

## Soon AI tool to be used to enhance Telangana govt teachers training

Hyderabad: The Education department has decided to leverage digital initiatives and artificial intelligence to improve school education and teacher training in the State. Towards this a team led by Education department Secretary Dr. Yogita Rana, along with Intermediate Education Director Krishna Aditya, School Education Director EV Narasimha Reddy and among others, visited EkStep Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to fostering digital transformation and creating public good in education, in Bengaluru on Thursday.

During the meeting the visiting delegation deliberated on focus areas for collaborations, including foundational literacy and numeracy, AI-powered digital initiatives, data-driven insights and teacher professional development. As part of the FLN, impactful interventions aimed at improving foundational skills in primary school students, en-

suring they acquire critical reading, writing, and numeracy abilities with AI driven digital initiatives has been explored. Leveraging of AI tools for personalized learning experiences and better resource utilization in schools has been examined. Using data-driven insights, the department is planning to identify learning gaps and initiate evidence based decisions. To enhance teacher capacity building, effective use of technology and AI in the classrooms is also explored during the meeting. The department is now working on a detailed plan of action in collaboration with EkStep Foundation. This plan will focus on implementing digital initiatives, improving FLN outcomes, and providing holistic support to teachers and students alike. Earlier, the Telangana delegation visited EkStep Foundation in Kerala in December 2024, where the team observed the Kerala government's successful integration of AI tools into its ICT curriculum.



## Weather getting hotter across Telangana



Hyderabad: After a spell that lasted for over two months, the winter season in Hyderabad and Telangana has reached its final stages. For the past few days, the day time maximum temperatures in Hyderabad and districts have registered a significant rise and are now hovering between 34 degree Celsius and 37 degree Celsius with weather almost resembling summer. Average night time temperatures too have increased and are now ranging between 12 degree Celsius and 22 degree Celsius across Telangana. In Hyderabad, the minimum temperatures are now between 13 degree Celsius and 23 degree Celsius, a clear indication of seasonal change. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)-Hyderabad too has given a clear indication of rising temperatures in its State-wide forecast. "Minimum temperatures are likely to be above normal by 2°C - 3°C during the next 3 days over Telangana. Dry

weather is very likely to prevail over the State," it said. The forecast from IMD-Hyderabad, however, made it clear that mist or hazy conditions are most likely to prevail during morning hours at isolated pockets over Telangana for the next 3-days. Noted weather tracker from Hyderabad, T Balaji, through his handle in X (telanganaweatherman) also indicated that winter season in Hyderabad and elsewhere in TS is over.

"Good bye winters! It's been a good 2.5 months of proper winter so far. Now, we enter the spring season. During February 1 to 12, super dry weather is expected with hot day temperatures. However, nights will be comfortable, mornings will be slightly cold," he said. According to Balaji, the maximum temperatures across Telangana between February 1 and 12 will be between 34 degree C and 37 degree C.

## UoH student representing Telangana team wins bronze medal in Goalball National Championship

Goalball is a team sport designed specifically for visually-challenged athletes. This tournament was conducted by the Goalball Federation of India, in collaboration with the Tara Goalball Sports Association of Maharashtra.

Hyderabad: Lucky Mirani, student of IMA, Political Science, University of Hyderabad (UoH) represented the Telangana team in the 4th Goalball National Championship, which was held in Gondia, Maharashtra, from December 26 to 28, and the team won a bronze medal in the same.

Goalball is a team sport designed spe-

cifically for visually-challenged athletes. This tournament was conducted by the Goalball Federation of India, in collaboration with the Tara Goalball Sports Association of Maharashtra. A total of 17 teams from across India participated in this tournament, and the Telangana team secured 3rd position, receiving a bronze medal from the dignitaries.



# How back-channel talks set stage for Modi's visit to US

The central characters in this saga are Michael Waltz and S Jaishankar. And the plot begins with Waltz's visit to Delhi in August 2023, and Jaishankar's three visits to Washington DC in the last five months. Together, it is a saga of providence, astute diplomatic investment, political signalling, and confident engagement. The Waltz connection on the occasion of the completion of the celebrations of 75 years of Independence, the Indian government invited a special Congressional delegation of members of the House India caucus, led by Congressman Waltz, then a Republican representative from Florida, and Ro Khanna, a Democratic representative from California.

Waltz was not particularly well-known, but Indian diplomats of the time had done well in identifying him as a rising star in the Republican Party. He was a veteran of the Afghanistan war, furious with the manner of US withdrawal from Kabul but also now instinctively trained to spot Pakistani duplicity. His wife, Julia Nesheiwat, had served as Trump's homeland security advisor in the final year of his first term. On the morning of Independence Day, Waltz made the trek to Red Fort to listen to Modi in the sun, as the PM acknowledged the presence of his delegation. After the event, Waltz said, "It was an amazing honour to be there. This was where [Jawaharlal] Nehru famously raised the tricolour on Indian Independence Day on August 15th. And to stand there, in front of the Red Fort, to see Modi give his address to his nation was an amazing honour. And I thought it was also incredible to hear him lay out a vision for India be a fully developed nation by 2047, the 100th year anniversary and his plan to achieve that."

The fact that Waltz knew India, had met Indian leaders, had been accorded Indian hospitality, and recognised India's role in the region both because of Pakistan and China had clearly helped in ensuring he had a positive view of the relationship. When Waltz got a prime time speaking slot at the Republican Convention last year — where he spoke about taking the families of those US soldiers who died during the withdrawal from Kabul to meet Trump — it was clear that he was destined for bigger things if Republicans won. And when Trump won, he appointed Waltz as his National Security Advisor (NSA). Trump, incidentally, has also appointed Waltz's sister-in-law Janette Nesheiwat as US's surgeon general — making Waltz, his wife and his wife's sister as the only trio from a family to be in charge of US national security, homeland security and health.

