

Kia begins production of Syros SUV from Anantapur plant

Hyderabad: Kia India has commenced mass production of its SUV Kia Syros. Officially unveiled last December, the SUV will roll out from the company's plant in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh. According to the company, the five-seat Syros has recorded 10,258 pre-orders. We're delighted with the interest our customers in India have already shown in the new Kia Syros SUV," said Ho Sung Song, president and CEO of Kia. The model introduces first-in-segment rear sliding, reclining and ventilated seats, and has over 80 connected features. It also offers a

dual-pane panoramic sunroof, a Harman Kardon Premium 8 Speaker Sound System, and first-in-segment Over-the-Air (OTA) software update capability, the company stated. Safety features include Forward Collision Avoidance Assist, Lane Keep Assist, a 360 Degree Camera with Blind View Monitor and Smart Cruise Control with Stop & Go. Kia Syros sales will officially begin in India from February 1. The company will reveal the price on February 1, which is expected to be in the range of Rs 9.7 lakh to Rs 16.50 lakh (ex-showroom).



Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II prioritises water sharing issues for crucial phase of hearing



Hyderabad: The Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II in its order issued on Thursday decided to hear the 'Further Reference'

first. This decision centres around critical questions of water sharing between the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana,

which could influence the project-wise allocation under Section 89 of the Andhra Pradesh Re-organization Act (APRA) of 2014. The Tribunal is currently handling references under two main sections - (I) Section 89 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act (APRA) 2014 which deals with the equitable allocation of water resources between the newly formed States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and (II) Section 3 of the Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD) Act 1956 which pertains to the broader allocation of Krishna river water among the riparian States.

The Tribunal clarified that the evidence on record from the reference under Section 89 of APRA can be considered in the 'Further Reference'. The admissibility of documents will be determined during the arguments. This move came after the Tribunal acknowledged that while some issues in the two references overlap, it would be more appropriate to handle them separately. Telangana had requested that

both references be considered together, but Andhra Pradesh objected to this even while filing a writ petition challenging the validity of the 'Further Reference'. Telangana presented its arguments strongly before the Krishna Tribunal. For the last 10 years, the water distribution between the two States has been continuing in the ratio of 66:34 between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Telangana government has sought amendment to the current ratio of sharing and has strongly requested the KWDT-II to revise it and make a permanent resolution in this direction through an IA." Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy, Advocate General Sudarshan Reddy, Irrigation Advisor Aditya Nath Das, E-in-C, and others attended the hearing of the Krishna River water-sharing dispute between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in the KWDT-2 court in Delhi on the day. Supreme Court senior counsel Vaidyanathan, former CWC Chairman Vohra, and Ravindra Rao represented Telangana.

Telangana to oppose UGC draft on appointment of Vice Chancellors

Hyderabad: Telangana is set to join other non-BJP ruled States in opposing the draft University Grants Commission (UGC) Regulations 2025, particularly with regards to proposed norms of the appointment of Vice Chancellors. Apprehensions are expressed on the proposed norms related to minimum qualifications and appointment and related issues, taking away universities from State control to the Central government. Presently, for appointment of the Vice Chancellors, the State government constitutes a search committee comprising nominees from government, university concerned and UGC. The proposed norms re-

place the government nominee with the Chancellor/visitor nominee, who will be chairperson of the committee. As Telangana Governor is also chancellor of the State universities, the government is worried it might lose authority to appoint VCs. Further, the draft provisions open up VC positions for non-academic backgrounds including from research organisations, industry, public administration, public policy and/or public sector undertakings. "We are opposing the VC appointment provisions. We have constituted an expert committee to study the draft and will shortly give our views," said Prof. V Balakista Reddy, Chairman TGCHC.



Tamil litterateurs and why they miss out on the prestigious Jnanpith Award

At a memorial event in Chennai for Ashokamitran in April 2017, speaker after speaker regretted that the veteran Tamil writer-critic had not been given the Jnanpith Award, the most prestigious of literary awards in the country. Sections of the intelligentsia have been nursing a grievance that many other Tamil stalwarts — Gnanakoothan and Ki. Rajanarayanan, both of whom died in the last 10 years — did not get the award despite being in the field for years. Ka. Naa. Subramanyam (Ka.Naa.Su) and T. Janakiraman, who belonged to the Manikodi generation of writers and died in the 1980s, were also among the notable writers who could not get the award. Commonly known as Ee. Paa, the 94-year-old Indira Parthasarathy is a prospective candidate. When Professor Parthasarathy, “an eminent Tamil writer, scholar, and cultural historian”, received the Sahitya Akademi’s highest honour — Fellowship for 2021 — it was after a gap of 25 years that a Tamil litterateur was chosen.

Only two awardeesThe grievance of the intelligentsia is caused, to a large extent, by the fact that there have been only two Tamil Jnanpith awardees, ever since the award was first given to eminent Malayalam poet G. Sankara Kurup 60 years ago. The last Tamil recipient of the award was D. Jayakanthan, who got it for 2002. His predecessor for Tamil was P.V. Akilandam, or Akilan, for 1975. All this was despite Tamil being widely acknowledged as the oldest living language. Professor Parthasarathy, who taught Tamil at Delhi University for 25 years and was a Visiting Professor of Indology at Warsaw University during 1981-86, says, “I don’t believe awards are the only yardstick to decide the quality of writing.” Even the selection of the first recipient of the Jnanpith Award [Sankara Kurup] raised eyebrows among certain sections of literary figures. One of the reasons was that in a country of many languages such as India, it was a difficult decision to make as “poetry has the closest relationship to the distinctive culture of the region”, he points out.

All private awards are arbitrary, according to K. Satchidanandan, former Secretary of the Akademi and a poet-critic in Malayalam and English. Citing the case of his mother tongue, he says, “If you look at those who got the award and those who did not [Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, O.V. Vijayan, Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon, and Edasseril], you will easily know [that] its value is relative. This is true even of the Nobel Prize,” he says, emphasising that “writers live on because of their works and people’s admiration for them, not the award they won”. S. Vaideeswaran, a veteran Tamil poet, feels the awards “depend more upon the author’s projection of his or her social and economic background apart from literature...the hardship he or she faced!!!! This has nothing to do with literature”. Professor Parthasarathy, who received the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1977 and Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for 2004, contends, “The Tamils have splendidly isolated themselves from the national landscape by boycotting the study of Hindi, whereas other south Indian languages concentrate on getting their best works translated into Hindi and English! The most important aspect in regard to Tamil is that there was a long tradition of those who were supposed to be well-educated in English and

Sanskrit, but never bothered to study old or modern Tamil literature.”

