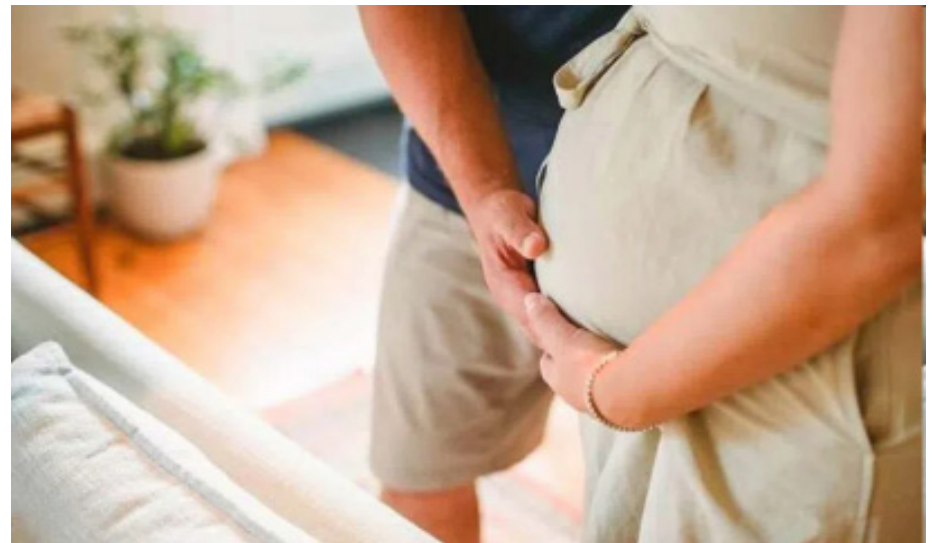


## Telangana's population growth nearing zero: Shocking decline in birth rates and fertility by 2035

Hyderabad: In the coming years, Telangana State will experience a significant decline or slowing down of the population growth, as key demographic indicators that influence population including birth of children, number of people who die and total fertility rates are projected to decline sharply to record levels. By 2031-35, the population growth rate, which is defined as the rate at which population increases over a period of time, will almost come to Zero (0.3) in Telangana State. By the same time, the Telangana State will be at the bottom three (along with Andhra Pradesh) in India to have the lowest Crude Birth Rate (CBR), which is the number of live births per thousand people in a population over a period of time. The CBR in Telangana State has declined steadily from 15.7 births in 2011-15 to a projected 10.2 by 2031-35, which means that only 10 live births will take place for 1,000 people in Telangana. Demographers point out that drop in birth of the number of children in a year is a crucial factor that indicates the slowing down of the population. The 'Population Projections for India and States 2011-

35', report by Census of India, indicates the all important fertility rates among women will also drop significantly in Telangana State, mirroring a similar trend all over the Country.

The Total Fertility Rates (TFR), which is the average number of children that a woman is likely to have in her lifetime, in Telangana State will drop to 1.5 by 2031. The TFR of 1.5 is an indication that fertility rates have reached below replacement levels. As States develop economically, women get better access to health and education, fertility rates begin to fall, a phenomenon seen across the world, public health officials here noted. Commenting on the drop of TFR, noted statistical platform 'Data for India' said "When a country's TFR drops to 2.1, meaning that women will have an average of 2.1 children over their lifetimes, demographers say that the country has reached 'replacement fertility'. This is a key milestone. If fertility falls below that level, the population will begin to decline in absolute numbers". Apart from CBR and TFR, another major factor influencing slowing down of population growth is the



number of people who die. Needless to say, like all Indian States, Telangana too will witness a drop in the number of people who die, because of increase in life expectancy. Back 2011-15, the average life expectancy among

men in Telangana State was 67 years, which will increase to 71.40 years by 2031. Similarly, the life expectancy of women will improve from 71 (2011-15) to 75.60 (2031-35) in Telangana State.

## Public discontent, internal squabbles make Congress jittery over local body elections



Hyderabad: The Congress government, which was planning to capitalise in a big way by launching four schemes ahead of the local body elections, is now jittery about conducting the polls considering different factors, especially the people's ire, which was evident at the Gram Sabhas. Since the last few months, there have been speculations over the local body elections. Last year, it was believed that panchayat elections would be held any time after Diwali but this was postponed to Sankranti. Of late, there has been discussion that the elections could be held in February. Though Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Minister D Anasuya assured that panchayat elections could be held soon, there is a buzz in political circles that

the elections could be delayed further due to a few reasons.

With an eye on panchayat elections, the Congress government is launching four schemes - Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Atmeeya Bharosa, Indiramma Indlu and ration cards distribution on Sunday. However, the people's mood, particularly the anger expressed by many over implementation of earlier schemes and questions raised over selection of beneficiaries in the list for the four new schemes at many Gram Sabhas seems to have left the Congress leadership a bit worried. To this effect, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy is also holding a meeting with a few cabinet Ministers here on Saturday to discuss the strategies for taking the four

schemes to the people and to win their confidence. Further, the Congress government had promised to implement 42 percent reservation for the BC community in the panchayat elections. Apart from political parties, which are demanding implementation of reservations, the Telangana Sarpanchalu Sangham Joint Action Committee is also demanding the government to conduct the elections only after clearing their pending bills. Even as the BC Commission is gearing up to submit its report in a few days, the Congress seems to be looking for different options. Since it is beyond the State government's purview to implement the reservations, the Congress intends to field 42 percent BC candidates for the panchayat elections. It is also learnt that the Congress would make an appeal to other parties to field a similar percentage of BC candidates and prove their commitment towards the community. One more worrying factor for the

Congress leadership is the internal differences among leaders. This is even worse between those who joined the party recently and the long-timers. Arguments and abuses between Congress leaders are becoming a regular feature in Patancheru, Gadwal, Pocharam, Khairthabad, Jagtial and other constituencies. More so, apart from panchayat elections, municipal elections and MLC elections are also scheduled in the near future. As the annual examinations would be held in March - April season, teachers would be occupied with examination duties. Considering all these factors, the Congress government might delay the panchayat elections or it could hold the ZPTC and MPTC elections ahead of the panchayat elections. One thing is for sure that the Congress leaders are apprehensive that any adverse impact in one election could cast an influence on the party's prospects in other elections.