But for India, what mattered was someone they knew and someone who knew Delhi was in the hot seat at a time when the national security council (NSC) has really emerged as the decisive pillar of American foreign policy machine, with State playing a secondary role. The Jaishankar triple push but having a friend in the right place is never enough. Perhaps aware that India had left a diplomatic vacuum for much of the past year in DC, Jaishankar visited the US capital after his annual run at the UN with an intent to build political bridges.

And he met a key associate of Trump, the president's last NSA, Robert O'Brien,



another ally of India who had helped during Trump's visit to Ahmedabad, during Galwan, and who India had kept in touch with. O'Brien eventually did not join the administration but he continues to exercise influence in the Trump world, Waltz consults him, and O'Brien's staffers in the last NSC -- from Ricky Gill who is now in charge of India desk at NSC to Kash Patel who is Trump's pick for FBI director — have found prime spots in the new team. Jaishankar's visit to DC helped in restarting channels of communication with Trump's national security world. Fast forward to the end of December where Jaishankar visited DC again, this time to establish early communication with Trump's operatives. It does seem that due to Christmas and the Senate confirmation process, many of Trump's top cabinet picks were not in a position to publicly meet the minister. But Waltz, whose job does not require a confirmation, met Jaishankar.

They clearly were aligned on China, on deepening bilateral ties, and on technology and supply chains as pillars of the new relationship. This is also where the idea of holding a Quad Summit and an early visit by Modi first took roots. It helped that Joe Biden's NSA Jake Sullivan, a strong ally of India, was working closely with Waltz during the transition and had briefed him about all that the administration had done to deepen ties with India. It was striking that at a public event titled "Passing the Baton", both the outgoing and incoming NSA agreed on India. Waltz spoke fondly of his role as the India caucus co-chair, Sullivan joked about starting an India caucus for spouses of Congressional reps (his wife has just got elected to the House). Three weeks later, Jaishankar was back to attend the inauguration. He became the first foreign minister to meet the new Secretary of State Rubio; Rubio's first diplomatic engagement was a meeting of Quad

foreign ministers; Jaishankar again met Waltz, their second meeting in less than a month; and other Indian diplomats began cultivating new NSC staffers. India was keen on an early meeting between the two principals, to talk about issues such as trade and immigration that could potentially lead to discord, to get a sense of the broad outlook of the new administration on China, Ukraine and West Asia, to preserve the technology and defence partnership and Quad, to pre-

pare for the disruptions that are in motion and on way, and for the public optics of bonhomie that always work well back home. Trump was game and it was a go. Energetic and enterprising Indian diplomacy, with more than a willing American partner, had succeeded in making Modi among the first set of leaders Trump will host in White House in his first month. Getting the right results, in terms of both trust building and the concrete deliverables, is the real test now.

## Tata Steel becomes India's first to develop hydrogen transport pipes

Ranchi: Tata Steel on Wednesday claimed that it has become India's first steel company to develop pipes for hydrogen transportation, marking a significant milestone in the country's hydrogen mission. The pipes, processed at Tata Steel's Khopoli plant using steel manufactured at its Kalinganagar plant, have successfully met all the critical properties required for hydrogen transportation, the company said in a statement. The complete technology development, from designing and manufacturing hot-rolled steel to producing the pipes, was done entirely in-house, demonstrating Tata Steel's ability to deliver critical energy infrastructure.

In 2024, Tata Steel became the first Indian steel company to produce hot-rolled steel for the transportation of gaseous hydrogen. "The hydrogen qualification tests were carried out at RINA-CSM S.p.A, Italy, a leading approving agency for hydrogen-related testing and characterisation," the statement added. The new hydrogen-compli-

ant API X65 grade pipes can be used for transportation of 100 per cent pure gaseous hydrogen under high pressure (100 bar), it said.

Prabhat Kumar, vice-president — marketing & sales (flat products), Tata Steel, said, "Tata Steel has always been at the forefront of developing technologies for manufacturing critical steel grades. The successful testing of the new ERW pipes demonstrates our capabilities to deliver critical physical infrastructure for the energy sector, domestically. We are proud to contribute to India's National Hydrogen Mission, which by itself is a key component of the country's ongoing clean energy transition." Kumar added, "Tata Steel is proud to be the first Indian steel company to successfully take on this challenge and deliver products to cater to the emerging domestic and global demand for these special grade steel pipes." The company said its research and development team has extensively developed innovative and sustainable solutions for hydrogen transportation and storage.

# 9th Nizam of Asaf Jahi Dynasty Raunaq Yar Khan Graced the Basant Panchami Festival as Chief Guest, Celebrating Interfaith Harmony in Hyd

Hyderabad: Highness Raunaq Yar Khan, the 9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty, was honored as the special chief guest at the annual Basant Panchami celebrations held at Keys High School, Secunderabad. This prestigious two-day event, dedicated to the Pooja of Goddess Saraswati, brought together over 1,500 participants and featured a vibrant array of cultural festivities, including delectable food and captivating music performed in both Hindi and Bengali. The tradition of Basant Panchami traces back to the teachings of the revered Sufi saints Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (1238 to 1325) and his celebrated disciple Amir Khusrow (1253 to 1325). Their legacy continues to inspire countless Sufi Dargahs, which honor their memory through music, including the soulful rhythms of Qawwali, merging joyous celebration with spiritual reflection, demonstrating unity that transcends religious boundaries.

Highness Raunaq Yar Khan expressed his sentiments regarding the event, stating, "I embraced this celebration with a deep reverence for Goddess Saraswati, forging connections with my Hindu brothers and sisters. It is crucial to nurture our shared cultural heritage and promote interfaith understanding." His participation signifies a noteworthy commitment to fostering unity and respect among diverse faiths. Notably, his acceptance of this invitation as a special chief guest carries immense significance. It was a rare honor bestowed by the organizing committee, recognizing his ongoing efforts to promote secularism and interfaith dialogue. His Highness's presence is a testament to his dedication to bridging differences between communities, as seen in his past actions



celebrating festivals such as Holi and Sankranti, which further emphasize his commitment to inclusivity.

