for UN peacekeeping. However, Pakistan's default mode will be to focus on India.

What India should expect India-Pakistan relations are still strained. Even if one assumes that some backchannels are busy working the lines, it is a given that enhanced bilateral cooperation does not necessarily result in enhanced multilateral cooperation, especially in the UN. This is true not just of Pakistan but also of countries India considers as "close friends", even in the Global South. For example, some OIC countries with which India has very close bilateral relations, line up behind Pakistani drafts in the UN which have anti-India language. They even argue — ingeniously — that the offensive language is not aimed at India. Fortunately, there is help usually from unexpected friends in such groups, enabling India to tide over the issues successfully.

To state the obvious, India should be prepared for Pakistan's anti-India initiatives in the UNSC. There was a brief period in 2012 when there was some synergy between the Missions of both countries in the UN when both nations were in the Council, but that was an aberration. Pakistan is back to its multilateral default mode of being anti-India. And in this, it now has a more assertive "iron brother" in China offering it an "all-weather friendship". Pakistan's first stated priority is to "combat terrorism", which it hopes will absolve it of the tag of "terrorist state". It will also try — as it always does — to slip that tag onto India. The list of Pakistan-based and Pakistani terrorist organisations associated with the ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda under UNSC Resolution 1267 mandated sanctions, including the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Mohammed, is long and instructive. In retaliation, Pakistan has presented several "dossiers" to the UN Secretary General, that have fancy claims of Indian terrorist attacks on Pakistan — anything to keep the anti-India pot boiling. After its stint in the UNSC in 2021-22, India's proposal (with the United States as co-signatory) to list Pakistani terrorist Abdul Rehman Makki, deputy leader of the LeT, under the 1267 sanctions regime was approved by the UNSC — including of course by China — making this the first listing (with India as a proposer) for terrorist acts in Jammu and Kashmir. It was a blow to Pakistan, which it must be waiting to avenge. However, even proposals under 1267 sanctions are given a religious colour by Pakistan. It made desperate attempts,



with trumped up charges, to list four Indian Hindus as terrorists, with the intention of getting at least one Hindu listed. The Council rejected every one of Pakistan's requests — not once but twice — thanks to the U.S. and other western countries. Member-states have seen through Pakistan's game. On Kashmir

Its next, and most obvious, stated priority will be Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Pakistan pushed for discussions on J&K in the Council through its "friends" when India abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution. Two closed "consultations" were held in the UNSC, with China acting as the cat's-paw. But nothing happened. At least four of the five permanent members (P-5) have little appetite for this issue. When a Pakistani journalist in New York asked this writer — when India entered the UNSC in January 2021 — about the "unfinished" business of Article 370, the reply he got was this: that the only "unfinished" business was the return of Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir (PoK) to India. With elections having been conducted and a popular government in place in J&K, Pakistan would find it hard to make an issue. China, which, incidentally, occupies a part of PoK after Pakistan ceded it to them, will only be too happy to keep the pot boiling. The Pakistani Ambassador to the UN made a case in the media on how the recent decision by the International Court of Justice decision on Palestine applies to J&K. One cannot stop Pakistan from trying to do what it wants as its presence in the UNSC will give it the lever to call for discussions on J&K. India is aware that the P-5 usually does not like to prevent discussions, but decides whether it should be open or closed and whether there should be an outcome. The use of Islamophobia Pakistan has used Islamophobia as a weapon to dilute the fight against terrorism and, going by its recent attempts, to target India. When the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GTS) was discussed in 2021, and again in 2023, Pakistan, supported by the OIC, sought to introduce Islamophobia as a 'justification' for terrorism. India stood alone and had the reference removed. But when India left the Council at the end of 2022, the United

Arab Emirates and others inserted, inter alia, Islamophobia into the UNSC Presidential statement for the first time in February 2023. In March 2024, the U.S., China and Russia voted in the UN General Assembly in support of an OIC resolution to appoint a UN Special Envoy for Combatting Islamophobia. With the right wing on the rise in the West, one has not heard the last on this subject in the Council with the OIC countries. Early this year, Pakistan raised the issue of the bilateral India-Pakistan Indus Waters Treaty in the Council, which is a purely bilateral agreement with its mechanism to resolve disputes. This is a misuse of the UNSC with the only benefit of catering to a domestic audience.

