

Paddy crop failure hits Medak farmers hard, seek govt relief

Medak: Paddy farmers in Rukmapur village of Chegunta mandal have been pushed into severe crisis after failing to get proper harvest from the 'Pathur 7545' variety, which they cultivated on more than 100 acres.

Farmers said they had been using seeds of a private company for years, sourcing them through supervisor Narsimhulu of Polampally. Since they generally secured a reasonable harvest, they continued to rely on him. Typically, farmers harvest between 28 and 32 quintals per acre, but this Vanakalam season, many did not even get 7 quintals, leaving them with heavy losses.

One farmer, Mekala Srinivas, who cultivated the same variety in 2.5 acres, said he did not get any harvest and abandoned his crop without cutting it. When farmers noticed poor growth and an unusually low yield, they approached Narsimhulu, who advised one of them to spray pesticide. The situation worsened, they said, and he stopped taking their calls and has not visited the village since.

A group of affected farmers recently visited the Medak Collectorate, seeking action against the seed company for supplying spurious seeds and requesting financial support.

Speaking to 'Telangana Today', Srinivas said each farmer had spent Rs 40,000 per acre and that he had not recovered even a rupee this season, losing Rs 1 lakh on his crop.



C-section crisis in Telangana set to get worse



Hyderabad: The decision by the Congress-led State government to curtail major initiatives aimed at encouraging maternal and child health is threatening to cast a long shadow over C-sections in Telangana State. A year into its term, the Congress-led State government appears to be devoid of any concrete ideas on how to address the crisis of cesarean deliveries in Telangana State. Given the total lack of public health advocacy regarding cesarean sections, senior health officials who were earlier involved in similar initiatives, express concern that the extremely high rates of Cesarean sections in Telangana State could persist, and may even worsen in the coming years.

A concerted multi-pronged effort, including consistent massive awareness programs to regulate C-sections, which were implemented under the previous BRS re-

gime, is yet to be taken-up in Telangana State. The gradual erosion of unique mother and child centric initiatives, such as KCR Kits, nutritional supplementation for pregnant women with anaemia, the establishment of more milk banks in addition to the existing one at Niloufer Hospital and conducting awareness programs by involving different cross-section of the society, are expected to further exacerbate the situation of cesarean sections in Telangana State, senior doctors familiar with the issue said.

To encourage normal deliveries, the earlier BRS government had held multiple meetings with private health care establishments to encourage them to avoid unnecessary C-sections and take-up more normal deliveries. Similar efforts are totally absent in the present Congress-led State government, even after a year in power. In the last decade, there was a concerted effort to uti-

lize services of midwives to ensure safe and enjoyable normal deliveries for pregnant women in Government hospitals. "Some of these initiatives are still there. However, what

is lacking is total lack of advocacy and specific focus to reduce the C-sections in Telangana State," public health officials summed it up.

Gehis Immigration and International Legal Services expands presence with new office in Hyd



Hyderabad: Gehis Immigration and International Legal Services, a prominent name in U.S. and international immigration law, on Friday announced the opening of its new office at Workafella Western Aqua, HiTech City – Coworking Space in Hyderabad. At the forefront of the firm is N.M. Gehi, Esq., an immigration attorney with over 25 years of experience and known for his

expertise in U.S. immigration law. He has successfully represented thousands of clients, including individuals, families, and multinational corporations, a press release said. With operations in India and the United States, Gehis Immigration and International Legal Services is dedicated to delivering comprehensive legal support in immigration matters.

Why are some packaged foods under the scanner? Explained

A study of 432 convenience food products, in five categories — idli mixes, breakfast cereals, porridge mixes, beverage mixes, soup mixes — and extruded ('puffed' or 'expanded') snacks, has found that a majority of these ready-to-eat/package food products are high in carbohydrates.

Who conducted the study?

The study, 'Assessment of front and back of pack nutrition labels of selected convenience food products and snacks available in the Indian market' by Shobana Shanmugam et al, was published in Plos One. Researchers with Chennai-based Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition and the University of Reading, the U.K. were involved. It aimed to evaluate the nutritional profiles and claims of selected convenience food products and snacks in the Indian market and also measured their healthiness by categorising them according to their nutrient profiles. The nutritional profiling of the foods was conducted based on the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) claims regulations, after evaluating the nutritional information on the front and back of pack labels of the selected food items. Only the nutritional content claims related to protein, dietary fibre, fat, sugar and cholesterol were evaluated in this study. The healthiness was assessed using a nutritional traffic light system. The products were classified into 'healthy', 'moderately healthy' and 'less healthy' based on the fat, saturated fat, and sugar content. The study was funded by the Department of Science and Technology.

What did the study find?

In essence, the study found that while most of the products could fall under the 'healthy' or 'moderately healthy' categories, except extruded snacks, most of the products provided over 70% of the energy from carbohydrates, while extruded snacks provided over 47% of the energy from fat. The energy distribution from protein was found to be less than 15%. All convenience food products that the study tested were rich in carbohydrate content. While beverage mixes had the highest carbohydrate content (35.5g to 95g/100g), extruded snacks had the highest total fat content (mean 28.3±7.5 g/100g), and the highest saturated fatty acid (SFA) content (mean 11.0±4.5 g/100g). The beverage mixes were found to be high in sugar content. The soup mixes had high sodium levels with poor protein and dietary fibre content. The idli mixes had high protein content and were largely sugar free. Breakfast cereals were found to have high dietary fibre. The study also found that despite FSSAI's packaging and labelling regulations requiring products to display the minimum nutritional information for energy, protein, carbohydrate, sugar, and total fat as "per 100 g" or "100 ml" or "per serving" of the product on the label, only certain breakfast cereals and some beverages widely disclosed the concept of per-serving information. Further, some products that claimed to contain whole grains did not display them in the ingredient list and these claims may be misleading to the consumer, it noted. It pointed out that a clear labelling system would be a valuable tool for consumers to choose healthier products.

What are the issues around food label-



ling?

For years, activists have been advocating for front-of-pack labelling that has warning labels indicating high fat, sugar and sodium. "We want the warning labels to be specific, so, for instance, a customer with hypertension can avoid food labelled as 'high sodium' or a customer with diabetes can avoid high sugar foods," said Vandana Prasad, a public health professional associated with the Public Health Resource Network. Lead author of the paper and senior scientist at Madras Diabetes Research Foundation Dr. Shanmugam said the present labelling system was not uniform, and customers could find it hard to understand. "Nutrition labelling in India is at an evolving stage and evidence of awareness and understanding of these labels by the Indian population is limited," the study notes.

How are changing diet patterns affecting health?

