

## AIG Hospitals to revolutionise cancer treatment with advanced proton beam therapy

Hyderabad: AIG Hospitals has entered into an agreement to acquire state-of-the-art ProteusONE proton therapy system, including DynamicARC from IBA, a Belgium-based supplier of equipment and services in the field of proton therapy, considered to be the most advanced form of radiation therapy available today. With this new delivery technique called DynamicARC proton therapy, the system will be the first-of-its-kind installation in South-East Asia. This strategic acquisition marks a significant milestone in AIG Hospitals' commitment to delivering the most advanced, effective, and accessible cancer care to patients in India, a press release said.

Proton beam therapy is a highly precise form of radiation therapy that targets

tumours with exceptional accuracy, substantially minimising damage to surrounding healthy tissues. This technology is a game changer in treating complex cancers, particularly in children and adults with tumours located near critical organs. "The acquisition of the proton beam therapy system and the strategic partnership with IBA represent a transformative step forward in our mission to provide cutting-edge, compassionate care," Dr. D Nageshwar Reddy, chairman of AIG Hospitals, said. AIG Hospitals will invest Rs 800 crore in this new oncology centre, making it only the third proton therapy centre in the country and the first one in twin Telugu States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.



## Hook, tempt, dupe — Investment fraud on the rise in Telangana as cybercrooks feed off your psyche



Hyderabad: The lure is simple — real big returns on investment. This happens to be the preferred bait used by the cyber

fraudsters to hook and reel in gullible victims. Crime data for 2024 shows that investment fraud has emerged as one of the

top five modus operandi adopted by cyber fraudsters. The victims, tempted by glib talk of the fraudsters and the promises of huge returns, end up transferring hard-earned money. Realisation of having been duped comes soon and then repentance is what they are left with in several cases.

While investment fraud has made its way into the top five MOs of last year, the other four were trading fraud, OTP fraud, digital arrest and debit/credit card frauds. In Hyderabad city alone, 926 cases of investment fraud were registered last year, of which 563 pertained to trading fraud loss. Shikha Goel, Director of the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB), said cyber fraudsters spend time understanding the psychological vulnerabilities of their targets, such as fear, greed or curiosity. "Depending on their understanding, they exploit these vulnerabilities to elicit specific responses or actions from their victims," she said. The vic-

tims in the State suffered losses amounting to Rs 1,866 crore due to cyber fraud in 2024. This translates to an average daily loss of nearly Rs 5 crore. A huge amount was lost by the victims in investment and trading fraud, which account for 10 per cent of the total cases. Goel said cybercrime is up by 18 per cent compared to last year. It is because of the adept usage of internet by people and new modus operandi adopted by fraudsters to cheat them.

"There are over 150 modus operandi currently adopted by cyber fraudsters across the globe," she said. During the year, across the State, 24,643 cases pertaining to different cybercrimes were registered and investigation followed up. Goel said the TGCSB is maintaining zero tolerance against cyber criminals. A total of 1,057 cyber criminals involved in 19,653 cases in Telangana and altogether 1,16,421 cases in the country were arrested.

## Forest Department wants Telangana temples to adopt elephants, to approach State government

Hyderabad: Considering the demand from different temple committees and other organisations for services of an elephant for religious processions, the Forest Department is planning to approach the State government to direct popular temples here to adopt a couple of elephants.

Every year, during Bonalu festivities, Muharram and other occasions, appeals are made by several temples to the Forest Department to arrange for an elephant for conducting processions. Accordingly, elephants are arranged from different States, mostly Karnataka. The temple committees have to

file applications to get the elephant's services and get sanction from different temple committees in Karnataka. Based on their sanction, a formal application is filed with the Forest Department in Karnataka for final approval.

In the entire exercise, the State Forest Department serves as a communication channel between the temple committees and Forest officials in Karnataka. However, the entire exercise is cumbersome for the temple committees. This apart, safe transportation of the elephant all the way from Karnataka and ensuring its well-being, arranging veteri-

narians and other logistics result in high expenditure as well. Considering all these factors, the State Forest Department is now planning to approach the State government with an appeal to direct popular temples here to adopt and raise a couple of elephants. This would serve multiple benefits.

"Temple committees and other organisations seeking to utilise the services of elephants have to undergo a cumbersome process of identifying experienced elephants and get approvals from Forest departments. Further, safe transportation covering long distances and arranging veterinarians is an-

other challenge," a senior Forest official said.

"We are planning to approach the State government to direct popular temples like Yadadri or Vemulawada to adopt a couple of elephants," the official added.

If any temple adopts an elephant and ensures its well-being, its services can be utilised during different processions by other temples as well. Temple committees also would not have to go through the cumbersome process to get mandatory permissions and the expenditure incurred in arranging the elephants could also be cut down considerably, the official added.



# These perfumeries are bottling the fragrance of your favourite memories

When Abhishek Sengupta returned to Kolkata in November last year after realising that he could not afford the exorbitant rent for his apartment in Mumbai's upscale neighbourhood Khar on a consultant's salary, he was despondent. He wanted to take along something that captured the essence of the city. "It's strange," he says, "I've always known Kolkata to be home. But now Mumbai has an equal place in my heart." While many people choose to bring back souvenirs or items they have bought, Abhishek decided to invest in a perfume that smells like Maximum City. "Mumbai has a particular smell that's hard to replicate. I'm not talking about the sometimes-saline smell, but the city's energetic, almost frenetic aroma," he explains. A colleague recommended Byredo's perfume Mumbai Noise — a scent crowded with contrasts: rich, warm woody and amber, blended with plummy Davana (*Artemisia pallens*) positioned alongside leather, bitter coffee stirred with sweet tonka beans. The scent captures the smoky haze of incense interspersed with street side coffee carts and dissonant soundscapes. "I rarely spritz on the scent; I just keep it to give it a whiff now and again," says Abhishek. Byredo, the European luxury brand founded in Stockholm in 2006 by Ben Gorham, has gained a cult following for its scents, which celebrate the nostalgia of "coming home" — a feeling of emotions and memories awakened. In fact, many of our purchases today are driven by nostalgia. Fragrance brands, too, are tapping into this emotion effectively, as scientific details about formulations are too complex for marketing. Instead, storytelling offers customers something to believe in, making the experience feel natural rather than forced. Booming industry Statista, a German online platform that specialises in data gathering and visualisation, projects that India's fragrance market will have an annual growth rate of 1.56% from 2024 to 2028. Non-luxury fragrances are expected to account for 57% of total sales.

