INDIAN CHRONICLE City

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Hyderabad doctor targeted in 'digital arrest' fraud attempt

Hyderabad: A senior doctor from the city narrowly escaped falling victim to a 'digital arrest' fraud attempt after cyber crooks allegedly posing as police officers, tried to intimidate him through a video call.

The Hyderabad Cybercrime Wing has released an awareness video based on the incident to caution the public.

According to Cybercrime officials, the doctor had received a video call from an individual impersonating a police officer. The fraudster claimed that the doctor was a suspect in a criminal case and instructed him not to inform anyone, pressuring him into compliance.

When the doctor stopped responding to calls, his assistant grew suspicious and alerted the family, who immediately contacted the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB).

Quick coordination with local cybercrime officials ensured no financial loss was incurred.

Police have warned citizens not to panic if they receive such calls and not send money or OTPs and not follow instructions from unknown callers claiming to be police or government authorities.

Victims or those receiving suspicious calls can immediately contact 1930 or file a complaint at cybercrime.gov.in.

Telangana High Court stays local body poll in Mahabubpatnam

Hyderabad: Justice T Madhavi Devi of the Telangana High Court on Thursday stayed the panchayat election process in Mahabubpatnam village of Mahabubabad district, after serious concerns were raised over the reservation pattern notified for Sarpanch and ward posts.

A writ petition via a lunch motion was moved by villagers Mittagudupula Yakub, Kasoju Srikanthachary, Siluveru Lingaiah, Polu Nagaiah, Vijay, Venkatamallu and others, questioning how the authorities could reserve the Sarpanch post and three ward seats for the ST community when the village has only seven ST voters, all belonging to three families.

During the hearing, Justice Madhavi Devi took exception to the State's approach. The court asked how four posts could be allotted to the ST category in a village where the ST population is so small. It questioned the State if all ST voters fall in one ward, how will the remaining ward members be elected, and how will the representation of other communities be ensured?

Special Government Pleader Rahul Reddy, appearing for the State, maintained that the reservations were made strictly in line with the rotation roster. He argued that reservations are not based on present voter numbers and that the authorities had followed the mandated rotational cycle.

The petitioners pointed out that after the earlier reorganisation by the previous government, Mahabubpatnam Gram Panchayat had 576 voters, comprising 199 SCs, 358 BCs, 13 OCs and 7 STs. Despite this, based on 2011 Census data, the authorities this time allotted the Sarpanch post and three ward positions to the ST category. The villagers told the court that the seven ST voters are from two closely related families, making the reservation pattern impractical and unfair.

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After hearing the submissions, the court observed that the reservation process in this instance required closer scrutiny. Finding a prima facie imbalance in the application of the roster, Justice Madhavi Devi stayed the election process for Mahabubpatnam.

Obesity among children peaks in India

Hyderabad: For a long time, public health specialists have focused on malnutrition among children. However, it turns out that in modern times, children in urban as well as rural India have unchecked and unregulated access to fast food and ultra-processed food items.Due to unbridled access to junk food, childhood obesity among children has now become a major challenge for parents, public health specialists and policy experts.In 2022, nearly 1.25 crore children in India (5 to 19 years) were overweight while in 1990, it was 4 lakh. Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) in 2016-18 indicated that 2.1 percent of children (5 to 9 years) and 2.4 percent adolescents (10-19 years) are already obese and 8.5 percent of children and 6.2 percent of adolescents were overweight.

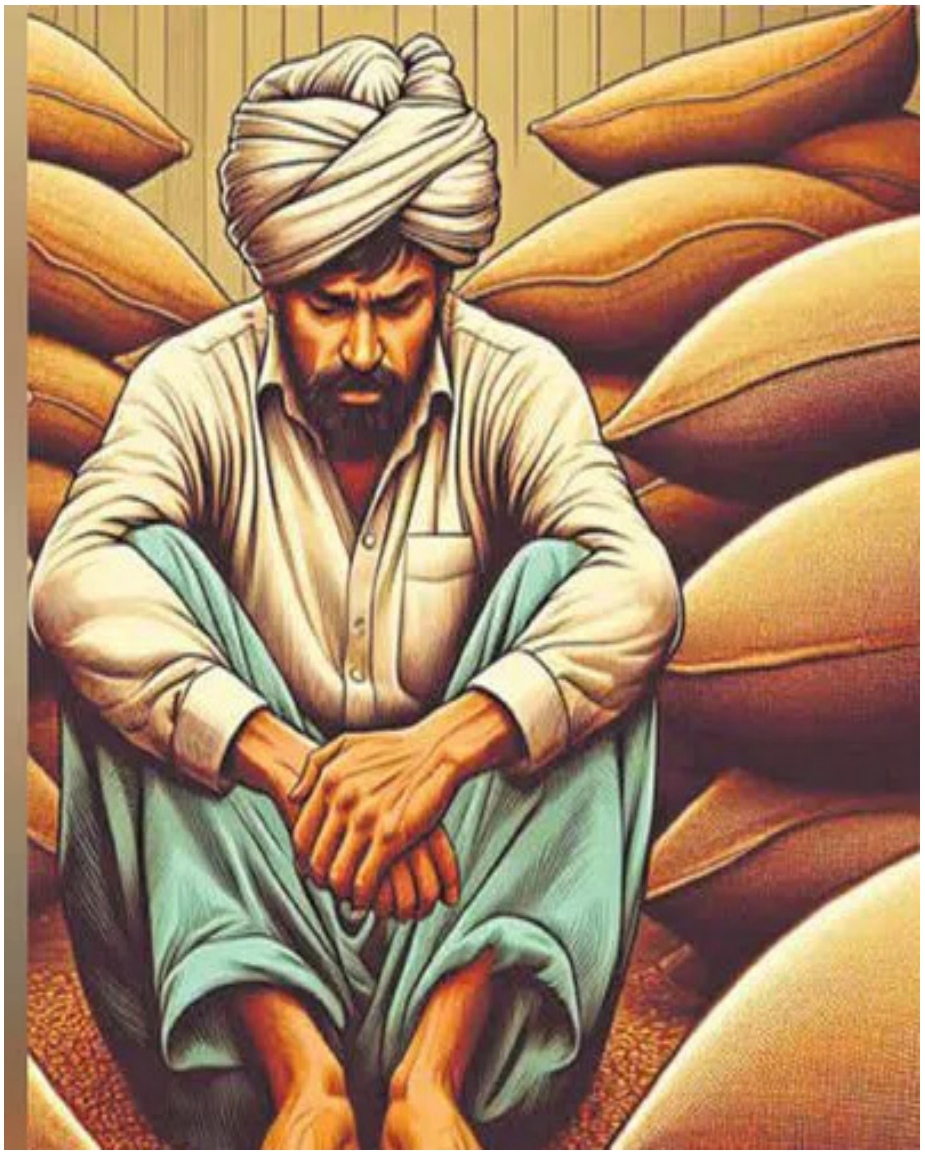
About a year ago, Hyderabad-based Asian Institute of Gastroenterology (AIG), conducted an outreach program, which indicated that children are increasingly consuming fast food and ultra-processed food items. This alarming trend is not just confined to urban cities, even children in rural areas have free access to ultra-processed food items."The habit of consuming fast food, especially in children, causes a number of health issues, including inflammation and an increased risk of developing insulin resistance due to elevated Body Mass Index (BMI). Insulin resistance at a young age sets the stage for a lifetime of metabolic disorders, including type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease," says Dr Nageshwar Reddy, founder AIG Hospitals.In addition to children, the prevalence of obesity among adults in Telangana has also reached alarming levels, recent population-based study by researchers from Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) indicated.

