

Scarlet fever cases on rise in Hyderabad: Here's what every parent needs to know

Hyderabad: Hyderabad is witnessing a rise in cases of scarlet fever among children between 5 years and 15 years, along with other viral fevers during the ongoing winter season, senior pediatricians on Monday said. Scarlet fever is a seasonal bacterial infection among children and is caused by group A Streptococcus, which can be treated through certain antibiotics. It usually takes at least 2 to 5 days for the symptoms to show-up, once the child is exposed to the bacteria.

"We are seeing children 5 to 15 years of age with scarlet fever for the past few days. If your child develops fever, red and painful tonsils with or without creamish deposits, a diffuse red sandpaper like rash day 2 and/or a strawberry like tongue, please consult a

pediatrician," Dr Sivaranjani Santosh, Developmental Pediatrician, Hyderabad. The symptoms to look out for are fever with sore throat, strawberry like tongue, and rash. Scarlet fever is highly contagious and can spread when the infected person sneezes or coughs on to the other. It can spread by sharing food, water, touching the secretions and carrying them to the nose and mouth.

"Please do not send your child to school till the child is fever free completely for at least 24 hours. The infection can be very well treated with appropriate antibiotics used for the prescribed duration. Do not delay the treatment, as delaying the treatment can have implications for the heart and kidney in addition to worsening of the child's condition," Dr Sivaranjani said.



Over 2,000 government schools in Telangana lack toilet facilities for girls



Hyderabad: Thousands of young girls are grappling with indignity and health risks as over 2,000 government-run schools in the State lack toilet facilities. That's not all. Toilets in another 2,200 government schools went defunct as they were either broken, filthy or lack running water facilities. These revelations came to the limelight in the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) plus report for the academic year 2023-24.

Of the 29,383 girls and co-educational schools operating under government management, 27,366 schools have toilet facilities, forcing students in 2,017 schools to either relieve themselves in open spaces or hold it back until they reach home. Due to lack of toilets, several girl students reported urinary tract infections. Worst is the case when girls are on the menstruation cycle. Without a safe and private space, several girl stu-

dents are being forced to stay home during their periods. In addition, among the schools with toilet facilities, 25,089 have functional toilets as 2,277 toilets went defunct due to poor maintenance, lack of running water facilities and security in the schools. At 93.1 per cent, Telangana is lagging behind the national average of 97.1 per cent in terms of schools with toilet facilities for girls. The State (85.4 per cent) is also far behind the national average of 93.2 per cent with respect to schools with functional toilet facilities for girls. Similar is the predicament of the young boys studying in the government-run schools in the State. In fact, 4,823 government schools do not have toilet facilities for boys and an additional 2,618 schools lack functional toilets. At 83.2 per cent with toilet facilities for boys and 74.1 per cent with functional toilet facilities, the State is behind the national average of 94.8 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively.

According to teachers, the construction

of toilets, one of the 12 components of 'Mana Ooru - Mana Badi', was stopped mid-way in several schools after the change of the government in the State and due to lack of funds. Later, the construction was not taken up by the government as part of the 'Amma Adarsha Patashala Committees'. "One of the main reasons for toilets going defunct is lack

of maintenance, adequate and timely release of school grants. Further, there is no security for schools, leaving toilets vulnerable to theft. In several instances, taps were removed from the toilets and we got them fixed. Moreover, there is an issue of running water as well," said a High School headmaster requesting anonymity.

Soak in nature's bliss with Telangana govt's Akkamahadevi-Domalpenta staycation



Hyderabad: The Telangana Forest Department has launched a stay package covering the Akkamahadevi-Domalpenta sites as part of ecotourism activities at the Amrabad tiger reserve. Centered at Domalpenta, four rooms are being allotted towards the accommodation at Vanavihanga cottages in the first phase. The accommo-

modation provides a scenic atmosphere of the Krishna river backwaters from the Srisailem dam for visitors. On the first day of the package, the visitors will be taken to the Octopus viewpoint and Vjarala Madugu in safari vehicles. The next day, they will be taken on safari to the trekking point of the Akkamahadevi caves and the visitors would be dropped to trek down to the caves.

Decoding India's growth slowdown

The first advance estimate of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024-25, released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) this week, shows a decline in the real GDP growth rate to 6.4% from 8.2% registered in 2023-24. This is lower than the 6.5 to 7% range projected by the Economic Survey in July 2024. The growth rate of nominal GDP, which is the sum of the real GDP growth rate and the overall inflation rate, is estimated at 9.7% in 2024-25 — significantly lower than the 10.5% growth rate projected in the last Union Budget. Data discrepancies

The official diminution of India's projected GDP growth rate may still be an underestimation of the extent of economic slowdown. Academics and institutional experts have consistently pointed out serious defects in the official GDP estimates, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommending an upgrade of the real sector statistics. An "Informational Annex" to the 2023 IMF Staff consultation report on India had inter alia noted that, "...the compilation of constant price GDP deviate from the conceptual requirements of the national accounts, in part due to the use of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as a deflator for many economic activities. The appropriate price to deflate GDP by type of activity is the Producer Price Index (PPI), which is under development. Large revisions to historical series, the relatively short time span of the revised series, major discrepancies between GDP by activity and GDP by expenditure, and the lack of official seasonally-adjusted quarterly GDP series complicate analysis.

Together, these weaknesses make it challenging to monitor high frequency trends in India's economy through official statistics, particularly from the demand side." The estimation of real or constant price GDP requires the use of a GDP deflator to estimate values of GDP components in constant prices. The GDP deflator being used in India's official estimates is a weighted average of wholesale and retail price indices. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI), 2011-12 series has shown high volatility over the past decade, leading to inexplicably large divergences between the WPI and CPI inflation rates (Chart 1). This has had serious implications for the accuracy of the GDP deflator and real GDP estimates. For instance, the nominal GDP growth rate was estimated at 14.2% in 2022-23 and 9.6% in 2023-24, which indicated a sharp decline in growth (Table 1). However, the real GDP growth rate was estimated to have grown from 7.0% to 8.2%, indicating growth acceleration. This implied that the GDP deflator was only 1.4% in 2023-24, even as retail inflation was at 5.4%, because the WPI inflation rate was estimated to have fallen from a high of 9.4% in 2022-23 to a negative of -0.7% in 2023-24. In short, because of high volatility in the WPI, the nominal GDP estimate showed a growth deceleration in 2023-24 but the real GDP estimate reflected growth acceleration. Such anomalous and confounding data on macroeconomic fundamentals invariably lead to delusions and policy errors.

Elusive private investment Tabled a day ahead of the Union Budget last July, the Economic Survey 2023-24 had taken comfort in the 8.2% growth in real GDP and indicated a vigorous expansion of investment by the private-sector. Yet, the Chief Economic Advisor had asked whether the corporate sector responded positively to the tax cuts of Sep-

tember 2019, and complained about sluggish corporate investments in machinery and equipment and intellectual property products. He criticised the disproportionate allocation of gross fixed capital formation (investment) in the private sector to "dwellings, other buildings and structures" as an unhealthy mix. Throwing such caution to the wind, the Union Budget relied entirely on a revival of the private corporate capex cycle to announce the 'Prime Minister's Package for Employment and Skilling' with an outlay of ₹2 trillion, aimed at benefiting 41 million youth over a five-year-period. The employment linked incentive/subsidy scheme and the internship programme for one crore youth in five years, were premised on the expectation of massive job creation, consequent to an acceleration of private corporate investment. The fiscal consolidation roadmap, whereby the fiscal deficit was projected to decline from 5.6% of GDP in 2023-24, to 4.9% in 2024-25 and 4.5% in 2025-26, was also announced with the budgetary expectation of the private sector taking a lead in the capital formation process. However, the latest GDP estimates have shown a significant decline in the growth of real gross fixed capital formation from 9% in 2023-24 to 6.4% in 2024-25. A longer view of India's growth trajectory over the past decade, even on the basis of exaggerated official national account estimates, shows the irrationality of official expectations.