There is also a growing demand for traditional and natural scents, reflecting a preference for local and eco-friendly products. For instance, Bombay Perfumery's Chai Musk, a unisex fragrance, also celebrates the vibrancy of Mumbai, capturing its hustle, shared stories, and the ever-present chai culture. Then there is Forest Essentials' Nargis, one of their best-selling fragrances, which is sourced from the snow-clad valleys of Kashmir for their sweet essential oil. Receptivity for natural perfumes is part of the broader affinity and movement towards natural, organic beauty. Additionally, synthetic alternatives can never completely replicate the scent of the original, natural flower or ingredient. "At Forest Essentials, we wanted to create an exceptional range of natural perfumes as per the tenets of the ancient science of Ayurveda, keeping the legacy of traditional Indian perfumery alive. Our perfumes use the traditional process of Sandhan Kalpana and contain pure grain alcohol, as mentioned in ancient texts," says Sanya Dawar, marketing and brand communications lead at Forest Essentials. Emotional connection Manan Gandhi, founder of Bombay Perfumery, believes nostalgia varies for each person and is influenced by di-

verse cultural scents. "It's challenging to pinpoint specific nostalgic notes, but generally, Indians have a strong nostalgic connection to floral scents, which are tied to festivals, weddings, temples, and other cultural events. Many consumers are drawn to Bombay Perfumery's floral scents like Madurai Talkies and Moire, which feature popular Indian flowers such as jasmine, rose, and rajnigandha (tuberose)." Varisha P, a marketing consultant from Bengaluru, recently bought perfume oil from Call of the Valley, a Mumbai-based beauty brand founded in 2019 by Jean-Christophe Bonnafous. Bonnafous, who splits his time between Puducherry and Mumbai, created the brand to reconnect city dwellers with nature through the sensory experience of wearing precious oils and fragrances. Varisha says she had never tried this type of fragrance before, which is applied directly to the skin with a roll-on appli-

cator, but was pleasantly surprised by its mild scent, as she prefers fragrances that are not overwhelming. "I purchased the Vetiver roll-on because it reminded me of a fragrance my mother, who passed away in 2018, would wear. The notes of the perfume sort of reflect my mother's personality, which was a beautiful contrast of being cool and warm," says Varisha. Manan believes that since nostalgia is heavily linked to emotions and personal memories, brands should be mindful not to use it as a marketing tool purely to convert new consumers. The fragrance industry in India is evolving, emphasising collaboration, emotional connections with consumers, and a deep understanding of fragrance context and purpose. Beyond just preserving memories, fragrance brands now serve as developers who mediate between clients and perfumers. Storytelling and forging emotional bonds are pivotal. It is crucial



to identify the emotional associations consumers have with fragrances, as reactions to perfumes can often reflect deeper personal sentiments.

## Airline pilots' body calls attention to lithium battery fire risk | Explained

The story so far: On January 2, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) issued three position papers on the fire risk due to the use of lithium-ion batteries in airport and aircraft settings. The papers are motivated by air operators' increasing use of electric vehicles (EVs) and lithium-ion batteries as they work towards their carbon neutrality commitments as well as the batteries becoming more energy-dense.

What is IFALPA? IFALPA is a global non-profit representing the international community of professional pilots. After World War II, the United Nations established the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in 1947 to coordinate air transport and its principles worldwide. A year later, ICAO organised a conference in London where pilots could interact with its leaders. IFALPA was born at this event with 13 pilots' associations. According to a source on the ICAO website, IFALPA encompassed 104 member associations representing one lakh professional pilots worldwide around 2013. Per the same source, "The belief [is] that the unique perspective of pilots operating in scheduled flying would be of significant benefit to the creation and adaptation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) through which ICAO regulates international civil aviation." IFALPA also provides inputs to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Airports Council International, and the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Association.

Why the concerns about lithium batteries?

Almost every major industry in the world is mechanised to a significant degree, and the energy for these machines has traditionally been produced by burning fossil fuels. As climate mitigation has become more pressing, industries are under pressure to replace this thermal energy — the principal cause of global warming — with electric energy. For example, EVs draw electric en-



ergy from a battery to drive an electric motor and supply kinetic energy to the wheels. In an internal combustion engine, heat energy released by burning fossil fuels moves pistons, whose motion is converted to rotary motion of the wheels. Lithium-ion batteries have emerged as a popular solution to storing electric energy because they are energy-dense, rechargeable, and can be made in almost any shape, which is useful when there are space constraints as onboard an aircraft. But lithium-ion batteries have been known to catch fire when they are subjected to certain physical stresses. The fire is the result of the stress creating a short-circuit inside the battery, leaving it to keep producing electric current, heat, and oxygen — an event called thermal runaway. The battery's internal components can become corroded while the risk of catching fire increases. The short circuit can be the result of mechanical, electric, and/or thermal abuse, which respectively deform the internal structure, degrade its electric performance, and cause heat to accumulate. A January 2024 IFALPA position paper said "cooling a reacting personal electronic device with large amounts of non-

alcoholic liquid has been demonstrated to be very effective in controlling the propagation of the thermal runaway." More recently, after Hurricane Helene struck the US in November 2024, 48 lithium-ion batteries reportedly caught fire. University of South Carolina mechanical engineer Xinyu Huang said they may have been the result of EV batteries rarely being rated to be waterproof when they're sitting in salt water for more than 30 minutes. Such situations are more likely to occur during flooding, which is becoming more common due to climate change and poor urban planning.

