

Hyderabad residents face hours-long power cuts after thunder showers

Hyderabad: People from several areas in Hyderabad reported power cuts that lasted for several hours following thunder showers on Saturday morning.

The social media handle of TSSPDCL at X (formerly Twitter) on Saturday was clogged with complaints from angry customers from many parts of Hyderabad, who were venting their frustration at not having access to power at peak hours. Power customers from Jahanuma, Malakpet, Moosarambagh, Vangalrao Nagar, Ramanthapur, Uppal, Peeramcheru, Badangpet, Sainikpuri and several other regions complained to the TSSPDCL about power cuts.



Health dept issues heatwave advisory for Hyderabad, Telangana districts



Hyderabad: The State health department has urged general public to exercise extreme caution and take precautions against the ongoing heatwave in Hyderabad and elsewhere in the districts. As a part of precautionary measures, elaborate arrangements have been taken-up including providing special beds, I.V fluids, essential medicines at public health facilities and ORS sachets have been made available with ANMs / ASHAs / Anganwadi workers to meet any exigencies, Director of Public Health (DPH), Dr B Ravinder Nayak said. Vulnerable individuals including infants, young children pregnant women, people working outside, persons with mental health issues, physical illness, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure, should be extremely cautious.

- Stay hydrated: Drink sufficient water as and when possible, even when not thirsty.

- Consume Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS), lemon water, butter milk / lassi with some added salts, fruit juices etc. • Carry water during travel • Eat seasonal fruits and

vegetables with high water content like water melon, musk melon, orange, grapes, pineapple, cucumber, lettuce or other locally available fruits and vegetables. • Stay covered: Wear thin loose cotton garments preferably light colored

- Cover your head: use umbrella, hat, cap, towel and other traditional head gears during exposure to direct sunlight
- Wear shoes or chappals while going out in sun. • Stay indoors as much as possible in well ventilated and cool places
- Block direct sunlight and heat waves: Keep windows and curtains closed during the day, especially on the sunny side of your house. Open them up at night to let cooler air in. • If going outdoor, limit your outdoor activity to cooler times of the day i.e., morning and evening

- Avoid getting out in the sun between 12 noon and 3 pm • Avoid strenuous activities when outside in the afternoon • Do not go out barefoot • Avoid cooking during peak summer hours. Open doors and windows to ventilate cooking area adequately • Avoid alcohol, tea, coffee and carbonated soft

drinks or drinks with large amount of sugar as these actually lead to loss of more body-fluid or may cause stomach cramps • Avoid high-protein food and do not eat stale food • Do not leave children or pets in parked vehicle

Danger signs
Seek immediate medical attention from nearby government health facilities if any of the following is observed: • Altered

mental sensorium with disorientation: confusion and agitation, irritability, ataxia, seizure and coma • Hot, red and dry skin • Body temperature more than or equal to 40 degree C of 104 F • Throbbing headache • Anxiety, Dizziness, fainting and light headedness • Muscle weakness or cramps • Nausea and vomiting • Rapid heart beat • Rapid, shallow breathing

Hyderabad Metro Rail extends service hours for IPL match at Uppal Stadium



Hyderabad: Hyderabad Metro Rail has made an announcement regarding its operations during the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket match at Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Uppal on Thursday. In light of this event, metro trains will extend their service hours beyond the regular closing times. As per the schedule, the final trains will leave their respective terminal stations at 12:15 am, with the aim

of arriving at their destinations around 1:10 am. This adjustment in timing is designed to accommodate the increased demand expected due to the cricket match.

During these extended hours, passengers will be allowed entry at specific stations only, namely Uppal, Stadium, and NGRI stations. At all other stations, only exits will be operational, according to an official release.

