

## Reddit user reports harassment by transgender person in Hyderabad, terms experience 'jarring'

Hyderabad: In yet another post about facing harassment by a transgender person, a woman Reddit user shared her experience. The Reddit user, going by the name 'anonymous\_soulll' posted on the 'r/hyderabad' about her ordeal saying that a transgender person approached her while she was walking on the Gachibowli-Miyapur road near DLF along with her roommate, and demanded an exorbitant amount of money. "This person kept at it. This is the first time I'm seeing a transgender person approach girls this way," said the Reddit user in her post.

"We told them that we've got no money with us and he said to go. I was very intimidating and we were both equally scared. (sic)" she posted adding that the transgender person demanded the woman to pay more money when she tried to transfer Rs. 10 from using her UPI account. "I gave him 10 rupees and he was extremely offended. Said people gave him 11000 and 5000 and we were

Shaming him this way. We just ran from there." the woman added. Had a jarring experience with transgender person byu/anonymous\_soulll inhyderabad

Responding to the woman's post, another user going by the name 'Far\_Information\_4070' said that he had also faced a similar experience in the same area. "We just wanted to get rid of them, so my friend took his phone out to send some 20rs, but they asked for 1500 rs. We were just blank," the user said. "Daylight robbery and police won't stop this," commented another user. This is not the first time someone has commented on the issue on the platform. In a viral post made last year, a woman shared her horrific experience of being harassed by transgender individuals. It may be recalled that a Reddit user previously posted about how some members of the transgender community entered into an argument with her family despite them explaining that they were postponing their housewarming ceremony



because someone in the family was up at our new house byu/zamindar-pilla hospitalised. Transgenders/Hijras showed inhyderabad

## Experts stress importance of including millets in PDS for food security, nutrition



Sangareddy: Experts, who attended a debate organised on 'Promoting Millets in the Public Distribution System' in India by the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Tata Cornell Institute (TCI), underlined the importance of making millets permanent part of the PDS distribution chain for providing food security and nutrition. They felt that the inclusion of millets in the PDS remains underutilised. Addressing the meeting organised at ICRISAT's Hyderabad campus, Dr Prabhu Pingali, ICRISAT Board Chair and Director of TCI, observed that the insights of the experts would help pave the

way for more effective and future-ready PDS system in India. "Millets can reshape our food systems, but only if we align policy, science, and action toward that goal. In response, the TCI is working with its partners to decode the 'true cost of the PDS'—considering its environmental, economic, and nutritional impacts and assessing untapped opportunities for improvement. For example, by enabling States to source locally grown millets through the work of ICRISAT and its partners, we're not just supporting farmers — we are strengthening the PDS to provide healthier more sustainable food for the most economically vulnerable," he said.

## Solar power to light up Karimnagar's Rekonda village

Karimnagar: Solar power is going to light up Rekonda soon. Located in Chigurumamidi mandal, the village has been selected as a solar model village by the State government under the Prime Minister's Surya Ghar scheme.

The first village in the district selected under the scheme will be entirely covered by solar power. As part of the programme, solar panels will be established on the roofs of all houses as well as in agricultural fields. The electricity generated through the solar panels will be utilised for domestic purposes and excess power will be sold. For this purpose, electricity officials recently sur-

veyed the village. There are 1,340 household and 843 agricultural power connections in the village. Based on the power utilised in the past, 1 to 3 watt solar panels will be arranged on houses while 5 watt panels will be fixed to agricultural connections. Besides the supply of solar panels, the government will bear the entire expenditure including fixing of panels.

If solar energy doesn't suffice the needs, people can utilise the State government's electricity, which will be provided for Rs 3.33 per unit to customers. Customers should provide power bills, Aadhaar, bank passbooks, and mobile phone num-



bers to the Electricity Department staff. Based on a recommendation by Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnam

Prabhakar, Rekonda was selected as a solar model village, the Electricity Department officials said.



# It's not just what you eat, when you eat also matters

While working late night or in night shifts has already impacted eating habits and patterns, the mushrooming of food outlets, round-the-clock availability of food, late-night and binge eating is becoming a growing concern. "It's not just about what you eat but also when you eat. The body's internal clock regulates metabolism, and eating in sync with these rhythms can improve metabolism, support weight management, and lower the risk of chronic metabolic diseases," said Meenakshi Bajaj, dietician, Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super Speciality Hospital. This is what the concept of chrononutrition looks at. "This is a new discipline that considers the quantity and timing of meals from the perception of chronobiology. Chrononutrition focuses on how the timing of meals impacts health by aligning eating habits with the body's natural circadian rhythms," she added. Recent research suggests a strong association with morning-ness or evening-ness. Ms. Meenakshi Bajaj said, adding: "Irregular eating disrupts this rhythm, leading to poor metabolic health. The evening chronotype has been linked with unhealthy food choices, binge eating, night snacking and various metabolic disorders, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, whereas morning individuals are related with lower rates of depression and improved mental health. Late meals can also disrupt hormones and increase appetite."