‘None to highlight Tamil works’Thiruppur Krishnan, writer and Editor of the Tamil journal Amudhasurabhi, citing the example of Jayakanthan, points out, “It is not just enough if you have the qualifications. You also require people who can articulate your case in a credible manner. In respect of the last Tamil recipient of the Jnanpith Award, this was what was done by literary personalities such as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who received the Akademi’s Fellowship in 1975 for his contribution to Indian writing in English; ‘Chitti’ P.G. Sundararajan, veteran writer-journalist; and K.S. Subramanian, who translated Jayakanthan’s works.” Of late, there has been a fall in the strength of literary critics who highlight Tamil works to non-Tamil audiences, particularly to those knowing only English, he says. Referring to the time gap since the selection of the last Tamil awardee, A.J. Thomas, a poet in English, translator of several Malayalam works into English, and the Editor of The Greatest Malayalam Stories Ever Told, says, “I don’t know what the Jnanpith Award Committee does to counter this natural handicap, but whatever it is, that is not obviously working efficiently in the case of Tamil.” He cites the “naturally inadequate representation” of Tamil Jnanpith awardees on the award committee as one of the reasons for Tamil not getting its due, because



previous awardees, he points out, automatically constitute a decisive section of the panel. The second significant reason could be the “comparative absence of good translations” of Tamil literary works till about a decade ago. “Now, there are many good translations from Tamil to English, and I think it is only a matter of time before the next award goes to a Tamil writer.” Filling the gap to reinforce Mr. Thomas’ optimism, the Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, a body under the School Education Department, is doing its bit to over-

come the “lack of Tamil presence in the non-Tamil world”. In recent years, thanks to the initiative of enterprising civil servants, it has been functioning with the stated aim of “promoting the literature and culture of Tamil Nadu”. It has been bringing out, with the collaboration of 20 private publishers, a series of award-winning Tamil works in English, apart from other Indian languages. Mr. Thomas’ forecast of Tamil having its third Jnanpith Award winner in the near future is likely to come true sooner or later.

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.” “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 overenthusiastic 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). Stampede victims being shifted into an ambulance at Padmavati Park. 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. 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.

Defaming Punjab: Is it a scripted conspiracy?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN: Interacting with a batch of participants from Indian Institute of Democratic Leadership (IIDL) at Vice-President's enclave on Wednesday, the Vice-President, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar stressed on the significance of expression and dialogue, stating, "We take pride, we are mother of democracy. We are all this democracy, but are we justifying that claim? If I look around.... I'm a worried man. The political climate in the country is alarmingly worrisome. Political parties have no meaningful dialogue amongst themselves. They do not deliberate on issues of Nationalism, Security or Development. You will find a confrontational stance solidifying. Disturbance has been weaponized as a political strategy, and look at the kind of language used from all quarters—right, left and centre that not only belittles the Indian mind, but tarnishes the fair name of our civilization." "I am concerned as Vice-President of the country that the expression and dialogue, these twins, fundamental to blossoming of any democratic value, are fast receding in background. People are judgmental. They have a view. I am alone right, all others are wrong, without listening to the other point of view", he added. It shows that in the present scenario how pained the soul of the worthy Vice-President is! We can't say why the Vice-President has reacted so, but the statement of BJP leader Parvesh Verma style persons surely might have stained some effect on this version.

What Parvesh Verma Said?

In an update on January 22, Wednesday, The Tribune, an English Daily quoted that Verma had said in Delhi on Tuesday, "Thousands of vehicles with Punjab registration plates are roaming around here (Delhi). Who are in those vehicles? Preparations for celebrating January 26 (Republic Day) are going on here (in Delhi). What something big are they going to do here that could put our security system at risk." This reportedly quoted version of Parvesh Verma has boiled the political atmosphere and the political leaders have slammed Verma with red mouth.

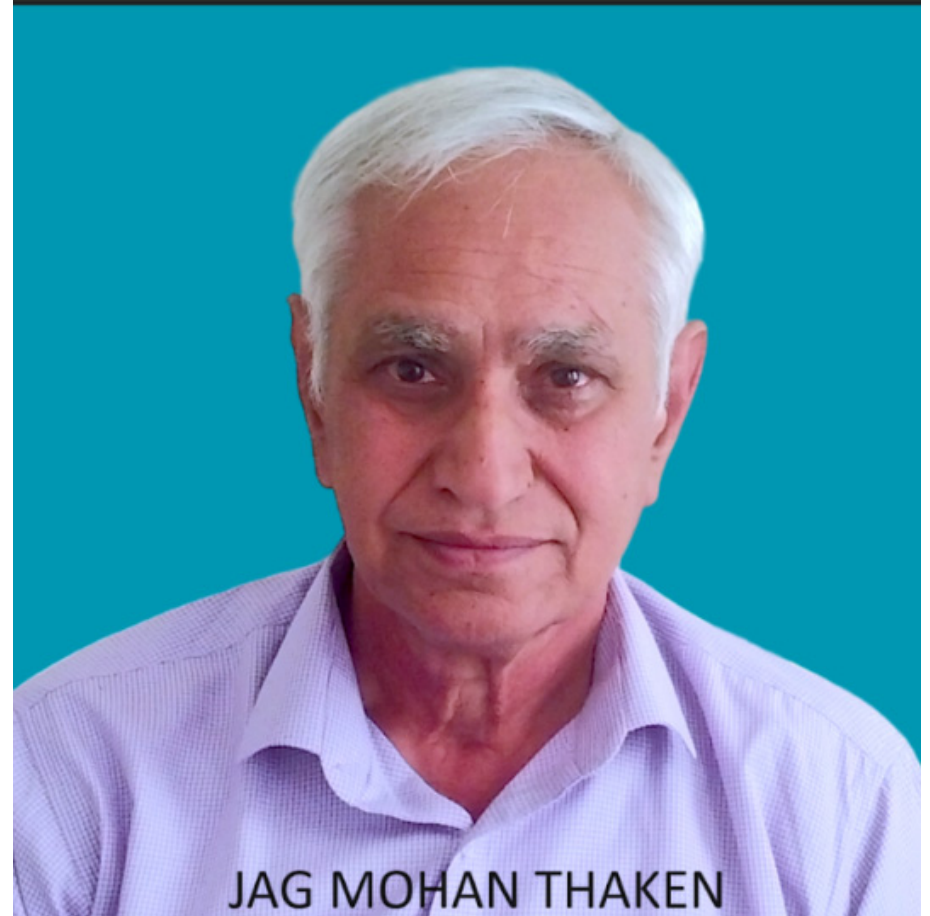
In a release of Aam Aadmi Party, on January 21, responding to the statement of Verma, Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, quoted stating on his X account, "Delhi is the capital of India, and people from every state live here. Vehicles from every state move freely across the country, and there is no restriction on their movement. BJP's statement questioning the presence of Punjab-registered vehicles in Delhi is not only appalling but also deeply insulting to Punjabis. They are insinuating that Punjabis are a threat to national security simply because of their state of origin. This is unacceptable and an insult to the patriotism of every Punjabi." CM Mann further questioned the BJP's priorities saying, "Home Minister Amit Shah cannot secure the country's borders nor prevent illegal infiltrations of thousands of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. Yet, he and his party leaders label Punjabis traveling to Delhi as a security threat. This reflects their dangerous mindset and complete disregard for Punjab's immense contributions to the nation's security and progress.

BJP owes an apology to the Punjabi community for this baseless and shameful allegation." Aman Arora, Punjab AAP President reminding the BJP of Punjab's legacy of sacrifice and patriotism added, "It was Punjabis who made over 80% of the sacrifices for India's freedom. It was Punjabis who stood at the forefront to protect the country, then and now. The Gurus of Punjab gave their lives for the nation's unity and humanity. Even today, whenever danger looms over India's borders, it is the Punjabi soldiers who stand tall and defend the country with their lives. For BJP leaders to question the loyalty of Punjabis is an insult to this legacy." AAP leader Sanjay Singh @SanjayAzadSIn reacted to BJP leader Parvesh Verma's 'vehicles from Punjab entering Delhi' remark. "This statement is a huge disrespect to Punjabis. Delhi is the capital of the country... vehicles of every state are here. I think Amit Shah should seek apology from the Sikh community for this statement. People will teach them a lesson in the (Delhi) election by the power of their vote."

Why Punjab is toed upon every time?

