

## Time to brace for another spell of cold wave in Telangana

Hyderabad: Following a brief spell of rise in minimum temperatures by 2 degree Celsius to 4 degree Celsius, a significant temperature drop is expected in the coming days in Hyderabad and in districts. Based on the forecasts made by Indian Meteorological Department (IMD-Hyderabad) and amateur weather enthusiasts tracking weather patterns in Telangana, a powerful cold wave is expected to sweep across Telangana State between January 8 and 10.

Hinting at a similar change in weather, the IMD-Hyderabad in its Tuesday afternoon forecast said "Minimum temperatures are likely to be normal in the next three days. Thereafter, the temperatures are likely to be below normal by 2 degree Celsius to 3 degree Celsius. Mist or hazy conditions are likely to prevail during morning hours over Telangana for the next 5 days," IMD-Hyderabad said. Noted weather enthusiast from Hyderabad, T Balaji, popularly known

as Telangana Weatherman on X (formerly Twitter) said "Northern parts of Telangana will see strong cold wave during January 8 and 11 with minimum temperatures dropping up to 5 degree Celsius. Other parts of Telangana including Hyderabad will see strong cold wave during January 9 and 10 with temperatures dropping up to 7 degree C and 9 degree C". Meanwhile, chilly weather conditions continued to prevail in Hyderabad and districts of Telangana between Monday night and Tuesday evening. Minimum temperatures in parts of Hyderabad hovered between 11.6 degree Celsius and 15 degree Celsius while in districts, the minimum temperatures 9 degree C and 14 degree C. Top 5 cold places in Hyderabad on Tuesday: University of Hyderabad (UoH) campus: 11.6 degree C; Moula Ali/ Uppal: 11.8 degree C; Rajendranagar: 12.2 degree C; BHEL Ramachandrapuram: 12.2 degree C; Macha Bollaram/ Alwal: 13.5 degree C. Top 5 cold places in districts: Kohir



(Sangareddy): 9 degree C; Tiryani (KomaramBheem Asifabad): 9.6 degree C; Sirpur (KomramBheem Asifabad): 9.7 degree C; Moinabad (Rangareddy): 10.3 degree C; Shabad (Rangareddy): 10.3 degree C.

## Tata Motors to bring back iconic 'Sumo' in 2025?



Hyderabad: One cannot simply list the best discontinued Indian SUVs without featuring the iconic Tata Sumo! Such has been the craze surrounding this legendary vehicle. The Sumo, an epitome of ruggedness and versatility, redefined the Indian car market in many ways. Its robust stance, majestic road presence, and never-say-die character enabled owners to clock hundreds of thousands of kilometers on Indian roads in the late '90s and early 2000s. This legacy has earned the Sumo a prominent place in automotive history. Car enthusiasts, even today, are eager to get their hands on one of

these machines—better still if they can park one in their garages. Named after Sumant Moolgaokar, widely regarded as the architect of Tata Motors' success, the Sumo was launched in 1994 and enjoyed a successful run until 2019, when it was discontinued. If reports are to be believed, Tata Motors is planning to re-launch the Sumo this year, equipped with contemporary features to meet the expectations of modern customers. If it happens, this move will add another feather to Tata Motors' illustrious cap, further cementing its reputation for producing safe and stylish vehicles. According to reports, the new Tata Sumo will be packed with advanced

features while staying true to its rugged and reliable reputation. The SUV is expected to maintain its off-road capabilities, enhanced by modern technology. The automaker is also likely to focus heavily on comfortable interiors and advanced safety systems, as

seen in its recent lineup of vehicles. The Sumo is estimated to come with a competitive price tag ranging between ₹10 to ₹15 lakh. This reliable workhorse is expected to attract a wide range of buyers, including off-road enthusiasts and families.

## State governments urged to work towards achieve 75% farm mechanisation by 2047

Hyderabad: India has set the goal to achieve 75 percent mechanisation in agriculture by 2047, said Dr SN Jha, DDG Agricultural Engineering, ICAR. Participating in the 39th annual workshop on Farm Implements and Machinery jointly organised by the PJTAU, ICAR and CIAE Bhopal here on Tuesday, Dr Jha urged the State governments to cooperate fully to achieve this goal.

Dr Jha suggested establishing a separate department for agricultural engineering in State agricultural departments and stressed the importance of using advanced technology to increase productivity and attract youth to the farming sector. He noted that more agricultural engineering colleges were needed to achieve this goal. PJTAU Vice Chancellor, Dr Aldas Janaiah said new



agricultural practices with minimal human intervention would emerge in the coming years. He emphasised the need for more advanced tools and machines in agricultural mechanisation. Dr P Raghuramireddy, Dr J Satyanarayana, Dr KN Agarwal, Dr VM Mayande, Dr CR Mehata, Dr KP Singh, Dr P Rajaiah, and ICAR officials, and others participated.

# Manmohan Singh: An easy boss with some mischievous humour

There is a simple way of knowing what world leaders are like, which is to observe the demeanour of their staff. While sitting down for interviews with leaders, I have often been more struck by how nervous or ill-tempered their secretaries and advisers are than by the leaders themselves who, by and large, want to make a good impression. If those in the background are relaxed and smiling, it indicates that the leader is easy-going. If the staff are on their toes, shifting anxiously as the interview proceeds, it suggests that the leader is imperious. I once sat through a particularly difficult interview where the leader's press adviser sat right behind him, fixing me with a pleading stare, sweating profusely every time I asked a question that the boss may not have liked, and repeatedly trying to cut the interview short.

By that count, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away last week, was an extremely easy boss. I seldom saw anyone in his office in New Delhi's South Block appear worried in his presence. In 2009, when Dr. Singh won a re-election after completing a full term from 2004 to 2009, a first at that time since Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, I was able to test my theory on a number of occasions. He granted me an interview on the campaign trail, to speak about his initiatives with the U.S. and Pakistan, charges of corruption against his government, and plans for the future. The 2009 win was particularly significant as he had come through a heart bypass just months before the election, and in his interview, he was clear that 2009 would be his last election (he didn't contest in 2014). He also gave the television channel I worked for (CNN-IBN) access to the Prime Minister's home to interview his wife, Gursharan Kaur, and their daughters. Later, I also anchored a children's day show where Dr. Singh interacted with 60 children, who asked him largely unscripted questions, such as "why do you wear a blue turban?" and "how do you feel when you are called a weak Prime Minister?" One child was scathing about India's education system, saying "thousands of children are out begging on the streets". Even when I asked Dr. Singh about being called a "puppet Prime Minister" with then-Congress president Sonia Gandhi holding the strings, he answered with unerring politeness, and with no interference from his advisers. While his bearing was serious, Dr. Singh wasn't above some mischievous humour. At a formal lunch he hosted for a visiting dignitary, he was pressed repeatedly about raising India's climate change commitments. The guest proceeded to give him a lecture on all the new technology that the West was adopting, including in electric vehicles. Dr. Singh listened politely, and whispered something to an aide. When the convoy arrived to ferry the guest away, Dr. Singh handed him, not into the white Ambassador cars that were normally used, but into a tiny Reva, the earliest Indian electric vehicle, with a slightly sardonic smile. "Voh gussa pee jaate hain (He drinks up his anger)" Mrs. Kaur said when I asked her why he never seemed to lose his cool. B.B. Sundaresan, Vice-Chancellor, S.L. Khurana, Tamil Nadu Governor and Chancellor of the Madras University, Manmohan Singh, Governor of Reserve bank of India, and C. Aranganayagam, Education Minister, at the convocation of Madras