As per the household consumption expenditure survey 2022-23, Indians are now spending more on processed food, beverages, and refreshments while reducing money spent on home-cooked food. Though there are subtle variations in rural and urban areas, the pattern is valid across both regions. Experts have highlighted this changing diet is a huge contributing factor to the staggering burden of non-communicable diseases in the country. The Economic Survey of India this year, citing the Indian Council of Medical Research's dietary guidelines, noted that 56.4% of the total disease burden in India is due to unhealthy diets. Not only do excessive carbohydrates in the diet place a strain on the pancreas, therefore increasing one's risk for type 2 diabetes, but other chemicals in processed food can increase the risk of ailments such as fatty liver as well, said Nihal Thomas, senior professor, Department of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, Christian Medical College, Vellore. Dr. Shanmugam underlined the need for re-

formulation of packaged/processed food items to ensure they contain more proteins, alongside less fat and sodium. R.M. Anjana, managing director of Dr. Mohan's Diabetes

Specialities Centre, Chennai, who was also part of the study, reiterated the importance of reading food labels and avoiding processed food as much as possible.

What the Pelicot rape case tells us

There is something about a woman unafraid. A woman uninterrupted. A woman unperturbed by what she can lose. Mostly, it's a woman who has nothing left to lose. Or so she thinks. Gisèle Pelicot's world of marital stability, trust, and security came crashing down four years ago. "My world fell apart," she remarked when she first recognised the woman (getting raped by a stranger) in a photograph shown by the police as herself. The Pelicot rape trial has reminded the world of the tenuousness of a woman's sense of safety. "I am a rapist just like all the others in this room," Dominique Pelicot, Gisèle's husband, said during the trial. And that's what it is all about. Though he made this statement referring to his co-defendants, the 50 men he invited over for almost a decade to rape his sedated wife, it has far greater resonance for women across the world.

Gisèle's decision to waive her anonymity during the rape trial made this resonance even stronger. She became an Everywoman. It's making men uncomfortable, as usual. "Not all men," runs the hackneyed refrain. It's a discordant note: The fact is that it's easy to turn a man, any man, into a rapist if there's an assurance of no consequences for their actions.

This trial has opened more wounds than it sought to heal. The list of Gisèle's rapists is quite eclectic — drivers, workers, journalists, nurses, soldiers and DJs, all played this game. Imagine finding 72 men within a 50

km radius of Pelicots' home in a sparsely populated village, Mazan, with a total population of about 7,000. At least 2% of all men in this region chose to rape by invitation.

All of Gisèle's rapists have been found guilty of rape, but not before more than 20,000 photos and videos were presented in a trial, which was made open to the public at her insistence. This is what makes this case historic. It has, once and for all, made it clear: He would if he could. It's time to trash, yet again, George Etherege's 17th-century comedy, *She Would If She Could*, about women's lustfulness. It's time to revisit the alleged cuckold-making Lady Cockwood's life.

Dominique's love of cuckoldry is yet another cautionary tale for women across the world. It's clear today that what men love can hurt women they claim to love very badly. But most men do not care about hurting women. Dominique could find at least 72 rapists. Coco, the website that facilitated Dominique's rape-my-wife set-up, is awash with men sharing similar proclivities. And this is just one site. They couldn't resist the temptation and were manipulated by Dominique. Men get tempted a bit too easily. "Men will be men." Hurting women is the easiest temptation. Shakespeare's "Most dangerous/Is that temptation that doth goad us on/To sin in loving virtue" and other similar lines across literatures and cultures have glorified this temptation to force oneself non-consensually.

From a spiteful election to a 'total revolution': How 1974 set the stage for the Emergency

The year began with a fiery agitation in Gujarat, followed by a particularly malicious state election of the kind never seen before in independent India. Treading on its heels was yet another and far more fervent uprising, this time in Bihar, which culminated in a severely polarised public opinion as the year came to an end. The year 1974, scholars say, has been one of the most "understudied" in the political history of modern India, particularly when we take into consideration what came before and what happened after it. The year 1971, for instance, is well-known for the Bangladesh War and 1975 was when the Emergency was announced. Though it does not invoke the same kind of curiosity or urgency, the political and social developments in 1974 set the stage for the historic turn of events that took place the following year. The 1970s began with a set of dramatic events. To begin with, the Bangladesh Liberation War came to an end with India emerging victorious. Indira Gandhi, who was already riding on the back of immense electoral popularity, became almost invincible. "She was now perceived as a war heroine, almost a goddess in fact," says Abhishek Choudhary, author of *Vajpayee: The Ascent of the Hindu Right (1924-77)* (2023). He explains that for India, the psychological impact of winning a war for the first time was of the kind that is hard for us to imagine today. It went a long way in further cementing Indira Gandhi's popularity, and making the Opposition nearly helpless in its attempt to overthrow her.

The Congress leader's increasing appeal was soon followed by widespread discontent about the economic situation in the country. In 1971, economists V M Dandekar and Nilkantha Rath came out with a major study titled 'Poverty in India- Dimensions and Trends', which concluded that 40 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population "lived below the poverty line, that is with diets inadequate even in terms of calories." In his book *India After Gandhi* (2017), historian Ramachandra Guha notes that other economists came out with other estimates: some put the percentage of the really poor even higher than Dandekar and Rath; others said it was slightly lower. "The economists disputed exactly how many poor people there were in India, but all agreed that there were too many – close to 200 million by even the most conservative reckoning," writes Guha. The food situation in the country had also deteriorated with fair-price shops often running out of stocks.

The situation was even worse when it came to social reform, particularly in the education sector. Despite enormous growth in the number of colleges and expansion of professional courses such as engineering and medicine, basic education was not even close to being at desirable levels. As Guha notes, "There were more illiterates in 1972 than there were in 1947." The fourth Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 added a further layer of economic constraints. The Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) doubled the price of crude oil in a punitive measure against the West, but this affected India as well. Consequently, the government passed an ordinance doubling the price of fuels. Then there were the allegations of corruption and nepotism that started mounting soon after Indira