This is not the first time that such a derogatory statement against Punjabis has been issued by someone. During the 13-month long farmers' agitation in 2020-21, some people, having a grudge against the farmers' movement, even tagged the farmers as terrorists and Khalistanis. Why did the farmers stop entering Delhi? Why were they barricaded with nails? Not only that time, even today, the Punjab farmers, agitating at Khanauri and Sambhu borders, are being barred to carrying on their 'Delhi Chalo' march? What threat does the BJP-led central government and its double engine Haryana government inhale from the Punjab farmers march to Delhi? Why are Punjab farmers not allowed to enter their own country's capital to press upon their demands? Are the countrymen not even entitled to visit their capital? Why is the central government treating Punjab farmers as if they are not our natives, as alleged by the farmer leader, Sarvan Singh Pandher. UNI reporting on January 18, quoted Pandher, "Union government should not treat farmers as citizens of an enemy country." Pandher cited the news of ceasefire between Israel and Hamas as good news for human rights activists across the world and hoped that the Narendra Modi government will allow farmers to go to New Delhi and protest peacefully, which is their democratic right.

Not only on farmers' issues, Punjab is targeted on other platforms also. As alleged by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Punjab, Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA Chandrashekhar Thakur has accused Punjab of being responsible for the drug problem in Himachal. In a slamming statement, issued by AAP on January 22, the party has strongly condemned the statement of the Himachal leader stating it as irresponsible and baseless remarks. The release quotes that in his controversial statement, Thakur claimed that drugs like "Chitta" are being supplied to Himachal from Punjab, alleging that Punjab has been actively working to destabilize Himachal's youth. Thakur also



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made unfounded remarks about Punjab's efforts to curb drug abuse and questioned the state's initiatives like the establishment of a military academy. Responding sharply to these allegations, Punjab AAP leader Neel Garg stated, "The statement by the Himachal Congress MLA is completely baseless, devoid of facts, and a deliberate attempt to malign Punjab's reputation. It is ironic that the Congress, whose leadership has repeatedly failed to control the drug menace in its own state, is now pointing fingers at Punjab." Garg further exposed, "Himachal is home to illegal drug manufacturing hubs that have been repeatedly flagged by law enforcement agencies. Instead of addressing

these hotspots and strengthening local policing, Congress leaders are busy playing the blame game."

"Punjab's youth have already suffered due to the drug menace, and it is shameful for Congress to further malign a state that has been battling this issue on multiple fronts," Garg said. Now the question arises - Isn't some foul smell being fuelled in the air with the intention of defaming Punjab on every nook and corner? Is there someone scripting this conspiracy to defame Punjab, the country's food court, with some hidden agenda or motive? Everyone will have to think over this to counter negative agenda and stabilise harmony in the society.

Two Government City College students selected for Republic Day Parade



Hyderabad: Two NSS student volunteers of the Government City College have

been selected to participate in the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi.

OPPO Reno13 Series: Dual-Chip Power for Unstoppable Gaming and Entertainment

Hyderabad: OPPO's latest Reno13 Series redefines user experience with groundbreaking innovation. Beyond its impressive camera system, the dual-chip configuration—comprising the MediaTek Dimensity 8350 and the SignalBoost X1 chipset—sets new standards in performance, connectivity and lag-free experience.

MediaTek Dimensity 8350

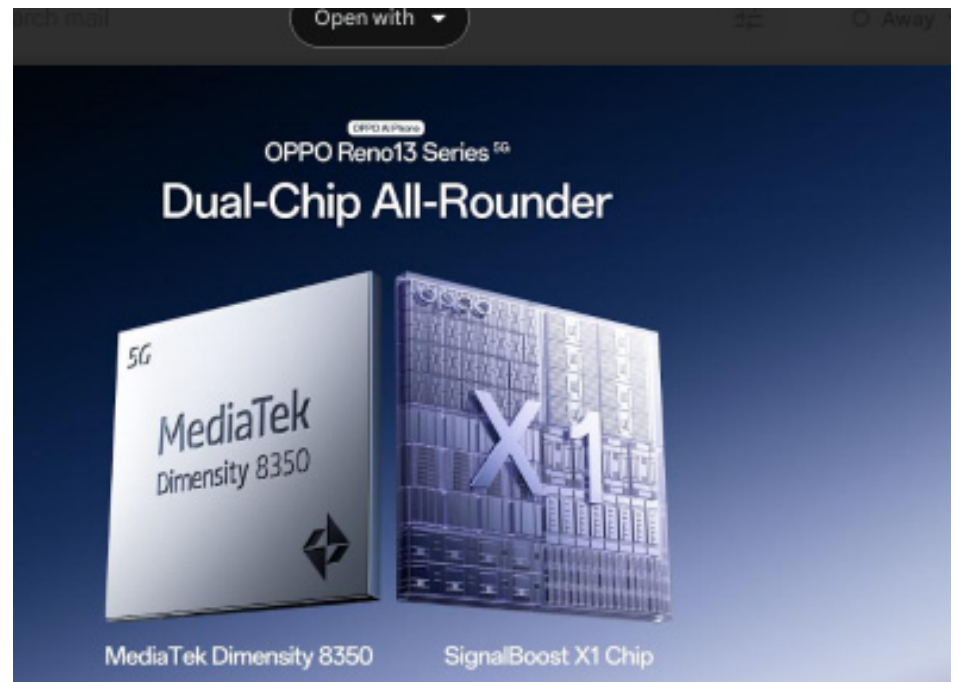
OPPO is the first to introduce the MediaTek Dimensity 8350 in the Reno13 Series, jointly optimized with MediaTek to deliver an exceptional gaming experience. Built on a 4nm process, it features an octa-core CPU featuring Arm Cortex-A715 processors operating at speeds of up to 3.35GHz and four energy-efficient Cortex-A510 cores. This architecture strikes a balance between powerful performance for demanding tasks and efficient performance for everyday applications.

MediaTek introduces StarSpeed Engine in Dimensity 8350, replacing the previous HyperEngine technology. This advance engine optimizes performance with a 10% reduction in power consumption during regular use and up to 24% savings during high-frame-rate gaming. It further enhances scene

transition speeds by 24% and reduces jitter, resulting in smoother gameplay and improved responsiveness.

Additionally, the SoC is equipped with a capable Mali-G615 MC6 GPU, which delivers high-quality graphics rendering, making it suitable for graphically intensive games. It supports display refresh rates of up to 120Hz for Full HD+ panels, providing fluid visuals that enhance the gaming experience. Lag-free gaming with SignalBoost X1 Chip

OPPO's self-developed SignalBoost X1 chip is engineered to deliver seamless performance, even in low-signal conditions. Debuting in the Reno13 Series, the X1 chip represents a breakthrough in network management by enabling the device to connect with network signals with greater efficiency—ensuring smooth gameplay even with just a single bar of signal strength. The SignalBoost X1 chipset further enhances Wi-Fi transmission power by 25%, providing full signal coverage up to 115 meters. Whether gaming in the farthest corner or transferring files at an impressive 19.3 Mbps—a staggering 149% improvement over its predecessor—this innovation ensures weak signals are a thing of the past. On top of this, the up-



dated AI LinkBoost includes a Wi-Fi Positioning feature that guides users on how to place their phone in the optimal position to secure a strong connection even in difficult

spots. Together, these new and improved technologies enable smoother online gaming, streaming, and file sharing without disruption in even more environments.