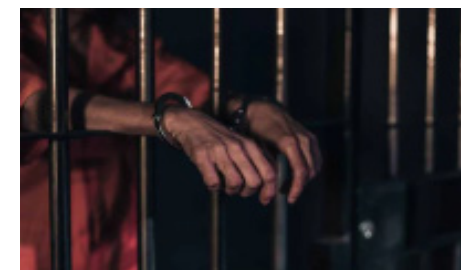
University in Madras on January 10, 1985. Then World Bank President, Lewis T. Preston, with the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, and Union Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, during a luncheon meeting in New Delhi on November 12, 1992. Looking back down the road the economy has travelled for three years under his guidance? Or is Dr. Manmohan Singh, Finance Minister trying to see what the future holds? Picture published on July 18, 1994. Finance Minister Manmohan Singh on the way to Parliament to present the Budget for 1994-95. Finance Minister Manmohan Singh presides over the 34th meeting of the Advisory Board on Customs and Central Excise in New Delhi on September 14, 1994. Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, giving final touches to the general budget for 1995-96 in New Delhi on March 14, 1995. Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao with his Finance Minister Manmohan Singh during an awards ceremony in New Delhi on April 20, 1995.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi with Manmohan Singh, CPI(M) leader Harikishan Singh Surjeet and CPI leader D. Raja after a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on January 13, 2002. Former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh at a meeting with Confederation of Indian Industries members on party and election finance in New Delhi on February 22, 2002. A Congress delegation of Ahmed Patel, Manmohan Singh, Kamal Nath and Arjun Singh are seen at the Prime Minister's house after discussing about the Gujarat situation in New Delhi on February 28, 2002. Then Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and his Home Minister L.K. Advani meeting with then Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Dr. Manmohan Singh, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, at his residence in New Delhi, to discuss security situation in May 19, 2002. Prime Minister-designate Manmohan Singh, accompanied by Congress president Sonia Gandhi shows the letter of support from Congress

and its allies, during a press meet at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on May 19, 2004. Manmohan Singh takes oath as Prime Minister at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on May 22, 2004. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee with the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the swearing-in ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on May 22, 2004. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance Sonia Gandhi during a dinner meeting at her residence in New Delhi on May 23, 2004. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after offering tributes at Shanti Van on the occasion of 40th death anniversary Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi on May 27, 2004. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the birth centenary celebrations of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, in New Delhi on October 2, 2004. Visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Manmohan Singh during a meeting in New Delhi on April 11, 2005, in which the two leaders inked accords to resolve boundary disputes between the two countries. (From left) Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, his wife Gurcharan Kaur and Congress president Sonia Gandhi during the Defence Investiture ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on April 19, 2005. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi meets Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on June 12, 2009. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi during an MoU signing ceremony for the Dhamanganga-Pinjal and Par-Tapi link projects in New Delhi on May 3, 2010. Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during an event to inaugurate the passenger terminal building of the Kartarpur corridor on the Indian side, also known as Integrated Check Post, in Gurdaspur on November 9, 2019. Dr. Singh had a remarkable career, but he didn't make too much of it. In fact, he suppressed any reporter's instinct for emotive copy. His family did the same, telling me in an inter-

view that his favourite food was lauki ka halwa and kadi chawal (he was vegetarian) and that they hadn't been on a holiday in decades. Seeing the disappointment on my face at these slightly colourless responses for the profile I was working on, his daughter said, almost conspiratorially, that I should ask him to sing. She disclosed that he had sung to them as children, and had also composed songs for his grandchildren as lullabies. However, I never got my wish. When I asked him at the children's day event to perform his favourite song, he blushed and quickly turned to his wife, known for her kirtan singing, saying, "She is much better than me".

## Man jailed for attempting to kill daughter, son-in-law in Hyd



Hyderabad: A local court on Friday sentenced a man to 10 years rigorous imprisonment in an attempt to murder case of his daughter and son-in-law which was reported at SR Nagar in 2018. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 1,000 on him. The convict V Manohar Chary (50), a gold smith from Borabanda who bore a grudge against his daughter Madhavi and son-in-law Sandeep as they had an inter-caste marriage against his wish, attacked the couple with a knife in full public view in Erragadda. The couple were grievously injured, but later recovered in hospital.

# Punjab Parties react furiously over reported decision to re-designate the post of “Advisor to Punjab Governor-cum-UT Administrator”

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), January 8 – The reported decision of the central government to re-designate the post of “Advisor to Punjab Governor-cum-UT Administrator” has infuriated the Punjab based political parties except BJP. Despite blaming each other these parties are on the same platform in this matter. Former Deputy Chief Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal senior leader Sardar Sukhbir Singh Badal on Wednesday warned the Union Government against going ahead with the reported decision to re-designate the post of “Advisor to Punjab Governor-cum-UT Administrator” as “Chief Secretary, UT Chandigarh”. Mr Badal was reacting to reports in a section of the press about a notification of the Union Government to this effect.

He said that the latest decision comes with the active collusion of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab and its chief minister Bhagwant Mann. “Mann had formally acknowledged Haryana’s right over Chandigarh by agreeing to the setting up of Haryana Legislative Assembly here. He had the same anti-Punjab stand on Punjab University and the PGI.” said Mr Badal.

The Akali leader said that the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab is a settled issue, committed by two Prime Ministers of the country and endorsed by the Union Cabinet as well as by both Houses of the Parliament following the Memorandum of Settlement on Punjab in July 1985. “Even the issue of the Hindi speaking areas to be transferred to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh stands settled beyond any possible dispute or doubt. Two separate Commissions set up by the Union

Government had categorically ruled in favour of Punjab, saying that there was no Hindi speaking area in the state that could be transferred to Haryana,” said Mr Badal. “So, the only unfinished agenda of the 1966 re-organisation of Punjab was to restore to us our constitutional rights on the river waters as a riparian state, the transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas to Punjab left out of the state and restoration of the state’s control over institutions and authorities like the BBMB, educational and cultural institutions etc. Punjab demands nothing more than its due rights as guaranteed under the Constitution of India.” The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Punjab has also strongly opposed the central government’s decision to appoint a Chief Secretary in Chandigarh in place of an Advisor. The party stated that this decision once again exposes the anti-Punjab attitude of the central government. It is an attempt to weaken Punjab’s claim over Chandigarh.