During its stint between 2021-22, India played a robust and positive role in strengthening international peace and security. While many UNSC members misuse "Arria formula" meetings (a dispensation where any UNSC member can circumvent the Council and hold informal meetings on any issue),

India avoided doing this and stuck to its priorities in the Council. Pakistan will have no such compunctions. It is unfortunate that Pakistan ignores the many multilateral synergies between India and Pakistan to work together on UN issues. Both countries have similar interests: in UN peacekeeping, as they are large troop-contributing countries; in combating climate change, as they face severe climate change-induced floods and natural disasters; in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 2030; in focusing on the debt burden of the Global South; or in reforming multilateral financial institutions. Sometimes even functional contacts with Indian diplomats are frowned upon by its Mission. Pakistan's internal political churning, economic collapse and misplaced priorities have prevented it from strengthening multilateralism and the UN in a world wrecked by conflicts. While its term will be high on rhetoric against India, it is difficult to see how UN member-states will be persuaded to play its game.

Coffee, tea may reduce heart attack, stroke risk in lupus patients

New Delhi: Consuming more caffeine, present in coffee, tea, and cocoa may improve heart health in people with lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, according to a study on Wednesday. Patients with inflammatory rheumatic diseases, such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, are at higher risk of heart attack and stroke. This is both due to the disease and some treatments for them, particularly cortisone derivatives.

To date, these patients were given conventional recommendations like quitting smoking, reducing cholesterol, and controlling high blood pressure, the new study published in the journal *Rheumatology*, added drinking caffeine to the list to boost their heart health. Researchers from Sapienza University of Rome, in Italy, suggested that caffeine, present in coffee, tea, and cocoa, actively helps endothelial progenitor cells, the group

of cells that help regenerate the lining of blood vessels and are involved in vascular growth.

"The present study is an attempt to provide patients with information on the possible role of diet in controlling the disease," said the paper's lead author, Fulvia Ceccarelli. Caffeine not only acts as a stimulant effect on the body but also exerts an anti-inflammatory effect. It is because it binds with the receptors expressed on the surface of immune cells. In the study, the team examined 31 lupus patients who did not have traditional cardiovascular risk factors using a seven-day food questionnaire. After a week, the patient's blood was measured to check blood vessels' health. The result revealed that patients who consumed caffeine had better vascular health, as measured through endothelial cells, which form the important inner layer of blood vessels.

A Viksit Bharat cannot be built with people choking on poor air

A report published in the Lancet, last week, points out that no one in India lives in an area where the yearly average pollution levels are below the WHO norms. The report's conclusion is somewhat along expected lines. India's air quality standards are not up to that mandated by the global health organisation. The Lancet Report underlines an even graver concern. More than 80 per cent of the Indian population lives in areas where the air quality does not even meet the country's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) of $40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ — much higher than the WHO's recommendation of $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. The latest Lancet study's estimates of deaths due to air pollution is also higher than that of the Global Burden of Disease. The report came barely a week after rapidly deteriorating air quality forced schools in the national capital to ask students to take online classes. But it has also been apparent now that pollution is not just a problem of the country's megacities. Poor has historically been one of the flip sides of development in most parts of the world. Solutions are not always easy — the US and UK, for instance, took decades to clean up the air.

Get basics right The trouble is that India has yet to get a lot of fundamental rights. Controlling the poor air problem requires

knowing it well. It requires factoring in environmental conditions and the load from different emitting sources. While there are studies to understand the nature and dynamics of the toxic air enveloping metros, pollution in most other parts of the country is an under-researched area. The country's premier air quality monitoring body, the Central Pollution Control Board, recommends at least four stations to assess particulate matter levels in a city. But the agency's data shows that more than 70 per cent of urban centres in the country have only monitoring station. The CPCB's requirement estimate is, in fact, a conservative one. A city covering 400 square kilometres would require at least 25 stations. India operates barely 40 per cent of this capacity. And, most of rural India is outside the monitoring network. That's why pollution remains a poorly understood phenomenon outside the metros.

A growing body of scholarship has also shown that several state pollution monitoring authorities lack the expertise to tackle pollution. The technical posts in pollution watchdogs have a perennial vacancy problem. The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 198 stipulates that state pollution control boards should have at least two members with special knowledge or practical experience in air quality management.



However, this has historically not been the case in several pollution monitoring boards in the country. Moreover, survey after survey shows that the country's municipalities do not understand the gravity of the problem. Regions, not cities On one hand, most of India does not have the know-how to fight pollution. And, on the other hand, the country's clean air programmes continue to ignore state-of-the-art solutions which underline targeting regions, and not cities or states. That's why despite a bevy of programmes

and agencies, India has made little headway in bending the pollution curve. Most read might be too much to expect a drastic change in 2025. But some things can be done at the earliest. A country that claims to be on the course to becoming a developed country should do better in monitoring air quality and in equipping control stations with experts. The least that the country's policymakers can do is acknowledge the problem is not only in the metros, identify what our cities, towns and villages lack and make sure that these facilities are provided at the earliest.