Replacing an early, healthy breakfast with an unhealthy late dinner and desserts, from takeaways to dining in food joints by young and middle-aged persons is problematic. The latest fad is exploring and enjoying food from midnight to early morning, she observed. "This food craze may have public health implications, as calorie dense meals when consumed during late evenings, can desynchronise the circadian rhythm. It's interesting to note that even when a healthy meal or snack is consumed late at night, it has a negative impact on health," she explained. A. Chezian, associate professor of Gastroenterology, Government Kilpauk Medical College Hospital, said that chrononutrition plays a huge role in gastrointestinal health and thereby, overall health. "Eating at a fixed time everyday is important for proper secretion and functioning of digestive enzymes and stomach acid, thereby decreasing the incidence of gastroesophageal reflux disease, gastric ulcers, gallstones. It ensures good gut immunity through establishing and ensuring healthy gut microbiota," he said.

He added that restricting energy intake time to the light phase is preferable, as it is key to preventing lifestyle disorders such as obesity, fatty liver, diabetes and dyslipidemia, thereby ensuring good cardiovascular health. "Chrononutrition disruptors are on the rise due to shift working systems and night shifts. This, added to round-the-clock accessibility to food especially junk food, is causing havoc on people's health. Eating dinner late is a proven risk factor for insulin resistance and thereby metabolic syndrome, which is a combination of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia and fatty liver. However, one should have a moderate approach to any change in pattern of eating by



consulting with a physician," Dr. Chezian said. Arulprakash S., senior consultant and clinical lead, gastroenterology, MGM Healthcare, said there is established evidence that disturbing the circadian rhythm with lifestyle changes such as erratic food habits, consuming high carbohydrate food, foods high in fats and high in calories in the evening could lead to metabolic disorders. "Ideally, the timing of food intake has to be respected as much as possible. Avoid high calorie intake in the evenings. Those on night shifts can take plant-based diets and drink fluids," he said. While there

are studies to support this, many do take it seriously, he observed. "Genes also determine circadian rhythm. It is not the same for everyone," he added. Dr. Arulprakash went on to stress the need to follow a consistent dietary pattern to prevent lifestyle diseases. "People tend to explore and resort to binge eating, including from midnight to 3 a.m. Eating late in the night is definitely not a healthy practise. This is a slow and gradual process and can affect the body as you age. Young people should follow a regular dietary pattern, avoid high carb, high fat foods in the evenings and most importantly, should not skip

breakfast," he said. Ms. Meenakshi Bajaj pointed out that evidence also indicates that Time-Restricted Eating within a 10-12 hour window during the day and fasting overnight has been shown to improve blood glucose levels, help with weight loss, and enhance overall metabolic health. "Eating on time is as important as eating healthy. Start the day with a balanced breakfast, promoting satiety and metabolism, and practice 'light evenings'. Consuming fewer and healthy calories at night prevents weight gain, reduces the risk of fatty liver, high cholesterol, prediabetes and diabetes," she added.

## Thiruvananthapuram makes good food choice with healthy eats

For 25-year-old Vrinda Vinod, who lost her grandfather to high blood pressure, an affinity towards healthy food started at a young age with her mother bringing in a healthy twist while packing her lunch boxes to school. Following her graduation from a law school in Bengaluru, Vrinda returned to the city and converted their rented space at Pattom to a cloud kitchen, The Salad Bistro, in November 2023, serving salads, smoothies and sweets, that were mindfully crafted. Vrinda belongs to the list of foodpreneurs who have decided to venture into the business of "healthy food" in the State capital in recent years. Outlets such as Whealthier, Salad Caffe, Boiled, and Steamed are among those who are serving healthy but not boring food, ranging from salads to oil-free and sugar-free protein platters.

"Healthy food is the future. Illnesses that used to appear in 60-year-olds are starting for those in their 30s nowadays. The current generation have begun going to the gym not

just for bodybuilding, but also for their general health," says Sreenath Raveendran, one of the three founders of Boiled at Jawahar Nagar.

Boiled follows a strict "no oil, no sugar" policy, with their best-selling items being ghee chicken, honey chilli lemon chicken, coconut milk poached chicken and boiled special chicken salad. "We use only honey in our dishes," says Sreenath. Coconut milk poached chicken from Boiled "Evidence suggests that high-sugar diets can lead to obesity and inflammation as well as high triglycerides, blood sugar, and blood pressure levels — all of which are risk factors for heart disease," says Dr Leena Saju, nutritionist at KIMSHEALTH Hospital. Another outlet which follows the same policy is Steamed at Kuravankonam. Founded by young entrepreneurs A Pranoy Jose and Gowri Nandan VR, Steamed started as a cloud kitchen. Currently, the restaurant serves a variety of platters, shakes, wraps, momos and even

mandis, which do not use oil. They also had a sweet box for Deepavali in 2024 with protein bars made without any sugar. Gowri Nandan says, "We keep in mind the quantity of nutrients, proteins, carbs and other components necessary for a person. Our focus is on the quantity of nutrients." Sudheep Suresh, 38, discovered Steamed while scrolling through social media. As someone who was looking to shift to a healthier diet for the past few years, this was a welcome discovery. "The oil-free concept they offer is healthy and I like their menu as well. I specifically prefer their protein platter as it is not very heavy, but also filling," says Sudheep, who has been in Thiruvananthapuram for the past eight years. The outlets claim to have found healthy alternatives through trial and error. For instance, Steamed substituted mayonnaise by creating their own dip that uses cashew as its base. "Even for a cholesterol or a diabetes patient, if they want to enjoy a shawarma or a wrap, we have options for that," says Pranoy.



