Paddy procurement falls short of targets amid declining arrivals

Hyderabad: The State Civil Supplies Corporation is facing challenges in its paddy procurement efforts, which were projected to cross 90 lakh metric tonnes during the Kharif marketing season. As of now, the actual procurement is yet to touch 40 lakh metric tonnes, with arrivals on a declining trend.Despite the government's assurance to keep paddy procurement centres open until January, the arrivals in the market over the past week have averaged between 50,000 to 60,000 tonnes per day. This is significantly lower than expected. Private traders and millers have been active in the market, mainly focusing on fine varieties, which has further impacted the government's procurement efforts.
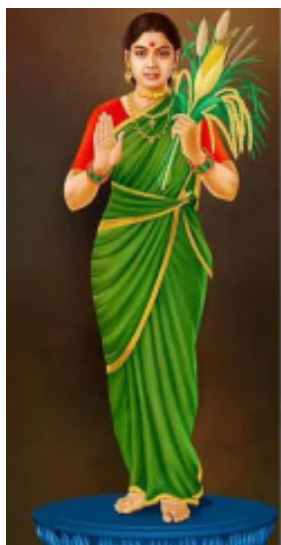
Initially, there were plans to hire additional storage facilities to maintain stock levels in anticipation of heavy arrivals. However, this need did not arise as millers have been lifting the procured stocks for custom milling rice (CMR) operations. The paddy procured from farmers is being moved 100 percent to millers for CMR operations. The rice pro-

vided to the millers is stored under the joint monitoring of both the millers and the Corporation. Millers have expressed readiness to take any quantity for CMR.The Corporation planned to hire godown space of 18 to 19 lakh metric tonnes for stocking rice to meet the state Public Distribution System (PDS) requirements and other welfare initiatives.

This is crucial as the State's godown requirement for paddy storage stands at 18 lakh metric tonnes.Meeting the additional requirement from the State, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) will also be stocking over 22 lakh tonnes to meet the State's needs.With the paddy procurement close to 40 lakh metric tonnes. The declining trend in arrivals and the competition from private traders and millers pose challenges for the MSP operations. As the Corporation continues its efforts to secure and store the required quantities, the focus remains on ensuring that the needs of the State are met without compromising the quality and efficiency of the procurement process, officials said.

Telangana Thalli image, State official song to be part of school textbooks

Hyderabad: The newly designed Telangana Thalli image along with the State official song 'Jaya Jayahe Telangana' will be part of the State board textbooks with the State government deciding to print them for the next academic year.School Education director EV Narasimha Reddy said the State government recently approved the new Telangana Thalli image besides the State official song and they would be printed in the textbooks for the academic year 2025-26.

The process for printing the textbooks

has recently commenced, he said, adding that the bilingual textbooks concept is being retained for the forthcoming academic year.To be available in two languages i.e., Telugu and English or Urdu and English or Hindi and English, the textbooks will help non-English medium students transition to English medium besides helping them better understand and learn topics with ease.Meanwhile, the School Education department is working to bring major changes in the State board curriculum. The new curriculum, which will be aligned with National

Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF) 2023, for all classes will come into force from the academic year 2026-27.To be done in a phased manner, the non-languages-Mathematics, Sciences, and Social Sciences syllabus is being changed first followed by languages Telugu, Hindi, Urdu and English.As per the new framework, social science will have 20 per cent content at local level, 30 per cent at regional level and 30 per cent at national level and 20 per cent at the international level.Divided into four

stages – foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary – the NCF 2023 focuses on holistic development, equity and inclusion, curriculum flexibility, integration of technology, environmental consciousness among other areas.

It emphasizes competency-based education, multidisciplinary learning, continuous assessment, local context and culture, and teacher empowerment among other areas. The last curriculum revision was done based on the NCF – 2005 in 2015.

Merciless bankers leave Wanaparthy farmer's family in rude shock

Wanaparthy: In an incident that has shaken the small farming community of Duppali village in Madanapuram mandal of Wanaparthy, a farmer Lacha Goud woke up on Tuesday to hear bank officials making loud announcements through a tom-tom and microphone. The announcements declared that two acres of his land, mortgaged against a loan of Rs.5 lakh, would be auctioned at the Gram Panchayat office on December 21.The news sent shockwaves through the village, as it was unprecedented for farmers in the area to have their property auctioned by bankers. Goud's family, desperate to prevent

the auction, rushed to meet bank officials and pleaded with them to stop making such announcements, explaining that they were still trying to mobilize the money owed to the District Cooperative Central Bank. They even fell at the feet of the officials, but their pleas went unheard.

Lacha Goud tried to request elected representatives to intervene and halt the bank's auction. Despite the efforts of neighbouring farmers who assured the bankers that Goud would repay the loan and requested some grace time, the bank officials remained firm in their decision.

Cherlapally takes charge to ease Secunderabad's load for a makeover

South Central Railway (SCR) is keen get the newly-developed fourth terminal station of Cherlapally commissioned soon so that it can shift some of the originating trains from the Secunderabad railway station. This, senior railway officials informed, would free up a few platforms at the main station for taking up major redevelopment works as part of the ?699-crore project initiated last year.The ?430-crore Cherlapally terminal station is a little more than 11 km away. This station can handle 10 passing trains and 15 originating trains with the help of 10 new railway lines and four new platforms. There is a plan to shift at least 10 trains here from Secunderabad station so that the key works on new buildings on both sides, platforms, passenger amenities, entry/exits etc. can begin for modernisation, said railway officials."It will take a month each for work to be completed near each of the 10 platforms at Secunderabad for laying slabs. During that time, we will be moving certain trains to originate from Cherlapally station in a staggered manner without affecting daily passenger services," said SCR Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) A. Sridhar.

Yet for now, key offices will continue to function from temporary buildings at the main station, like the new booking office constructed on platform one (north side) for facilitating construction activity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the project in August last year and works began the very next month.About 30% of the physical redevelopment work has been completed and other works are expected to gather pace once Cherlapally station eases some pressure on Secunderabad station. A revamped Secunderabad station is crucial to SCR because it alone earns a revenue of ?500 crore and handles 20 million passengers per year.On a daily average, around 180 trains use the station with a footfall of 1.5 lakh passengers. Ongoing upgrades with modern amenities are meant to handle the expected rise in these numbers in future, he said.Once completed, the 'new' Secunderabad station will have new ground plus three-storey buildings on both sides — near platform one and platform 10, a double storey sky concourse with passenger amenities at one place along with space for retail, cafeterias, recreational facilities, separate entry and exits (drop off and pick up locations) to avoid cross movement of arrival and departure passengers as well as vehicular movement.