## ACB nabs two government officials taking bribe in Medak, Khammam

Hyderabad: Two government officials were nabbed on Monday by the Anti-Corruption Bureau while taking bribes in various incidents in Sathupalli of Khammam and Manoharabad of Medak district. According to ACB statements, 32nd ward officer of Sathupalli Town in Khammam, Nallanti Vinod

was caught red-handed at the Bharat Juice Centre near the District Cooperative Bank while demanding and accepting a bribe of Rs 2,500 from a person for doing an official favour. Vinod had demanded the bribe from a woman to process her ration card and Indiramma house sanction application.

# Will the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip hold? | Explained

The story so far: After 15 months of fighting, which was triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack in which about 1,200 people were killed, Israel and Hamas have accepted a ceasefire in Gaza. On Saturday, Israel's 24-member cabinet gave approval to the agreement, which is expected to be implemented in three phases. The deal, which came into force on Sunday, was reached in talks mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. If it holds, it would provide a desperately needed relief for Gaza, the tiny strip along the Mediterranean Sea which was relentlessly bombed by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) over the past 15 months in which over 46,000 Palestinians were killed and almost the entire population of the enclave displaced.

What are the terms?

The deal is to be implemented in three phases. In the 42-day first phase, Hamas will release 33 hostages, most of those alive, and Israel will free roughly 1,000 Palestinian security prisoners. Israel will also partially withdraw the IDF from Gaza, and allow the entry of about 600 trucks of humanitarian aid into the enclave every day. The IDF is expected to withdraw from the Netzarim Corridor, which separates northern Gaza, which has seen massive Israeli bombardment from Day one of the war, from the south, where most of the enclave's population have been pushed into. If the Israeli troops withdraw from Netzarim, it would allow some of the displaced Gazans to move from the south and centre to the north. But in the first phase, Israeli troops will remain in the Philadelphi Corridor on the Rafah crossing — which means Israel will continue to monitor Gaza's border with Egypt. On the 16th day of the first phase, discussions are expected to begin on the second phase. If the first phase is implemented as per plan, 65 hostages will still be in Hamas's captivity and Israeli troops will still be there at Philadelphi and some buffer zones in Gaza. In the second stage, Hamas will be required to release most of the remaining living hostages and both sides should declare a permanent end to the hostilities. The third phase will involve discussions on the 'day after'.

Why did both parties accept a ceasefire now?

The deal accepted by both parties is not essentially different from the deal offered eight months ago. Hamas had announced earlier that it would accept a deal, provided the war is brought to a permanent end. In May, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the agreement, saying Israel would continue its military offensive in Gaza until it meets its objectives. But a lot has changed in the region since. Israel now believes its regional standing has become stronger. Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia organisation, has lost most of its top leadership in Israeli attacks. The IDF has killed most of the leaders of Hamas, including Yahya Sinwar. Israel carried out a massive air strike in Iran in October, targeting the Islamic Republic's air defences and other military facilities (to which Iran hasn't responded yet). More importantly, the fall of the Assad regime in Syria has further weakened Iran's so-called 'axis of resistance' in West Asia. Mr. Assad's Syria

was the land bridge between Iran and Hezbollah. Since this land bridge is disrupted, Hezbollah will find it difficult to rearm itself. These developments have also strengthened Mr. Netanyahu's political standing at home. These factors probably influenced him to change his position about a deal with Hamas. But that's not all. After months of fighting, Israel failed to meet its declared objectives in Gaza. When he launched the war, Mr. Netanyahu said Israel would dismantle Hamas. Israeli attacks have degraded Hamas's militant infrastructure, but Hamas reinvented itself as an insurgency, its original avatar. Antony Blinken, the U.S. Secretary of State, recently said the American assessment was that Hamas recruited as many fighters as it had lost. The inability to meet its objectives through military means might also have influenced Israel's leaders to take a more pragmatic view of pausing the conflict and getting the hostages freed. Then, there is the Trump factor.

What role did the U.S. play?

The Biden administration has been pushing for a ceasefire for long, but it also offered full support to Israel's war in Gaza. Washington continues to supply weapons to Israel and offer diplomatic protection to Israel at global fora. Mr. Biden's refusal to use effective pressure tactics on Israel meant that the latter continued the war despite Washington's public call and private diplomatic push for a ceasefire. But now, Mr. Biden can claim that a ceasefire was reached just days before he left the White House. Arab and Israeli media claim that the Trump factor also played a key role. Donald Trump had earlier said that "all hell will break loose" if there was no agreement between Israel and Hamas before he takes office on January 20 as the 47th President of the U.S. Mr. Trump's West Asia envoy Steve Witkoff had met the negotiators and the Israeli leadership last week. Times of Israel reported, quoting Arab officials, that Mr. Witkoff managed to achieve in a single meeting more than what President Biden did the whole year. Mr. Trump is known for his pro-Israel positions. But he had promised during his campaign that he would bring the wars in West Asia and Ukraine to an end if returned to the White House. If the war is brought to an end, besides the humanitarian angle, it would offer some stability to West Asia. Mr. Trump may not like the U.S. being drawn into another never-ending war in the region. Also, if the Israel-Hamas war pauses, the Houthis of Yemen could stop attacking Israel and the ships passing through the Red Sea. Both the U.S. and Israel carried out air strikes against the Houthis in recent months but failed to stop their attacks. If the Red Sea calms down, normal freight traffic through the Suez Canal could resume, tamping down the inflationary pressure on the global economy.

Why is Phase 3 going to be a challenge?

As of now, the focus of both parties would be on implementing the first phase — which has a fair chance of being implemented. The second phase could see the exchange of more hostages for prisoners. But the real challenge would be Phase 3. Hamas has demanded a complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. Israel



now realises that it cannot dismantle Hamas — the organisation would survive in one way or another. On a more practical note, Israel doesn't want to leave Hamas as a ruling or fighting force in Gaza. This poses a dilemma

for Israel. If it agrees to end the war and leave Gaza, Hamas would remain a militant insurgency in Gaza. If Israel continues to stay in Gaza, there won't be a lasting ceasefire agreement and a war of attrition will go on.

