

Telangana government to introduce boating, other water sport activities at Mir Alam Tank in Hyd

Hyderabad: Demands for introducing latest boating and water sports activities at Mir Alam Tank abutting the Nehru Zoological Park is gaining momentum with the State government taking up beautification works at the water body. The Mir Alam tank is being developed on lines of Hussain Sagar in the city.

The State government in the last few years had introduced several new water recreational activities at Hussain Sagar. At the Mir Alam Tank, a lone 20 seater mechanised boats operates for the visitors and only a handful of visitors to the Nehru Zoological Park are actually aware of the leisure activity as only five signboards direct towards to boating facility.

The entrance to boating point is located from a remote corner of the zoo park. The mechanized boat operates from 10 am to 5 pm every day and on Monday's it is closed coinciding with the zoo holiday. "In the first

place, people are not aware of the boating facility at Mir Alam and no efforts were made to publicize or promote it properly. Only a few people who regularly visit the zoo park know about it and not all would walk the distance to the boating point from the main zoo thoroughfare," said Shehzad Khan, a school teacher from Bahadurpura. People feel the spot holds a lot of importance because of its proximity to zoo park where thousands of people visit on regular days and numbers swell on weekends. "Domestic and international tourist visit the zoo park regularly. If the boating facilities are improved it will showcase the State tourism in a positive way," said another visitor.

A speed boat allotted to the Mir Alam lies defunct since its engine developed snag long ago. When contacted, an official of tourism department said Mir Alam Tank is filled with water hyacinth for four to five months a year and during that period the boating facility is completely stopped. "We will send a team and do inspection to see what all new



facilities can be introduced at the place," said the official.

Hundred teams up with badminton icon Srikanth Kidambi



Hyderabad: Hundred, a leading global performance-focused sports brand, announces its partnership with badminton legend Srikanth Kidambi, Padma Shri Awardee, former World #1 Men's Singles player and one of the most celebrated figures in the sport. Srikanth's collaboration with Hundred marks a pivotal step in the brand's mission to strengthen its presence in the Indian badminton market.

The partnership will make its official debut at the prestigious Indonesia Masters 2025, reflecting Hundred's commitment to inspiring and empowering the next generation of badminton enthusiasts. Badminton is now the second most popular sport among Gen Z in India, trailing only cricket, as revealed in the 2024 Google-Deloitte Think

Sports report. Srikanth Kidambi's association with Hundred underscores the brand's dedication to fostering the sport's growth in India and nurturing young talent to excel on the global stage. The partnership underscores Hundred's mission to dominate and grow all sports segments in India including Badminton and compete against global legacy players, setting new benchmarks in performance and innovation. Srikanth said, "I am thrilled to partner with Hundred, a brand that resonates with my passion for performance and pushing boundaries. Together, we aim to inspire the next generation of badminton players." Manak Kapoor, Director, Hundred Singapore, stated, "Welcoming Srikanth to the Hundred family is a testament to our commitment to pushing the boundaries of bad-

minton globally. We see Srikanth as a pivotal figure in driving this mission, particularly in India, where his legacy and influence can

inspire young players to embrace the sport, take it seriously, and compete at the highest levels."

Hilife exhibition brings New Year fashion trends to Hyderabad in a 3-day expo



Hyderabad: The largest fashion and lifestyle exhibition brand 'Hilife Exhibition' is all set to introduce New Year Fashion Trends in Hyderabad with its scintillating New Year Fashions and Trends Special Exhibition happening from January 31 to February 2 at HICC, Novotel, Hitec City.

'Hilife Exhibition' will be bringing in an exciting display of fashion, glamour, style and luxury. Fashion wear, lifestyle wear, bridal wear, designer wear, accessories, jewellery and more will be showcased at the three-day expo. It will have top fashion labels, designers and the artistic collection.

Want to second a World champion? 'Put aside your personal preferences and get into the player's shoes,' says P. Harikrishna

There is a common factor between the men's and women's reigning World chess champions: P. Harikrishna worked as a second to both D. Gukesh and Ju Wenjun. Ju retained the women's title back in 2023, while Gukesh became the youngest World champion in history, at 18, dethroning Ding Liren last month in Singapore. Harikrishna, who played a significant role in the Chennai youngster's triumph, is looking forward to their meeting in the Dutch village of Wijk aan Zee, where they will come face to face across a chessboard, at the Tata Steel tournament, one of the most prestigious events in the chess calendar. It kicks off on January 17.

One of the most prodigious chess talents to have come out of India, Harikrishna was once the World No. 10. He was also a part of India's gold-medal-winning Olympiad team. The 38-year-old was preparing for Wijk aan Zee at his Prague home when The Hindu caught up with him over the phone for an interview. Excerpts: At Wijk aan Zee, Gukesh will be playing two of his seconds — you and Vincent Keymer. Yes, we could not meet Gukesh after he won the World Championship. So it will be nice to meet him, looking forward to it very much. There is such a strong field at Wijk aan Zee...

The field is very strong actually, with many strong young players and experienced ones as well. Apart from Gukesh, there are players like Fabiano Caruana, Arjun Erigaisi, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, R. Praggnanandhaa, Anish Giri, Wei Yi... I have been preparing for the tournament, I want to give my best. The last time I played was in 2021. And I had played a couple of times earlier as well. Wunderkind: A former World junior champion, Harikrishna is one of the most prodigious chess talents to have come out of India.

Wunderkind: A former World junior champion, Harikrishna is one of the most prodigious chess talents to have come out of India. [Wei and you worked together as seconds for Ju for her last World title match... Yes, for her match against Lei Tingjie, but unfortunately in 2023, there was not much time. We had only three months to prepare. But generally, the preparation should be around six months. With Gukesh, it was more than that, wasn't it? Yes. I began working with him actually for the Candidates tournament [held in April in Toronto]. Once he was sure of qualifying for the Candidates, which was after the World Rapid and Blitz Championships, the last event in the FIDE circuit, he messaged me and asked if I could help. So we started preparing for the Candidates. And naturally, after he won the Candidates, he wanted to have the team that helped him. He also wanted Vincent, who joined us for the match. Gukesh's team was headed by Grzegorz Gajewski and it also included Radoslaw Wojtaszek, Jan-Krzysztof Duda and Jan Klimkowski. How did the team function? We were analysing in the best possible way so we could give the ideas to Gukesh. While the match was on, only Gajewski was with Gukesh in Singapore, we were based in Spain. That worked perfectly for us time-zone-wise. When they go to sleep we could prepare. Gajewski would, in their evenings, ask us to check something. And then he gave a lot of valuable inputs. And along the lines, we developed which idea could be interesting for Gukesh to play the

next day. And to make that idea as clean as possible was our task. Sometimes we could come up with a better idea, sometimes maybe not convincing. So we had a lot of discussions, a lot of analyses. We did it together. Apart from the work we did in the openings, Gukesh played a lot of blitz games as training.