The study reported that 47.7 percent of people in Telangana and 46.7 percent of people in AP were obese, which is a clear indication of the heavy burden of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, hypertension etc, among general population.PM's Mann ki Baat to address obesity

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign to address obesity during Mann Ki

Baat has attracted support from celebrities, influencers, public health specialists, eminent personalities, doctors, sports persons and from all walks of life.On multiple social media outlets, especially X (formerly Twitter), physicians have attempted to engage with youth, in order to address childhood obesity.While celebrities and influencers are tagging each other to take the message of fighting obesity forward, physicians on their part have started holding awareness meetings and utilizing their own reach on social media to talk about obesity.Noted physicians including Dr Nageshwar Reddy from AIG, senior management of Apollo Hospitals, Dr Devi Shetty from Karnataka, and many more are frequently touching upon the issue of obesity.

Farmer tries to end life as bankers threaten auction over 27-year-old loan



Nalgonda: Even agricultural cooperative societies, which are expected to support farmers by fulfilling their credit needs, are now adding to their despair, with one such society, pressured to meet recovery targets, acted ruthlessly and pushed a farmer to the brink.Venkanna, a physically challenged farmer, recently attempted suicide due to harassment by bank officials demanding repayment of a loan, which he claimed to have already repaid. Venkanna's father had taken a loan of Rs 40,000 from Edavelli Primary Cooperative Bank 27 years ago. At the time of partitioning family properties, Venkanna claimed to have cleared his father's loan borrowed against their four acres of land, but he failed to obtain a no dues certificate. Now, the bankers demand Rs 1.68 lakh with interest and have threatened to auction the property.Distressed by the bank's harassment, Venkanna consumed pesticide in a desperate attempt to escape his predicament. He is currently battling for his life at the Nalgonda Government Hospital.Four years ago, Venkanna and his wife Rani had availed an agriculture loan of Rs 1.90 lakh from the same bank for agricultural needs. Recently, cooperative bank officials marked their land placing red flags in a symbolic takeover of possession.

They claimed that the land now belonged to society and threatened to auction it if the loan, along with interest, was not repaid by March 19.This also added to his predicament, forcing Venkanna to attempt ending his life.

Inter officials get notices for transporting question papers in three-wheeler

Hyderabad: Instead of a car, they moved the intermediate examination material in an auto and ended up being slapped with a show cause notice.In Jagtial district, 20 officials – 10 chief superintendents and another 10 departmental officers – were found to have transported questions papers from the strong room to examination centres in a three-wheeler instead of the mandated four-wheeler. This incident happened on the first day of the intermediate examination on Wednesday.Now, the higher-ups have taken a serious view of the deviation from the prescribed transport mode for the examination material, and served notices to the officials involved.The notices were issued by Intermediate Education District Examination Committee convenor and District Collector B Satya Prasad and the officials were instructed to submit their explanation within one day, failing which action would be initiated based on the material available on the record.

NAAC accreditation: Addressing irregularities and implementing reforms for better quality education

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994 to systematically assess and accredit the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in India, with the objective of quality assurance and improvement in the quality of education. Over the years, the NAAC rating has acquired a lot of significance, as it determines the eligibility for government funding, grants and academic autonomy such as approval for online programmes.In the absence of any other credible independent assessment body in India, parents and students rely on the NAAC rating for choosing the institution for studies. Moreover, many recruiting companies consider it as a benchmark for assessing the quality of the institution. This places pressure on the institutions to secure good NAAC rating.In the last 30 years, the NAAC accreditation system has undergone several revisions to address emerging challenges, incorporate global best practices, and enhance the credibility of the accreditation process. However, in the recent past, it has been mired in controversies and allegations of corruption, thereby denting its credibility and image. This article examines the issues and the reformative measures, proposed by the NAAC to remedy the situation and enhance the credibility of its ratings.Current assessment framework

As per the NAAC assessment framework that was launched in July 2017, which is in vogue today, a Self Study Report (SSR) is to be submitted online at NAAC portal, along with supporting documents, covering seven criteria. These are Curricular Aspects, Teaching-Learning and Evaluation, Research, Innovations and extension, Infrastructure and Learning Resources, Student Support and Progression, Governance, Leadership and Management and Institutional Values and Best Practices).Seventy percent of the total score is a System Generated Score (SGS) that is based on evaluation of the quantitative metrics through a Data Validation and Verification (DVV) process by an independent agency. Clarifications are sought wherever needed. The balance 30% of the score is obtained based on an assessment of the qualitative metrics by the Peer Review Team at the institution and the Student Satisfaction Survey score. On the basis of the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), secured by the institution, the final grade is assigned on a seven point scale from A++ to C. Grade "D" connotes non-accreditation.

Low participation of institutionsAs per the NAAC website, as of Feb. 23 2025, 491 universities and 8,226 colleges had been rated, which constitutes about 41% of the universities and 19% of the colleges. NEP 2020 envisages that by 2035, all the institutions should be accredited.It was found that a number of institutions have not been participating, for fear of securing a poor rating. Besides, most of the colleges lack adequate personnel, well trained in rating preparation. Accreditation participation rates vary significantly across the regions, with the southern states having higher participation compared to northern, eastern and north-eastern regions.

Remedial measures by NAACThe NAAC introduced a Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) to simplify the process and focus on outcome-based metrics. It also introduced digital platforms for data submission and IT systems to streamline the processes, including the allocation of peer assessors. Training programmes were conducted for assessors and institutional coordinators to improve the quality of evaluations. The NAAC has increased its outreach to institutions, particularly in underserved regions, to encourage participation. Besides, it also launched a mentoring system, wherein the best performing institutions serve as mentors to the aspiring institutions.Allegations of irregularities Despite the above measures, allegations of subjectivity and bias in the grading process have been raised by some institutions claiming unfair evaluations. Many say the assessment process lacks transparency, particularly about the peer review mechanism. Instances of institutions submitting falsified or inflated data to secure higher grades have been reported.

