

## Congress track record casts doubt on Telangana's promise-laden energy policy

Hyderabad: After failing to add even a single megawatt of renewable energy in the last one year, the Congress government has now come up with a new Clean and Green Energy Policy which claims to target investments of Rs 1.98 lakh crore and creation of 1.14 lakh jobs over the next decade. While the policy seems promising on paper, Telangana in recent times has not been visibly making use of the potential of solar energy for various reasons. Apart from this, the lack of awareness, high initial costs, absence of State government subsidy and lack of financing options are hindering rooftop solar installation programmes in the State.

The new policy aims to add 20,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030, making Telangana a major player in renewable energy in the country. However, at the field level, the situation is totally different with the solar power generators facing problems due to the non-cooperative attitude of the staff of DISCOMs. The new policy talks about encouraging rooftop solar power plants in government schools, Indiramma houses, government buildings and gram panchayat offices. Unfinished Work However, going by the track record of this government, the move does not appear to work at the field level as in the last one year, the government did nothing to set up solar panels on government buildings. In fact, the Congress government could not even complete the programme to install rooftop solar panels on government schools across the State initiated by the previous BRS government. Apart from this, a large section of people who have installed rooftop solar panels on their residences are complaining that though they have opted to get payments for the additional solar power



supplied to the grid, they are not being paid in time. The people argue that on one hand, the government claimed that it wanted to encourage installation of solar panels on all the residential buildings while on the other, the Discom officials were creating hurdles for interested consumers by delaying the process. People are blaming authorities of the government departments concerned for hindering the success of the clean energy

programme. Self-help groups In the new policy, the government claims that it will support women's self-help groups to establish solar power plants with capacities ranging from 500 kilowatts to 2 MW. However, recently it has been noticed that the State government has designed the tenders in such a way for installing 1,000 MW solar power plants across Telangana through self-help groups (SHGs) under the Indira Mahila

Shakti Scheme, that it is likely to benefit only big companies such as Adani Group. The Congress government has been talking about setting up floating solar plants on reservoirs but so far nothing much has been done. It has not even conducted a study to implement the project. The government has made tall claims in the new clean and green energy policy, but how far it will be implemented at the ground level has to be seen.

## Fernandez Foundation, TSCS organise blood donation drive in Hyd

Over 100 donors including care givers from the hospital, members of TSCS and family members of the patients came together and contributed their blood to save lives

Hyderabad: Fernandez Foundation, in collaboration with the Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Society (TSCS), organised a highly successful blood donation drive, commemorating the 14th anniversary of Fernandez Hospital, Hyderguda.

Over 100 donors including care givers from the hospital, members of TSCS and family members of the patients came together and contributed their blood to save lives. The 100 units of blood will directly benefit patients, especially children requiring

transfusions at TSCS. Expressing gratitude to the donors, Dr Tejaswini Kushnoor, Associate Director, Administration and Operations, Fernandez Foundation said "Each unit of blood donated represents a lifeline for patients in need". Aleem Baig, Joint Secretary, TSCS, emphasized the importance of such initiatives. "Regular blood donations are crucial for individuals with chronic blood disorders who require ongoing transfusions. We are proud to partner with Fernandez Foundation to make a meaningful impact."



# Steering towards stability after a year of uncertainty

Historians may dub 2024 “the polycritical year” or “the year of uncertainty”. “Polycrisis” is a buzzword first coined by a French philosopher to describe a situation in which the collective impact of distinct but interrelated threats is so overwhelming that it is not possible to identify the precise cause of the crisis and, therefore, provide a solution. The year ended with the world at the junction of multiple crossroads — geopolitics, geoeconomics, geoenergy and geotechnics. One route leads to a dystopian future. The other is to progress, stability and sustainability. The challenge for 2025 is to resolve uncertainties and steer the world in the latter direction.

Seventy countries went to the polls in 2024. One thread linked the results of all the elections. The electorate voted against the incumbent leadership. In some countries, notably the USA and the UK, the ruling party was turfed out of office. In others like France and Japan, the leadership returned to power with a reduced mandate. Many commentators have provided an explanation for this wave of anti-incumbency. Some have adduced economic slowdown, others inflation, still others social media-induced polarisation and public anger. They are all correct. The explanation lies in a mix of these factors. What is uncertain is whether these factors capture fully the drivers behind this public reaction. Is this mood change an “aberrant moment in time” (President Joe Biden’s comment regards President Trump’s first term) or something structural and longer-lasting?

On the international front, the rules of engagement defined by the West after World War II are in tatters. This is manifest in the resurgence of pseudo-imperial and territorial atavism. President Putin reportedly wants to recreate “Imperia Rus”, the kingdom of East Slavic states united by King Vladimir of Kiev in the 10th century. President Xi Jinping appears not to be interested in China taking “centre stage” as the Middle Kingdom. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is manic about the idea of “Greater Israel” in which there is no place for a Palestinian state. President Erdogan, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Assad dynasty in Syria, is rumoured to harbour ambitions of extending Turkey’s regional sphere of influence — a la the Ottoman Empire — and President-elect Trump wants to “make America Great again”. What does all this augur? A return to modernist feudalism, the resurgence of Cold War antagonisms albeit with an expanded cast of adversaries? A step-by-step, unintended but potentially catastrophic conjoining of loosely connected ambitions to create the perfect storm of a global conflict?

The global economy is shrouded in similar uncertainty. The year ended with slowing growth rates, increased protectionism, rising public debt, erratic monetary policy and Trump’s predictably unpredictable pronouncements on trade, taxes, technology, payment systems, alliances and immigration. The question is which button will he push. The answer must await the settling down of his administration but even then the direction of change will most likely be unclear. As will the ramifications. The Green Energy transition has acquired significance because

of global warming. The word “transition” can, however, be misleading. It signals the substitution of one embedded energy system with another. History would suggest, however, that this is an elusive objective.