The annual growth rates of real gross fixed capital formation in public and private sectors (%) During the 10 years of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rule, between 2004-05 and 2013-14, the average annual growth of real GDP was at 6.8%, investment 10% and private consumption 6% (Chart 1). Between the onset of the present regime till the outbreak of the pandemic, that is, between 2014-15 and 2019-20, real GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.8% (exactly similar to UPA), but real investment growth fell to 6.3% while private consumption growth increased to 6.8%. Thus, economic growth under NDA was not investment led, as was the case under UPA.

Moreover, during the UPA period, real growth in private investment was over 10%, above the growth of public sector investment at around 9% (Chart 3). Under NDA rule, till the pandemic, public investment in real terms grew faster at an average of 6.6% per year, than private investment which grew by 6.3%. Investment, consumption and output had collapsed in 2020-21 owing to the lockdown induced recession. The recovery in 2021-22 was indeed led by private investment, but the spikes in the growth rates of investment, consumption and output were on account of base effect — it was simply a return to normalcy after the collapse in the preceding year. From 2022-23 to 2024-25, real GDP and investment have grown at an annual average rate of 7.2% each and private consumption at 6%. Post-pandemic there has been one percentage point increase in the annual average growth rate of real investment, and 0.8 percentage point decline in the annual average growth rate of private consumption.

Therefore, there is absolutely no indication of any structural break in the investment behaviour of the private corporate sector so far under the 11 years of NDA rule. The deep corporate tax cuts in September 2019 have failed to spur capital formation and



real economic activity; rather it has only helped a short lived spurt in corporate earnings and fuelled a post-pandemic bubble in the equity market. In contrast, the advent of the UPA regime had led to a real investment and exports boom between 2004-05 till the financial crisis and global recession of 2008-09, which was facilitated both by a massive increase in industrial bank credit and significant foreign capital inflows. A similar private investment led boom has remained elusive under the NDA regime. This testifies to the forgotten truth of political economy, that supposedly business friendly governments can deliver much wealth and profits for their cronies but are incapable of bringing about economy-wide structural changes and common prosperity.

Fiscal strains The more reliable supply side data on the Indian economy reflects a more sober picture of economic recovery since the pandemic and the nature of the slowdown that has set in. Quarterly Gross Value Added (GVA) growth on a year-on-year basis has been on a downward slide since 2023-24 (Chart 4). The agriculture sector continues to show cyclical fluctuations. After showing double-digit growth in the two quarters of 2023-24, the growth rate of manufacturing GVA has been on a downside. Slowdown is visible not only in the mining, power and construction sectors but also in services like retail trade, transport, communications, finance and real estate. The only

sector where GVA is projected to grow at a higher pace in 2024-25 than the previous year is public administration, defence and other services. This shows the crucial role of public spending in sustaining economic growth in the Indian economy. In this context, the monthly accounts of the Union Government further indicate that crucial revenue and expenditure targets set in the last Union Budget are likely to remain unachieved. While the windfall of a ₹2.11 trillion surplus transfer from the Reserve Bank of India has enabled the Union Government to mobilise over 78% of its non-tax revenue target for 2024-25 by November 2024, mobilisation of the Centre's net tax revenues between April to November 2024 was only 56% of the budgetary target of ₹25.83 trillion (Table 2). This has led to spending less than half of the ₹11.11 trillion, budgeted as capex for 2024-25 till November 2024. It is clear that economic slowdown has disrupted budgetary plans by slowing down tax revenue growth. Adhering to the fiscal consolidation path would imply a squeeze on public spending, including capital expenditure, which in turn would further aggravate the slowdown. Jettisoning fiscal rectitude altogether is also not feasible, given the already elevated levels of public debt and interest payments. The only way out appears to be a reworking of the revenue mobilisation strategy by enhancing taxation on wealth and profits in order to enhance capex and welfare spending.

Meet Maya, Leah who joined Sir Ratan Tata Industrial Institute's board

Hyderabad: Noel Tata's daughters, Maya and Leah, were on Thursday inducted on the board of trustees of the Sir Ratan Tata Industrial Institute (SRTII), a unit of Sir Ratan Tata Trust.

Maya and Leah Tata have replaced Arnaz Kotwal and Freddy Talati who resigned from the board. While this is seen as a move to infuse young blood, it also riled the elders' at SRTI, according to media report.

An upset Kotwal, who is now in Dubai, wrote a dissent note to fellow trustees as per media reports. "... was very saddened that none of you reached out to speak with me directly about this matter and I was blindsided by this communication from a virtual stranger under the direction of his CEO, Sidharth Sharma, both of whom have no nexus to

SRTI," as quoted in the media. Ratan Tata, who died in October, was until his death the chairman of Tata Trusts, the philanthropic arm of the Tata Group, which holds around 66% in the group's holding company Tata Sons. Noel Tata, Ratan Tata's half-brother was appointed as chairman of Tata Trusts in October 2024. Noel is married to Aloo Mistry, daughter of industrialist Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry and sister of late Cyrus Mistry, who was also a former chairman of the Tata Group. The SP Group is a major shareholder in Tata Sons with around 18 per cent stake. They have three children: Leah, Maya and Neville Tata. Leah Tata is the eldest daughter of Noel and Aloo. She is vice president at The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), the hospitality arm of Tata Group. Leah joined the Tata Group in 2006,

VCIWU Hosts a Three-Day International Conference on the Asaf Jahi Dynasty



"First Day of Asaf Jahi Dynasty Conference Highlights the Transformation from Royalism to Democracy and the Role of Urdu in Shaping Hyderabad's Cultural Identity"

Hyderabad: The "Veeranari Chakali Iamma" Women's University in Koti, Hyderabad, inaugurated a three-day international conference today, celebrating the successful 300-year journey of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty from Royalism to Democracy from 1724 to 2024. Hosted by the University's Urdu Department under the leadership of Professor S. Naseem, the conference aims to explore the complexities and cultural narratives that have emerged during this historic transformation.

The esteemed inaugural session was presided over by Ms. Surya Dhananjay, Vice Chancellor of the university, and was graced by His Highness Raunaq Yar Khan, the 9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty and the first democratic Nizam, who delivered the keynote address. In his thought-provoking speech, His Highness reflected on the lasting impact of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty on India's democratic development. "As we celebrate three centuries, we must recognize the immense contribution of various writers and poets in promoting Urdu as a language of culture and harmony," he stated. His remarks underscored a legacy that intertwines royal lineage with democratic ideals, showcasing how the Asaf Jahi rulers have paved the way for cultural enrichment and democratic participation.

Joining him as the special guest was Mr. M. M. Pallam Raju, Former Cabinet Minister for Human Resource Development and Minister of State for Defence in the Central Government, who emphasized the profound legacy of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty, stating, "The legacy of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty is not just about its royal roots; it is also about its deep influence on the culture, language, and litera-

ture of our nation. This conference is an exceptional platform to explore and celebrate that legacy." His comments highlighted the dynasty's role in elevating languages and uniting diverse communities under a shared cultural umbrella.