What do the IFALPA papers say?

The three position papers are numbered POS01, POS02, and POS03. POS02 and POS03 are more general whereas POS01 is more specific. POS02 is motivated by the different kind of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries (compared to internal combustion engines). As Mr. Huang wrote, "When a lithium-ion battery pack bursts into flames, it releases toxic fumes, burns violently and is extremely hard to put out. Frequently, firefighters' only option is to let it burn out by itself."



# OPPO India celebrates the magic of 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara' with Reno13 Series



Hyderabad :Building on the popularity of the Reno13 Series' brand campaign #LiveInTheMoment, OPPO India has launched a series of short films with Siddhant Chaturvedi, Ishaan Khatter and Vedang Raina. Celebrating the classic, 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara', the trio relives the iconic moments from the movie and creates lasting memories with their OPPO Reno13 Series. The exciting series of four short films captures the vibrant spirit of today's youth who embrace life with spontaneity, courage, and adventure. Inspired by the popular scenes of the original movie, the short films position the smartphone as an integral AI companion as they recreate the adventures.

Their journey is captured through the lens of the OPPO Reno13 Series and show-

cases the advanced AI-powered camera capabilities through AI Live Photo, AI Unblur, AI Reflection Remover and underwater photography mode. The short films are being rolled-out on the social media platforms of OPPO India and other OTT platforms in a phased manner.

Commenting on the campaign, Sushant Vasishta, Head of Product and Digital Marketing, OPPO India, said, "At OPPO India, customers are central to all our efforts, and we strive to blend technology with creative storytelling to deepen our connection with our audience. Just as the film inspired an entire generation to embrace life's adventures, the Reno13 Series empowers today's youth to capture those timeless experiences with unmatched clarity and creativity." In the first film, the trio is seen at a beachside bar,

plotting to prank a middle-aged man enjoying his drink. Siddhant takes charge, only to be betrayed by his friends, and left alone to face the consequences. Siddhant's priceless reactions are captured through Reno13's AI Live Photo in 2K-level clarity by Ishaan.

The second film opens with Ishaan in the pool, encouraging a hesitant Vedang to take the plunge. Siddhant joins in, pulling Vedang into the water. The trio captures crystal-clear shots using Reno13's underwater photography mode. With IP66, IP68, and IP69 certifications for splash, dust, and freshwater resistance\*, the Reno13 Series ensures every moment—above or below the surface—is captured effortlessly. The next

film begins with a Flamenco-themed party night. Amidst the lively beats, the dancer invites Ishaan to join her on the floor. Siddhant then uses Reno13's AI Unblur feature to capture a clear, vibrant shot of their impromptu performance while in motion.

In the last film, Ishaan and Vedang relax inside a car amid scenic surroundings, while Siddhant, dressed in a formal shirt, tie, and casual shorts, takes an official video call outside. Spotting the humorous scene, Vedang snaps a photo on his Reno13 and uses the AI Reflection Remover to remove the glass reflection, capturing the moment flawlessly. The film is scheduled to go live on January 11th, 2025.

## Toolkit for India to take the lead in the 6G race

If you are reading this article on a wireless device, then a complex set of interdependent, multi-component technologies are at work. These technologies come together as technical standards based on patent-protected inventions. Technical standards are ubiquitous and ensure seamless functionality in devices we use daily. A smartphone, for instance, contains hundreds of thousands of patents, which demonstrates industrial-grade technology innovation where functions such as camera, memory, sensors, touchscreen, and apps rely on underlying standards (4G/5G, Wi-Fi, audio/video codecs) ensuring interoperability. This interoperability — which makes a device smart, extends beyond the smartphone to wearable devices, connected cars, and IoT.

Standard development allows patent holders to propose solutions in open standard development forums. Patents for tech deemed essential to a standard (Standard Essential Patent or SEP) must be licensed on fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory (FRAND) terms. The global tech industry, academia, and government bodies collaborate in standard development, which is inherently risky, uncertain, and expensive. A consensus-driven tech-adoption process fosters innovation, interoperability, and inclusivity in the participating organisations (innovators and implementers) that have varying expectations, priorities, and commercial interests. Standard Development Organisations (SDO) like India's TSDSI, the European Union's ETSI, and the United States' IEEE create and promote technical, industrial, or regulatory standards to ensure product/service uniformity and quality. SDOs balance the incentives for stakeholders by facilitating voluntary participation in standard development. This results in better, cheaper, and accessible technologies.

Consensus-driven deliberations in these forums have enabled rapid technological evolution from 2G to 5G within three decades, democratising the development of new technology. A FRAND licensing regime ensures access to standardised technologies at a reasonable price while offering fair compensation to patent owners furthering next-generation technologies.

For India, embracing and contributing to open technical standardisation is key to maintaining its global position in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) exports. There is an opportunity for our manufacturers to export worldwide. Indian SEP holders can monetise their SEPs to fund research and development (R&D). Our manufacturers can leverage the FRAND licens-

ing system. For this, we need to contribute to international standard development with our own indigenously developed technologies. A robust and unambiguous understanding and enforcement of Intellectual Property (IP) is necessary for this.

In 2023-24, the Indian Patent Office granted a record 100,000 patents. India has consistently performed well in the Global Innovation Index 2024 and ranked first in global exports of ICTs. The World Trade Organization revealed that India managed to outpace China in digital services in ICT exports in 2024.

