

## Temperatures drop to single digit at multiple locations in Telangana

Hyderabad; After a respite that lasted for nearly 10-days, minimum temperatures in outskirts of Hyderabad and several districts in Telangana State fell to single digits on Monday. The average of minimum temperatures between Sunday evening and Monday morning was 9.4 degree Celsius at Moinabad in the city outskirts while in districts, multiple locations at KumramBheem Asifabad, Adilabad, Sangareddy and Nirmal temperatures hovered between 6.5 degree C and 9 degree Celsius. The Monday afternoon forecast by Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Hyderabad, said for the next 3-days, the minimum temperatures will hover between 5 degree C and 10 degree Celsius at different locations in Nirmal,

Adilabad and Mancherla districts. The IMD-Hyderabad also alerted that fog and misty conditions are very likely to prevail during the morning hours at isolated pockets of Telangana for the next 3 days. Noted amateur weather forecaster from Hyderabad, T Balaji, popular on platform X with @telanganaweatherman handle said that the drop in temperatures after a while could be the last for this winter.

“Last leg of shivering cold winters across Telangana now. Single digit temperatures in North, West Telangana and 10-12 degree C in Hyderabad city. Mornings are bitterly cold, will continue till January 25. Day time temperatures will be warm (Sic),” he posted on X.



## KRMB meet: Telangana protests continued injustice in Krishna water sharing with AP



Hyderabad: The stand-off between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh over the sharing of Krishna River water once again took centre stage at the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) meeting here on Tuesday. Telangana lodged a strong protest against what it described as continued injustice in the 66:34 water-sharing ratio between AP and Telangana. Telangana officials demanded a 71 percent share for the State, citing its 71 percent catchment area. They proposed an interim 50:50 sharing ratio until a final decision could be reached.

However, the board's response was not favorable as they were met with stiff opposition from AP. The board officials assured both the States of meeting their water needs depending on the availability. Telangana's Principal Secretary for Irrigation Rahul Bojja and ENC General Anil Kumar specifically de-

manded the withdrawal of CRPF forces deployed at the Nagarjuna Sagar project site. This follows an incident on October 28, 2023, which saw clashes between officials and security forces from both Telugu States, resulting in the occupation of 13 crest gates and the NSP Right Main Canal Head Regulator by Andhra Pradesh. The board's response did not offer any immediate resolution to this demand. Telangana officials insisted on the rehabilitation of the Srisailem project, addressing all structural issues while emphasising that the project continued to be under the operational control of AP. They also demanded the installation of a telemetry system at 11 new locations to ensure regular monitoring of water withdrawals by both States from Krishna basin projects and their outlets. The meeting was chaired by KRMB chairman Atul Jain.

## Apollo University signs MoU with University of Leicester

Hyderabad: The Apollo University, Apollo Hospitals, and University of Leicester, United Kingdom, have partnered to establish the Centre for Digital Health and Precision Medicine (CDHPM) at The Apollo University campus in Chittoor. The advanced research centre will bring together the expertise and resources of both institutions to create a global hub for digital health and precision medicine. The CDHPM centre will be the hub in Chittoor while the hub at the University of Leicester will be based at the BHF Cardiovascular Research Centre at Glenfield

Hospital, Leicester.

The CDHPM was inaugurated on Monday by Dr. Prathap C Reddy, Chancellor of the Apollo University and founding chairman, Apollo Hospitals, in the presence of University of Leicester and The Apollo University's Vice-Chancellors. The centre, which is fully functional, will focus on revolutionising patient care by developing novel digital and personalised solutions using advanced analytical approaches to routinely collect healthcare data, a press release added.



The advanced research centre will bring together the expertise and resources of both institutions to create a global hub for digital health and precision medicine

# How the draft rules for implementing data protection falls short

After a long wait of 16 months, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has released the draft rules for implementing the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act). These rules are open for public feedback until the middle of February. Various stakeholders, including civil society, academia, and industry, have been eagerly awaiting the publication of these proposed rules as they contain the baseline implementation framework of the DPDP Act. The DPDP Act is India's first comprehensive data privacy law that applies to all spheres of commerce and industry. It lays down operational obligations for data processors, special protections for children, and rights for all users, and a body for grievance redressal called the Data Protection Board of India. At the time of release, the DPDP Act was criticised by civil society for not instituting a specialised regulator, not incorporating standard protections against government access to data, and excessive delegation of regulatory functions to the Central government. Lack of detail The draft rules propose operative guidance for critical mechanisms such as notice and consent to a user for data collection and processing, intimation of data breaches, collection of parental consent on behalf of children, data localisation measures, and the procedure for setting up the Data Protection Board. Although the draft rules provide some guidance for implementing the DPDP Act, they lack detailed guidelines to help improve the lives of India's digital nagriks. Let's illustrate some shortcomings from the perspective of two critical avenues that the DPDP Act seeks to introduce — rights of users and the protection of children's data. User rights

The DPDP Act enhances the autonomy of users over their personal data by providing them with the right to access, correct, complete, update, and erase their data. The law leaves it to the corresponding rules for clarifying the manner in which users can exercise these rights. Unfortunately, the draft rules do not make it clear how users may make these requests. They simply state that users can make requests to data processors for exercising their rights by following the steps published by businesses. This is simply restating what the Act lays down in another language. For example, as per the right to erasure, can users ask search engines to remove links to certain websites? Courts in India have frequently asked Google to 'de-list' certain links from showing up on its public search engine. The rules could have prescribed standards to clarify the mechanism in these situations such as requiring that users share specific hyperlinks for erasure. Since the right to erasure may also impact a third-party's online speech, the draft rules could have articulated certain modes or conditions for objection that data processors could make against such an erasure request. However, the draft rules do not bring out any such clarity. Protecting children Today children are increasingly using various websites on the internet including social media platforms.