How India's 'one citizen, one vote' democracy came to be

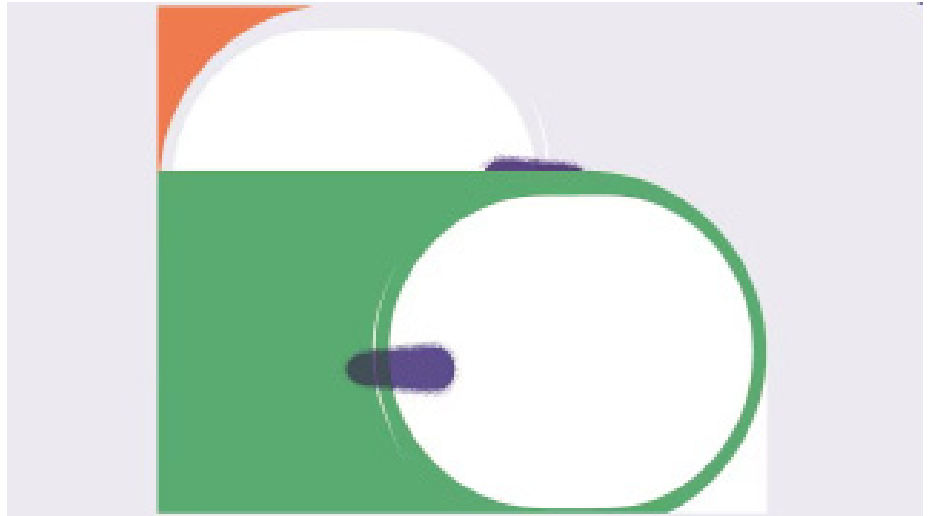
India's general elections commenced this week. This year's elections are being held from April 19 to June 1, with results being declared on June 4. Approximately 970 million Indians out of a population of 1.4 billion are eligible to vote. What a mammoth undertaking for the world's largest constitutional democracy, with the largest electoral project. How did we get here? First, what are elections? The word "elections" comes from the Latin "eligere", which means "to pick out". The commencement of the 2024 national elections in India provides us with the opportunity to consider this relatively contemporary concept of one citizen, one vote. This right of "one citizen, one vote" is not one that has existed from time immemorial. Nor is it synonymous with having a functioning and enduring Constitution.

For instance, the United States, whose Constitution was adopted in 1787, initially granted the right to vote only to white men with property. At the time of the birth of the nation, women, African Americans and Native Americans, amongst others, did not have the right to vote. It was through the 15th amendment to the US Constitution that African American men got the right to vote. Yet, their franchise was burdened by having to pay poll taxes and pass literacy tests. In 1920, white women won the right to vote. African American and Native American women would have to fight for many more years to secure the right to vote. In 1971, by the 26th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, the voting age was reduced to 18 years.

How did India get here? India's own journey to universal adult franchise was a clear and unbroken one. It did not create classes of citizens who could or could not exercise their franchise. In the Constituent Assembly, which seated those who drafted the Constitution from 1946 to 1950, there were some who were disconcerted by the challenges of a franchise for all Indians. Some members, like M Thirumala Rao, pointed to the difficulties of franchise without literacy.

On November 23, 1949, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar made one of the more thoughtful interventions, arguing that for a broad-based democracy like the one India wanted to establish, any property or literacy qualifications would exclude a large number of the "labouring classes and womenfolk". Optimistically, Ayyar hoped that large-scale universal suffrage would have the effect of "rooting out corruption", and this would be an incidental return on "democratic elections". He also lauded the dismantling of communal electorates established previously by the British, by independent India's first government. Ayyar made the point that a communal electorate and democracy cannot coexist, since the former prevents "the free growth of democracy on a healthy and sound basis". India's ambitious universal adult franchise project, imagined and cemented during the harsh and violent years of Partition and nation formation, would come to

fruition with the first general elections held between October 25, 1951 and February 21, 1952. It was the largest election ever conducted at the time, with over a sixth of humanity casting their votes. A total of 173,212,343 or roughly 173 million voters were registered. The Constitution has always located the security of universal franchise in the "superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission." Importantly, the Election Commission controls the preparation for and the conduct of parliamentary and legislative assembly elections in India. Therefore, a neutral, impartial and alert Election Commission is the heart of the project that is India's electoral democracy. The year 2024 is not just one of general elections in India. It's the year for elections all over the world. The countries that hold over half the world's population will conduct their elections this year. The year commenced with Bangladesh, followed by Pakistan holding their elections. In March, Russia conducted its elections, with Vladimir Putin, rather predictably, retaining his position. The United Kingdom, United States and South Africa will hold their elections over the course of this year. The United States will have two elderly candidates — sitting President Joe Biden and erstwhile President Donald