Advancements in wireless technologies have increased internet penetration and mobile broadband subscriptions. Over 95% of villages in rural India now have access to 3G/ 4G networks. Despite the strides made by India, a lot more is needed to sustain a leadership position in digital payments, online banking, connected devices, and access to online government services. Some spokes must be removed from the wheel, such as shortage of skilled R&D personnel, slow knowledge creation in basic and applied science, and dismal R&D spending which is presently at 0.3% and 0.2% of GDP by the public and the private sector, respectively.

This results in two adverse outcomes. One, India lacks a presence in global R&D-intensive industries such as tech hardware, electronics, health care devices, and industrial engineering; two, most Indian firms rely on manufacturing rather than innovating.

The government's aim to achieve 10% of all 6G patents and 1/6th of contributions to global standards reflects India's global ambitions. A four-pronged approach is needed to realise this. First, Indian innovators, even startups, need policies that promote R&D and enable participation in SDOs as SEP holders. Second, the ICT sector must support open international standardisation and FRAND licensing to access global markets. Third, foster a culture of innovation and negotiation, a process already laid down by Indian and international courts. Fourth, actively contribute to technical standards, and IP protection, and engage in FRAND licensing. The future of connected and smart devices requires the co-creation of new technologies and collaboration in standard development. 2025 is an inflexion point. For collaborative and accessible technological advancement, all eyes are currently on India. Ashish Bharadwaj is professor and founding dean, BITS Law School Mumbai under BITS Pilani. The views expressed are personal



# Highness Raunaq Yar Khan, Nizam of Asaf Jahi's celebrates Sankranti

Hyderabad: Dalit, Muslim, Christian & Adivasi "D"J.A.C. & Deendar Anjuman, Hyderabad, "Deendar Anjuman" after their 3 days (9th 10th 11 Jan 2025) International, Inter Religious Conference on bringing Communities together. All three on the Same intent as above, Invited All for kite flying on culmination of 300 yrs/3rd centenary of the Asaf Jahi Nizams of Hyderabad, at The celebration on 13th January, SANKRANTI titled "Bringing Communities Together, Sankranti Kite Flying Celebration". Highness Raunaq Yar Khan, 9th Nizam Of The Asaf Jahi Dynasty, annually celebrates HOLI separately at his vast Private estate on Road No. 25 dead-end gate at Jubilee Hills, for the Last 50 years. This started in his teens & till date with no breaks. This trend at first was pure innocent, inclusive fun and presently as friendly integration and bridging of varied faiths & communities which is the urgent need of the present turbulent times. These events are also to commemorate the secular rule of Nawab Raunaq's great grand father, His highness Mahboob Ali Khan (Siddiqui), 6th Nizam of Hyderabad and Nawab Raunaq's role model & widely acknowledged as the most secular ruler of Hyderabad Deccan by numerous accounts of Cyrillic Jones, a British Railway head, Scientific man Sir Vishweshwar & upto world renowned multifaceted Indian, Sarojni Naidu, in their various written accounts available on record today.



Telangana Fitness Festival By Shafi Sami Poster Launch By Madhu Goud Yaskhi Campaign Committee Chairman INCTelangana Venue LB Stadium Outdoor On 9th February



# Toolkit for India to take the lead in the 6G race

The future of connected and smart devices requires the co-creation of new technologies and collaboration in standard development. If you are reading this article on a wireless device, then a complex set of interdependent, multi-component technologies are at work. These technologies come together as technical standards based on patent-protected inventions. Technical standards are ubiquitous and ensure seamless functionality in devices we use daily. A smartphone, for instance, contains hundreds of thousands of patents, which demonstrates industrial-grade technology innovation where functions such as camera, memory, sensors, touchscreen, and apps rely on underlying standards (4G/5G, Wi-Fi, audio/video codecs) ensuring interoperability. This interoperability — which makes a device smart, extends beyond the smartphone to wearable devices, connected cars, and IoT. Standard development allows patent holders to propose solutions in open standard development forums. Patents for tech deemed essential to a standard (Standard Essential Patent or SEP) must be licensed on fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory (FRAND) terms.

The global tech industry, academia, and government bodies collaborate in standard development, which is inherently risky, uncertain, and expensive. A consensus-driven tech-adoption process fosters innovation, interoperability, and inclusivity in the participating organisations (innovators and implementers) that have varying expectations, priorities, and commercial interests. Standard Development Organisations (SDO) like India's TSDSI, the European Union's ETSI, and the United States' IEEE create and promote technical, industrial, or regulatory standards to ensure product/service uniformity and quality. SDOs balance the incentives for stakeholders by facilitating voluntary participation in standard development. This results in better, cheaper, and accessible technologies. Consensus-driven deliberations in these forums have enabled rapid technological evolution from 2G to 5G within three decades, democratising the development of new technology. A FRAND licensing regime ensures access to standardised technologies at a reasonable price while offering fair compensation to patent owners furthering next-generation technologies.

For India, embracing and contributing to open technical standardisation is key to maintaining its global position in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) exports. There is an opportunity for our manufacturers to export worldwide. Indian SEP holders can monetise their SEPs to fund research and development (R&D). Our manufacturers can leverage the FRAND licensing system. For this, we need to contribute to international standard development with our own indigenously developed technologies. A robust and unambiguous understanding and enforcement of Intellectual Property (IP) is necessary for this. In 2023-24, the Indian Patent Office granted a record 100,000 patents. India has consistently performed well in the Global Innovation Index 2024 and ranked first in global exports of ICTs. The World Trade Organization revealed that In-

dia managed to outpace China in digital services in ICT exports in 2024. Advancements in wireless technologies have increased internet penetration and mobile broadband subscriptions. Over 95% of villages in rural India now have access to 3G/4G networks. Despite the strides made by India, a lot more is needed to sustain a leadership position in digital payments, online banking, connected devices, and access to online government services. Some spokes must be removed from the wheel, such as shortage of skilled R&D personnel, slow knowledge creation in basic and applied science, and dismal R&D spending which is presently at 0.3% and 0.2% of GDP by the public and the private sector, respectively. This results in two adverse outcomes. One, India lacks a presence in global R&D-intensive industries such as tech hardware, electronics, health care devices, and industrial engineering; two, most Indian firms rely on manufacturing rather than innovating. The government's aim to achieve 10% of all 6G patents and 1/6th of contributions to global standards reflects India's global ambitions. A four-pronged approach is needed to realise this. First, Indian innovators, even startups, need policies that promote R&D and enable participation in