Two walkways of 7.5 metres along with two travelators at both buildings on either side with a provision of another walkway at the main entrance side connecting with skyway of East and West metro station are part of the plan. One foot overbridge (FoB) of 4.5 metres width with travelators, another FoB of seven metres width and a skywalk of nine metres width are also on the anvil.Giving an update, Mr. Sridhar informed that about 95% of the basement construction work has been completed including civil, plumbing and roads works on the south side or Bhoiguda side. Ground floor will be the drop-off zone for departing passengers, while the basement one will be the pick-up zone for arriving passengers.At the main entrance, the main building basement and slab work up to first floor has been done. Likewise, foundation work is completed on two platforms and ex-

cavations are ongoing for the air concourse, travelator and other facilities. Existing platforms are to get a complete makeover, and all these will be connected with 26 lifts and 32 escalators.A multi-level parking on Platform 1 side and underground parking at the Bhoiguda side are under construction. At Platform 10, there will be sufficient parking for both bikes and cars with nearly 3,000 square metres and near Platform 1 near the Ganesh Temple, another six floor multi-level 400 car and bike parking is coming up with foundation works completed and utilities shift under way.Railway authorities have also provided space for a 5,000 kWp solar power plant apart from two electrical substations of 33KV capacity, one of which is getting finishing touches. Two underground water tanks of total 3.5 lakh litre capacity near the reservation office and another near the train lighting area is done while another six lakh litre tank near Platform 10 is almost ready."Secunderabad station redevelopment

work aims to regenerate the core area with multi-modal integration, ensure seamless transfer of passengers from one mode to other mode and ease in pick up and drop off

areas. The main circulating area will be decongested and there will be adequate parking facility for both four- and two-wheelers," said SCR general manager Arun Kumar Jain.

Still a giant leap for man: the stagnation of the long jump

In April 2022, the legendary Carl Lewis put out a blunt statement on social media platform X (then Twitter) that long jump was the hardest event in track and field. "There have been 5 male world record holders [sic: breakers] in the long jump since 1936," Lewis said. "The present outdoor record is 31 years old... Seems pretty tough to me. What other event is that difficult to master?"In quick time, Lewis was roundly criticised and even called an attention seeker, pretty much in line with X's image of being a toxic crucible of abuse and simplistic narratives. It didn't matter that Lewis was a nine-time Olympic gold medallist, with four of those in the long jump in a streak that started at Los Angeles 1984 and ended at Atlanta 1996.

The Carl Lewis argumentLewis' rationale was that Mike Powell's world record of 8.95m at the Tokyo World Championships in 1991 was — and is still — standing. The same with Bob Beamon's Olympic record of 8.90m set at Mexico City 1968. Starting 1970, the men's high jump, triple jump and pole vault — the other three jump events — have seen 12, 5 and 14 athletes better the best mark. Long jump has seen a grand total of one. Of the six record-holders from 1935, Powell, Beamon and Jesse Owens have each held it for 23 years or more.

In fairness, the longevity of a world record shouldn't always determine the difficulty level of an event. If that is the case, the women's track races should be the hardest of all, for the 100m, 200m, 400m and 800m records have remained intact since the 1980s. But Lewis' thinking had more than a kernel of truth — that long jump was among the toughest to master, if not the toughest, and the lack of progression in world record distances was one of its prime fallouts."Long jump is a combination of speed, elastic strength and technique," James Hillier, the athletics director at Reliance Foundation, told The Hindu. "If you look at the runway data

from the Olympic Games, the winner has had the fastest times. The issue is how you transfer horizontal speed, which might be 10 m/s or higher for top long jumpers, into a vertical lift off the board.

"You have to hit that sweet spot. You have to be able to run fast enough because the speed is what carries you forward. But you should also be running within yourself so that you can coordinate and time a take-off. If you are driving a car at 30 miles an hour, and someone tugs the steering wheel, the car will just go off a little bit but you can correct it. If you are going at 100 miles an hour, a slight tug can result in a very bad accident. It is the same in long jumping."As good as it gets: A four-time Olympic champion in the long jump, Carl Lewis once won 65 consecutive events in the discipline. | Photo credit: Getty ImagesAs good as it gets: A four-time Olympic champion in the long jump, Carl Lewis once won 65 consecutive events in the discipline. | Photo credit: Getty ImagesBetween the 40m runway and the jump lies the 20cm take-off board where pinpoint accuracy is non-negotiable. Jump from a few centimetres behind and you will end up losing that much distance. Leap from too close, the margin of error for a foul shrinks.Lewis' greatness lay in the fact that he had mastered this difficult balancing act. At Los Angeles in 1984, the American won the 100m, 200m, 4x100m relay races and the long jump. Four years later in Seoul, he again completed the 100m-long jump double.

Easier to medalThough he never held the long jump world record, the distances Lewis leapt were top draw — 8.54m in 1984, 8.72m in 1988 and 8.67m in 1992. In contrast, Brit Greg Rutherford took gold at London 2012 with 8.31m; American Jeff Henderson at Rio 2016 with 8.38m, and Greek Miltiadis Tentoglou at Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 with 8.41m and 8.48m respectively. And today, the number of elite athletes

competing in both sprints and long jump is near-zero.According to Powell, the long jump's stagnating distances were a sure sign that the already tough discipline was regressing. In a media interaction in Bengaluru back in May 2016, Powell had said: "In the 2012 Olympics, 8.12 was the bronze. If Jesse Owens' mark of 8.13 [world record set in 1935] can win a medal in 2012, that's unheard of. Every other event has progressed."A factor that could be responsible is the lack of rivalries. At the 1991 Worlds, when Powell set the present best mark (8.95m), Lewis had three of his career-best jumps — 8.83m, 8.84m and 8.87m — and one wind-assisted mark of 8.91m which was better than Beamon's then world record (8.90m). Lewis had in fact come into Tokyo unbeaten in 65 consecutive long jump events, "determined to break the world record that night"."I was on a mission," Powell recollected. "Carl had just broken the world record in the 100m. And the key to jumping long is running fast. I had to break the record to beat him! On top of that, I hated Carl. He was my idol at first but after I started competing, I thought I had to demonise him. He was the guy in the sport. But I looked at him like another to beat."However, if World Athletics, as announced this February, goes ahead and trials a "take-off zone" instead of a board and starts measuring distances from the point athletes become airborne, it would mean the end of the long jump as we have known it,

Big 'C' presents innovative offers on the occasion of its 22nd anniversary

Big 'C', the number one mobile retail company in South India, has announced innovative offers on the occasion of its 22nd anniversary. The details of these offers were revealed by the founder and CMD of the company, Shri M. Balu Chowdhury. He said that Big 'C' has completed 22 years since its inception, and within a short period of time, Big 'C' has risen to the number one position in every field related to mobile phones. It is the tradition of Big C to announce attractive offers on every festival and special occasion, and similarly, on the occasion of this 22nd anniversary, they are announcing innovative offers. On the purchase of a smartphone, a smartwatch worth Rs. 5,999/- or ear buds worth Rs. 1,799/- will be offered for just Rs. 22/-, he said. He explained that they are also offering up to 10% instant cashback, zero down payment and no cost EMI offers for mobile purchases. Not only this, will also provide a assured gift on every mobile purchase. Along with the above offers, they will also offer the following offers. upto 10% Instant Cashback. On VIVO, OPPO, MI, REALME, ONEPLUS mobile phones Up to Rs. 20,000/- instant cashback on the purchase of SAMSUNG mobiles. Up to Rs.

7000/- instant discount on the purchase of IPHONE mobiles. Up to 51% discount on Branded Accessories. They said that they are also providing an attractive facility to purchase mobiles, smart TVs, laptops and air conditioners without any interest and down payment on ATM cards. Big 'C' means mobile... He said that Big 'C' has developed in a way that mobile means Big 'C', and Big 'C' continues to be number one in every field related to mobile phones. He said that they have achieved this highest level and position only because of their planning and hard work, high business values, and the love and admiration of the customers.