Trump — take on each other for the presidency. A Reuters report quotes the Institute of International Finance as stating that the "tsunami" of 2024 elections "could add to a record glut of global debt estimated to have hit \$310 trillion by the end of 2023." It adds that by the end of 2024, "countries accounting for over 60 per cent of the world's economic output, and more than half of its population would have voted." Haiti, Indonesia, Cambodia, Iran (with an extremely low turnout of 41 per

cent), Portugal, Slovakia, Senegal, Kuwait, South Korea and the Solomon Islands have also already conducted or will hold elections over the course of 2024. The one exception is Ukraine — it was scheduled to hold elections in March, but could not do so due to the conflict with Russia. With voting in phase one of India's election completed, I wonder what our founding fathers and founding mothers would have made of the electoral democracy that is India? Are we what they envisaged us to be?

This refreshing drink will not only quench your thirst but also keep you energised

Hydration is the need of the hour. While nothing beats plain water, you can always add some flavour to zing it up a bit. So, if you are looking to add that punch to your water, how about adding a dash of health to it, too? It's nothing tedious — all you need are three ingredients: chia seeds, lemon, and beetroot. Sounds interesting? Check out this recipe shared on the Azzy | Bowl To Soul Instagram page. "This chia seeds in water with lemon and honey is a refreshing and healthy drink. This refreshing blend not only quenches your thirst but also provides a nutritious boost to keep you energised throughout the day. So say cheers to a healthy and refreshing drink to keep you hydrated in summer," the caption read.

Dr Rinky Kapoor, consultant dermatologist, cosmetic dermatologist and dermatologist, The Esthetic Clinics recommended incorporating this hydrating beverage made from chia seeds, lemon, honey, beetroot, and black salt into your daily routine. Chia seeds are an excellent source of hydration due to their ability to absorb water and form a gel-like substance in the stomach, helping to slow down the absorption of sugar and keep you feeling full and hydrated for longer periods. "They are also rich in omega-3 fatty acids, fibre,



and protein, making them a nutritious addition to any diet," said Dr Kapoor. Lemon is a natural source of vitamin C, which acts as a powerful antioxidant and plays a crucial role in maintaining skin health and supporting the immune system. Dr Kapoor shared that it also adds a refreshing citrus flavour to the beverage, enhancing its taste and appeal.

Honey not only provides a touch of sweetness but also contains antioxidants and antibacterial properties that can support overall health. According to Dr Kapoor,

it has been used for centuries as a natural remedy for various ailments and is a healthier alternative to refined sugar. Beetroot is incredibly hydrating and packed with essential nutrients such as vitamins A, C, and K, as well as minerals like potassium and manganese. "It also contains nitrates, which have been shown to improve blood flow, lower blood pressure, and enhance athletic performance," said Dr Kapoor. Black salt, also known as kala namak, is a type of rock salt that is rich in minerals and has a distinctive sulfurous flavour. "

SKM Demands Prosecution of the PM Modi for his Speech at Rajasthan rally

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), April 23: Stating the speech of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Rajasthan rally in Banswara as highly poisonous hate speech against a particular community and violation of the respective laws for national unity, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has demanded prosecution of PM Modi and imposing a ban on him for six years from contesting election. In a press release, SKM Media Cell stated, "He (Modi) must be removed from the post of Prime Minister with immediate effect otherwise the country will face a constitutional crisis of a law breaker holding one of the highest constitutional posts. The provocative speech of Narendra Modi is aimed at contaminating the social sphere and causing blood shed among communities hence the Supreme Court has to take suo moto cognizance and intervene."

SKM alleged that the highly provocative speech of the Prime Minister at Banswara in Rajasthan on 20th April 2024 indicates his total disrespect to the rule of law and abject insensitivity towards the pluralistic social fabric of our country. The Prime Minister has accused all members of the main minority group of the country as 'intruders' without any substance is nothing but insanity that violates the secular constitution that ensures separation of state and religion in governance. SKM states that Secularism is the fundamental feature of our successful democracy being in existence for the last 77 long years after becoming independent from the British colonial yoke. Slamming the statement of PM

Modi, SKM said that the allegation against the congress party of seizing the wealth of the people to give to a particular community is actually to divert the attention of the people from the greater skew in wealth ownership under the last ten years of Modi government.