To safeguard children, the DPDP Act obligates data processors to seek verifiable parental consent before accessing the personal data of children under the age of 18. The manner of obtaining parental consent

was to be laid down in the subsequent rules. However, here again the draft rules fall short. There is no detailing of an exact mechanism for identifying children and collecting parental consent. The rules provide that data processors will need to adopt appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure parental consent is obtained prior to accessing data of a child. The rules focus on how data processors must exercise due diligence for checking that parents are identifiable adults. This is a simple rephrasing of what the law lays down in the DPDP Act. The rules were required to lay down detailed procedures for how businesses are expected to verify the identity of parents. They simply lay down illustrations where parents could either point to their existing user details on a common platform, or prove their identity by providing details of any kind of formal identity, for example a government issued ID. Again, critical questions remain.

How will data processors identify parental relations, that is, that the adult proving their identity and providing consent is actually the guardian of the child? What if children lie about their actual age when accessing a website? What mechanisms do platforms need to put in place to gauge the veracity of an age claim? Indian families, in-



cluding children, often share a single device to access digital services, how will businesses identify children in these cases? The draft rules do not provide any guidance to these practical implementation questions. Despite a 16-month window for drafting and consulting experts for the framing of these rules, the MeitY has released a document that is vague, incomplete, and rushed. Typically guidelines are very detailed, account for consumer privacy, and provide operational clarity for businesses

and data processors. Unfortunately, the proposed rules leave much to be desired.

The government needs to seek appropriate expert advice, conduct wide consultations, and clarify timelines for implementation, before finalising the rules that will form the back-bone of India's first data privacy law. Jhalak M. Kakkar is the Executive Director and Shashank Mohan is the Associate Director at the Centre for Communication Governance at the National Law University Delhi.

## Should voter IDs be linked with Aadhaar? | Explained

The story so far: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have accused each other of manipulating electoral rolls before the Delhi Assembly elections. This has reignited the debate about linking voter IDs/Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC) with respective Aadhaar numbers.

What is the history of the proposal?

The Election Commission (EC) had in February 2015 launched the National Electoral Rolls Purification and Authentication Program (NERPAP). This was to address the issue of duplicate entries in the electoral roll and to remove such entries. In order to achieve this, the EC began authenticating EPIC data by linking it with the Aadhaar database. It had linked more than 300 million voters in a span of three months. However, the Supreme Court in an interim order, in August 2015, held that the mandatory use of Aadhaar should only be for welfare schemes and PAN linking. Following this order, the NERPAP exercise was discontinued. After the Supreme Court's final order in Puttaswamy in September 2018, that upheld the constitutional validity of the Aadhaar Act, the EC sought amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RP Act, 1950). The Parliament amended the RP Act, 1950 and The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 in December 2021 to enable the linking of EPIC with Aadhaar. It provided the format in which Aadhaar information may be submitted to the electoral registration officer by a new voter at the time of fresh registration (Form 6: to establish identity) or an existing voter already included in the electoral roll



(Form 6B: for the purpose of authentication). Any other listed document may be submitted only if the voter is unable to furnish their Aadhaar number because they do not have one. However, in order to keep these amendments voluntary in nature, the word 'may' have been used in the amendments. Further, the amendment also specifies that no application for inclusion of name in the electoral roll shall be denied and no entries shall be deleted due to the inability of an individual to furnish or intimate the Aadhaar number due to 'sufficient cause.' Such individuals may furnish alternate documents like PAN card, Driving Licence, Passport, Bank passbook etc. While the above amendments were challenged in the Supreme Court, the EC in September 2023 informed the court that submis-

sion of the Aadhaar number is not mandatory. It added that it is looking into issuing appropriate clarificatory changes in the forms introduced for this purpose. However, it may be noted that Form 6 and 6B have not been amended till date and they continue to seek the same details as before from the applicants. The forms require the voters to declare that they do not have an Aadhaar number to avoid providing the same. What are the pros and cons?

EPIC linkage with the respective Aadhaar number would definitely help in weeding out duplicate entries; that is essential. At present, more than 650 million Aadhaar numbers have already been uploaded in the process of finalising the electoral rolls.

# Session on “What Next after Tenth” Held at G. Pulla Reddy High School, Mehdiapatnam



Hyderabad, Tuesday: G. Pulla Reddy High School, Mehdiapatnam, hosted an inspiring session titled “What Next after Tenth,” organized by VINGS Media and G5 Media Group in association with 21st Century Educational Academy. The session, aimed at parents and school students, provided guidance on diverse academic and career opportunities after Class X. Principal Palem Sangeetha welcomed the attendees and en-

couraged them to take notes to aid their future decision-making. Mr. P. Krishna Pradeep, Chairman of 21st Century Educational Academy, advised students to identify their strengths and weaknesses for informed career choices. He cautioned them to avoid distractions such as Cinema and Cell Phones and emphasized adopting the “4 C’s” of learning: Context, Concept, Consequences, and Contemporariness. Dr.