Among the gathering were esteemed guests whose presence added weight to the discussions surrounding the cultural and historical significance of the Urdu language and litera-

ture in shaping Hyderabad's identity. A central theme of the conference is the critical exploration of the contributions of non-Muslim poets and writers in popularizing Urdu, reflecting on the vital role of literature in fostering cultural synthesis within the diverse landscape of the Asaf Jahi influence. The conference will culminate in an evening Gazal program, offering an artistic tribute to the Urdu language, alongside the distribution

of awards to the best researchers focusing on history and poetry.

As a notable historical context, His Highness Raunaq Yar Khan's great-grandfather, H.H. Mahboob Ali Pasha, made the pivotal decision to transition the state's official language from Persian to Urdu in the late 1980s, an act that significantly reshaped the linguistic and cultural landscape of Hyderabad.

The meat of the obesity problem

The Lancet urges a shift from BMI to better obesity metrics, emphasizing the need for accurate assessments to address rising obesity rates, especially in India.

Obesity's links with many non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the consequent health burden make it a health concern of singular importance for both people and policy. Yet, for decades now, the world has used a rather flawed metric to diagnose it — Body Mass Index (BMI), an estimation of body fat content based on weight relative to height. While a BMI of 30 or above is considered obesity, this remains prone to errors of both over- and under-estimation of body fat content and attendant risks. To illustrate, while certain athletes will register a BMI upwards of 30, it usually is because of, among other things, higher muscle mass or bone weight. At the same time, not all people with excessive body fat clock a BMI number above the obesity threshold. BMI, therefore, has been an inaccurate measure, confounding responses to individual health all this while. It is against this backdrop that the Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology Commis-

sion has called for moving away from BMI-based obesity diagnosis. In its report, the commission highlights the need to develop consensus on use of more appropriate obesity metrics, such as waist circumference, waist-hip ratio, and waist-height ratio, factoring in gender-, age-, and ethnicity-specific cut-offs. While there can be no surer estimation than direct measurement of body fat, where this is not possible, the commission recommends using one of these body size metrics along with BMI or two body size metrics, BMI notwithstanding. It also recommends that obesity be categorised as either pre-clinical obesity or clinical obesity — the latter being associated with changed/impaired organ function and inability to conduct daily activities — with the relatively more aggressive forms of treatment (including drugs and surgery) reserved for clinical obesity. The need now is for the medical community to adopt metrics that can help capture the true picture on obesity. For India, where obesity has become a major health concern even as undernutrition challenges remain, population-level well-being translates into a problem of



understanding individual nutrition challenges and addressing these. More so because the country, as data from a Lancet study last year shows, faces serious future risks from obesity, with large populations of obese children (ages 5-19) and women above 20 (maternal obesity has a strong correlation with later years obesity among children). There are portents from the consumption data as well — falling whole foods consumption in households even as processed food and sugary drinks intake is rising. Against such a backdrop, the government must push the adoption of holistic measures of obesity, even as various food support programmes evolve into nutrition support ones.



Girl dies suspiciously Sangareddy: The death of an 11-year-old girl in a farm well in Sangapur village of Raikode mandal came to light on Thursday. The daughter of Madhu Gadda Satish's wife Anita from the same village has been identified as Vaishnavi. According to the police report, Anita and Satish from the same village had a love marriage 12 years ago. They had

two daughters, the younger daughter died recently, while the elder daughter died in a well under suspicious circumstances, said SI Narayana. Expressing objections that there are many suspicions about the death of my granddaughter, he said that a case has been registered on the complaint of his grandmother Madhu Gadda Sammamma and is being investigated.

Is groundwater contamination high in India? | Explained

The story so far: An assessment of India's groundwater by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) found that several States are grappling with a serious problem of nitrate contamination.

Which are the sources of contamination?

The most concerning finding was that the number of districts with excessive nitrate in their groundwater rose from 359 in 2017 to 440 in 2023. This works out to nearly 56% of India's districts having excessive nitrate in ground water, defined as having more than 45 mg/l (milligram per litre). Of the 15,239 groundwater samples collected from across the country for testing, 19.8% samples had nitrates — nitrogenous compounds — above safe limits though it must be said that this proportion has not substantially changed since 2017. In the 13,028 samples analysed in 2017 for instance, 21.6% had excessive nitrate. There are two major concerns with excess nitrate content: one is methemoglobinemia, or a reduced ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen. A bigger problem with excessive nitrates are environmental: once the nitrates in the groundwater rise to the surface and become part of lakes and ponds, algal blooms throttle the health of aquatic ecosystems. The most common contaminant identified in groundwater is dissolved nitrogen in the form of nitrate in sub-surface waters. Since, the nitrogen content of soil is generally quite low, farmers have to look for external sources of nitrogen by using ammonium nitrate, calcium nitrate, urea, diammonium hydrogen phosphate etc. Although nitrate is the main form in which ni-

trogen occurs in groundwater, dissolved nitrogen also occurs in the form of ammonium (NH₄⁺), ammonia (NH₃), nitrite (NO₂⁻), nitrogen (N₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and organic nitrogen.

Which places had serious contamination?

Rajasthan, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu reported the highest proportion of tested groundwater blocks with nitrate exceeding permissible levels — 49%, 48% and 37% of the tested samples respectively reported numbers beyond the limit. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have a long-standing nitrate problem with relative levels fairly constant since 2017, the report says. However a growing concern are blocks in central and southern India, which are reporting an increasing trend, and therefore is a reason for worry. "Maharashtra (35.74%), Telangana (27.48%), Andhra Pradesh (23.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (22.58%) also show notable levels of nitrate contamination," the report notes.

Is nitrate the only chemical contaminant?

Other major chemical contaminants affecting groundwater quality are arsenic, iron, fluoride and uranium. Just as 19.8% samples of tested groundwater had excess nitrate, 9.04% of samples had fluoride levels above the limit. Fluoride concentrations exceeding the permissible limit were "a major concern" in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Rajasthan and Punjab reported the maximum number of samples with uranium concentration exceeding 100 ppb (parts per billion).

Sexual assault survivors need trauma-informed mental health interventions, say experts

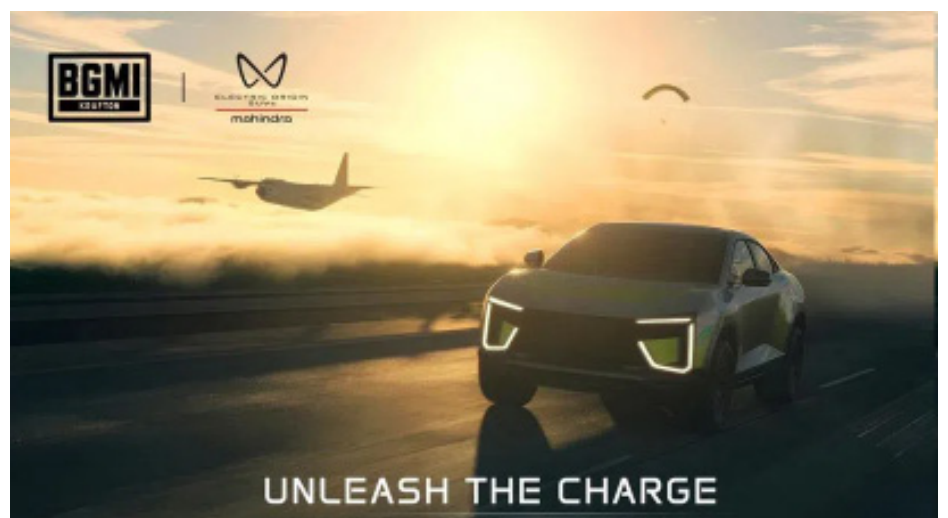
Even before the dust on the sexual assault on a young student inside the campus of Anna University in the city had settled another incident was reported in the city on Tuesday. A research scholar from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras lodged a police complaint stating that a man in a bakery outside the institute campus had sexually harassed her. Anna University later set up a helpline number and improved security on the campus.