Yes, Gajewski told me that Gukesh was very well prepared for the tie-breaks if required, by playing hundreds of blitz games. But, openings are the main part of the preparation. And, you know, with so many strong players in the team, many ideas come up. I also had another role, which was to analyse some main games and some positions. And we used to have this during camps also. Finally! Harikrishna, who first played in the Olympiad in 2000, ended his wait for a medal with the team gold in 2024. | Photo credit: Nagara Gopal Finally! Harikrishna, who first played in the Olympiad in 2000, ended his wait for a medal with the team gold in 2024. | Photo credit: Nagara Gopal The deep preparation in the opening seems to have paid off for Gukesh, as he looked so sure, making his opening moves quickly in most of the games, which gave him the clear advantage in time over Ding. You must be happy with the way the openings went for Gukesh. Absolutely. For us seconds, it is not the best opening that he remembers, but the one which he feels good about. That is the most important. He played well in the openings which we discussed. Right from the beginning we decided to have some human touch, because the computer can suggest many, many things. So, we made sure that we equalised not just with the help of engines, but that also we should take some risks. I think that really worked. And we looked at some ideas from games played at the lower levels, so they were not novelties but they helped. The first game, which Gukesh lost, was a little bit of a setback, I have to say. But, after that, you could see that whatever openings we were choosing, he was feeling good, except Game 12. In that game, Ding also played quite well, I have to add.

He did, almost flawless he was. And that was possibly the best game Ding has played in recent times. Yes. And credit to Gukesh for being able to recover from that.

How did you find this process of being a second? Is it tiring and how is it different from being a player?

As a player, you have your own choices, but as a second, you need to put aside your personal preferences and go into the shoes of the player and look at what is best. At the same time, you should not lose your strength because you look into what the player wants. You should also use your own strength, to understand the opening or choice of ideas. Yes, it is definitely quite tiring.

How important was the Olympiad gold for you as a player? You have been playing at the Olympiads for a long, long time. Yes. My first Olympiad was in 2000 when I was 14. And I played all the Olympiads after that except the one in 2014. Two times we finished fourth when I was a member, once in Baku in 2016. And the second time was in Chennai in 2022. Thankfully, the B team won the bronze in Chennai, but the A team, which I was part of, finished fourth. The Olympiad had been the only team competition in which



I didn't win a medal. I have won medals at the Asian Games and Asian Team Champi-

onships. So I am glad that now I have an Olympiad medal.

Gaze isn't necessarily framed by gender lens

One of the formative works on gaze and visual art consumption, *Ways of Seeing* — a 1972 TV series created by writer John Berger and producer Mike Dibb for BBC Two — offers an exhaustive summary of themes that underscore visual depictions. "Men dream of women; women dream of themselves being dreamt of. Men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at," Berger says at the beginning of Episode 2 — *Women and Art*. He makes a case for how heterosexual patriarchy dominated the arts through classical European paintings, some of the earliest platters for visual consumption before photographs and cinema made their way — a status quo maintained to date.

In a recent interview, Malayalam actor and the star of Payal Kapadia's critically acclaimed film *All We Imagine As Light*, Kani Kusruti remarks that the male gaze is not limited by the gender that defines it. In simple words, the male gaze transcends boundaries of sexuality and identity to accommodate demand and supply nurtured by norms of performativity and perception. It has been reinforced too many times and has now become naturalised.

Take for instance, Bollywood directors Farah Khan Kunder or Pooja Bhatt, whose films *Main Hoon Naa* and *Jism 2*, respectively, use the women characters, and subsequently their identities and bodies, to drive a male-centric plot. In the former, a blockbuster starring Shah Rukh Khan, the characters of Sushmita Sen and Amrita Rao are used as pawns of objectification. Sen as Chandni Chopra, a sensuous chemistry teacher, is deployed to take under her wings and transform the wardrobe (and image) of a "tomboyish" Sanjana, played by Rao. Soon after the desired changes, Sanjana is turned into the eye candy of the college. Bhatt's *Jism 2* was termed an "erotic thriller". The film was promoted on the plank that it starred Sunny Leone (as Izna), a former adult entertainer, marking her debut in Bollywood. Leone's character is portrayed almost as an excuse

for the hypersexualised scenes. Izna's body is used as a site of male desire rather than the passion of romance it claims to depict.

At the centre of these depictions and consumptions is the female gaze, a close cousin of the male gaze but imagined by women through the perceptions of a heterosexual man. As stories being told by women, films by women directors often carry the burden of having to undo years of normative damage without accounting for the fact that women, too, are products of those norms. Film theorist Laura Mulvey, one of the first people to engage with the terminology "male gaze", underscored that among the many pleasures that cinema might offer is scopophilia — to derive pleasure from watching others naked or engaged in sexual activity.

Cinema engages the human form with the surroundings, the scale, and the characters, which derive meaning through the fascination of the spectator, regardless of gender. In conventional mainstream cinema, this fascination is fed by a range of factors, including the body as a site of curiosity, projected desire, aspiration, and consumption, all of which overlap. Prolonged suppression of identity, repression of desire, and interminable standards of beauty play varied roles in this melee.

Over time, there have been attempts to feminise the gaze, an important step in breaking stereotypes. It seeks to subvert the male perception, which can also include demystifying its site, i.e., the body. However, this is where purpose matters over tokenism. For instance, the viral Telugu item song *Oo Antava* from the Allu Arjun starrer *Pushpa: The Rise* typically depicts a seductress dancing amid a set of debauched men including the hero, with the exception that the lyrics are seemingly progressive. Loosely translated, the lyrics sum up to how "they scan me if I wear a skirt or saree. It is not the clothes that matter but men's perception". But here is the caveat:

Punjab Govt disagrees with the Centre's new Agri-Marketing Policy: Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), January 17: Expressing disagreement with the Centre's new Agricultural marketing policy, Punjab Agriculture Minister, Gurmeet Singh Khudian, said that the farmer could not store the crop for a long time in wait for the handsome price of grain in the open market. He said that there are more than 1800 mandis/procurement centres in Punjab that cannot run with this new system. Therefore, the state government does not agree with this new marketing policy to safeguard the interests of farmers. Showing his concern over the non-acceptance of agitating farmers' demands by the central government, Minister Khudian said that the Centre Govt should accept their demands without having an indifferent approach to the farmers. Keeping in mind the health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on indefinite hunger strike, he urged the Centre government to consider the demands of the farmers.