On this occasion, he wished that all the people of the Telugu states should take advantage of these extremely attractive offers being offered by Big C and own the best mobiles. M. Balu Chowdary Founder & C.M.D

DICV Wins Gold at ICQCC 2024 Showcasing Excellence in Quality and Innovation

Director & CEO, Daimler India Commercial Vehicles, said, "I am truly impressed by the passion and commitment of our teams toward continuous improvement through the Quality Circle methodology. Winning the prestigious Gold Award at ICQCC 2024 is a proud moment for DICV and a testament to our focus on innovation, quality and operational excellence. Years ago, during a shop floor visit, I encouraged the team to prove that we are not just the best in India but among the best globally. They embraced that challenge, and this award showcases their dedication and ingenuity in setting new benchmarks for the commercial vehicle industry." DICV demonstrates its commitment to high quality standards through its 'Daimler India School of Quality', which equips the entire workforce with advanced quality skills and a growth-oriented mindset. The program is structured across three levels: the Foundation level covers 'Basic Quality Tools & Methods', the Secondary level teaches 'Advanced Quality Tools with Six Sigma Approach', and the University level focuses on postgraduate and research programs. Employees are assigned various courses at different stages of the program based on their qualifications and experience. By fostering continuous learning and upskilling, DICV ensures that every employee stays up to date with evolving technologies and industry trends.

Hyderabad :Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Daimler Truck AG, has added its first international recognition to its growing list of achievements by winning the prestigious Gold Award at the International Convention on Quality Control Circles (ICQCC) 2024 in Sri Lanka. Two teams from DICV participated in this highly competitive event alongside 1,083 teams from over 14 countries.

ICQCC, an annual convention, serves as a global platform where leading organizations showcase groundbreaking ideas and best practices in quality control. DICV's journey to the Gold Award at ICQCC reflects the dedication, passion and rigorous teamwork, invested in addressing two critical challenges in heavy-duty truck manufacturing. The team utilized a structured, data-driven approach that included in-depth analysis, cross-functional collaboration and innovative problem-solving, to identify the root causes of these issues. The solutions implemented not only enhanced customer safety and operational efficiency, but also improved product quality. Speaking on this monumental achievement, Satyakam Arya, Managing

CREDAI Hyderabad marks 25 years of transforming urban development

Hyderabad: CREDAI Hyderabad celebrated its silver jubilee, commemorating 25 years of reshaping the sector into an ethical, professional, and innovation-driven industry. Since its inception in 1997, from Builders Forum with 28 members to CREDAI Hyderabad with 330 members, it has been at the forefront of driving positive change in the city's urban development. On the occasion, founder members were honored. CREDAI Hyderabad has collaborated with the government to establish forward-thinking policies, including frameworks like GO-86 and also introduced innovative measures such as adopting advanced technologies to streamline approval processes, enhancing the ease of doing business, and ensuring transparency across the sector, a press release said. V Rajashekar Reddy, President of CREDAI, Hyderabad, said, "As we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of CREDAI Hyderabad, it is appropriate that we recognise the inspiring and steadfast contribution of our founding members and past leaders, who motivated the developers to adopt fair .

Role of Edge AI in enhancing real-time data processing

Edge Artificial Intelligence (Edge AI) has revolutionised the way data is processed in modern IoT applications, bringing real-time capabilities closer to the source of data generation—at the "edge" of networks. This shift in computing has profound implications for industries reliant on Internet of Things (IoT) devices, allowing for faster decision-making, reduced latency, and more efficient use of network resources. As we explore the role of Edge AI, it becomes clear that its ability to enhance real-time data processing is driving new possibilities for various sectors.Traditional IoT systems have depended heavily on cloud-based models, where data is collected from edge devices, transmitted to centralised cloud servers, and then processed. While effective in some scenarios, this approach comes with inherent challenges. Latency issues arise from the distance between the edge device and the cloud server, often leading to delays that are unacceptable for time-sensitive applications. Additionally, the sheer volume of data generated by IoT devices can strain network bandwidth, causing inefficiencies and higher costs.

This is where Edge AI offers a transformative solution. By moving computation closer to where the data is generated—on the edge devices themselves—it becomes possible to perform data analysis and make decisions locally, and in real-time. Instead of transmitting every piece of raw data to the cloud, edge devices can filter and process the data before sending only the most relevant information. This not only reduces network congestion but also significantly speeds up response times, which is crucial for applications like autonomous vehicles, industrial automation, and smart health care systems.One of the major breakthroughs in Edge AI involves the development of lightweight AI models. Traditional AI models, such as deep learning networks and neural networks, are often too large and computationally heavy to run on edge devices with limited resources. These models typically require powerful GPUs or cloud-based servers to operate efficiently. However, advancements in model optimisation techniques, such as quantisation and hyperparameter tuning, have enabled AI models to be compressed and optimised for edge environments. As a result, these smaller models can now run on devices with minimal processing power and memory, like microcontrollers, without compromising performance.A key advantage of Edge AI lies in its ability to provide immediate insights through local processing. For example, in industrial settings, machines equipped with Edge AI can monitor production lines and detect anomalies in real-time. By processing the data directly on-site, these systems can identify potential faults or inefficiencies without waiting for cloud-based analysis. This allows for rapid intervention, reducing downtime and improving overall operational efficiency.The health care industry is another sector benefiting from Edge AI. Medical devices, such as wearables and diagnostic tools, generate vast amounts of data. In scenarios where immediate action is critical—such as monitoring a patient's vital signs—Edge AI enables real-time analysis, allow-

ing for quicker responses to changes in a patient's condition. This capability is especially valuable in remote health care settings, where connectivity to cloud servers might be unreliable or slow.

Another significant development is the growing use of federated learning at the edge. In federated learning, multiple edge devices collaborate to train a shared AI model while keeping the data local. This decentralised approach enhances privacy and security by ensuring that sensitive data never leaves the device. Instead of sending raw data to the cloud for training, only the model updates are transmitted. This approach not only protects user privacy but also reduces the risks associated with data breaches and regulatory non-compliance.As the edge computing ecosystem continues to mature, more sophisticated tasks can be handled locally. Emerging technologies, such as neuromorphic computing, offer even more potential by mimicking the brain's neural architecture. These systems, designed for ultra-low-power environments, can process complex data streams with incredible speed and efficiency, making them ideal for applications that require real-time decision-making, such as robotics and autonomous systems.However, challenges remain in fully realising the potential of Edge AI. One of the primary hurdles is the complexity of deploying AI models on resource-constrained devices. While there have been significant advancements in reducing model size and improving efficiency, many AI models still require more memory and processing power than what edge devices can provide. Additionally, maintaining model accuracy when dealing with reduced

datasets at the edge can be difficult, especially in environments where the data is noisy or incomplete.Another challenge is the variability in hardware platforms for edge computing. The diversity of edge devices—from sensors and cameras to industrial machinery—means that AI models need to be highly adaptable to different architectures. Open-source tools like Apache TVM have made strides in addressing this issue by providing frameworks that allow models to run on a wide range of hardware. This interoperability is crucial for ensuring that AI models can be deployed across various industries without extensive customisation.Despite these challenges, the progress in Edge AI is undeniable. The ongoing evolution of processors and AI accelerators designed specifically for edge computing is making it possible to perform more

complex tasks on smaller, energy-efficient devices. As Edge AI continues to develop, it is poised to unlock new applications that were previously thought to be beyond the capabilities of IoT devices.In conclusion, the role of Edge AI in enhancing real-time data processing for modern IoT applications is pivotal. By bringing computation closer to the source of data, Edge AI reduces latency, optimises bandwidth usage, and enables faster decision-making. The convergence of AI and edge computing is driving innovation across a wide range of industries, from manufacturing and health care to agriculture and retail. While challenges remain, the advancements in lightweight AI models, federated learning, and hardware optimisation are paving the way for a future where real-time, on-device intelligence becomes the norm rather than the exception.