Chennai-based psychiatrist Lakshmi Vijayakumar, who runs Sneha, a non-governmental organisation that helps in the prevention of suicides and Vidya Reddy, founder of Tulir, a non-governmental organisation working to prevent child sexual abuse, say a majority of sexually abused persons undergo post-traumatic stress disorder, which could manifest early, or even after many years. This could be avoided if the survivors have a helpline to call and express their feelings and fears. Such a service is lacking in the country, Ms. Reddy says.

"They go through post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is guilt and anxiety about future. Those are the immediate psychological issues. A lot of that we can deal with to some extent," Dr. Lakshmi explains. She said studies had shown that around 30%-35% of women who died by or attempted suicide had been sexually abused. Other issues include loss of trust in men and rejection of marriage, and anxiety about having physical intercourse also come up, she adds. "As psychiatrists, we assess them for PTSD. I do psychotherapy to assuage their guilt and make them feel more confident about themselves, learn to trust and understand that what has happened is not their fault and the third is to help them develop healthy

relationship. For some people it can last a long time. It depends on their inner ability to cope and the family support they receive," she adds. "The dynamics of sexual violence need to be understood, along with the varied presentation of anyone who has been abused and assaulted, depending on the context, age, frequency, relationship with assaulter and degree of violence. People who intervene from a mental health perspective must be trauma informed and recognise the complexities of rape trauma syndrome, post traumatic stress disorder. Being able to call someone who is trauma informed with an understanding of sexual violence to share the experience could bring about reassurance," she explains. Ms. Reddy points out that there is a whole continuum of interventional services between a counsellor and psychiatrist that is yet to take off in the country. She suggests promoting a helpline for psychological counselling like that of cybercrime alerts that is currently being advertised through mobile phone caller tunes. "Considering police investigations follow a standard operating procedure of compliances and tick boxes, secondary victimisation by investigating authorities, of complainants of sexual assault, must be first addressed with regard to any mental health intervention/counseling," she says. Dr. Lakshmi and Ms. Reddy say sexually abused victims cannot be seen in isolation. It is necessary to understand the ecology around the individual, their family situation and relatives, who are all going through a stressful experience. The trauma simmers in the background while they may go on with their day-to-day life. The imagery painted of a depressed individual is very different from the reality of how it impacts people, Ms. Reddy says.

Here's how to win Mahindra BE 6 Electric SUV by playing Battlegrounds Mobile India



Hyderabad: Mahindra has collaborated with Krafton India, the developers of Battlegrounds Mobile India, to introduce Mahindra BE 6 electric SUV to the gaming world. Players can start experiencing the BE 6 on January 16, and it will have exclusive features like custom suits, weapons, and backpacks inspired by the car. To heighten the excitement, Krafton and Mahindra have set up a digital contest for the players, in which the winners will be rewarded with the actual BE

6 eSUV. Here's how you can participate: Complete Missions: Players need to complete the missions from Mahindra BE 6 Exchange Centre in the game for earning "Nitro Wheel" and redeem those for "Mahindra Event Crate." Make a Video: Make a video of the BE 6 in BGMI for 10-30 seconds. Post on Social Media: Upload the video to Instagram or YouTube, tagging both BGMI's and Mahindra Electric's official accounts.

LinkedIn launches AI-powered 'job match' feature to simplify job search, recruitment

New Delhi: LinkedIn on Thursday rolled out a new artificial intelligence-(AI) based feature that can help both employment seekers find the right job and recruiters to get the apt talent. The new LinkedIn feature will help job seekers understand how their skills and experience line up with open positions. "With one click, job seekers get detailed insights into which qualifications they meet and which ones they might be missing so they can decide if they should apply," LinkedIn said, noting that it will help them better focus their search on the opportunities where they're more likely to hear back. "Job match will be rolling out globally in English in the coming weeks with other languages coming soon," said Rohan Rajiv, Product Lead on Jobseeker, Jobs Marketplace AI, Employer Brand – LinkedIn Talent Solutions. The feature comes as the professional networking site's new report noted how job seeking and

recruiting have become challenging.

The report showed that 82 per cent of professionals in India plan to look for a new job this year, yet more than half (55 per cent) said the job search has become harder in the last year. It noted that 49 per cent of job seekers are applying to more jobs than ever but are hearing back less. On the other hand, more than 69 per cent of Indian HR professionals feel it has become more challenging to find qualified talent for a role. About 27 per cent of HR professionals said they spend between 3-5 hours a day reviewing applications and 55 per cent say that less than half the job applications they receive meet all the criteria. "The job market is tough, but it's a reminder for Indians to take a more thoughtful approach to their job search. Building the right skills is key but so is keeping your LinkedIn profile updated and focusing on roles



that truly match with your skills," said Nirajita Banerjee, Career Expert and Sr. Managing Editor for LinkedIn India. "Being more strategic and deliberate can reward you with new opportunities and meaningful career growth even in a challenging job market," she added. Further, LinkedIn noted that the new feature will help premium subscribers see a categorical rating that indicates if they are a high, medium, or low match. They can also

know if they have a higher chance of hearing back from the hirer as a Top Applicant. "Premium subscribers will have the option to tap LinkedIn's AI-powered tools to improve their cover letter and resume," the company said. As professionals look to break through the job search in 2025, LinkedIn can help job seekers stand out, find the right job, and gain insights to explore their job potential.