During a press conference at the Chandigarh party office on Wednesday, senior AAP leader and spokesperson Neel Garg said that the appointment of a Chief Secretary is meant for a state. Chandigarh is not a state, nor does it have a Chief Minister. Then why was there a need for the appointment of a Chief Secretary? He said that the people of Punjab will never tolerate this decision. The central government should reconsider and withdraw the decision. The AAP spokesperson said that Chandigarh belongs to Punjab. It was clearly stated during the division of Punjab and Haryana in 1966 that until Haryana builds its new capi-

tal, Chandigarh will remain a Union Territory, after which it will be handed over to Punjab. In 1970, ₹10 crore was also given to Haryana to build its capital. Several states in India have been divided, and they all established their respective capitals, but Punjab continues to face discrimination. He added that historically, politically, and socially, Chandigarh belongs to Punjab. Chandigarh was built by uprooting 27 villages of Punjab. Therefore, the central government should not make any major decisions without consulting the Punjab government.

He recalled that a few months ago, the central government had proposed to allocate 10 acres of land in Chandigarh for Haryana to build an assembly, further weakening Punjab’s claim over Chandigarh. However, when the people of Punjab and AAP strongly opposed it, the proposal was temporarily shelved. Similarly, Punjab’s rights were violated in the appointments at BBMB (Bhakra Beas Management Board). Due to such actions, Senate elections at Punjab University have also been delayed. Punjab’s water rights are being plundered as well. The Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord on July 24, 1985, also stated that Chandigarh would be given to Punjab, and Punjab’s water would remain with Punjab, but this has not been implemented to date. Garg also criticized Congress and the Akali Dal, stating that from 1966 to 1977, Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India, and Giani Zail Singh was the Chief Minister of Punjab from 1972 to 1977. During that time, if they had wanted, they could have handed over Chandigarh to Punjab. Similarly, from 1980 to 1984, Indira

Gandhi was again the Prime Minister, and Darbara Singh was the Congress Chief Minister of Punjab, but even then, Congress did not pay attention to this issue. From 1992 to 1995, Beant Singh’s government was in Punjab, and Narasimha Rao’s government was in power at the centre, but nothing was done then either. Even after the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord, nothing could be achieved. In 1977, Parkash Singh Badal became the Chief Minister of Punjab and served multiple terms.

In 2002, he was the Chief Minister when Vajpayee was the Prime Minister, and they were allies. Despite having a good friendship with Vajpayee, Badal did not take any steps for Chandigarh. Garg appealed to all political parties to unite on this issue and stated that we must fight resolutely for Punjab’s rights. State body of the congress party has also criticized the central government and stated it a deliberate action to weaken Punjab’s authority. Opposing the decision of the central government, PPCC Chief Amarinder Singh Raja Warring in a tweet, stated, “We @INCPunjab strongly oppose the Central Government’s decision to re-designate the Chandigarh Administrator’s Advisor as Chief Secretary.”

This move is a clear attempt to undermine Punjab’s rightful claim over Chandigarh and raises serious concerns about the officer’s affiliation with the Punjab cadre. Taking such a decision without consulting Punjab is unacceptable & reflects a disregard for the state’s interests. This deliberate action appears to weaken Punjab’s authority.”

## Let us build a corruption-free society Renowned music director RP Patnaik



Hyderabad: Renowned music director and advisor of the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization, RP Patnaik, emphasized the need for the organization to work towards building a corruption-free society. On Thursday, he unveiled the Youth for Anti-Corruption calendar. Speaking on the occasion, he

urged the youth to step forward for the cause of a corruption-free society and stressed that every individual has a responsibility to strive for a better society.

He pointed out the importance of creating awareness about eliminating corruption from the village level to urban areas. He

stated that a better society can only be achieved through a questioning attitude. He praised the innovative programs undertaken by the Youth for Anti-Corruption organization as thought-provoking initiatives for social change.

The calendar launch event was at-

tended by Rajendra Palnati (Youth for Anti-Corruption), advisors Ashok Kumar, women’s team members Dr. Sravanthi, Dr. Snigdha, and Geetha Reddy, Hyderabad president Konne Devender, core committee members Komati Ramesh Babu, Dhyavanapalli Rakesh, and others.

# Beat Rising Winter Energy Bills with 5 Energy-Efficient Bajaj Water Heaters

Hyderabad :As winter sets in, energy bills tend to soar, especially with the increased need for hot water for your showers. But high costs don't have to dampen your season! Bajaj brings you a range of energy-efficient water heaters, crafted to deliver cozy warmth without straining your wallet. Designed with care, Bajaj water heaters ensure consistent comfort while helping you save on energy, making your winters both warm and budget-friendly. Whether you're preparing for a long, hot shower or just washing up; these models are built to meet diverse needs without compromising on durability, or affordability. Here are best water heaters models to consider this season:

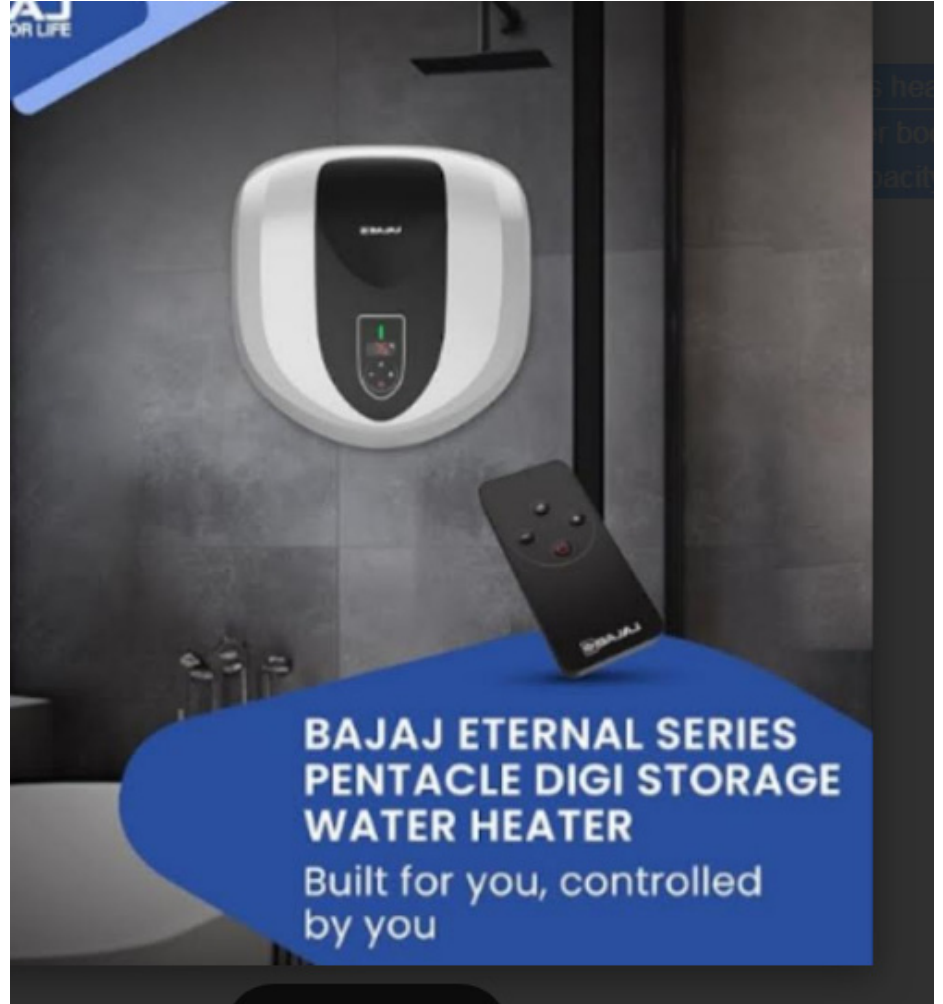
**Bajaj Eternal Series Pentacle Digi 15L: Smart Water Heater with Digital Precision:**