Canon India launches Seven Large Format Printers with Enhanced Colour Quality and Productivity



Hyderabad :Canon India, a leader in digital imaging solutions, today announced the launch of the new imagePROGRAF TZ-5320 and TX Series (TX-5420/5320/5220), which offer a range of single function and multi-function large format printers to cater to diverse printing needs. The imagePROGRAF TZ-5320 outputs large volumes of drawings at high speed to meet high productivity needs in the construction, design, manufacturing and output industries. The TX series covers a wide range of printing needs, including drawings, posters

and bulletin boards. Speaking on the launch, Mr. Toshiaki Nomura, President & CEO, Canon India said, "With the printing industry in India witnessing rapid transformation driven by evolving customer needs, Canon remains steadfast in its mission to introduce pioneering solutions that meet the dynamic demands of the market and customers. Our latest imagePROGRAF TZ and TX series reflects this commitment, offering enhanced speed, precision, and versatility. These advanced printers are designed to empower professionals in graphic arts, architecture,

and engineering by enabling large-volume, high-quality output with remarkable ease. We believe these innovations will further strengthen the creative ecosystem in India by unlocking new avenues for growth and expression." Thanks to enhanced productivity and improved poster quality with vivid colours, the new printers are ideal for the CAD industries, corporate and government sectors, and areas of the output industry like in-house production of corporate materials can be elevated.

Sharing his thoughts on the new lineup, Mr. C Sukumaran, Senior Director, Products & Communication, Canon India said, "The

launch of the new imagePROGRAF TZ and TX series highlights Canon's continuous efforts to combine advanced technology with environmental responsibility. Equipped with enhanced magenta ink and automatic ink sensing, these printers deliver improved colour vibrancy, sharpness, and reduced downtime—key to meeting the growing demands of professionals for precision and productivity. Additionally, features such as reduced energy consumption and eco-conscious packaging underscore our commitment to sustainability, ensuring that our products not only offer best-in-class performance but also contribute positively to the environment.

Extra-marital affair behind Hyderabad's Meerpet murder

Hyderabad: Chilling details have emerged in the brutal murder of Venkata Madhavi, a house wife, by her ex-serviceman-husband Guru Murthy in Meerpet. Investigators suspect an argument between the couple over the Murthy's alleged extra-marital affair led to the murder.

The suspect reportedly took his wife and two children to watch a movie on January 14 and then went to Madhavi's parents place to celebrate Sankranti. Leaving their children there, the couple returned home when an argument is suspected to have taken place between them.

The police investigating the case suspect that during the argument Madhavi pulled out her 'mangalsutra' and threw it on Guru Murthy's face following which the latter pushed her against the wall, resulting in grievous injuries and death.

To destroy evidence, the suspect allegedly chopped her body into small parts using two knives and then boiled in a bucket full of water with electric immersible heater. Later, he is suspected to have put the chunks into pressure cooker and boiled them. Murthy, it is allegedly put the body pieces into two bags and disposed them in an open drainage and lake.

Gokaraju Rangaraju College of Pharmacy Launches Free Upskilling Program for Pharmacists to Enhance Industry Standards

Hyderabad:Gokaraju Rangaraju College of Pharmacy, located in Nizampet, Hyderabad, officially inaugurated the first batch of a four-day free "Upskilling and Certification Program on Pharmacovigilance and Case Processing for Registered Pharmacists in Telangana." This groundbreaking initiative, held on January 22, 2025, is a collaborative effort with The Life Sciences Sector Skill Development Council (LSSSDC) and PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana), supported by vital stakeholders including the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Pharmacy Council of India (PCI), and Telangana State Pharmacy Council (TSPC).

The event was graced by Principal Dr.

M. Ganga Raju, who emphasized the program's significance in addressing the skill gap in the rapidly evolving life sciences sector. Dignitaries such as Yoganandham, Registrar of the Telangana Pharmacy Council; Amarendhra Babu, Cluster Head South Zone at LSSSDC; and Dr. Dharmadhata, Retired Director of Drug Controller Administration, underscored the critical importance of pharmacovigilance and its impact on patient safety and regulatory compliance. They also praised the initiatives undertaken by the management of Gokaraju Rangaraju College of Pharmacy. Coordinated by Dr. A. Seetha Devi, an LSSSDC-certified trainer, the program curriculum is designed to seamlessly blend theoretical knowledge with real-world case studies, ensuring participants gain practical insights relevant to their profession.



Netaji's Celebrations under the Auspices of Youth for Anti-Corruption



Hyderabad :The Youth for Anti-Corruption organization conducted the birth anniversary celebrations of freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at their central office in Hyderabad.

The founder, Rajendra Palnati, and Greater Hyderabad President, Konne Devender, stated that Netaji's struggle for India's independence is an inspiration for

today's youth. They emphasized that Netaji, through the establishment of the Azad Hind Fauj, ignited the spirit of resistance and patriotism among Indians. They urged the younger generation to follow in the footsteps of this great leader and strive for a corruption-free society. The event was attended by organization members Nagendra, Naresh, and others.

Harish Rao slams withholding of senior citizens' pensions in Mancherial

Hyderabad: Former Minister and senior BRS MLA T Harish Rao lashed out at the Congress government for withholding an elderly woman's social security pension in Mancherial district and adjusting the amount towards property tax arrears of her deceased son in Mancherial district. He condemned the officials' actions, demanding them to stop such illegal and unethical practices.

Around 15 senior citizens including Doke Chukkamma, were reportedly denied

their monthly pension of Rs 2,016 for January in Namnooru village of Hazipur mandal in Mancherial district. When they approached the local gram panchayat, the officials informed them that their pension amount had been adjusted towards property tax arrears. Chukkamma's son had passed away and despite her requests to adjust the amount in monthly installments, the officials refused. Calling the move unjust and inhuman, Harish Rao condemned linking pension disbursements to property tax arrears.

Can gene editing help with hereditary eye diseases? A new study explores the possibility

A research team from the Institute of Molecular and Clinical Ophthalmology, Basel in Switzerland, has developed a technique to edit genes, to demonstrate how it could be used to perhaps cure Stargardt disease, a rare, genetic eye disease that leads to vision loss. Stargardt disease is an inherited disease that leads to progressive vision loss in children and young adults. It is usually bilateral, involving both eyes. Everybody's eyes contain a yellowish-brown pigment called lipofuscin that builds up in cells as people age. People with Stargardt disease have too much lipofuscin -- it builds up over the macula, which is the central part of the retina and is responsible for clear and sharp central vision.

Stargardt disease also known as Stargardt macular degeneration, is commonly caused by changes in a gene, ABCA4. This gene influences how your body uses Vitamin A. There is currently no cure available for the disease. What the research team, in collaboration with scientists from Beam Therapeutics, an American biotechnology company, did, was develop a highly optimised adenine base editor -- a genome editing tool to make precise changes in DNA -- and deliver it into the retina using an adeno associated viral vector. AAVs are usually non-integrating, which means that DNA they carry doesn't usually insert itself into the cell's genome. This was used to correct the mutation in the ABCA4 gene that causes the disease. Their study, 'High-efficiency base editing in the retina in primates and human tissues', was published in the journal Nature Medicine recently. "The resulting gene therapy vectors achieved high levels of gene correction in mutation-carrying mice and in female nonhuman primates... which has the potential to translate to a clinical benefit. No off-target editing was detectable... The high editing rates in primates show promise for efficient gene editing in other ocular diseases that are targetable by base editing," the paper stated.

What is the scenario in India?