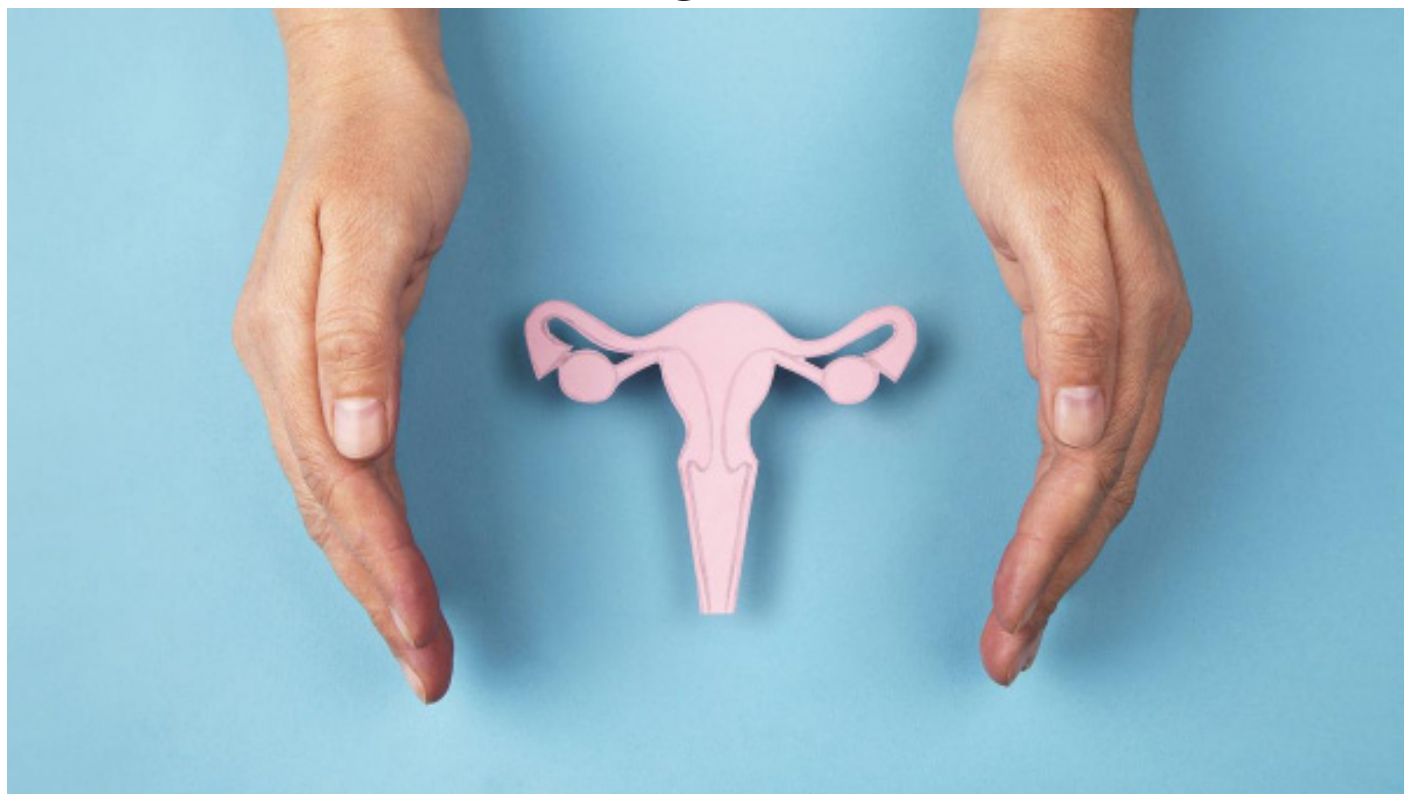
Across India, 50,000 physicians to be trained to eradicate cervical cancer through HPV vaccination

This January, which is marked as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has partnered with the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) in a drive to eliminate cervical cancer from India. The collaboration focuses on widespread vaccination and enhancing physician training. As part of this initiative, a one-year training programme has been introduced, aimed at educating over 50,000 IMA physicians from Tier 2, Tier 3, and Tier 4 cities. These physicians will receive specialised training from FOGSI experts, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to combat cervical cancer effectively. Cervical cancer continues to pose a significant public health challenge in India, with the country accounting for 77,348 deaths annually. India contributes to 25% of the global cervical cancer mortality, highlighting the urgent need for intensified efforts to combat the disease. A key strategy in addressing this issue is increasing the uptake of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, a critical tool in preventing cervical cancer.

This effort, announced at the All India Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (AICOG) conference in Mumbai, seeks to bolster the country's fight against one of its most prevalent preventable cancers. The programme underscores the role of general physicians, gynaecologists, and paediatricians in promoting HPV vaccination and addressing vaccine hesitancy, aligning with the government's vision of a 'Cervical Cancer Mukh Bharat'. The training modules will include evidence-based guidelines and practical strategies for confidently recommending the HPV vaccine. By equipping healthcare professionals with the knowledge and tools to address vaccine hesitancy, this initiative directly supports the Government of India's plan to protect adolescent girls from cervical cancer through HPV vaccination.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer develops in a woman's



cervix (the entrance to the uterus from the vagina). Almost all cervical cancer cases (99%) are linked to infection with high-risk human papillomaviruses (HPV), an extremely common virus transmitted through sexual contact. Although most infections with HPV resolve spontaneously and cause no symptoms, persistent infection can cause cervical cancer in women. Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women. In 2022, an estimated 660,000 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer worldwide and about 350,000 women died from the disease. Effective primary (HPV vaccination) and secondary prevention approaches (screening for, and treating precancerous lesions) will prevent most cervical cancer cases. The programme's development is

supported by the Cancer Foundation of India and the American Cancer Society, ensuring it aligns with global best practices. Priya Ganesh Kumar, National Convener of the HPV Program, highlighted the scientific evidence backing HPV vaccination and its critical role in cancer prevention. "India needs more and more physicians to strongly advocate for HPV vaccination, one of the safest vaccines that prevents cancer. Backed by strong scientific evidence from India and globally, there is no doubt about its effectiveness," said Dr. Priya.

Dilip Bhanushali, national president of IMA, highlighted the significance of empowering physicians with accurate knowledge to bridge awareness gaps and enhance vaccine uptake. "This collaboration is not just a

professional commitment but a personal mission to ensure Indian girls are protected from cervical cancer," he said. Cervical Cancer: a preventable tragedy

Cervical cancer is on its way to elimination globally, and one of the key strategies to eliminate it is to vaccinate 90% young girls (9 to 14 years) against HPV to prevent cervical cancer in their adulthood. The HPV vaccine has been proven to be highly effective in preventing infections that are the primary cause of cervical cancer. FOGSI president Sunita Tandulwadkar underscored the initiative's importance, marking it as a key presidential programme. "HPV vaccination is a powerful tool in eliminating cervical cancer. We will not stop until we achieve our collective goal," she affirmed.

Carter made sure he did not 'ignore' Africa like other American leaders

Jimmy Carter was the first U.S. President to make a state visit to sub-Saharan Africa. He once called helping with Zimbabwe's transition from white rule to independence "our greatest single success." And when he died at 100, his foundation's work in rural Africa had nearly fulfilled his quest to eliminate a disease that afflicted millions, for the first time since the eradication of smallpox. The African continent, a booming region with a population rivaling China's that is set to double by 2050, is where Carter's legacy remains most evident. Until his presidency, U.S. leaders had shown little interest in Africa, even as independence movements swept the region in the 1960s and 1970s. "I think the day of the so-called ugly American is over," Carter said during his warm 1978 reception in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. He said the official state visit swept aside "past aloofness by the United States," and he joked that he and then Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo would go into peanut farming together. Cold War tensions drew Carter's attention to the continent as the U.S. and Soviet Union competed for influence. But Carter also drew on the missionary traditions of his Baptist faith and the racial injustice he witnessed in his homeland in the U.S. South. "For too long our country ignored Africa," Carter told the Democratic National Committee in his first year as President. African leaders soon received invitations to the White House, intrigued by the abrupt interest from the world's most powerful nation and what it could mean for them. Carter observed after his first Africa trip, "There is a common theme that runs through the advice to me of leaders of African nations: 'We want to manage our own affairs. We want to be friends with both of the great superpowers and also with the nations of Europe. We do not want to choose up sides.'"