The Pentacle Digi isn't just smart on the outside with its digital temperature control - it's built smart on the inside too. Its key features include DuraAce™ tank, fortified with marine-grade glass-line coating, stands strong against corrosion, ensuring years of reliable performance. The DuraCoat™ non-stick heating element efficiently heats water while resisting scale buildup, maximizing energy savings. Precise temperature control is further enhanced by the DuraNte™ Thermostat and easy-to-use remote control, letting you set your perfect comfort level while minimizing energy wastage. It's AgeGuard™ technology prevents color fading of outer body. It is backed by a 4-year product warranty & 6 years element warranty. Apart from the durable features, it has 8 smart modes which enables users to set geyser as per their need. The Pentacle Digi is smart water heater that offers savings and lasting performance. It is available in 2 ca-

capacity options 15L and 25L. Price starts at INR 19,210/-

**Bajaj Armour Series Contempo: Faster Heating in a Stylish Package:** The Bajaj Contempo is a stylish and efficient water heater packed with features for lasting performance and safety. Inside, it's has the DuraAce™ Tank with marine-grade glass-line coating providing excellent protection against corrosion and backed by a 10-year warranty and the DuraCoat™ non-stick heating element which resists scale build up and comes with a 6-year warranty. Its 3 kW power delivers 33% faster heating, while the shock-resistant and rust-proof Engineering thermoplastic body adds to its longevity and modern aesthetic. Safety is paramount with features like Child safety mode, Bajaj Voltage Pro™ and the DuraNte™ Thermostat for reliable and safe operation. It's AgeGuard™ technology prevent color fading of outer body. The Contempo offers a complete package of style, efficiency, and safety for a superior hot water experience. It is available in 4 capacity options, 6L, 10L, 15L and 25L. Price starts at INR 14,500/-

**Bajaj Endure Series Gracio Storage Water Heater: Stylish & Efficient Water Heater:** This Bajaj Gracio water heater features impressive Bajaj DuraAce™ Tank with marine-grade glass-line coating, providing excellent protection against corrosion and backed by a 10-year warranty. Impressive. Efficient heating is ensured by the Bajaj DuraCoat™ Non-Stick Heating Element, which resists scale buildup and comes with a 6-year warranty. The reliable Bajaj DuraNte™ Thermostat ensures consistent performance offering 4 years of reliability and insulated tank minimizes heat loss, keeping your water hot for longer adding to the en-



ergy saving,. It's Bajaj AgeGuard™ technology prevent color fading of outer body. The Gracio proves that you can enjoy efficient

and durable hot water which add up to the bathroom decor. It is available in 4 capacity options, 6L, 10L, 15L and 25L. Price starts from INR 14,090/-

## Innovative offers on the occasion of Sankranti in Big 'C'

Big 'C', the No.1 mobile retail company in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states... has announced attractive offers on the occasion of Sankranti. Company Founder & C.M.D. Shri M. Balu Chowdary revealed the details of the offers. On the occasion of this Sankranti festival, Big C is offering free mobile protection worth up to Rs.10,000, and a smart watch worth Rs.5,999 or Air Buds worth Rs.1,799 on every mobile purchase. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the newly launched OPPO Reno 13 mobiles are available in all Big C showrooms. On purchase of Reno 13 mobiles, we are offering a Swiss military speaker worth Rs.7990 along with one year mobile protection and instant cashback up to Rs.5000.

Along with the above offers, the below mentioned offers will also be provided on the purchase of mobiles.

- 1) Up to Rs.15,000 instant cashback on mobile purchase.
- 2) upto 51% Discount on Branded Ac-

cessories

3) He said that they are also offering the attractive facility of buying a mobile without any interest and down payment.

4) Instant discount upto Rs.5,000 on purchase of iPhone mobile

5) Upto 10% cashback on purchase of Vivo & Oppo mobiles

6) Instant discount of upto Rs.3,000 on purchase of Oneplus & Realme mobiles

7) Instant discount of upto Rs.5,000 on purchase of MI Mobiles

Apart from that, they are also providing an attractive facility of buying mobile, smart TV, laptop and air conditioner without any interest or down payment on the ATM card.

He added that Big 'C' is in the habit of announcing special offers to celebrate every festival and special occasion and this Sankranti is also offering attractive offers. He wished all the public to avail these offers. M. Balu Chowdary Founder & C.M.D



# Sharp fall in Madrasa and unrecognised school enrolments

The number of students enrolled in Indian schools in 2023-24 declined by 1.22 crore compared with 2018-19, show data. Officials argue that Aadhaar numbers and unique student IDs have been used to identify beneficiaries of educational schemes and, in the process, duplicate entries and ghost entries have been weeded out. However, Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE) data show that this new method of data collection has had a disproportionate impact on Madrasas — both recognised and unrecognised — and other unrecognised schools. Unrecognised schools don't have a license to function and don't meet many of the criteria set by the government in terms of infrastructure, class size, etc. There was a sharp drop in school enrolments among recognised Madrasa schools even as the number of recognised Madrasas and the number of teachers working in them increased.

Chart 1 shows the absolute number of students enrolled in government, government-aided, private, and other schools in 2018-19 and 2023-24. Other schools include unrecognised schools and Madrasas (recognised and unrecognised). Student enrolments dropped from 13.1 crore to 12.7 crore in government schools, 2.7 crore to 2.5 crore in government-aided schools, 9.2 crore to 9 crore in private schools, and 90 lakh to 49 lakh in other schools. Chart 2 shows the absolute drop in the number of students enrolled in 2023-24 compared with 2018-19 across school types. Enrolments dropped by 36 lakh in government schools, 24 lakh in government-aided schools, 21 lakh in private schools, and more than 40 lakh in other schools.