The world has undergone two energy transitions — wood to coal in the 18th century and coal to oil in the 20th. Both were driven by technology, competitiveness and convenience. Neither led to the displacement of one energy source by another. What did happen was a flip in market shares. Coal displaced wood in the 19th century and oil displaced coal in the 20th as the dominant energy source. The “transitions” were, in other words, “additive” “not substitutive”. Technology has made renewable energy competitive and accessible and brought about the necessary conditions for increasing the market share of solar and wind in the energy consumption basket. It has not, however, removed the blockers to ensure their dominance. Three blockers create uncertainty about the pace and extent of the green energy transition. First, structural. The shift from an embedded energy system built around fossil fuels to a new system based on green energy requires massive redesign and rebuild — and decades. Second, finance. The resources needed to finance this redesign/rebuild run into trillions of dollars. No one entity can meet this requirement. The only way these amounts can be mobilised is through the conjoint working of public, private and multilateral institutions to devise innovative funding mechanisms. And three, politics. The phasing down, let alone the phasing out, of fossil fuels will trigger economic and social consequences. Elected leaders are,



therefore, wary of treading down this path. Global warming requires the current transition to be “substitutive” not “additive”. The uncertainty is whether this is feasible. And if not, what would be the consequences? most read

Technology presents possibly the most worrying uncertainty. Few challenge the assertion that technological innovation has radically altered our lives. Few wish to place a block on further technological progress. That said, there are questions. Might the creator of “human competitive intelligence” lose control over his creation? What protocols should be put in place to safeguard against such

(imagined?) risks? What are the ethical /human ramifications of AI /AIG, robotics, quantum computing and genetic engineering? How should the lines of accountability be defined? The best and brightest are engaged in a vibrant debate but as yet there is no clarity. Polycritical uncertainties require global polycentric institutions. This is a heavy ask. But as the Greek philosopher Epictetus said, “We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them”. In simpler terms, the global community should create multidisciplinary institutions and respond to these uncertainties collectively.

## Are urban ropeways a good bet for future?

The temple town of Varanasi — one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world — is synonymous with the vibrant yet chaotic narrow alleys, bustling markets, food, sight, and sound, all of which make for a sensory overload. But soon one will have the option to navigate these streets from a height of 45 metres, as trial runs for India’s first urban ropeway system is expected to start in the city in February. With peak tourist footfalls reaching 200,000 on a single day, this cable car system will help tourists and locals alike, say authorities. It will reduce the journey time from the Cantonment area to Godowlia to 15 minutes, which takes 45 minutes to even an hour during peak hours, said Pulkit Garg, vice-chairman of Varanasi Development Authority. The 3.85 km ropeway system, with stops at Godowlia Chowk, Girja Ghar, Rath Yatra, Kashi Vidyapith (Bharatmala Mandir), and Varanasi Cantonment Railway Station, is designed to carry 3,000 people in one direction in an hour. Operating for 16 hours a day, the system will have the capacity to carry 96,000 people daily, according to officials. Garg said commercial operations are likely to start in the first half of this year. The project is being built under a hybrid annuity model (HAM) under the public-private-partnership framework by the National Highways Logistics Management (NHLML), a subsidiary of the National Highways Authority of India. NHLML is also currently setting up

around 200 ropeway projects with three such projects tendered out in Himachal Pradesh’s Kullu, Mahakaleshwar Temple in MP’s Ujjain, and Dosi Hills in Haryana under the National Ropeways Development Programme — Parvatmala Pariyojana. While the fares are yet to be officially set, Garg said ticket prices are likely to be in line with Metro fares in other Indian cities, while an NHLML official said that ticket prices will be comparable with existing auto-rickshaw fares in Varanasi. The affordable tickets will be made feasible with the help of revenue generated from the commercial space in the stations. “We will have at least 2,000-3,000 sq m of commercial space available at each station with the two terminal stations having even larger space,” said Garg. Originally, the commercial operations were set to begin by mid last year after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is also the Varanasi MP, laid the foundation stone for the project in March 2023. However, the project faced delays including land acquisition hurdles. Garg said the final land acquisition hurdle was cleared last week only. He said while majorly the project was built on government land, there was minor land acquisition needs with only ₹60 crore spent for land acquisition from private parties. Once the ropeway is ready, the city will join many South American cities to have such an aerial mass transit option. Existing ropeways in India and the world function primarily as addi-

tional attractions in tourist hot spots but not as alternative mass transportation systems. While ropeways, cable cars, and aerial trams are often used interchangeably, they differ slightly. However, all three can be classified as aerial lifts. Medellin in Columbia (the second most populous city after the capital Bogota) was the first such city globally to start a mass transit cable car system that connects with the city’s metro network in 2004. By 2022, the network grew across six lines to a total of 14km in length carrying more than 220 million people annually with one major line carrying 44,000 passengers daily. A similar system in Mexico City currently around 24.75km in length spread across two lines serves around 135,000 people daily, especially in hilly underserved areas by conventional transport. Mi Teleférico (My cable car) in Bolivia — the world’s largest and highest cable car system joins the two cities of El Alto and La Paz and the contiguous urban area, and sees a daily ridership of 300,000 across 10 lines with one major line carrying more than 65,000 passengers daily. Commuting between the two cities, which would otherwise take an hour through windy roads on a bus, has been reduced to just 15 minutes at a cheaper fare due to this. Such systems have gained traction in New York or Constantine in Algeria or Haifa in Israel or Namur in Belgium but nothing comparable to the South American cities.

# Double-Engine government committed to farmers' upliftment – CM Haryana



Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), January 9 - Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said that the BJP-led double-engine government is consistently working towards the welfare of farmers. Our goal is to enhance farmers' income and make them economically prosperous. He said that 70 percent of the state's farmers own less land, necessitating a special strategy for their upliftment. The Chief Minister further said that the upcoming budget must include provisions aimed at increasing farmers' profits to empower them economically. The Chief Minister was addressing a pre-budget consultation meeting at Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University in Hisar Thursday, where he took suggestions from progressive farmers regarding their upliftment. Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shyam Singh Rana, Public Health Engineering Minister Ranbir Gangwa, MLA S Vinod Bhyana, and Randhir Panihar were also present. During the discussion, the Chief Minister engaged in one-on-one interactions with the farmers. In the first session, over 52 suggestions were shared by the farmers. Along with progressive farmers, agricultural experts also participated in the session. In the second session, discussions were held with farmers associated with Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and members of the FPO federation also contributed their suggestions. The Chief Minister said that the suggestions shared during today's discussions will be incorporated into the upcoming budget. He said that the state government is particularly focused on the welfare of farmers, with special attention being given to increasing their income and strengthening their position. He said that agriculture contributes 18 percent to Haryana's GDP and expressed the government's intention to implement measures that would ensure small landholding farmers can earn a good income. For this, initiatives like e-mandi and other options are being developed.