The theme echoes today as China also jostles with Russia and the U.S. for influence, and access to Africa's raw materials. But neither superpower has had an emissary like Carter, who made human rights central to U.S. foreign policy and made 43 more trips to the continent after his presidency, promoting Carter Center projects that sought to empower Africans to determine their own futures. As President, Carter focused on civil and political rights. He later broadened his efforts to include social and economic rights as the key to public health. "They are the rights of the human by virtue of their humanity. And Carter is the single person in the world that has done the most for advancing this idea," said Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim, a Sudanese legal scholar. Even as a presidential candidate, Carter mused about what he might accomplish, telling Playboy magazine in 1976, "it might be that now I should drop my campaign for President and start a crusade for black-majority rule in South Africa or Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)." Carter welcomed Zimbabwe's independence just four years later, hosting new Prime Minister Robert Mugabe at the White House and quoting the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Relations with Mugabe's government soon soured amid deadly repression and by 1986 Carter led a walkout of dip-

lomats in the capital. In 2008, Carter was barred from Zimbabwe, a first in his travels. He called the country "a basket case, an embarrassment to the region." "Whatever the Zimbabwean leadership may think of him now, Zimbabweans, at least those who were around in the 1970s and 1980s, will always regard him as an icon and a tenacious promoter of democracy," said Eldred Masunungure, a Harare-based political analyst.

Carter also criticised South Africa's government for its treatment of Black citizens under apartheid, at a time when South Africa was "trying to ingratiate itself with influential economies around the world," current President Cyril Ramaphosa said on X after Carter's death. Fighting diseases The think

tank Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter founded in 1982 played a key role in monitoring African elections and brokering ceasefires between warring forces, but fighting disease was the third pillar of The Carter Center's work. "The first time I came here to Cape Town, I almost got in a fight with the president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, because he was refusing to let AIDS be treated," Carter told a local newspaper. "That's the closest I've come to getting into a fist fight with a head of state." Carter often said he was determined to outlive the last guinea worm infecting the human race. Once affecting millions of people, the parasitic disease has nearly been eliminated, with just 14 cases documented in 2023 in a handful of African countries. Carter's quest included arranging a four-month "guinea worm cease-fire" in

Sudan in 1995 so that The Carter Center could reach almost 2,000 endemic villages. "He taught us a lot about having faith," said Makoy Samuel Yibi, who leads the guinea worm eradication programme for South Sudan's Health Ministry and grew up with people who believed the disease was simply their fate. "Even the poor people call these people poor, you see. To have the leader of the free world pay attention and try to uplift them is a touching virtue." Such dedication impressed health officials in Africa over the years. "President Carter worked for all humankind irrespective of race, religion, or status," Ethiopia's former Health Minister, Lia Tadesse, said in a statement. Ethiopia, the continent's second most populous country with over 110 million people, had zero guinea worm cases in 2023.

How AI is redefining death, memory and immortality

Imagine attending a funeral where the person who has died speaks directly to you, answering your questions and sharing memories. This happened at the funeral of Marina Smith, a Holocaust educator who died in 2022. Thanks to an AI technology company called StoryFile, Smith seemed to interact naturally with her family and friends. The system used prerecorded answers combined with artificial intelligence to create a realistic, interactive experience. This wasn't just a video; it was something closer to a real conversation, giving people a new way to feel connected to a loved one after they're gone.

Virtual life after death Technology has already begun to change how people think about life after death. Several technology companies are helping people manage their digital lives after they're gone. For example, Apple, Google and Meta offer tools to allow someone you trust to access your online accounts when you die. Microsoft has patented a system that can take someone's digital data — such as texts, emails and social media posts — and use it to create a chatbot. This chatbot can respond in ways that sound like the original person.

In South Korea, a group of media companies took this idea even further. A documentary called "Meeting You" showed a mother reunited with her daughter through virtual reality. Using advanced digital imaging and voice technology, the mother was able to see and talk to her dead daughter as if she were really there. These examples may seem like science fiction, but they're real tools available today. As AI continues to improve, the possibility of creating digital versions of people after they die feels closer than ever.

Who owns your digital afterlife?

While the idea of a digital afterlife is fascinating, it raises some big questions. For example, who owns your online accounts after you die? This issue is already being discussed in courts and by governments around the world. In the United States, nearly all states have passed laws allowing people to

include digital accounts in their wills. In Germany, courts ruled that Facebook had to give a deceased person's family access to their account, saying that digital accounts should be treated as inheritable property, like a bank account or house. But there are still plenty of challenges. For example, what if a digital clone of you says or does something online that you would never have said or done in real life? Who is responsible for what your AI version does?

When a deepfake of actor Bruce Willis appeared in an ad without his permission, it sparked a debate about how people's digital likenesses can be controlled, or even exploited, for profit. Cost is another issue. While some basic tools for managing digital accounts after death are free, more advanced services can be expensive. For example, creating an AI version of yourself might cost thousands of dollars, meaning that only wealthy people could afford to "live on" digitally. This cost barrier raises important questions about whether digital immortality could create new forms of inequality.

Grieving in a digital world Losing someone is often painful, and in today's world, many people turn to social media to feel connected to those they've lost. Research shows that a significant proportion of people maintain their social media connections with deceased loved ones. But this new way of grieving comes with challenges. Unlike physical memories such as photos or keepsakes that fade over time, digital memories remain fresh and easily accessible. They can even appear unexpectedly in your social media feeds, bringing back emotions when you least expect them. Some psychologists worry that staying connected to someone's digital presence could make it harder for people to move on. This is especially true as AI technology becomes more advanced. Imagine being able to chat with a digital version of a loved one that feels almost real. While this might seem comforting, it could make it even harder for someone to accept their loss and let go. Cultural and religious views on digital afterlife Different cultures and

religions have their own unique perspectives on digital immortality. For example: The Vatican, the center of the Catholic Church, has said that digital legacies should always respect human dignity. In Islamic traditions, scholars are discussing how digital remains fit into religious laws. In Japan, some Buddhist temples are offering digital graveyards where families can preserve and interact with digital traces of their loved ones. These examples show how technology is being shaped by different beliefs about life, death and remembrance. They also highlight the challenges of blending new innovations with long-standing cultural and religious traditions. Planning your digital legacy When you think about the future, you probably imagine what you want to achieve in life, not what will happen to your online accounts when you're gone. But experts say it's important to plan for your digital assets: everything from social media profiles and email accounts to digital photos, online bank accounts and even cryptocurrencies.

Adding digital assets to your will can help you decide how your accounts should be managed after you're gone. You might want to leave instructions about who can access your accounts, what should be deleted and whether you'd like to create a digital version of yourself. You can even decide if your digital self should "die" after a certain amount of time. These are questions that more and more people will need to think about in the future. Here are steps you can take to control your digital afterlife: Decide on a digital legacy. Reflect on whether creating a digital self aligns with your personal, cultural or spiritual beliefs. Discuss your preferences with loved ones.

Inventory and plan for digital assets. Make a list of all digital accounts, content and tools representing your digital self. Decide how these should be managed, preserved or deleted. Choose a digital executor. Appoint a trustworthy, tech-savvy person to oversee your digital assets and carry out your wishes. Clearly communicate your intentions with them.

Is it time for an Indian Banksy? The list of issues in need of public scrutiny is growing by the day but Indian street art continues to play it safe

Some years ago, in the U.S., I remember attending a charity auction organised by the Philadelphia Arts League. Local artists were invited to display and sell their works by placing them on a conveyor belt that moved slowly towards a shredder. If a piece was picked by a buyer, the proceeds went to the children's hospital; if not, it was shredded into the garbage bin. The artist merely watched helplessly. London-based street artist Banksy similarly sold a painting at a Sotheby's auction for £1 million. As soon as the bid was accepted and the hammer came down, the artwork slipped out of its frame and shredded onto the floor. The self-destruction ironically increased the artistic value of the painting which was renamed Love is in the Bin. Whether the shredding was an artistic act done to add theatrical value to the painting, it is hard to say, but in all likelihood it was part of Banksy's plan to ensure that art is not taken too seriously. His bigger works are altogether different. In 2017, in West Bank, Banksy established the Walled Off Hotel, a temporary art exhibit on the tragedy of Palestine. A play on New York's Waldorf chain, the hotel looks right into Israel's West Bank Barrier and proudly boasts the worst view in the world. Part art, part politics, part satire, the artwork has to date attracted over 140,000 visitors.