How air pollution affects insulin sensitivity

Air pollution is known to affect the lungs, eyes, skin, and heart. But, according to various studies, there is an association between polluted air and metabolic health, too, stressed Dr Manjusha Agarwal, senior consultant, internal medicine, Gleneagles Hospital Parel Mumbai. "Particulate matter (pm) and toxic gases are known to increase inflammation and oxidative stress, disrupting the delicate balance of the endocrine system. This is known to cause impaired insulin, leading to insulin sensitivity and abnormal blood sugar levels requiring timely attention," said Dr Agarwal.Insulin sensitivity refers to how effectively the body's cells respond to insulin, a hormone essential for regulating blood sugar levels. "Reduced insulin sensitivity, or insulin resistance, can lead to metabolic disorders like type 2 diabetes. The World Health Organization reports that over 347 million people globally are affected by diabetes, with more than 80 per cent of related deaths taking place in low and middle-income countries," said Dr Parjeet Kaur, associate director, endocrinology and diabetes, Medanta, Gurugram.

While genetic, dietary, and lifestyle factors are well-known contributors, emerging research highlights the significant role of environmental factors, particularly air pollution, in impairing insulin sensitivity, added Dr Kaur,

further mentioning that long-term exposure to air pollution is associated with the "odds of insulin resistance."While epidemiological evidence suggests that exposure to ambient air fine particulate matter (PM2.5) increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, experts contend that the mechanisms "underlying these effects of PM2.5 remain unclear as more accurate studies are required", according to Dr Manisha Mendiratta, associate director and head – pulmonology, Sarvodaya Hospital, Sector-8, Faridabad.Nevertheless, it is essential to check health parameters if you already have pre-existing conditions like pre-diabetes or diabetes, said Dr Kaur. "It is also important to understand that oxidative stress is the major contributing factor by which air pollution leads to diabetes," said Dr Agarwal.

Air pollution's impact on insulin sensitivity extends beyond inflammation to include the harmful effects of endocrine disruptors. "While avoiding exposure entirely may not be feasible, taking proactive steps to limit exposure and support metabolic health can help mitigate its effects and lower the risk of diabetes," said Dr Abhijit Bhograj, consultant, endocrinologist, diabetes and thyroid, Manipal Hospital Hebbal.According to Dr Mendiratta, long-term air pollution exposure was associated with decreased insulin sen-

sitivity among adults and youth, patients with diabetes, and individuals prone to type 2 diabetes, suggesting impaired insulin sensitivity could be an important intermediate step linking air pollution to developing type 2 diabetes.

Check blood sugar levels regularly as recommended by the doctor. "It is essential to maintain an optimum weight, eat a nutritious diet, exercise daily, and avoid junk, oily, canned, processed, and sugary foods," said Dr Agarwal.Dr Bhograj advised avoiding outdoor activities during high-pollution periods, especially in areas with heavy traffic.
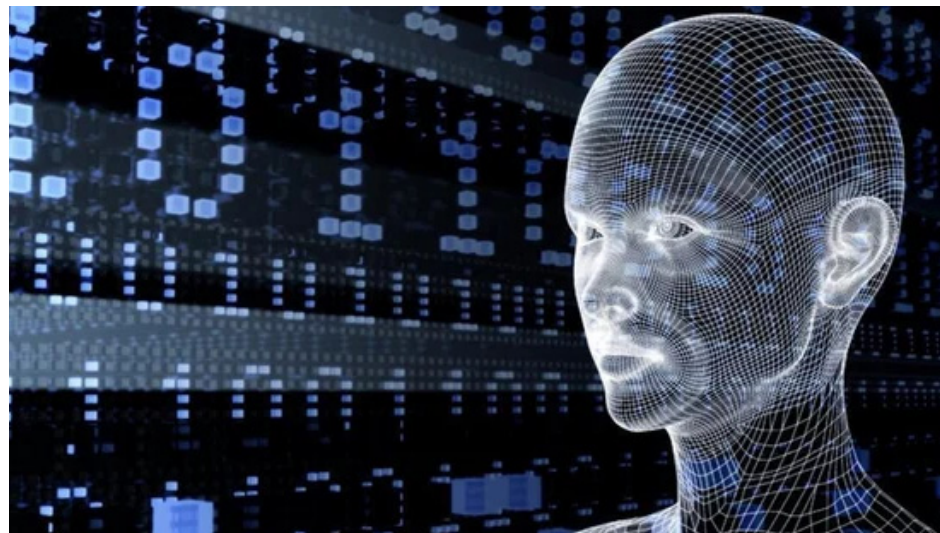
Future-proofing data strategies with GenAI

The objective of Data Strategy is to empower the business by delivering the right data at the right time to the right users for decision-making and for accelerating innovation across products and services.Defining Data Strategy involves developing a comprehensive roadmap and framework for collecting, managing, analysing, and sharing data assets across an enterprise. Since the success of ChatGPT, it has become essential for all organisations to develop a Gen Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) strategy to embed Gen AI across business activities. Establishing the right data foundation for the Gen AI applications brings in the right business specific context. Data serves as the anchor around which Gen AI applications are to be developed and implemented, hence a right data strategy is a prerequisite.Data Readiness for AI (DRAI) should be a core aspect when defining a data strategy. Three critical areas to consider in defining a future-proof robust data strategy includes:Traditional data systems are rigid and siloed, unable to scale and require higher efforts to accommodate the rapid influx of data in various forms from diverse sources. Organisations must adopt flexible data architectures that can adapt to these changes without incurring significant costs or delays.

By leveraging open-source compatible multi-cloud services, organisations can gain flexibility to customise, expand, and evolve the data ecosystems. Considerations for data formats like Delta, Iceberg and computes like Spark, Ray are some of the examples. Open-source technologies provide adaptability, while multi-cloud architectures eliminate dependence on any single cloud provider, increasing both resilience and scalability. This combination also enables seamless integration of recent technologies and tools without significant re-engineering, as both open-source and multi-cloud environments support broad interoperability and open standards.Data marketplace acts as a hub where consumers can easily discover, evaluate, and access data assets. A marketplace-driven model enables flexible consumption and fosters collaboration. Additionally, it opens avenues for data monetisation, to generate revenue by delivering high-value insights with Gen AI applicationsMaking data ready for consumption by GenAI platforms with comprehensive governance empowers users to interact with data more intuitively, regardless of their technical skill level. Gen AI can deliver personalised insights based on users' roles, preferences, and historical interactions, making analytics more relevant and impactful. By embedding Gen AI, organisations bring in a user-centric data environment where more users can leverage data without dependency on the IT team.Intelligent data wrangling uses AI to automate data preparation, significantly reducing the time and effort required to clean, transform, and structure data for analysis. By embedding AI, we can detect errors, recommend corrections, and as well perform corrections in an automated way. Intelligent data blending also facilitates combining diverse data sources with a unified view to uncover richer insights. Embedding Gen AI in the data prep process, also enables data analysts to perform their tasks much quicker and respond back to business with newer insights quicker.