Gandhi's spectacular win in the 1971 elections. Her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, would suddenly be more visible in public life. Soon after graduating from school, he started a car project in Gurgaon, the proposal for which was cleared with undue haste. In December 1972, the Opposition, pointing out the irregularities in Sanjay's venture, demanded a debate in Parliament. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh's Atal Bihari Vajpayee alleged that Sanjay had been allotted land, raw materials and even telephone connections at dirt-cheap rates and that Maruti Limited was in fact "Corruption Unlimited". While Indira Gandhi dismissed these allegations, there were other nepotism charges too. After the 1971 elections, Indira Gandhi sacked the chief ministers of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh and replaced them with her favourites. Matters came to a boil in March 1973 when the government appointed Justice A N Ray as the new Supreme Court Chief Justice, overlooking three seniors. The Opposition was vociferous in its condemnation of the move. Among the many critics was Jayaprakash Narayan, a veteran leader of the Sarvodaya movement popularly known as JP. He wrote to Indira Gandhi asking if these out-of-turn promotions were intended to make the Supreme Court a "creature of the government of the day". Throughout the winter of 1972 and all of 1973, the Opposition staged multiple rounds of protests against rising prices, low food production and rampant corruption. Choudhary in his book notes that 1973 was widely judged to be the "worst year in India since Independence". It ended with yet another public spectacle, when to commemorate India's 25th year of Independence, the government engraved a time capsule to be buried in the foreground of the Red Fort. Opposition leaders demanded to be shown the contents of the capsule, certain that it would have ignored the historical contributions of their ideological predecessors. When the government refused, Vajpayee and S N Mishra of Congress (O) showed up at the Red Fort on the morning of December 23 with pickaxes and started digging the earth. They were unsuccessful in revealing the capsule since the police arrived soon after with an arrest warrant against them on the grounds of "breach of peace". A students' 'andolan' spreads in Gujarat. The troubles of 1974 began in Gujarat, where a severe drought and the failure of two crops in succession had caused a more than 100 per cent rise in the prices of foodgrains and cooking oil. At the same time, essential commodities started disappearing from the market. People in general, and students in particular, whose hotel bills had risen by more than 40 per cent, blamed the Congress government for the crisis. In January 1974, the students of L D College of Engineering in Ahmedabad went on a strike and went about destroying college and hostel furniture. When the police responded with a lathi charge and made arrests, it further enraged the students. Protests spread to colleges and schools in the city. On January 10, a call for an Ahmedabad bandh saw Opposition parties, Sarvodaya workers, corporate employees and the middle class participating. Soon the agitation spread to Baroda, Surat and other towns and cities of the state. The large-scale protests were accompanied by rioting, looting and burning of shops. And the authori-



ties responded with excessive use of force. On January 11, the students formed the Navnirman Yuvak Samiti (Youth Organisation for Regeneration) and escalated their demands. They now wanted the resignation of the state government and a dissolution of the Assembly. With the movement spreading rapidly and finding support from several sections of civil society, the Centre was forced to ask the state government to resign and suspend, but not dissolve, the Assembly. The agitation, however, continued. On February 11, JP visited Ahmedabad and applauded the students for the vast and successful movement. "It should be an example for the youth in other parts of the country," he said, as cited by historian Bipan Chandra in his book *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (2017). A few months later, Narayan, in his writings, noted the Gujarat andolan's influence on him: "For years I was groping to find a way out. In fact, while my objectives have not changed I have all along been searching for the right way to achieve it.... Then I saw students in Gujarat bring about a big political change with the backing of the people and the moral support of Ravishankar Maharaj (Sarvodaya leader) and I knew this was the way out." The final act of the agitation in Gujarat took place in March, and again in April, when Morarji Desai went on an indefinite hunger strike. Indira Gandhi was forced to dissolve the Assembly and call for fresh elections in the state in June. Soon after, the Navnirman movement disintegrated. But it was a political watershed and was to become a model for similar movements in other parts of the country, especially the one in Bihar.

A spiteful election: Vajpayee under attack. While Gujarat simmered in revolutionary spirit, a different kind of political drama was being played out in Uttar Pradesh. The successive sweeping electoral victories by Indira Gandhi had left the Opposition feeling rather helpless. The UP elections to be held in early 1974 almost looked like a last ray of hope for the desperate Opposition. Even though the Jana Sangh had for a while toyed with the idea of collaborating with other Opposition parties, they decided to go alone and form post-electoral coalitions, if necessary. The Jana Sangh wanted Vajpayee, who was the party's national presi-

dent at the time, to be their chief ministerial candidate. Vajpayee, however, had declined the candidature as it would have been a demotion for someone who was leading the party in Parliament at the time. Consequently, a mid-way solution was found, wherein Vajpayee would lead the campaign and the CM would be decided later. The campaign turned unusually dramatic with mudslinging from both ends. Vajpayee's loyalty to the country came to be questioned, for instance, when Bombay tabloid *Blitz* published a story accusing him of having betrayed the 1942 Quit India Movement. As noted by Choudhary in his book, the insinuation was factually incorrect. Then there were the personal attacks. Then Uttar Pradesh chief minister Hemvati Bahuguna made aspersions on Vajpayee's moral character by taking a dig at his personal life. The elections drew to a close with the Congress once again emerging victorious. "By then the Opposition had concluded that there is no way they can defeat Indira through elections," says Choudhary. A different strategy had to be devised to overpower Indira Gandhi, and a new leader as well, a role that was taken up by Jayaprakash Narayan, he adds. 'Total revolution': JP as a unifying force. The conditions in Bihar were ripe for a mass movement. In his book, Chandra notes that "Bihar was economically more backward and politically far worse governed as compared to Gujarat". Apart from rising prices, shortage of essential commodities, unemployment and corruption, there also existed intense factionalism and internal feuds within the ruling Congress. Between March 1967 and March 1974, Bihar had 11 Congress and Opposition governments and witnessed three spells of President's Rule. By the end of 1973, Left-wing groups led by the Communist Party of India launched a series of mass demonstrations. Inspired, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the Jana Sangh, along with other non-Communist student groups came together to form a united front of their own called the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (CSS). The group expanded rapidly, establishing branches in almost every town of the state. Knowledge Nugget: Jay Prakash Narayan Jayaprakash Narayan's movement ended the free run of the Congress. On March 18, 1974, the CSS marched to the Assembly in Patna.

Why fatty liver cases rose in 2024: What are bigger triggers than alcohol?

With India already bearing a high disease burden because of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, another condition that co-exists and develops with these is quickly posing a new health hazard. That's called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease or NAFLD, when fat builds up in the liver in non-drinkers, inflaming and scarring it, resulting in serious damage if untreated over time. "Almost one in three to four people in India have fatty liver," says Dr SK Sarin, Director, Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, who prepared the Health Ministry's recent "Operational Guidelines and Training Module of Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease." This preventive module has been drawn up to detect the condition early, when it is mostly asymptomatic, and prevent it from becoming the next big public health concern. NAFLD is now being detected across age groups. Fatty liver and liver disease have become as common, if not more, than heart disease.

"We did a survey in Delhi among 6,000 people going to mohalla clinics. Almost 57 per cent of them had fatty liver. Of those who had fatty liver, 11 per cent were lean or had normal weight," says Dr Sarin. This means that NAFLD could be assuming the status of a silent epidemic with community prevalence ranging between nine and 32 per cent, depending on age, gender, area of residence and socio-economic status.

What has the profile of NAFLD patients been in 2024?

Up to 10 per cent of new patients being admitted at Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) had fatty liver. The age group is younger now, less than 40 years. NAFLD is now more common among IT sector professionals and desk workers for three reasons: they work late, they eat late and binge-drink often. They complain of fatigue, which they wrongly attribute to stress when it is their eating and drinking habits that are the real triggers.

What are common causes of NAFLD among Indians?