A September 2023 paper by researchers from L. V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad that studied the clinical profile and

demographic distribution of Stargardt disease phenotypes, found that the disease was seen more commonly in males, presenting during the second decade of life. The disease prevalence was estimated at 1 in 8000 to 10000 populations, with deterioration of visual acuity leading to legal blindness and loss of central visual acuity, the paper said. Of the 1,964 patients studied, a history of Stargardt disease for siblings, parents, and relatives was documented in 10.79% of patients, and parental consanguinity was documented in 10.69% of patients.

In India, Stargardt disease, a form of hereditary macular degeneration, is not uncommon, said Mohan Rajan, chairperson and medical director, Rajan Eye Care Hospital, Chennai. "So far, in ophthalmology, we have been able to solve all problems except hereditary ones. The future lies in gene therapy. While there is not much happening in this regard in India as of now, this is going to be the future when it comes to curing these diseases," he said. Dr. Rajan added that the research paper showed promising results; however, only trials on humans would prove how effective the therapy could be. He pointed out that cost would also be a factor with such therapy. S. Soundari, medical director, Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital in Chennai, said that going forward, genetic editing would be the right path when it came to the treatment of these inherited eye diseases that affected many patients. She said Dr. Agarwal's Eye had tied up with MedGenome a genomics-driven research and diagnostics company, to get a spectrum for these genetic diseases, in order to have a complete analysis of the genes. This, she said, not only helped in being able to detect certain conditions early and therefore being able to start treatment quickly, but also helped with counselling patients. For instance, she explained, knowing about autosomal dominant/recessive patterns could help couples make decisions on starting a family. In case of consanguineous marriages too, it helped doctors to advise patients. Dr. Soundari however also pointed out that how successful these therapies were in humans was yet to be seen, and there was still a long way to go.

Darkness descends on Bastar

There is a shop called Tea and Coffee at the centre of Bijapur, a city in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, nearly 400 kilometres from Raipur. It is enveloped in the aroma of freshly brewed ginger tea. Bubbling saucepans fuel conversations at what was once the Old Bus Stand. In the shopping complex that now stands here, one unit is shuttered, opening only occasionally. Just 10 days ago, it would burst into life around 10 a.m. every day, with a steady stream of visitors from across the country. Tea and Coffee owner Kapil Jhadi was kept busy with orders here. "Journalists, politicians, social workers in remote villages, even policemen in uniform, would come," Jhadi says.

But that was before January 1, the day Mukesh Chandrakar, 33, who occupied the space as an office, disappeared. On January 3, Mukesh's body was found in a septic tank, about 3 km from here. A journalist who began the YouTube news channel 'Bastar Junction' — which now has 1.59 lakh subscribers — Mukesh had run a report on the poor condition of a road in Bijapur. Police say he was murdered by three brothers, all construction contractors, Mukesh's distant relatives: Suresh Chandrakar, Dinesh Chandrakar, and Ritesh Chandrakar. The three, and Mahendra Ramteke, an employee, were taken into custody. Soon after people heard the news of Mukesh's murder, there was an outpouring of emotion on X, with journalists from across India speaking about how he was the go-to person for anything related to the Naxal-prone region. There were also conversations on how grassroots journalists never got their place in the sun, and about their safety. Memorial meetings were held, from Raipur to New Delhi. For Jhadi, who followed his work, "His reports touched the core issues of interior Bijapur and the whole of the Bastar region." Mukesh, who was a freelancer with NDTV, had worked on the story of road-construction corruption with Bastar Junction's correspondent Nilesh Tripathi. The video, released on December 25, exposed the poor quality of a 52.4-km-long stretch, connecting Gangaloor and Nelasnar villages in Bijapur. A day later, the Chhattisgarh government had announced an inquiry into the matter.

Capturing stark realities Mukesh's journalism captured the stark realities of life in Bastar's conflict-ridden zone, where left-wing extremists have waged a decades-long war against the Indian state. His stories tracked villagers risking their lives to source basics like salt, risky makeshift bridges and crumbling roads, parents losing children to blasts, children sustaining bullet wounds in encounters between the police and Naxals. These were documentaries of the everyday struggles of tribal communities caught in the crossfire. A teary-eyed tribal woman who attended Mukesh's funeral said he was like a god for her. "He had helped me get a job. I appeal to the government to find his killers and arrest them as soon as possible," she told TV cameras, before the alleged killers were arrested. Nearly 2 km away from the office is Mukesh's modest home: a one-BHK (bedroom-hall-kitchen) that he rented with a cousin and a colleague. Mukesh's older brother, Yukesh, 36, a TV journalist, who is married with two children, lives in an adjacent house within the compound. It was in this compound that the brothers had their last conversation on January 1, between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. The chat was about celebrations. "Mukesh and I had planned to have a little

celebration of our own on December 31, but he had to go to Dantewada. I went back home and slept," says Yukesh, as he attends to a stream of visitors, including State Congress president Deepak Baij and Bijapur's Congress MLA Vikram Mandavi. On January 2, Yukesh learnt from his son that Mukesh — Bittu for the family — had gone out. Given his inconsistent schedule and knack of breaking stories, no one suspected anything initially, assuming that he had left to cover a story. "I dialled his number, but it was switched off. Even that wasn't unusual. Around 1 p.m. my older (step) brother (Purushottam) called me to ask if all three of us brothers could drive to our village Basaguda, as the paddy procurement season was on and our crops had to be sold. Mukesh was still unavailable," says Yukesh. The search

In his complaint to the police, Yukesh noted that he had called Nilesh, the journalist with whom Mukesh had prepared the report on the Gangaloor-Mirtur stretch. "Nilesh told me that he had spoken to my brother around 6.30 p.m. the previous day, and Mukesh had told him that Ritesh (one of the now-accused men) was to visit him," the complaint notes. Yukesh says it was Nilesh who suggested that the police be informed. Yukesh began the search, followed by other Bijapur journalists, like Ganesh Mishra and Pinaki Ranjan Das, who were close friends. "Mukesh's laptop showed his last location near a shed owned by Suresh (another of the now-accused men)," says Mishra. The shed has nearly 17 rooms in which the contractor's labourers reside and a badminton court where outsiders, including Mukesh, played sometimes. Suresh Patragitri, 30, who works for a web news portal 'Lalluram', says he accompanied a police team to the shed on January 2, and while the rooms were searched, nothing was found there. Patragiri and another journalist, Pushpa Rokde, 40, from 'Prakhar Samachar' recounts that the journalists noticed a newly constructed concrete slab that covered a septic tank. "The next day (January 3) I asked two women who lived there about the slab. They told me it had been constructed around 8, the previous morning. We cross-checked with some badminton players, who confirmed they had not seen the cover earlier," says Rokde, who has been a journalist for a couple of decades. The contractor had allegedly told the police that he wanted to construct a bathroom over it. "But the septic tank underneath would have needed an outlet for the gas. It only added to our suspicion," Rokde adds. While they informed the police, journalists claim it took nearly a day and intense pressure from the community to get it broken open on January 3 evening. Mukesh's body with injury marks all over was retrieved then. As soon as the news of the death spread, the spotlight shifted to other aspects: the story Mukesh and Nilesh had done against the backdrop of the overall risks journalists face in Bastar, where the alleged nexus between officials and construction contractors often escape scrutiny amid stories of conflict.