## Transit-oriented development still on paper

TOD works by integrating land-use and transport planning by allowing mixed-use neighbourhoods with active frontages centred around public transport nodes. Announced in the last Budget, the central government is yet to implement its transit-oriented development (TOD) framework in 14 cities having a population of 3 million even as urban planning experts advocate that TOD could potentially resolve the twin problems of pollution and congestion by making urbanisation compact. TOD works by integrating land-use planning and transport planning by allowing high-rises, mixed-use (residences, commercial complexes, office spaces) neighbourhoods with active frontages centred around public transport nodes, thereby encouraging public transport usage, walking or cycling. The concept is also resource-efficient as it not only makes commuting for daily necessities easier but also reduces the per capita cost of civic amenities, including water and sanitation.

The relaxed FAR (floor area ratio) norms are allowed within the influence zone of 800 metres to 1km around busy bus and metro stations. Its thorough implementation allows for envisaging the concept of 15-minute cities such as pushed by the Parisian city authority. Incidentally, the Centre has mentioned the concept at least five times in its Budget since 2019 according to Rutul Joshi, an urban planning expert.

Joshi said the reason why TOD is making slow progress in India is due to disharmony in policy. "There is no defined legal mandates or statutory provisions to make TOD plans. While private development can take care of high floor area, to ensure higher walkability and access to public transport, there is also a need for adequate budgetary

provisions." Thirdly, he said the same high FAR norms are allowed in peripheral areas, including along state and national highways which attract the attention of private developers due to lower cost of land and indirectly take capital away from core-city projects where land is scarce and priced at a premium. Another expert working with the Union ministry of housing and urban affairs (MoHUA), who asked not to be named, said that "a lack of political will" was the primary reason for the Centre's reluctance to push TOD as urban planning is a state subject. The entire nation's urban policy framework of 2018-19 has remained a damp squib, the expert said. "MoHUA did not even engage with the states even once."

Slow pace of work Not only in the global North, TOD has been successfully tried out in developing economies as well. Curitiba in Brazil is one of the early adopters that began developing its transit corridors in the 1970s, focusing on creating a system that prioritised public transport over private vehicle use and facilitated high-density development near transit corridors. In India, so far, only a handful of states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra have notified a state-level policy for TOD and identified at least one corridor along a Metro line for its implementation. But there has been an absence of any tangible help from MoHUA, said the expert cited above. However, the Centre has given incentives to some states for notifying a TOD policy on paper, and for identifying a corridor in any of their cities for adopting urban policy reforms, under the broad scheme of special assistance to states for capital investment and also as a sub-scheme of the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).

# Seminar on “How to Crack Civil Services in the First Attempt: UPSC Master Class” Held at VJIT, Moinabad on Monday .

Hyderabad: A seminar on “How to Crack Civil Services in the First Attempt: UPSC Master Class” was conducted by VINGS Media and G5 Media Group, in association with 21st Century IAS Academy, at Vidya Jyothi Institute of Technology (VJIT), Moinabad.

P. Krishna Pradeep, Chairman of 21st Century IAS Academy, inspired the students by narrating the extraordinary journey of Shiva Guru Prabhakaran, an IAS officer who overcame significant hardships. Despite financial challenges, Prabhakar completed his intermediate studies privately, pursued engineering, and succeeded in the IAS exam on his fourth attempt. As part of his dedication to public service, he committed to addressing health issues in his village twice a week. To fulfill this mission, he married a doctor in 2021. Pradeep highlighted the immense powers and responsibilities of an IAS officer, urging students to pursue such meaningful and impactful careers. Dr. Bhavani Shankar, Chief Mentor of the academy, emphasized the academy's two-decade legacy in civil services training. He outlined the academy's target of achieving 20 UPSC ranks this year and encouraged students to use social media as an effective tool for exam preparation. During his address, Dr. Shankar presented a detailed PPT explaining the types of questions commonly asked



in the UPSC exams, along with strategies for tackling them. The seminar also marked the launch of exclusive study materials, created by the academy's experts, which were

unveiled by Dr. Padmaja, Principal of VJIT. Distinguished attendees included R. Venkatachalam, Senior Administrative Officer, Dr. Praveen, Placement Officer; Dr.

Srujana, Career Guidance Cell Coordinator; Giri Prakaash, Director of VINGS Media and G5 Media Group; Ganesh, Editor; and Mahesh, Manager.

## Googee Group Presents



Telangana Fitness Festival  
By Shafi Sami Poster Launch By

Shri Mahesh Kumar Goud Garu  
Tpcc President INCTelangana

Along With Osman alhajri  
Karwan incharge & Shaik Akbar

Malakpet Incharge Venue LB  
outdoor Stadium On 9th February

# The Eventors” Kick-start First-of-its-Kind “Society Cricket Championship” (SCC) A Celebration of Healthy Living, Togetherness, and Cricket

Hyderabad :Bringing communities together for a fun-filled, action-packed experience, The Eventors, a start-up event company, has launched the Society Cricket Championship (SCC), a Leather Ball T-20 Cricket Tournament modelled on the lines of IPL. Hosted at the scenic Sadasiva Cricket Club in Amdapur, Moinnabad, the event will run from January 25 to March 16, 2025. This inaugural tournament features 12 teams representing prominent societies such as Rajapushpa Regalia, My Home Avatar, and Prestige High Fields. The grand launch took place today 25th January at 9:00 AM, marked by vibrant enthusiasm from participants, families, and cricket enthusiasts alike.

The Society Cricket Championship, SCC aims to promote a healthy lifestyle by encouraging physical activity through cricket, India’s favourite sport. Beyond the game, the event fosters a sense of togetherness by creating an opportunity for families and friends to bond over weekends while enjoying spirited competition and entertainment.

The Eventors envision the championship as a platform for networking, fun, and strengthening community ties. “The Society Cricket Championship is not just about cricket; it’s about celebrating the spirit of community, health, and togetherness. We’re thrilled to bring societies together and provide an engaging platform for people to connect through sport,” said Mr. Kumar Kanduri, co-Founder of “The Eventors”. To ensure the safety and well-being of all participants, The Eventors have arranged for an ambulance with a paramedic (Red Health) to be available on-site throughout the tournament. This thoughtful addition underscores their commitment to making SCC not only a fun event but also a safe one.