The Chief Minister further remarked that, in the past, transporting produce to the market was a significant challenge. However, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country's road and rail connectivity network has been significantly strengthened, making it easier to transport crops across regions. He highlighted the

progress made by the country over the last 10 years, particularly under the Prime Minister's leadership. Today, the government is introducing new initiatives to benefit farmers, including the promotion of organic farming. The Chief Minister also praised the efforts of Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat in advancing organic farming practices. The Chief Minister urged farmers to adopt crop diversification, encouraging them to move away from traditional farming practices. He said that diversification could significantly

increase farmers' income. He also encouraged farmers to focus on the production of coarse grains, adding that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made efforts to bring coarse grains to the global stage. During his address, the Chief Minister highlighted the success of strawberry farming in village Syhadwa, Hisar, praising the hard work of local farmers in cultivating strawberries. He also mentioned the cultivation of Kinnow in Sirsa. He stressed that farmers must explore innovative approaches beyond traditional

farming to improve their income and achieve sustainable growth. The Chief Minister said that the state government has launched a portal for receiving suggestions related to the General Budget of Haryana for the year 2025-26. Through this portal, common citizens, progressive farmers, and representatives associated with Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) can submit their suggestions. He assured that these suggestions would be taken into account and incorporated into the budget.

## Tata Play Launches 'Sirf Lage Mehenga' Campaign, Introduces Super Value TV Packs for the viewers

Hyderabad: Tata Play, India's leading Direct to Home (DTH) provider, has unveiled its latest campaign, 'Sirf Lage Mehenga,' celebrating new year and the harvest season. Catering to the choices of every family member, Tata Play's Telugu Super Value Pack offers an extensive, budget-friendly, high quality entertainment experience including genres like general entertainment, news, sports, music, movies, devotional, Kids and more. Conceptualized by Ogilvy, 'Sirf Lage Mehenga' campaign showcases a series of overstatement parody films that humorously dispels the myth of DTH services being expensive. The films highlight how Tata Play delivers world class entertainment at an affordable price, ensuring an uncompromised viewing experience. By weaving humor into crucial nail-biting situations, the films emphasize the joy of discovering original and premium entertainment that is available on television. The campaign has been customized in different languages to appeal to viewers across the country. Tata Play continues to set the benchmark in delivering value-driven entertainment for audiences across geographies, tiers, hierarchies and echelons. With packs starting at INR 255 per month, viewers can change or choose their packs by visiting the Tata Play website at <https://www.tataplay.com/> or by visiting the Manage Section in the Tata Play Mobile App. They can also visit their nearest dealers in the region to avail the offer.

# "The First Person to Live 1,000 Years Is Already Born," Says Dr. Bruce Murphy at Rotary Club of Lake District Charter Day Event

Hyderabad: The Rotary Club of Lake District (RCLD) convened an inspiring event titled "Reverse Aging: Rewriting the Rules of Health" at ITC Kohenuur, Hyderabad, gathering esteemed global leaders in health and technology. This event focused on the exciting advancements in reversing aging and promoting healthier, longer lives through the integration of science, innovation, and artificial intelligence. Moderated by Rtn. Ananth Rao, the session featured two prominent speakers Dr. Bruce Murphy, CEO of Arkansas Heart Hospital, an internationally recognized cardiologist and innovator in health sciences and Mr. Uday Akkaraju, Founder and CEO of Bond.AI, a trailblazer in AI-driven health and wellness solutions.

The event was honored with the presence of distinguished guests, including Mr. Jayesh Ranjan, Special Chief Secretary of the Industries & Commerce (I&C) and Information Technology (IT) Department of the Telangana Government. Additionally, leading doctors and entrepreneurs from Hyderabad contributed to the evening's rich dialogue and diverse insights. In his keynote address, Dr. Bruce Murphy made a compelling assertion that, "The first person to live 1,000 years is already born. We are on the verge of an era where aging can be addressed as a scientific challenge rather than an inevitability. With advances in genetic engineering, we have the potential to completely change our perceptions and experiences of aging." Mr. Uday Akkaraju echoed this sentiment with insights into the synergy between artificial intelligence and health sciences, highlighting its role in enhancing both longevity and quality of life. He stated that, "AI, when integrated with human genetics, offers personalized solutions that can not



only extend our lifespans but also enhance the quality of living. This is about living longer and living better." The event also marked the Charter Day of RCLD, celebrating a signifi-

cant milestone in the club's history while emphasizing a commitment to innovation and service.

This celebration was led by Mr. Uday

Pilani, Founder of RCLD and District Governor 2026-27, along with Rtn. Chiranjeev Saluja, President of RCLD (2024-25), who articulated their vision for fostering impactful discussions within the community.

## 84th All India Industrial Exhibition – Numaish 2025

Hyderabad: The 84th All India Industrial Exhibition, known as Numaish 2025, commenced on January 3, 2025.

The Telangana Prison Department proudly established its stall, numbered 1 to 5, which was inaugurated by Dr. Soumya Mishra, IPS, Director General of Prisons & Correctional Services, alongside Sri B. Surender Reddy, Honorable Secretary, and other esteemed dignitaries.

The Prison Department's stall features an extensive display of products crafted by inmates from various prisons across Telangana. This initiative serves a dual purpose: equipping inmates with vocational skills and facilitating their social reintegration by enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society through the sale of their Prison made articles.

This initiative underscores the Department's commitment to rehabilitating inmates by offering them avenues for personal development and financial independence. The products showcased at the stall are available for both display and purchase,



reflecting the high quality and craftsmanship of the inmates' work.

The 'My Nation' stall of the Telangana Prisons Department was recognized with the "Best Exhibition Stall from the Government Sector" award at the 2024 Numaish, achiev-

ing impressive sales of ₹ 20,96,133.

The Telangana Prisons Department cordially invites the public to support this meaningful endeavor by visiting the 'My Nation' stall at Numaish 2025. In attendance at the inaugural event were Dr. D. Srinivas,

Deputy Inspector General of Prisons (Hyderabad Range), Sri N. Shivakumar Goud, Superintendent of Jails, Hyderabad, and Sri G. Ramachandram, Superintendent of Jails, Cherlapally, along with several other officials from the Prison Department.