As data forms and volumes continue to grow, the complexity of data management increases. Organisations face challenges in data quality, governance, and compliance. Traditional data management approaches are rule based and are unable to keep pace with the data growth, leading to delays and increased cost.DRAI, involves preparing data to meet the specific requirements of AI applications, ensuring that the data is relevant, clean, and in accessible form. Some of the DRAI metrics that help us get insights into data toxicity include measuring bias, data skewness, sample size, mislabels, image quality, and lexical diversity. By establishing DRAI metrics, organisations can systematically assess and track the preparedness of data for AI, enabling efficient and reliable AI model deployment.Gen AI enhances the data discovery and data quality management process by automatically identifying data relationships, patterns of anomalies, missing values, and inconsistencies across large datasets. It also recommends corrective actions and provides descriptive content on the data issues along with the lineage. Measuring the quality of both structured and unstructured is equally critical and it has been made possible with Gen AI. Its ability to handle diverse data types along with the insights on lineage increases user trust on the data made available to them. Implementations include AI-driven data quality platforms and tools that utilise machine learning algorithms and anomaly detection models.Organising, tagging, and making data attributes easily accessible across an organisation is essential for efficient data governance. Gen AI enhances metadata management by intelligently tagging, classifying, and adding business contextual descriptions to the data attributes. It enables semantic search using NLP, allowing users to discover data intuitively and efficiently. A well-organised data catalogue promotes data democratisation, empowering both technical and non-technical users to access data seamlesslyA data architecture that supports collaboration across different business sectors or industries enables organisations to exchange valuable data insights, leading to innovations that benefit multiple industries.

For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, a data-sharing initiative among health care and technology companies enabled the development of predictive models for outbreak tracking. Google collaborated with healthcare providers with pool of anonymised health data. This collaboration improved response times, highlighting the power of cross-industry data sharing. Organisations benefit from such collaborations by gaining access to richer datasets, faster AI model training, and broader perspectives, providing competitive advantages and enabling new business models.To achieve cross-industry collaboration, organisations need a flexible and interoperable data architecture with data governance that supports secure data exchange, data privacy compliance, and standardised data formats.Future-proof data strategies are essential for organisations seeking to thrive in an increasingly AI-driven world. To establish such a data strategy that is AI-ready, it is crucial to address two critical questions: How can we get the data ready for Gen AI? How can we leverage Gen AI to accelerate the data readiness process? The ability to adopt a flexible data architecture that supports collaboration across industries and incorporates Gen AI-driven automation in data management processes will define the future data landscape.

Here's how often you should replace your pillows

"Did you know pillows expire? If you fold them and they stay that way (without springing back), it is time to discard them," read an Instagram post by 'Extreme Satisfying Cleaning'.However, netizens were not convinced and took to the comments section, responding with, "Girl, that was a body pillow. They are going to fold like that. The other ones are just regular pillows. They don't fold unless you make them," and "This doesn't seem like a very scientific test…" One user wrote: "How to convince yourself to spend more money without seeming unreasonable".To verify the claim, we reached out to experts.

Dermatologists suggest replacing pillows every 1-2 years to maintain hygiene and skin health. Over time, pillows accumulate dust mites, dead skin cells, and oils, which can trigger allergies or skin issues, said cosmetologist Dr Karuna Malhotra, founder of Dr Karuna's Cosmetic Skin & Homeo Clinic. She reiterated that using an old pillow can contribute to acne and skin irritation due to the buildup of bacteria and debris over time.It loses support, shape, collects allergies, looks lumpy and becomes less hygienic over time. "Even the finest pillows lose charm and can wake with an ache that's an alarming call to dispose and use it for sustainable purpose," said Abhaye Gupta, CEO, Rabyana.

Dr Arvind Mehra, senior director, orthopaedic, Paras health Gurugram said, one could replace them sooner if they show signs of lumps, flattening, or discoloration. "Apart from dust, replacing pillows at the right time is crucial for maintaining spinal health and preventing orthopedic issues. Worn-out pillows that fail to provide proper neck and spine alignment can lead to chronic neck pain, headaches, and even long-term posture problems," said Dr Mehra.

Cyclone Fengal: The cyclone that battered Tamil Nadu

On the evening of December 1, 2024, a family of four and three of their neighbours huddled together under a metal roofed single-room house, in VOC Nagar, a residential area at the foot of the Arunachala hill in Tiruvannamalai district. They listened as torrential rains brought by Cyclone Fengal pounded the district in interior Tamil Nadu.S. Meenakshi, 27, who lives opposite the house, recalls the tragedy that occurred shortly after. Her sister, R. Meena, 26, and Meena's husband, N. Rajkumar, 32, both brick kiln workers, had returned home the previous evening as their workplace, located 20 kilometres from the temple town, had flooded. Meenakshi says the couple had been working in the brick kiln for a few years and had often stayed there for weeks to complete tasks before returning to VOC Nagar.That Sunday was special for Rajkumar as he had come back to his children — 9-year-old Goutham and 7-year-old Iniya — after working tirelessly for a month at the kiln, she says. Meenakshi's daughter, Ramya, 13, had also gone to Rajkumar's house along with two neighbours — Vinothini, 14, and Maha, 10."Around 4.30 p.m., we heard a deafening sound. Meena called out to me and I rushed out," says Meenakshi. "The next few moments were a blur. A heap of mud, boulders, and debris came rolling down the hill. Meena rushed inside to bring the children out but it was too late. My sister's home was buried," she says, sobbing.

All the seven occupants were instantly killed. Other houses in the neighbourhood were completely or partially destroyed. Relatives searched for loved ones in the slush amid relentless rains until a rescue team, led by Tiruvannamalai Collector D. Baskara Pandian, reached the site. They evacuated nearly 250 families from the hills, moved them to community halls in Tiruvannamalai town, and gave them food and medicines.The seven bodies were recovered after a nearly 20-hour operation by a 170-member team, including 35 personnel of the National Disaster Response Force, and a sniffer dog the next evening. "When the team retrieved two bodies from the spot, they saw that Rajkumar had been holding Iniya tightly," recalls a senior official.A trail of destruction

While heavy rainfall during the northeast monsoon is common at this time of the year in Tamil Nadu, the State and the Union Territory of Puducherry did not expect Cyclone Fengal to cause such widespread devastation when it crossed the eastern coast on the night of November 30, 2024. On December 1, 2024, unusually heavy rainfall (40 cm to 50 cm) was recorded in many places in Puducherry and the northern and northwestern parts of Tamil Nadu. Among the coastal districts, Chennai was less affected.The cyclone then slowly drifted westward, dumping rains, causing floods, submerging acres of crops, damaging civic infrastructure, and displacing thousands of people. When it later moved inland, it pummelled several districts. Mailam in Villupuram district received 51 cm of rainfall on December 1 and Uthangarai in Krishnagiri district received 50 cm on December 2. Some areas of Villupuram such as Kedar and Soorapattu received more than 33 cm of rainfall on a single day.Widespread floods hit Uthangarai, Pochampalli in Krishnagiri

D. Vasanthkumar, 51, of Muthu Nagar in Nellikuppam, Cuddalore district, spent an entire night on the stairway leading to his terrace as floodwater had entered his house. "Local officials gave us flood alerts at 8 p.m. asking us to evacuate the street. But the water level rose rapidly in the area and a few of us were stranded. It took two days for the floodwater to recede," he says. While Vasanthkumar managed to salvage important documents that were lying in his loft, he lost most of his electronic devices.In his letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi this week, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said 12 lives were lost in the cyclonic storm that had wreaked havoc in 14 districts. Villupuram, Tiruvannamalai, and Kallakurichi received more than 50 cm of rainfall in a single day, which was equal to an entire season's share. He noted that more than 2.11 lakh hectares of agricultural and horticultural land had been inundated and nearly 963 cattle had died. About 9,500 km of roads, 1,847 culverts, and 417 tanks had been damaged. Stalin said that the cyclone had overwhelmed the State's resources and requested the Centre to release ?2,000 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund to assist rehabilitation efforts.Besides compensation for damaged crops, the Tamil Nadu government announced relief of ?2,000 per family in the districts of Villupuram, Cuddalore, and Kallakurichi on December 3. Stalin also donated one month's salary towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to execute relief measures in the six worst-affected districts. On December 6, the Union Home Ministry approved the release of ?944.80 crore to the Tamil Nadu government as the Central share from the State Disaster Response Fund to help the people affected by the cyclone.Puducherry Chief Minister N. Rangaswamy announced relief assistance of ?5,000 to all ration cardholders affected by the cyclone in the UT and ?30,000 per hectare to affected farmers.Vehicles in the Uthangarai area of Krishnagiri following heavy rainfall on December 2, 2024.