After studying the NAAC peer team assessment reports, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), in March 2023, was reported to have pointed out glaring discrepancies in 29% of the 133 test checked cases, wherein a significant mismatch between the observations and the awarded scores was observed.The ICT audit conducted by a committee constituted by the Chairman, NAAC in September 2022 found that the IT system for allocation of assessors was compromised and assessors were allocated arbitrarily. During the recent CBI investigation into the irregularities in the case of a private university, it was reported that the list of inspection team members was "re-generated" by the system, confirming the earlier finding.A review of aberrations (grade jump of over 2 grades between two consecutive cycles) of about 400 institutions by the NAAC during July- Aug 2023 was reported to have resulted in downgrading the grades of about 50% of the institutions after the review. In Jan. 2024, the NAAC was reported to have put the grading process of 30 Institutions on hold due to grade inflation, wherein an inexplicable jump of five grades was noticed in a few cases between two successive review cycles. Re-Data Validation and Verification (DVV) by a new committee was reported to have led to the reduction of grades for some of the institutions.As a follow up on the tip-off from the recent CBI investigations on corruption, the NAAC is reported to have removed 900 assessors, constituting about 20% of the empanelled ones, from the peer review panel. Besides, the NAAC seems to be re-examining the assessment reports of the institutions that requested re-evaluation of the grades.All the above developments point to the erosion of moral values that form the foundation in a quality assessment system. Besides, they are likely to affect the morale of the right minded employees of the NAAC, as an organisation. More importantly, the image of the NAAC and the credibility of its ratings have been dented.Overarching committee for reforms in accreditationIn order to address the alleged and observed irregularities, an Overarching Committee was constituted by the Ministry of Education, Government of

India, in November 2022, under the Chairmanship oDr K Radhakrishnan, former Chairman of ISRO . After studying the prevailing system, various reports on the alleged irregularities and the global rating systems , the committee proposed reforms, aligned with the vision of NEP 2020. These include adoption of a simple, trust-based, data-driven and rationalised system for accreditation.To encourage more participation from unrated institutions, it recommended an adapted Binary Accreditation System, which is in line with the best global practices. In this system, status is announced as "Accredited" or "Provisionally accredited" (applied but not yet accredited) or "Not accredited" (not applied). Institutions can later move up to Maturity-Based Graded Accreditation (Level 1 to 5), as and when they are ready.

In view of the heterogeneity of the institutions, it is proposed to categorise them, based on their orientation/vision and heritage/legacy, and then seek information, that is appropriate for the category. A framework of 10 attributes, covering input, process, outcomes, and impact has been suggested.

In order avoid duplication of efforts in data collection, a mechanism has been proposed to collect a superset of data from the HEIs, to serve multiple purposes, with an in-built design for collateral cross-checking to check authenticity of data. It is proposed to conduct the assessment with minimal peer review visits, which was the primary source of controversies. The committee submitted its report in January 2024 and the same was accepted by the Government of India.Progress in implementation of the proposed systemThe NAAC, in its meeting held on Jan. 27 2024, decided that the recommended reforms shall be implemented comprehensively before Dec. 2024, in two stages. In the first stage, the Binary Accreditation is to be implemented by May 2024 and no new applications will be accepted as per the earlier RAF methodology thereafter. The Maturity Based Graded levels (MBGL) were slated to be implemented by December 2024. As per the NAAC notification of 29 June 2024, it was stated that HEIs with valid accreditation as per the present RAF, whose validity expires between July 1 2024 and date of launch of Maturity Based Graded Levels (MBGL), shall be extended for a maximum period of three months after the launch of the MBGL. HEIs that are already accredited may apply for Maturity Based Graded Level, before validity expires, once the MBGL is announced. HEIs whose Institutional Information for Quality Assessment or SSR applications are under RAF may opt for binary accreditation or may decide to go ahead under the current RAF. Meanwhile, the NAAC conducted regional consultation workshops with stakeholders in five regions and prepared manuals for different disciplines.After a gap of over seven months, the NAAC issued a notification on Feb. 10 2025, as per which, it is proposed to launch the Basic (Binary) Accreditation in April-May 2025, followed by the Maturity-Based Graded Levels (MBGL). However, details of the Basic Accreditation Framework and procedure have not yet been hosted on the NAAC website. The dates for launch of the MBGL have not been announced either.

Lack of clarityThough a lot of preparatory work seems to have been done by the NAAC to implement the new reformatory system, for some reason, documents like the details of Binary Accreditation Framework, procedures, manuals and so on have not yet been placed on the NAAC website. Though it has been over a year since the decision was taken to implement the new system in toto by Dec 2024, even the first phase of implementation is yet to be started.Those institutions interested to apply for the new Binary System have been waiting for over a year. It is not yet clear as to when the NAAC will be ready to start the second phase of implementation of MBGL.. Until the MBGL is implemented, HEIs that are already accredited under RAF cannot shift to the new system. It will necessitate simultaneous operation of both the systems, which may be cumbersome for the NAAC.

It is also not clear how the NAAC will collect the data and validate it, without peer visits, which is the most critical part of the reform. Likewise, NAAC plans for data collection and validation using One Nation One Data (ONOD) Platform, so as to ensure integrity of the data, are also not yet clear.Meanwhile, recent press reports of last minute cancellation of earlier scheduled peer team visits to some colleges, as a part of an earlier system and plans to conduct verification totally online, were disappointing to the concerned colleges, as they had completed all the preparations for the visits and the procedure for online verification has not

Coal power is costing India up to 10% of its rice and wheat crops

According to new research led by researchers at Stanford University in the US, coal-fired power plants are quietly depleting India's rice and wheat output, destroying up to 10% of the yield in several states.The emissions from coal power plants include carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, fly ash, soot, suspended particulate matter, and other trace gases. These pollutants have been linked to smog, acid rain, eutrophication and various other environmental burdens.An elusive linkIn the new study, PhD student Kirat Singh and his colleagues turned the spotlight on the less explored consequences of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) on crop productivity.The nitrogen oxides in general are an established side effect of India's coal dependence. They are phytotoxic, meaning they stress plants, and have been known to hinder cellular function and interfere with crucial enzymatic activities. The oxides also contribute to the formation of ozone, which in turn exacerbates crop damage and produces particulate matter that limits the amount of sunlight available for photosynthesis."We know that coal-fired power plants contribute significantly to air pollution," Singh said. "And we also know from past studies that various pollutants, including NO2, can negatively impact crop growth. But there hadn't been a study linking the two in a systematic way at the power-plant level, particularly in India."Tracking plant healthTo compensate for the lack of ground monitoring stations in agricultural areas, the researchers used data from satellite images to glean high-resolution insights into NO2 concentration across India. Since multiple power plants contribute to NO2 pollution across different distances, the researchers summed up all coal-attributable NO2 emissions reaching each location instead of isolating individual sources. This approach gave them a comprehensive picture of the amount of pollution to which agricultural regions were exposed.