Following the outcry over the death, a special investigation team (SIT) was formed. Suresh's properties were demolished by the government. On January 7, the Chhattisgarh Public Works Department (PWD) suspended his registration as a construction contractor. Vested interests at play The news report Mukesh and Nilesh had worked on



was aired on NDTV's regional (Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh) network on December 25. The project, initially tendered at ₹50 crore, ballooned to ₹120 crore despite no changes to the scope of work, the report said. Chhattisgarh government's PWD is the agency dealing with such contracts. Nilesh says that he and Mukesh were travelling to interior Bijapur for a different story when he noticed the poor quality of the road and got curious. The Hindu visited the road which remains potholed, despite what appears to be some recent patchwork on certain stretches.

After the report was aired, there was a State raid on Suresh's premises apart from the inquiry, according to local news reports. After the recovery of Mukesh's body from Suresh's shed, older stories about the contractor's meteoric rise from a cook to a multimillionaire who travelled in luxury cars and had a grand wedding, where he had travelled in a helicopter to receive the bride, started doing the rounds. The septic tank in a shed owned by Suresh Chandrashekhar, in which Mukesh's body was found. The septic tank was covered with a recently constructed concrete slab, which planted seeds of doubt in the minds of other journalists.

The septic tank in a shed owned by Suresh Chandrashekhar, in which Mukesh's body was found. The septic tank was covered with a recently constructed concrete slab, which planted seeds of doubt in the minds of other journalists. Nilesh, who has worked as a journalist for a decade and knows the perils of practising the profession in India's interiors, feels burdened by the death of his colleague. "But there was a need for people to see the story, because Mukesh had continuously raised the issue of corruption and irregularities," he says. Of the three brothers who are now in police custody, Ritesh was a friend of Mukesh's, says his brother. After the murder was unearthed, Bastar Inspector General P. Sundarraj said that the duo was having dinner together in the shed when the two had an argument over Mukesh being a 'hindrance' in Ritesh's work despite them being family. Ritesh and Ramteke allegedly attacked Mukesh with an iron rod. However, the police is looking at Suresh, who was arrested in Hyderabad on January 5, as the person behind the conspiracy, as he is now the 'prime accused' "We are collecting all the technical and material evidence in the case," says Mayank Gurjar, the head of the SIT now probing the case. The journey to journalism

Mishra says that Mukesh's confidence

in his reportage was rooted in his well-oiled network. The duo had travelled to all but 50 of the 650 villages in Bijapur. "He had empathy for last-mile villagers," he says. One of Mukesh's earliest reports that made a mark was about the incarceration of an innocent youth for over a year and how his life had been ruined by this. Then there is the more popular story about how he was a part of a team that secured the release of a Central Reserve Police Force jawan abducted by Maoists in 2021. In a conversation last May with this reporter, he had said that his sensitivity towards the tribals was rooted in his past, which was full of hardship, but also had stories of kindness.

Mukesh was born in Basaguda, a village nearly 50 km from Bijapur. His father passed away when he was just two and a half years old, leaving his unlettered mother, an anganwadi worker with a meagre salary, to raise him and his brother in a tribal area without land or rights to forest produce. They survived on the kindness of tribal neighbours who would give them a part of their crops or produce. One of the stories that he recalled was how he would sleep outside a Vizag hospital where his mother Kaushalya (now deceased) was being treated for cancer because he could neither stay inside the women's ward nor afford accommodation. "On days it rained, there was no sleep," he had said.

To begin with, Mukesh had worked in a garage as a mechanic to make ends meet. The family's struggles worsened during the Salwa Judum movement, a counter-insurgency force, which displaced them to a relief camp. The inspiration to join journalism came from his older brother, and after spending nearly eight years in mainstream national media, he decided to start his own channel. A Raipur-based journalist of a national daily said she had encouraged Mukesh when he discussed it with her. "I told him that it was a good move, as Bastar journalists often remain anonymous or exist as footnotes in reports filed on the region despite their groundwork. The cloak of anonymity would go, and he could tell his own stories," she says. Besides his daily reports, Mukesh provided regular explainers, breaking down the complexities of a long struggle and the implications of it for those living in the area. Mukesh knew Bijapur district — a large area of which is covered in the dense Abujhmad forests — like the back of his hand, and often ventured beyond to travel the larger Bastar region. According to his friends and fellow journalists, the monetisation of his YouTube channel, his recent car purchase,

Manmohan Singh: Legacy of a peacemaker

“India should seize the present moment, as it will get the best possible deal from Pakistan, and time is running out,” Munir Chowdhary, a former colleague of Murtaza Bhutto, the assassinated son of Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto, told me at his house in Mirpur area of Pakistan controlled Jammu and Kashmir in January 2006. Mr. Chowdhary’s family was originally from the Chhamb area of Jammu & Kashmir, a part of which was given to Pakistan as a result of the delineation of the Line of Control (LoC), and they had migrated across the LoC during the 1965 war. I paid little attention to his words, as I had a more important task: to make use of the rare opportunity that had come my way to do unhindered research and collect reports for this paper. Unlike the trips facilitated for Indians by the Pakistani establishment — or vice versa — as part of track-two engagements or otherwise, which are controlled and monitored, I had applied for the LoC permit and, surprisingly, got permission to visit Pakistan-controlled Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan. Pakistan had announced that with the LoC permit, one could travel anywhere within the country. This lucky opportunity to travel anywhere in Pakistan, which arguably hadn’t existed for several decades for an Indian journalist, came directly as a result of the 2005 Confidence-Building Measures (CBM) under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Manmohan Singh: Life and legacy of India’s reformist Prime Minister. Dr. Singh’s achievements in office including the progressive legislations such as the MNREGA and the Forest Rights Act, his deft handling of the economy — particularly during the U.S. financial crisis of 2008 — and his big breakthrough in the form of the U.S.-India nuclear deal have been well-documented. But his engagement on Jammu & Kashmir and Pakistan has not been as discussed, perhaps because it didn’t come to fruition, as the 2007 lawyers’ movement in Pakistan, the Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008, and the youth unrest in the valley after 2008 made it impossible for the momentum to continue.

Nevertheless, the importance of that phase cannot be discounted, as it serves as a reference point for the future, when the time is opportune, and for those invested in the difficult exercise of peacebuilding elsewhere. As a first-hand eyewitness to the unfolding realities on the ground during that momentous period of the first decade of the 2000s, my own conversations with Dr. Singh gave me a rare opportunity to comprehend and witness the complicated nature of peacebuilding in that phase. With the India-Pakistan relationship remaining unresolved and, given the presence of nuclear arms in the equation, it continues to be a subject of global interest. I joined The Hindu’s Jammu & Kashmir bureau in 2001 as a colleague of the late Shujaat Bukhari, who was assassinated in 2018. That year changed the global landscape after 9/11, and its echoes were felt in Jammu & Kashmir. Within a few days of 9/11, the Srinagar Legislative Assembly was attacked on October 1, 2001, followed by the attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001. This led to Operation Parakram, a military buildup initiated by In-

dia along the LoC and the International Border. The following year was marked by another series of provocative terrorist attacks, such as the Raghunath Mandir attack in March 2002, and then the Kaluchak attack on the family members of Indian Army personnel at an Army camp near National Highway 1A on 14 May 2002.