# NEET PG percentile slashed so seats don't go vacant; may open doors to seat sale racket

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has lowered the NEET PG counselling 2024 percentile. The move aims to ensure seats don't go vacant in the ongoing counselling process. Most of the vacant seats are from pre-clinical and para-clinical branches like Biochemistry, Anatomy, and others. Experts say providing better paying jobs to candidates emerging from these branches could help resolve the issue. From the General/EWS category, candidates with 15 percentile and above will be eligible to participate in counselling. From the SC/ST/OBC/ PwD category, candidates with 10 percentile and above will be eligible to participate in counselling. At the start of counselling, the qualifying percentile for General/EWS candidates was 50 percentile. It was 40 percentile for SC/ST/OBC/ PwD category.

According to Dr. Pravin H. Shingare, Former Director of Medical Education and Research, Maharashtra State, Mumbai, says approximately 80% of the seats of pre-clinical and para-clinical branches like Anatomy, Physiology, Microbiology, Forensic Medicine, Community Medicine remain vacant every year. He says studying these branches leads to job roles like performing autopsy examinations, biochemical tests, blood and urine tests, and so on. They also open up opportunities in the pharmacy industry and teaching space. "MBBS graduates are not keenly pursuing these branches as the courses and the careers they will embark upon rarely come with patient exposure to which they are inclined."

Dr. Dhruv Chauhan, National Council Member, Indian Medical Association: Junior Doctors' Network (IMA-JDN), says pursuing these branches makes MBBS students feel on the same threshold as BSc graduates since there is little to distinguish between them and other graduates performing similar roles at work. Although only MBBS graduates can do these PG courses, they don't choose to opt for these branches. "But that is only one aspect of it. These branches don't offer any patient exposure and the payscale is not good, so the seats remain vacant", he said. Dr. Shingare says this decision to increase the qualifying criteria by reducing the percentile is not new. A lot of candidates who take the exam do not qualify. Students who don't get any seats when the admission process is concluding will be willing to take the vacant ones if provided with an opportunity. "As you take qualifying criteria down you open up opportunities for them. These experiments are done every year. So last year the qualifying percentile was made zero", he said.

Dr. Shingare says the NEET PG exam was introduced in 2013, before that there were no qualifying criteria for studying PG in India. He says this decision to take the qualifying criteria down could be soon applied to super speciality courses as well, which are studied after PG. "Any student who cleared MBBS was qualified to apply for PG education. Since this exam came, that has changed. Does that mean the way we functioned for the last 75 years was wrong?" he said. Dr. Chauhan adds a note of caution, however. He says that reducing the percentile creates a loophole for private medical colleges to sell their seats for crores of ru-



pees. "During counselling, some students block seats in clinical branches after a round but don't join, leaving the seats vacant in subsequently. When the percentile is reduced, these seats that are in demand can be illegally sold to candidates with as little as 10 percentile for a hefty sum. In effect, you are downgrading merit in exchange for

money that is the intent behind NEET", he said. Dr. Shingare seeks to dispel any impression that Deemed Universities can make money by increasing the number of seats. They do not get permission to increase the number of seats at the fag end of admission process. "They need to do it a year in advance. For 2026 seats, they need to get ap-

proval in August 2025". Dr. Chauhan says it needs to be investigated why non-clinical seats are not getting filled. "

Something needs to be done to provide better paying jobs to candidates of these branches. Lack of jobs and low payscale lead to worries about survival, which needs to be addressed", he said.

## How AI is redefining death, memory and immortality

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

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

In South Korea, a group of media companies took this idea even further. A documentary called "Meeting You" showed a

mother reunited with her daughter through virtual reality. Using advanced digital imaging and voice technology, the mother was able to see and talk to her dead daughter as if she were really there. These examples may seem like science fiction, but they're real tools available today. As AI continues to improve, the possibility of creating digital versions of people after they die feels closer than ever.

Who owns your digital afterlife?

While the idea of a digital afterlife is fascinating, it raises some big questions. For example, who owns your online accounts after you die? This issue is already being discussed in courts and by governments around the world. In the United States, nearly all states have passed laws allowing people to include digital accounts in their wills. In Germany, courts ruled that Facebook had to give a deceased person's family access to their account, saying that digital accounts should be treated as inheritable property, like a bank account or house. But there are still plenty of challenges. For example, what if a digital clone of you says or does something online that you would never have said or done in real life? Who is responsible for what your AI version does?

When a deepfake of actor Bruce Willis appeared in an ad without his permission, it

sparked a debate about how people's digital likenesses can be controlled, or even exploited, for profit. Cost is another issue. While some basic tools for managing digital accounts after death are free, more advanced services can be expensive. For example, creating an AI version of yourself might cost thousands of dollars, meaning that only wealthy people could afford to "live on" digitally. This cost barrier raises important questions about whether digital immortality could create new forms of inequality.

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

# Lalu proposes, Nitish disposes: Amid a familiar dance of friends-turned-rivals, a look at their decades-long relationship

Products of the 1974 JP movement, the trajectories of Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar tell the story of Bihar politics of the last four decades and more. And, they continue to remain curious case studies. Over the weekend, Nitish, the Bihar Chief Minister, said amid his ongoing Pragati Yatra that “it was a mistake on his part to switch sides twice and he would now remain with the BJP-led NDA forever”. In Muzaffarpur on Sunday, he said, “Those who were in power before us ... did they do anything? People used to fear stepping out of their homes after sunset. I had by mistake aligned with them a couple of times.”

The Bihar CM's comments clearing the air on his political stance came days after RJD chief Lalu Prasad attempted to warm up to him by saying, “If Nitish Kumar decides to join us, he is always welcome. We will work together.” In a 2015 interview to this correspondent, Nitish Kumar recounted how he supported Prasad's claim to the Leader of the Opposition post in 1989, choosing him instead of the more famous and seasoned Yadav troika of Anoop Prasad Yadav, Vinayak Prasad Yadav, and Gajendra Himanshu because he “wanted to take power to a leader of his generation”.