The Eventors extend their heartfelt gratitude to Title Sponsor: Radhey Group, and Associate Partners: Healthy Farms, Chetana Samprati - Integrated Wellbeing, Better Food Factory, Red Health, Decathlon,

CrickStore, Shubham Hotel, and Isthree – Press, Clean & Care, for their invaluable support in making this unique initiative a reality. Their contribution has played a pivotal role in bringing this concept to life, setting the

stage for an unforgettable experience for all involved. Join us in cheering for your favourite teams and celebrating the spirit of cricket and community. Together, let’s make the Society Cricket Championship a grand success!

## Biscope 2025" Lights Up Suchitra Academy with Student Creativity and Artistic Expression

Hyderabad:Suchitra Academy proudly hosted its highly anticipated Visual and Performing Arts presentation, "Biscope 2025," celebrating the exceptional creativity and talent of its students. The event showcased over 250 artistic works, ranging from stunning sculptures and pottery to intricate ceramic pieces, engaging installations, vibrant tie-dye creations, exquisite crafts, embroidery, and captivating paintings. Each piece reflected the dedication, innovation, and artistic potential of the young minds at Suchitra Academy. The festivities were further amplified by a series of captivating performances in music and dance, bringing the visual art exhibits to life. Each act left the audience spellbound, exemplifying the diverse talents of the students and their hard work in honing their artistic skills. The highlight of the evening was the presence of the esteemed artist Ms. Deepa Nath, who graced the event as the Chief Guest. Her inspiring words resonated with the students and encouraged them to explore their creative passions further. "Seeing the level of talent and creativity on display today fills me with hope for the future of art in our society. These young art-



ists are the torchbearers of artistic expression, and I urge them to continue pursuing

their artistic journeys with passion and dedication," remarked Ms. Nath. Ms. Deepa

Kapoor, principal of Suchitra Academy, students parents were participated.

# Royal Stag BoomBox Kicks Off Its Third Edition in Hyderabad: Iconic Performances by Amit Trivedi, Nikhita Gandhi, Raftaar and DJ Yogii

Hyderabad: Celebrating the spirit of 'Living it Large', Seagram's Royal Stag marked the commencement of its highly anticipated third edition of Royal Stag BoomBox with a groundbreaking show in Hyderabad, Telangana at Boulder Hills on January 25th. Building on the phenomenal success of previous editions, this year's festival pushes boundaries even further by bringing together the best of music and gaming entertainment. The evening witnessed an overwhelming response as thousands of enthusiasts gathered to experience performances by some of India's most celebrated artists. The event delivered an unforgettable night of pulsating music, enthralling performances, and unparalleled energy.

The sprawling grounds of Boulder Hills came alive with vibrant installations, immersive art displays, curated food experiences, and interactive zones, creating a multisensory celebration beyond just music. The evening kicked off with an electrifying set by DJ Yogii, who set the perfect mood for the night. The energy amplified as rap phenomenon Raftaar took the stage, followed by a mesmerizing performance by versatile vocalist Nikhita Gandhi. The grand finale saw music maestro Amit Trivedi deliver a spectacular closing act that perfectly embodied the festival's signature blend of diverse musical genres, creating an unforgettable experience for Generation Large. The event also showcased an electrifying EAFC Face-Off competition between Munna Bhai Gaming and Joker Ki Haveli, live on stage. Music director and singer Amit Trivedi shared, "Royal Stag BoomBox is a beautiful celebration of music – raw, authentic, and straight from the heart. For me, it's about sharing stories through melodies and connecting with people on a deeper level. I feel truly grateful to be a part of this platform, and performing here in Hyderabad, with its incredibly enthusiastic audience, was a euphoric experience. Singer Nikhita Gandhi added, "Personally for me, Royal Stag BoomBox has always been about experimenting and breaking boundaries through music. Whether



it's fusing genres or delivering an electrifying live performance, this platform allows us to push creative limits. Performing at Royal Stag BoomBox in Hyderabad was an unforgettable experience and I am excited for my

next show in Mumbai." Eminent Hip-Hop artist Raftaar shared, "Royal Stag BoomBox is where the beats hit hard, and the vibes are always on point.

For me, it's about more than just rap-

ping – it's about taking the crowd on an energetic and emotional ride. Hyderabad brought the fire tonight, and I'm grateful to have had the chance to set the stage ablaze with my high-octane music and raw energy!"

## ARUN ICECREAMS REACHES NEW PRODUCTION MILESTONE AT GOVINDAPUR FACILITY

Hyderabad : Arun Icecreams, Ice Cream brand under Hatsun Agro Product Limited, has achieved a significant production milestone at its Govindapur facility, now producing 1.27 lakh kilograms of ice cream daily. This accomplishment underscores the company's commitment to meeting increasing consumer demand.

Established in 2022, the Govindapur plant spans 113 acres and is recognized as India's largest ice cream manufacturing unit. The facility is equipped with cutting edge robotic technology and equipment that enable the production of a diverse range of ice cream products with enhanced efficiency, precision and quality. Marking the milestone, Arun Icecreams organized a Kids Adventure Education Program on January 27, 2025 at the facility. Part of a series that commenced on

January 20, 2025, this initiative aimed to educate children on sustainability and ice cream production while offering an engaging learning experience.

In line with its commitment to sustainability, the Govindapur facility incorporates several eco-friendly initiatives. These include rainwater harvesting systems, water treatment and recycling processes, and the utilization of solar-powered energy solutions, all aimed at minimizing the environmental impact of operations.

Commenting on the milestone, \*Padma Shree Shri. R G Chandramogan, Chairman of Hatsun Agro Product Limited\* , said, "Reaching this production milestone reflects our dedication to leveraging advanced technology and sustainable practices in our operations. The Govindapur facility exempli-



fies our approach to responsible growth and quality assurance."

He also added, "We are pleased to host the Kids Adventure Education Program at our Govindapur facility, which allows us to share

our success story while creating an enriching experience for young minds. We look forward to hosting more such programs in the future, blending education and fun to inspire children to learn about sustainability and the fascinating world of ice cream production."