Being overweight or obese. Anybody who has a metabolic syndrome or a cluster of conditions, including blood pressure, high triglycerides, high cholesterol, high blood sugar and obesity. Eating a diet high in sweets, starchy items and processed snacks can lead to NAFLD. Fatty liver is present in 85-90 per cent of diabetics as well as those with obesity. To begin with, anybody who is overweight must lose the kilos and get back in range. The formula for weight is very simple: Height minus 100 cm for men and height minus 105 cm in women. First, lose extra weight with the right exercise and diet. If you have a family history of diabetes, obesity or blood pressure, then reduce another 5 kg. People who are overweight or obese should aim to lose 7-10 per cent of their weight in 2025 and those who are of normal weight should aim for 3-5 per cent if they already have fatty liver. Exercising becomes important because even if you do not lose adequate weight, it will remove the fat and you will become healthier. How a good diet, exercise and sleep can become a game changer

The wrong diet and lifestyle are bigger triggers for fatty liver than alcohol. Have a low calorie diet between 1,200 to 1,400 calo-

ries. Extra sugar goes to two places. One from the gut into the liver, second into the muscle. If muscles are not moving, the sugar is by and large directed to the liver, which converts extra sugar into fat. If you have fatty liver, about 40 to 50 per cent of the meals you have daily should be uncooked. I myself mostly rely on raw vegetable salads and fruits in my meals. Opt for millets and discard anything which is made up of fructose. Corn syrup has 50 to 60 per cent fructose, which is extremely harmful for fatty liver. Fruit juices, colas and dressings, all have corn syrup. Take low-sugar fruits like guava, apple or maybe papaya.

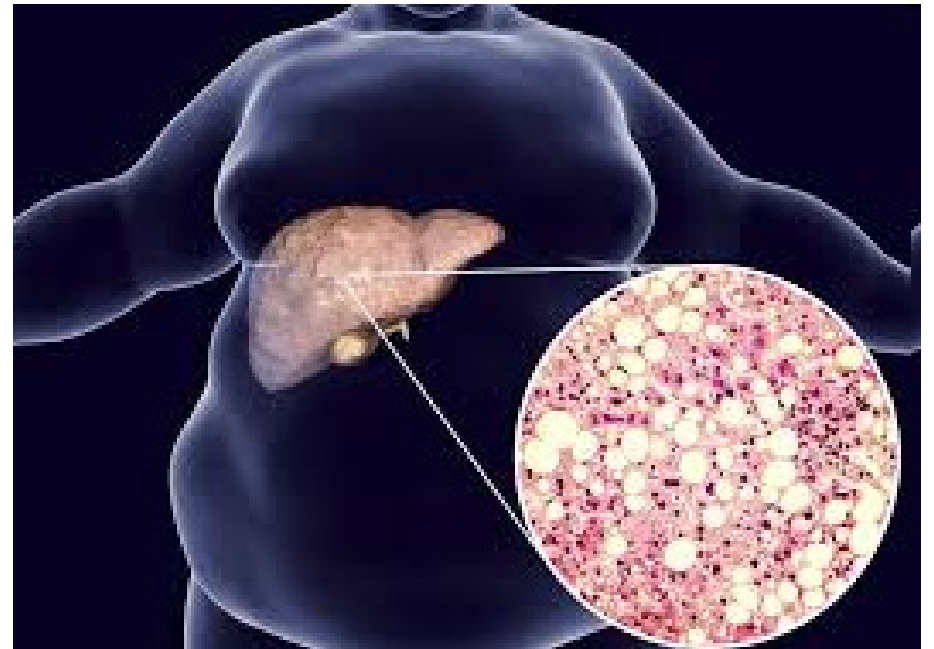
How important is sleep?

Sleeping on time is important because if you sleep anytime between 2 am and 6 am, chances of obesity increase by 35 per cent. So sleep on time and get your seven hours.

How does fatty liver impact other organs?

If the person has advanced fatty liver, like grade 2 or 3, they become more prone to developing gall bladder stones.

The risk of cancer goes up steeply. Liver cancer is the second most common cause of cancer deaths in the world, as per



WHO, and fatty liver is probably the commonest cause. About 39 per cent of liver cancer patients are diabetics too. Cirrhosis and liver cancer are about four times more common in patients with diabetes and fatty

liver. About 15 to 20 per cent of fatty liver patients have cardiac events, what we call MACE (Major Adverse Cardiac Events) every year. The fat from the liver gets deposited in the heart.

Indie games unlocked new levels in 2024, says K Narayanan

The gaming industry has had another rough year, with mass layoffs, risk-averse franchises trying to be everything to everyone, and larger production houses struggling to hold on to their margins in a world of rising budgets and inadequate sales. Partly because of these factors, it has also been a year in which independent games have shone. These offerings have been varied and inventive, harking back to a time when videogames were fun, invited you in and didn't try to pick your pocket while you were there. Here are my favourite indie releases from 2024. * Lorelei and the Laser Eyes One of the first games I ever bought was called The 7th Guest, back in the mid-1990s. It was a haunted-house mystery in which one had to solve puzzles to understand what was going on in the mysterious mansion of a long-disappeared toymaker named Stauff. I hadn't thought of The 7th Guest for nearly 30 years, until Lorelei and the Laser Eyes was released by Simogo and Annapurna Interactive in May. It's a throwback and an update. The player is the titular Lorelei, invited to the mysterious Hotel Letztes Jahr for a filmmaking project. One must solve puzzles to progress and uncover the true story of what happened here. Expect excellent storytelling, a stunning experience (the game is dark and spooky), and a dog you can pet. * Dungeons of Hinterberg

Imagine a game that combines aspects of Monster Hunter and Stardew Valley, illustrated by Tintin's Herge. That's what Dungeons of Hinterberg (Microbird, Curve; July) feels like. Step into the shoes of Luisa, a burnt-



out trainee lawyer taking a break in the Austrian Alps. Hunt monsters by day, and hang out and build (vital) relationships with townspeople in the evenings. The aesthetic is colourful and vibrant, reminiscent of the Jo, Zette and Jocko stories. There are hub zones where players can meet, pick up different styles of magic, and gather perks, abilities and gear. And, there's another pet dog. * Tactical Breach Wizards This one's set in a modern-day world, but with militarised magic. One fights with assault staffs and silenced wands. There's a further twist. In this grid-and turn-based tactical game, the aim is to find interesting ways to throw one's enemies out of a window. Tactical Breach Wizards (Suspicious Developments; June) is part of the so-called Defenestration Trilogy.