Then, to estimate how NO2 from coal-fired power plants affected crop yield, the researchers turned to a satellite-derived vegetation index. They used a physical signal called near-infrared reflectance of vegetation (NIRv) as a proxy for plant health. NIRv measures greenness. Healthy crops are richer in chlorophyll, which can't be detected by visible light but is sensitive to near-infrared light. So a higher percentage of near-infrared light is reflected by leaves in healthy plants.Using pre-established coefficients, the researchers could link NO2 levels, measured by the TROPOMI satellite, to changes in NIRv. They used India-specific coefficients of 0.0006 for monsoon rice and 0.0007 for winter wheat. For every 1 mol/m2 increase in NO2, for example, the corresponding drop in NIRv was 0.0006 and 0.0007, respectively.Prior research has already shown a linear relationship between NIRv and crop yield, allowing the researchers to directly estimate how much yield was lost due to pollution. They set a baseline NIRv of 0.007, representing zero crop growth, and calculated the percentage decrease in yield based on pollution-driven declines in greenness. This method helped them quantify the agricultural damage wrought by NO2 without requiring physical field measurements.Blowin' in the windThey also analysed wind patterns to differentiate between pollution from coal plants from that from other industrial and environmental sources. This step helped the team unravel major differences in the effects of coal pollution across States.

For example, Chhattisgarh, a major hub for coal-fired power, had the highest share of NO2 pollution from coal plants: about 19% of NO2 detected in the monsoon season and 12.5% in winter came from coal plants.Surprisingly, Uttar Pradesh had high overall NO2 levels but only a small portion of that came from coal power, while Tamil Nadu had relatively low NO2 pollution but the bulk of it came from coal power.Coal's contribution to air pollution thus varied by region. Not all power plants have the same impact: those located near fertile farmland with a high emissions exposure caused the most agricultural damage, Singh said.

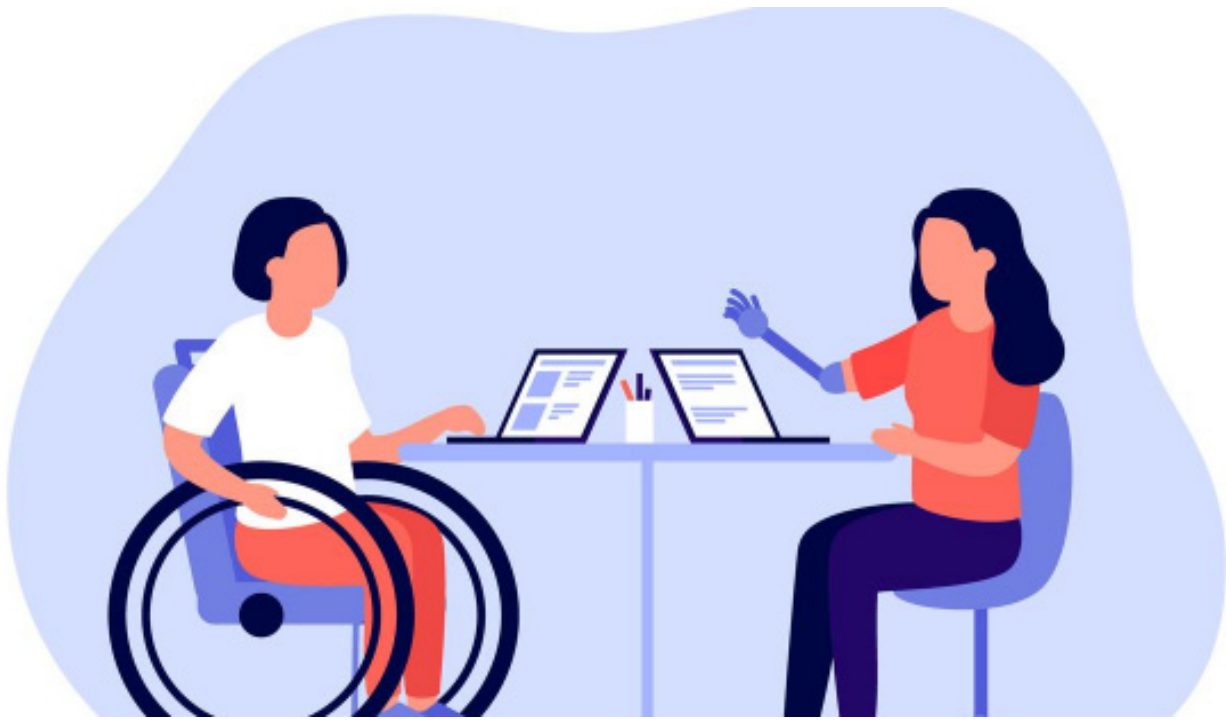
An overlooked lossCrop damage intensity — measured as monetised loss per gigawatt-hour (GWh) of electricity generated — for wheat and rice touched up to $17,370/GWh (Rs 15 lakh on February 6, 2025) and $13,420/GWh (Rs 11.7 lakh) respectively.About 20% of coal-fired electricity generation during the monsoon season accounted for half of all coal NO2-related rice losses while 12% of total winter season generation was linked to 50% of wheat losses.This suggested that targeting a relatively small subset of highly polluting power stations could still have significant benefits for agricultural productivity. To wit, as per the study, the yield of 5.7% of cropland in West Bengal near coal-fired power stations could increase 5-10% while the gains of 1.66% could exceed 10%. Similarly in Madhya Pradesh, the yield in 5.9% of cropland could increase 5-10% yield gains and another 11.9% could gain by more than 10%.

To compare, the annual yield growth for kharif rice and rabi wheat has averaged just 1.7% and 1.5% respectively between 2011 to 2020.According to the study, India's rice production could gain $420 million a year and wheat $400 million a year, roughly Rs 7,000 crore in total.Expected yield gains from eliminating coal-attributable nitrogen dioxide concentrations in major rice- and wheat-producing states. Large tracts of cropland in all key states are expected to see yield improvements of 1% from eliminating coal-related NO2. Data from 2019 growing seasons.Expected yield gains from eliminating coal-attributable nitrogen dioxide concentrations in major rice- and wheat-producing states. Large tracts of cropland in all key states are expected to see yield improvements of 1% from eliminating coal-related NO2. Data from 2019 growing seasons. | Photo Credit: PNAS: 122 (6) e2421679122India and coalAs the 2025-2026 Economic Survey as well as energy experts have noted, coal power plays a crucial role in India's growth at the moment. The 2025-2026 Union Budget has allocated 255% more for the Ministry of Coal over revised estimates of FY 2024-2025.India's demand for food is soaring as well. In 2024, the Global Hunger Index ranked India 105th out of 127 countries on food security. Rice and wheat are staple crops in India and in many parts of the world to which these grains are exported.Singh said he hopes to inform policy reforms that will allow the coal and agricultural sectors to meet in the middle. "When you're crafting policy around controlling pollution from the power sector, considering crop impacts alongside health and greenhouse gas emissions can help policymakers prioritise where that pollution control equipment should be installed," he said."If you want to optimise the money that is being invested in installing all of this pollution-control equipment, you want to focus on power plants where it would bring the most benefit. Policymakers might find information in our research that could be helpful in terms of figuring out which power stations to prioritise," he added