Keeping in mind the fluid and violent context, there were fears of large-scale militant violence during the (then) upcoming 2002 Assembly elections. As Jammu & Kashmir headed into election mode, I met Dr. Singh at New Delhi’s India International Centre (IIC) in August 2002 at a fellowship event. He was the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha. Just before the event started, the hostess introduced me and the other fellows to Dr. Singh, who was the chief guest on the occasion. As we were standing for tea before the event, Dr. Singh took me aside and asked me a few questions about Jammu & Kashmir and Pakistan. Dr. Singh had just been made the party in charge of Jammu & Kashmir by the Congress party. He listened to me patiently, asking follow-up questions, and wanting granular details. He then said it would be a mistake to reduce India-Pakistan relations to a flip-flop approach. He was referring to the National Democratic Alliance’s (NDA) Pakistan policy.

Two years passed, and in the 2004 Parliamentary elections, I met him in April at a campaign function, where I interviewed him for The Hindu. In the interview, published on April 24, he pressed for reforms with a human face. After the formal interview finished, he asked, “Young man, what is your assessment of Jammu & Kashmir and the India-Pakistan equation? And are we looking at peace anytime soon?” He was particularly interested in knowing the impact of the ceasefire along the LoC and the International Border, which had been announced in November 2003. He asked me about the details of divided families and their presence in various frontier areas of Jammu & Kashmir. I told him about my recent field trips to the Line of Control and the International Border areas and pointed out the tangible benefits of the peace. He said, “All this is fine, but we need to create incentives for sustainable peace. We need to put in place measures to ensure that spoilers in Pakistan are deterred.” On May 22, 2004, Dr. Singh became India’s 13th Prime Minister. Under PM Vajpayee’s watch, India and Pakistan had already taken a few steps toward peace after the setbacks in Agra and Kargil. While Dr. Singh refrained from making any flamboyant statements on Pakistan in 2004, within a few months of taking over, the bureaucracy was set in motion in a particular direction vis-à-vis Pakistan. Manmohan Singh: An easy boss with some mischievous humour. On 28 December 2005, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran visited Islamabad and, in a press conference, said, “The Indian side put forward a proposal for meetings of families/reunion of families in Kashmir at five places, on designated days and periods of time, under joint security arrangements. The places are Mendhar, Poonch, Suchetgarh, Uri, and Tangdhar along the Neelam Valley. Our Pakistani friends have told us they are

willing to consider the proposal for allowing family reunions under joint arrangements.”

Dr. Singh had studied the subject of divided families in detail, including the nuances of the subject. He was also not oblivious to the concerns about cross-border terrorism. On March 11, 2005, in the Rajya Sabha, he said, “As I have said on many occasions and at various fora, we are willing to discuss all issues in this relationship, including Jammu & Kashmir. But the essential premise remains that our interlocutors will play their part in ensuring that cross-border terrorism ends and that the infrastructural support to such organisations is dismantled. We are, therefore, following the course of altruism, but with due caution.” If one sifts through his statements or those of the foreign policy establishment, one finds little hesitation in discussing Jammu & Kashmir, but at the same time, remaining firm on India’s position on cross-border terrorism. It is with clarity of vision and confidence about the Indian position that the idea that borders cannot be changed but can be made soft originated. At the heart of it are the initiatives to address the humanitarian needs of the people of divided Jammu & Kashmir. In Jammu & Kashmir, he was firm in saying that there is zero tolerance for human rights violations. Dr. Singh was also not completely indifferent to the difficult choices faced by his interlocutor on the Pakistani side, who was dealing with the pressure from militant outfits and other elements in the Pakistani polity, including the military. Incidentally, Dr. Singh was born into a Khatri family, a Punjabi community of traders and administrators, in Jhelum district, better known as the Pothwar belt, which adjoins the Rawalpindi-Islamabad area. In this region, joining the Army has been a tradition for Rajputs and Jats ever since western Punjab, now Pakistani Punjab, became one of the prime recruiting grounds for the British Indian Army after the 1857 mutiny. Several senior Pakistan Army commanders, including one of the Army chiefs, Asif Nawaz, hail from this area. Manmohan Singh — a hero of Indian middle class. The shadow of militancy consistently chased Dr. Singh’s initiatives, including the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus. It never deterred him, but there was no room for complacency. On April 4, 2005, at the crack of dawn, several passengers planning to travel from various parts of the Indian side of Jammu & Kashmir on the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus were whisked away to a heavily guarded location by security agencies in Srinagar. The day before, the Tourist Reception Centre in Srinagar had been attacked, and Lashkar-e-Taiba had taken responsibility. Some of the Pakistani correspondents stationed in New Delhi also came to report on the flag-off ceremony. A day before, we were speculating in Srinagar whether the event would be postponed or whether Dr. Singh would come. But it seems as if Dr. Singh had decided that the initiative, which had already led to a groundswell of support, could not be reversed and that his presence was necessary. When Dr. Singh invoked Kabul in his Srinagar speech while flagging off the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus on a rainy morning, he broadened the idea of regional reconciliation and included Af-



ghanistan in its ambit. This wasn’t lost on the Western audience. He said that he hoped his grandchildren would see a day when one could have breakfast in Delhi, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul, just as it had been. Dr. Singh was constantly in search of ideas to create incentives for peace. Growing up in Amritsar as a partition survivor and later becoming an economist of international repute, it is difficult to believe that he wouldn’t have been affected by how border areas, which were once bustling trade routes, had become pale shadows of the past. Along the Radcliffe Line, there are several border areas such as Faridkot, Jammu, Gurdaspur, or even areas near the LoC, that have suffered the fallout of partition and have become mere shadows of what they once were. The intra-LoC trade, which germinated in 2007, continued until the 2019 Pulwama attack. It has since been stopped altogether owing to allegations of money-laundering from the Indian side. Another facet that cannot be ignored is the momentous boost to people-to-people contacts and several track-two initiatives during Dr. Singh’s tenure. He was aware of the post-independence trajectory of Pakistan and recognised that to conflate the state with the people was a flawed policy choice. During Zia-ul-Haq’s rule in the 1980s, many activists, poets, lawyers, and journalists in urban areas waged a democratic struggle at the cost of personal victimisation. They were bold enough to openly criticise Zia’s leadership for sponsoring religious extremism in society and curtailing civil liberties, particularly women’s rights. Some of the famous Urdu plays, popular in the subcontinent, made immediately after Zia’s death, immortalised these struggles. During that phase, Pakistanis inclined towards peace visited India. In many cases, as this author is personally aware, last-minute visa applications of Pakistani passport holders were cleared at the top echelons of Dr. Singh’s administration. This made the task of those carrying out track-two engagements easier, and there was no need to hold these events outside the region, which often proves to be a futile exercise of elite interaction with little societal grounding. Manmohan Singh left a lasting imprint on India’s external relations. Another significant event during Dr. Singh’s tenure was the visit of Pakistani journalists to Jammu and Kashmir from October 3 to 9, 2004, on the invitation of the Indian chapter of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA).