December rain a big reason for turnaround in northeast monsoon

The northeast monsoon season — it runs officially from October to December — is in its last month now. The season is an important source of rain for five peninsular states: Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. How has the season been for these states this year? Very rainy in all states except Telangana if one is looking at summary numbers. However, this summary masks the fact that a big reason for the surplus rain in the season is the surplus recorded in December because of Cyclone Fengal. Before unpacking the trends of the northeast monsoon summarised above, it is useful to underline its importance in different states. This is because it has different degrees of importance in the five states listed above. For example, the season accounts for 49% of the annual rain in Tamil Nadu but only 13% of the annual rain in Telangana, according to the 1971-2020 average (considered the Long Period Average or the LPA) for the October-December period. Therefore, Tamil Nadu has much more to lose from poor rain in this season than Telangana or Karnataka.

To be sure, while the season may not be very important for states like Karnataka overall, it is for their interior parts. The reason for this is the driver of the season. An important driver of the northeast monsoon is the northeasterly trade wind (blowing from the northeast), as opposed to the southwest-

erly trade winds that drive the summer monsoon, which is also known as the southwest monsoon. Because of the western ghats, the former affects only the interior or non-coastal parts of the states on the west coast while Tamil Nadu on the east coast is a rain shadow region for the southwest monsoon. So what is the rain performance in the northeast season so far? Compared to the LPA, Telangana has a big 29.4% deficit. None of the other four states have a deficit, but the degree of surplus varies across states. Andhra Pradesh has just a 3.1% surplus, for example, while both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have a surplus of over 30%. The overall trends for the season so far described above suggest that this is largely a rainy northeast monsoon. However, this masks how the season's performance changed over time. Without the rain brought by Cyclone Fengal in early December (which was followed by a low-pressure area in the second week), all states except Karnataka would have a deficit. All the five states had a surplus of over 200% in December, which helped them clear the deficit accumulated in a drier than usual November. These trends read together mean that the overall performance of rain in the northeast monsoon season so far is good perhaps only for rain's accumulation in natural and manmade reservoirs. Otherwise, the season is made up of the twin disasters of a dry November and a rainy December.