AI adoption top priority for 98% of Indian business leaders by 2026: Report

New Delhi: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved from a mere buzzword to a crucial business strategy, with 98% of business leaders in India prioritizing AI adoption for 2025, according to a new report released on Thursday.The demand for technical skills such as software development and AI expertise continues to rise, alongside essential soft skills like communication and problem-solving. A LinkedIn report highlights that over 60% of HR professionals in the country believe AI-powered tools can streamline and expedite the hiring process."AI is reshaping how we hire and develop talent, but the real unlock isn't just adopting AI — it's making it work for the business," said

Why are PwDs worried about DPDP rules? | Explained



With the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) looking to wrap up public consultations on the draft Rules for the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 by March 5, disability rights activists are trying to get a key provision of the Act amended or dropped, pointing out that it infantilises Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), negates their decision-making capabilities, and comes from a misunderstood notion of how guardianship works for PwDs.

What does this provision state?

Section 9(1), in clubbing children with PwDs, has mandated that even in cases of adult PwDs who have legal guardians, consent for use of any personal data must be obtained from the guardian concerned. While government officials have said that the draft Rules have tried to address the issue by limiting the number of disabilities the provision would apply to, activists and experts maintain that there remain significant challenges in its implementation.

What do the draft Rules say?

The Union government has said that it brought the DPDP Act, 2023 to govern the processing of digital personal data in a way that "recognises both the right of individuals to protect their personal data and the need to process such personal data for lawful purposes and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto". Section 9(1) of the Act says, "The Data Fiduciary shall, before processing any personal data of a child or a person with disability who has a lawful guardian obtain verifiable consent of the parent of such child or the lawful guardian, as the case may be, in such manner as may be prescribed."The Act's language defines data fiduciaries as those parties processing the personal data and data principals as the users whose data is being collected. But in Section 2(j)(ii), for PwDs, the Act has included "lawful guardian" within the meaning of data principal.In the draft Rules notified by the MeitY on January 3this year, the government has proceeded to set out the rules that will govern the Act. In these Rules, Rule 10 deals with the governing of Section 9(1) of the Act. Rule 10(2) says, "A Data Fiduciary, while obtaining verifiable consent from an individual identifying herself as the lawful guardian of a person with disability, shall observe due diligence to verify that such guardian is appointed by a court of law, a designated authority or a local level committee, under the law applicable to guardianship." In the next sub-section, the Rules provide for considering guardianship under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act) and the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 (NT Act).It also goes on to define PwDs, for whom the consent clause of Section 9(1) would apply to, as: "(i) an individual who has long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders her full and effective participation in society equally with others and who, despite being provided adequate and appropriate support, is unable to take legally binding decisions; And (ii) an individual who is suffering from any of the conditions relating to autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation or a combination of any two or more of such conditions and includes an individual suffering from severe multiple disability."But while the Rule on how to take the consent of the parents of children contains detailed explanations in the form of illustrations that highlight different scenarios and how the consent procedure would work in each, there is no similar illustrations presented for the sub-section that deals with taking consent of the guardian of a person with disability.This has led disability rights activists and experts alike to question how the consent clause would apply to PwDs, details of procedures for different disabilities and degrees of severity, and whether it would apply uniformly to guardians appointed under different laws.

How do guardianships for PwDs work?

The legal guardianship for PwDs, while not mandatory, is governed by two laws in India — the RPWD Act, 2016 and the NT Act, 1999 — both of which mandate different roles for the guardians appointed under it for adult PwDs.The NT Act's guardianship clauses apply to people who are "diagnosed with conditions related to autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability (previously categorised as mental retardation), or any combined occurrence of two or more of these conditions". It provides for full guardianship of the PwD. In contrast, the RPWD Act's guardianship clauses apply to people "experiencing long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, when interacting with various barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". This provides for a "limited guardianship", which allows for support in making specific legal decisions when the individual's capacity is deemed insufficient.While the NT Act goes against the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by making "decision-making capacity" a metric for guardianship without adequately defining it, the RPWD Act, drafted to keep up with the UNCRPD, frames guardianship as support to PwDs in exercising their own decision-making rights.

Where does the conflict arise?

A small survey among 91 PwDs by policy thinktank PACTA and Saksham Disability has shown that about 27.4% of them had legal guardians. Amongst those respondents who knew which law their guardianship was governed by, most said theirs were under the RPWD Act's provision for "limited guardianship". But despite this, the practicalities of guardianship are different, a report by Saksham and PACTA noted, adding that most of the PwDs with guardians maintained that their legal guardian ends up managing all their affairs. This report, released last month, noted that while the Act and the draft Rules are sound "in theory" if the guardianship is under the RPWD Act, the realities of how this guardianship works would mean that "a guardian is likely to deprive the autonomy and personhood of the individual".On the other hand, in cases of guardians appointed under the NT Act, this would be in "direct conflict" with the autonomy of persons with disabilities under the UNCRPD, the report argued.The report noted that a plain reading of Section 9(1) of the DPDP Act "appears to presume" that just because a PwD might have a legal guardian, this in itself would be indicative of their "inability to take decisions in the digital sphere".In addition, it said the law does not consider intersectionality of gender and disability. It cites a situation where a PwD woman may not be able to buy sanitary napkins from an online platform because it may now require their guardian's consent for them to be able to access the platform itself.Nipun Malhotra, of the Nipman Foundation, who is leading efforts to lobby the government on these provisions, has said that Section 9(1) of the DPDP Act, 2023 itself has caused enough chaos on how it would apply, to whom, and under what circumstances. As for the government's attempts to address the issue with the law by limiting the definition of PwDs in the draft Rules, Mr. Malhotra told The Hindu, "Instead of simplifying how it would apply, the definitions have further complicated the issue." Citing one example of the definition, he explained that "physical impairment" has been included. "But there is no provision for people with just physical disability to have legal guardians. This will only confuse people more."

What are the concerns being raised?