# World's biggest International Temples Convention and Expo announces its second edition in Tirupati in February 2025, Mahakumbh of Temples opens registrations for all in the temple ecosystem

Hyderabad: The International Temples Convention and Expo (ITCX) makes a grand return with its highly anticipated second edition. Building on the phenomenal success of its inaugural chapter in 2023 which earned widespread acclaim, the convention also received the support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. This year, the convention promises to be even more magnificent in scale and scope and is set to take place in the revered temple city of Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh from February 17 to 19, 2025. Developed by Temple Connect (India), ITCX stands as the world's first groundbreaking platform exclusively devoted to the comprehensive management of temples worldwide, aiming to empower excellence in the administration, operations, and advancements of the temple economy.

Spearheaded by Shri Giresh Kulkarni, Founder of Temple Connect, this landmark event is co-led by Prasad Lad (Chairman of ITCX 2025 and Member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council). The convention plays a transformative role in elevating the Temple Tourism and Pilgrimage Ecosystem, with the esteemed backing of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, under the "Incredible India" initiative. Registrations are free and currently open - temple managers and representatives are invited to register for the event by January 31 2025, to be part of this

transformative experience. Two representatives from each temple can attend at no registration cost, with their accommodations covered as part of the program. Additional trustees are welcome to join for a nominal fee and can also participate in the committee to gain deeper insights and connections.

With a sharp focus on the pillars of temple management, the conclave will address critical issues ranging from temple safety, cutting-edge security and surveillance protocols, to strategic fund management and comprehensive disaster management. It will also address essential aspects of sanitation and hygiene standards, and food distribution management (particularly for large-scale meal services), along with the integration of over 75 high-tech innovations in the Temple & Faith Tech space. In addition to these pressing topics, ITCX will delve deep into insightful discussions around crowd and queue management, sustainable waste management practices, and infrastructure development - all designed to enrich the sacred experiences of devotees and strengthen the temple ecosystem holistically. Spanning three immersive days, ITCX will build a dynamic forum for the seamless exchange of knowledge and valuable insights among temple management teams worldwide, including heads of temples, trustees, and administrators from Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism



- all under one roof. A key highlight of the convention includes case study exhibitions (CSE) from these devotional institutions across 58 countries, offering invaluable learnings and diverse perspectives. This exclusive event is designed to establish and promote best practices while shaping a sus-

tainable, forward-thinking approach to temple administration. It also offers a unique opportunity for the younger generation, Brand Solutions providers, and policymakers to engage and enhance the devotees' experience, while gaining actionable insights to drive positive change and innovation in temple management.

## ASER 2024: How India's focus on basic skills is improving learning outcomes

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 2024, shows a 7-10% jump in reading and arithmetic in the last two years between 2022 to 2024. ASER surveys have been done regularly since 2005 and such a significant jump was never seen across the country. This jump in basic learning outcomes, therefore, is laudable. But we must keep in mind that it comes after a deep drop in learning due to Covid. ASER 2022 showed that after nearly two years of school closures, there was a massive drop in the already low learning levels in students across the country. So this jump in ASER 2024 reflects a recovery to pre-covid levels. Two factors led to this quick recovery. First, the State governments recognised and addressed learning losses due to Covid with focused efforts immediately after schools reopened. Tamil Nadu, for instance, implemented a statewide programme called Illam Thedi Kalvi.

Second, there has been a slow policy movement towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) since pre-Covid years. At the national and State level there has been a push to initiate programmes in FLN. In Tamil Nadu, an FLN initiative called Ennum Ezhuthum was launched.

The combination of FLN initiatives and Covid learning loss recovery initiatives meant that for the first time in the country, there was such a strong consistent attention to basic

skills over two years. This is the reason for the significant jump in learning levels seen in ASER 2024. This is fantastic evidence that a country-wide focus on basic skills does produce a significant measurable impact within a short period. The shift in government policy towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy is quite recent. For most of the second decade of this century, governments dismissed the data. They refused to accept the need for the focus on basic skills. The norm was setting higher and higher learning goals every few years. This pushed teachers to focus on completing the syllabus instead of ensuring that all children achieved basic skills.

Need to stay focused It is extremely important to sustain a sharp focus on basic skills for at least the next ten years. There is much talk about skilling today because many educated graduates are found to be unemployed. The roots of this problem go back to the lack of basic reading and maths skills imparted to students at the primary school level. Achieving high FLN levels is integral to future employability and skilled human resources. It is needed for the multi-trillion dollar economy goals set by the government. While the jump in ASER 2024 is positive, it is important to recognize that the starting base was so low that even today after the jump the percentage of children who can read or subtract is still quite low. To



see a permanent transformation in the educational levels of our children, this singular focus on basic skills must continue without dilution for the next 10 years. It is important that officials and educationists do not get over-ambitious and add more and more focus themes, which could easily dilute the ground-level focus on basic skills. By setting big unachievable goals, over-ambitious projects often end up de-legitimising small achievable goals. The goals set cannot be met and the goals that can be reached are not considered important. This creates a widespread sense of failure. While this is a problem in many sectors, it has plagued the

education sector for many decades. It is time to recognize that by setting simple achievable goals and actually reaching it, huge positive motivation is created at all levels. This in turn allows the system to incrementally set and reach higher and higher goals over time. A national focus on ensuring that even the last child is able to read and do basic arithmetic is a simple achievable goal with huge transformational potential. Ensuring universal literacy and numeracy in our schools by 2030 will not only be a huge achievement by itself, it will also set the stage for the next big jump in educational outcomes.