Mr. Abhijeeth Bhattacharjee, founder of "Sangitanjali," an organization known for its dedication to cultural events, expressed gratitude for Raunaq Yar Khan's participa-

tion. "It is such a privilege to have a person of His Highness's stature grace this occasion. Celebrated by two diverse faiths, his presence as the 9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty exemplifies the spirit of unity and secular values that he cherishes," Bhattacharjee stated. This year's Basant

Panchami festival included vibrant performances, community engagement, and a heartfelt homage that highlighted the enduring legacy of cultural amalgamation. Attendees not only honored the goddess but also celebrated the rich historical tapestry interwoven by Sufi traditions and Hindu customs.

## When freedom came on Aug 15, 1947, AK Gopalan was in jail; his case a benchmark for personal liberty

Minutes past midnight, on August 15, 1947, the echoes of Mahatma Gandhi ki jai and Bharat Mata ki jai reverberated through the Cannanore (now Kannur) jail where Communist leader A K Gopalan, then 43, was in solitary confinement. He had secretly kept a national flag with him for the occasion. At dawn, he hoisted the Tricolour where other prisoners gathered to hear him speak. Barely four or five minutes into his speech, the jail authorities stopped him. A day later, accused of stirring up the people "against His Majesty the Emperor", Gopalan (or AKG, as is popularly known) was produced before a magistrate in Calicut (now Kozhikode) and charged with sedition. He was released on October 12, 1947, but just over a month later, he was detained again under the colonial laws that were still in place in the newly independent nation. After India became a republic, the Preventive Detention Act, 1950 was passed to 'regularise' detentions of many including AKG.

"I was a political prisoner from 1930 to 1945 in the eyes of a foreign government. Under today's popular government, I am branded as a criminal," he wrote in his autobiography *In the Cause of the People*. In 1950, he moved the Supreme Court against his detention, perhaps hoping that the freedoms guaranteed by the new Constitution

that came into force in 1950 would ensure his release from jail. After all, Article 21 stated that "no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law". AKG argued that the preventive detention law violated his fundamental rights under, among others, Article 21 and Article 22 of the Constitution (protection against arrest and detention). However, Article 22, while providing for "protection against arrest and detention", including the right to be informed of charges, the right to a lawyer and the right to be produced before a court within 24 hours, carves out a strategic exception — that protection is suspended when an arrest is under a law that specifically provides for preventive detention. Thus, *AK Gopalan v State of Madras* would thus go on to become the first case to question the Constitution's contrariety. On May 19, 1950, a six-judge bench held that the preventive detention law was valid and only allowed minor procedural safeguards that the length of detention had to be informed at the time of arrest although it could be extended. While AKG lost his case, the prescient questions it raised continue to shape our rights and freedoms. "Preventive detention is curtailing someone's freedom based on their past conduct that was used in England and other parts during war situations. The British

used it in India and while we continued it in our Constitution, Gopalan's case brought in some procedural safeguards. Disclosure of grounds for detention, judicial review were put in place even if Gopalan lost his case in the SC. The argument that we look at our fundamental rights as a bundle and not in isolation also emerged from the arguments by Gopalan's lawyer," former Attorney General for India K K Venugopal told *The Indian Express*. His father M K Nambyar argued for AKG. Born on October 1, 1904, in Peralasseri village in Kerala's Kannur district, Ayillyath Kuttiari Gopalan came from an upper-caste Hindu Nambiar family. After completing college, Gopalan worked as a school teacher for seven years. But the stirrings of the nationalist movement drew him away from the classroom. His participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement landed him in jail for the first time at the age of 26. While he went on to become president of the Kerala Congress and a member of the All India Congress Committee, interactions with communist leaders in prison shifted Gopalan's politics. By 1934, Gopalan had joined the Congress Socialist Party and, in 1939, when the party merged into the Communist Party, Gopalan became one of Kerala's earliest Communist leaders, alongside P Krishna Pillai and E M S Namboodiripad. It is during

one such detention, with fellow Communist leader M R Venkataraman, when Gopalan "filed occasional affidavits and wrote to the court as a matter of course". One of these writ petitions became the AK Gopalan case. The legendary lawyer Nambyar, then a Mangalore-based mofussil lawyer, appeared against then Attorney General and Constituent Assembly member M C Setalvad. When freedom came on Aug 15, 1947, AK Gopalan was in jail; his case a benchmark for personal liberty. AKG wrote in his autobiography that he was taken to Delhi to witness the hearing in a "special First Class compartment by two Inspectors and twelve policemen". In his book, *M.K. Nambyar: The Constitutional Visionary*, K K Venugopal says that his father, while arguing for AKG, invoked everything from India's dharmic traditions of justice; a Latin enunciation, saying that the "procedure established by law" under Article 21 would mean 'jus' (a broader concept of justice and morality) and not just 'lex' (a written law or rule) to even use a quick-witted "quote from an authoritative book by a respected author" to bolster his case — his adversary Setalvad's own book on civil liberties. However, four of the six judges held that "procedure established by law" is a narrow threshold and a law made by Parliament.

# Children's Musical Offering Organized by BUSY BEES Students Impress with Their Melodious Performances



Hyderabad: With the blessings of Lord Sri Venkateswara, the BGB Learning Center organized a Swaraarchana (musical offering) program in his honor.

The event, held at Hills Country, featured children showcasing their talents through music, dance, recitations, and devotional performances, captivating the audience.

The performances included:

Bharatanatyam by Thamrapaashyanti  
Sloka recitations by Vaishnavi and Tanvika

Bhagavad Gita recitations by Advit, Nagasahita, and Bhavin

Pothana Bhagavatam slokas by Sri Ramachandra and Dev Karthikeya

Daily devotional chants by Arya and Himanvika Dodda

Vishnu Sahasranama recitation by Adya

Annamacharya Keerthanas dedicated to Sri Venkateswara Swamy

The Swara Neerajanam (musical tribute) was highlighted by performances from Shaurya Rampalli, Kreethi, Sunvish, Pratibha, and Shanmukh Priya.