Given the way the consent clause has been structured for PwDs in the DPDP Act, 2023 and the draft Rules, some of the principal concerns that have emerged include those of what legal obligations would the guardian of a PwD face; how the consent clause can be implemented in cases where guardianship law is in dissonance with the UNCRPD; and whether the legal guardian can opt out of consenting on behalf of the user with respect to specific platforms.Another issue highlighted by Saksham in their report has been that of concerns among PwDs about what the fate of their personal data will be. For instance, the rights body has posited that to comply with Section 9(1) of the Act, any data fiduciary would have to ask at least two questions: (i) Whether the user has a disability? (ii) Whether the user had a legal guardian. In cases where the answer to the first question is yes but the second is not, the platform will still have data on the person's disability with no purpose to process it.Further, Saksham has questioned that if the definition of data principal includes the legal guardian of a PwD, would that then mean that they must take on the full legal responsibility and face

Kerala from cricket's whipping boys to Ranji Finalists? The untold story of a 50-over revolution

As a schoolboy, when I visited grandparents in Kerala, there was a running joke provoked by my love for cricket. Relatives would tell me with much merriment that cricket was a game played by royalty and madmen — "usually the same people," they added — and berate me for not playing football or volleyball.Most relatives were converted in the 1980s, when television brought cricket into their homes. Like the mathematician G.H. Hardy who said that even if he lay dying he would still want to hear the cricket scores, my grandmother expressed just such a wish. That was startling. She had become a fan of Ravi Shastri, which was as dramatic a turnaround as you could imagine.Perhaps television played the key role in spreading the game in one of India's few regions where traditionally cricket was looked down upon.But long before that, Kerala's contribution to cricket had been well established. A Kerala player and later secretary of the association, K.V. Kelappan Thampuran, had invented the 50-over game in 1951. This was the Pooja All-India tournament, a decade before the Midlands Knockout Cup was played in England and 12 years before the Gillette Cup there.

Practical reasonKelappan is seldom given credit for his innovation even in India. He invented the popular format — which led to the World Cup and the current Champions Trophy — for a very practical reason. He wanted to run an all-India tournament in Tripunithra, a small town in Kochi, but there was not much time for the existing formats (three-day and two-day). It also meant "long breaks from family and work," in the words of Vishnu Kumar who has written about the tournament's origins.Today, as Kerala plays the final of the Ranji Trophy for the first time ever, it is easy to forget how low down the pecking order their cricket had once been. Kerala were the whipping boys of the South Zone. Occasionally when they came close to upsetting rivals, the fact that they didn't know how to handle the situation allowed the opposition to regroup. Nothing succeeds like failure.It meant that players from the region were never in the national reckoning no matter what they did although any success would have been, by definition, against superior teams. Among their best-known batters was Balan Pandit, whose 262 not out against Andhra was the highest individual score till Sreekumar Nair made an unbeaten 306 against Services in 2017.In the mid-80s, skipper K. Jayaram scored four centuries in five Ranji matches, but didn't get to play in the Duleep Trophy.

Before the fast bowlers Tinu Yohanan and S. Sreesanth played for India, Kerala fans had to be content with those who had a parental connection with the State, like Ajay Jadeja or Robin Uthappa (whose mothers were from Kerala). Or Sunil Valson and K.P. Bhaskar who were born elsewhere. Currently the talented Sanju Samson is in and out of India's white ball teams."This is Kerala's 1983 moment," leg spinner Ananthapadmanabhan said after Kerala's entry into the final. It was under his captaincy that Kerala first qualified for the knockout thirty years ago.

National call-up?

Will the successes of the two finalists lead to a national call-up for some leading performers? Vidarbha's Yash Rathod, 24, has made 933 runs this season with five centuries. Akshay Wadkar, 30, is in the Top Ten with 674 runs. Among Kerala's batters, Salman Nizar, 27, has 607 runs, and Mohammed Azharuddeen, 30, has 601.Vidarbha's left arm spinner Harsh Dube, 22, heads the wicket-taking list with 66 while Kerala veteran Jalaj Saxena is their leading bowler with 38.I bring up the statistics merely to point out that for long India's international cricket has run on parallel lines with the domestic, not meeting at all till the cricket board's recent order that all internationals turn out in the Ranji Trophy. This, following a disastrous tour of Australia. How many of the finalists will find themselves in the national reckoning

Gautam Adani U.S. indictment: How are summons issued under the Hague Convention?

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) informed a New York court on February 18, 2025, that it has sought assistance from the Indian government under the Hague Service Convention—formally known as the Convention on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters, 1965—to serve summons on billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani in a securities and wire fraud case. The Adanis were recently charged by the U.S. Department of Justice and the SEC in criminal and civil cases for allegedly bribing Indian government officials over $250 million to advance the Adani Group's solar projects.

What did the SEC say?

The SEC informed the court that it had invoked Article 5(a) of the Convention to request India's Ministry of Law and Justice to facilitate the service of summons on the defendants. It further stated that it is exploring alternative service methods permitted under Rule 4(f) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which governs civil litigation in U.S. federal courts.On February 10, 2025, the Trump administration paused enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA)—one of the laws under which the Adanis have been charged—for 180 days. The FCPA prohibits U.S. entities and individuals from bribing foreign governments, political parties, or officials to secure business.As per the executive order, the attorney general must review "all existing FCPA investigations or enforcement actions" and take steps "to restore proper bounds on FCPA enforcement". However, the SEC's latest court filing suggests that the order does not apply retroactively. As a result, the Agency's investigation into the Adanis is likely to continue unless the law is amended.Following his visit to Washington last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told journalists that his meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump did not include discussions on the Adani case, as it was a "personal matter".

How does the Hague Service Convention operate?

With the rise in cross-border litigation, the need for an effective and reliable mechanism to serve judicial and extrajudicial documents on parties residing in foreign jurisdictions became imperative. As a result, countries adopted the Convention at the Hague Conference on Private International Law in 1965. Building on the 1905 and 1954 Hague Conventions on Civil Procedure, this multilateral treaty ensures that defendants sued in foreign jurisdictions receive timely and actual notice of legal proceedings while also facilitating proof of service.Eighty four states, including India and the U.S., are parties to the Convention. Its procedures apply only when both the sending and receiving countries are signatories. Each member state must also designate a central authority to process requests and facilitate the service of documents from other signatory states.Signatory states can select the modes of transmission that apply within their jurisdiction. Under the Convention, the primary mode of service is through designated central authorities. However, alternative channels are also available, including postal service, diplomatic and consular channels, direct communication between judicial officers in both states, direct contact between an interested party and judicial authorities in the receiving state, and direct communication between government authorities.

How is service effectuated on defendants in India?

India acceded to the Convention on November 23, 2006, with certain reservations, expressly opposing all alternative service methods under Article 10. It prohibits the service of judicial documents through diplomatic or consular channels, except when the recipient is a national of the requesting country. For instance, a U.S. court cannot serve documents in India through U.S. diplomatic or consular channels, unless the recipient is a U.S. national residing in India. Additionally, all service requests must be in English or accompanied by an English translation.As a result, valid service can only be executed through the Ministry of Law and Justice, India's designated central authority. The Law Ministry is permitted to reject a service request but must specify the reasons for such refusal. For instance, under Article 13, a request can be denied if the state believes its sovereignty or security would be compromised.However, a state cannot reject a service request solely because it claims exclusive jurisdiction over the subject matter under its domestic law. Similarly, under Article 29, a request cannot be refused simply because the state's internal law does not recognise a right of action.If the central authority raises no objections, it proceeds with serving the defendant. The service is then treated as a summons issued by an Indian court under Section 29(c) of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. Once completed, the central authority issues an acknowledgement to the requesting party. The entire process typically takes six to eight months.