# Future Bureaucrats Inspired at St. Martin's Engineering College



Hyderabad, Jan 30: A seminar on "How to Crack Civil Services in the First Attempt" was successfully conducted at St. Martin's Engineering College, Kompally, by VINGS Media and G5 Media Group in collaboration with 21st Century IAS Academy on Thursday. Mr. P. Krishna Pradeep, Chairman of 21st Century IAS Academy, addressed the gathering, emphasizing the honor of serving in a position where one's

address becomes a "care-of address" for those in need. He shared the inspiring story of IAS officer Amit Kataria, popularly known as "The Dabang Officer," who exemplified selfless service by accepting only one rupee as his salary while supporting his family through his wife's income.

Dr. Bhavani Shankar, Chief Mentor and Director of 21st Century IAS Academy, de-

bunked the myth that only students from prestigious institutions like IITs and IIMs can crack the Civil Services Examination. He highlighted that even students from regular degree colleges can succeed, as many UPSC questions are based on concepts from as early as the 6th-grade curriculum. He urged students to aim for civil services not just for career growth but to create a lasting impact on society. Dr. P. Santosh Kumar

Patra, Group Director of St. Martin's Engineering College, welcomed the students and encouraged them to seize this career-defining opportunity.

The event was attended by Mr. Garla Ramesh, Training and Placement Officer, Mr. Giri Prakash - Director, VINGS Media, Mr. Ganesh - Editor, Mr. Prasad - Manager, along with faculty members and enthusiastic students.



# How Uttarakhand UCC rules for live-in relationships raise privacy and surveillance concerns

Uttarakhand's Uniform Civil Code passed by the State Assembly in February 2024, mandates the registration of live-in relationships both at their commencement and termination. This requirement applies not only to residents of Uttarakhand but also to individuals residing elsewhere in India. The rules, which came into effect on January 27, 2025, impose extensive documentation requirements for such registrations, including Aadhaar cards, details of any previous marital or live-in relationships, and the name and contact information of landlords. Experts have cautioned that these onerous restrictions on a consensual adult relationship constitute severe constitutional violations, particularly concerning privacy and personal liberty. "Requiring individuals in a live-in relationship to register with the government constitutes a gross violation of the right to privacy enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. It also contravenes the nine-judge bench decision in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, which affirmed that the right to privacy encompasses both informational privacy and decisional autonomy. There can be no disproportionate intrusion by the state into the private realm of an individual", Alok Prasanna Kumar, co-founder of Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy told The Hindu.

Registration process Under the code, only unmarried, heterosexual couples can enter into live-in relationships. Couples currently in a live-in relationship or intending to enter one can register through the newly launched online portal. For offline registration, they have to submit a 16-page form along with supporting documents to the concerned registrar. Depending on the jurisdiction, the registrar may be the sub-divisional magistrate, municipal commissioner, chief executive officer of a cantonment board, or any officer appointed by them. As stipulated in Rule 15(3)(e), applicants are required to submit an extensive set of documents for registration such as their photographs, their income tax Permanent Account Number (PAN), their Aadhaar linked to their phone number, and proof of residence or domicile within the State. If either partner is between the ages of 18 and 21, they must provide the Aadhaar-linked phone number and address of each of their parents or legal guardians. The registrar is legally obligated to notify the parents or guardians regarding the registration of the relationship, as well as its subsequent termination. Marriage eligibility and relationship history

A distinctive feature of the rules is their attempt to equate live-in relationships with the status of marriage. If a couple falls within the "degrees of prohibited relationships" as outlined in Schedule 1 — meaning they are related by blood — they must obtain approval from a religious or community leader certifying their eligibility to marry. The term "degrees of prohibited relationships" is derived from the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, which forbids marriages between individuals who are lineally or consanguinely related, unless such unions are permitted by local customs. Couples are also required to furnish proof of any prior relationships, particularly if they have previously been in a live-in relationship. Further, they are required to disclose their current status — whether single, married, divorced, annulled, separated, or widowed. Supporting documentation may in-



clude a divorce or annulment decree, a death certificate, or a certificate of termination for a previous live-in relationship. If a marriage was dissolved through customary religious practices, appropriate evidence of such dissolution must be provided. Housing details