Bhavani Shankar, Director of 21st Century Educational Academy, introduced alternative career paths beyond the traditional IIT and NEET tracks. He highlighted opportunities in fields like CLAT (Common Law Admission Test), CUET (Common University Entrance Test), and IPMAT (Integrated Program in Management Aptitude Test), which offer excellent career prospects. Dr. Shankar also encouraged students to focus on building

skills in arithmetic, reasoning, and general knowledge. As part of the session, books authored by experts at 21st Century Educational Academy were unveiled by the Principal, providing students with access to exclusive study materials tailored for competitive exams and career planning. The event was attended by Director Giri Prakash, Editor Ganesh, Managers Mahesh and Prasad from VINGS Media and G5 Media Group.

# South India Women Inspiration Award 2025 received by Karre Pavani Ravi

The South India Women Inspiration Awards program was held on Sunday at Bhaskara Auditorium in Hyderabad. Organized by the Sharada Educational Society, the event honored women who have stood as role models. In this event, Karre Pavani, President of Adarana Seva Samiti from Karimnagar, received the South India Women Inspiration Award 2025 from actress Kavitha.

On this occasion, Karre Pavani stated that women are not just confined to being homemakers but also bear responsibilities and respect towards society. She highlighted how women, as social activists, are participating in numerous voluntary activities and struggles, awakening society on par with men and standing as inspirations to all. The people of Karimnagar congratulated Karre Pavani



# Katalyst Launches the World's First AI-Powered Personal Styling Service in Collaboration with Master Bibo

Hyderabad :Personal styling and professional development have reached new heights with the unveiling of the world's first AI-Powered Personal Styling and Image Development Service by Katalyst at an exclusive launch event in Hyderabad's Hitec Administrative Block. This innovative platform combines cutting-edge artificial intelligence with the artistry of professional styling to transform the image consulting landscape. The launch represents a prestigious alliance between Dr. Usha Yanamandra, Founder of Katalyst, and Master Bibo, a globally celebrated Global Art Director, Model Coach, and CEO of Vice Academy based in Sweden and the UAE. Their collaboration aims to merge technology with creativity for a groundbreaking approach to personal image consulting. The event boasted attendance from an array of distinguished personalities, including:

- \*Master Bibo:\* A renowned fashion expert who has coached models featured on iconic platforms like Vogue and participated in over 80 international fashion shows.

- \*Poonam Kaur:\* Acclaimed actress and advocate promoting self-expression and confidence.

- \*H.E. Nawab Syed Algazi:\* Chairman and Special Presidential Envoy to India & SAARC countries, dedicated to various social causes.

- \*Srinivas Kollipara:\* Founder and COO of T-Hub, India's leading startup incubator.

In a world where first impressions and personal branding are critically important, Katalyst's groundbreaking service empowers individuals to realize their best selves



under the motto, "See it. Believe it. Become it." Dr. Usha Yanamandra, during her keynote address, underscored the transformative nature of Katalyst's offering: "For 45 years, image consulting in India remained a largely manual process. With this launch, we

have introduced AI-driven solutions that merge technology with creativity to elevate personal and professional growth on a global scale." Katalyst's

AI-Powered Personal Styling Service is

meticulously designed to provide personalized solutions catered to the unique needs of each client, spanning from styling to body language coaching. The service ensures that clients can confidently project authenticity and professionalism in every setting.

## Canon India Launches Its Official e-Shop – Quality and Convenience at Your Fingertips

# Canon

## Delighting You Always

Canon India today announced the launch of its first official e-Shop in India, marking a significant milestone in the company's digital transformation journey. Serving as the ultimate 'One-Stop Destination for Canon consumer products,' the platform ensures seamless accessibility for customers across more than 89,000 PIN

codes in India. By partnering exclusively with Canon-authorized business partners, the e-Shop offers a wide range of high-quality products, including cameras, lenses, printers, and accessories, enabling consumers to explore and purchase authentic Canon products from Canon authorized business partners. This strategic initiative aligns with the growing preference among Indian consum-

ers for digital shopping to meet their technology needs. With features like secure payment options and easy order tracking, the Canon e-Shop offers unparalleled convenience, reliability and security. In addition to offering Canon's complete range of consumer products on a single platform, the e-Shop will showcase all ongoing offers and schemes, enhancing value for users. Shar-

ing his thoughts on the launch, Mr. Toshiaki Nomura, President & CEO, Canon India said, "At Canon India, we are committed to understanding and adapting to our customers' evolving needs, thereby ensuring Customer Delight throughout. The launch of our e-Shop is a testament to this commitment, as it offers a seamless and trusted shopping experience at the convenience of a touch. By bringing our extensive range of Canon products onto a single platform, we ensure our customers can effortlessly transition from exploring our brand to fulfilling their technology requirements. This milestone aligns with our vision to enhance accessibility, convenience, and trust, reaffirming Canon India as a customer-first brand." The Canon India e-Shop launch reinforces the company's ongoing efforts to strengthen its digital footprint. With a phased expansion strategy to onboard additional partners and products, Canon aims to establish a holistic platform to meet the dynamic needs of its customers. While the initial rollout emphasizes a cohesive shopping experience, future enhancements will include innovative features such as an AI-powered chatbot for personalised customer support.