Without a doubt, Banksy is today one of the most important and prolific street artists of our time. In August 2024, nine animal-related artworks appeared in quick succession on London walls. A gorilla at the entrance to the local zoo, two elephants stretching trunks out of building windows, pigeons on an imaginary wire — the graphic simplicity of much of the work is often undercut by scathing satire. Two surveillance cameras strut about like pigeons on the sidewalk; on a wall in Ukraine, a young boy wrestles a bully to the ground; another is seen painting a sign 'Graffiti is a Crime'. It is hard to qualify Banksy's work — site-specific and done at night — as art or vandalism; but as a critic noted, it is the most essential form of public vandalism. Sadly, such vandalism falls entirely out of the framework of art in India. How well would Banksy do in a country where the primary showcase for public art is a triptych of the Mahabharata in a metro station, or a bronze statue of Shivaji at a roundabout? Would he be allowed to run his painterly fingers on the walls surrounding Churchgate Station in Mumbai, or to deface Delhi's India Gate? Could he in fact write a cryptic message about Indian democracy on the dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan, or wrap the new Parliament building in plastic. Unlikely.

For the past decade, despite increasing popularity and visibility, Indian street art has been a reluctant commentator in the public sphere, even though it originally evolved from the political graffiti of Kolkata. Since then it has progressed to three-dimensional wall paintings, quotations, and many forms of caricature and large-scale imagery, visible in many cities. In Delhi's Lodhi Colony, high-walled arched colonial compounds are filled with a bright colour palette that skillfully disguises the fraying neutrality of the old colonial architecture. At Kala Ghoda in Mumbai, and annual street art festivals in Bengaluru, Kochi and Pune, portraits of famous personalities cut across building facades, trees spread their painted branches around cor-

ner walls; murals even appear on private properties that abut the road. Talented local artists display their work on many varied themes with an unusually rich style of pictorial representation. Banksy's work, by contrast is remarkably spare — relying on the directness of its evocative message. It is unusual in content, display and execution as much as it is a product of its surprising location. As always, the artist remains hidden in plain sight.

Everyone knows him, but publicly, he remains invisible, going about his nightly production without frill or fuss. A pandemic poster, 'Do not wash your hands' — is it social comment or satire?; Girl with Balloon — graphic art or cultural artefact?; surveillance cameras posing as street pigeons — public protest or political comment? The calculated absurdity of the artist's position is baffling, clever, disturbing, always surprising, but rarely self-conscious. When will it appear next, where, and in what medium...? As the Indian art season reopens, our own ill-tempered cities — desolate, bereft of landscape, and falling apart — cry out for such expression. Religion, separatism, censorship, com-



munal rage, growing illiteracy, bureaucratic apathy, political arrogance, business bluster, media manipulation, the list of Indian is-

ssues in need of public scrutiny grows day by day. But an Indian Banksy refuses to step out of the shadows.

What is the Himachal Pradesh scholarship scam, in which the CBI recently arrested an ED official?

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday (January 8) arrested Vishal Deep, an assistant director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), in connection to its probe into the Himachal Pradesh scholarship scam. Deep, who had been absconding since December 22, had allegedly demanded a bribe from the owners of two private educational institutes in Himachal in return for not taking action against them in the multi-crore scam. A special court in Mumbai, however, rejected the CBI's plea for a transit demand for Deep, deemed his arrest illegal, and ordered his release on a bond.

What is the Himachal Pradesh scholarship scam?

A Rs 200 crore scam The Himachal Pradesh scholarship scam, which came to light in 2018, involved the misappropriation of approximately Rs 200 crore under various scholarship schemes intended for post-matric students belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Class (OBC) categories, and other minorities in the state between 2013 and 2017. In a well-planned conspiracy, instead of disbursing the scholarship funds to eligible students, the money was credited to the accounts of bogus or proxy students who were falsely shown as enrolled in various educational institutions in the state. The scam came to light when reports emerged that hundreds of eligible students in the Spiti Valley had not received their scholarship money for five years, even though funds were issued in their names by the Directorate of Higher Education in Shimla. Sources said private institutes used the names, pictures and residential addresses of actual students for opening the bank accounts, but the scholarship money never reached genuine

students. Consequently, in many cases, genuine students dropped out of their studies due to the want of money — even as institutes continued to encash scholarships in their names.

How CBI got involved Although the Police in Shimla had registered an FIR in connection to the scam at a Shimla police station in November 2018, then Chief Minister Jairam Thakur decided to refer the matter to the CBI.

The CBI took over the investigation in 2019, lodged a fresh FIR, and arrested at least 19 people. The agency in March 2024 filed a detailed chargesheet in a special CBI court in Shimla, implicating 20 educational institutes and 105 individuals, including the owners of said institutes, personnel from the Directorate of Higher Education in Shimla, bank employees, and several private individuals. So far, 19 individuals, including employees of the Directorate of Higher Education, Shimla, as well as chairmen, vice-chairmen, directors, employees of educational institutions, and bank officials, have been arrested by the CBI. The investigation into the scholarship scam is being monitored by the Himachal Pradesh High Court in Shimla.

ED launches own investigation After the CBI lodged an FIR in 2019, the ED initiated its own independent investigation under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. In October 2023, the ED attached five immovable properties located in Mohali and Shimla, and balances in 14 bank accounts. These assets, valued at approximately Rs 6.25 crore, belonged to Rajdeep Singh, Krishan Kumar, and others.

The ED investigation revealed that Rajdeep Singh and Krishan Kumar, partners

in M/s ASAMS Education Group & Skill Development Society, fraudulently claimed scholarships under the post-matric scheme for SC/ST/OBC students using false, forged, and fabricated documents.

These claims were verified by another accused, Arvind Rajta, an official in the Directorate of Higher Education, Shimla. In August 2023, the ED arrested Rajdeep Singh, Krishan Kumar (partners in ASAMS Education Group), Hitesh Gandhi (Vice-Chairman of KC Group of Institutions, Pandoga), and Arvind Rajta (then official in the Scholarship Branch of the Directorate of Higher Education). Allegations against ED officials

On December 22, 2024, the CBI in Chandigarh registered two FIRs under Section 7A of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988 (amended in 2018). The FIRs were filed based on complaints from Rajneesh Bansal, owner of Himalayan Group of Professional Institutes in Kala Amb, Sirmour district, and Bhupender Kumar Sharma, chairman of Dev Bhoomi Group of Institution, Chandpur, Una district.

The complainants alleged that the ED had registered cases against them related to the scholarship scam. They further claimed that ED officials in Shimla, including assistant director Vishal Deep and enforcement officers Neeraj and Sunil, had demanded a bribe of approximately Rs 1.15 crore to avoid arrest. The bribe was reportedly demanded through two private individuals, identified as Munawar and Rahim.

Vishal Deep joined the ED on deputation from Central Board of Indirect-Taxes and Customs (CBIC) in November, 2023. The CBI raided Deep's house on December 29 last year, and recovered more than Rs 1 crore in cash from the premises.