SDOs as SEP holders. Second, the ICT sector must support open international standardisation and FRAND licensing to access global markets. Third, foster a culture of innovation and negotiation, a process already laid down by Indian and international courts. Fourth, actively contribute to technical standards, and IP protection, and engage in FRAND licensing. The future of connected

and smart devices requires the co-creation of new technologies and collaboration in standard development. 2025 is an inflexion point. For collaborative and accessible technological advancement, all eyes are currently on India. Ashish Bharadwaj is professor and founding dean, BITS Law School Mumbai under BITS Pilani. The views expressed are personal

## Good fences for good neighbours

The escalation of tensions along the India-Bangladesh border in recent days is yet another reflection of the low point to which bilateral ties have fallen under the current caretaker administration in Dhaka. Bangladesh's expression of concern over India's efforts to fence the international boundary to stem smuggling and other transnational crimes is misplaced, especially since there have been several attempts by smugglers and traffickers from the Bangladeshi side to transgress the border over the past week amidst attacks on Indian border guards. At a meeting with Bangladesh's foreign secretary Mohammad Jashim Uddin to discuss the border tensions, Indian envoy Pranay Verma pointed out that New Delhi is committed to ensuring a crime-free boundary and tackling the challenges posed by smugglers and criminals. In this context, the Indian envoy sought a cooperative approach to fighting crimes and called for implementing agreements on border management.

One of the key aims of the agreement to fence the India-Bangladesh border is cracking down on smuggling and streamlining the legitimate movement of goods and people. The Indian side has already fenced three-fourths of the total border running more than 4,000 km. A challenging geography — large rivers that periodically flood and keep shifting their course, for instance — and the long stretches that remain to be fenced have



made the exercise tedious and prolonged. Stray incidents of violence, including firing, are periodically reported from along the border, especially in West Bengal. There are mechanisms in place to address these issues, and if necessary, these can be revisited to make them work more effectively. New Delhi and Dhaka have covered a lot of ground in this area in the past few decades, including settling the conundrum of enclaves and amicably resolving their maritime bound-

ary in 2014. India is well within its rights to construct fencing in porous sections of the border to prevent transnational crimes; any outstanding issues can be addressed in the upcoming talks between the heads of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). It would be foolish to undo all the achievements of the past and create another point of dispute in a relationship that is already weighed down because of the new political dynamics in Dhaka.



# Curious, intrepid, confused, lonely: seeing travel through many layers

One of the most striking things about Shahnaz Habib's *Airplane Mode (Westland)* was its subtitle, "A Passive-Aggressive History of Travel." Was, because now the copies online sport different subtitles. There is "An Irreverent History of Travel", which brings to mind Anthony Bourdain's *World Travel: An Irreverent Guide* (more on the rockstar chef later), and 'Travels in the Ruins of Tourism'. Much in Habib's stream of consciousness style, one wonders at the subtitle change. Was passive-aggressive too esoteric or too belligerent? Was 'irreverent' more accessible or SEO friendly, and 'ruins of tourism' suitably grim for all the mournful Mallechs and Mollies of the internet?

Habib's book, like all gripping, glorious books, is simultaneously intensely personal and interstellar. There are her travels including landing in Istanbul, diffident and lonely, made even more so by Megan who she meets in Hagia Sophia, which was a museum in 2007. Megan, a young white backpacker, who wanted to 'do' Turkey in a week, has already 'done' Topkapi Palace, the Grand Bazaar, and the boat ride across the Bosphorus in the two days she has been in Istanbul. Megan's industry makes Habib feel even more inadequate as she wanders about the bazaars. "I want to be curious and intrepid; instead I am confused and lonely," she writes. Through her personal travels, Habib looks at the history of travel, of 'militourism', where soldiers go to pretty paradises including Goa to let off steam, and the effect of colonialism, Euro-centric ideals and capitalism on travel.

Wrong-coloured passport Habib's decision to go to Paris with her husband before the birth of their child, has her delving into the history of passports and 'passportism', and how the wrong coloured passport is as much a deterrent to travel as the wrong skin colour. So while her husband, a white American, needed nothing for his visa application to Paris, Habib needed a host of documents, that Indians travelling are unfortunately familiar with including a letter from her employer, bank statements, letter of invitation and an application fee of 60 Euros.

The Paris trip also has Habib revealing the Marshall Plan to prop up Paris, brought to its knees post World War II, by selling Paris to middleclass Americans. The recipe of "infrastructure and advertising" has succeeded from the 1950s till date — what is Emily in Paris but another hard sell of the City of Lights, a title, which Habib wryly comments was hard won by the French government who kept the Notre Dame and Place de la Concorde lit up despite post-War electricity shortages. While in Istanbul, Habib's muses about guide books from the venerable Baedeker Guides published from the 1830s to the Lonely Planet books, which started off as counter-cultural keys to unlocking the secrets of a space and morphed into the behemoth it is now. The irony of Baedeker dying of overwork while writing books on leisure travel is not lost on Habib. Top-down view Guide books take the top-down view of travel, telling what you need to see to understand or in Megan's word, 'do' a country. There is a snobbery attached to carrying guide books, which Habib highlights with an example from E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*. If Eleanor had not taken away Lucy's