Govinda Namalu was played on the piano by Ashrit, while Dev Karthikeya and Sri Ramachandra mesmerized the audience with their enactment of the Lava-Kusha drama.

Distinguished guests, including Rajendra Palnati, Gopi Kommalapati, Geeta Reddy, Niranjan Babu, and Gopalakrishna Dodda, attended the event and presented



awards to the young performers.

The event was coordinated by BGB

Learning Center founder Dodda Hima Bindu Udataveni, along with teachers Sirisha,

Sudha Kuravada, Nikita, Sujitha, Ashwini, and Indira, among others.

# Trump, Musk gun for USAID: All about the agency, its role in India

The United States Agency of International Development (USAID) over the week-end emerged as the latest casualty in the Trump administration's bid to rehaul the federal government. A week after President Donald Trump ordered a 90-day pause on foreign aid, his administration removed two top USAID security officials after they refused to grant representatives of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) access to restricted spaces at the agency. Musk has since repeatedly called for USAID's "death", referring to it as a "criminal organisation". Trump and Musk have targeted USAID for the same reasons as they have gone after multiple other departments and agencies in the federal government: to reduce spending and eliminate the perceived bloat within the US federal government. The President had campaigned on a promise to "dismantle the deep state" and sack "rogue bureaucrats". He simultaneously promised to downsize the federal government, and slash excessive and inefficient government spending. To deliver on these promises, Trump appointed billionaire Musk as the chief of the newly fashioned DOGE whose sole mandate is to make the federal government more efficient. Musk has vowed to slash federal spending by \$2 trillion. Soon after taking office, Trump ordered a temporary pause in federal funding so that departments and agencies can "review their grants, loans and programs to ensure that they align with the new administration's priorities", NPR reported. This order was temporarily blocked by a federal judge. The Trump administration has nonetheless continued to target specific programs — such as DEI (Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion), which provide help to historically underrepresented and discriminated groups — and departments or agencies.

USAID is the "lead international humanitarian and development arm of the US government", according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS). The agency provides assistance to other countries primarily by funding non-governmental organisations (NGOs), foreign governments, international organisations, or other US agencies, often for specific programs to alleviate poverty, provide education and healthcare, among other things. The agency managed more than \$43 billion in funds, and provided assistance to around 130 countries in FY2023. (See Charts). The top 10 recipients of USAID-managed funds in FY2023 were: (in descending order of funding) Ukraine, Ethiopia, Jordan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Syria. USAID employed more than 10,000 people in FY2023, according to CRS, with approximately two-thirds of this workforce serving overseas. This number does not factor in thousands of "institutional support contractors" who are pivotal for the execution of the agency's programs. USAID maintains more than 60 missions around the world. Proponents of USAID argue that the agency is essential to further US influence overseas. "It's a national security tool kit that has been developed over 60 years," Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International, an aid group that does not receive US funding, told The Washington Post. "And if it's destroyed, it cannot be easily rebuilt," he said. What is the history of USAID?

Since the end of World War II, the US has viewed international development assistance as a key weapon in its foreign policy arsenal, one it has wielded to make new allies, and exert leverage over existing ones. This began with the Marshall Plan which provided economic assistance to war-torn Europe, in no small part to prevent communism from spreading beyond the Iron Curtain. During the Cold War "... economic, technical, and military development aid gained enormous prominence as a foreign policy tool as the United States... entered into a competition with the Soviet Union," historian Corinna R Unger wrote in *International Development: A Postwar History* (2018). USAID too was a product of the Red Scare, more specifically, the United States' fear of a communist takeover of Latin America following the Cuban Revolution of 1959. In 1961, President John F Kennedy launched the "Alliance for Progress", a multi-billion dollar program to boost democracy and economic development in South and Central America with educational initiatives, housing and infrastructure projects, among other things. "[The program] was an attempt... to fight communist tendencies in Latin America... with USAID responsible for coordinating the activities of the different organisations involved," Unger wrote. The agency was established via an executive order by President Kennedy after the US Congress in 1961 passed the Foreign Assistance Act which mandated the creation of a single agency to administer foreign aid.

What role does USAID play in India?

The US has provided development and humanitarian assistance to India since 1951, when President Harry Truman signed the India Emergency Food Assistance Act, according to an archived page on the USAID website.

"USAID's program has evolved progressively over the decades from emergency provision of food, to infrastructure development, capacity building of key Indian institutions, support for the opening of the Indian economy and more," the website said. Economic aid from the US has also helped establish eight agricultural universities, the first Indian Institute of Technology, and 14 regional engineering colleges, as well as strengthen India's national programs on immunisation, family planning, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and polio, according to the website. However, its operations in India — as in the rest of the world — have historically come with strings and conditions attached. For instance, USAID in 1965 gave India a \$67 million loan to build a chemical fertiliser factory in Madras (now Chennai) on the condition that a private American company be in charge of distribution, rather than the Indian government, and no additional fertiliser plants be built in the region. In 2004, the Indian government decided to reject any foreign aid that comes with conditions. This has, over time, led to a decline in the quantum of such assistance. According to [ForeignAssistance.gov](https://www.foreignassistance.gov/), US aid obligations to India in FY2024 stood at \$141 million, down from more than \$153 million in 2023, and significantly lower than the \$208 million obligated in 2001 (the earliest year for which this data is available online). This



means that India should be able to tackle any disruptions in USAID in the near future. "Although USAID does fund many crucial initiatives in India, it comprises only a small slice

of the pie in terms of the country's total expenditure on social welfare programs," a source in the development sector said, on the condition of anonymity.