Helpfully, it allows players to rewind at

will during their turn, to undo actions and preview outcomes. And while the writing has its flaws, I found it hilarious. (One way to be revived is if a necromancer puts a bullet in your head.) This set of 50 offerings released by Mossmouth in September is a sumptuous treat for the nostalgic gamer. The games have the look and feel of the earliest ones ported from arcade to PC in the 1990s: think, Pac-Man, Dig Dug, Zeliard. Even for those who never cared for such things, the set makes for an absorbing experience. Nearly every genre is represented, with an excellent mix of action and strategy. The games differ in length and complexity, ensuring there's something for everyone. Some are straightforward and score-focused, perfect for quick-play sessions. Others are story-driven experiences that require time and skill.

How the Right overtook the Left in India

There is a famous dialogue from the Hindi film 3 Idiots: “Dekho hum kahan nikal aaye aur tum kahan reh gaye” (See where we have reached and where you are left). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) cohorts could be saying this to the Communists in India. The RSS will complete 100 years in 2025. The Communist movement in India is also a century old. The Left produced some of the most valiant fighters during the independence movement even as the Right was cosy up to the British empire. It is no secret that a large share of prisoners in Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were Communists. Despite such a glorious past, the reality is that the Indian Left is now in a labyrinth. Today, the Right clearly dominates Parliament: the BJP alone occupies 240 Lok Sabha seats. The Left parties combined occupy just eight seats. Compare this to the first general elections in independent India in 1951-1952 when the Congress was in power and the Communist Party of India (CPI) was the principal opposition party. At present, the Right is also far ahead in terms of organisational strength and structure. The total membership of the Left parties (those who contest elections) is not more than 2 million and the mass organisations that they represent number around 30 million. The RSS alone has a membership of over 7 million, and the BJP has a membership of more than 100 million.

The trajectory of the Left and RightThe rise and fall of these political entities depends on various historical episodes, the foremost being changes in the social production system. The initial years of development after the 1950s saw the establishment of industrial towns and the emergence of a strong Left-leaning working class. Major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata witnessed a robust presence of the Left, which was reflected in their political strength. However, the capitalist production system underwent significant changes after the mid-1980s. The rise of fragmented production, a diminishing organised working class, and the corresponding growth of informal sector workers pushed the Left out of the political scene. Meanwhile, the Right maintained its presence through cultural interventions — a space largely neglected by the Left. Informal sector workers became fertile ground for identity politics based on caste and religion. Consequently, there has been a parallel rise of the Right and the decline of the Left in Indian cities. Another critical factor was the strong presence of the Left in rural India, driven by the ‘land reforms’ slogan and related movements. These were influential across the country for a long time. However, over the past few decades, newer classes within the peasantry have emerged and many of them have shifted towards the Right.

Beyond land reforms, the Left struggled to build sustainable layers of governance, except in West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala. It remained overly preoccupied with the imminence of a revolution and the idea of capturing state power. It sidelined all other essential matters. And the revolution never materialised. The national question is crucial for both the Left and the Right, though their approaches differ. For the Left, it involves uniting all democratic sections of society against external enemies, particularly imperialism. This was evident during the colonial period. However, in independent India, the narrative of a foreign enemy could not be

sustained as strongly due to obvious reasons. In contrast, for the Right, the national question is less about unity among the people and more about promoting the narrative of ‘Hindu nationalism’ against perceived ‘others’. During the independence movement, this narrative did not gain much traction, as Indian nationalism against British rule was able to mobilise larger sections of society. Over the last few decades, however, this second form of ‘nationalism’ has increasingly dominated the narrative and has become more and more pronounced with time. Another major element relates to the idea of modernism and the role of the Constitution. Undoubtedly, the Constitution is rooted in the finest modernist values of equity, secularism, socialism, and more. However, the nation-state remained influenced by feudal and semi-feudal values, which continue to shape its character. Unlike in the West where modernism evolved out of the defeat or destruction of class feudalism, which was preceded by the Renaissance, religious reformation and enlightenment, in India no worthwhile renaissance could take place. The religious reformation that took place in some parts of the country could not disintegrate the caste system which affected all Indian religions, and the Brahmanical enlightenment could not produce a new anti-caste equalitarian philosophy. India has a peculiar situation now, where the Constitution is far ahead of the polity and human values, which are still evolving. This gives fertile ground for the Right to make advances on both post-truth narratives and campaigns on religious and identity issues.

Leadership and organisational strategiesJyoti Basu, former Chief Minister of West Bengal, once spoke of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)’s “historic blunder”. He was referring to the party’s decision not to allow him to be the Prime Minister after the 1996 Lok Sabha polls threw up a hung Parliament. His remark warrants deeper reflection. The Left is still fixated on the revolution and is reluctant to embrace the multi-layered demands of electoral politics. If the Left is unwilling to take full responsibility, why should people trust them with their votes? This disconnect is evident in Kerala, where voters support the Left in Assembly elections



but turn to other parties in general elections. On the other hand, the Right maximises every electoral success to further its agenda. In every national and Assembly election over the last 10 years, it has been clear that the Right tries to ensure that no opportunity is left unutilised. This divergence also highlights the contrasting leadership styles of the Left and Right. The generation of Left leaders who built mass movements and endured state repression is nearly gone. Leaders such as H.K.S. Surjeet, who spent over a decade in jail, represent a fading legacy. Today’s Left

leadership often emerges from educational institutions — a natural progression — but lacks the experience of building movements on the ground. In China, the Communist Party believes in building cultural consciousness. Even Xi Jinping was sent to work in the farmland for years away from his university. But this is not the case in India. On the other hand, leaders of the Right spend time with their cadre and help build leadership. Before he became Prime Minister, when Narendra Modi was in charge of States, he would constantly spend time with the cadre and even stay in their homes.

How rage rooms are redefining anger and stress relief in India

After a grueling week at work, juggling demanding deadlines and personal challenges, Karnam Gupta, 29, a reputation manager, felt he was at his breaking point. “It was one of those times when you literally feel like breaking something,” he told indianexpress.com. On a friend’s recommendation, he booked a session at a rage room — a space designed to let people unleash frustrations by smashing objects to smithereens. As Gupta picked up a baseball bat and swung at a bottle, he felt a twinge of fear. But with each swing, the act became less about destruction and more about release, about reclaiming a sense of peace. “There was a point where I started to feel the stress lowering and my mind calming down,” he said. What Gupta experienced is a growing trend in India in 2024. Rage rooms—also called smash rooms—are emerging as an

unconventional outlet for anger and stress. The concept, already popular in countries like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Japan, has found its footing in India in recent years, particularly as conversations around mental health gained momentum. The idea is simple yet cathartic: don protective gear, choose from an array of breakable objects—from plates to electronic devices—and channel your anger, stress, or anxiety into smashing them, all in a controlled environment. Rage rooms stand out because they combine physical release with emotional catharsis, creating an experience that feels as much like therapy as entertainment. But can rage rooms offer a lasting solution, or are they just a fleeting urban fad? To understand more, indianexpress.com spoke to people who have used rage rooms, along with mental health experts and rage room business

owners. Personal experiencesFor some, like Arjun Tyagi, rage rooms provide an immediate and active form of stress relief. “Meditation or yoga requires time and patience, but I needed something more physical and instant,” said Tyagi, an account manager.