# Cambridge to be part of India's ambitious One Nation One Subscription initiative

## Outlines plans to boost research excellence and learning across India

Hyderabad: Cambridge University Press is one of the key publishers in the Government of India's groundbreaking One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, a transformative effort aimed at boosting academic and research excellence across the country. Cambridge will be expanding access to its vast repository of journals, enabling India's academic community to leverage high-quality research and peer-reviewed articles. Spearheaded by the Government of India, ONOS is a landmark effort to ensure access to quality scholarly research journals across the nation. As one of the 30 global publishers participating in this initiative, Cambridge will provide access to 430 journals across Science, Technology & Medicine and Humanities & Social Sciences.

ONOS provides seamless access to high-quality academic and research content to over 1.77 crore users across 6,380 government-funded institutions in India. This move comes at a critical juncture in India's progress towards its vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 and Cambridge is committed to supporting India's vision of democratising knowledge and giving rise to a robust research ecosystem. On her recent visit to India, Mandy Hill, Managing Director of Academic Publishing at Cambridge University Press, engaged with stakeholders to discuss various initiatives, including ONOS and how to advance global learning and research through broader access to academic resources. "The ONOS initiative directly supports Cambridge's mission of furthering the

advancement of learning, knowledge and research worldwide. We believe broader access fuels greater research impact, and ONOS allows us to put this principle into practice. We hope to build an inclusive ecosystem that promotes knowledge sharing and innovation through collaboration with local institutions. We applaud the Indian government's commitment to encourage the country's researchers and learners through this initiative," she added. Cambridge will have a clear focus on India's ONOS initiative facilitating equal access to high-researched peer-reviewed journals, advancement of Indian research by way of discounted publication fees, and alignment with the National Education Policy 2020 for building a holistic research ecosystem. Cambridge aims to empower Indian scholars by providing access to its journals, supporting educational advancement, and enhancing output, ultimately amplifying the country's standing in research globally. "ONOS is a game-changer for India's higher education landscape," said Arun Rajamani, Managing Director of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, South Asia. "We're proud to be part of this endeavour, empowering the next generation of researchers and unlocking India's potential for groundbreaking discoveries. This association with the Government of India enables us to share the wealth of knowledge that Cambridge has cultivated over decades." Through ONOS, Indian universities will get access to select esteemed journals by Cambridge including Journal of Fluid



# CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Mechanics, Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Acta Numerica, British Journal of Psychiatry, Epidemiology and Psychiat-

ric Sciences, European Psychiatry, Epidemiology & Infection, Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis, amongst others.

## Parkinsonism and prostate enlargement: sometimes the twain shall meet

As men grow older, they may experience prostate issues, and some of them may also develop Parkinsonism. While these conditions may seem unrelated, they can sometimes overlap and make life more challenging. Understanding how they're connected and how to manage them can help improve quality of life. An enlarged prostate due to age is a common problem among elderly men. The prostate is a secondary sexual organ that sits at the base of the bladder in the urinary passage. As the prostate increases in size, it causes luminal narrowing, leading to urinary symptoms. This effectively means the space inside the bladder reduces in size due to the growing prostate. These symptoms vary from patient to patient. Obstruction-related symptoms are straining to pass urine, slow flow, hesitancy and incomplete emptying of the bladder. Bladder-related symptoms are urgency, incontinence and night-time frequency. It is advised to rule out other causes of an enlarged prostate by a healthcare provider. Parkinsonism

Parkinson's disease refers to a movement disorder that cause symptoms such as shaking or tremors in the hands and other parts of the body, muscle stiffness, slow movements, and difficulties with balance and walking. Parkinsonism can result from various causes, including certain medications, brain injuries, or other neurological conditions. It can also lead to additional issues like mood

changes, sleep problems, and bladder difficulties. The link Parkinsonism can sometimes make the symptoms appear similar to prostate enlargement.

This happens because Parkinsonism affects how the brain controls muscles, including the ones involved in bladder function. This can lead to a sudden and strong urge to urinate, need to go to the bathroom frequently, and have trouble holding urine. For men with an enlarged prostate, these bladder problems can add to the challenges they already face. Together, Parkinsonism and an enlarged prostate can make daily activities more stressful and uncomfortable. Managing both conditions

The good news is that both conditions can be managed with the right care and support. For enlarged prostate, medication along with adopting healthy habits like avoiding excessive water intake in the evening and limiting bladder irritants such as caffeine and alcohol can help reduce symptoms, and in cases where medications aren't sufficient, minimally invasive procedures can provide relief by alleviating pressure on the bladder. For Parkinsonism, medications designed to address movement difficulties may also improve bladder control. Gentle exercises such as walking or yoga can enhance balance, strength, and overall well-being, while bladder training can help manage sudden urges



and prevent accidents. Together, these strategies can significantly improve quality of life for individuals dealing with both conditions. See a Doctor

If you or a loved one notices urinary issues, shaking hands, or difficulty moving, it's important to see a doctor. Early treatment can make a big difference in managing both Parkinsonism and Enlarged Prostate. A healthcare provider can create a plan to address both conditions and help improve your quality of life. While managing these condi-

tions may seem overwhelming, many men live active and fulfilling lives with the right care. Regular check-ups, open communication with doctors, and support from family can make the journey easier.