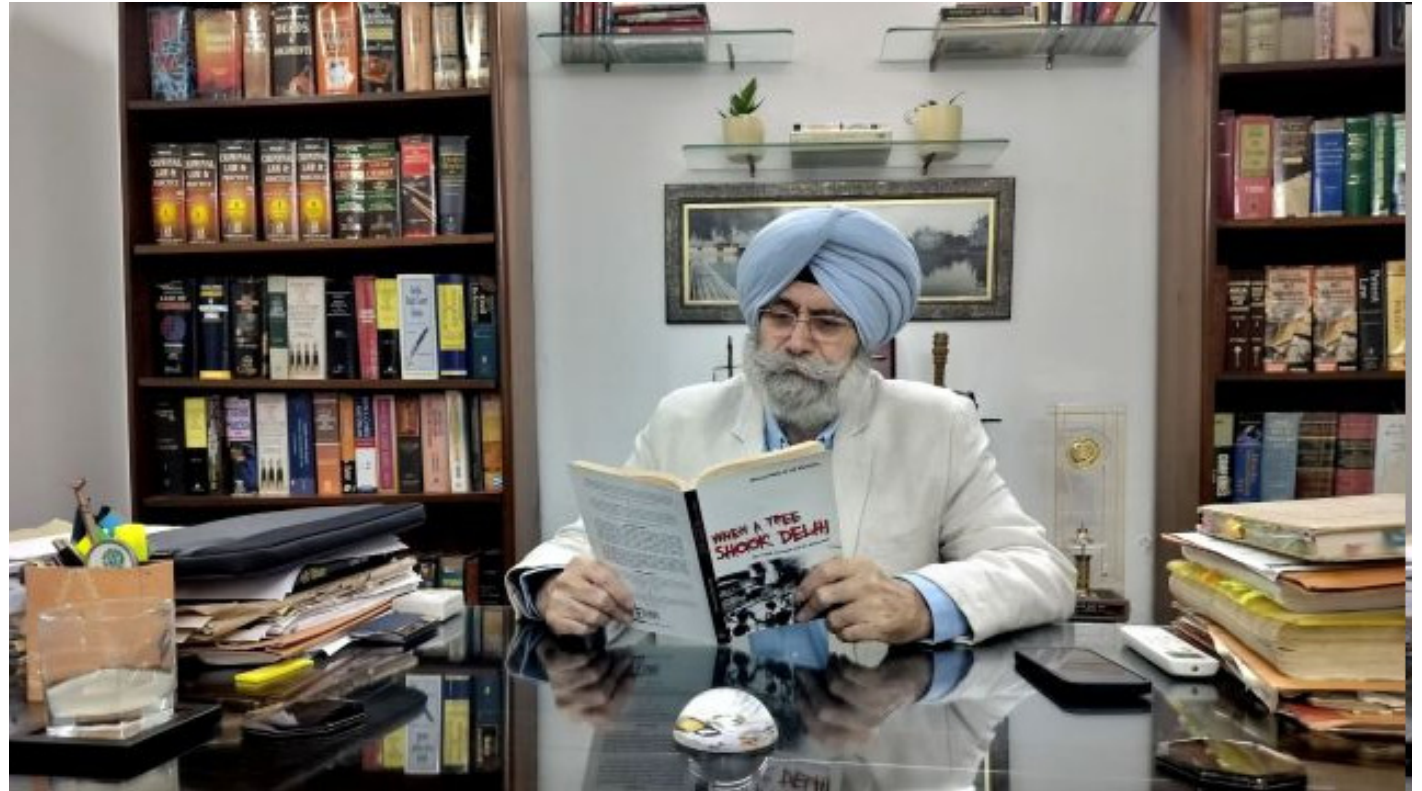


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1984 riots and a 40-year quest for justice: H S Phoolka, the voice on the other side

On a recent morning, as he enters the courtroom in Delhi's Rouse Avenue District Court in his trademark sky-blue turban and black coat, senior advocate H S Phoolka elicits several nods. Many among those in the room have seen the man in action for exactly four decades now — as one of the most untiring voices for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that broke out across the country following then prime minister Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984. Some rise from their seats as Phoolka makes his way to the front row, flanked by advocates Gurbaksh Singh and Kamna Vohra, his trusted comrades for decades. Amit Jindal, the CBI's Public Prosecutor, takes a seat next to Phoolka and they get ready to argue. It's 11.30 am and the court has assembled for the trial in the rioting case against former Congress MP Jagdish Tytler. Phoolka is representing Lakhwinder Kaur, 58, who had accused Tytler of leading the mob that killed her husband and two other Sikhs during the riots. Twenty-five years ago, on November 5, 1999, Phoolka was designated a senior advocate at the age of 44 years.

In the courtroom, Phoolka straightens his coat and stands up. Before he can speak, Tytler's counsel asks for an adjournment citing the main counsel's ill health. "The witness is an old woman who has come from Dehradun. These lawyers are constantly asking for adjournments," Phoolka says, objecting to the appeal for adjournment. A few minutes later, the judge adjourns the case. Also present in court is Nirpreet Kaur, another riot victim who helped Phoolka track down Lakhwinder. After the hearing, Phoolka, Vohra, Nirpreet and Lakhwinder head to his chamber in Block 2 of the premises. "Not only has Phoolka fought the cases pro bono, he has also supported many victims financially," says Nirpreet. In 2019, Phoolka was awarded the Padma Shri for his pro bono work for the riot victims. Now, ahead of another hearing in the Sikh riots case — on December 16, a Delhi court is likely to pass a judgment in a case against former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar — Phoolka, who is arguing for the victims, says there were times in his career when he had to abandon his private practice to focus on the riot cases, which make up "about a fifth of all the cases" he has fought. H S Phoolka with his wife Maninder Kaur in 1984 "We have been fighting throughout to put the fear of law in people... Sajjan Kumar went to jail at the age of 71. Till there is no fear of law, riots will continue unabated... Had the accused in the 1984 riots been convicted, none of the riots that took place afterwards would have taken place. 1984 was the beginning of the criminalisation of politics," says Phoolka. And to think that law was never a young Phoolka's first career choice. Born in 1955 in Bhadaur, a village in Punjab's Barnala district, Phoolka completed his schooling from a government school near his house. Following a BSc in Agriculture from Ludhiana in 1977 and a law degree from Chandigarh, he moved to Delhi to practise law. "Law was not a preferred course then... People often wondered why I joined a law college," he chuckles. "I wanted to become an IPS officer... Agriculture was not a subject, but law was."