Will rage rooms become a lasting feature of India’s urban landscape, or will they fade as a fleeting fad? Will rage rooms become a lasting feature of India’s urban landscape, or will they fade as a fleeting fad? “The idea of breaking things in a controlled environment sounded unique and liberating,” he said. The moment he started breaking objects, Tyagi felt a wave of release. “Smashing things allowed me to physically vent emotions I didn’t even realise I was holding onto—stress, anger, and frustration. Afterward, I felt lighter, calmer, and surprisingly more clear-headed. It was like a weight had been lifted, even if only temporarily,” he said.

Francois Bayrou: Revolving door PM

The Prime Ministership of France, currently caught in a revolving door situation, has its fourth entrant of the year in Francois Bayrou. The 73-year-old centrist leader of the Democratic Movement (MoDem) party acceded to the role on December 12 after Michel Barnier was ousted in a no-confidence vote — the first since 1962. Mr. Barnier's stint had lasted three months. Gabriel Attal, who had fulfilled the duties before Mr. Barnier, served for nine months until September before his government was dissolved in June by President Emmanuel Macron, who sought a fresh mandate following the EU parliamentary polls. Elections to the 27-member bloc had delivered a shocker to the 46-year-old President whose party could not poll even half as many votes as Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally.

Mr. Bayrou calls the challenges ahead of him 'Himalayan'.

But the start of his tenure has belied the political acumen usually associated with a seasoned leader active since the 1980s. For when the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean was languishing in the aftermath of Cyclone Chido on December 14, the Prime Minister chose to fly off to attend a council meeting in Pau, a small city in South-western France, whose mayorship he retains. Not helping the administration's cause was visiting President Macron who lost his temper when taking stock. "If it wasn't for France, you'd be 10,000 times deeper in shit," the President was caught on camera saying and swearing when residents complained of water and other aid not reaching them despite it being the seventh day since the cyclone struck. While the official death toll stands at 31, thousands are feared dead in France's poorest territory. For Mr. Macron, Mr. Bayrou's appointment is not just a way of addressing the political instability precipitated by his reckless actions, but the two go back a long way. The MoDem leader, who had thrice run for President unsuccessfully in the past, stepped aside in 2017 and lent support to an emerging Mr. Macron. The debt may have been repaid by appointing Mr. Bayrou as Justice Minister the same year, but the fruits were short-lived as he had to step down over a party funding scandal in just over a month. It is reported that the President was mulling other candidates such as outgoing Armed Forces Minister Sébastien Lecornu and former Industry Minister Roland Lescure for the post of Prime Minister. However, Mr. Bayrou is believed to have strong-armed Mr. Macron into naming him to the position. Born to wealthy farmers in Borderes, Mr. Bayrou worked as a teacher of Greek and Latin before embarking on a political career in the 1980s. First elected to the National Assembly in 1986, he was Education Minister between 1993 and 1997 and went on to become a member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2002.

Presidential bids Mr. Bayrou's first shot for President came in 2002 but proved futile. He ran again in 2007 by presenting himself as the third way between the Left and the Right, with the campaign earning him the moniker of the 'third man' of French politics. Despite tripling his vote share to 18.6% compared to the previous time, Mr. Bayrou wound up third in an election that was ultimately won by the Republican Party's Nicolas Sarkozy. Mr. Bayrou contested once more unsuccessfully in 2012. A fallout with Mr. Sarkozy notwithstanding, Mr.

Bayrou is pally with far-right's Ms. Le Pen, whom the MoDem leader helped garner sponsors to run for President. The fact that he also lent support to Socialist candidates Francois Hollande and Ségolène Royal in the past makes him palatable to the Left too. However, the snap polls called Mr. Macron to arrest the surge of the far-right saw the leftwing securing a maximum number of 182 seats, while falling short of the 289 majority in the 577-strong National Assembly. Mr. Macron's Ensemble came second with 168 seats while Le Pen's National Rally came close with 143. This has spawned a National Assembly where none of the blocs have a majority. Mr. Bayrou overcame a stutter in his childhood to scale the heights of politics. The Centrist leader's challenge now lies in tackling a parliament whose composition leaves him with little teeth to present a Budget that can address France's ballooning economic woes.



Are militants in Manipur using Starlink satellite internet? | Explained

The story so far: Billionaire Elon Musk has denied claims that his space company SpaceX's satellite internet technology Starlink is being used by militants in Manipur. This came after the Indian Army and police seized weapons and what looked like a Starlink-branded satellite router and antenna. Starlink is still pending regulatory approval in India, though it will be starting in neighbouring Bangladesh and Bhutan in 2025. However, the discovery of the Starlink devices in Manipur raises questions about whether or not militants and other non-state actors can bypass geographic restrictions on the Starlink technology.

What is Starlink and how does it work?

Starlink uses an extensive low Earth orbit satellite constellation to deliver broadband internet that has high speeds and low latency. This means that rather than restricting users to essential or emergency functions, they can also stream content, play games online, make video calls, or carry out other high data rate activities, per the company. It is a popular choice for users worldwide in remote areas, sea vessels, disaster-struck regions, or places where oppressive regimes have throttled access to more mainstream internet services. There are thousands of satellites in the Starlink system, and they orbit Earth at around 550 km. Though they cover the entire globe, per SpaceX, the company is not authorised to provide its services to users in some regions. "Additionally, if a vessel strays into the waters of a country which prohibits Starlink from operating within it, our satellites will be unable to communicate with it effectively," said Starlink on its website.

What is the controversy surrounding Starlink?

The Spear Corps of the Indian army on December 16 shared photos on Elon Musk-owned X of guns, ammunition, and country-made mortars that Indian army and police units had seized in Manipur. X users spotted a small satellite device and router, with the latter bearing the SpaceX logo. In response to an X user who claimed that Musk's technology was being used by terrorists, the bil-

lionaire replied, "This is false. Starlink satellite beams are turned off over India." The Starlink device also had "RPF/PLA" written on it, which refers to a Myanmar-based Meitei extremist group that is banned in India. Per Starlink's website and coverage map, the service date for Myanmar is unknown. However, this is not the first time SpaceX has become embroiled in controversy in India. Last month, smugglers originating from Myanmar were caught by the Andaman and Nicobar islands police with over 6,000 kg of meth and a Starlink device that was allegedly used for navigation and communication, despite service being prohibited in Indian waters. Furthermore, in August this year, Starlink equipment was seen being sold on the B2B platform IndiaMART.

Can Starlink satellite internet be controlled or intercepted?