AAP Punjab spokesperson Harsukhinder Singh Babbi Badal appreciated the decision of the Bhagwant Mann government to refuse the implementation of the new draft of the agriculture marketing policy suggested by the Centre Punjab Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Dairy Development Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian Friday laid a foundation stone of Sub Yard of Dana Mandi at Saneta village in Mohali. He said that this sub yard will be built in 5 acres at a cost of Rs 2.5 crore, which will be completed within

6 months. Addressing the gathering after laying the foundation stone, S. Khudian said that the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann-led Punjab Government has given a major relief to the farmers of more than 20 villages in the nearby area by approving the construction of this sub yard. He said that earlier, due to the lack of a dana mandi (procurement centre) in Saneta, the farmers were forced to sell their crops on the roadside. When he was informed by MLA Kulwant Singh about the issue, he immediately directed the officials of the Punjab Mandi Board to start it by removing all the hiccups in the construction of the Saneta sub yard. He said that today the long pending demand of the area has been fulfilled. He congratulated the gram panchayat of Saneta village for the generosity shown in the year 2011 by giving the panchayat land for the same. Minister Khudian said that three auction platforms, one big shed, 71 shops and booths, a water tank and water disposal will be constructed in this mandi. He said that earlier the arrival of 60000 quintals of paddy and 33000 quintals of wheat was recorded in this mandi, which will enhance the arrival of more foodgrains with the completion of construction of the new market. He said that this market will give a major relief to the urban area from the issue of traffic during the procurement season. He said that the state is making all out efforts to ensure the availability of quality seeds and fertilizers in Punjab. Councillor Sarabjit Singh Samana,



while welcoming Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian on behalf of MLA Kulwant Singh, said that the setting up of Saneta sub yard was a big challenge and problem for the area, which has been met today with the kicking off of this project by

the Bhagwant Mann government. He also demanded that the newly built building of Saneta Hospital should be opened soon, on which the Minister of Agriculture, assured to meet Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Balbir Singh.

Shiv Nadar University Chennai Announces Admissions for Integrated Law Program

SHIV NADAR
— FOUNDATION —

Hyderabad :Shiv Nadar University Chennai launched the Shiv Nadar School of Law, its latest academic initiative in 2024, and is now accepting applications for the second incoming batch of the integrated B.A., LL.B. program, for the academic year 2025-26. With a focus on nurturing ethical, globally competent, and socially responsible legal professionals, the program combines a true-blue liberal arts program with a unique pedagogy for law that focuses on niche legal skills. Applications can be submitted online at apply.snuchennaiadmissions.com.

Shiv Nadar School of Law was established under the Shiv Nadar Foundation's vision to redefine legal education in India. The program is designed to develop critical thinking, analytical skills, and a global perspective on legal issues, ensuring students are well-prepared to address real-world challenges. To enhance practical understanding, 20% of the faculty comprises leading national

and international legal practitioners, bringing real-world insights into the classroom. Dean and Professor Shiv Swaminathan highlighted the transformative goals of the program, stating, "What sets the Shiv Nadar School of Law apart is our world-class faculty, which is drawn from the world's leading universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Princeton, Yale etc. and our emphasis on imparting niche, enduring and highly employable skills. Our unique curriculum seeks to empower students to tackle complex legal challenges and drive meaningful change in society."

The Shiv Nadar School of Law will provide students with extensive career support through annual internships and a dedicated placement team, preparing them not just for their first job but for a lifelong career in law. Students will also benefit from the resources and intellectual environment of the Shiv Nadar University Chennai campus, which spans 230 acres and features state-of-the-

art libraries and world-class research facilities. Eligibility: Students will be shortlisted for interviews on the basis of any one of the following criteria: CLAT Score [OR] Any major law entrance examination (an indicative list includes LNAT, AILET, SLAT, MH CET Law, TN LAW CET, AP

LAWCET) [OR] Grades of class 10 and 12. Students can apply with class 10 score if class 12 score is not available at the time of application. Application Deadlines: Applications opened on Jan 1, 2025. Admission decisions will be made on a rolling basis.

Distribution of CMRF cheques Sangareddy

On the orders of State Health Minister Sri Damodar Rajanarsimha, CMRF cheques worth Rs 15 lakh were handed over to the victims at the Agricultural Market Office in Raikode on Friday under the leadership of District Library Chairman Anjaiah. The pro-

gram was attended by the latest former Sarpanch Kedarnath Patel, Temple Committee Chairman Satish Kulkarni, former AMC Chairman Yesaiah, Prabhakar, Gyaneshwar, Maruthi Rao, Sivakumar, Durgesh, Kiran and others.

Mounting debts drive couple to end lives in Telangana's Nirmal

Nirmal: A man and his wife died by suicide allegedly by hanging as they were depressed over their inability to repay loans in Dilawarpur mandal centre on Friday. Police said that Koripelli Bhaskar Reddy (60) and

his wife Anasuya (52) from Chincholi (B) village in Sarangapur mandal were found dead after being hanged to a tree near a temple on the outskirts of Dilawarpur mandal headquarters.

Royal Stag BoomBox – The Experiential Music Festival Returns With Its 3rd Edition

Hyderabad :Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox returns for its third edition, blending Bollywood's iconic melodies with contemporary hip-hop beats. With this season being produced by Mirchi, the immersive music festival showcased its upcoming lineup at an exclusive media preview in Mumbai on January 14th, 2025. This unique cultural fusion continues to redefine the intersection of traditional and modern Indian music, embodying the brand's 'Living it Large' philosophy. Music has been a key consumer engagement pillar for the brand. Royal Stag BoomBox audaciously brings together Bollywood's timeless melodies with hip-hop's raw energy, creating the original sound of today's generation, Generation Large. The festival's unique format creates a distinct sound that resonates with today's youth – a tribe that makes rather than follows trends. This year, the platform has also tied up with Ampverse DMI Pulse, the cutting-edge marketing agency who will bring in the gaming experience for the 1st time to Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox. Leveraging their expertise in identifying youth trends and the intersection of gaming and entertainment, a lineup of top gaming influencers has been curated, who resonate with audiences in each city. These Influencers will take part in an exhilarating EAFC 24 gaming showdown, bringing high-energy face-offs to Hyderabad, Mumbai and Gurugram. The event will feature showdowns, intense gameplay, lively banter, and real-time crowd interactions, creating an immersive experience that seamlessly blends gaming, music, and live entertainment. Kartik Mohindra, Chief Marketing Officer and Head of Global Business Development at Pernod Ricard India said, "The universal language of mu-



sic, especially in live experiences, has this remarkable power to unite people and create moments of pure magic. Royal Stag continues to celebrate music as its key youth passion pillar. Now, as we unveil the third edition of Royal Stag BoomBox, the platform is set to elevate the experience with an exciting new soundscape, blending the melodies of Bollywood with the pulsating beats of Hip-Hop, along with art and cultural experiences, truly exemplifying the brand philosophy of Living It Large." Speaking about the

third edition of Royal Stag BoomBox, Ajay Gupte, CEO-South Asia, Wavemaker said, "Royal Stag has always championed music as a core passion point for today's youth. In this 3rd edition of Royal Stag Boombox, we are amplifying our 'Live It Large' philosophy. The overwhelming success of previous iterations proved we are tapping into something truly special. Expect an even more dynamic experience, a truly electrifying fusion of Bollywood's emotive melodies and the raw energy of hip-hop. Get ready for a

power-packed lineup that will redefine music festivals." Yatish Mehrishi, CEO of ENIL said "Royal Stag BoomBox is all about bringing people together through the magic of music—it's where innovation meets culture, and tradition blends seamlessly with modern vibes. At ENIL, we're excited to collaborate on something so special that celebrates diversity and creates unforgettable moments. This edition is a step forward in raising the bar, delivering energy, joy, and memories that music lovers across the country will treasure for a lifetime."