# Mahakumbh 2025: Five things to do at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj

Be ready to brave mammoth crowds (more than 40 crore people will be attending the festivities over the next few weeks) and the cold (temperatures dip till 7 degrees), but if you overcome that, the Maha Kumbh is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In this largest religious congregation in the world, crores of people, both Indians and from abroad, gather to take part in the Mela. Here are a few things you could do at the Maha Kumbh 2025: The Ganga is the main river at Prayagraj, but a short boat ride from its banks by boat will take you to the Triveni Sangam, a major destination for Hindu pilgrimages. Here, priests are ready to help you with sankalpam (a purification process before doing any puja), after which you can prepare for the rituals at Kumbh Mela, which include taking a dip and offering prayers. The Sangam is the confluence of Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati, and a dip in this stretch is considered to free you from rebirth and cleanse your soul. An evening experience of the Ganga aarti can also be a great experience. But be aware: the cold can be harsh. Fortunately, accommodation here includes a few luxury tent stays.

Some of them are fierce. Some of them are friendly. But the many sadhus who have arrived in Prayagraj for the Kumbh Mela are fascinating people. Witnessing them and the shahi snan processions should be among the must-do things on your list. Be wary when you approach the naga sadhus – who are usually reticent and even violent sometimes. While some of them from the Himalayas

have been meditating and practising yoga for many years now, which probably explains their quirks and capacity to withstand cold temperatures, many sadhus have renounced worldly pleasures in pursuit of spirituality, like the now-viral 'IITian Baba' who was spotted in Prayagraj. The Maha Kumbh 2025 uses technology and AI tools for ease of the million devotees. Check out the Kumbh Sah'Al'yak, a generative AI tool that acts as a virtual companion. Its features include travel tips, event schedules and other updates to help you navigate the milling crowds. There's also computerised lost-and-found centres here. And, if crowds make you nervous, there is a 'Digital Maha Kumbh Experience Centre' that brings to life the different facets of the festival through thematic zones and robotics. Said to be a fusion of tradition and technology, this centre houses, among other things, immersive virtual reality presentations of various mythological tales. Tired of the crowds and traffic near the Kumbh venue? Then, you could explore other areas in Prayagraj, that includes taking a walk near the Akbar Fort (Allahabad Fort). Or visiting the Shri Bade Hanuman Ji Temple, which has a couple of interesting stories related to it. According to one legend, Hanuman fell asleep here while once waiting for Lord Rama, which is why this temple has him in a sleeping posture with eyes wide open. Another story revolving around this 700-year-old temple involves the King of Kannauj. Once you have explored Prayagraj, head to Varanasi, located 120 kilometres away. A



visit to the many ghats – from the old Dasawamedh Ghat and Assi Ghat to the new-age Namoo Ghat - can be a spiritually uplifting and healing experience, for, as Mark Twain reportedly once remarked, "Benares

is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as of them put together." And when you're at Varanasi, don't forget to try out the delicious tamarachaat, malaiyyo and rabdi lassi.

## 15 firms make 70% donations to largest electoral trust

Fifteen business groups accounted for about 70% or ₹785.985 crore of the ₹1,075.71 crore that the Prudent Electoral Trust (PET), the largest electoral trust in the country, received in FY24, documents available on the Election Commission of India (ECI) website showed. Of the ₹1,075.68 crore that PET disbursed to six parties, the BJP received the lion's share at ₹723.785 crore, or 67.3%, followed by the Congress at ₹156.4 crore or 14.5%. The BRS received ₹85 crore or 7.9% followed by the YRCP at ₹72.5 crore (6.7%) and the TDP at ₹33 crore (3.1%). The Janasena Party received a lone donation of ₹5 crore from PET. While the ECI recognises 19 electoral trusts, the contribution reports of only 14 are available on the ECI website. Of these 14, only five electoral trusts, including PET, received donations in FY24. The top donors to PET were ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India and DLF, each of which donated ₹100 crore. Of the ₹75 crore ArcelorMittal donated on January 6, PET transferred ₹65 crore to the BJP and the remaining ₹10 crore to Congress on January 8. The ₹25 crore that Arcelor Mittal donated on February 26 was transferred to BJP on February 28.

This was followed by Hyderabad-based Maatha Projects that donated ₹75 crore. CESC gave 60 crore. Calcutta Elec-

tric Supply Corporation, or CESC, is part of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group. Another RP-Sanjiv Geonka Group entity, Haldia Energy donated 10 crore. Maruti Suzuki India donated ₹60 crore on March 30, 2024, one of the only two donations made that day. The other was a 5 crore donation by Om Sri Venkateswara Construction Group. Between March 30 and March 31, PET disbursed funds only twice --- ₹70 crore to BJP and 22.43 crore to Congress on March 30. The Hetero Group, through its subsidiaries Hetero Labs and Hetero Healthcare donated a total of ₹55 crore. The Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical group was the first company in India to launch a generic version of the Remdesivir injection during the pandemic. Apollo Tyres donated 50 crore. S Motors, through TVS Motors and TVS Credit Services donated 50 crore. TVS Motors has an 80.69 per cent stake in TVS Credit Services. Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited (MEIL), which had emerged as the second biggest buyer of electoral bonds, donated 25 crore directly and another ₹25 crore through its subsidiary Western UP Power Transmission in May 2023.

Cipla donated contributed ₹30.195 crore. Bharti Airtel, directly and through its subsidiaries Bharti Telemedia (Airtel's DTH

service provider) and Nextra Data (Airtel's data centre company) donated a total of ₹29 crore. PET received 56% of all donations, valued at ₹602.834 crore, for FY24 in 46 days between February 15 and March 31. The Supreme Court had struck down the electoral bonds scheme as unconstitutional on February 15. On March 18, the apex court had instructed the ECI to disclose the details of electoral bonds bought and redeemed after April 12, 2019. Between March 19 and March 31, PET got donations worth ₹527.435 crore, or 49 per cent of all donations it received in FY24. PET gave the biggest cheques after disclosures about the electoral bonds had been made public --- ₹218.5 crore on March 28, and ₹118.17.5 crore on March 30, both to the BJP.