When read together, Charts 1 and 2 show that the number of students in other schools only formed around 2% to 4% of the total enrolments in both the years (Chart 1),



but formed over 33% of the decline in total enrolments (Chart 2). Calculating the decline in enrolments in percentage terms brings out the disparity further. Chart 3 shows the percentage drop in student enrolments in 2023-24 compared with 2018-19 across school types. Enrolments declined by 2.8% in government schools, 8.7% in government-aided schools, 2.3% in private schools and 44.8% in other schools. Chart 4 shows a break-up of student enrolments in other schools — separately for recognised Madrasas,

unrecognised Madrasas, and other unrecognised schools — for 2023-24 and 2018-19. Enrolments dropped from 30 lakh to 25 lakh (16% decline) in recognised Madrasas, 6.1 lakh to 78,283 (87% decline) in unrecognised Madrasas, and 53 lakh to 23.5 lakh (56% decline) in other unrecognised schools. In unrecognised Madrasas and other unrecognised schools, the number of schools and teachers has sharply reduced, which also explains the drop in students in them. However, the number of recognised

Madrasa schools have increased by 7%, and the number of teachers in those schools have risen by 13% even though the student share has decreased by 16%. So, there has been a disproportionate decrease in enrolments in Madrasas and unrecognised schools. Is this because duplicate entries and ghost entries were removed or was there an actual drop in students? It is important to explore this further especially since recognised Madrasas and the number of teachers working in them has increased despite a drop in student enrolments.

## Government report reveals stark infrastructure gap in Indian schools

Of the over 14.71 lakh schools in India, up to 1.52 lakh schools have no functional electricity, according to the latest data released by the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) maintained by the Ministry of Education. Of the 14.71 lakh schools, 10.17 lakh schools are government-run, of which 9.12 lakh schools have functional electricity, while 1.52 lakh schools do not. Apart from the government-run schools, there are 4.54 lakh schools are government-aided, private and unaided, and others, of which 4.07 lakh schools have functional electricity. Of the total schools, 14.47 lakh schools have drinking water facilities, but in only 14.11 lakh schools is the drinking water facility functional. Of the 10.17 lakh government schools, functional drinking water facility is available in 9.78 lakh schools. Of the 4.46 lakh government-aided, private and other schools, 4.33 lakh have functional drinking water. With regard to toilets, of the 14.71 lakh schools, 14.50 lakh schools have toilet facilities, but only 14.04 lakh toilets are

functional. The report says 67,000 schools operate without functional toilets, of which a majority (46,000) are government schools operating without functional toilets. The condition is much worse when it comes to providing disabled-friendly facilities. Of 10.17 lakh government schools, only 3.37 lakh schools have disabled-friendly toilets, which accounts for 33.2% of schools. However, only 30.6% of them are functional. The condition is slightly better in government-aided schools, with 35,640 (44.4%) of 80,313 schools having disabled-friendly toilets.

Of the 14.71 lakh schools, 11.34 lakh schools (77%) have ramps, and even an even lesser number of schools, 7.69 lakh (52.3%), have ramps with hand rails. When it comes to having functional computers for pedagogical purposes, one in two schools have no access to computers for teaching and learning. Of the 14.71 lakh schools, only 7.48 lakh schools (50%) have access to computers for teaching and learning. Also, 7.92



lakh schools have the Internet, while 8.41 lakh schools have computer facilities. In the sub-category of government schools, of 10.17 lakh schools govt, only 4.42 lakh

(43.5%) schools have computers functional for pedagogical purposes. Whereas in private unaided schools, of 3.31 lakh schools, up to 2.34 lakh (70.9%) schools have this facility.

# The tick-tock of the Pawar family clock

“Saheb is definitely hurt that importance was given to personal political ambitions over the family,” says Vitthal Maniar, 86, sitting in his office in a crowded lane of Nana Peth in Maharashtra’s Pune. Saheb is Maniar’s college friend and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar, who turned 84 on December 12, 2024. Maniar had fought and lost a college election against Sharad, but gained a lifelong friend. The families are so close that Ajit Pawar, 65, Sharad’s nephew, calls him Kaka (father’s brother). Maniar is referring to the “personal political ambitions” of Ajit, who is now holding the post of Deputy Chief Minister for the sixth time. In mid-2023, Ajit had split from the centrist Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), co-founded by Sharad in 1999, taking along with him a majority of its MLAs. He then joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, partners in the ruling Mahayuti alliance.

Since its inception, the NCP has never formed a government on its own, though it has almost always been part of the ruling alliance in the State. It has been one of the strongest regional forces, an umbrella under which sugar barons and regional satraps from resource-rich western Maharashtra gather. Sharad has been Chief Minister four times and his family has businesses in sugar, other agro-industries, realty, and the media. Today, the Pawar empire is in flux, with six members of the family in active politics and the third generation keen to prove its mettle. While the ongoing tussle between uncle and nephew has drawn national attention, at the heart of the family disruption is the question of who will inherit Sharad’s six-decade-old political legacy. At the polls

Ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha poll, Ajit’s faction was given the NCP’s name and ‘clock’ symbol. Sharad’s group, NCP (SP), was treated as a faction and allotted the symbol of ‘a man blowing a trumpet’ (tutari vajavnara maanus in Marathi). While the matter is sub judice, it was a blow to the patriarch. Days after his trusted aides left him, reporters asked Sharad who was with him. He promptly raised his own hand and smiled. In the Assembly election to 288 seats in November 2024, the NCP won 41 out of the 56 seats it contested, while the NCP (SP) secured only 10 out of the 86 seats it contested. For the first time in his political career, Sharad, who has never lost an election he has contested, did not address mediapersons the day the results were declared. The next day, he said at a press conference that the results were “unexpected”, but he would not resign from politics. “That is a call that my colleagues and I will take. There was clear polarisation of votes in this election,” he said in Karad, where he goes every year to pay tribute to his political mentor and the first Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Yashwantrao Chavan, on his death anniversary. “People say the use of money during this election was unprecedented,” he said. “Though he will not fight any polls, that man can never retire from politics. He eats, drinks, and breathes politics. He loves going among people. It works as a tonic for him,” his daughter Supriya Sule, 55, four-time MP from Baramati, had said at The Hindu’s ‘Poll Arena’, a political conclave held days before the Assembly election, vouching for her father’s love for public life.

Pawar power Sharad was one of 10 children and born in Baramati, which became



his political and business stronghold. Here, among sugarcane farmers, wheat growers, and grape exporters, amid lush green fields of village landscapes and city pockets, he established sugar cooperatives, research and educational institutes, and cultural centres. Today, Baramati’s Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation has over 400 companies. Here, people talk fondly of the octogenarian, but there is a hushed discussion about Ajit’s work. “The people of the State have decided — Tai (Sule) for the Centre and Dada (Ajit) for the State,” says a person on condition of anonymity. “Sharad flexed his muscles against an established politician in the 1960s, an unthinkable act then,” says Satish Khomne, 72, who has been the NCP (SP) chief’s political supporter since the 1970s. “He brought foreign associations for horticulture development and irrigation; he brought companies for investment. He showed Baramati what development meant. He was the one who brought in Ajit. But we know even today, Saheb has an eye on Baramati,” he says. A former Union Agriculture Minister and Defence Minister, and a leader with multi-party reach, Sharad is a pillar of the INDIA bloc, a grouping of 30-odd parties that was formed to fight the BJP in the Lok Sabha election. His supporters say he holds the power to bring together unlikely leaders. “His friendships with political opponents and adversaries are legendary.... His networking skills are formidable and those skills are much needed when politics takes on a bitter partisan flavour, as it does every now and then,” Congress leader Sonia Gandhi had said of Sharad during his 75th birthday celebrations in 2015. Sharad institutionalised women’s reservation in local self-government bodies in Maharashtra. It was during his tenure as Defence Minister that women were inducted into non-medical roles in the Army. However, he has also been associated with several alleged scams and controversies, both as a Minister and cricketer body head. Congress leader K.V. Thomas had in 2014 called him a “backstabber” for revolting against Sonia in 1999. So had Shiv Sena leader Anant Geete