It's Big, it's an SUV, it's an EV, it's a BMW.



Hyderabad: BMW India launched the first-ever BMW X1 Long Wheelbase All Electric at the Auto Expo 2025. The car can be booked at BMW dealerships across India from today onwards. The BMW X1 Long Wheelbase All Electric becomes the first

electric vehicle by BMW to be 'Made in India'. Locally produced at BMW Group Plant Chennai, the BMW X1 Long Wheelbase All Electric is available exclusively in the eDrive20L drivetrain. Mr. Vikram Pawah, President and CEO, BMW Group India said,

"Today, BMW has pioneered a disruption in the Indian premium automotive segment by launching the first-ever X1 Long Wheelbase All Electric. It's Big, it's an SUV, it's an EV and it's a BMW! The X1 Long Wheelbase is here to dominate every day, your way. A

premium offering that offers practicality and sustainability, all in one package, making it the obvious choice as your first BMW. Exuding space, comfort and versatility, it is the perfect premium SUV for rising aspirations of new Bharat. As the first 'Made in India' EV from BMW, the X1 Long Wheelbase beckons a new era of innovation and excellence. Mr. Pawah further added, "The first-ever X1 Long Wheelbase is ideal for individuals with modern lifestyle who stay ahead of the curve and do not compromise. BMW India is set to exceed your experience by offering a comprehensive solution complimented by smart financial plans, a widespread EV ecosystem with new services like Destination Charging, Smart eRouting, Charging Concierge and much more. With so much substance packed into it, the X1 Long Wheelbase is 'The One' aspirational SUV." The introductory ex-showroom price of the first-ever BMW X1 Long Wheelbase All Electric eDrive20L M Sport is INR 49,00,000. Price prevailing at the time of invoicing will be applicable. Ex-showroom prices inclusive of GST (incl. compensation cess) as applicable but exclude Road Tax, Tax Collected at Source (TCS), RTO statutory taxes/fees, other local tax cess levies and insurance. Price / options are subject to change without prior notice. For further information, contact an authorised BMW dealer.

The fatal line between fervour and frenzy

C.B. Gopal Reddy, a nonagenarian, was taking a nap in his flat at Bairagipatteda, a residential area in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, when his house help, Revathi, jolted him awake around 8.30 p.m. on January 8. Even as Revathi began explaining to him about a commotion at Padmavati Park in their locality, he heard the unsettling sound of the ambulances entering the area and reaching the park where nearly 2,000 devotees of Lord Venkateswara have been anxiously waiting since morning. The devotees, who came from various parts of India, gathered at the park as they waited for officials to allow them into the Rama Naidu Municipal Corporation School. There, they were to be issued the Vaikunta Ekadasi darshan tokens for Tirumala temple, the largest Hindu temple in the world.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) announced that 1.2 lakh darshan tokens would be issued for three days from January 10 to 12. The tokens were to be issued from 5 a.m. on January 9. However, scores of devotees began turning up in the temple city a day in advance, on January 8. Rama Naidu Municipal Corporation School was one of the eight token centres that the TTD, the administrative body of the temple, chose for the annual event. Big rush at small locality Gopal Reddy, however, was surprised to see hundreds of devotees turn up at his locality, which is not known to many non-locals. He assumed that the token centre was set up to cater to the locals of the temple city.

Little did he or his neighbours know that the devotees were ferried to the area by autorickshaws. The devotees say that they were told by the auto drivers that they were more likely to get the tokens at this centre as it was unknown to many and that the rush was less there. To the devotees' disappointment, the rush began peaking by the evening, and around 8.25 p.m., the entry of police into the park triggered commotion, which quickly escalated into a stampede, causing the death of six people. "We make four trips to Tirumala every year. This is our first trip in 2025. This is also the first time I'm leaving the place without having a darshan and I'm returning home to Visakhapatnam with my husband's body" Mani Kumari Devotee from Visakhapatnam An inconsolable Mani Kumari, wife of Naidu Babu, 55, who died in the stampede says, "We make four trips to Tirumala every year. This is our first trip in 2025. This is also the first time I'm leaving the place without having a darshan and I'm returning home to Visakhapatnam with my husband's body." Clad in traditional yellow dhoti and shirt, K. Venkatesh, the husband of K. Shanti, another victim, wryly remembered how he had been taking the 'Govinda Mala' for the last fifteen years only to take his wife's dead body from the temple city this year. (The Govinda Mala includes observance of abstinence for 41 days. The vow is relinquished by getting a darshan at the Tirumala temple on Vaikunta Ekadasi.) Six people, including S. Lavanya (38), K. Shanti (33) and G. Rajani (47) from Visakhapatnam, B. Naidu Babu (55) from Narsipatnam, and V. Nirmala (53) of Pollachi, and Malliga (50) of Mettur from Tamil Nadu lost their lives in the stampede that night, marking a black day in the history of Tirupati. It is only the second major tragedy that ever happened in Tirupati after the stampede that occurred inside the Tirumala temple on August 12, 1967, in which thirteen pilgrims were killed. What happened that day



Appa Rao, a devotee who waited at the park and fled the spot during the stampede, recalls the events of the day that led to the tragedy: "Someone in the park fell very sick and needed medical attention. It was then that the security officials made an announcement through the handheld microphone asking the devotees to make way for the policemen who were on their way to rescue the person." Devotees jostle each other as the crowd surges towards the ticket issuing centre. "The announcement was lost in the din when the barricades erected were moved to make way for the police to get in. A surge of devotees breached the barriers and ran towards the queue line," he adds. "The over-enthusiastic devotees misunderstood the situation. Many believed the announcement was about the issuance of tokens and started moving towards the gate. The devotees, who have become restless after the long wait, were in no mood to pay attention to the announcements made appealing to them to observe restraint and sit calmly," say TTD authorities. Chaos ensued, and in a span of two minutes, a stampede occurred. Many fell unconscious due to breathlessness. The police and staff on duty rescued some by performing Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).

After waiting for 15 minutes for the ambulance, the victims were taken to Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital (SVRRGGH). Some were shifted to Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS), a TTD-run super specialty hospital.