## A dialogue of three musical streams



Chandrika Krishnamoorthy Tandon, despite early schooling in music, came into the limelight as a musician rather late. That's only because the Chennai-born American musician was carving out her niche as a businessperson — she was the first Indian American woman partner at McKinsey, the global consultancy firm. Triveni, the album that has fetched her a Grammy for Best New Age, Ambient or Chant Album, is a collaborative effort with South African flautist Wouter Kellerman and Japanese-origin cellist Eru Matsumoto. This is the first Grammy for 71-year-old Tandon. Triveni, a seven-track album, offers an elevating yet calming soundscape built around Eru's cello notes punctuated by Kellerman's flute and Tandon's soaring voice that recites "shanthi mantras" from Taittiriya, Isavasya, and Brihadaranyaka upanishads. Celebrated verses from the eastern philosophical tradition that speak about the non-duality of the being and the material world and pray for the

well-being of the whole collective embellish the cello and flute drawing inspiration from the western classical tradition. Triveni is in the best traditions of crossover music that transcends borders of classical lineage and grammar. The Recording Academy (which gives the Grammys), of course, has recognised this world music, as the genre is popularly called, by showering awards on legends such as Ravi Shankar and Zakir Hussain. Since the time the sitar maestro introduced the Hindustani musical tradition to America by playing at Woodstock in 1969, or the Beatles dabbled with transcendental meditation in Rishikesh the previous year, Indian classical music traditions have become a source for creative journeys among western musicians. Teachers such as the sarod maestro Ali Akbar Khan have further deepened the resonance of Indian sounds in the West; so much so that a sitar, sarod or table today does not stand apart in an ensemble of piano, cello or violins. Indic chants and swaras.

# Handling cybercrimes through public-private partnership model

In recent years, cybercrimes have skyrocketed, becoming one of the most pressing challenges for governments, organisations, and individuals worldwide. According to a report by Cybersecurity Ventures, cybercrime is projected to cost the global economy a staggering \$10.5 trillion annually by the end of 2025, up from \$3 trillion in 2015. This exponential rise is fuelled by the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks, ranging from ransomware and data breaches to phishing and identity theft. The rise of cybercrime has affected law enforcement agencies globally and India is no exception. Police forces are facing significant challenges as they grapple with the evolving nature of cyber threats and the increasing complexity of investigating and preventing cybercrimes. The sheer volume of cybercrimes in India, as recorded in the recent NCRB's Crime in India, is overwhelming.

Fraud, hacking, identity theft, online harassment, digital arrest, investment app frauds and child exploitation are just a few of the types of cybercrimes that law enforcement agencies must contend with. Each crime presents its unique challenges and requires specialised knowledge and tools. The complex nature of cybercrimes adds layers of intricacy to investigations, often involving multiple jurisdictions, encryption, anonymization, and sophisticated attack vectors. Government and Police cannot alone contain the growing menace of cybercrimes and the IT industry also cannot handle it alone. Hence the solution is to ensure the collaboration of the Government with the private sector and academia to conform with the rapidly-changing technological world. A collaborative strategy like the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model is essential to address the growing complexities of cybercrime. The National Cyber Security Policy of India also affirms in developing effective PPP models. The PPP model allows for the pooling of resources, expertise, and technologies, enabling faster detection, response, and prevention of cyberattacks. By working together, stakeholders can share real-time threat intelligence, enhance cybersecurity infrastructure, and foster a unified approach to creating a resilient digital environment.

CCITR, a PPP Model To put in place an institutionalized structure for an effective capacity building of cybercrime investigations, the CID Karnataka, in collaboration with Infosys Foundation and Data Security Council of India (DSCI), set up the Centre for Cybercrime Investigation Training & Research (CCITR) at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters, Bengaluru, in 2019. CCITR is one of its kind of public-private partnership aimed at improving the investigation and prosecution of cybercrime cases. As part of this collaboration, DSCI plays the role of knowledge partner and Infosys Foundation as the funding partner. This centre has been instrumental in combatting cybercrimes through training, research, and collaboration. The Centre continues to contribute significantly to the Karnataka Police's efforts to train police, prosecution, judiciary and other departments in handling technology investigations and create standard operating procedures

(SOPs) in cybercrime investigations. Among the key objectives of CCITR is supporting the police, prosecution, and judiciary in handling technology investigations. It develops capabilities and cooperates within the public and private sectors. It is tasked with developing of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in Cyber Crime Investigations, besides conducting research in digital forensics and cybercrime investigation. CCITR has the responsibility of fostering entrepreneurship for the development of essential cyber forensics products and solutions. It Collaborates with national and international organizations working in the Digital Forensics domain. Key takeaways

The centre has also developed cybercrime investigation-related resource materials like Cybercrime Investigation Manual, Handbook on Digital Evidence, and research papers on the Dark web and anti-forensics, Drone forensics and RAID forensics. As of December, 2024, CCITR has trained over 46,400 personnel from police, prosecution, judiciary and others in long and short courses. CCITR adopted virtual training and other activities during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. The workshops on "Cyberlaw & Cybercrimes" for 1067 judicial officers of the rank of district and sessions judge, senior civil judge, and civil judge were carried out with the support of Karnataka Judicial Academy Bengaluru.

Establishment of CCITR as an institutionalised mechanism for effectively building the capacity and infrastructure for handling cybercrime investigations under PPP model has helped the stakeholders of criminal justice system like Police, Prosecu-



tion and Judiciary in digital investigation, appreciation of digital evidences, developing new strategies, collaboration and technological advancements to provide justice to the victims of cybercrimes. Similar PPP initiatives will go a long way in preventing / containing cybercrimes and building safer societies. Key benefits to public and government-Enhancing public online safety Through regular capacity-building programmes on cybercrime investigation techniques & digital forensics at CCITR, police are equipping themselves with the latest modus operandi adopted by cyber criminals. CCITR has initiated 'Cybercrime Awareness' campaign through social media channels with the motive of educating the public. Confidence in the judicial system The CCITR contribute through regular capacity-building programs conducted for judicial officers and prosecutors on cyberlaw and cybercrimes. This

sensitises the judiciary in appreciation of digital evidence, speeding up the trial, and deciding the cases. Career-building opportunities Through the Cyber Law and Policy Hackathon and internship programme, the CCITR is educating students from engineering and law backgrounds on the various challenges faced by Law Enforcement. Encouraged to research to provide meaningful solutions. This results in improving the cybercrime investigation and indirectly, attempting to provide justice to the victims. Knowledge sharing among agencies The publications and research papers released by CCITR, and the creation of a telegram group consisting of trained Law Enforcement are acting as a platform to address the queries raised during the investigation and digital forensic analysis. This is contributing towards speeding up of investigation and increasing the possibility of providing justice to the victim at a faster pace.