International borders are not solid and it is not easy to refine satellite internet coverage to such a precise degree that service is activated or halted exactly in line with a nation's border. An additional complication is that many international borders are contested or unclear, while satellites moving above them are continuously transmitting encrypted signals. This encryption stops satellites from being hacked by militants or other malicious actors trying to intercept the service. The key question is whether militants in Manipur can effectively use Starlink satellite internet within India. "If these [Starlink] boxes have been purchased from outside of India, by whatever means, they can be used because then, that box is authorised. The only thing is, do they have a position location feature? In that case, yes, if you buy a [Starlink] terminal in the U.S. and bring it to India, because of the geographical location change, it might not work. But that is provided the terminal has a built-in geographic location identifier," theorised former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) engineer, Arup Dasgupta.

Starlink supports VPNs that use TCP or UDP, per the company website, though this can affect the app's performance. So, can users buy foreign Starlink terminals and

then use VPN services in order to access satellite internet in India?

"It depends on the internals of the Starlink hardware," Dasgupta explained. To help visualise how Starlink stops users in prohibited regions from accessing its satellite internet, Dasgupta used the analogy of a set-top box that does not let TV watchers access some channels while others who have access can watch these channels. Musk in February this year also strongly trashed news reports claiming that Starlink devices were being sold to Russia, and later explained on X that Starlink satellites would not close the link in Russia. However, this did not allay concerns of Starlink being used by the Russian military in occupied regions of Ukraine.

With regards to seized Starlink devices, Dasgupta pointed out that by tracking the unique identification code of the Starlink terminal, it might be possible to find the buyer. However, this too could prove difficult due to dummy organisations or shadow companies obfuscating the trail of likely illegal buyers. In essence, more information is needed from SpaceX and Musk to understand how the company ensures that Starlink satellite internet does not reach the countries yet to allow Starlink, while enabling service for neighbouring countries or waters that do allow Starlink service. The Hindu was also able to download the Starlink app from the Google Play Store in India and go through the set-up process up to the point a plugged-in Starlink device was needed. The app may collect users' approximate and precise locations for functionality reasons but these are optional, per the app's profile. This is in stark contrast to banned apps like TikTok, which are unavailable on the app store.

How are militants in Manipur using Starlink?

This is not yet known, as more information is needed both from Musk's SpaceX as well as the Indian authorities. Musk has said that satellite beams for India were never on in the first place, but there are questions about the cross-border use of Starlink devices over land, sea, and air.

Syrian Democratic Forces: Rebels with a cause

When civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, one of the first things Bashar al-Assad's regime did was to pull back troops from the country's north-east so that they could defend the heartland against militias. This gave an opportunity to Syria's Kurds, the country's largest ethnic minority who make up some 10% of its population, to establish a de facto autonomous government in the region. In 2012, they established the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, also known as Rojava. In late 2015, the new administration formally established an armed wing called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In the subsequent years, the SDF would emerge as a highly effective ground force in the war against the Islamic State (IS) in the region. After Mr. Assad crushed most of his enemies by 2016-17, with help from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, his government entered into a detente with the Rojava. The SDF did not directly challenge Mr. Assad's authority. Mr. Assad's regime did not recognise the autonomous government, but stopped short of attacking the SDF. There was tense stability.

Mr. Assad's government collapsed on December 8. The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly al-Qaeda's Syria branch, has now captured Damascus. The HTS is backed by Türkiye, which sees the SDF as a terrorist entity. The Kurds are now caught between a pro-Turkish Islamist group that's in power in Damascus and a hostile Türkiye across the border. Kurds are often referred to as "a people without a state". They are divided among four countries — Türkiye, Iraq, Syria and Iran. In Iraq, they have enjoyed autonomy ever since the first Gulf war. In Türkiye, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been fighting a bloody civil war against the state for decades. When the Syrian Kurds established their own autonomous government and militia, Türkiye got alarmed because it thought the empowerment of Syrian Kurds would invariably strengthen the Turkish Kurds. The main political party among Syrian Kurds was the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The People's Protection Units (YPG) was its armed wing. Türkiye considered both the PYD and the YPG as extended arms of the PKK and designated all of them as terrorist organisations.

The YPG assumed regional prominence when the Islamic State, which seized eastern Syria's Raqqa and Deir Ezour, turned to Kobane, a Kurdish town on the Turkish-Syrian border. The YPG, backed by U.S. air power, defeated the IS in Kobane in 2015, which marked the beginning of the downfall of the IS's 'Caliphate', established across Syria and Iraq. Türkiye, a NATO ally of the U.S., strongly opposed America's support for the YPG. Later in 2015, the SDF was created, with the YPG being its core. Other smaller Arab militias, who were also threatened by the IS, also signed up for the SDF. Ever since, the SDF has acted as the official military wing of the Rojava. In its battle against the Islamic State, the SDF continued to get support from the U.S. America still has less than 1,000 troops in Syria, in the name of fighting terrorism, and they co-ordinate with the SDF. In 2018 and 2019, Türkiye carried out limited military incursions



into Syria, aimed at capturing SDF-held territories and creating a buffer on the border. Tensions flared up recently when the HTS-led Islamist militants were advancing towards Damascus. The Syrian National Army (SNA), a Turkish proxy and an ally of the HTS, attacked the SDF in the border region and captured more territories. As Syria changes, the SDF's focus is on protecting Kurdish autonomy. Abu Mohammed al-

Jolani, Syria's new ruler, has promised to respect the country's diversity but said nothing about Kurdish autonomy. Türkiye, whose hands have been strengthened by the fall of Mr. Assad's regime, has demanded demobilising the SDF. Türkiye has also mobilised troops along its border, triggering fears that it was planning to launch another incursion. The SDF, caught between an uncertain future and a challenging present,

says the threat from Türkiye is weakening its counter-terror operations. "The danger of an Islamic State resurgence has doubled ever since Assad has fallen," says General Mazloum Abdi, an SDF commander who led battles against the jihadists in the past. "Daesh (IS) has captured weapons from re-treating Syrian government troops in recent weeks. Their activity has increased significantly," he adds.

Ways to make our roads accident free

The tragic incident in Bengaluru, where a container truck lost balance and fell atop a car (a brand that is arguably the safest in the world), crushing it and killing its occupants highlight three reasons why India has among the most unsafe roads in the world. It is a problem that has left the minister in charge of road transport and highways, Nitin Gadkari, hiding his face in international conferences (as he recently admitted).

The first reason is design. Most Indian roads are poorly designed. They ignore the realities of Indian traffic — its diverse nature as well the road sense, or lack of it, of people. The second is the complete flouting of rules by most commercial traffic — trucks ply on roads they are not meant to ply on, at all times of day and night, carrying weights they are not meant to bear, and are usually driven by people who are not trained adequately. Modern highways increase the speed at which these trucks travel, further multiplying the risks.