Nitish, a studious leader with a flair for writing well-crafted Hindi, often wrote press notes for Prasad who had become the LoP. A year later, when Lalu Prasad became the CM, Nitish became his principal advisor though he was elected MP in 1989 after defeating Congress heavyweight Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav. It was quite ironic that Nitish's success came at the cost of someone who was once Lalu's idol. The next chapter in their relationship came soon afterwards. With the Janata Dal having won 48 of 54 seats in undivided Bihar in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, senior party leaders such as George Fernandes, Sharad Yadav, and Ram Vilas Paswan started feeling cornered. But it was Nitish who first raised the banner of revolt by the end of 1993 and eventually formed the Samata Party under George Fernandes's leadership in 1994. Nitish Kumar charted his own course by contesting the 1995 Assembly elections alone and won only seven seats. Lalu Prasad again returned to power. When some journalists went to meet him on the day of the results, a surprised Nitish asked why journalists should come to him when Lalu was the king of state politics. Since then, Nitish has traversed one long course. He joined the NDA in 1995, winning the confidence of top BJP leaders Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani, who chose to make him the Bihar CM in 2000 instead of their party colleague Sushil Kumar Modi. Though he remained the CM for a week, Nitish managed to make his political stature bigger than any BJP Bihar leader, including possible challenger Modi. All through his political heyday, Lalu Prasad remained Nitish's chief political rival. It was the late BJP leader Arun Jaitley who pushed for Nitish as the NDA's CM face in the October 2005 polls. It worked and Nitish returned to the helm of the state. In 2010, he overran the Opposition as the RJD was reduced to just 23 MLAs in a House of 243. This was the second big blow for the RJD within months. In the Lok Sabha polls the year before, the RJD had fallen from 22 seats to four, while the NDA won 32 of the 40 Lok Sabha constituencies.

Just when everyone thought it was the

end of the Lalu-Nitish story, in 2013, the Janata Dal (United) leader parted ways with the NDA because of his national ambitions. The JD(U) contested the 2014 Lok Sabha polls alone and it backfired as the party was reduced from 20 to two seats. Nitish hit a new political low and became desperate to reboot his politics. Often called the “biggest political calculator of Bihar”, he worked out that joining hands with his once principal rival would once again put him on the path of ascendancy in Bihar politics. In the 2015 interview, Nitish said he “decided to join Lalu Prasad because of his mass base and lack of choice before him”. The two socialist leaders — referred to as “Bada Bhai” and “Chhota Bhai”, big brother and younger brother — came together before the 2015 Assembly polls. When they were to share the dais after 21 years at a function in Vaishali, there was a great buzz in the media. As they embraced each other with smiles playing on their faces, another phase began in state politics: the revival of Lalu but with Nitish keeping his primacy. The RJD-JD(U)-Congress alliance won 178 seats. Even though the RJD emerged as the single-largest party with 81 seats, 10 more than the JD(U), Lalu conceded the CM post to Nitish.

That is when the flip-flop story began. By the end of 2016, Nitish started feeling uncomfortable in the company of Lalu, who was said to be taking major policy decisions from behind the scenes, and his sons Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, the Deputy CM, and Tej Pratap Yadav, the health minister. Nitish had been looking for an alibi to quit the Mahagathbandhan. The CBI's raids at Lalu's home and the subsequent IRCTC case filed against him and his family, including Tejashwi, in mid-2017 provided him just that. Nitish went to Rajgir and remained incommunicado for a few days. At the time, Lalu told the media: “Just when Nitish keeps quiet, it means he is up to something big.” The



JD(U) leader returned to Patna a few days later and dialled Lalu to inform him that he was quitting the alliance. At the time, Lalu is learned to have replied: “Thik hai, toh aap ja rahe hain? (Okay, so are you leaving?)”

With Nitish gone, Tejashwi wanted to forge his own path and rise in stature. In the 2020 Assembly polls, his “10 lakh jobs” pitch almost brought him to power as the RJD-led Mahagathbandhan won 110 seats, only 12 short of a majority. The JD(U) was relegated to third position (43 seats) behind the RJD (75 seats) and the BJP (74 seats). But Nitish again became the CM, with his numbers guaranteeing him the crucial role of deciding who would come to power. Though Tejashwi was averse to Nitish's return in 2022, it was Lalu who again had his way and welcomed back Nitish. In private, the RJD chief rea-

soned that the two of them together could be at the helm of Bihar for several years. However, Nitish not being made the convenor of the INDIA bloc and the lack of support from Lalu again led to the Bihar CM switching sides in January 2024. How Nitish swings may decide the course of Bihar politics in a crucial election year and Lalu knows this well. And this political calculation is likely behind his overture to his friend-turned-rival. Through all the ups and downs over the decades, an endearing feature of the Lalu-Nitish story has been that neither has personally attacked the other. Lalu Prasad, in fact, once stopped senior leader Prabhunath Singh from using foul language against the Bihar CM. In private conversations, the RJD chief has often been heard saying that “Nitish was like a family member”.

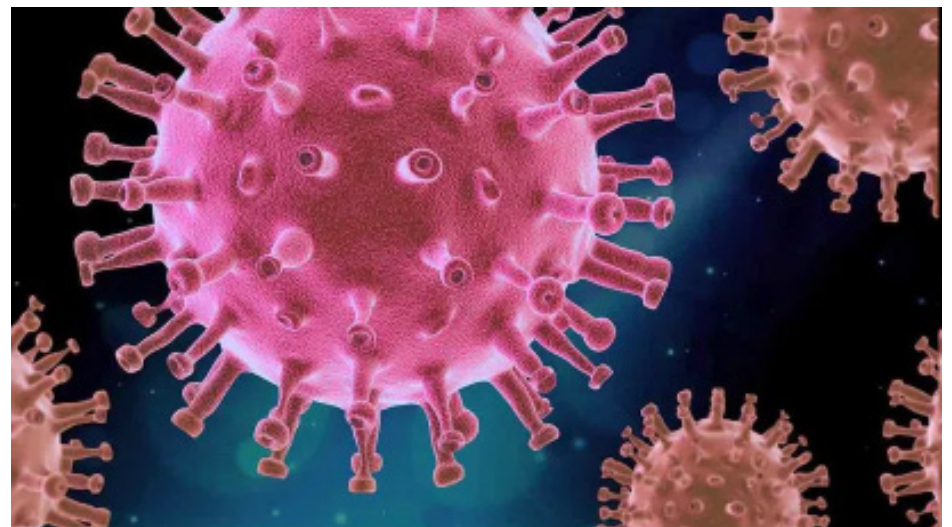
## HMPV: Symptoms, how it spreads and precautions you should take