Baedeker, Habib muses, might she not have had an adventure that did not end in marriage? While one might not want to be caught dead with a guide book, (if you are that kind of cool traveller), what about one written by the ultimate cool traveller, Anthony Bourdain, who Habib hastens to admit she is far from. Bourdain, chef, television host and writer extraordinaire has travelled the world and eaten everything. The book, put together by his long-time assistant, Laurie Woolever, is a look at the world "through Tony's eyes" in Woolever's words. Guide books and guided tours tell you what to see and not see and also how to feel and negate the subjective to a certain extent. Then you have personal views of the world, where a raindrop

on a leaf in Mongolia could move one to tears or have another throw a hissy fit. Travelling through books Habib writes of her father who prefers to travel through books, which brings to mind the decision to visit Uzbekistan after reading of Emperor Babur's homesickness for pomegranates from Ferghana in *Raiders from the North* by Alex Rutherford. Istanbul also brings to mind Agatha Christie who is supposed to have written *Murder on the Orient Express* at Pera Palace, a claim debunked as urban legend in Charles King's remarkably thrilling history, *Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul*. Rather than Christie's novels set in Baghdad, Mesopotamia or Egypt, or her charming account of accompanying her ar-

chaeologist husband on digs in Iraq and Syria in *Come, Tell Me How You Live*, Habib chooses *Absent in the Spring*, a non crime book by Christie writing as Mary Westmacott to talk of the queen of crime's attitude towards the Other. Habib's thoughts on the invisible Indians serving in hotels far away from home are fascinating — I.S. Johar played the manager on *The Karnak* in the 1978 version of *Death on the Nile* and there was also Gaurau (Raza Jaffrey) as Carrie's personal butler in *Sex and the City 2*. Travel cannot be isolated, the traveller and the travellee come together, giving and taking from each other just like Habib draws a line from Charles Baudelaire's posh *Flâneur* to the Malayalam equivalent of 'vayanokkal.'

## IED was likely planted a month before detonation

The high intensity IED (improvised explosive device) used by Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Monday, in which eight police personnel and a civilian driver were killed, was likely planted at least a month before the incident, officials aware of the matter said, adding that Bijapur continues to be a hot spot for Left-wing extremism (LWE), with IEDs planted by the Maoists being recovered frequently.

"The IED used on Monday must have been planted more than a month ago. The road where explosives were placed had a thick overgrowth of grass and other plants. The wires recovered from the spot appeared to be weeks old. The Maoists planted the IED and just needed to detonate it when they decided to attack. Bijapur district must be having hundreds of such IEDs planted by the Maoist groups," a senior police officer aware of the matter said on condition of anonymity. Nearly 50% of IEDs seized by all

forces across the state was from Bijapur district alone in 2024, according to police data accessed by HT. Of the total of 260 IEDs recovered in 2024, at least 105 were found in Bijapur, followed by 80 in Sukma. The IEDs recovered weigh between 1kg and 30kg. Security officials suspect the IED used in Monday's attack could have weighed 20-30 kg.

LWE violence in Chhattisgarh is reported from the seven districts within the Bastar range -- Bastar, Dantewada, Bijapur, Kanker, Narayanpur, Kondagaon, and Sukma. Bastar and Kondagaon districts have been declared as LWE-free by the state government. Senior officials in the central armed police forces posted in Chhattisgarh said that while there has been a surge in anti-Maoist operations, the challenge of detecting IEDs in Sukma and Bijapur, and especially the latter, remains. They added that Maoist cadres have fled deeper into the

jungles of Abhujmaad, primarily in the Narayanpur district, but have left behind IEDs. These just need to be connected to a detonator when they receive intelligence about the movement of security forces, the officials said. "It is unfortunate that there was no intelligence regarding the IED on the Kutru-Bedre road that killed the 9 men. This is a case of one failure. In fact, just four days ago, on January 1, security forces recovered 10 IEDs from two police stations of Bijapur. These IEDs were planted below a road but were not as the powerful as the one used by Maoists on Monday. These IEDs weighed around 1 kg and 3 kg," a senior CRPF officer said, asking not to be named. Officials aware of Monday's attacks said the IED blast created a crater on the road that measured almost 8-10 feet deep. "The explosive used was powerful. The mangled door of the vehicle was flung almost 50 feet from the ground.



# Whose parks and gardens are these anyway?

For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City. But of late, the city's parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership of these public spaces in their own ways. While the ownership of these spaces technically lies with the State government, the lack of concrete regulations give rise to the question of 'whose park is it anyway?' from time to time. What started this conversation this time around was what happened with Cubbon Reads on December 21. Cubbon Reads is a community of readers who gather at Cubbon Park, one of the largest lung spaces in the city, and read from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Saturday. There are people who come by themselves, those who come in duos or groups and lay down their mats and carry on with their reading. This practice has been going on for almost a year now and has inspired such events in other places in Bengaluru as well as other cities.

For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. The organisers claim that hundreds of people gather every weekend to read in Cubbon Park. However, chaos broke out on December 21 after the reading session was interrupted by officials of the Horticulture Department. On that day, readers had brought gift-wrapped books to exchange among each other to celebrate the pop culture event known as 'Secret Santa'. These books were confiscated by the officials and the curators of the event were called into their offices.

G. Kusuma, Deputy Director, Horticulture Department, said that the event was stopped as there was a lot of "screaming and shouting" and a gathering of up to 1,000 people, which is not allowed as per department rules. She said that any event in which over 20 people gather should get prior permission from the department, which was not the case with Cubbon Reads. The organisers, on the other hand, alleged that they had never been informed about these rules by the department, and on that particular day, they were mistreated and harassed by the authorities. For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. "They first took two of our curators to the Department of Horticulture office. The department officials were hostile and thought that Cubbon Reads was selling books to the public and using a public space to make money. They forcefully extricated their ID cards. The security guards there were talking about imposing fines from anywhere between ₹25,000 and ₹60,000. Also, our founding curators, who are not in town, were called. They were threatened with a First Information Report and a fine and asked to show up in their office right away, or else the current curators would be held in custody," the community said in a press release. For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. They further said: "Regarding the request for permission, we have been conducting silent reading gatherings for 100 weekends now, and each time, over 200 to 300 people have shown up. Not once did the park authorities have an issue with us coming there to read, stacking books, and



taking group pictures with hundreds of us huddled. We did not anticipate that readers coming together with gift-wrapped books would invite suspicion from the park authorities, forcing them to snatch the belongings and unwrap gift covers—only to find harmless books inside." For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership.