River of Life turns lens on the magical brown landscapes of MM Hills

About halfway into the 55-minute-long documentary *Cauvery: River of Life*, a herd of elephants can be seen approaching a stream of water. It's peak summer at MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary. Everything is a shade of brown and the pachyderms have come wandering a very long distance in search of water. They would be elated to see water finally, one might think; But right next to the stream, the matriarch stops. With one of her front legs slightly raised, she starts moving her trunk around. Too many smells in the air. Thanks to an unkind summer, there are a large number of takers for the very little water which has become too murky for the jumbos' liking. The elephants cross the rivulet and keep walking. You feel a sense of disappointment for them, but then the magic happens.

A few steps away from the stream, the matriarch starts kicking the ground, her pillar-like leg digging into the earth. As heavy thumps fall on it, the damp soil gives away and with her trunk, she blows into it. Water starts gushing out. A new source. Unpolluted. The elephants drink and move on after having created a new waterhole for the rest of the species too to drink from.

"There is this wrong notion among people that we should feed animals or wildlife with water and fodder during times of scarcity. We wanted to highlight that ecosystems and wildlife have evolved over millions of years and they know how to survive. If we nearly protect the habitat, that's good enough. They will find ways to survive. That's one of the primary ideas we wanted to get out through this film," says Sanjay Gubbi, known as the leopard man of India. The documentary, where the renowned ecologist for the first time dons the hat of executive producer and scientific advisor, was directed by Sara (Saravana Kumar) and made with the help of the Karnataka Forest Department. A fruit of the labour of several people for four years, it is the first documentary made entirely by an all-Indian crew, Gubbi notes. The movie was screened earlier this week in Bengaluru in the presence of Eshwar Khandre, Minister of Forest, Ecology and Environment, PCCF Subhash Malkhede and Mysuru MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar. These regions, located at the intersection of Western and Eastern ghats and bound by the Cauvery in the north and Palar in the south have a very unique combination habitats

Gubbi and team started their research in MM Hills about 15 years ago. Realising the potential of the landscape for conservation work, they worked with the Karnataka government to notify the MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary as well as to expand the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. These regions, located at the intersection of Western and Eastern ghats and bound by the Cauvery in the north and Palar in the south have a very unique combination habitats. "There are dry deciduous forests and moist deciduous forests in the region. But a large part of it is woodland savannah which is majorly a grassland ecosystem with fewer trees. It has riverine habitats along the river Cauvery and its tributaries, and unique wildlife species such as grizzled giant squirrels, mahseer fish and so on," points out Gubbi who feels that the region has not received enough attention from the public, policymakers or even environ-

mentalists. "In Karnataka, when we think of wildlife, we only think of Nagarhole, Bandipur and, at best, BRT Tiger Reserve. So, an important intention of the movie was to highlight the landscape, its value and the unique behaviour of its wildlife," Gubbi notes.

The movie shows how each species in the region not only deploys unique strategies to see through the dry season but even use it to their advantage at times. Yet another aim of the movie was to counter the prevalent notion that 'brown is bad', or what Gubbi terms as 'nature racism.' The sanctuaries being woodland savannahs go through cycles of green and brown. But the popular imagination in which a healthy forest is thought of as green often gets alarmed on seeing 'brown' forests "When it dries up, it doesn't mean that area is no more beautiful. It has its own ecosystem and species, and many species adapt to the changing cycles situation," Gubbi notes.

From the helicopter trees that spread their seeds in the summer to oters that rear their cubs inside the thicket of holemathi tree roots which appear when the river water recedes, the movie shows how each species in the region not only deploys unique strategies to see through the dry season but even use it to their advantage at times. Gubbi criticised how people try to meddle with natural processes without understanding them deeply.

"We wanted to tell people brown is also beautiful. These are all these natural open ecosystems. People often think they need to go and plant trees in those areas. It's a bit of nature racism. You can plant trees in urban areas, but nature has its own way of regenerating itself," Gubbi says. He also criticises how people try to meddle with natural processes without understanding them deeply. "The intentions may be good, but the understanding is missing. We need not give water to elephants or other animals in the forest. And if some animals die due to scarcity of water, it's a part of the natural process by which populations get controlled."

While Gubbi, who authored 'Leopard Diaries', has been known for his works around the conservation of large carnivores such as tigers and leopards, the documentary, interestingly, features no big cats. It shows the survival strategies of various species from helicopter trees to termites, from skipper frogs to dholes, from herons to tilapias, from sambar to elephants and more, but in no frame appears a tiger or leopard. The captivating shots ensure that their absence is barely felt. Gubbi notes that it was a deliberate decision to prevent the movie from becoming 'yet another tiger story.' "There are tens and hundreds of films on tigers, and it has become an overkill. To get people's attention to nature, the makers of movies often make everything tiger-centric and follow a pattern of storytelling – there would be a tiger, they'd give a name to it; it has three cubs fathered by another tiger... the narrative becomes very monotonous. People forget about the other fauna smaller in size and other habitats. We wanted to make people aware of the smaller parts of the ecosystem which are equally important. "What started off as a plan to do a 10-minute video showing the location, over time, turned into a long-format documentary. In the 'be-



hind the scenes' of the documentary, DoP Sripad Sridhar narrates how the crew had to at times apply elephant dung on themselves and around the hide while shooting so that elephants would not catch the human scent. An alien terrain and animals shy of humans made the process of shooting challenging. Gubbi's knowledge of the landscape, its animals and its natural history came in handy though. "Sara is very ethically conscious while making films. He did not want to set up stage-managed shots. Nor did we want to disturb wildlife. Since it's quite difficult to spot wildlife in the area, having a very deep knowledge of the landscape and its animals helped the filmmakers a lot," says Gubbi, who feels more such collaborative initiatives, where science, natural history, creative process

and forest department come together, should emerge. While the idea is to do more public screenings and show the movie at schools, colleges and universities, an important part of the future plan includes bringing the Kannada version of the movie. "We want to take it to the villages, especially to those in and around Cauvery and MM Hills wilderness, villages in Mysuru District, Chamarajanagar District, Mandya District, Ramanagara District... We would also like to do a Tamil version. We are open to other languages too. It's all done pro bono," says Gubbi. "This collaboration has to continue, and we would be very happy to do out-of-the-box movies like this to build awareness and also to store as an archive for the future generation," he adds.

Breather for online gaming firms as SC stays GST notices worth over Rs 1 lakh cr

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday stayed showcause notices issued by GST authorities worth over Rs 1 lakh crore to online gaming companies and casinos over alleged tax evasion. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said the matters required hearing and all proceedings against the gaming companies should remain stayed in the meantime.

Additional solicitor general N Venkataraman, representing the GST department, said some showcause notices would come to an end in February. The matter was posted on March 18. GST authorities in October 2023 issued showcause notices to online gaming companies for tax evasion.

The government amended the GST law, making it mandatory for overseas online gaming companies to register in India from October 1, 2023 onward. In August, 2023, the GST council clarified 28 per cent GST would be levied on the full value of bets placed on online gaming platforms. Gaming companies moved various high courts against such GST demands, contesting the claims of the revenue authorities. The top court last year allowed a petition of the Centre and transferred to itself pleas, challenging the imposition of 28 per cent GST on e-gaming firms, from



A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said the matters required hearing and all proceedings against the gaming companies should remain stayed in the meantime.

nine high courts for an authoritative pronouncement. Many online gaming firms like Games 24x7, Head Digital Works, Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports had moved the top court challenging the GST imposition. The top court had stayed the Karnataka High Court verdict quashing the GST intimation notice to the tune of Rs 21,000 crore issued to an online gaming firm.