The library and moot court competitions in law college are what steered him towards a legal career. "In the first month, I participated in a moot court competition. In the audience was J S Khehar (who would later become the Chief Justice of India). After the competition, he said he would guide me. He was my first law teacher. I won the next moot competition," says Phoolka, who graduated from law college in 1981. Recalling his first case, Phoolka says, "I was fighting my first case in 1981, when a High Court judge, Justice G R Luthra, asked me, 'Who are you? Why are you not in robes?'. I replied, 'I'm waiting for my results'. The judge smiled and mentioned my name in the order sheet even though I did not yet have a licence." 1984 riots Phoolka, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2019 for his pro bono (free) work for the anti-Sikh riots victims, in 1984. (Special Arrangement) Till he got his robes, he wandered around the judge's court. When Phoolka got his licence and robes a week later, the same judge congratulated him. Phoolka ended up working with a senior advocate for three months before starting his independent practice.

Over the course of his career, Phoolka says, he has never represented a rape accused or a person arrested in a drug case. "Even if a criminal gives me 10 times more (money), I prefer to represent victims. I want young lawyers to know that you can be successful by doing this as well." It was Justice A P Shah, Phoolka says, who in 2009 reminded him of his "true calling". Phoolka was then appearing for the Delhi civic body in a matter involving the removal of a Banjara colony. "Justice Shah was extremely patient and eloquent... he had a soft spot for the poor and children. He looked me in the eye and asked me why I was appearing for the MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi). 'Children are the worst sufferers after removal of these colonies,' he said," says Phoolka, adding that he stopped taking MCD's demolition cases

after that day. From getting guidelines framed on missing children to fighting cases pertaining to child labour, trafficking and drug abuse, Phoolka has taken up a number of child rights cases. He was also the counsel in the recent Supreme Court case, where it was held that "storing and watching child porn were offences". While Phoolka is confident about his cases, he is less confident when it comes to technology. "I can handle the digital world, but I need help navigating it. At least I can handle my own Twitter and Facebook accounts," he smiles. When he is not in court, he is with his family or reading law books. "I like spending my free time at home. My wife (Maninder Kaur) and I were very good friends for eight years before we got married. She is my best friend," he says, adding that Maninder, who works with a food processing firm, is currently researching natural sources of de-addiction to help tackle the spike in drug addiction among Punjab's

youth. 1980 Phoolka, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2019 for his pro bono (free) work for the anti-Sikh riots victims, in 1984. Special Arrangement Talking about their children, he says, "Our son is a special child... I love spending time with him. Our daughter Prabhsahay Kaur is an advocate who assists me with research for many of my cases." Phoolka's wife was pregnant with their daughter during the anti-Sikh riots. Their landlord's son smuggled them out in his car from South Extension to AIIMS. The couple stayed with a friend in Saket for five days before finally getting a flight to Chandigarh. Prabhsahay was born in April 1985. Phoolka — or "Phoolke", as his friends and contemporaries refer to him — complains that Defence Colony used to be lush green when he first came to Delhi four decades ago. "Delhi is overcrowded now. You are stuck on the roads for hours. Skyscrapers and constructions have gobbled up the greenery."

Smokeless tobacco, betel nut fuel oral cancer cases in India: Lancet

New Delhi: India has the highest number of oral cancer cases among countries in South Asia, driven by increased use of smokeless tobacco products like betel quid with tobacco, gutka, khaini; and areca nut, according to a study on Wednesday. The study led by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and published in The Lancet Oncology journal showed that India logged 83,400 of the 120,200 oral cancer cases globally caused by smokeless tobacco (chewed, sucked, inhaled, applied locally, or ingested) and areca nut (seed of the areca palm) in 2022.

The consumption of areca nut (30 per cent) and betel quid with tobacco (28 per

cent) were responsible for the most oral cancer cases among women, followed by gutka (21 per cent) and khaini (21 per cent). Among men, it was khaini (47 per cent), gutka (43 per cent), betel quid with tobacco (33 per cent), and areca nut (32 per cent). "Smokeless tobacco and areca nut products are available to consumers in many different forms across the world, but consuming smokeless tobacco and areca nut is linked to multiple diseases, including oral cancer," said Dr Harriet Rumgay, a scientist in the Cancer Surveillance Branch at IARC. "We found that more than 120,000 people across the world were diagnosed with oral cancer that could have been caused by using smokeless tobacco or areca nut."