Four days after the rains subsided, Villupuram, a predominant agricultural district, is struggling to return to regular life. Nearly 80,520 hectares of crops are damaged, many lakes have breached their banks, and the Malattaru and Then Pennai rivers are brimming with floodwater.V. Tamilarasi, 64, of Pillur village in Villupuram taluk, is searching for someone to help her clear the deposits of sludge that cover her agricultural land. Flash floods in the Then Pennai river submerged crops. She has also lost two goats."I cultivated black gram and casuarina plantations in three acres. The crop is submerged under six feet of water. I spent ?2 lakh for cultivation. I don't know how I am going to manage the loss," she worries.Villages such as Pillaiyarkuppam and Arasamangalam have become small islands. They did not have power and communication networks for three days, which left many stranded or confined to their houses without water or food."The district previously experienced such large-scale floods in 1972. This time, I was caught un-

awares. While village administrative officers helped us, officials and elected representatives came much later," Tamilarasi says.The situation was no different in the urban stretches of Villupuram. S. Neela, 55, of Ashakulam, spent nearly a day cleaning the muck and waste that floodwater had brought into her house on December 1.

"Our street had waist-deep water. My family of four managed with 20 litres of packaged water for three days. We had to put up with the sewage that had mixed with the stagnant water for three days. We all worked together to drain the water as we didn't get immediate help," she says.R.T. Murugan, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam (All India Kisan Sabha), says, "Crops in various parts were on the verge of drying for want of water until the downpour. We have not seen such water flow in the Malattaru and Then Pennai rivers in December. I was preparing for paddy harvest for Pongal and recently sowed black gram in an acre. I face a loss of ?50,000 as floodwater marooned my land. Poorly maintained water bodies in villages too led to quick damage."Puducherry heaved a sigh of relief after the storm passed through the region on December 1, but was hit by another disaster when water was discharged from the brimming dams of Tamil Nadu, particularly the Sathanur dam in Tiruvannamalai on December 2.The discharge of 1.68 lakh cubic feet per second (cusecs) of floodwater from the Sathanur dam sparked a political debate. The Opposition parties blamed the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government for the deluge in the northern districts without prior notice. Refuting the claims of a self-created disaster, Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan noted that sufficient flood warnings had been given and flood discharge was planned considering the safety of the dam and the lives of the people.

The Water Resources Department noted that uncontrolled Thenpennai river catchment worsened the flood situation. Record-breaking rainfall in Krishnagiri and flash flood in tributaries such as Koraiyar and Kallar accelerated flow in the river that was already in spate. There is no mechanism to gauge rainfall or the floodwater generated in the Then Pennai's tributaries.A senior Water Resources Department official says Sathanur reservoir received an inflow of 40,000 cusecs within four hours from December 1 night. The reservoir did not have sufficient storage capacity to store the entire inflow, he adds. "We adhered to the rules and there was no lag in flood warning. After 1972, when the dam discharged nearly 2.57 lakh cusecs, this is the second time that such a high quantum of surplus water was released," the official says.However, G. Jayakumar of Pananhuppam, Villupuram district, who helped people reach relief camps, says, "Flood warnings did not reach the villages (A.K. Kuchipalayam and Kallipattu) close to the riverbanks. Residents assumed it would be another normal rain spell. Many left behind their belongings and cattle to save their lives."When the Water Resources Department team visited Villupuram, they were aghast at the damage. "We could not identify boundaries of water bodies and roads. The district is generally mostly dry in December. The teams are now assessing the damage," the official says.In Sathanur village, S. Arul, president of the village panchayat, rescued several elderly residents from huts that were submerged in floodwater and shifted them to a school. "They also lost important documents in the floods," he says.

Predicting the path of a cycloneMany officials say it is difficult to be fully prepared for a cyclone that causes such extensive damage. This is especially because it is difficult for weather models to pick up extreme weather events at a particular place, according to meteorologists.Cyclone Fengal remained a low-pressure system after forming in the far eastern Indian Ocean on November 14 and became a depression in the Bay of Bengal only after 10 days. It moved relatively slowly for another week before the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said it had become a cyclone. On November 28, the IMD announced that Cyclone Fengal would cross the north Tamil Nadu-Puducherry coasts on the morning of November 30. The cyclone moved at a leisurely pace. While fast-moving cyclones tend to retreat quickly, slow-moving ones weaken into a deep depression, dumping unprecedented amounts of rainfall.S. Balachandran, Additional Director General of Meteorology, Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, says the cyclone had undergone changes in its intensity over the ocean due to multiple factors. "

What the collapse of France's govt means, what happens now

President Emmanuel Macron has vowed to stay in office until the end of his term in 2027, defying calls for his resignation after the minority government of Prime Minister Michel Barnier collapsed in dramatic fashion in a historic vote in France's National Assembly Barnier, a veteran conservative who was appointed to the post by Macron only in September, has become the shortest-serving prime minister of the French Fifth Republic that began in 1958.The vote of no-confidence came amid disagreements among parties about government spending, but is linked to deeper issues in French politics that became evident following the snap election that Macron called in June.Here is what to know about the political crisis in the world's seventh-largest economy, and what happens next.Vote of no-confidenceThe no-confidence vote was meant to convey parliament's rejection of the government's budget proposals. The draft aimed to cut government spending by measures including reining in pensions, and save around •60 billion through austerity measures.However, it was unpopular among parties on both the left and the right. Support from either of these two parliamentary groups was essential for the government to survive, since none of the three major political blocs — the left-wing, the right-wing, and Barnier's centre-right — have a majority.Anticipating a crisis, Barnier invoked Article 49.3 of the French Constitution, which allows the prime minister, after deliberation by the council of ministers, to force a Bill through the National Assembly without a vote, according to a report in Le Monde.This meant the only way to prevent the Bill from passing was for the opposition parties to initiate a motion of no-confidence against the government. This is what they did, and succeeded.Problem of cohabitationMuch of the current instability stems from Macron's decision to dissolve the National Assembly and call snap polls in June after right-wing parties won a significant number of votes in the EU Parliament elections that month.