If the partners are already living together, they must provide proof of their shared household, such as the most recent electricity or water bill. If they reside in rented accommodation, they must also submit the landlord's full name, contact number, and a copy of the rent agreement. The registrar is obligated to contact the landlord while verifying the application details. If the partners are not yet living together, they must apply for a provisional certificate. Upon receiving such a certificate, the couple must secure accommodation within 30 days, with a possible 15-day extension. They must then apply for final registration, providing proof of their new premises. The rules also impose specific obligations on landlords. When leasing property to a live-in couple, landlords must request either a provisional or final registration certificate, which will be incorporated into the rent agreement. Failure to comply will result in a penalty, the details of which will be notified by the government. Summary inquiry and penalties

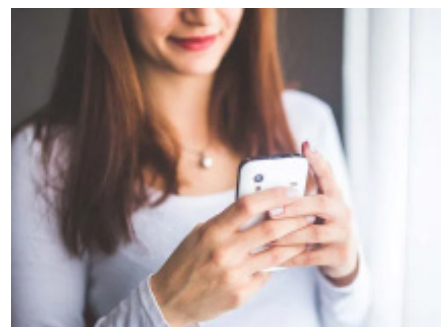
Under the rules, the registrar is empowered to conduct a summary inquiry to verify the authenticity of submitted documents and ensure that the relationship was not established through coercion, undue influence, misrepresentation, or fraud. If an application is rejected, the couple has the right to appeal before the Registrar General under the code. Failure to register a live-in relationship within a month may result in both civil and criminal penalties. Upon conviction, a magistrate may impose a jail term of up to three months, a fine of up to ₹10,000, or both. Providing false information or concealing details about the relationship carries a stricter penalty — imprisonment of up to three months, a fine of up to ₹25,000, or both. The registrar,

either acting suo motu or upon receiving a complaint regarding non-registration, can issue a notice directing compliance. Non-compliance may lead to legal proceedings, and if convicted, the couple could face imprisonment of up to six months, a fine of up to ₹25,000, or both. False complaints may attract a fine determined by the State government, with repeat offenders facing a higher penalty. 'Social surveillance' According to Apar Gupta, advocate and co-founder of the Internet Freedom Foundation, the rules allow third-party disclosures of personal data without sufficient safeguards. "The rules permit disclosure to entities such as landlords,

police authorities, and resident welfare associations without proper checks and balances. This will lead to large-scale social surveillance of relationships, which appears to be the intended consequence of the legislation," he said. He also highlighted the absence of audit or review mechanisms to prevent data breaches.

"There are no penalties for third parties in cases of data leaks, which is particularly concerning since the exposure of personal information can pose real-world threats. This is likely to disproportionately affect interfaith and inter-caste couples," Mr. Gupta added.

## Smartphone use for social media surpasses education among Telangana teenagers, raises concerns



According to the report, 92.3 percent of children aged 14 to 16 years know how to use a smartphone. While 61 percent utilize it for educational purposes, a significant 82.5 percent are engaged in social media browsing. This shift in smartphone usage has sparked concerns about its impact on students' academic performance.

Hyderabad: For several Telangana teenagers, scrolling through Facebook, Instagram or watching short videos on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube on smartphones has become more routine than using the devices for homework or learning purposes. This has come to fore in the Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2024 report released by the Pratham, an NGO, which conducted the survey.

As per the report, among the children aged between 14 and 16 years, 92.3 percent know how to operate a smartphone, while 61 percent used the device for educational related activity, a whopping 82.5 percent hooked to social media browsing. This shift in smartphone usage has raised concerns about the academic performance of students. Overall, 82.2 percent of all children in the age group of 14-16 years in the country reported knowing how to use a smartphone. Of these, 57 percent know how to use it for an educational activity, while 76 percent said that they had used it for social media during the survey week.



# What is the current status of the introduction of African cheetahs?

The Cheetah Action Plan (CAP) represents India's ambitious effort to introduce African cheetahs into its ecosystems, with a focus on both conserving the species and restoring the health of savanna habitats. However, the project has faced several challenges since its inception, including extended captivity of the cheetahs and fatalities, raising questions about its long-term prospects.

What is Project Cheetah?

The CAP states that the translocation of a large carnivore, African cheetahs in this case, is a strategy to conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions. It also states that India plans to assist the Government of Iran, and the international conservation community with conserving the Asiatic cheetah and increasing its distribution range to include protected landscapes in India. The CAP also says cheetahs will be a flagship species for the degraded dry-open forest/savanna ecosystems in India and increase the value of restoring and conserving them, as well as improve the fortunes of local communities through eco-tourism. It has been estimated that the released population should reach the carrying capacity of Kuno National Park in about 15 years and that of the wider Kuno landscape in 30-40 years. According to the CAP, the introduction programme requires long-term (at least 25 years) financial, technical, and administrative commitments from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, and the Wildlife Institute of India.

Why are the African cheetahs in captivity?