The third is the absence of adequate



monitoring. Many transport and police departments exhibit a rentier mindset, or are strapped in terms of people and resources. Their acts of omission and commission mean that crimes, big and small, are a com-

mon occurrence across Indian roads. Not all (fortunately) result in accidents, but no self-respecting country would want the safe movement of goods and people to become a game of chance.

Justice, Constitution align with more women on the bench: Justice BV Nagarathna

Justice BV Nagarathna spoke candidly on a range of issues, reflecting on the enduring legacy of her father, justice ES Venkataramiah, and sharing her thoughts on her impending tenure as the first woman Chief Justice of India. In a conversation with Utkarsh Anand, justice Nagarathna delved into her judicial philosophy, the evolving role of women in the judiciary and the challenges faced by the justice system today. Your impending tenure as the first woman Chief Justice of India is a historic milestone. How do you think your father's perspective on women in leadership might align with the strides you have made in breaking the glass ceiling? As far as I am concerned, it is important for me to focus on how I reach that milestone rather than the milestone itself because one has to work for everything, and nothing comes free. How I am perceived in these years as a judge -- the kind of work I do, the dedication I exhibit -- is more important to me than simply attaining that position, however short it may be. My father's life is a lesson for me, even though he passed away in 1997. I think of him every day -- both my parents. In moments of doubt, I always ask myself what my father would have done in the situation, and that becomes an important consideration for me.

With the distinction of being part of one of only two father-child duos to reach the position of Chief Justice of India, how do you reflect on this unique legacy, and what does it mean to you personally and professionally?

For me, it's a privilege to have been born to Justice Venkataramiah, who was already a senior lawyer when I was born. I am very humbled by the legacy. This legacy keeps me going because I must uphold the standards he set. It's all positive -- nothing negative about it.

Your father held significant roles in Karnataka before ascending to the Supreme Court. In light of his leadership in the judiciary, how do you think he would have viewed the growing presence of women in the legal profession and the judiciary today? Are there any areas of concern?

There is no area of concern, and it is a welcome change. My father appointed the first woman judge, justice Fathima Beevi, to the Supreme Court during his tenure as the CJI in 1989. Since then, women judges have proved themselves exceptionally well. There can be no doubt about women in the judiciary. I always say that women in the judiciary are not just auxiliary; they are central. Justice and adjudication truly align with the Constitution when more women are on the bench because they bring fresh perspectives.

How would you describe the judicial philosophy your father embodied during his tenure as Chief Justice of India? Do you see a continuity or a significant shift in judicial approaches since his time?

I think there has been a change with continuity. My father was deeply entrenched in the values of the Preamble and the Constitution. He believed in using the Constitution to render justice to the citizens and innovating its provisions for the betterment of society. He saw the Constitution as a living tree, a dynamic, organic entity that must adapt to changing times. While we cannot

stray from our foundations, there must always be an interpretation that aligns with the evolving needs of society.

Justice Venkataramiah was part of benches that delivered over 700 judgments. What lessons can be drawn from his work ethic and commitment, particularly as the judiciary faces an increasing case backlog today?

Pendency is a relative subject because the moment you file a case today, it becomes pending tomorrow. With a trebling population, litigation has naturally increased, leading to a flooded docket. However, this reflects the public's faith in the judiciary. The challenge lies in navigating pendency with effective strategies to reduce it. Every Chief Justice, whether of a High Court or the Supreme Court, has sought to address this. Pendency should not be seen negatively; it represents trust in the system.

As someone who has witnessed the judiciary from the perspective of a daughter, an advocate, and now a judge, how do you compare the challenges faced by judges in your father's era to those faced by the judiciary today?



ciary today?

Challenges have always existed, but they evolve with each decade. The nature of litigation has changed; we no longer see the same kinds of cases we had in the 50s, 80s, or 90s. Today, Public Interest Litigation (PIL) is a significant challenge. While PIL was ini-

tially a boon for Indian citizens, it has also been misused. Courts now carefully discern which cases to entertain. It is crucial to focus on challenges and adopt a balanced approach, considering both the system's perspective and that of justice-seekers outside it.

A chance to strike gold during the Kuwait visit

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is set to visit Kuwait on December 21-22. The visit will be the first by an Indian Prime Minister in 43 years, the last being the visit by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1981. Mr. Modi was scheduled to visit Kuwait in January 2022, but the visit was postponed due to concerns about COVID-19. The visit holds great significance not only for the bilateral ties but also the region, which is going through a very difficult phase of conflict and transition. Mr. Modi has visited all the other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) over the past 10 years, some more than once, and not having visited Kuwait was seen as a gap in India's West Asia engagement. This visit aims to not only plug this gap but also give a boost to the rather stagnant ties between the two countries which, otherwise, have much potential for a strong engagement. A country with strategic significance. Why is Kuwait important? Despite being one of the smallest countries in the region, it holds significant strategic importance. Located at the north-east end of the Persian Gulf, it shares borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia and hosts important American military bases. It is the only monarchy in the region which has experimented successfully with democracy. On regional issues, it has generally maintained a neutral stance and has often been the interlocutor in resolving disputes. Its wealth is owed primarily to its vast oil reserves, which are sixth-largest globally. It is also one of the founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). It also has one of the largest basket sovereign wealth funds. These funds, managed by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), have grown at an impressive rate and are currently esti-



mated to be \$924 billion (in March 2024), the fourth largest in the world after Norway, China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Untapped potential, existing links

India and Kuwait have always enjoyed friendly ties, built on a strong foundation of history and cultural bonds. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait following its independence from the British Protectorate in 1961. In fact, the Indian rupee was a legal tender in Kuwait till 1961. Trade and people-to-people ties have traditionally been the main anchors of the bilateral ties. India has consistently been among the top trading partners of Kuwait, with the total bilateral trade with Kuwait during FY 2023-24 being \$ 10.47 billion. During FY 2023-24, Kuwait was the sixth largest crude supplier catering to about 3.0 % of India's total energy needs. The KIA has invested indirectly in India with estimated investments of more than US\$10 billion. During

the COVID-19 pandemic too, India and Kuwait demonstrated a strong sense of brotherhood. India provided two lakh vaccine doses. During the second wave of COVID-19 in May 2021, Kuwait provided 282 oxygen cylinders, 60 oxygen concentrators, ventilators and many other medical supplies to India. People-to-people ties form the other firm anchor. Out of a population of almost 4.9 million, around 1 million Indians not only form the largest expatriate group in Kuwait but are also among the most trusted. As a special gesture, a 'Festival of India' was organised in Kuwait in March 2023. A weekly Hindi radio programme, 'Namaste Kuwait' has been started by Kuwait National Radio since April 2024. And, 26 schools in Kuwait with over 60,000 students, follow the Central Board of Secondary Education curriculum of India. When tragedy struck on June 12, in the form of a fire in a residential building in Kuwait killing over 40 Indians.