Quoting the latest Oxfam report, SKM stated that this report has revealed that the top 1% of the population that represent the entire billionaires too owns 40.5% of the wealth of the country while, the bottom 50% of the population or 70 crore people that represent the poor and middle farmers and rural workers owns merely 3% of the wealth of the nation. There is no Hindu or Muslim divide among these poor sections. The Modi government has reduced the corporate tax from 30% to the range of 22%-16% during the last ten years. One of the corporate groups Reliance owned by Mukesh Ambani has enhanced their assets from Rs. 1,67,000 crores in 2014 to Rs. 8,03,000 crores in 2023. The loan arrear of Rs. 14.55 lakh crore of the corporate houses has been written off during 2014-2022 by the Modi government when not a single rupee of the debt relief was provided to the farmers and farm workers though 154 suicide have been taking place daily in India under the Modi raj. "This is an extraordinary situation hence; SKM appeals to all sections of the people to take all precautions to maintain peace and social tranquillities against any sort of provocation by the elements of vested interests inimical to the national unity and friendship and brotherhood of the people. Only the people can defeat the

politics of communal division and stand firmly to safeguard secular fabrics of India", the release states. All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) Haryana state committee, in a joint statement by Master Balbir Singh, President and Sumit Singh, General Secretary has also severely condemned the speech stating it a highly inflammatory and communally provocative utterances of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A press release shared to our representative by Dr. Inderjeet Singh, National Vice-President of AIKS on Tuesday, stated that AIKS has described the core of his speech as contemptuous and outrageous with strong potential of inciting violence between communities. "This has been done intentionally as an attempt to polarise the people on communal lines in order to get electoral gains at the cost of our age old syncretic cultural ethos and social harmony." The farmers union alleged that spreading hatred based on absolute falsehood by a person of the stature of Prime Minister has brought down the prestige of the highest executive office Modi is holding. His conduct in this case is not only brazen violation of election code of conduct but actually tantamount to committing serious offences under various sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) including hate crime and wilfully creating discord between different communities. According to AIKS it was even more astonishing that the Election Commission of India mandated with the task of enforcing and monitoring the provisions of Representation of People Act

and the model code of conduct for a free and fair election, has not initiated any action against Prime Minister Modi so far for indulging in gross violation of the relevant laws with impunity. In this situation Supreme court should take suo moto cognizance and intervene at the earliest when the PM and other BJP leaders are showing utter disregard and audacity of posing themselves above the law of land. AIKS has appealed to farmers and other sections to see through the nefarious designs being contemplated by BJP and safeguard their unity that stood tested during farmers movement in spite of repeated attempts to defame and tarnish the farmers movement as anti-national and separatist. AIKS alleges that the Prime Minister and other leaders are resorting to hate mongering between communities in the face of widespread anger brewing among the people for the treachery and deceit done to them in terms of ruthless destruction of their livelihood during the entire 10 years of pro-corporate Modi regime. Haryana Kisan Sabha has appealed to all sections of the toiling masses to observe extreme vigilance and not to fall prey to the BJP machinations towards diverting the attention of the people from real livelihood issues and get carried by emotive communal and caste issues. AIKS has reiterated its call to teach BJP a lesson for cheating the peasantry by not honouring the assurances pertaining to legal guarantee of MSP etc given on the occasion of suspension of 13-month long farmers agitation following withdrawal of pro-corporate three black laws.

Glycemic index of diets: importance beyond diabetes control

The concept of 'Glycemic Index' was first proposed by Prof. David Jenkins of the University of Toronto in 1981. Glycemic index (GI) of a food refers to the property of the food to increase the blood glucose level and is a measure of the 'quality' of carbohydrates. Glucose or white bread is used as the comparator. The GI of glucose is taken as 100 and the GI of other foods are given as a percentage of this. Thus, the GI of foods are classified as low GI (less than 55), medium GI (56-69) and high GI (over 70). The GI multiplied by the amount of the carbohydrate consumed, determines the glycemic load (GL). Many nutritionists strongly believe in the deleterious effect of consuming diets with high GI and conversely the beneficial effects of taking diets with low GI. There are others who believe that this is too simplistic an approach. Their argument is that carbohydrate is only one of the macronutrients of food and the quality of protein and fat are ignored if only GI is used to assess the quality of a diet.