Hyderabad: With Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases getting reported by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), here are the symptoms, treatments and precautions that the general public have to follow. Symptoms • Cough, fever, nasal congestion and shortness of breath. • Clinical symptoms of HMPV infection could progress to bronchitis or pneumonia. • Most of the symptoms are similar to influenza, pneumonia that cause upper and lower respiratory infections. • Time taken to develop (incubation period) symptoms are 3 to 6 days. • Illness duration may vary but average people recover in 3 to 5 five-days

How it spreads

- When infected persons cough or sneeze
- Close personal contact, shaking hands and touching infected persons
- Touching objects/surfaces that have HMPV and then touching the mouth, nose or eyes

HMPV circulation in India is between July/August and December/January



How to prevent

- Frequent washing of hands
- Avoid close contact with sick persons
- Patients with cold-like symptoms should cover mouth while sneezing and

- coughing
- Stay at home and take adequate risk
- Testing and diagnosis
- There are adequate tests available in private diagnostic facilities to confirm HMPV
- A doctor must prescribe the test if needed

# Trump's win inaugurates a new chapter of racism against Indians

The beginning of this new chapter was marked by the most intense bout of racism that Indians faced since the 9/11 terror attacks led to suspicion, prejudice and attacks against Brown people. And it runs the risk of arguably having even longer-term implications for not just the safety and security but the opportunities for those who trace their heritage to the Indian subcontinent more generally and India specifically. The broad contours of what happened are now fairly well-known. But here is a quick recap.

Donald Trump appointed a Chennai-born, Silicon Valley technologist, Sriram Krishnan, as an artificial intelligence policy advisor. Krishnan has backed easier immigration pathways for high skilled professionals through the H-1B route.

Enter Laura Loomer, a Trump supporter who would otherwise have been one more fringe voice in the Make America Great Again (MAGA) universe but for the fact that she accompanied Trump on his plane to the presidential debate and even to the 9/11 memorial just four months ago, despite having termed the 9/11 attack itself as an inside job. Loomer used Krishnan's appointment and backing for H-1B visas to trigger outrage on three fronts. First, she framed Indians who immigrated through this route and became critical to America's tech world as invaders taking American jobs. Second, she attacked Elon Musk, David Sacks, and other tech titans who supported Trump and H-1Bs, portraying them as imposters seeking to influence Trump for personal gain. Third, she condemned the entire framework of legal immigration as weakening America. This was followed by a range of racist attacks against Indians. To their credit, Musk and Sacks fully backed Krishnan, with Musk directly taking on the racists, asserting that the Republican Party had to be cleansed of them, explaining why the lack of engineering talent was the foundational weakness of the Valley, and declaring that he would go to war on the issue of H-1B visas, one that he was on when he entered the US himself. At the same time, Musk acknowledged that there was rampant abuse of the system. Musk's colleague and Republican leader, Vivek Ramaswamy, went a step further and argued that the absence of enough American talent to fill these jobs, thus requiring outside talent, was due to American (White) culture of parenting and how kids were brought up. So this became the broad framework of the debate. Both sides reaffirmed their loyalty to Trump and opposition to illegal immigration. But that's where the differences began.

The tech crowd backed legal immigration and pointed to its role in sustaining American competitiveness, while rejecting the racism that was at least partly driving the opposition. But — and this is crucial — even H-1B advocates made it clear they favoured giving jobs to Americans first, backed the H-1B route only for those who were among the most exceptionally talented, opposed the use of the visa route for any other purpose, and promised to weed out the fraud in the system. The older MAGA base made it clear that they were opposed to current levels of legal immigration and dug out data to claim that Indian companies in US hired Indian

workers and brought them through the H-1B route when they could have employed Americans, thus engaging in labour arbitrage. They accused tech firms of hiring foreign workers not just for roles that required exceptional skills but even for run-of-the-mill jobs for which there were enough Americans in the labour force - keeping the foreign workers in servitude and making profits. After a few days of intra-MAGA wrangling, Trump stepped in and took Musk's side. He backed the H-1B programme. And it appeared that the debate had settled.

But the debate may not have truly settled, for here are three key implications of what happened at the end of December. For one, despite anti-immigrant politics showing its ugly face over the past decade, Indians had largely managed to escape the wrath of the nativist MAGA base - both because the primary ire was directed at illegal immigrants and because Indians were often considered a "model minority". But racism isn't selective and those who engage in the politics of othering are on the constant lookout for the next target. The rising power, wealth, and visibility of Indian-Americans made it perhaps inevitable that the nativist base would direct its anger at the Desi community. What Loomer and her ilk have done is open the floodgates for this anti-Indian racism. There will now be a strand within MAGA which will adopt this posture. It may be fringe for now, it may not have the backing of the leadership, but remember in politics of this kind, usually, the pendulum only swings to the more extreme positions. And remember once these positions begin to get articulated in the public sphere, amplified and legitimised in the virtual world, it doesn't take much for it to translate into the real world. On Friday, a joyous tweet by an Indian-American Congressman celebrating that the community had six members in the House now invited an avalanche of racist attacks. Expect this to intensify. Two, the debate has put the advocates of legal immigration reform within the Republican tent on the defensive. To be able to even suggest that Trump administration and the Republican Congress pursue comprehensive immigration reform and attract talent — a position that the national security, corporate and tech constituencies of the party hold — they will first have to wait for a major crackdown on illegal immigrants. This was a key promise that helped Trump win. His picks to handle immigration — Stephen Miller at the White House, Tom Homan as the border czar, Kristi Noem at homeland security — all share an almost messianic belief in radically increasing the scale of deportation of those who allegedly entered the US illegally. With Indians (especially from Punjab and Gujarat) now high up in the list of illegal immigrants, expect the crackdown to extend to them. But the operative point here is that until this process plays out, it is likely that the administration will slow down H-1B and green card processing times and divert resources and personnel. It is also likely that political advocates of H-1B will refrain from engaging in another round of confrontation with the base.