Amidst all this, many other communities and individuals who frequent Cubbon Park also shared their experiences on social media stating that they were allegedly harassed by the Horticulture Department. There are many similar communities which go by the names Cubbon Paints, Cubbon Designs, Cubbon Canines etc. who all gather in the park on designated days. For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. There were also other regular visitors who sided with the Horticulture Department and said that hundreds of people gathering in a lung space without permission needed interception. For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. "While some rules of the department like banning photography inside the park do not make sense, with this particular issue, both the parties were at fault. While silent reading inside the park is one thing, making it an event for gift swapping naturally attracts more people and the organisers should have taken prior permission. We should also think about the fact that not all those who participate in the event will dispose of those wrappers properly," said a member of the Cubbon Park Conservation Committee. But regulars of Lalbagh Botani-

cal Garden in the southern part of Bengaluru rarely report rifts with the Horticulture Department. "For 15 years now, many small activities have taken place in Lalbagh. Whoever wants to conduct events usually gets in touch with the walkers and then we help them contact the officials and then reading, art and craft events are organised. The only time we had to fight with the department was when they wanted even the morning walkers to buy tickets. After we protested, they took that rule down," said P. Sadashiva, president, Lalbagh Walkers' Association. Not only Cubbon Park

For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. These debates are not limited to Cubbon Park alone and extend to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) parks as well. The BBMP owns over 1,200 parks in Bengaluru and they are open to all groups of citizens. With the privatisation of such parks and the adoption of 506 parks by local citizens and Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs), citizens had raised issues about access to the parks. While BBMP had mandated that parks should be open throughout the day (5 a.m. to 10 p.m.), many used to be closed for hours in the afternoon. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar responded to these complaints in 2024 and reiterated that the parks should remain open throughout the day irrespective of who maintains them. However, there are some rules even in these parks which do not benefit the public. For instance, the BBMP has banned the consumption of food in public parks. "The intervention of the BBMP with regard to timings has definitely helped delivery partners. As gig workers, we are always on the move, and we need spaces where we can rest and have food. Hence the removal of restrictions on food consumption can be of great help to us as

we cannot sit anywhere else and eat at ease," said Vinay Sarathy, president of United Food Delivery Partners' Union. For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. Just like gig workers, pourakarmikas, drivers, domestic workers, and street vendors are some of the other groups who are often disserved by the restrictions on access and activities in public parks. "Any organisation can help maintain the park, but they should not be the rulemakers. Parks are needed especially by people who cannot meet at other places, cannot find privacy in their own homes, homeless people, and blue-collar workers. The rules around access and activities in parks should be in such a manner that it benefits the most vulnerable and the marginalised in society. The decisions should be made democratically," said Vinay Sreenivasa, advocate and citizen activist. Role of RWAs While the RWAs in the city deny allegations that they restrict access to parks and control the systems there, they agree that local residents should be involved up to some extent in the operations of the parks as they are the ones who should bear the consequences when things take a turn for the worse. For decades, Bengaluru has revelled in its status as the Garden City, but of late, its parks and gardens have become objects of contention as different groups want to claim ownership. "As we live in the vicinity of these parks, we need to ensure that anti-social elements do not enter the parks. They even rough up security guards and it is the local residents who rush to the parks and call the police. We are the ones who take the responsibility for these parks," said Sneha Nandihal from I Change Indiranagar. She added that RWAs often also take care of planting saplings, maintenance of infrastructure in parks as BBMP officials rarely keep a check on such things.



# Peek into the world of Bengaluru's smallest inhabitants

Did you know ants once shared the planet with dinosaurs like the T-Rex and the Velociraptor? Or that termites cultivate food gardens of fungi within their large, intricately constructed mounds? And that it isn't just honey that will go missing in a world without bees, but also many fruits, vegetables, grains and nuts. Also, not all spiders build webs, cockroaches are a lot more than irritating house pests, butterflies can taste food with their feet, and male cicadas serenade potential mates using a unique sound-producing organ on their abdomen called the tymbal? The world of these minibeasts is indeed both enigmatic and fascinating, as a new book, *Commonly Spotted Insects & Spiders in the City of Bengaluru*, reinforces repeatedly. "The lives, survival strategies and nature history stories of insects and spiders can range from the calmly simple (or at least what we know so far) to the bizarrely complex," states the introduction to the book, which has been co-authored by Vena Kapoor, Priya Venkatesh and Vaidya R., designed by Pratyush Gupta and enabled by the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum's Small Grants Programme.

Filled with mind-boggling facts and gorgeous pictures, it offers a ringside view of the lives and natural histories of some of the city's many six- and eight-legged creatures — around 135 insects and 25 spiders — serving as "an easy-to-use tool to help you identify and get to know more about some of the commonly found insects and spiders living their lives around us." As Vaidya points out, most of the images in the book were not shot in far-flung, wooded areas with many trees but bang amid the concrete jungle that is Bengaluru. "Most of them have been shot right at homes or just outside them, in gardens, etc," says the Bengaluru-based nature enthusiast and photographer. "The main point we are trying to emphasise is that there is a lot of biodiversity, even in your backyard."