in 2021. It was only poetic justice, say critics, that his own nephew betrayed him to join hands with the BJP. Many likened Ajit’s move to his uncle’s in 1978, when Sharad rebelled and toppled Vasantdada Patil’s government to become the youngest Chief Minister at 38 years. In 2019, when Ajit joined hands with the BJP for the first time, Shalini Patil, the wife of Vasantdada, had said, “The way Sharad behaved with Vasanttrao, he must have got a similar experience from his family when Ajit aligned with the BJP.” NCP leaders and cousins Supriya Sule and Ajit Pawar in Mumbai, months before the party split in 2023. NCP leaders and cousins Supriya Sule and Ajit Pawar in Mumbai, months before the party split in 2023. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

A matter of succession in the Lok Sabha poll, Ajit’s wife, Sunetra Pawar, contested against his cousin Sule in Baramati. Shrinivas Pawar, Ajit’s elder brother, who heads the Sharayu Group of companies in Mumbai, which deals in agribusiness, automobile dealerships, security solutions, among others, led the public expression of the family’s displeasure. During the election campaigning, Ajit appealed to Baramati’s electors to vote for a ‘Pawar’, in an obvious reference against his cousin ‘Sule’ and in favour of his wife. Sharad had hit back saying, “There is nothing wrong in seeking votes for Pawar. There is the original Pawar and the one coming from outside.” Finally, Sule won. “I do feel bad that I have to contest against a family member. Whatever happens, the fact is that we were a family, we are a family, and we will continue to be a family,” Sunetra had said. During the election, the other Pawars had campaigned for Sule. She maintained that this was a battle of ideologies and she would contest on the basis of her work for the constituency. Ajit later termed his wife contesting against Sule a “mistake” and appealed to Sharad not to field a family member against him as a candidate in Baramati in the Assembly election. Sharad did just that and fielded Yugendra Pawar, 32, Shrinivas’s son, who lost by over 1 lakh votes to his uncle. Ajit was back as MLA for the eighth time. During the Assembly election, the rest of the family actively campaigned

against Ajit, with Sharad’s politically reclusive wife Pratibha, referred to as Kaki, also hitting the ground in favour of Yugendra. In a lasting image, Pratibha, along with Sule’s daughter, Revati, in her 20s, was seen standing in front of a banner that read: “Mhatara jithe jaatay, changbhala hotay (Wherever the old man goes, it changes the winds).” During his election campaign, Yugendra had said of his uncle Ajit: “Today, he has left Pawar Saheb, his ideology, and has taken the party with him. But people love Pawar Saheb.” The ascent of Ajit Things were different even during Deepavali, which at least 50 members of the Pawar clan usually celebrate together in Baramati. This time, the festival came during peak election campaigning. For the first time, the family had two separate celebrations in Baramati, one at Govindbaug, where Sharad and most of the family assembled; the other at Katewadi, where Ajit celebrated and met people at a ‘Janata darbar’. A few months before the Lok Sabha election, Ajit while addressing NCP office-bearers in Mumbai said old people should sit at home and let the next generation handle affairs. Within months, Sharad’s NCP (SP) had contested 10 seats in the Lok Sabha poll and won eight. Fortunes were reversed in the Assembly election, though the NCP (SP)’s vote share was larger than the NCP’s. Naresh Arora, who heads Design Boxed, a poll campaign management company, says it was a challenge managing Ajit’s image. “One perception was that he was arrogant, rude. That needed to be changed. He is actually a very jovial person, but never connected with people that way. So, we designed a campaign around this,” he says. The party organised the Jan Samman Yatra, which boosted the morale of NCP workers and put Ajit in the midst of his electorate. “He was always seen as someone who sat in the Mantralaya (State Secretariat) and got work done. The yatra got him to mix with people. People liked that he cracked jokes and smiled. This was different from the image of the person who worked from early morning, got agitated with officials who didn’t deliver, and rebuked them in public,” says Arora.

# Understanding Human Metapneumovirus, as cases emerge from China | Explained

Last week, China's diseases control authority said that it was piloting a monitoring system for pneumonia of unknown origin, with cases of some respiratory diseases expected to rise through the winter. According to a Reuters report, this move to establish a dedicated system was aimed at helping authorities set up protocols to handle unknown pathogens. The country was already witnessing an upward trend in overall infections as of mid-December, and was expecting to see more respiratory infections in the winter and spring. One of the pathogens that was detected, and which showed an upward trend in the northern provinces especially among people under the age of 14, was human metapneumovirus, as per the report. Subsequently, viral posts showcasing crowds of people in what looked like Chinese hospitals began doing the rounds on social media along with statements about China allegedly declaring an emergency over this virus. However, so far, there has been no such official declaration.

What is human metapneumovirus?

Human metapneumovirus (HMPV) is a respiratory virus that causes mild infections similar to that caused by a common cold. First identified by scientists in 2001, the virus belongs to the Pneumoviridae family, of which respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), measles and mumps are also members. HMPV can cause both upper and lower respiratory tract infections and is generally seen in winter and early spring. Children, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems are more susceptible to the infection and to developing complications from it.

What are the signs and symptoms of HMPV?

Symptoms can resemble those caused by a common cold. They include a cough, runny or blocked nose, sore throat, fever and wheezing. The estimated incubation period is three to six days. In most people, the illness goes away on its own within a few days, with rest and supportive care at home. In a few people however, complications such as bronchitis or pneumonia may arise, requiring medical care.

How does HMPV spread?

HMPV spreads through contact with an infected person or touching objects that have the virus on them. This can be through: secretions from coughs, sneezes; close contact with someone who has the infection such as shaking hands, hugging; touching a doorknob or a phone or a keyboard that may be contaminated with the virus and then touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

How is HMPV treated?

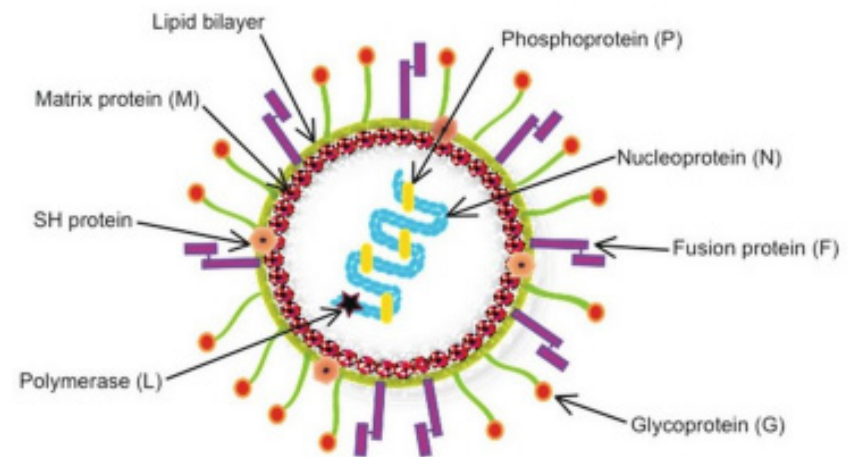
There is no vaccine and there is no specific antiviral to treat HMPV. Most people require over-the-counter medications to relieve fever and pain, possibly with a decongestant. Antibiotics will not work for HMPV.