The President took a political gamble, believing that voters would be less inclined to support those parties in national polls. At that time, Macron's centre-right Ensemble coalition was the largest alliance in parliament, but no group held a majority.But instead of galvanising in favour of Ensemble, voters favoured left-wing parties, which won the largest number of seats. Far-right parties, including Marine Le Pen's National Rally, made gains at the cost of Macron's coalition.In France's semi-presidential, representative parliamentary democracy, the president is empowered to appoint the prime minister. After some delay, Macron cobbled together a coalition with Barnier's conservative The Republicans party.This enraged the parties on the left, who believed they had the people's mandate as the largest bloc. While there is no legal obligation on the president to appoint the leader of the largest party in parliament, leaders of parties with popular support are generally appointed to avoid public backlash.Barnier's appointment led to a situation known as "cohabitation" in France — one in which the prime minister and the president belong to different parties. Periods of cohabitation are unusual, but not unheard of in France — and because the two leaders represent different political agendas and

views, such periods have typically witnessed a tussle between parliament and the president in the passage of legislation.

What comes next?Macron has said a new prime minister will be named in the coming days. A few names, mostly of centrist and centre-right leaders such as Sébastien Lecornu, François Bayrou, and Xavier Bertrand have been floated in the French media as possible candidates for the post.Until then, Barnier will head a caretaker government. A special law will be presented by mid-December to enable the state to levy taxes from next year, based on existing rules, and avoid a government shutdown. The new government will then prepare a budget law for 2025.Given the deep divisions in parliament, there is no guarantee the new PM will not face similar challenges. However, according to rules under the French Constitution, the next parliamentary elections cannot be held until July 2025.Marta Lorimer, a lecturer in politics at the UK's Cardiff University, told France 24, "What is at stake is France's financial stability… France is effectively going into the new year without a bud-

get and no clear majority to pass one. Although it will be possible to extend the 2024 budget to avoid a government shutdown, this does mean that no new measures can be introduced, be it cuts or expenditures, and it is unclear how — or when — a new budget

could be passed."Concerns have been raised for France's economy and high debt as well. Rating agency Moody's said the government's fall on Wednesday "reduces the likelihood of consolidating public finances".

India's digital PRAGATI

As nations grapple with how to implement ambitious infrastructure agendas amid rising costs and complex regulatory environments, India has quietly pioneered an innovative solution. While much recent attention has focused on the country's technological advances in digital payments and identity systems, another digital transformation has been revolutionising how India manages its massive infrastructure projects.

This week, Oxford University's Saïd Business School, in collaboration with the Gates Foundation, launched a case study examining India's PRAGATI platform — a digital initiative that has helped accelerate more than 340 major infrastructure projects worth some $205 billion. The study, released at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore earlier this week, reveals how digital governance under the highest level of political leadership can help nations overcome traditional bottlenecks in infrastructure development.PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) was launched in 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and combines leadership with video conferencing, drone feeds, and data management to enable oversight of critical infrastructure. The platform's impact has helped complete long-delayed projects like segments of National Highway 8 in Maharashtra, the Chenab Bridge in Jammu and Kashmir, which is now the world's highest rail bridge, and the Bogibeel Bridge in Assam, which had languished for more than a decade before being completed within three years of coming under review in PRAGATI.

What makes PRAGATI noteworthy is the way it leverages the impact of active leadership from the top. Based on SWAGAT, a digital platform started by then Chief Minister Modi in Gujarat to address people's grievances, PRAGATI has enabled the prime minister to take a consistent, direct role in overseeing complex infrastructure projects.

In PRAGATI meetings, he is joined by senior aides, the cabinet secretary, all chief secretaries of states, and secretaries of the central ministries in dedicated video conference links. At these gatherings, the prime minister asks detailed questions about problems and delays, sets specific deadlines, and proposes solutions.

The value of this high-level involvement can't be overstated. In a large country with a complex federal structure, it communicates the importance of infrastructure development as a top national priority and injects a sense of urgency and accountability into the bureaucratic process. When officials know their decisions are trackable, they are much more motivated to move quickly to resolve bottlenecks. Top-level leadership also inspires new enthusiasm for collaboration among stakeholders. Bridging the political divide, PRAGATI has proven equally valuable in accelerating complex infrastructure projects in all states, whether governed by the same political party in charge at the national level or by another political party in a particular state.Consider the construction of the Bogibeel Bridge that runs across the wide Brahmaputra River, once viewed as "unbridgeable". When the project entered the PRAGATI system in 2015, a decade had passed with minimal construction. Weather challenges, worker attrition, and land procurement issues had all stymied progress. The platform's intervention prompted regular site visits by both state and central ministry officials and catalysed unprecedented cooperation between central and state agencies, leading to acceleration of work on what is now a lifeline for the remote region of Dhemaji.PRAGATI's success has inspired the creation of complementary digital platforms. PM Gati Shakti, launched in 2021, provides sophisticated geospatial planning tools that help optimise infrastructure design and reduce adverse environmental impact.

PARIVESH has streamlined environmental clearances, leading to greater transparency and also reducing approval times, at times from 600 days earlier to just 70-75 days now. Together, these platforms form a digital ecosystem that is transforming how India approaches infrastructure development.The impact extends beyond physical infrastructure. PRAGATI has also accelerated social development programmes, from rural electrification to providing tap water connections to millions of households.This digital transformation in infrastructure governance offers valuable lessons for other nations seeking to build sustainable infrastructure for the future, particularly in the developing world. First, technology alone isn't enough — success requires sustained leadership from the top to drive implementation. Second, digital platforms must be designed to facilitate collaboration across different levels of government while respecting local autonomy. Third, combining various technological tools — from video conferencing to drone monitoring — creates powerful synergies for project oversight.The results speak for themselves. Studies by the Reserve Bank of India estimate that for every rupee spent on infrastructure, the country sees a 2.5 to 3.5-rupee gain in GDP. With JP Morgan predicting India will become the world's third-largest economy by 2027, the country's digital approach to infrastructure governance could serve as a model for other emerging economies.

The challenge now is to build on this foundation. As India works toward its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047, platforms like PRAGATI will need to evolve to handle increasingly complex projects. But the core principle — using the right combination of technology and leadership to dramatically accelerate infrastructure development by driving collaboration, accountability, and transparency — offers a powerful template for nations seeking to transform their approach to infrastructure development.

The nine lives of Biren Singh: Footballer, journalist and embattled CM of Manipur

On June 30, 2023, N Biren Singh and a group of MLAs headed towards the Manipur Raj Bhawan, armed with a letter of resignation. The conflict in Manipur had been raging for 59 days then and the previous night, hundreds of people had gathered at Imphal's iconic Khwairamband women's market after two Meitei men had been killed in firing. They had raised slogans against the state government for failing to stop the violence and clashed with security forces. People close to Singh said he felt he had "lost the trust of the people".However, Singh never reached the Raj Bhawan that day. With his delegation being met by crowds of supporters, Singh's trusted minister, L Susindro Meitei, handed the letter to some of the women in the crowd who proceeded to tear it for the cameras. Singh announced that he would not resign.Seventeen months since that episode and countless violent conflagrations later, 63-year-old N Biren Singh continues as the embattled Chief Minister of Manipur — battling crises of confidence from the Kuki-Zomi community, from allied parties, from a section of his own party and his ministers, and even from among the electorate, which elected Congress representatives for both of Manipur's parliamentary seats earlier this year.

But why, despite calls for a change in leadership from different quarters, the Union government and the BJP central leadership has stuck by Singh is what many in Manipur agree is "the million-dollar question."Despite multiple attempts by The Indian Express, the Chief Minister or his office did not respond to messages.