With the right approach, including medications, lifestyle adjustments, and a focus on well-being, it's possible to overcome these hurdles and enjoy a healthy, positive life. Taking small steps every day toward better health can lead to lasting improvements and a brighter future.

# We need accessibility rules that are based on principles

The Court reasoned that the Rule was drafted in a discretionary tone whereas the corresponding provisions (Sections 40, 44, 45, 46, 89) in the Act imposed a mandatory obligation for the government. This was significant as Rule 15 was a statutory provision under which the accessibility guidelines of respective departments and ministries were notified. Key examples include the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' guidelines for creating barrier-free environments, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' bus body code, and other accessibility standards established by the Ministries of Sports, Culture, and Information and Broadcasting. The Court observed that these guidelines allowed discretion to the ministries and departments, which is antithetical to the mandatory language of the Act. Moreover, striking down Rule 15 also meant that the accessibility guidelines notified under the Rule lost their statutory authority. As a result, the Court gave the government three months to develop minimum mandatory accessibility requirements to govern all the sectors. The judgment is a stark reminder of how accessibility guidelines have been created in silos without the identification of normative principles that will ensure universality and intersectionality to those guidelines. Thus, while formulating new guidelines, there needs to be a shift towards a principle-based framework on accessibility rules.

The idea of accessibilityThe Court deliberated in detail on the difference between accessibility and reasonable accommodation. Accessibility and reasonable accommodation both originate within the principles of substantive equality of the Constitution. Accessibility is now accepted as a right woven throughout the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Conversely, reasonable accommodation is a facilitator of substantive equality where specific challenges are dealt with in a specific context. Therefore, both concepts should be understood as interdependent and complementary to each other, where accessibility builds the edifice through standardised accessibility standards from the outset, while reasonable accommodation ensures tailored solutions for those individuals who might still face inaccessibility in a specific context. The idea of accessibility is not static, and the conceptual contours and corresponding tools have evolved regularly. For instance, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things and their incorporation into social interactions, the understanding of digital accessibility has evolved simultaneously. This makes it necessary to modify the nature, extent, and type of digitally accessible tools that can ensure broader inclusivity. The shifting threshold also needs to be understood in the context of phased realisation of accessibility. The Court in Rajive Raturi observed that the existing guidelines are framed in a way that establishes long-term goals of accessibility without setting the minimum standards requiring immediate implementation. Hence, the minimum accessibility threshold shall be envisaged on a sliding scale wherein the baseline moves forward at periodical intervals. Canada has developed a comprehensive road map to achieve full accessibility by 2040, focusing on

harmonising standards across the country through two work streams, with periodic reviews every five years to adapt to changing needs.

The RPwD Act defines barriers in the broadest form possible, wherein intangible barriers such as attitudinal barriers are recognised in addition to tangible barriers such as infrastructure. This has modified how accessibility is viewed and understood within physical and digital ecosystems. Thus, it is necessary to evolve accessibility parameters in theory and practice to overcome tangible and intangible barriers. For instance, the evolving understanding of disability is an aspect that informs the attitude of society and, hence, directly relates to the attitudinal barrier. Thus, accessibility must also align with this evolution of disability understanding to be truly inclusive. The understanding of universal design has also evolved over time. It is not just limited to persons with disabilities but also includes every vulnerable community, such as women, children, and the elderly. This reflects a tacit recognition of the universality of disability, which is not identified as an individual's incapacity to perform but rather the composition of the environment in which one operates. Disability may arise from a high cognitive workload causing an inability to focus and control emotions, temporarily broken limbs, unavailability of ramps to a pregnant mother, age-related complications, etc. Thus, the rules should be applicable across groups, providing accessibility in the general sense and not exclusive to persons with disabilities. Compliance with social audit

Section 48 of the RPwD Act mandates the Central and State governments to regularly undertake social audits of all general schemes and programmes to ensure they do not have an adverse impact on the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities. Social audits play a vital role in developing and strengthening the accountability of the government and service providers. For instance, regular social audits of schemes providing assistance technologies to persons with disabilities can assess the bottlenecks in the delivery of services, identify the changing needs of individuals, and provide better devices. However, due to the lack of standardised guidelines under the RPwD Rules, there is no clarity on the scope and methodology of social audits. This might lead to inconsistencies among the Centre and the States, lack of awareness, and insufficient training for auditors. Therefore, clear guidelines and operationalisation of social audits at a larger scale will help identify the changing nature of disability-related challenges and make targeted interventions to enhance service delivery through concerned schemes and programmes.