Can HMPV be prevented?

Yes, as with most other respiratory viruses, the best way to protect yourself from illness is to wash your hands frequently with soap and water, avoid close contact with infected persons, avoid touching your face, nose, eyes and mouth and wear a mask if you think you may be infected, so that you

can prevent transmitting it to others. People with lung conditions such as asthma or COPD should be extra cautious and protect themselves from infection.

Health Ministry monitoring situation In light of the reports from China, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) under the Union Health Ministry is closely monitoring respiratory and seasonal influenza cases in the country, and is in touch with international agencies, according to official sources. "We will continue to monitor the situation closely, validate information and update accordingly," official sources said. "The data from December 16-22, indicates a recent rise in acute respiratory infections, including seasonal influenza, rhinovirus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and human metapneumovirus (HMPV); however, the overall scale and intensity of respiratory infectious diseases in China this year is lower



than last year. A seasonal increase in respiratory pathogens is expected in the northern

hemisphere, particularly during the winter period," sources said.

## Towards freer trade through AITIGA

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) was signed and entered into force on January 1, 2010. The AITIGA (also known as ASEAN-India FTA) was a culmination of a series of efforts by both ASEAN member-States and India to ameliorate their ties. After completing a decade of the AITIGA in 2019, ASEAN and India mutually decided to review the agreement through consultations. While attending the 20th ASEAN-India Summit in 2022 at Jakarta, the Indian Prime Minister emphasised the need to complete the AITIGA in a time-bound manner. At the same Summit, the scope of the review was agreed upon. Both parties have decided to make the agreement more effective, user-friendly, simple, and trade-facilitative, while aligning it with current global trading practices as well as supporting sustainable inclusive growth. A detailed action plan for the review was also finalised and the deadline of 2025 was set for completing the process. An early conclusion of the review would significantly contribute to the trade relations.

ASEAN-India trade took over a decade to double the value of trade. The bilateral trade was \$ 56 billion in 2010-11, when the FTA came into effect, became \$ 132 billion in 2022-23 and then declined to \$ 121 billion in 2023-24. During this period, the AITIGA saw tariff liberalisation of over 90% of products traded between them and tariffs on over 5,000 product lines eliminated by 2023. While India's exports to ASEAN increased from \$ 25.63 billion in 2010-11 to \$ 41.21 billion in 2023-24, its imports increased from \$ 30.61 billion to \$ 79.66 billion in the same period. Especially in the case of ASEAN, the trade balance has deteriorated after the implementation of the FTA. With Vietnam, the surplus in trade balance in 2010 changed to a deficit in 2020, standing at \$ 1068.6 million. After the implementation of the ASEAN-India FTA, a surplus in trade balance has been recorded with Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Myanmar. This also indicates that the ASEAN has gained a trade surplus on the current account, whereas India has witnessed a trade deficit. Increasing asym-

metry in the balance of trade for India has raised concerns. Therefore, it is worth reviewing the AITIGA and the corresponding trade linkages. A popular question always haunts the ASEAN-India trade: why the trade between them is always remained a slow starter? The answer is India's bad luck and timing. Generally speaking, series of global headwinds slowed down the ASEAN-India trade soon after India implemented the AITIGA. Both of their trade with the world had faced three major shocks since 2010-11: the Covid-19-induced pandemic. These all primarily triggered the plunge of trade and resulted in slowing down the economic growth in India as well as ASEAN. India and ASEAN also witnessed a V-shaped rise in their respective global trade post-pandemic. What is the neat gain from the first phase of AITIGA? Quality of trade has picked up the demand. For example, trade in non-oil and/or non-mineral better represents the quality of trade integration. India's non-oil and non-mineral export to ASEAN continued to rise. In 2010, the export of non-oil and non-mineral was \$ 15.74 billion (accounting for 68.5% of India's total exports to ASEAN), which became \$ 30.49 billion in 2021 (accounting for 75% of India's total exports to ASEAN). In case of imports, India's total imports of non-oil and non-mineral from ASEAN were valued at \$ 21.36 billion in 2010, accounting for 72.1% cent of the total imports from ASEAN, which later increased to \$ 53.38 billion in 2021, accounting for 82.3% of the total imports from ASEAN. What follows is that non-oil and non-mineral products have dominated India's imports from ASEAN in post-FTA phase, which include textiles, electronic goods, chemicals, and machinery. These products are vital to India's manufacturing and services sectors, and the significant increase in their imports in 2021 suggests the growing demand for these products in India. India's trade composition with ASEAN has also shifted from agricultural raw materials and food to more manufactured goods. The export of manufactured goods has increased from 35.29% in 2010 to 39.53% in 2020, whereas its imports have climbed from 32.12% in 2010 to

38.57% in 2020. This shift in export composition is driven by transport equipment, chemicals and textiles. Interestingly, imports of transport equipment from ASEAN are increasing at a more increasing rate than their exports. Declining shares of exports and imports of minerals, mineral fuels and oils in the post-FTA indicate that trade between ASEAN and India has diversified into non-oil non-mineral sectors, thereby suggesting higher value addition of the real economies, which is one of the prime objectives of the AITIGA. Contrary to popular belief, there has been an increasing trade in items in the exclusion list. Therefore, the review of the FTA should also involve an assessment of the exclusion list products after a decade, which may have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the FTA in promoting trade. In a total of 12,169 tariff lines between ASEAN and India, around 75% of the tariff lines are governed by the normal track commitments. Among the 1297 tariff lines put under the exclusion list by India, a prominent proportion of the commodities in the agricultural sector are excluded for any reduction or elimination in tariffs. Around 17% of the tariff lines in the exclusion list tend to come from tariff lines in the textile and apparel industry. The share of India's exports to ASEAN in its total exports has only climbed marginally. There has been a considerable change in the number of tariff lines between ASEAN and India post the signing of the FTA. ASEAN countries have varying numbers of products in their exclusion lists, ranging from 150 to 2,057. Among the ASEAN countries, Vietnam has the highest number of products in its exclusion list (2,057 products), followed by Myanmar (1,613 products). With Vietnam, the number of tariff lines in imports has increased from 1,306 to 1,963. Ideally, items placed in the exclusion list must not see an increase in their imports as they are kept out of the ambit of any tariff reduction/elimination. However, in the case of India's imports from ASEAN, an opposite traction could be seen. In a substantial number of exclusion list items, the import has gone up after the implementation of the AIFTA. supply chains. Concluding the negotiation of the