What do judicial precedents say?

There is ongoing debate over whether service through alternative channels such as social media and email is precluded by India's reservation under Article 10 of the Convention. This controversy arises from conflicting judicial interpretations regarding the scope of the reservation. In Federal Trade Commission v. PCCare247 Inc. (2013), a U.S. district court ruled that service of process in India through Facebook and email is permissible. The court reasoned that these methods do not fall within the purview of Article 10 and that India has not explicitly objected to them.However, in Punjab National Bank (International) Ltd. v. Boris Shipping Ltd. & Ors. (2019), the England and Wales High Court (Queen's Bench Division) overturned a lower court ruling that had allowed the service of summons through alternative methods on defendants residing in India. The court held that such service was invalid as it did not adhere to the procedure prescribed by India under the Convention. It emphasised that deviations

The future of sustainability: rethinking education and career pathways in India

Recently, I participated in a panel discussion at the Azim Premji University in Bengaluru as part of the Wipro Earthian Awards. This gathering brought together participants from diverse backgrounds — students and educators from remote villages, tier-2 and tier-3 cities, and major urban centers — each with their perspectives and experiences in environmental stewardship. The panel discussion centered on a crucial yet often overlooked aspect: how sustainability can evolve from an academic subject to a viable and fulfilling career pathway.One question stood out to me: A teacher asked, "As a parent, would you advise your child to pursue a career in sustainability?" Another teacher raised concerns about why Environmental Science is not taught as a hands-on subject in schools. A third wondered how teachers can stay updated with advancements in the field. These questions revealed an underlying disconnect between sustainability as an evolving field and how it is perceived and taught in schools across India.Sustainability: an evolving fieldThe hesitation around sustainability as a career choice is reflective of a larger issue. There is a misconception that careers in sustainability are limited or financially unviable.

India, like much of the world, is in the midst of a climate crisis. From extreme heat waves and erratic monsoons to pollution and depleting resources, environmental challenges are no longer distant threats—they are here and affecting us daily.

Yet, while sectors such as Finance, Technology, and Engineering are often seen as the primary career paths, Sustainability is an evolving field that requires expertise from multiple disciplines. Whether one comes from a background in Economics, Law, Engineering, Social Sciences, or even the Arts, there is a place for diverse skill sets in Sustainability.Industries are rapidly shifting towards green energy, sustainable manufacturing, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting, creating a demand for professionals who can integrate sustainability principles into various domains. Governments, corporations, and research institutions are investing heavily in solutions for climate change adaptation, energy transition, circular economy, and nature-based solutions.If parents and educators continue to view sustainability as a secondary option, students may hesitate to explore its vast potential. India must recognise and nurture sustainability as a mainstream career choice to build the skilled workforce necessary to address the climate crisis and drive innovation for a more resilient future. Sustainability is turning into a multidisciplinary, future-ready field and so thinking about building a career in sustainability is increasingly viable.Reforms in teaching at school levelA recurring theme in our discussion was the way Environmental Science is taught in schools. Currently, it is often reduced to textbook definitions, rote learning, and annual environment-themed projects. But Environmental Science is not just a subject—it is a way of engaging with the world around us.

Science should be experiential, and Environmental Science education must move beyond the classroom. Schools must integrate some real-world applications. With the advent of cheaper IOT-based sensors, it is cost-effective to set up key instruments such as weather stations, and monitoring air and water quality instruments for students on practical teaching.Additionally, students can be engaged in project-based learning in waste management, afforestation, and biodiversity conservation. Many students in rural and semi-urban areas are already living close to environmental challenges. Making them active participants in local environmental and sustainability efforts would not only enhance learning but also empower them to be problem-solvers in their communities.Some countries leading in climate action have already incorporated such experiential learning models. For example, the nature school concept in Finland's environmental education includes field studies and problem-solving activities based on local issues. The question is, can we take inspiration and adapt similar models and fine-tune our students and the Indian wisdom to blend into our education to revitalise environmental and sustainability education in India?Need for teachers to upskillOne of the most critical gaps highlighted during our discussion was the lack of avenues for teachers to stay updated with new developments in sustainability. The strong concern highlighted was if the teachers are not updated, how can they teach their students effectively? Unlike subjects like math or history, sustainability is a dynamic field—it evolves with scientific discoveries, technological innovations, and policy changes.How do we ensure our teachers are equipped with the latest knowledge? The answer probably lies in continuous learning programs. Universities, research institutions, and governmental bodies must collaborate to create upskilling programs for educators. Regular workshops, online courses, and interactive platforms can help teachers stay informed. Additionally, partnerships with sustainability professionals — scientists, urban planners, climate policy experts — can bring fresh insights into classrooms and bridge the gap between research and teaching.

A national-level initiative to train teachers in sustainability education could have a transformative impact, ensuring that students across India receive relevant and forward-thinking education in this crucial field.Shift in perception about sustainabilityBeyond schools, the general perception of sustainability in India also needs a shift. Sustainability is often seen as an elite concern — something that urban policymakers, environmental NGOs, or global institutions discuss, but not an immediate priority for everyday citizens. This could not be further from the truth. In reality, the most affected by environmental degradation are those with the least resources to cope.Farmers dealing with unpredictable rainfall, urban dwellers battling rising air pollution, and coastal communities facing sea-level rise — these are real, urgent challenges. Making sustainability a household concern requires mainstreaming it in our conversations, media, and governance.Public awareness

campaigns, storytelling through films and digital media, and community-based sustainability initiatives can help change this perception. The government's emphasis on solar energy, electric vehicles, and sustainable infrastructure is a step in the right direction, but these policies must be accompanied by grassroots awareness and education.The panel discussion reinforced one key takeaway: All of us have a role to play in taking sustainability beyond textbooks and into our everyday lives. Schools, teachers, parents, policymakers, and industry leaders must work together to reshape sustainability education in India. A well-informed young generation that sees sustainability not just as an academic subject but as a way of thinking and problem-solving will be crucial in building a resilient future.

NRI couple donate Rs 10 crore to Indo-American Cancer Hospital

Hyderabad: An NRI couple from the United States, Dr Raghavendra Rao and Kalyani, have donated Rs 10 crore to establish Indo-American Cancer Research Organisation (IACRO) under Basavatarakam Indo-American Cancer Hospital and Research Institute (BIACH&RI).