The Chennai-headquartered Murugappa Group, at 132.5 crore, made the biggest donations to an electoral trust, just not to PET. Five companies from the Murugappa Group donated to Triumph Electoral Trust, making it the second largest electoral trust after PET. Except for 5 crore that Triumph disbursed to the DMK in March 2024, the remaining 27.5 crore donated by the conglomerate was donated to the BJP. The five group companies are --- EID

Parry India (2 crore in April 2023), Coromandel International (50 lakh in June 2023 and 25 crore in March 2024), Tube Investments of India (25 crore in March 2024), Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company (50 crore in March 2024), and CG Power Industrial Solutions (30 crore in March 2024). On February 29, the Union Cabinet had approved a proposal by CG Power to set up a semiconductor unit in Gujarat. CG Power, in partnership with Japan's Renesas Electronics Corporation and Thailand's Stars Microelectronics, is setting up an ATMP (assembly, testing, marking, and packaging) unit for specialised chips in Sanand, Gujarat with an investment of 7,600 crore, and an output of 15 million chips per day. Jaybharath Electoral Trust got donations worth 9 crore from two Coimbatore-based companies --- Lakshmi Machine Works (8 crore) and Super Sales India (1 crore). 5 crore was disbursed to the BJP, 3 crore to DMK and 1 crore to AIADMK. Kolkata-based Paribartan Electoral Trust got a donation for 1 crore RCCPL Private Limited in October 2023 but the trust, in its submission to the ECI, said that the funds were distributed through electoral bonds and hence the details of the recipient are "not required to be disclosed".

# Following urban raptors in the Chennai Metropolitan Area

On January 17, a tinkle in a WhatsApp group of Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) made Gnanaskandan Kesavabharathi jump out of his seat. A tidbit of information that arrived with that tinkle demanded an immediate response and GK (as he is known in naturalist circles) was on to it, promptly keying in an instruction that elbowed two young MNS members on to the road to MRC Nagar. The info that cranked up the series of actions — “not one but two Peregrine falcons lord it over a rash of buildings at MRC Nagar”. It was a tipoff from Ambika C., a resident of MRC Nagar with an MNS membership. The two MNS members landed at the spot lickety-split to ascertain the snappy report's veracity. One of the questions to get out of the way: is the new entrant really a Peregrine falcon or a “lookalike”, some other falcon being mistaken for a Peregrine? As sure as eggs are eggs, there were two Peregrine falcons, a male and a female, greeting the two naturalists, while being perched on a tall building.

Project Raptor Watch (PRW), spearheaded by GK, has been studying this patch for at least three winters, if not more, as a Peregrine falcon had helped itself to it, making it its winter stay, choosing its perch among three tall buildings. The patch is now a divided territory with another Peregrine falcon wading into the space. Bharath Ravikumar, one of the two MNS members to study two Peregrine falcons at MRC Nagar, observes: “It was 3.30 p.m. Both of them were perched far apart. There was no hint of any unrest or an incination to ‘ward off’ the other; they were both calmly minding their own business. Around 4.30 p.m., the male took to the air and disappeared and half an hour later, he showed up and was perched on the same ledge as the female, but on the opposite end. This seemed to have disturbed her; and she started walking towards him and pushed him off the ledge.” If observations elsewhere are anything to go by, they will tolerate each other and might even come to hunt together, as is the case at House of Hiranandani Upscale where two Peregrine falcons — a male and a female — are at ease with each other, sometimes launching what clearly appears to be a joint hunting expedition. These observations have been made by E. Arun Kumar, an MNS member residing at Upscale. “Of course, as this is the wintering ground, they would not pair off, but they could likely form a bond strong enough to hunt together,” says GK about the two falcons at MRC Nagar. “Based on observations, the possibility of tolerance towards each other is higher if it is a male and a female. Territorial instinct would kick in stronger if both Peregrine falcons were of the same sex.”

Regular monitoring Continual monitoring of the patches in its focus is the hallmark of PRW, in fact PRW 2.0. GK notes that as a matter of routine, members of PRW 2.0 go on a raptor survey once a week. And when a freak occurrence needs to be investigated, they lose no time in doing so. On the scope and focus of the project, GK says, “It is a longterm raptor monitoring programme of Madras Naturalists' Society which seeks to document, study and monitor the abundance, local movements, nesting and breed-

ing activity of the raptors found in Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Chennai and Chengalpattu (KTCC) districts — defining it a tad differently, the Chennai Metropolitan Area.” The study area extends to Pulicat in the north and Nayapakkam in the west. Thiruporur and beyond, Tiger Lily Lake being defining, brings up the southernmost point.

GK continues: “PRW 1.0 started in 2015 aimed at documenting the different raptor species seen in KTCC. PRW took a new shape in 2020 as PRW 2.0 giving birth to species-specific projects such as Black kite population monitoring at Perungudi dump site, Peregrine falcon abundance survey for KTCC and nest monitoring of resident raptor species such as the Red necked falcon and the White bellied sea eagle. The project is carried out by a dedicated group of 45 volunteers. The volunteers survey 15 different clusters covering 45 hotspots. Historically, 32 raptor species have been recorded in this region and PRW has documented seven more for the region over the last one decade taking the current tally to 39 raptor species.” Black kite monitoring For the Black kite monitoring project, headed by MNS member Sunil Unni, binoculars were trained on the Perungudi dump site where one can see swarms of black kites at certain times of the year. “There are Black kites that are resident in Chennai. And there are Black kites that head to Chennai from elsewhere during the south west monsoon. A majority of the Black kites that migrate to the city during this period likely fly in from the west — Kerala and Karnataka — where the south west monsoon is the primary monsoon. When south west monsoon recedes, they go back to where they came from. At the height of the South west monsoon, the number of Black kites at the Perungudi dump site swelled to around 1,300 and now, it is hardly 20,” GK begins. Peregrine number survey Another exercise under PRW 2.0, this survey is being conducted only in parts of KTCC where the Peregrine falcon is known to be present as also where it could be found. Here is a break-up of the wintering Peregrine falcon population in apartments across Chennai.