Rules have to be understandableThe earlier accessibility rules across departments and ministries suffered from bureaucratic complexity regarding their mandate. There were too many technicalities and often contradictory accessibility mandates from multiple ministries that confused the complying entities. For instance, a sporting complex has multiple guidelines for accessibility from the Ministry of Urban Affairs and



Housing, Sports, Transport, and others. This led to not just a failure to provide objective parameters but also increased the compliance cost for such establishments. During the proceeding under the redressal mechanism, the complex and overlapping guidelines also delayed the relief sought by persons with disabilities. The new accessibility rules must be direct, understandable, and practical to ensure effective implementation. The ambiguity in department/ministry jurisdiction that plagued the earlier rules should also be addressed by having a nodal authority, ideally, the sector regulators, and in the absence of it, the Ministry of Social Justice

and Empowerment should adjudicate on rules. The deadline for releasing the new accessibility guidelines is February, subject to extension. Thus, there is a necessity for diverse sectors, both private and public, beyond social services such as financial, technological, transport, to deliberate upon the minimum rules of accessibility. This isn't just warranted by the legislative mandate of the RPwD Act but also a market incentive to tap into the large population base by providing accessible products and services. Shashank Pandey, Lawyer and founder of the Politics and Disability Forum; Nayan Chandra Mishra, Law student at Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow

## Government schools should also comply with safety norms, says Karnataka High Court

Observing that government schools are not exempt from various safety norms that are prescribed for private aided and unaided schools, the High Court of Karnataka has directed the Principal Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, to formulate a detailed action plan within six weeks and submit a report on how the government schools will also comply with those norms. The court also directed the Secretary to create a portal within the department's website to provide details of the norms to be adhered to by all schools under various laws, the status of compliance by each school, and provision for the schools to upload the compliance status to conditions imposed by the authorities while granting recognition, etc.

Petition of private schoolsJustice Suraj Govindaraj passed the order on a petition filed by Organisation for Unaided Recognised Schools (OURS), Bengaluru, and some private unaided schools. The petitioners had questioned a 2022 circular issued by the department mandating schools to submit certificates for structural stability of the buildings and fire safety clearance, sanctioned building plans, etc.

The court did not find fault with the government seeking the certificates as these are the norms that the school authorities are required to follow under various other laws and

building bylaws depending upon the location of the schools as a pre-condition for granting recognition or renewal of recognition. However, the court found substance in the contention of petitioners that all safety-related norms are enforced only on private schools and not on government schools, while pointing out that non-adherence by government schools appears to be a major lacuna which is required to be addressed by the government.

Obligation to followThe government has to act as a model citizen and comply with all applicable rules which it requires a private citizen to comply with, the court said, while observing that "when the State imposes certain rules, regulations and obligations to be followed by private individuals or organisations, the State and or its entities, if involved in the very same activity, are also duty-bound to follow such rules, regulations, and obligations as imposed on private individuals or organisations."

Considering that the petitioner-schools have been imparting education for several years, the court has granted them time till the commencement of the next academic year to comply with the requirements under the local municipal laws, building bylaws and all laws, rules and regulations which are applicable to them.

# Resisting transparency, eroding public trust

Last year, presiding officer Anil Masih was caught on CCTV camera manipulating votes in the Chandigarh mayor elections to help the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secure victory. The incident underlined the importance of infusing transparency in the electoral process to detect and prevent election fraud. It is ironic then that even before the year ended, the Central government brought an amendment to Rule 93(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict public access to election-related records.

The amendment came days after the Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to provide information under Rule 93(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules. Copies of Form 17C and CCTV footage of the Assembly elections in Haryana were among the records sought by the petitioner. Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules provides a framework for people to obtain information related to elections. Rule 93(2) originally stated that other than the records specifically exempt under Rule 93(1), all papers relating to elections shall be available for people to inspect and take copies of. The amendment to Rule 93(2) narrows the scope of people's right to information by adding a qualification that only "papers as specified in these rules relating to the election shall be open to public inspection". Records related to the electoral process, including Form 17C, video recordings and CCTV footage, will potentially get caught in the cross hairs of the new amendment.

Delays that led to doubtsThe role of the ECI in the matter is particularly disconcerting. One of the safeguards in the Representation of the People Act, 1951, to prevent the ruling party from arbitrarily misusing its power to frame rules is that the rules can be made only "after consulting the Election Commission". It is baffling why the institution vested with the responsibility of ensuring free and fair elections is opposed to transparency, especially at a time when serious questions have been raised about the sanctity of the electoral process.

In the general elections of 2024, the ECI did not put out voter turnout figures in absolute numbers after the completion of voting in the initial phases. This, coupled with an unusually high revision of 6% in voter turnout in some phases of the election, without any explanation, prompted a public demand for disclosure of Form 17C. Part I of this Form is filled by the Presiding Officer of each polling station at the close of voting and is submitted to the Returning Officer of the constituency. It contains information on the voter turnout and the number of votes recorded in the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). Part II is filled on the day of counting by noting the votes secured by each candidate as recorded in the EVMs. The documents reveal whether or not voter turnout tallies with the votes polled and counted. Several political parties also sought copies of Form 17C after the general elections, claiming an abnormally large increase in voter turnout between the figures declared by the ECI at the close of polls on the day of voting and the final turnout declared a few days later. For instance, an ally of the BJP, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), claimed a massive increase between the two figures in some constituencies in Odisha, raising doubts about the integrity of the election process. In the Assembly elections held in Haryana and Maharashtra, similar concerns were raised and applications were again filed seeking copies of Form 17C and

other election records.