## Trump-Modi summit will straddle key space between geopolitics, real impact

Washington President Donald Trump has said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Washington DC in February. In symbolic terms, the timing of the visit is the message. It speaks to India's importance that the transition from a stable Democratic administration to a disruptive Republican administration has been relatively smooth so far for New Delhi. In tangible terms, the visit should be judged on five parameters of how it meets the current moment in global geopolitics. In terms of the real political impact, it should be judged on a sixth parameter -- whether it addresses a fundamental deficit in the world view of a Trumpist ecosystem. The five-fold test One, does the visit send early signals of positivity about the future of the India-US strategic relationship with convergence both in Indo-Pacific and West Asia? This is likely. Both Delhi and DC remain anxious about China. Both Delhi and DC want to see a Saudi-Israel deal and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). There is also greater alignment on Ukraine, where both want an end to the war as soon as possible. Two, are both sides able to have difficult conversations privately on trade, immigration, defence and investments and arrive at a clear road map to resolve differences, without Trump possibly blurring out

embarrassing details? This is unlikely for now. A trade pact is eventually possible but will require battling domestic political lobbies. Defence acquisitions and defence co-production can be reconciled but will need give and take. The in-principle agreement on taking illegal immigrants back is fine but the scale of the problem is still unclear. There is a tension between Trump's desire for onshoring and India's hopes for friendshoring though there is meeting ground too. To top it, Trump doesn't understand discretion, which will make the Indian system, acutely conscious of optics, uncertain of what's in store. But just an early signal that divergences can be managed will be a good start. Three, can the visit prevent public damage from issues that are integral to Trump's agenda but have the potential of hurting Modi's political base — the diaspora and urban middle class in case of legal migration, Gujaratis in case of illegal immigration, and key business lobbies in case of trade? This is possible, but only as long as India is able to offer Trump what he considers real political wins. Four, do both sides trust each on China? This is to be determined. The US has sent mixed signals about its China policy — with Trump's defence of TikTok, the absence of Day 1 tariffs on China, invitation to Xi

Jinping for the inauguration, statements suggesting that US and China can make the world safer, and US seeking China's help to end the Ukraine war. India has embarked on its own version of normal diplomacy in abnormal times with China. Clear, transparent communication can help while ambiguity and opacity can erode trust. Five, do both sides send reassuring signals to critical tech and business investor constituencies about being trusted partners? In the wake of DeepSeek's disruption of the entire artificial intelligence race, do they find new ways to collaborate to ensure national security for both, dominance and competitiveness in the case of America and growth of an ecosystem and innovation in the case of India? Expect mixed results on the fifth test. Both sides are invested in continuing the initiative on critical and emerging technologies (iCET) or elements of it. On AI, there will have to be a reset with a careful examination of the entire gamut of issues — the impact of chip restrictions, how India can add value with its twin assets (data and tech talent), India's ambitions to grow an ecosystem and become an AI power in its own right, and the US's goal to sustain its dominance in the face of a China making up the gap in much quicker time than anyone anticipated.

# Australian Open: Unearthing hidden gems in the land of the Great Barrier Reef

The pinnacle of sport as you know it. Grand Slam tennis – there's nothing like it. There's no room for error. Perfection is the norm. Anything below, and you will struggle to keep up. Show the slightest sign of crumbling — one bounce more than optimal before your serve, two extra sips of water to calm your nerves, three beads of sweat that don't belong and stand out like a sore thumb — and you'll be eaten alive. Majors are the best test of your endurance – mental and physical. Three or five sets of gruelling, mind-numbing, and terrifying tennis that will have you craving for respite. That is why the favourites remain the favourites. What sets them apart from the rest, you ask? Winner's mentality. In a year when the usual suspects proved their mettle and soared to greater heights Down Under, a fair few unusual "unsuspects" took the world by storm with the upsets they caused at the Happy Slam. Learning on the go for four hours and 49 minutes. That's how long it took for 19-year-old Learner Tien to achieve the greatest win of his career as he beat last year's runner-up and the then World No. 5 Daniil Medvedev in a thrilling five-setter.

In his first Grand Slam tournament outside the US Open, Tien took on Camilo Ugo Carabelli in the first round of the main draw. He displayed great resilience and character to beat the Argentinian 4-6, 7-6(3), 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 and claim his maiden Major win. The reward? A marathon with a former World No. 1. Tien was immediately thrown straight into the deep end as the rookie was to match up against the stone-cold Medvedev. If the tale of David and Goliath were ever to have a live-action adaptation, this would have been it. Medvedev is a Goliath of tennis in every sense of the word. US Open winner, three-time Australian Open runner-up, 380 career singles victories, and more. Once you look past all that, his freakishly towering height, at 198cm, would make most players feel infinitesimally small and powerless on the court. With two daring, defying left-handed forehands down the line to win the first two sets, reminiscent of a certain Spaniard's touch, Tien was well poised to pull off one of the biggest upsets of the tournament. But class comes through, and rightly so. So self-assuringly unflinching, Medvedev saved a match point in the third set and pulled it back to make it two sets apiece. The decider headed to a tie-break, with Tien serving for the tie. And as the ball let fly from his racquet and swerved inwards of the centre line, Medvedev's return would go long, and he had done it. The teen had scaled his highest peak yet. He would go on to become the youngest man to make it to the round-of-16 since Rafael Nadal when he beat Frenchman Corentin Moutet, before going down to Lorenzo Sonego.