Per the CAP, radio-collared male coalitions were to be released first from their holding enclosures (bomas) after a period of one to two months. The radio-collared females were to be released one to four weeks after the males, depending on how comfortable the males were in their new environment. India has missed these timelines. The quarantine period in Kuno for all the cheetahs was longer than specified. Once the cheetahs were released into the bomas, they endured a prolonged period of confinement. In fact, the 12 surviving adult cheetahs of the 20 brought from Africa have spent almost all of the last 12 months in captivity. Such long-term captivity can only be interpreted as a misguided attempt by those managing the cheetahs to play it safe, possibly in the belief that the mortality of the cats can be mitigated in captivity and that they will also be easier to breed. The problem? Captive cats quickly become unfit to be released to range free in the wild, which is Project Cheetah's objective. A Namibian policy categorically restricts the captivity period for wild large carnivores to three months. If the period exceeds this duration, the carnivore should either be euthanised or be held permanently in captivity. As per this policy, the 12 adult cheetahs and the 12 cubs currently in Kuno are unfit to be released into the wild.

Why did so many cheetahs die after moving?

Deaths and births are part and parcel of the lives of all species. That said, in such



The Cheetah Action Plan (CAP) represents India's ambitious effort to introduce African cheetahs into its ecosystems, with a focus on both conserving the species and restoring the health of savanna habitats.

international projects, utmost care should be taken to assess and choose individual animals before they are imported. Once the cats are in India, we are responsible for deploying the best available knowledge and management practices to ensure they thrive, not just survive. There have been failures on both these fronts. One female cheetah imported from Namibia had a pre-existing and chronic renal ailment resulting in her death in captivity in March 2023. A male from South Africa died in captivity in April 2023 due to suspected hypokalaemia and the resulting acute heart failure. A female from South Africa died in captivity in May 2023 as she was mauled by a male coalition in an enclosure while the managers were trying to get her to mate. All three cats died before they were released at all. In late May 2023, three of the four cubs born to Jwala were found dead due to heat stroke. Between July 11 and August 2, 2023, two males from South Africa (one free-ranging and the other in captivity) and one female from Namibia (free-ranging) died. The official reason was that these cats contracted dermatitis, followed by myiasis and septicaemia. The root cause was allegedly the growth of a winter coat during the Indian summer and monsoons. This is physiologically impossible since a shorter day length is required for the winter coat to grow. In January 2024, a male from Namibia died in captivity due to septicaemia. In August 2024, another male from Namibia — the only free-ranging African cheetah in Kuno — died apparently due to drowning. A few cheetah researchers with decades of experience said none had heard of a single instance of a free-ranging cheetah drowning. Two of the cubs born in a litter

of six died in June and August 2024. One cub's spine was broken.

Why are the cheetahs located in Kuno?

The CAP states that 10 sites were surveyed in five central Indian States to determine their suitability for introducing African cheetahs. Of these, Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh was found to be the most suitable for introducing the cheetahs because of its habitat and adequate prey base. But even in Kuno, the cheetahs have largely been held captive. About 80 sq. km has been fenced off in Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary and cheetahs were initially supposed to be released there by December 2023 or January 2024. Now the plan seems to be to introduce the cats in late 2024 or early 2025. A captive breeding facility for the African cheetahs is being built in the Banni grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat. Some cheetahs are likely to be housed here. Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh has also been mentioned as a potential site for introducing African cheetahs.

Who is responsible for the cheetahs?

An expert committee appointed by the NTCA and chaired by Rajesh Gopal has the overall responsibility for guiding the project. The NTCA and the MoEFCC are the institutions responsible for all high-level decision-making, including negotiating with the African countries to procure the cheetahs. The Wildlife Institute of India has been providing technical inputs and the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has been responsible for the field implementation.

Will Project Cheetah have measurable

outcomes?

The CAP outlines both short-term and long-term success criteria for introducing cheetahs in India. In the short term, the goals include a 50% survival rate for the first year, cheetahs establishing home ranges, successful reproduction in the wild, and generating revenue for local communities through eco-tourism. These goals are currently not being met due to prolonged captivity, which contradicts the plan's original prescriptions. Long-term success is measured by cheetahs becoming a stable part of the ecosystem with natural survival rates, establishing a viable metapopulation, improving habitat quality and prey diversity, and benefiting local economies through sustainable conservation efforts.

Does Project Cheetah have a sunset clause?

In some sense, the long-term criteria for success like the establishment of a viable metapopulation in India should be viewed as the sunset clause. Such projects will need almost constant management attention. The timelines stretch across a minimum of 15 years but more realistically 30 to 40 years, as per the CAP. But the big question still remains: does India have sufficient habitat (4,000 to 8,000 sq. km) of the required quality to establish a viable population of free-ranging cheetahs in the wild? Ravi Chellam is a wildlife biologist and conservation scientist based in Bengaluru. He is CEO of Metastring Foundation and Coordinator of Biodiversity Collaborative. The views expressed by him are independent and personal.



# Environment takes centre stage as global summits loom

Global warming. Disappearing plant and animal species. Fertile land turning to desert. Plastic in the oceans, on land, and the air we breathe. These urgent environmental challenges will be in the spotlight over the next few months as the United Nations hosts four major sessions to address key threats to the planet. Biodiversity First up is a Conference of the Parties (COP) dedicated to biodiversity being held in Cali, Colombia, from October 21 to November 1. These are called every two years to debate how the world can cooperate to better protect the rich variety of plant and animal life in the natural world. The COP16 isn't expected to break new ground but is more a stocktake of progress since the last summit secured historic assurances for biodiversity.