Government action Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, several State Cabinet Ministers and former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited Tirupati the next day and called on the victims recovering at the hospital. After consultations with the TTD's Chairman B.R. Naidu, Executive Officer J. Syamala Rao, Additional EO Ch, Venkaiah Chowdary, Collector S. Venkateswar and Tirupati SP L. Subbarayudu, the Chief Minister, concluded that there was laxity on the part of the staff handling the centre. Chandrababu Naidu ordered the suspension

of Deputy Superintendent of Police Ramana Kumar, who was the security in-charge of the centre, and TTD's Sri Venkateswara Gosamrakshanasala (Dairy Farm) Director K. Haranath Reddy, who was bestowed with the overall responsibility of managing the centre. The Chief Minister also announced the transfer of SP Subbarayudu, TTD Joint EO M. Gowthami, an IAS officer and TTD's Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (CV&SO) S. Sreedhar. He also ordered a judicial probe into the incident.

TTD preparedness The TTD management says it got into preparedness mode a fortnight ahead of the holy event. This year's schedule and protocol were similar to those of last year's. The three main centres which issue tickets 365 days a year, viz., Srinivasam pilgrim complex (near central bus station), Vishnu Nivasam pilgrim complex (near railway station) and Bhudevi complex (Alipiri, the foot of Tirumala hills) were ready with 12, 14 and 11 counters respectively. Makeshift centres were created at Jeevakona Zilla Parishad High School (with 10 counters), Muthyala Reddy Palle Zilla Parishad High School (8 counters), Ramachandra Pushkarini (10 counters), Rama Naidu High School, Bairagipatteda (10 counters), Indira Maidanam (15 counters) and Balaji Nagar community hall at Tirumala (4 counters, for Tirumala residents only).

The district police and TTD's vigilance wing were required to take care of crowd management, once the devotees are let inside the centres. The two institutions deputed a Deputy Superintendent of Police cadre official and an Assistant Vigilance and Security Officer (TTD), respectively, at every centre. Instructions had also been issued to them to independently take a call on when to allow the devotees into the centres. Flaw in crowd management However, at Bairagipatteda, the coordination between the officials seems to have failed utterly. At this centre, the queue line was long enough to accommodate 750 pilgrims, and the holding area was sufficient to hold 1,500 persons. If necessary, the queue line could be extended using ropes to accommodate another 750 people. In addition to a Deputy Superintendent cadre offi-

cial to head the Bairagipatteda centre, the district police deputed four Inspectors, 14 Sub-Inspectors, 92 civil forces, and two special party police for crowd management. Similarly, the TTD's in-house vigilance wing deputed an SPF inspector, two Reserve Sub-Inspectors, and 39 personnel. The TTD's vigilance sleuths are well-versed in crowd management at Tirumala. Similarly, the civil police are known to handle mobs that push and jostle, especially during processions, fairs, and festivals.

"The police of the two institutions could have easily formed the 'first line of defence' together in handling a paltry crowd of 2,000 persons, but 'lack of coordination' at the ground level led to the disaster, as observed even by the Chief Minister," a senior police official told The Hindu. "In spite of being given a free hand, the absence of cohesive action between the two entities was quite palpable, as the TTD's officials were taking instructions from their CV&SO, while the civil police were waiting for orders from the district police head," a TTD senior official says. "The unfortunate incident happened as the forces deployed at the centre failed to gauge the pressure from the public and opened the park gate all of a sudden without prior announcement" J. Syamala Rao Executive Officer, TTD "The unfortunate incident happened as the forces deployed at the centre failed to gauge the pressure from the public and opened the park gate all of a sudden without prior announcement," Syamala Rao says. In fact, at the time of the stampede, the devotees had not entered the TTD's token-issuing premises but were waiting in the adjacent park. They were only pushing ahead to secure entry into the holding point. Many wonder how the TTD officials could be held responsible for the stampede occurring in a public place (a park owned by the municipal corporation), which was clearly outside their purview. The TTD Joint Executive Officer Gowthami, SP L. Subbarayudu and the TTD's CV&SO S. Sreedhar oversaw all the nine centres and were involved in overall supervision of arrangements and crowd dynamics, besides physically visiting some centres upon receiving complaints.

When rivals turn allies: unpacking the Novak Djokovic-Andy Murray coaching arrangement

Hiring a coach is not an exact science. There is no single foundational principle that guides athletes through this process and there is no overarching hypothesis against which a coach's worth can be tested. It's more abstract, less quantifiable. In an individual discipline like tennis, it is all the more difficult. There is a need for personalities to match, and cohesion, trust and mutual respect are non-negotiable. If anything, luck often plays an outsized role in zeroing in on the right person. Anticipated storyline

Against this backdrop, how does one look at the Novak Djokovic-Andy Murray combination? The mouthwatering — at least on paper — player-coach partnership will debut at the Australian Open, the season's first Grand Slam tournament, that gets underway on Sunday, and is already one of the most anticipated storylines going into Melbourne. Born a week apart in May 1987, the Serb and the Brit have known each other since childhood. And for two years in 2015-16, when Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were off pace, theirs was men's tennis' pre-eminent rivalry, featuring 12 clashes, nine of them in finals, including three at the Majors.

Murray is a three-time Slam champion, eight-time runner-up and former World No. 1. In fact, the 37-year-old was an active player — though far diminished from his glory days — until August 2024. It is perhaps this pedigree, champion mentality and intricate knowledge of the ever-shifting sands of modern-day tennis that prompted Djokovic to turn to Murray. At 37, Djokovic is in the last leg of his career. The 24-time Major winner hasn't won a Tour-level title since November 2023 and is in the midst of his worst run at the Slams since 2016-18 when he went eight events without a trophy. He is entering the Australian Open — a title he has acquired a whopping 10 times — ranked No. 7 in the world. Starting 2008, the year of his first triumph Down Under, only once before has Djokovic touched down in Melbourne ranked outside the top-five — in 2018 when he lost in the round of 16. Djokovic is also the last man standing from the famed 'Big Three' era, hoping to delay the inevitable takeover of the sport by the scintillating duo of Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner. As the sport gets younger, taller and more powerful — Djokovic is four years older than the second oldest man in the top-10, Grigor Dimitrov, and doesn't have a height advantage against six of the 10 best players — he needs fresh solutions if he is to overhaul Margaret Court's 24-Slam count.

"He [Murray] has a unique perspective on my game as one of the greatest rivals that I've had," Djokovic told [atptour.com](https://www.atptour.com). "He knows the pros and cons of my game and has also played until recently. So he knows all the other best players, the youngsters, and their weaknesses and strengths. I love talking to him about the nuances, the details, how I can improve, how I can gain an inch, more court positioning, compared to my opponent. And every percentage counts at the highest level."