As a part of the initiative, on the occasion of Shivaratri on Wednesday, Dr Rao and Kalyani donated the first instalment of Rs 5 crore by handing over a cheque to the senior management of BIACH&RI, in the presence of its chairman and actor Balakrishna.in addition to providing state-of-the-art cancer treatment facilities at subsidised rates for poor families, the BIACH&RI had recently decided to increase its focus on advanced cancer research.As a part of this initiative, the hospital has decided to establish an ultra-modern research facility IACRO to allow scientists and researchers to take up advanced cutting-edge research on cancer.Speaking on the occasion, Dr Raghavendra Rao hoped that the new cancer research centre at BIACH&RI will bring new hope to lakhs of cancer patients in the country.

Why is there so much gold in west Africa?

Militaries that have taken power in Africa's Sahel region – notably Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – have put pressure on western mining firms for a fairer distribution of revenue from the lucrative mining sector.Gold is one of the resources at the heart of these tensions. West Africa has been a renowned gold mining hub for centuries, dating back to the ancient Ghana empire, which earned its reputation as the "Land of Gold" because of its abundant reserves and thriving trade networks. The region remains a global leader in gold production. As of 2024, west Africa contributed approximately 10.8% of the world's total gold output.But why is there so much gold in this region? The Conversation Africa asked geologist Raymond Kazapoe to explain.

How is gold formed?

The simple answer here is that we are not certain. However, scientists have some ideas.Gold, like all elements, formed through high energy reactions that occurred in various cosmic and space environments some 13 billion years ago, when the universe started to form.However, gold deposits – or the concentration of gold in large volumes within rock formations – are believed to occur through various processes, explained by two theories.The first theory – described by geologist Richard J. Goldfarb – argues that large amounts of gold were deposited in certain areas when continents were expanding and changing shape, around 3 billion years ago. This happened when smaller landmasses, or islands, collided and stuck to larger continents, a process called accretionary tectonics. During these collisions, mineral-rich fluids moved through the Earth's crust, depositing gold in certain areas.A newer, complementary theory by planetary scientist Andrew Tomkins explains the formation of some much younger gold deposits during the Phanerozoic period (approximately 650 million years ago). It suggests that as the Earth's oceans became richer in oxygen during the Phanerozoic period, gold got trapped within another mineral known as pyrite (often called fool's gold) as microscopic particles. Later, geological processes – like continental growth (accretion) and heat or pressure changes (metamorphism) released this gold – forming deposits that could be mined.

Where in west Africa is gold found and what are its sources?

Most gold production and reserves in west Africa are found within the west African craton. This is one of the world's oldest geological formations, consisting of ancient, continental crust that has remained largely unchanged for billions of years.The craton underlies much of west Africa, spanning parts of Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania. In fact, most west African countries that have significant gold deposits have close to 50% of their landmass on the craton. Notably, between 35% and 45% of Ghana, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire's territory sits on it – which is why these areas receive so much attention from gold prospectors.Gold deposits were formed within west Africa's craton rocks during a major tectonic event, known as the Eburnean Orogeny, 2.2 billion to 2.08 billion years ago. This event was accompanied by the temperature, pressure and tectonic conditions which promote gold mineralisation events. Most of the gold resources in the west African craton are found within ancient geological formations formed by volcanic and tectonic processes about 2.3 billion to 2.05 billion years ago. These are known as the Rhyacian Birimian granitoid-greenstone belts.These gold-bearing belts in Ghana and Mali are by far the most endowed when compared with other countries in the region. Ghana and Mali currently, cumulatively account for over 57% of the combined past production and resources of the entire west Africa subregion.Ghana is thought to be home to 1,000 metric tonnes of gold. The country produces 90 metric tonnes each year – or 7% of global production. Gold production in Mali reached around 67.7 tonnes in 2023. Mali has an estimated 800 tons of gold deposits.By comparison, the world's two largest gold producers are China (which mined approximately 370 metric tonnes of gold in 2023) and Australia (which had an output of around 310 metric tonnes in 2023).

What are some of the modern exploration tools used to find gold?

Gold was traditionally found by panning in riverbeds, where miners swirled sediment in water to separate the heavy gold particles, or by digging shallow pits to extract gold-rich ores. Over time, methods have evolved to include geochemical exploration techniques, advanced geophysical surveys, and chemical extraction techniques, like cyanide leaching.Geological mapping techniques are always evolving, and at the moment, there is a lot of interest in combining remote sensing data with cutting-edge data analytics methods, like machine learning. By combining these two methods, geologists can get around some of the problems caused by traditional methods, like the reliance on subjective judgement to create reliable maps and the need to spend money prospecting in areas with low chances of success.In recent years, deep learning computer techniques have made significant progress. They examine various geological data-sets to reduce uncertainty and increase the chances of finding gold mineralisation through advanced artificial intelligence techniques. These methods have proved highly beneficial in identifying specific features and discovering new mineral deposits when applied to remote sensing data.Another method, which I've researched and which could serve as a complementary gold exploration tool, is the use of stable isotopes. Stable isotopes are elements – like carbon, hydrogen and oxygen – that do not decay over time. Some are responsible for helping to carry gold, in fluids, through rocks to form the deposits. As the gold-bearing fluids interact with the rocks, they transfer the stable isotopes to the rocks, thereby imbuing them with their unique signature. The thinking here is to identify the signature and then use it as a proxy for finding gold, since gold itself is hard to identify directly.Advancements in analytical techniques have reduced the cost, volume, and time involved.

Quadric IT showcases cutting-edge AI and sustainability innovations at BioAsia 2025

Hyderabad: Quadric IT, a pioneer in AI-driven and sustainable technology solutions, is making waves at BioAsia with a lineup of groundbreaking innovations. Among these, the Reusable Smart AI-Based Notebook, co-invented by Suman Balabommu, Kesari Sai Krishna Sabniveesu, and Raghu Ram Thatavarthy, is set to revolutionize the way notes are taken in meetings.This AI-powered reusable notebook functions like a traditional notebook but offers 100 reuses per page. Handwritten content can be seamlessly converted into digital format using the RenoteAI app, which also enables cloud storage and AI-generated prompts for instant knowledge retrieval. Users can simply wipe the pages with a wet cloth or tissue to erase and reuse, dramatically reducing paper consumption."The goal is to merge sustainability with AI-powered efficiency, ensuring that businesses and individuals alike can reduce waste while enhancing productivity," said Kesari Sabniveesu, Co-Founder of Quadric IT.Quadric IT's Reusable Smart AI-Based NotebookBeyond the Reusable Smart Notebook, Quadric IT is presenting a range of AI and data-driven solutions tailored for Bio and Pharma industries. These innovations aim to streamline operations, enhance decision-making, and contribute to a greener future.With a strong focus on AI, ERP, data tools, and sustainability,