Two at TVH Oranya Bay in Padur, Old Mahabalipuram Road; two at House of Hiranandani in Egattur; One at Bashyam OMR; one at Appaswamy OMR; one at DLF Garden City in Semmancheri; two at MRC Nagar; one at Trellis South in Vadapalani and one at Taisha in Saligramam. In urban sites with a Peregrine falcon presence, those residing there help with data about the bird. “Through regular monitoring, we know the everyday movements and patterns of most of the Peregrine falcons,” he notes. “Now, we are on to the next stage of the Peregrine falcon survey — we are doing a pre-NE monsoon survey, the NE monsoon survey and post-NE monsoon survey to understand where the numbers differ. When the monsoonal rains subside, the Peregrine falcons return to their regular haunts. We do synchronised surveys to ensure the same Peregrine falcon is not counted again. When this study reaches the third year, we expect to have in-and-out data of around 30 Peregrine falcons.” The parameters GK contin-



ues: “As we undertake a scientific study in these projects, certain parameters come into play — namely, weather, external disturbances, wind and rain. Through these parameters we see patterns. When JCB dredges up the dump site, the Black kite numbers will shoot up — this we would put down to external disturbance even as we ascertain the extent of the increase in numbers. When wind and rain cease, the Black kite numbers will go up. During rains, peregrine falcons will go into “hiding”. Hunting in tandem Whatever the vexations that sear the rufous crown of a red necked falcon, an absentee spouse is certainly not one of them. The male and female of this species are co-workers. Truth be told, that description is not spot-on, hardly setting the species apart from most others. To varying degrees, the male and the female in almost every avian species divide the drudge work that goes with raising the young. What makes the red necked falcon a touch better than most other species in this matter is that both the male and the female have teamwork and partnership developed to the nth degree. The male and female Red necked falcon hunt in tandem with a level of coordination that would make any doubles pair in a racquet sport proud. Bharath Ravikumar lives in a place wedged between ECR and OMR and is characterised by transmission towers, and also marsh-like patch. He gets to see a red necked falcon pair up close.

Listen to Bharath: “A Red necked falcon pair have a hunting technique down to art, and it requires simultaneous participation from the male and the female. Sometimes, the female will launch the attack by flushing the birds parked on the ground and directing them to go in a particular direction. The male red necked falcon would be flying parallelly but at a higher elevation, and when these flushed birds have been guided in a particular direction, the male would go for the kill.” There would also be reversal of roles, with the male doing the flushing and the female completing the hunt by going for the kill. E. Arun Kumar, a resident of House of Hiranandani Upscale in Egattur, OMR who has witnessed this teamwork by a Red necked falcon pair being orchestrated to perfection at Kaveripakkam, notes that this behaviour is well-entrenched in the species. Putting the air channel to good use Peregrine falcons feel snug in declivitous

landscapes — as much at ease in those crafted with human hands as with those occurring naturally. When they shack up for the winter at House of Hiranandani Upscale in Egattur, the two Peregrine falcons would hardly miss the rock faces they are accustomed to back in their breeding grounds. The tall towers serve them well, probably far too well for them to long wistfully for them when they have made the return trip. Upscale resident and MNS member E. Arun Kumar, who tracks the movements of these two Peregrine falcons — named Rana and Nandini — has studied how these towers are an incredible aid in these raptors' hunting expeditions. Arun explains the science behind it. An air channel inevitably forms between the towers facing. Depending upon the direction in which they are flying, the pigeons find their flight aided or impeded by the air channel.

When the air is blowing against the pigeons and slamming the brakes on them, the Peregrine falcon that has soared high above the towers (where the air flows freely) takes advantage of the situation. And then Arun goes on to discuss the artistry and the subterfuge that complement the science — narrating a hunt underpinned by this principle that he witnessed on a windy day just ahead of a massive wet rag of a day. Arun narrates that given the weather, he was hoping, even expecting a pelagic bird to be buffeted about and finally fly his way. But he was instead treated to “a midair hunt by the fast and furious peregrine falcon”. And he is not complaining. With the aerial show put up by the Peregrine falcon, the disappointment vamooshed into thin air. The Peregrine falcon was slowly hovering around the apartment blocks and seemed view the pigeons' presence dispassionately. But the Peregrine falcon's presence unsettled some of the pigeons, he says, there was a frenzied scampering among them. After surveying the scene stationed on a window parapet for a few minutes, the Peregrine falcon swept away “towards the open space in the midst of different towers”, its flight marked by palpable intensity. When the falcon was gaining elevation, for a fleeting moment Arun got the impression it was leaving the vicinity. The elevation was being achieved to launch an aerial attack. There was speed, suddenness and flawless execution. Before Arun could realise it, the hunt had been brought to a successful completion.

# Whitefield: Between a colonial past and a post-liberalisation future

The stolid-looking, grey-bearded gentleman has a piercing gaze, one that seems to follow us as we file past his photograph hung on the thick walls of the Whitefield Club. "That is a picture of Mr. White," says Deepa Peck, a long-time resident of Whitefield who is leading us on a heritage walk around the neighbourhood. Most people new to the city associate Whitefield with the IT hub, upscale malls, vehicular congestion and never-ending water woes. But the suburb also has a long history dating back to 1882, as Deepa, who developed a keen interest in the locality's heritage since her husband's family, the Pecks, was among the earliest inhabitants of Whitefield, constantly reiterates. According to her, the man in the photograph, David Emmanuel Starkenburgh White, after whom the area is named, founded Whitefield then on land granted to the Eurasian and Anglo-Indian Association by Chamrajendra Wadiyar X, the Maharaja of Mysore.

Back then, Whitefield was envisioned as an agricultural settlement, with the early Whitefielders referred to as the settlers, explains Deepa. Whitefield was built in two concentric circles: the Inner Circle, consisting of wedge-shaped residential plots, at the centre of which was the Village Green, from which four radial roads lead to the Outer Circle, comprising larger tracts of land with residences, she further explains. "To the east was the Main Road with residences on either side," says Deepa, adding that the initial idea of a self-sufficient farming settlement never really took off, partly because of water scarcity. "Water problems are nothing new here. It has been a problem since 1882," she remarks wryly. Also, "most of the settlers had little or no agricultural background." At that time, the Whitefield Settlers Association, headed by Mr. White, was the sole governing body that looked after the affairs of Whitefield - long before it came under the Panchayat, and today, the BBMP. "However, with the advent of apartments and gated communities, each having their own RWA, the Settlers' Association didn't have much relevance," states Deepa, who currently holds the office. In fact, at the last AGM, it was decided that the Whitefield Settlers' Association would amalgamate with Whitefield Rising, a citizen's movement in the area, since "it seemed better to be under the aegis of a larger, unifying umbrella."