Arthropods, the phylum which includes insects, spiders, scorpions, centipedes, millipedes, crabs, prawns and even head lice, is the most successful animal group on the planet, consisting of over 800,000 described species, with many still undiscovered. First emerging in the water around 500 million years ago, before colonising land a few million years later, arthropods are found in every nook and cranny of the planet today. So ubiquitous are these tiny creatures that the combined biomass of terrestrial arthropods alone is believed to be roughly 1 billion tonnes, roughly equivalent to the biomass of all human beings and livestock put together, according to a study published in the open-access journal *Science Advances* in 2023. Insects, which form the majority of the arthropods, "pretty much rule the world," says Priya, the founder-director of The Naturalist School (TNS), Bengaluru. She considers them "the most diverse and fascinating creatures we have on Planet Earth: they come in all shapes, sizes and colours, are also found everywhere, in the air, land and water" and are "a very important part of the entire food chain because of which the whole planet is going around," she says. Not only are they both prey and predators, but they also play an important role in helping many plants propagate. "Most of the plant kingdom,

as you know, are producers, without which there would be no food on this planet," says Priya. And many of these plants, particularly those that make fruits, depend on insects for pollination. "In that sense, they are very intricately connected to life on earth." Vena, a city-based conservationist and independent nature educator, believes that observing and learning about arthropods is also a great way to get people interested in nature and natural systems. Often, too often, there is a deep cognitive dissociation between human beings and insects, she says. "They are all around us but are often kind of hidden. We don't notice them as much because of their size or the associations we have with them." She finds it pretty humbling to know that there are millions of organisms around us, playing such crucial roles and that we are only just scratching the surface and getting to know them. "They are as messy as human beings with bizarre habits and behaviours."

The idea for *Commonly Spotted Insects & Spiders in the City of Bengaluru* started with the realisation that there was no easy-to-use guide on insects that could help people get more natural history information about arthropods, especially insects and spiders that they encounter even in a city like Bengaluru. People would have to troll through popular apps like i-naturalist or Google it," says Vena, who often leads these nature walks. "Nature educators, like myself, were also doing that because we had no other means to access this information." The idea, therefore, was to create a resource for beginner naturalists that was easy to use and understand without being too heavily scientific, she says. The initial plan was to create a set of flashcards about insects, much like the flashcards on common Indian birds currently produced by the Nature Conservation Foundation, says Vena. "We pitched this idea to the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum's Small Grants Programme and were, luckily, selected among many applicants," she says.

The next step was selecting the insects and spiders that would be featured, a mammoth task considering the sheer diversity. "We could have easily done a book 10 times this size." They started by first coming up with different groups, such as ants, termites, butterflies, spiders, mantids, lacewings, beetles and so on, and then identifying the most common species in those groups using a combination of experience and also by using the iNaturalist database, says Vaidya, adding that, in some cases, where quite a few species existed in each group, as in the case of beetles and dragonflies, it was further narrowed down to the most commonly-seen species to "make sure you get the most representative species in the city."

Once the initial master database was created, images had to be sourced and matched to the various insects and spiders that were finally selected. While some of the photos already existed with the co-authors, many did not, and so "my main task was about finding these images," says Vaidya, who turned to iNaturalist, reaching out to nature enthusiasts and naturalists who had posted images on it, such as Jithesh Pai, Anubhav Agarwal, Chandu Bandi and Yuvan



Aves. While the initial plan was to create flashcards, after taking feedback from multiple people, the initiative evolved into its current format, a book offering detailed information about some common insects and spiders in the city, including the tropical fire ant, the carpenter bee, the potter wasp, the common tree cricket, the giant Asian mantis, the flesh fly, the cotton stainer bug and crab spiders.

"The idea was to create a reference book and visual tool that nature educators can use while taking people out for walks," says Vena, adding that around 100 free print copies of the book will be distributed free of cost to Bengaluru's nature educators. An e-version of the book is also available for free download on the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum website, and a Kannada translation is in the works. "Having the whole book as open source means that people can look at

it, take printouts for themselves and use it," she adds. By this offering, the authors hope that people will eventually feel a sense of connection to these tiny animals that are such a crucial part of Planet Earth. "The idea is that the more we get to know about the life forms that share our world, the hope is that there will be more empathy-building, curiosity, and a sense of wonder," says Vena. She also believes that the book could be a starting point to help people reflect on what is required to protect these creatures and how our daily behaviours and habits have a profound impact on the lives of these creatures who share our world with us. "This book is just one tool to get people more interested and curious about what they can find in Bangalore," she says. "The hope is also that they start documenting and recording behaviour more, contributing to natural history observations, which we don't do enough of in this country."

## Poco X7, X7 Pro to be launched on Jan 9, here's how much it is likely to cost and other features

Hyderabad: The wait for Poco X7 Pro ends with Xiaomi's sub-brand Poco set to launch the successor to its popular X series in India on January 9. The new series will consist of two models: Poco X7 5G and Poco X7 Pro 5G, both targeting the mid-range smartphone segment. Poco X7 Pro is expected to be priced under Rs 30,000. Poco X7 is likely to cost less than Rs 20,000. Specifications

According to reports, the Poco X7 Pro will feature a sleek rear panel, with a dual black and yellow fusion design. Powered by MediaTek Dimensity 8400 Ultra chipset, 6,550mAh battery for long lasting usage, and Xiaomi HyperOS 2.0, it boasts of India's slimmest and lightest phone. The 50-megapixel primary camera has Optical Image Stabilisation (OIS) for steady shots, advanced snapshot features. The front cam-



era is a 20 MP. It comes with IP68 and IP69 ratings for 'exceptional' durability and quality, and also has a fingerprint scanner underneath for biometric authentication. It includes a 6.67-inch AMOLED display with Gorilla Glass Victus 2, offering stronger protection from scratch and drop. Poco X7 will also have a dual camera configuration with 50-megapixel OIS.