# India must revisit the animal welfare framework at its zoos

The move by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) to suspend the membership of the Delhi's National Zoological Park (originally the Delhi zoo) has sparked much debate on the animal welfare framework in Indian zoos. On October 7, WAZA notified suspension of the Delhi zoo's WAZA membership, effective from October 8, 2024, with the possibility of cancellation if the conditions laid down by WAZA in the said notification are not fulfilled by the zoo by April 7, 2025. The decision has evoked shock but also relief as the Delhi zoo's 29-year-old African male elephant, Shankar, which was given to India as a diplomatic gift by Zimbabwe in 1998, has been consistently neglected. Shankar had a female companion which passed away in 2005 and was never replaced. The male elephant exhibits maladaptive behaviour. This situation is problematic as elephants are extremely social animals forming complex relationships. WAZA was made aware of the elephant's plight through numerous complaints. A team from WAZA also visited the zoo on March 18, 2024, which showed the elephant to be in a poor physical and mental state. It was found to be tethered by a chain in a solitary enclosure without the normal stimulants or the immersive environment found in the wild which keep elephants content and healthy.

The WAZA team thereafter urged the Delhi zoo to take note of the elephant's plight and act within the next 15 days to end the animal's suffering in line with WAZA's Animal Welfare Strategy which specifies the 'Five Domains Animal Welfare Model'. Nothing substantial was ever done, compelling WAZA to indefinitely suspend the Delhi zoo's WAZA membership. But this suspension has been made subject to two conditions: either get the animal relocated or address its health concerns by April 7, 2025. The deplorable condition of the elephant goes against every ideal of WAZA carved out through its science-based knowledge in animal care and welfare, environmental education and global conservation, since its inception in 1935, with the aim of guiding zoos and aquariums across the world and ensuring animal welfare and conservation. Plight of other elephants

Delhi zoo also has two Asian elephants — a male and a female. It is hard to ignore the mental distress that these Asian elephants exhibit through their incessant 'head-bobbing', which is a classic sign of mental distress in elephants. The elephants are also in an enclosure with insufficient area. It is agonising to see them in distress. Studies suggest that on average, a wild elephant, under non-extreme environmental conditions, walks for up to 10 kilometres a day. They also forage in a forest for up to 19 hours a day during which they undertake a range of behaviours that are regarded as essential for their survival. It appears that it was the poor nutrition, unsuitable environment and poor physical health of Shankar which compelled WAZA to act against the Delhi zoo. Notably, these are also problems which affect the two Asian elephants causing them to lose motivation to undertake survival-related behaviours. The situation at the Delhi zoo is an outright violation of global standards in the maintenance of zoos and its animals



in other countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland. The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), in its 'Management Guidelines for the Welfare of Elephants', states that zoos must ensure that the standards of husbandry practices, housing, health and welfare management of elephants are humane, appropriate and in line with their intelligence, social behaviour and longevity.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) of the United Kingdom, in its 'Standards of Modern Zoo Practice', acknowledges that as elephants are highly-intelligent animals with large natural ranges and a complex social life, meeting their needs in captivity is challenging. It further states in paragraph 8.8.4 that elephants have to be kept in stable, female groups with matriarchal herds being the norm and that even the non-productive, older or problem elephants have to be kept in groups considering their indispensable need to socialise. In paragraph 8.8.6, it further states that even the bull elephants in musth, if separated from cows or other bulls, cannot be subjected to prolonged physical or social isolation from other elephants. But the Delhi zoo has kept Shankar in social isolation for a very long time. Pertinently, in paragraph 8.8.5, it states that female elephants must have contact with other female elephants at all times and shall ideally be part of a group of at least four female elephants that are over two years old. The female Asian elephant has not had any female company for a very long time. Thus, the zoo is violating every single one of these global standards despite being the object of international censure.

CZA is remiss in statutory duties. It is hard to believe that the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, has not been aware of the rampant violations of law at the zoo, being the nodal authority under the said Act. These violations seem all the more worrisome con-

sidering the fact that in 1982, the Delhi zoo was renamed as the National Zoological Park with the idea of it being the model zoo of the country. If its poor management so far is any indication, the zoo has only been a major let-down for animal rights activists. As a member of WAZA, the CZA has been repeatedly informed by WAZA, since at least March of this year, about the shortcomings in its approach when it comes to the framing and enforcement of up-to-date guidelines—in line with the global norms—regarding animal welfare applicable to zoos across India.

The CZA, by letting the zoo deprive its elephants of the company of other elephants and a healthy environment, and by not addressing their mental and physical health needs, is violating its statutory duty as can be inferred from a conjoint reading of Section 38C(a) and Section 38H(6) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 — which mandates that the CZA has to specify the minimum standards, in line with global standards — for housing, upkeep and the veterinary care of animals at Indian zoos and that it shall cancel the recognition granted to a zoo if it is found to be failing to meet or maintain those standards. In fact, by not cancelling the recognition of the zoo, the CZA is also violating the scheme of law underlying the Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009, wherein the central government has laid down the general standards to be observed by zoos; these include not separating any animal from its group unless it is for the welfare of that animal and ensuring that it is treated for health issues which includes mental health. Considering that elephants have an innate need to live in herds, not being in herds adversely affects their welfare. Thus, the zoo has no justification for the way it has been treating its elephants for so long now. It is bizarre that even though the zoo does not have the infrastructure, the capacity or the suitable environment to keep these majestic animals, it still insists, in the face of condemnation, on

having these animals at the cost of their welfare.

The CZA has turned a blind eye to the woes of these elephants. Even though it has framed guidelines titled 'Elephants' Upkeep in Zoos', wherein the CZA has emphatically asserted its ban on zoos that lack an appropriate environment for housing elephants, and has asserted that elephants must be housed in small groups, it is baffling that it has not enforced the full rigour of these guidelines. Maybe the CZA should look at and draw inspiration from the work of Indian rescue centres such as 'Wildlife SOS', which is dedicated to the care of abused, diseased, wounded and malnourished elephants. It is sad that even though there are robust laws on paper regarding elephant care and welfare which empower the CZA to resolve these problems, it has not been enforcing these laws the way it ought to. Perhaps, this is because the law does not prescribe any consequences for CZA itself in cases where the CZA wilfully neglects to discharge its statutory duties. It would help if the Indian government introduces checks and balances in the law with respect to the CZA and even for errant zoos that do not follow prescribed standards of animal care. The CZA has fallen short of the expectations of animal rights advocates and there are huge shortcomings in its attitude towards its statutory duties. Ethical dilemma While it would not be right to denounce the Delhi zoo solely based on its callous handling of its elephants, it does beg the question: is it even ethical for any zoo to have such animals when it does not have the infrastructure or the capacity to have them? Delhi zoo and the CZA have clearly sprung into action and are now looking at long term and 'WAZA-worthy' solutions to the problems of their elephants. With WAZA indicating in its October 7 notice that it might also cancel the CZA's WAZA membership, WAZA's membership of nine Indian zoos hangs in the balance.