Picking them right What gives hope is the Serb's own record in picking coaches. Of course, during his previous slump (2016-18), he flirted with Andre Agassi for roughly a year and sought philosophical answers to his on-court travails from a quasi-spiritual guru Pepe Imaz. But outside of these, his association with coach Marian Vajda has

been long-standing, and he struck gold with German legend Boris Becker and Croat Goran Ivanisevic. Becker had a hand in Djokovic securing six Majors while Ivanisevic helped him bag 12. These appointments, when initially announced, seemed to defy conventional logic, for Becker and Ivanisevic were predominantly attacking players and Djokovic a defensive baseliner. However, over time, their imprints were visible in Djokovic's progress. In the presence of Becker, he improved his forecourt skills a great deal, with his low volleys standing out. With Ivanisevic in tow, Djokovic bettered his serve immeasurably and also mastered the art of clutch serving. It was no surprise that from 2011 to 2024, Djokovic reached 10 Wimbledon finals and succeeded in seven of them. "Andy is a student of the game, both in terms of tactics, and health and fitness," said Australian doubles great Todd Woodbridge. "He is infatuated with tennis. Andy will look at all the data and he'll provide all the statistics to put into the tactics of every match." Him joining up with Novak is not just fascinating, but a smart decision from Novak, because who else can coach Novak? He has done everything more than any other person. You put Andy in there, who has won Wimbledon, US Open, Olympics and Davis Cup... he understands the stretch, the pressure and what Novak needs now because he has just been through it. Intersecting lives: Born a week apart in May 1987, Murray and Djokovic have known each other since childhood. A friend who can help him pick the right piece to complete a complex jigsaw may be just what Djokovic needs. | Photo credit: Getty Images Intersecting lives: Born a week apart in May 1987, Murray and Djokovic have known each other since childhood. A friend who can help him pick the right piece to complete a complex jigsaw may be just what Djokovic needs.

But such seemingly straightforward fixes can also fail; Djokovic's own association with Agassi is a prime example. After he won the 2016 French Open and became the first man since Rod Laver to hold all four Majors at once, Djokovic experienced a severe lack of motivation. Agassi couldn't bail him out despite having overcome the feeling of emptiness in his own career after he reached the pinnacle of the world rankings. "In any coach-student relationship you need trust and trust can take time," said Agassi of Djokovic's decision to choose Murray. "It's not about what I [as a coach] know that changes your career. Information doesn't lead to transformation. You need to encounter the right information at work and then you might transform. In order to encounter it, you have to have full buy-in. I'm sure there's going to be a lot of trust immediately. We'll see how the results go."

Wanted: a reassuring presence It is also worth remembering that Djokovic, arguably, has the most technically sound game in the history of men's tennis. So he will not require a father figure who radically reshapes his court-craft but a friend who can put a casual arm around the shoulder and help pick the right piece to finish a complex jigsaw. More a reassuring presence like how Stefan Edberg was to Federer in 2014 when he nudged the Swiss great to embrace a larger racquet head (switching from 90 square



inches to 97) to great success. "Andy won't have any secrets, but there are a lot of small details that he will know that maybe Novak doesn't think about," Swedish great Mats Wilander told Eurosport. "We always talk about peaking, and Murray knows how to peak. If you win the Olympic Games twice, Wimbledon twice and you are from Great Britain, you understand how to be at your best at the most crucial times." Murray and

Djokovic also had similar behaviour towards their coaching boxes.

It looked like it was a little bit of complaining or it could have just been about explaining how they were feeling. It will be interesting to see how Murray will react when Djokovic throws his arms up and says 'what am I supposed to be doing now?' It is going to be one of the most entertaining and interesting relationships."

Waikar to lead Indian men's team in Kho Kho WC

Kho kho has been a part of Pratik Waikar's life since the age of eight. The game might have begun as a fun activity or a welcome distraction from academics during his school hours, but succeeding in it as the years passed has propelled the 32-year-old from Pune to becoming the captain of the Indian men's team for the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup.

The tournament, which will be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium from January 13 to 19, kicks off with host India taking on Nepal after Pakistan was omitted from the list of participating nations due to visa issues. The leadership role underlines Waikar's status as one of the best kho kho players in the country. Besides being part of the national team since 2016, when it won gold in the South Asian Games, he has starred for Telugu Yoddhas in Ultimate Kho Kho. "I was expecting to be named captain, but it is a very big responsibility to lead the country in the World Cup. I hope to live up to the expectations. I would want the entire team to play with discipline and focus and win the tournament," Waikar told The Hindu after India's men's and women's squads were announced on Thursday. "This is a huge opportunity for all the players. The hope now is for kho kho to become a global sport and get a lot of recognition." While Waikar sensed an almost instant connection with this indig-

enous sport in school, the decision to become a professional kho kho player wasn't straightforward. From the lack of exciting opportunities to financial uncertainties, the man from Maharashtra had a lot to weigh up. "Earlier, there wasn't financial support in kho kho. People would say this isn't a professional game. In terms of jobs and prize money, other sports were far ahead. So, there was resistance," he explained. "My aim then was to just represent my State and see how things go. But the interest kept increasing. I was also getting success and so I continued. Right after I turned 18, I got a job in the Maharashtra State Electricity Board. So my parents were happy and they never stopped me from playing kho kho after that." The women's team, meanwhile, will be led by Priyanka Ingle. The 24-year-old also hails from Pune. India will also field one additional team each in the men's and women's sections. The squads: Men: Pratik Waikar (capt.), Prabani Sabar, Mehul, Sachin Bhargo, Suyash Gargate, Ramji Kashyap, Siva Pothir Reddy, Aditya Ganpule, Gowtham M.K., Nikhil B, Akash Kumar, Subramani V., Suman Barman, Aniket Pote, S. Rokeson Singh. Women: Priyanka Ingle (capt.), Ashwini Shinde, Reshma Rathore, Bhilar Devjibhai, Nirmala Bhati, Neeta Devi, Chaithra R., Subhashree Sing, Magai Majhi, Anshu Kumari, Vaishnavi Bajrang, Nasreen Shaikh, Meenu, Monika, Nazia Bibi.

'If I can be a useful model for people to emulate, why not?' asks Shashi Tharoor

In his new book *A Wonderland of Words*, Shashi Tharoor writes about being in love with words since he was a child. Over the years, he says he has become a role model for aspirational Indians. In an interview, Tharoor talks about his literary pursuits and why he would love to return to fiction. Edited excerpts.

For someone who has been so involved with words, what do you feel about the way language is evolving now?

Wasn't that always the case? In my generation, when people started saying things like cool and hip and groovy, the earlier generation looked askance. Now it's old fashioned to say cool or hip or groovy. Each generation does come up with its own words.

Does a life in politics make writing more complex?