Refusal to disclose informationUnfortunately, all these requests were stonewalled by the ECI. In a petition to the ECI, the BJD complained that even its candidates were denied copies of Form 17C, despite making requests under the Representation of the People Act and the Right to Information Act, 2005. Further, when the matter of proactive disclosure of Form 17C was agitated in the Supreme Court, the ECI opposed it on the specious grounds that there is no legal mandate to share Form 17C with anyone other than the candidates and political parties through their designated polling agents. In fact, it claimed that there is a "one-to-one relationship between each Form 17C and its possessor" and its unrestricted disclosure is amendable to mischief as people may morph the images. Further, it argued that there is no technical facility to scan the documents. The ECI's reluctance to share copies of Form 17C is inexplicable. Copies of Part 1 of Form 17C are given to polling agents who are present at the booth and there is no prohibition on their further dissemination. In Digital India, the claim that Returning Officers don't have the technical facility to scan and upload a couple of thousand pages is scarcely credible. On December 26, 2024, more than six months after the general elections, the ECI released a set of



42 statistical reports terming it a "Treasure Trove for stakeholders including academicians, researchers, election watchers worldwide". This too had no data from Form 17C, which would conclusively resolve the vexed issue of difference between votes polled and counted. Transparency is key to ensure public trust and participation in the electoral process. In 2024, the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bonds scheme as being violative of a voter's fundamental right to information. A challenge to the new amend-

ment has already reached the apex court. Rather than wait for the verdict of the judiciary, the ECI and the BJP would do well to realise that this amendment has no place in a democracy and withdraw it. Anjali Bhardwaj, Transparency activist associated with the Satark Nagrik Sangathan and the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information; Amrita Johri, Transparency activist associated with the Satark Nagrik Sangathan and the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information

## Meghana Prakash makes polymer clay jewellery

The next time you gift a book to a bibliophile, pair it with a miniature book pendant for an extra touch of joy. Bengaluru-based software professional-turned-jewellery designer Meghana Prakash (@theclayarte) began creating these pendants to diversify her offerings beyond her signature floral designs. "Book lovers were overjoyed seeing the pendants," Meghana shares, highlighting the charm they bring to her collection. Meghana Prakash is a self-taught polymer clay jewellery designer who started crafting as a hobby, alongside quilling. What began as a weekend passion evolved into a full-time profession two years ago. Meghana was drawn to polymer clay for its pliability and versatility, which allowed her to experiment with diverse designs. "It's a new medium, and learning resources are limited, so I discovered its potential through trial, error, and YouTube tutorials," she explains. Her diploma in jewellery design from the Institute of Fashion Technology, Bangalore also helps refine her creative process and articulate her designs effectively. When asked about the most challenging aspect of her work, Meghana reveals, "For me, it's the design phase. Once that's clear, everything flows smoothly. I work primarily with my fingers, as it helps me control pressure and shapes more precisely, using tools only when necessary." Her hands-on approach highlights the artistry and meticulous effort behind her creations. Polymer clay products are baked to enhance their durability, making them both drop-proof and slightly flexible. Meghana, who works from her home studio in Bengaluru, is a regular at events, including Comic Con, where her jewellery—particularly her floral earring collection—is sought after.



# Israel-Hamas draft ceasefire deal: A look at the terms and tensions

If the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal goes according to the current draft, then fighting will stop in Gaza for 42 days, and dozens of Israeli hostages and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners will be freed. In this first phase Israeli troops will pull back to the edges of Gaza, and many Palestinians will be able to return to what remains of their homes as stepped-up aid flows in. The question is if the ceasefire will survive beyond that first phase.

That will depend on even more negotiations meant to begin within weeks. In those talks, Israel, Hamas, and the U.S, Egyptian and Qatari mediators will have to tackle the tough issue of how Gaza will be governed, with Israel demanding the elimination of Hamas. Without a deal within those 42 days to begin the second phase, Israel could resume its campaign in Gaza to destroy Hamas — even as dozens of hostages remain in the militants' hands. Hamas has agreed to a draft of the ceasefire deal, two officials confirmed, but Israeli officials say details are still being worked out, meaning some terms could change, or the whole deal could even fall through. Here is a look at the plan and potential pitfalls in the draft seen by the Associated Press. During the first phase, Hamas is to release 33 hostages in exchange for the freeing of hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. By the end of the phase, all living women, children and older people held by the militants should be freed.

Some 100 hostages remain captive inside Gaza, a mix of civilians and soldiers, and the military believes at least a third them are dead. On the first official day of the ceasefire, Hamas is to free three hostages, then another four on the seventh day. After that, it will make weekly releases. Which hostages and how many Palestinians will be released is complicated. The 33 will include women, children and those over 50 — almost all civilians, but the deal also commits Hamas to free all living female soldiers. Hamas will release living hostages first, but if the living don't complete the 33 number, bodies will be handed over. Not all hostages are held by Hamas, so getting other militant groups to hand them over could be an issue. In exchange, Israel will free 30 Palestinian women, children or elderly for each living civilian hostage freed. For each female soldier freed, Israel will release 50 Palestinian prisoners, including 30 serving life sentences. In exchange for bodies handed over by Hamas, Israel will free all women and children it has detained from Gaza since the war began on Oct. 7, 2023. Dozens of men, including soldiers, will remain captive in Gaza, pending the second phase. During the proposed deal's first phase, Israeli troops are to pull back into a buffer zone about a kilometer (0.6 miles) wide inside Gaza along its borders with Israel. Smoke rise over the northern Gaza Strip as seen from a position on the Israeli side of the border on January 13, 2025 in Southern Israel, Israel. Smoke rise over the northern Gaza Strip as seen from a position on the Israeli side of the border on January 13, 2025 in Southern Israel, Israel. | Photo Credit: Getty Images That will allow displaced Palestinians to return to their homes, including in Gaza City and northern Gaza. With most of Gaza's population driven into massive, squalid tent camps, Palestinians are desperate to get back to their homes,