Three, the backlash has created a situation where even the fiercest advocates of H-1B route are not seeking its expansion or



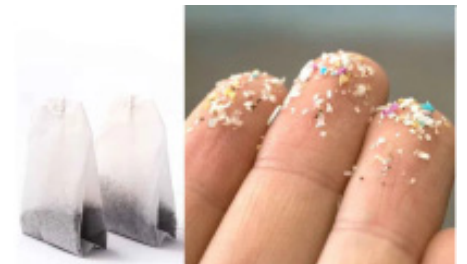
enhanced mobility of more professionals, which is frankly what America needs and which is the basis of a lot of enhanced collaboration between India and the US on the tech side, for what India can offer is talent. Trump himself is not the most reliable barometer on this, given his publicly expressed hostility to the programme in the past. Even Musk and Ramaswamy have said they want a more focused visa process that focuses on top-tier talent. When a user on X pointed out that a majority of those who were entering America on H-1B were coming in for "relatively lower wage IT and financial services jobs", Musk responded with his own post, "Easily fixed by raising the minimum salary significantly and adding a yearly cost for maintaining the H-1B, making it materially more expensive to hire from overseas than domestically. I've been very clear that the program is broken and needs major reform."

Sacks, the AI czar, added, "Elon has said that H-1B should be overhauled, that it should focus on exceptional talent in high-

value areas, and that the scams and low-pay jobs should end. This is not to say there aren't still differences but less than it first appeared. Time to move forward as one team." All of this means that, at the very minimum, there will be more vigorous implementation of rules related to the issuance of the visa. Don't be surprised if companies become even more careful, consular officers become even more careful, and the broader optics around the visa changes. It is in America's interest to import talent. That is what continues to give the country a substantial edge over its adversaries. But eventually, it is a sovereign decision, a decision that will inevitably be a product of the political climate of the times and the balance of power within the host society between forces that favour and oppose immigration. Given that the lives and futures of Indian citizens are at stake, New Delhi should closely monitor this debate and vigorously protect its citizens' interests. But the signal is unmistakable - the political era that enabled the post-2000 surge in Indian immigration to the US is drawing to a close.

## Tea bags release billions of microplastics into our bodies

Hyderabad: In today's world microplastic menace has become a major health hazard for people. Whether through bottled water or table salt, microplastics have invaded human tissues, according to a recent study. A new study conducted by Spanish researchers has found that a tea bags can release billions of microplastics and nanoplastic particles into the hot water, in which these bags are dipped. Using a set of cutting-edge technology of laser, they captured how tea bags release micro and nano plastics into the hot water. For the study, the researchers tested three types of tea bags. Tea bags made from polypropylene were found to be releasing about 1.2 billion particles per millilitre, averaging 136.7 nanometres in size. Those made from cellulose released around 135 million particles per millilitre, around 244 nanometres in size. And nylon-6 teabags released 8.18 million particles per millilitre, with an average size of 138.4 nanometres in size. The study also found that the absorption rate of these micro



and nanoparticles in the human body is much higher. Within 24 hours of consumption, they reached the nucleus of the intestinal cells. Scientists say that longtime exposure of these particles in the gut may lead to inflammatory bowel disease and affect body immunity. Though many companies have claimed that paper is used instead of plastic for manufacturing a tea bag, it still contains plastic at low levels, to give a standard shape to the bag. To lower the risk of microplastic exposure, tea enthusiasts can opt for loose leaf-based tea instead of polymer-based tea bags.

# Why poetic coaches need pragmatic prose to perfect their playing patterns

On a windy night in Stockholm, Jose Mourinho planted a red flag in the corner of Friends Arena, where his Manchester United had just toppled Ajax to hoist the Europa League title. After the revelry of the night, he delivered another caustic one-liner of his: "There are a lot of poets in football but they don't win titles." He was laughing, rather than ranting, at those managers that obsessed systems and structures, the Johan Cruyff and Marcelo Bielsas of the world, the romantics that never sacrificed their principles for functionality or trophies. Mourinho was the pragmatist, who would bend the team whichever way he wanted, depending on what suits the team best. If his Inter Milan brigade that stunned Pep Guardiola's tiki-takaing Barcelona blended impregnable defending and needle-eye counterattacking, his first Chelsea iteration, played fluid and dynamic football. As did his Real Madrid.

The snide didn't age well, Mourinho has not won another major trophy yet. He has slumped from being one of the hottest managers in Europe to one that is pursued by the clubs from outside Europe's top five leagues. Men of systems captured the consciousness of football, Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola, Hansi Flick and Xabi Alonso, even the modestly successful Roberto De Zerbi. So much so that every aspiring club wants not just titles with a clear and distinct identity, pushing the pragmatists to the lower echelons of the league. Another pragmatist manager Massimiliano Allegri is without a job, echoed by Mourinho who said that "every club wants a philosopher, not a manager." At the heart of the function-ideal debate, caught in neither worlds, are some of the leading clubs. Like Manchester United. They hired Ruben Amorim because they were not only impressed by the unbeaten, title-winning streaks, but also by the dynamic brand of football Sporting CP embraced. But he came at the wrong club at the wrong time. The United team at his disposal possessed none of the virtues required to thrive in a three-man defence formation that the Portuguese adamantly clings to. Rather it had exactly the men ill-fitted for such a high-energy structure.

Three-man defence thrives when the wingbacks are quick and robust, when the double midfield pivot are strong and strapping, when the forwards are incessant pressers and runners. In just a couple of practice sessions, Amorim would have realised that he cannot replicate a 3-4-3 or a 3-4-2-1 here. Yet, he remained religiously wedded to his drama, despite shuddering reality checks every week. Like for instance, starting with midfield pair of Cristian Eriksen and Casemiro against the muscular and faster trio of Bruno Guimaraes, Sandro Tonali and Joelinton. In the first 30 minutes, they were run ragged. But Amorim would stick to his beliefs. "I was here because of my idea and I will continue to do my idea until the end. I have to sell my idea. I don't have another one," he said. He did make minor tactical tweaks or in-game alterations, but everything was frame-worked in an inflexible three-man defence. The consequence was a wholly incoherent and scattered bunch, sleepwalking through a game. The transition could have been smoother had Amorim arrived between seasons where he could have cajoled the club into buying play-

ers that would have suited the system as well as regimented them into the formation in the pre-season. The club's management too should apportion some of the blame because they knew the manager's profile when they hired him, they could have foreseen the struggles.