When you come into Indian politics, it's complicated, because you have to work in multiple languages; or rather, things you say in one language can be translated, distorted and made stories of in other languages. As a result, I learned to be rather conscious of my public English. What's interesting is that while I have indeed been converted into a meme and an object of joking, the truth is there are also a lot of people who come up to me, asking for selfies and expressing admiration for my English. They often do so in

rather modest and or accented English, which means that for aspirational Indians, command of English is what they look up to as an admirable trait. If I can be a useful model for people to emulate, why not?

Could you talk about the kind of research that went into the book?

I began this as a series of columns. Then I started merging columns, expanding some for the book. Secondly, some of the pieces are clearly off the top of my head, but some required more research, and I did have help, which I've acknowledged in the book. Professor Sheeba Thattil did the research for me. She had access to lots of philological and etymological texts that I don't routinely come across or know where to look for. I was emphatic that I was not writing this for other professors of English. I was writing for general readers like myself, or people less involved in language than me. There were also some things I just stumbled across on the Internet. For example, in the Introduction, I include that wonderful letter by Robert Pirosh, who got a Hollywood screenwriter's job on the strength of it. I came across that entirely by fluke.

It's been a long time since you wrote fiction. Has returning to words in this sort of playful, interesting way given you room between much more intensive research and



work on your non-fiction writing? Partly true, but there is a more serious challenge, which is that fiction requires not only time, which is scarce enough for me, but it requires a space inside your head to create an alternative moral universe, to populate it with characters, incidents, episodes, conversations that are as real to you as those you encounter in your daily life. You construct this kind of glass palace of illusion, and you enter into it, ideally, every day while you're writing a novel. The problem with my life, both in my other

stages of my UN career and in my entire political life, is that I am constantly interrupted. The great merit of non-fiction is it's interruptible. Even if you suddenly have to go off on some work, on your return you can reread what you are writing, and your own line of thought and argument will recur to you and you will continue the work. That's why I found, as a practical proposition, that writing non-fiction was manageable. I have not abandoned fiction. If God grants me enough years, I certainly intend to return to it.

An interview with Dhvani Mehta, National Secretary, Rhodes Scholarship India

Rayan Chakrabarty, a final-year Master's student from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, plans to create a museum and document the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Asia. Vibha Swaminathan, a final-year Law student at National Law School, Bengaluru, aims to study citizenship regimes and human rights litigation. Avani Vats, a visually-impaired graduate from St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, is interested in epistemology and making philosophy accessible to people with disabilities. Shubham Narwal, a veterinarian at ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly, plans to explore conservation strategies for the Great Indian Bustard. Pal Aggarwal, a B.Tech student from IIT-Bombay, intends to become an astronaut, and advocate for women in Science. What do these youngsters have in common? They are all recipients of the Rhodes Scholarships 2025, which will enable them to pursue their higher education at Oxford University, the U.K. In September 2024, The Rhodes Trust announced the creation of a sixth Rhodes Scholarship for India. Dhvani Mehta, National Secretary, Rhodes Scholarship for India, talks about how the scholarship came to be, how it impacts Indian students, and more.

Established in 1902 by Cecil Rhodes, a British financier who was Prime Minister of Cape Colony in the 1890s, the Trust now acknowledges the role of colonial wealth and discriminatory practices in laying the foundation for the scholarship. Today, steps are being taken to correct the mistakes of the

past and make it more inclusive and equitable. "Earlier scholarships were restricted to the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand; in short, where the white man had made his mark. But the idea now is to ensure that more of the wealth on which the scholarship was founded goes back primarily to Africa, to which Cecil Rhodes owes a great debt, and to acknowledge other parts of the world where there has been a history of colonial rule and trauma," she adds. The parameters on which the scholarships are awarded are the same across countries. "There is no variation in the criteria barring technical variations of age, eligibility, citizenship, educational requirements. But, the criteria mentioned in Rhodes' will — academic excellence; energy to use one's talent to the fullest, including excellence in co-curricular or extracurricular activities, and values or how one demonstrates truth, courage, devotion to duty, timeliness, and leadership — are still the basis on which the Trust awards the scholarships," explains Mehta. Busting myths Mehta busts the myth of a "typical Rhodes scholar". There is no 'type', she explains. In fact, the scholarship's strength lies in its diversity and the opportunity to meet different people while at Rhodes House. Another myth was physical prowess: that one had to excel in a sporting activity. Back in 1903, the scholarship required applicants to be athletic and able men. But that isn't true anymore. The selection criteria mention 'energy to use one's talents to the full', but this can be shown through a range of extracurricular pursuits and lead-



ership opportunities. Mehta also shares tips for students who are planning their Rhodes journey: Early start: Don't wait till you are in the final year of your UG to think about what your application will look like. The scholarship requires you to have demonstrated your engagement in extracurricular and leadership activities early on.

Authenticity: Don't engage in extracur-

ricular or co-curricular activities only for the sake of the scholarship. The selection committee can make out which candidate is authentic and which ones are out for personal gain. Introspection matters: Maintain an excellent academic record. Apply to the scholarship as an opportunity to introspect about the kind of person you want to be and the career you want to have.

In Kerala, a squabble over shirts and seers

Sugin G. Nair, a 44-year-old interior designer, chants a hymn as he walks down the granite-laid path encircling the Chuttambalam, or outer enclosure, of the Siva temple in Ernakulam. The air is cold and fragrant with the smell of incense. Nair is dressed in a blue dhoti. His shirt, hung on his right arm, gently flutters in the breeze that wafts in from the backwaters, a network of brackish lagoons and canals lying parallel to the Arabian Sea in Kerala. A few worshippers, some of them holding flowers and other offerings, follow the chief priest as he carries the idol, adorned with garlands, around the temple in a procession. This daily temple ritual is called Seeveli. Nair stands in prayer as the procession ends before the sanctum sanctorum. He then steps outside the temple and puts on his shirt. "I won't break the centuries-old practice of entering temples without upper body clothing even if the temple authorities permit me to wear a shirt. It is my choice not to wear a shirt while I submit myself before a deity," he says.