Footballer, journalist, politicianIn the 1980s, Singh tackled a vastly different field. A footballer, he was a wingback in the BSF team that defeated JCT to lift the Durrand Cup in December 1981. He has also represented Manipur in the Santosh Trophy. He took a sharply different turn in 1991 when he started a vernacular daily called Naharolgi Thoudang and worked as its editor. A former colleague of Singh's said that in the 1990s, Thoudang was the third most circulated vernacular newspaper in the state."It was quite a popular newspaper and from what I recall, he was very steadfast on the issue of the territorial integrity of Manipur. Reading the editorials of that time, you could surmise that he was a strong nationalist standing for the state's territorial integrity," said the former colleague.It was in April 2000 that he shot into public attention when he was arrested for sedition along with Thounaojam Iboyaima, a revered figure in Manipuri society who was popularly known as 'Pabung' or father. Singh had been charged because the newspaper had reported a speech delivered by Thounaojam at an event which, reports of that time say, had cited a United Nations declaration that "armed rebellion may be a last resort against colonial oppression"."It was a hollow case which was soon dropped and they were released in a couple of weeks. But that was a watershed moment for Biren — we can say that his political journey began then," said his former colleague.footballer biren singh Biren Singh being introduced to President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy in December 1981, before the finals of the Durrand Cup in which Singh's BSF team defeated JCT. (Source: Kiren Rijiju's X handle)"With that

case, he became recognised as a fearless journalist who could stand up to a repressive government," said a journalist based in Imphal.Starkly, after Singh became Chief Minister, several journalists, researchers and activists have been booked in sedition cases for different reasons, including social media posts critical of Singh, the state government and the BJP.The next year, in 2001, with the state then under President's Rule, Manipur's Meitei-majority Valley erupted over the Government of India's extension of its 1997 ceasefire with the Naga insurgent group NSCN(IM) which had included a new clause: that this ceasefire would be "without any territorial limits."

The massive protests by Meitei groups – who saw this as legitimising the demand for the integration of Naga areas, and therefore, a threat to the 'territorial integrity' of Manipur – saw the state legislative Assembly being set ablaze and many protestors being killed in firing by security forces."The situation gave rise to a lot of nationalistic feelings and it was in the midst of all this that he formally entered politics with a new party called the Democratic Revolutionary People's Party, which was started by people who were actively involved in the agitation. When state legislative elections were held in 2002, after more than 200 days of President's Rule, he contested from Heingang constituency and won," said a former top administrator in the state.The DRPP supported the new government formed with the Congress's Okram Ibobi Singh as chief minister and in 2003, its two MLAs 'merged' with the Congress. Singh was now in the Congress, a party he would be with for the next 13 years. He rose rapidly in the party.Soon after joining the Congress, he was made Minister of State and went on to be Chairman of the Manipur Pollution Control Board. When he won again from Heingang, this time on a Congress ticket, he became part of the Cabinet. His proximity to Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh was well-known and several commentators remarked that the government was then called "IRB government", a reference to the initials of (Okram) Ibobi Singh and his two closest aides and troubleshooters, Kangujam Ranjit Singh and Biren Singh. However, the relationship with Ibobi began souring in his third term and Singh was dropped from the Cabinet despite being re-elected in 2017.A disgruntled Singh exited the Congress in 2016 and joined the BJP, ahead of the 2017 Manipur Assembly elections.Cong to BJP, and an elevation

In 2017, he won on a BJP ticket. It was a period, a senior Imphal-based journalist said, when Singh was "riding a huge wave of goodwill" and became the first BJP Chief Minister of the state.The journalist recalled that he was part of a delegation of journalists who paid Singh a visit after he became CM. "He told us that he prayed and met with a 'divine mother' who told him that he would 'become king' if he switched sides. He said he decided to follow her advice after consulting his supporters."However, Singh was not the obvious choice for the Chief Minister's position. The Congress was still the single largest party in the Assembly with 28 seats but the BJP, with 21 seats, ended up forming the government with the support of the National People's Party and the Naga People's Front."Except for [Thongam]

Bishwajit, all the others who had been elected on BJP tickets were newbies to the party, all 'borrowed' candidates," said a BJP MLA, who was among those elected in 2017.biren singh congress Biren Singh with Congress leader Ibobi Singh in 2017, when the former took over as Chief Minister. (File image)"Technically, Bishwajit was the rightful claimant because he was the only 'BJP person' at that time. But even he was seen as lacking the experience that Singh had… Singh had 15 years of experience working in government; nobody else had more than two years in politics," said the BJP leader."Everything had fallen in place (for Singh) then," said a political observer. "There were many more senior and experienced leaders than him who had contested on BJP tickets in 2017 — like Thounaojam Chaoba and Yumkham Erabot — but they lost. Had they won, he would have been a much tougher pick. But as it was, he was the only new BJP MLA who knew the Congress inside out and how its government had functioned for 15 years."And that was what he used to his advantage through his campaign and after he took charge of the new government: that he would "right the wrongs" under the Ibobi regime, from the shadow of 'encounter killings' to frequent bandhs and blockades, and frayed ties between Meiteis and the hill tribes. Though now a polarising figure, Singh was then seen as a friendly leader by both the Nagas and the Kuki-Zomis. His flagship outreach programme, 'Go To Hills', focused on development and welfare projects in the hill districts."Everything he was saying and doing was what the Ibobi government didn't. He was portrayed as a 'People's Chief Minister.' He was holding Cabinet meetings in hill districts to demonstrate his will to build bridges. And there was a perceptible difference, mostly because in this period, there were fewer insurgent activities. Bandhs and blockades had reduced. Ordinary people could venture out after 7 pm," said an Imphal-based journalist.However, people who have worked with him say the tensions and discord that have bubbled over in the last one-and-a-half years were brewing in his first term too."The government (in 2017) was a coalition one and he was surrounded by political greenhorns, so there were checks and balances. But he didn't treat his council of

ministers as equals, was autocratic and ran the government like a family business. His son-in-law R K Imo was still a Congress MLA then but was more powerful than the ministers. There were a lot of concerns but I think things did not implode because of the COVID pandemic," said an MLA who was a minister in the first term.Another blow to his image were accusations in 2020 by then Assistant Superintendent of Police (Narcotics and Affairs of Border Bureau) Brinda Thounaojam of him putting pressuring on the department to drop a case against a Kuki-Zomi BJP leader from Chandel district,Lhukhosei Zou, who was accused in a 2018 drug seizure case.

When the BJP came back to power with an absolute majority in 2022, it led a more aggressive government: from crackdowns on poppy plantations in the Kuki-Zomi hills allegedly run by "drug lords" to a hardened stance against the alleged influx of Chin people from Myanmar (who share ethnic ties with Manipur's Kuki-Zomis).The government also conducted land surveys and eviction drives in areas where Kukis had settled. Then, in March last year, weeks before the ongoing conflict that started in May 2023, the government pulled out of the Suspension of Operations agreement with Kuki armed umbrella outfits — all of these decisions that had support from large sections of Meitei society.A former bureaucrat calls these decisions and his actions afterwards as "hasty". "He does not have a very democratic style of functioning and at that time, all the 10 Kuki-Zomi MLAs were supporting the government. When there were actions and decisions taken about Kuki groups and villages, especially on matters such as evictions, the MLAs from the community should have been taken into confidence but instead these appeared as personal decisions."Kuki-Zomi groups and the MLAs from the community — including seven BJP MLAs, two of them ministers — have held Singh responsible for the conflict since its beginning. But now, the rumblings within his own ranks are louder than ever, with one minister, BJP MLA Yumnam Khemchand, saying that he had asked the Chief Minister to step down twice. Many more of his MLAs from the Valley have queued up before the top central BJP leadership asking for the Chief Minister to be changed.