even though many were destroyed or heavily damaged by Israel's campaign. But there are complications. During the past year of negotiations, Israel has insisted it must control the movement of Palestinians to the north to ensure Hamas does not take weapons back into those areas. Throughout the war, the Israeli military has severed the north from the rest of Gaza by holding the so-called Netzarim Corridor, a belt across the strip where troops cleared out the Palestinian population and set up bases. That allowed them to search people fleeing from the north into central Gaza and bar anyone trying to return.

The draft seen by the AP specifies that Israel is to leave the corridor. In the first week, troops would withdraw from the main north-south coastal road — Rasheed Street — which would open one route for Palestinians returning. By the 22nd day of the ceasefire, Israeli troops are to leave the entire corridor. Still, as talks continued Tuesday, an Israeli official insisted the military will keep control of Netzarim and that Palestinians returning north would have to pass inspections there, though he declined to provide details. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss closed negotiations.

Working out those contradictions could bring frictions. Throughout the first phase, Israel will retain control of the Philadelphi Corridor, the strip of territory along Gaza's border with Egypt, including the Rafah Crossing. Hamas dropped demands that Israel pull out of this area. In the first phase, aid entry to Gaza is to be ramped up to hundreds of trucks a day of food, medicine, supplies and fuel to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. That is far more than Israel has allowed in throughout the war. For months, aid groups have struggled to distribute to Palestinians even the trickle of aid entering Gaza because of Israeli military restrictions and rampant robberies of aid trucks by gangs. An end to fighting should alleviate that. The need is great. Malnutrition and diseases are rampant among Palestinians, crammed into tents and short on food and clean water. Hospitals have been damaged and short of supplies. The draft deal specifies that equipment will be allowed in to build shelters for tens of thousands whose homes were destroyed and to rebuild infrastructure like electricity, sewage, communications and road systems. But here, too, implementation could bring problems.

Even before the war, Israel has restricted entry of some equipment, arguing it could be used for military purposes by Hamas. Another Israeli official said arrangements are still being worked out over aid distribution and cleanup, but the plan is to prevent Hamas from having any role. Further complicating matters, Israel's government is still committed to its plan to ban UNRWA from operating and to cut all ties between the agency and the Israeli government. The UN agency is the major distributor of aid in Gaza and provides education, health and other basic services to millions of Palestinian refugees across the region, including in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. If all of that works out, the sides must still tackle the second phase. Negotiations over it are to begin on Day 16 of the ceasefire. Phase two's broad outlines are laid out in the draft: All remaining hostages are to be released in return for



a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a "sustainable calm."

But that seemingly basic exchange opens up much bigger issues. Israel has said it will not agree to a complete withdrawal until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated and it cannot rearm — ensuring Hamas no longer runs Gaza. Hamas says it will not hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from everywhere in Gaza. So the negotiations will have to get both sides to agree to an alternative for governing Gaza. Effectively, Hamas has to agree to its own removal from power — something it has said it is willing to do, but it may seek to keep a hand in any future government, which Israel has vehemently rejected. The draft agreement says a deal on the second phase must be worked out by the end of the first. Pressure will be on both sides to reach a deal, but what happens if they don't? It could go in many

directions. Hamas had wanted written guarantees that a ceasefire would continue as long as needed to agree on phase two. It has settled for verbal guarantees from the United States, Egypt and Qatar. Israel, however, has given no assurances. So Israel could threaten new military action to pressure Hamas in the negotiations or could outright resume its military campaign, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has threatened. Hamas and the mediators are betting the momentum from the first phase will make it difficult for him to do that. Re-launching the assault would risk losing the remaining hostages — infuriating many against Netanyahu — though stopping short of destroying Hamas will also anger key political partners. The third phase is likely to be less contentious: The bodies of remaining hostages would be returned in exchange for a 3- to 5-year reconstruction plan to be carried out in Gaza under international supervision.

## Motorola unveils tough and affordable Moto G Power 2025 with premium features



Hyderabad: Motorola has launched its 2025 Moto G series featuring Moto G and Moto G Power with exemplary toughness, packing everything without a premium price. The Moto G Power is priced at a mere \$299.99. It is built with IP68 and IP69 water-resistance ratings to withstand harsh handling. This makes it tougher than most flagship devices protecting it against water submersion, high-pressure jets, and dust. What makes the Moto G Power a fairly strong contender for a tough phone is its MIL-STD-

810H certification, giving it quality ratings for drops, temperature extremes, and high humidity.

It conducts short drop tests which prove it can survive falls from tufted distances of close to four feet with temperatures between -4°F and 140°F. A big 6.8-inch display featuring Gorilla Glass 5 and 120Hz refresh rate makes the Moto G Power ideal for broadcasting, gaming, and scrolling. Along with a powerful 5,000mAh battery supporting 30W wired and