In 2017, the Kerala government decided to permit non-Brahmin priests to perform temple rites. Today, another campaign is ongoing in the State. This time, it is about men's wear in temples. It began a few weeks ago when Swami Sathchidananda, the religious head of Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham Trust, the organisation leading the spiritual activities of the Ezhavas, who are classified as an Other Backward Class, said that men should be allowed to enter Hindu temples wearing shirts. His remarks sparked a controversy. Some priests and community leaders got upset, saying temple practices should be left untouched. The call also exposed the deep divide among the major Hindu communities, with the general secretary of the Nair Service Society criticising the suggestion. However, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan supported the call and lauded the campaign. He said it imbibed the spirit of social reformation led by Sree Narayana Guru, the 20th century seer and social reformer. Pushing for reform Swami Sathchidananda argues that there are many "undesirable" temple practices that continue to exist even today. "This is one practice which should have long been abandoned," he says. "Temple rituals and customs need to be reformed to be in tune with the changing times. The argument in favour of removing the shirt was that the divine radiance of temples would be diminished if men wore clothes on the upper part of their body. Hundreds of devotees who reach the hill shrine of Sabarimala and other temples have been wearing clothes on the upper part of their body," he points out. Swami Sathchidananda adds that the practice of not wearing a shirt is also "unhygienic". "Skin diseases could be transmitted through contact," he says. "The practice of allowing people to rent dhotis and wear them over trousers and salwar in some temples is also abominable." The seer contends that the practice of bare-chested men entering temples was introduced to prevent people from 'lower castes' from entering temples at a time when only 'upper castes' were permitted to enter temples. "Asking devotees to remove their shirts was the easi-

est way of identifying who was wearing a poonal (the sacred thread worn by Brahmins across the body) and prevent the lower castes from entering temples," he argues. The Jagannatha temple in Thalassery, in the northern district of Kannur, has a special place in the history of the Sree Narayana movement in Kerala, as the idol was consecrated by Sree Narayana Guru himself. Designed to resemble the Puri Jagannatha temple in Puri, Odisha, it was the first place where devotees from all castes were allowed to worship.

K. Sathyan, the president of Jnanodaya Yogam, the managing committee of the Jagannath temple, had tried to implement the committee's decision to permit men to wear shirts inside the temple two years ago. This attempt failed. "The decision had to be shelved," he recalls. "Some were apprehensive that some sections of society would resist this. We didn't want the temple premises to become a battlefield. So, we decided to keep the decision in abeyance." Sathyan says only a "mature society" can accept such social changes. He says no one prevents fully clothed devotees, who are mostly from the southern districts, from entering the Jagannath temple. "We hope that this practice will gather steam following Swami Sathchidananda's call," says Sathyan, who had been heading the temple administration panel for three years. A mark of respect, a matter of faith

However, some historians and temple priests refuse to buy the argument that the practice of men removing shirts was started with the aim of keeping non-Brahmins out of temples.

Historian Manu S. Pillai says it was a common practice in Kerala society to take off the thorthu (the thin long traditional bath towel that is widely used in Kerala) from one's shoulder and tie it around the waist as a mark of respect to elders, landlords, and others who were 'superior' on the social ladder. "It was a way of showing respect. A younger person would never wear a melmundu (upper garment) or thorthu in front of a family elder. Similarly, a peasant would never keep the thorthu on his shoulders while standing before a landlord," he says. Temple priests, Brahmins, and even kings took off their upper clothing inside temples as a gesture of obeisance, Pillai says. This practice stems from the belief that god is superior to everybody. Removing upper body clothing is an act of obeisance to the idol, he explains. "The erstwhile Kings of Travancore and Kochi never wore anything above their waist, as can be seen from their photographs and portraits," he observes. He is firm that the practice has nothing to do with identifying Brahmins who wear the sacred thread. "Most people belonging to the so-called upper caste, including those employed in temples, did not wear the sacred thread. So, that cannot be the reason for asking men to remove upper body clothing to enter temples," he reasons.

N. Radhakrishnan Potti, the general secretary of the Akhila Kerala Thanthri Mandalam, the community organisation of Kerala Brahmin priests, defends the prac-



tice. He says it has been in vogue for centuries in all the major temples of the State. "It is believed that male devotees absorb the radiance of the idol through their hearts and women through their foreheads. It is a matter of faith for temple worshippers and cannot be tampered with," he says. Potti explains how men in Kerala used to cover their torso using an uthareeyam, a piece of thin cloth draped over the body, which they would remove while paying obeisance to gurus and gods. "Such customs may have trickled into temples over the years. It is unique to Kerala," he says. Potti cites Kshethracharangaal, a book on temple rituals and practices written by Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiripad, which lists out practices that men must avoid when they visit temples. "It mentions smearing your hair with ghee and oil and wearing clothes on the upper part of your body, as well as headgear," he says. Potti is also clear that the task of initiating reforms and altering practices should be left to senior priests. "It is not an issue to be deliberated by seers and politicians," he asserts. Changing with the times

The dress code followed in the temples of Kerala is not uniform. Women were banned from wearing salwars to the Guruvayur temple in the town of Guruvayur; they could only wear sarees. This was until 2013, when the authorities modified the dress code to allow salwars too. They said that this had been a long-pending demand, especially from women who came to the temple from north India, and so they finally agreed to it.

Though no dress code has been prescribed for devotees in most of the temples governed by the Travancore Devaswom Board, men are mandated to remove their upper body garments to enter major temples, namely the Karikkakom temple in Thiruvananthapuram and the Ettumanoor temple in Kottayam. At the Sree Padmanabha temple in Thiruvananthapuram, men are mandated to wear a dhoti and women are expected to wear a sari or the mundu-set. Men who come to the temple in trousers are allowed to rent a dhoti, while women in salwar are allowed to rent a saree, both to be worn over their clothes, from the temple premises before entering the temple. Vedanta scholar Swami

Chidananda Puri has long been campaigning for such restrictions to be lifted. Speaking of how women's attire changed over centuries, he says, "Women in Kerala never wore clothes on the upper part of their body. Then, Neriyathu (an upper garment) and Mulakacha (cloth worn around the chest) became their attire. Later, blouses were accepted." Through this point, Puri underscores how only those religions and practices that have changed with time, to keep in step with societal changes, have thrived. "The dress code of devotees needs to be reformed. The insistence that one should enter temples bare-chested is deterring young men from going to temples. The Marga Darshak Mandal (a platform of Hindu seers) held last year at Thrissur had called for modifying the dress code of men. Now, many temple authorities are making changes in this direction," he says. Lekshmy Rajeev, author and a researcher on temple tantra, says women had to fight for their right to cover their breasts in Kerala, whereas men never protested about wearing clothing. "I believe this practice of not wearing sufficient clothing evolved into a ritual over time," she says. Rajeev also says not all men may feel comfortable displaying their torsos. "Men are forced to display their bodies publicly, which can make them feel uncomfortable and uneasy," she says. Arayakkandi Santhosh, the Devaswom Secretary of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, a social service organisation representing the Ezhavas, says the Yogam has always stood for reformative practices. "The managing committees of a few temples have recently resolved to abolish the practice and update the dress code. Temple committees stick to customary practices to avoid conflicts. However, men are free to wear shirts at the newly consecrated Guru temples," he says. The controversies surrounding the dress code have only helped Mukkoli Raveendran, a social activist and a follower of Sree Narayana Guru, strengthen his resolve about temple wear. "I will offer my prayers at a temple only when I am allowed to enter wearing a shirt. It has been five years since I prayed at a temple as a mark of protest against the dress code," says Raveendran, who is also a member of the administrative committee of the Jagannath temple.