Bengaluru's residential areas are no longer the neighbours' envy

For many Bengalureans, Indiranagar is their weekend leisure date at its many well-known pubs, restaurants or shops. But for Jayalakshmi Srighu, now 62, it has been home for almost half-a-century. Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces. When she moved into their house off Indiranagar 12th Main from Ulsoor in 1977, many people asked her family members why they had chosen an area so forsaken. "I was in class 10. We didn't know that roads were going to come up around us. This was part of a village called Doopanahalli and a laidback place. We were scared to come home after 6 p.m.," she recalls. The tuition teacher says she has seen the area grow before her eyes, remembering how they would marvel at the many beautiful houses being built on 100 Feet Road. "As we were building our house, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) planted so many trees. In the 1980s, the cross roads came up and plots were sold. I got married in 1984 and moved out of the country. When I returned in 1997 too, there were quite a few empty plots. In 1999, I bought a plot 10 houses away from the house where I grew up," she said. A bygone era

She reminisces about how residents would play badminton on the road and on empty plots, and how they could see flights land and take off from HAL airport, and even the utility building - then the tallest in the city. "The BPO culture changed everything. Around the mid-2000s, it just crept under us and things just ballooned. I still don't understand how 12th Main became a commercial access road. I still know a lot of people here, but there are very few locals. We are struggling to keep at least our road residential. I tell people this is the only place I have. It is unfortunate what it has become despite our fight. Even if it was commercial, it would have still worked if the basic rules such as parking facilities were followed," she says, while recalling how she battled sewage backflow in her house only a few days ago. Once a sought-after residential area, Indiranagar today is among the prime commercial hubs of Bengaluru. Its story is the same as many other prime old residential hubs of the city. With land parcels becoming scarce in the core areas of the city, real estate players across the board report massive redevelopment taking place in these prime areas. Digbijay Das, Senior Director, Valuation Services, Colliers India, said apart from the Central Business District (CBD) region, comprising M.G. Road, Richmond Road, Residency Road, Infantry Road, Cunningham Road, Sankey Road, Vittal Mallya Road, and Ulsoor, standalone residential developments in Koramangala, Indiranagar, Jayanagar, J.P. Nagar, etc., are being redeveloped into commercial office, retail, and mixed-use development areas. "Increase in commercial activity has led to a rise in land price and this has prompted the redevelopment. Redevelopment is taking place to fulfill the burgeoning demand for commercial office space, retail, and mixed-use real estate in CBD region which is starved of vacant land for new development," he said.

Sudhanshu Mishra, Principal Partner, Square Yards, an integrated platform for real

estate and mortgages, noted significant redevelopment across areas like Indiranagar, Koramangala, and parts of Whitefield, driven by rapid urbanisation and the growing demand for modern infrastructure. "Many older neighbourhoods, once dotted with independent houses, are transforming into high-rise apartments, tech parks, and retail complexes. This shift is largely fuelled by the city's robust IT ecosystem and the promise of higher returns for property owners and developers." Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces.

Increasingly, residential pockets are being converted into commercial or mixed-use developments, often resulting in higher property prices and changing the neighbourhood's character, he said, offering Mumbai's Lower Parel and Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) as examples. Natural progression "CBDs remain the cornerstone of urban economic activity, serving as pivotal hubs for commerce and corporate operations. However, the emergence of secondary business districts (SBDs) offers a complementary solution, addressing rising commercial space costs and easing congestion. This shift does not signal the end of CBDs but rather complements their role. In Bengaluru, areas near the CBD have evolved into mature commercial markets. With land availability becoming increasingly constrained, redevelopment emerges as a natural progression. By optimising land use and revitalising aging structures, redevelopment maximises the potential of the floor area ratio (FAR), enabling the creation of taller buildings or additional usable space, aligning with the city's growing demand for modern infrastructure," he added. But this transformation has come at a cost, rue old-time residents of these areas who continue to live there.

Sneha Nandihal from I Change Indiranagar, a federation of RWAs, has been at the forefront of a fight against illegal commercialisation of residential areas. "In Indiranagar, there are roads that have been categorised as commercial accesses. However, they shouldn't change the predominant nature of the residential lane. Trade licences being issued indiscriminately. In 2015, in the name of ease of business, the then Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Commissioner issued a circular that only two documents are enough to get a trade licence for properties on the mutation corridor and commercial access - commercial tariff meters and rental agreement. The process mandates that the officials check the place of trade for sufficient parking, fire safety, and ensure there are no building or zonal violations. If these places are found to be in violation, trade licences should be null and void. But no inspections are happening," she said, adding that there are establishments that do not have parking space for even a bicycle or have come up in setback areas [the minimum amount of open space surrounding a building that must be maintained] and basements. Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces. C.N. Kumar, a resident of Jayanagar, said the situation is progressively getting worse in this



old residential area too. "There are blatant violations of sanctioned plans. Independent bungalows are being converted into multiple floor dwellings. The densification of the area is leading to more traffic, and a strain on water, electricity, sewage network, and other resources. These are all old layouts and there is additional pressure on the resources now. The government should start looking at stricter implementation of existing rules," he said.

Property developers like Anil R.G., Managing Director, Concorde, acknowledged that residential-to-commercial redevelopment in areas like Indiranagar and Koramangala has led to significant transformations. "For instance, Indiranagar's 100 Feet Road has evolved into a bustling commercial hub, with rental values reaching ₹100 to 150 per sqft. This redevelopment has pushed up property prices by 50% to 70%, making it a lucrative opportunity for investors. However, long-term residents often face challenges such as increased traffic congestion. Indiranagar has seen a 30% rise in traffic over the past five years, and noise pollution, altering the quiet residential charm of the area. But, redevelopment has also brought modern infrastructure, better public amenities, and increased footfall, turning these neighborhoods into thriving urban spaces that cater to a younger, tech-savvy demographic," he added. A. Mohan Raju, Managing Director and CEO, Kalyani Developers, also said such residential-to-commercial redevelopment in areas like Whitefield typically leads to rising property prices and a higher cost of living. "While this boosts the local economy, it can displace long-term residents as land values increase and rental rates rise. The neighbourhood may undergo significant changes, with more commercial activity, infrastructure development, and population density, potentially disrupting the peaceful, residential environment. Over time, these areas may become more vibrant and economically prosperous, but the shift could result in the loss of cultural identity and challenges like traffic congestion and sustainability issues. Urban planning will be essential to balance growth with the needs of the community."

No master plan in place Ironically, the city does not have a masterplan in place after the withdrawal of the draft Revised Mas-

ter Plan (RMP), 2031, though the High Court of Karnataka in May, 2023, clarified that its withdrawal would not "negate all actions taken in pursuance of it, and the actions already taken as per the provisional RMP-2031 before withdrawal must be given due effect to." In addition, in October, 2022, the High Court of Karnataka directed the BBMP to submit a report on the exercise carried out on the use of residential premises for commercial activities in violation of the law in various parts of the city. The Division Bench was hearing a PIL petition filed by the Wilson Garden Residents' Welfare Association complaining that several basement floors, still floors, and parking areas in the residential zone are being allowed to be used by flower vendors in violation of laws. BBMP officials were unavailable for comment. The BBMP, this financial year, revised the property tax of 15,731 properties, as the tax being paid was for residential properties despite the properties being operated under the commercial category. The total pending amount estimated after this revision was ₹398.49 crore. The civic body has so far recovered ₹114.82 crore from 9,260 properties. 'NIMBY' phenomenon However, Mathew Idiculla, an urban policy expert, said different kinds of cities across the world undergo what is termed redevelopment, urban renewal, or gentrification, but in the Indian context, this process hasn't been as stark or disruptive as seen in other parts of the world. This, he said, could be owing to multiple factors, such as complicated ownership titles and land records having multiple claimants, as well as social and emotional factors.

"There's also resistance from old owners for their neighbourhood not to change. If you look at the regulatory side, the master planning system basically prevents any kind of commercialisation. Planning regulations are highly inconsistent with the realities on the ground, though they are made with good intentions. So, there are blatant violations and everyone wakes up when there is a disaster. There is huge dissonance between the plan of what the city should be and what the character of the city is. There is also the NIMBY (not in my backyard) phenomenon that comes into play," he explained. What we need, he said, is to have practical norms with some sort of consensus that are implementable, and have enforcement mechanisms. "