B(Lys)tering thought it was a sombre feeling in German Eva Lys' camp following her defeat to Destanee Aiava in the qualifiers, knowing that a win would have assured her a spot in the main draw. But, as all things in life, there is always a second chance. Elation. Scratch that. There was no time to react as Lys found out she would be competing in the first round as a "lucky loser" following 13th seed Anna Kalinskaya's withdrawal 10 minutes before her fixture. With nothing to lose and at least AUD\$132,000

assured in prize money, the young German took to the court with no warm-up, pep talk, or pre-match routine. Call it novice fortune. It mattered not as Lys took the Kia Arena by storm as she beat Aussie wildcard Kimberly Birrell in straight sets 6-2, 6-2 to progress to the second round, where she got the better of Varvara Gracheva. Unexpected but joyous, young Lys had to reschedule her flights home with each passing win. Now, in listless waters, she faced Romanian Jaqueline Cristian in the third round. It seemed Lys had reached breaking point as she lost the first set 2-6. But Cristian's sins were sufficient for Eva to redeem herself as a forehand that went long from the former restored parity. On the break with two match-points, Lys let fly a cross-court forehand, and that was that. She had become the first lucky loser to reach the fourth round of women's singles at the Australian Open in the Open Era. She had set up a meeting with five-time Slam winner Iga Swiatek, who ultimately ended her dream run. The magic didn't stop there as Lys discovered she had pocketed a tidy sum of AUD\$420,000 for her exploits. "I never went that far in a tournament... that is a number I've never even heard in my life," remarked the truly lucky loser. On the back of his second Challenger title at the Canberra Tennis International, 18-year-old Joao Fonseca announced himself in style at this year's Australian Open. The Brazilian teenager, along with fellow qualifiers Learner Tien and Martin Landaluce, made history as the trio's qualification to the main draw marked the first time three teenagers had qualified for the main draw of a Major since 2015. Having breezed through qualifying without dropping a set, Fonseca was given the daunting task of handling the relentless Andrey Rublev. The Russian had just missed out on a top-eight seeding in Melbourne following his shock first-round loss at the Hong Kong Open and surely had a point to prove.

Do you know the pros of being a rookie? There are no expectations. No pressure to perform from the outside. No noise. Nothing weighing you down. And soar he did with his newfound wings. Fonseca outplayed Rublev at his own game: high-octane, aggressive, first-strike tennis. With five set-points in the tie-break, the Brazilian phenom returned a serve down the centreline as the crowd roared the teenager on. He had won the first battle. Growing into the game with every point. Fonseca was oozing confidence by the second set. An ever-so-cheeky drop shot followed by a ferocious cross-court backhand winner, the tables had turned. Attacking every point with an endearing arrogance, he comfortably — if I may say so — took the set six games to three. It was all about mental endurance now. Could the teenager of trembling touch hold his nerve to seal the victory and cause the tournament's biggest upset? Matching the World No. 9 blow for blow, the third set went into a tie-break. With five points apiece, an unforgiving backhand down the line saw Fonseca within touching distance. With his hand to his ear, the teenager was now teasing the crowd. Never had a rookie looked more at home. One forehand later, it was over. He triumphed against the odds. With that, Fonseca had made history, becoming the first teen to beat a top-10 player in the first round of a Major since Mario Ancic at the 2002 Wimbledon Championships. He



would next play eventual quarterfinalist Lorenzo Sonego in the second round, where he would meet his end. But not before he pushed the Italian to the brink as the contest went down to the wire, with the match being decided in the fifth set. Although Fonseca's

ascendancy will inevitably be shadowed by Jannik Sinner's unrelenting title defence in the grand scheme of things at this edition of the Australian Open, his ferocity in sizing up against the top dogs is a telltale sign of the fortunes that await him.

## Towards a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem

India's aspirations of becoming a developed nation by 2047 hinges on whether its citizens have access to sustainable livelihoods. Generating jobs at a mass scale is a challenge for governments worldwide and with technology making rapid inroads into organisational structures, it is becoming challenging for personnel in some sectors to prove their mettle. While the growing prowess of technology has ushered in a new and differentiated shopping experience for consumers, the distinctive edge that human intervention has in shopping transactions can never be replaced. Direct selling offers a unique opportunity for companies to establish a bond with consumers and with the retail landscape undergoing rapid changes, there's enormous scope for more personalised offerings via this route. Besides providing additional income opportunities to direct sellers, the industry also generates direct employment. As a common practice, direct selling companies outsource several aspects related to the production, packaging and distribution of their products, thus generating direct employment across the value chain while enabling the development of the small and medium enterprises (SME) sector. As the direct selling segment continues to penetrate further into villages and small towns, the growth figures are bound to swell and drive adoption of new and innovative products. Along with increased consumer awareness and proximity to buyers providing a unique dynamic shopping experience, the direct selling segment is poised to take a massive leap. Various industry reports suggest there has been a consistent rise in the number of active direct sellers in the country. The number of active direct sellers in India increased from 8.4 million in 2021-22 to approximately 8.6 million in 2022-23, marking a 2.3% year-on-year growth. The industry's overall sales turnover also reached around

₹21,200 crore in 2022-23, driven largely by wellness and personal care products. Factors such as growing awareness around health and unique product formulations have played a catalytic role in the growth of the segment. The heart of India comprises the hinterland and small towns and cities. Direct selling has over the years managed to create millions of livelihood opportunities to build a sustainable ecosystem. Direct selling has also emerged a major source of income for job seekers and students pursuing higher education. It also offers a low-barrier entry point for individuals looking to become entrepreneurs, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. In a country like India where there are limited jobs, direct selling has turned out to be an effective solution for alleviating unemployment woes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has outlined India's economic ambitions and steps needed to achieve the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047, which envisions economic growth, sustainable development goals, improvements in the ease of living and doing business, enhanced infrastructure, and strengthened social welfare initiatives.