The idea for this walk goes back to a project done as part of Gully Tours City Explorer, the walking tour company's annual flagship programme, which seeks to create more ambassadors for the city. "As part of the programme, participants were divided into groups and asked to design a walk on any given topic," says Dr. Gayathri Talapula, who is also part of the walk. "Our group chose Whitefield because some of us live here, and we've always been intrigued by its past." Some of the other stops we make include the small but lovely Memorial Church, consecrated in 1886; the quaint Perfect Peace, one of the first few bungalows to be built in the area. Some of the other stops we make include the small but lovely Memorial Church, consecrated in 1886; the quaint Perfect Peace, one of the first few bungalows to be built in the area.

Research into past As part of their re-

search, the group explored the older areas of Whitefield, like the inner and outer circles, visiting some of the old houses and speaking to the people living there to get "all possible information about the past of Whitefield," says Gayathri, who, with her group, designed the heritage walk. During their research, they met Peck, who is deeply interested in the legacy of Whitefield and takes people on these small walks. Gayathri wishes to launch the Whitefield walk officially later this year. Some of the other stops we make include the small but lovely Memorial Church, consecrated in 1886; the quaint Perfect Peace, one of the first few bungalows to be built in the area, today owned by inventor Paul D'Souza and his mother; the larger Our Lady of Lourdes Church behind which is a stately hillock meant to represent Calvary; the run-down remains of Meer Saheb's General Store and Waverly Inn, neglected and overrun with dense undergrowth. Talapula admits to being rather intrigued by the "spicy" legend linked to this inn: it is believed that Winston Churchill, who lived in Bengaluru back then, often visited the inn to court Rose Hamilton, the daughter of the innkeeper James Hamilton. "Of course, there's no evidence of it, but I think everybody wants to believe that story," she says. "It is a pretty interesting link between the Prime Minister of the U.K. and Whitefield." The constant tussle between Whitefield's old identity as an Anglo-Indian settlement and what it is today, an IT hub filled with people for whom this is a layover stop and not a destination, clearly saddens its long-time residents, says Peck.

Vestiges of the old Whitefield have managed to cling to the few historical buildings still in use here thanks to its long-term residents' constant attempts to preserve it. For instance, the Whitefield Club, founded in 1905, was renovated in 2006, with great trouble being taken to maintain the look of the façade to match that of the original building. Then, in 2005, residents rallied to preserve the historic Whitefield Memorial Church from being damaged due to road widening plans. "The authorities don't seem to care about our history," she says. But this is a rich heritage. How can you destroy it? "The constant tussle between Whitefield's old identity as an Anglo-Indian settlement and what it is today, an IT hub filled with people for whom this is a layover stop and not a destination, clearly saddens its long-time residents, Peck included. "While words such as 'progress' and 'development' usually have a positive nuance, residents feel that 'development' in Whitefield seems quite the opposite," she says. "Instead, roads are being widened haphazardly while the water issue has become more significant than ever before as the supply cannot keep up with the demand for this basic resource. Large gated colonies and commercial establishments, many even illegal, have mushroomed and continue to sprout across the neighbourhood, taking over what was once a quiet, residential area. A few residents are actively involved in trying to improve issues facing Whitefield, but many don't want to get involved. "They come here for employment and will, probably, then return to where they came from," says Deepa. "Very few of the original families are left here now." However, when the International Tech Park (ITPL)



came up here in the late 90s, Whitefield residents actually welcomed it, remembers Deepa. "Till then, others would talk about how we lived in the boondocks! But things did improve with the advent of ITPL and other companies in and around Whitefield," she remembers. "It generated employment, not just for techies but also for locals, so it was welcomed."

Whitefield, like the city of Bengaluru itself, appears to have become a victim of its own success. "The resources and infrastructure are woefully inadequate to cater to the burgeoning population and the feverish ongoing construction happening all around," explains Deepa. Take, for instance, the constant water shortage in the locality. "While drilling borewells is technically banned, new ones are being drilled every few days," she says. "We inform officials, but the drilling

continues.' Slew of illegalities But she and other long-term residents who care about the place continue to fight the good fight in their own way. "We are rallying to preserve the character of the Inner and Outer Circle areas, which have been classified as Residential Main areas as per BBMP's Zoning, and no commercial establishments are permitted here," she says. "But it is a constant, uphill battle with officials themselves turning a blind eye to such illegalities." It is why she believes that walks like this, which expose people to the hidden heritage of the neighbourhood where they work, live in or traverse through, are very important. "When you have these walks and talk about the history and heritage of the area, some awareness does set in - and they realise that Whitefield is so much more than just a place where one stays for a while in a 2-bedroom apartment!"

## 2025 likely to be a sweet year for mango growers

It is most likely going to be a sweet year for mango growers in Karnataka, as the weather has been conducive so far for the crop. This comes after several consecutive bad years owing to weather and pest problems. The Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation (KSMDMC), after a meeting with a technical committee, has predicted a total mango yield of 12 lakh to 13 lakh tonnes for 2025. While the corporation had predicted an average yield of around 10 lakh tonnes, the yield had dropped to a mere 30% owing to weather factors and pest attacks last year. Extreme heat had led to flowers withering away instead of becoming fruits.

"Mangoes require cool conditions for fruit formation and this year, the weather has been conducive. Even though flowering has been slightly delayed, we have predicted an on year, subject to weather not playing spoilsport. If there is no rain until fruits are formed, then by the second week of April, we will start seeing mangoes in the market. Those who treat their mangoes (for quick ripening) might bring their fruits earlier," said C.G. Nagaraju, managing director, KSMDMC. As always, the mangoes from Ramanagara district and other areas around it are expected to hit the

market first, followed by those from Kolar, Chickballapur, and North Karnataka. While the corporation had predicted an average yield of around 10 lakh tonnes, the yield had dropped to a mere 30% owing to weather factors and pest attacks last year. Extreme heat had led to flowers withering away instead of becoming fruits. | Photo Credit: Sudhakara Jain Despite good weather conditions, pest problems continue to pester mango growers. "We have issued advisories to control hoppers disease, inflorescence bud disease etc. We have also sent technical teams to all the districts to help the farmers," Mr. Nagaraju said. While farmers are also hopeful this year, the cloudy conditions and light rain over the last few days have pushed them to worry. "We did not need this rain at this time as the flowers are close to fruit formation. If the weather improves over the next few days and there is enough heat in the upcoming weeks, then we might have a good year," said Dharanish Kumar, president, Kanakapura and Channapatna Mango Growers' Association.