In 2022 in Montreal, nations agreed to place 30 percent of the planet under environmental protection by 2030 in a landmark pact aimed at arresting biodiversity loss and restoring ecosystems to health. In Cali, countries will put forward national strategies to meet this global objective, and observers hope Colombia as host will provide a model for others to follow. WWF has commended the leadership shown so far by Colombia, which hosts close to 10 percent of Earth's biodiversity, including countless bird, butterfly, and orchid species. Climate The world's most important conference on climate change is this year being hosted by Azerbaijan, a former Soviet republic heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, from November 11 to 22. While the last summit in Dubai in 2023 delivered a historic commitment to transition the world away from fossil fuels, supporting poorer countries with climate change will top this year's agenda. The summit, known as COP29, is expected to land a new agreement on climate finance: money from rich nations most responsible for global warming to developing countries vulnerable to climate change. There isn't an agreed figure yet, or even consensus on where the money should come from, who should receive it, and what form it could take. But developing countries are pushing for much more than the \$100 billion pledged in 2009. This was only reached for the first time in full in 2022. "COP29 offers an opportunity to unlock more climate investments from a wider range of public and private sources and to improve the quality of this finance," said the World Resources Institute, a US think tank. The result of the US election, just six days before COP29 begins, could throw a last-minute curveball into the final negotiations, which have proved divisive so far. It also remains to be seen how many world leaders travel to Baku, the capital on the Caspian Sea, with some expected to focus their energy on COP30 in Brazil next year. Desertification The least high profile of the three COPs, this session in Saudi Arabia addressing the loss of fertile land to desert is nonetheless critical.

Climate variation like droughts and human activities like overgrazing can result in desertification, a process mainly in dry areas where land degrades and becomes unproductive. Experts hope the



COP16 on desertification, scheduled to take place in Riyadh from December 2 to 13, can act as a turning point in addressing this problem. "Discussions will focus on ways to restore 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030, as well as putting in place agreements to manage the droughts that are already affecting many regions of the globe," said Arona Diedhiou from the French National Research Institute for Sustainable

Development. Plastic In 2022, some 175 nations agreed to fast-track negotiations toward a world-first treaty on plastic pollution, and the final session gets underway on November 25 in South Korea. The treaty aims to marshal an international response to the plastic trash choking the environment, from oceans and rivers to mountains and sea ice. Some nations want the treaty to restrict how much plastic can be made

while others -- particularly oil and gas producing countries that provide the raw materials to make plastic -- want a focus on recycling. Hellen Kahaso Dena, head of Greenpeace's Pan-African Plastics Project, hopes that countries "will agree on a treaty that prioritises reducing plastic production." "There is no time to waste with approaches that will not solve the problem," the activist said.

## Meta to start using public posts on Facebook, Instagram in UK to train AI

Meta Platforms will begin training its AI models using public content shared by adults on Facebook and Instagram in the UK over the coming months, the company said, after it had paused the training in the region following a regulatory backlash. The company will use public posts including photos, captions and comments to train its generative artificial intelligence models, it said on Friday, adding that the training content will not include private messages or information from accounts of users under the age of 18.

The update follows Meta's decision in mid-June to pause the launch of its AI models in Europe after the Irish privacy regulator told the company to delay its plan to harness data from social media posts. The company had then said the delay would also allow it to address requests from Britain's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). "Since we paused training our generative AI models in the UK to address regulatory feedback, we've engaged positively with the ICO ... this clarity and certainty will help us bring AI at Meta products to the UK



much sooner," Meta said on Friday. Facebook and Instagram users in the UK will start receiving in-app notifications from next week explaining the company's procedure and how users can object to their data being used for the training, Meta added.

Meta has made changes to its ap-

proach since it paused the plans in June, the ICO said in a statement, adding the company has simplified the way users can object to the processing of their data and has extended the window in which they can do so. In June, Meta's plans faced backlash from advocacy group NOYB,



# Will Mission Mausam help tackle weather better?

On September 11, the Cabinet cleared a ₹2,000 crore programme called Mission Mausam to upgrade infrastructure used to make atmospheric observations. It will involve a major upgrade of instruments used by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

What are its objectives?

The mission's focus is to improve atmospheric observations to enable better quality monsoon forecasts, improve alerts warning of deteriorating air quality, and warn of extreme weather events and cyclones. Critical elements of the mission include deploying 'next-generation radars' and satellite systems with advanced sensors and high-performance supercomputers, developing improved earth-system models, and a GIS-based automated Decision Support System for real-time data dissemination. The nodal agency involved in executing the mission is the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES). In the first tranche of the mission until 2026, the MoES hopes to procure and install up to 60 weather radars, 15 wind profilers, and 15 radiosondes. These instruments give regular updates on the changing parameters of wind speeds, atmospheric pressure, humidity, and temperature at various elevations of the atmosphere.

Is this the first time that a mission of this sort has been conceived?