Ange Postecoglou criticism playing style Spurs Tottenham's head coach Ange Postecoglou reacts during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham and Liverpool at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024. (AP Photo/Dave Shopland) As unwilling to budge has been Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou. Come feast or famine, hell or high water, his teams spot a high defensive line, despite being burned repeatedly, even though most of his first-choice back four had been absent this season. Southampton's Russell Martin was similarly deluded by his expansive build-up before the club axed him. The Spurs manager would recently say: "I do not know what a Plan B or C is," he said. "If people want me to change my approach, it's not going to change. We are doing it for a reason." It is not to suggest that philosophy-slaved managers are living a delusional world. There are benefits if the team is guided by a definite theme. Movements become synchronised, hence more aesthetic, the roles are clear, everyone knows what everyone is supposed to do, the squad is unified by a guiding vision, the scouts and recruiters know what kind of players to hire. It promises sustenance and smoother inheritance, as Liverpool discovered in Arne Slot.

Arne Slot Liverpool Manchester City Mohamed Salah Liverpool's manager Arne Slot and Real Madrid's head coach Carlo Ancelotti, in the background, stand by the touchline before the Champions League opening phase soccer match between Liverpool and Real Madrid at Anfield Stadium, Liverpool, England, Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2024. (AP Photo/Jon Super) Klopp's successor is perhaps the best example of someone striking the balance of being flexible as well as idealistic. He has by and large stuck to Klopp's dogma, but made subtle changes too. Like, repurposing Mohammed Salah to centre-forward role (but on the right wing). He has lost a few yards, but sharpened his shooting skills even more. Trent Alexander Arnold is now the marauding orthodox full back rather than one who dropped into the midfield. Encouraged by the resurrection of Ryan Gravenberch, Liverpool progressed the ball through central channels. The great idealist Guardiola too has not been averse to change, though not of a radical nature. He changes functions within functions of the player.

Like John Stones in the treble-winning season operating as sweeper-playmakers, or Joao Cancelo functioning as a full-back forward. Another fitting example is Carlo Ancelotti. In his first year at Parma, he refused to buy Roberto Baggio because he didn't play with No 10s (but twin strikers). Baggio went to Bologna and netted 22 goals that season (1997-98). He picked the essence of coaching from that incident. "After that season, I was convinced that I should plan my style according to the strengths of my team," he once said. Two years later, he joined Juventus and moulded one of the best



no 10s in the world, Zinedine Zidane. The challenge, thus, is not about tearing the temple, but adding more practical layers so

that the soul doesn't rot. A manager can be a poet, but a few lessons of prose would not do harm.

## Experts raise concerns over rising reliance on melatonin

The supplement, a synthetic version of the natural hormone produced by the body's pineal gland, is readily available in various forms. Experts are raising concerns about the growing trend of people, particularly young adults, turning to over-the-counter melatonin supplements to manage sleep disorders without proper medical supervision. The supplement, a synthetic version of the natural hormone produced by the body's pineal gland, is readily available in various forms including gummies, sprays, powder and tablets through both offline pharmacies and online retailers. Melatonin is naturally released when it's dark outside, with levels falling by morning to regulate the body's internal clock. Sleep specialists warn that unsupervised consumption of melatonin could lead to long-term side effects, including disruption of the body's natural hormone synthesis and symptoms such as stomach ache, night terrors and anxiety. "Melatonin is the buzzword when talking of sleep health, especially among adolescents," said Dr Vikas Mittal, director of Wellness Home Clinic and Sleep Centre in Paschim Vihar. He attributes its widespread use to increasing sleep-related issues and self-medication habits. "People are consuming melatonin without understanding the appropriate dosage, potential side effects, or its impact on their natural sleep-wake cycles," Mittal added. He also warned about additional ingredients in some supplements: "Many of these gummies have other ingredients including sugar. Further, there are two ingredients known to be present in some gummies - Kava and Valerian - they are known to be liver toxic and can cause damage in the longer run." The natural hormone helps regulate sleep patterns, with the body producing between 0.1 and 0.9 milligrams daily. However, users report taking much higher doses, ranging from 3mg to 10mg daily, often without knowing the appropriate amount. Shonak Gosain, 21, began using melatonin in 2020 during the Covid pandemic when online studying disrupted his sleep pattern. "Initially, these seemed to work wonders, helping me

fall asleep faster," he said. However, after six to seven months of use, he experienced side effects including headaches, fatigue and irritability.

Another 21-year-old user, who requested anonymity, discovered melatonin through social media. "I started with the gummies, and at first felt like they were working for me. However, after I was diagnosed with dengue, I felt it gave me headaches," she said. Not all users report positive effects. Ananya Shirivstav, 36, a working mother, found the supplement ineffective. "Often, I have trouble sleeping and people around me suggested taking melatonin. Even after trying it multiple times, I felt that it wasn't working for me," she said. Dr Vibhu Kawatra, a paediatric specialist at Rainbow Hospital, expressed particular concern about young users. "The brain is still developing throughout childhood and adolescence, with maturation continuing well into the early 20s," she said. "The early introduction of synthetic melatonin might interfere with the body's natural hormonal production and regulation." Research published in the National Library of Medicine suggests limited effectiveness, with melatonin treatment reducing sleep onset time by only four minutes, increasing sleep efficiency by 2.2%, and extending total sleep duration by 12.8 minutes. Dr Shabiullah Syed, a Delhi-based sleep medicine expert, emphasised the importance of proper dosing. "It has to be low initially, which can be increased. One also has to make sure to take melatonin a few hours before the onset of sleep and not right before going to bed," he said. Experts recommend prioritising good sleep hygiene over supplements. This includes maintaining regular bedtime routines, reducing screen time before bed, ensuring a comfortable sleep environment and engaging in physical activity during the day. "Medicines should be the last resort and for short-term when adjusting to a new time zone or addressing occasional sleep disruptions," Dr Kawatra added.