Direct selling will be playing a crucial role in helping India achieve this goal. It helps nurture essential business skills such as salesmanship, networking, and leadership, enabling the generation of self-reliant professionals. Besides these features, low capital requirements and high personal engagement make it resilient during economic uncertainties. Thus, direct selling is the most seamless path of becoming an entrepreneur and fosters an ecosystem which further paves the way for a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. Even though online shopping has been lapped up by citizens, the lack of trust factor and an unpleasant experience with a product can force them to shun that route and opt for other modes of shopping.

# Will the FY26 Budget reverse the decline in social sector spending?

The share of the Union Budget allocated for the social sector has declined rapidly in recent years. Data show that the outlays to most schemes under the rural development, education, health, and social welfare heads have either declined or stagnated. Table 1 shows the allocations for various social sectors as a share of the total Budget. Expenditure on health as a share of the total Budget declined from 2.47%-2.22% in the FY18-22 period to 1.85%-1.75% in the FY23-25 period. The share of the total Budget allocated to the Ministry of Rural Development did not cross the 6%-mark in the last three years, which was the case for many years prior. Similarly, allocations for higher education as a share of the total Budget declined from the 1.57%-1.37% range in FY17-20 to 1.27%-0.88% in FY21-25. Allocations for school education declined from the 2.18%-1.96% range to 1.61%-1.23% and allocations for social welfare schemes declined from the 1.89%-1.61% range to 1.17%-0.97% in the same period. The reduced allocations can be better understood at the scheme level. Table 2 shows the allocations for various social sector schemes as a share of the total Budget.

Notably, allocations for schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), introduced under the United Progressive Alliance government, have declined significantly over time. The ₹86,000 crore (Budget Estimates) allocated for MGNREGS for 2024-25 formed only 1.78% of the total Budget, a 10-year low. Latest data show that the Rural Development Ministry was short of ₹4,315 crore, which resulted in a delay in the disbursement of wages to MGNREGS workers.

Allocation for the national social assistance programme, which includes old age pension, widow pension, and disability pension, has declined as a share of the total Budget from the range of 1.21%-0.36% in the years FY19-21 to about 0.2% in the last four years. The allocations for the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM-POSHAN) scheme as a share of the total Budget declined to 0.26% in FY25 (Budget Estimates) — the lowest in the last nine years — except FY24 (Revised Estimates). The primary objective of the scheme is to improve the nutritional status of children studying in Classes 1 to 8 in eligible schools. It was earlier known as the National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in Schools. There were some exceptions to this trend: allocations under the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)-Rural, and PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) as a share of the total Budget were on an increasing trend or at least stagnating.

Notably, all these schemes were launched post 2014. With the Budget for the next financial year set to be presented on February 1, it will be crucial to examine how the declining allocations for the social sector are being addressed. The sector has under its umbrella a host of important schemes, as shown in Table 3. The table shows major expenditure heads under each social sector. The number in the table corresponds to a scheme/expenditure head's share in each sector's total budget. For instance, about 33% of the health budget for the cur-



rent year went to a flexible pool to be used by States for their health needs and 20.6%

was allocated to autonomous bodies such as AIIMS. Close to half of the rural develop-

ment budget was given to MGNREGS and over 30% went to PMAY-Rural.

## Undocumented migrants in U.S.: vital workforce, low criminality

United States President Donald Trump introduced sweeping changes immediately after being sworn in, which could have a lasting impact on millions of undocumented migrants in the U.S. and the hundreds of thousands of people seeking entry at the country's borders. Mr. Trump pledged to "deport millions and millions of criminal aliens," referring to undocumented migrants living in the country. While Mr. Trump has frequently claimed that former President Joe Biden allowed 15-20 million illegal immigrants into the country, official figures estimate that there are around 11 million (Chart 1). Other estimates suggest that there are 13-14 million illegal immigrants. But none of these comes close to Mr. Trump's assertions. Around 2.1 lakh Indians were included in these estimates (as of 2022). Chart 1 | Estimates of illegal immigrants in the U.S. according to the Dept. of Homeland Security. Nearly 80% of the estimated 11 million undocumented migrants currently in the U.S. arrived before 2010. Chart 2 shows that 1.5 million of them entered decades ago, between 1980 and 1990. Chart 2 | The chart shows the current illegal immigrant population estimates across various periods of entries. Reports state that Mr. Trump has also dismissed top immigration court officials who are responsible for deciding who gets asylum and who does not. There are more than 3 million cases pending in immigration courts. In addition, Mr. Trump has shut down the mobile app CBP One, the sole platform for requesting asylum in the U.S. Chart 3 shows that in just over a year, the backlog in immigration courts in-



creased from 2.4 million to 3.5 million (Q4 of 2023-Q4 of 2024). Notably, the number of Indians attempting to enter the U.S. illegally has surged in recent years. A decade ago, U.S. border authorities stopped more than 1,500 Indian illegal migrants. This figure rose sharply to 96,917 in 2023 and 90,415 in 2024. There was a similar spike seen among Indians seeking asylum in the U.S. Moreover, a Bill passed by the Senate empowers officials to detain and even deport undocumented migrants who are arrested for or charged with even non-violent petty crimes such as shoplifting. Mr. Trump has blamed migrants for fuelling violent crime in the country. But data show that the violent offending rate of undocumented migrants is significantly lower

than that of U.S.-born citizens. The rate measures the frequency of criminal offenses committed by a specific population. Chart 4 presents the rate of violent crimes committed in Texas between 2012 and 2018 by U.S.-born citizens, documented immigrants, and undocumented immigrants. The rate of violent crimes committed by undocumented migrants was half that of those committed by U.S.-born citizens and significantly lower than those done by documented immigrants. Chart 4 | Rate of violent crimes committed in Texas between 2012 and 2018 by various groups. A significant majority of undocumented migrants contribute to the U.S. workforce, particularly in construction and agriculture. of Homeland Security Statistics.