No. The predecessor is the 'Monsoon Mission,' launched in 2012. Historically, the IMD has relied on statistical methods to forecast monsoons. Different weather parameters were permuted and combined in myriad ways to prepare forecasts about the likely performance of the monsoon in a particular year. These were extremely broad estimates; they almost never warned of the likelihood of droughts and also could not capture the wide regional diversity of the monsoon. Droughts and floods co-exist and these weather models were usually inadequate at capturing that. The Monsoon Mission proposed a radical approach. Since 2004, meteorologists and climate scientists have been working on a different approach to forecasting that relies on high performance computing machines, or supercomputers. They sought to simulate the weather on a particular day and, via physics equations, make a map of how each day's weather would pan out over the next few days, weeks, and even months. These weather models, called dynamical models, are now the standard approach to weather forecasts and climate studies. This can give more accurate 'medium range' forecasts and often this is what consumers of weather information find useful. The Monsoon Mission eventually succeeded in developing a general-purpose dynamical model that can be tweaked to generate forecasts on multiple timescales — from daily forecasts to seasonal monsoon predictions. Beyond the monsoon, such a model could be customised for heatwaves, cold waves, and local forecasts. It is also an expensive approach to fore-

casting and requires sophisticated computers, radars, wind profilers, and an array of data-gathering devices.

What is novel about this mission?

Improving dynamical models is an endless pursuit, limited only by money and intellectual curiosity. While the latest mission builds on its predecessor by getting more of such equipment, it has outlined a radical plan for "weather management." This means actively changing the weather using cloud seeding. The latter involves spraying clouds with appropriate chemicals to increase or decrease their water-carrying capacity. Plans are also afoot to control lightning. As statistics reveal, lightning strikes are the number one cause of nature-propelled deaths in India and were responsible for 2,821 or 35% of the 8,060 accidental deaths attributable to natural forces in 2022, according to the latest NCRB report. Meteorologists say they hope one day to be able to tweak the electrical characteristics of the cloud so that there are less lightning strikes that lethally traverse from sky to ground. To this end, a



large 'cloud chamber' — that simulates the interior of a cloud — will be set up at the IITM. To be sure, research into weather modification has a history stretching back to the 1950s and many experiments have been conducted in India, including spraying aerosols in certain regions of one

cloud, and leaving out the others. However, the big challenge with weather modification is setting sharp boundaries. It is not unusual for seeded clouds to rain in places where they are not supposed to. Gleaning a better understanding of these processes is a major component of Mission Mausam.

## Endometriosis pain leads to missed school and work in two-thirds of women with the condition, new study finds

More than two-thirds of women with endometriosis missed school or work due to pain from the condition, in a study of more than 17,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States. That is a key finding of new research published in the *Journal of Endometriosis and Uterine Disorders*. Our study also found that Black and Hispanic women were less likely to be diagnosed with endometriosis compared with white women. Interestingly, women who identified as part of the LGBTQ community had a higher likelihood of receiving an endometriosis diagnosis than heterosexual women. We used data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which is administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for the period 2011 to 2019. The survey data use adjusted weights to account for the racial composition of U.S. society, meaning our sample of 17,619 women represents 51,981,323 women of the U.S. population. We specifically examined factors related to quality of life, such as poverty, education and functional impairment, as well as race and sexual orientation. I am a physician-scientist and a researcher in women's health, working together with specialists in OB-GYN from Yale and the University of Texas.

Endometriosis is a chronic, often painful condition that affects approximately 10% of reproductive-age women worldwide. It occurs when tissues that would normally line the inner surface of the uterus instead occur outside the uterus, such as on the ovaries or even in distant organs such as the lungs or brain. These abnormally located lesions respond to hormonal

changes during the menstrual cycle, causing pain when stimulated by the hormones that regulate the menstrual cycle.

Our study sheds light on how endometriosis, despite its prevalence, remains underdiagnosed and under-researched. We found that 6.4% of reproductive-age women in the U.S. had an endometriosis diagnosis. More than 67% reported missed work or school, or having been unable to perform daily activities, due to pain associated with endometriosis. Our study highlights disparities in the diagnosis and management of endometriosis among different racial groups. Black women had 63% lower odds of getting an endometriosis diagnosis, and Hispanic women had 55% lower odds compared with non-Hispanic white women. This disparity may reflect historical biases in health care, pointing to the need for more equitable practices. In addition, our study underscores the importance of considering women's health across diverse population subgroups, with particular attention to sexual orientation. We found that non-heterosexual lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer women had 54% higher odds of receiving an endometriosis diagnosis compared with straight women. Our study was the first to examine endometriosis likelihood among non-heterosexual women at the national level in the U.S. We found no significant association between endometriosis and other quality-of-life indicators such as poverty, education or employment status, which suggests that the condition affects women across various socioeconomic backgrounds. What other research is being done? Our work adds to the growing body of evidence that Black



women are less likely to be diagnosed with endometriosis and that their reported pain symptoms are often overlooked. Explanations for this inequity include health care bias against minority women and limited access to medical care among Black women. Research also shows that many medical professionals as well as medical students and residents believe that Black women have a lower pain threshold compared with the white population. This is another possible reason that pain symptoms among Black women with endometriosis get neglected. Researchers from the U.K. reported the same findings, attributing these disparities to systemic bias and inequitable medical care. Another study estimates that the lifetime costs associated with having endometriosis are about USD 27,855 per year per patient in the U.S., costing the country about USD 22 billion annually on health care expenditures.