However, there is a lot of evidence to support the growing importance of the GI and GL of diets. The link between high GI and GL diets to the risk of type 2 diabetes

has been clearly established recently. However, what is less known is the association of high GI diets with cardiovascular disease and mortality. The Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study, of which we are also a part, involves 137,851 participants in 20 countries (including India) in five continents who have been followed for decades. In a paper published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2021, we looked at the association of the GI and GL of diets with cardiovascular disease. We used country specific food frequency questionnaires to assess the GIs and GLs of various diets in different countries. We reported that diets with high GI were associated with major cardiovascular events including deaths across all ethnicities. This was an eye opener regarding the importance of the GI of foods because until this study was published, it was not known that the importance of GI extends beyond diabetes. These findings are particularly relevant to India and South Asia where carbohydrate consumption in the form of high GI white rice or wheat, forms the bulk of calories, leading to very high GL of our diets. Hence all attempts should



be made to reduce the GI and GL of our diets. This could help, not only in the prevention and control of diabetes, but also to reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease which occurs at much younger ages in our country.

Examples of diets with low GI include brown rice, steel cut oats, legumes, pulses and beans, fruits like apple and guava, vegetables like spinach, lettuce, brinjal,

broccoli, tomatoes, paneer, soya, nuts and seeds. Diets with high GI include sugar and sweets, white rice, maida, potato, white bread, sweetened drinks, jaggery, cornflakes and cookies. If diets with high GI, i.e., the 'bad' carbohydrates, are replaced with 'good' carbs which have low GI and this is combined with adequate physical activity (exercise), it could help to curb the growing incidence of premature cardiovascular disease in India.

Why are sugary processed foods harmful? | Explained

The story so far: Over the past week, the spotlight has returned on high sugar content in flavoured malt-based milk powders and baby food. Government authorities are warning against branding such items as “healthy” and have called out the allegedly misleading promotion and marketing tactics while loading products with added sugar.

Why is it problematic to label malt-based, sugary milk products as ‘health’ drinks?

On analysing the product in question, (a drink like Bournvita, for example,) it is observed that it contains 86.7g of carbohydrates per 100g, of which 49.8g is sugar content. Of the total sugars, 37.4g is sucrose or added sugar. For every recommended per serve of 20g chocolate powder, the consumer is downing nearly 10g of total sugar. “Apart from added sugar, the process of malting, which involves germinating cereals, drying, roasting and powdering them, also produces sugar. Malting was a process originally used to produce single malt whiskey, and is also used in making malt-based milk beverages,” a scientific panel member of the Food Standards and Safety Authority of India (FSSAI) told The Hindu. Once you germinate a grain, the starch in the grain breaks down to sugar by the action of a group of enzymes called amylase. When you roast it, it develops a nice flavour as that sugar gets caramelised. “Maltose is nothing but two units of glucose, a form of sugar, bonded together. Apart from added sugar, the chocolate powder contains maltodextrin, liquid glucose, maltose generated from malting process of cereals and so on,” the member said.

What is FSSAI’s stand on sugar content?

In its Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations 2018, the FSSAI said that only if total sugar is less than 5g per 100g in a product, it can claim to be ‘low on sugar.’ Any product which is ‘low on sugar,’ can potentially be ‘healthy.’ But when products do not fulfil this requirement, and still advertise or market their products as ‘health drinks,’ it is problematic, the FSSAI scientific panel member added. “This is because if a child, for instance, takes four servings of this so-called drink, he or she will end up consuming 40 grams of sugar, which is higher than the World Health Organization’s advised threshold of consuming 25 grams or six teaspoons of sugar per day. In Indian households, one often adds extra teaspoons of sugar to a chocolate-powder drink too,” the member added.

What is the controversy over baby food?

A closer look at the ingredients of Wheat Apple Cherry baby cereal for kids from eight months up to 24 months marketed by Nestlé under the brand name Cerelac in India reveals that it contains 24 grams per 100 grams of total sugars derived from milk solids, maltodextrin, dextrose and so on. For a one to two year old

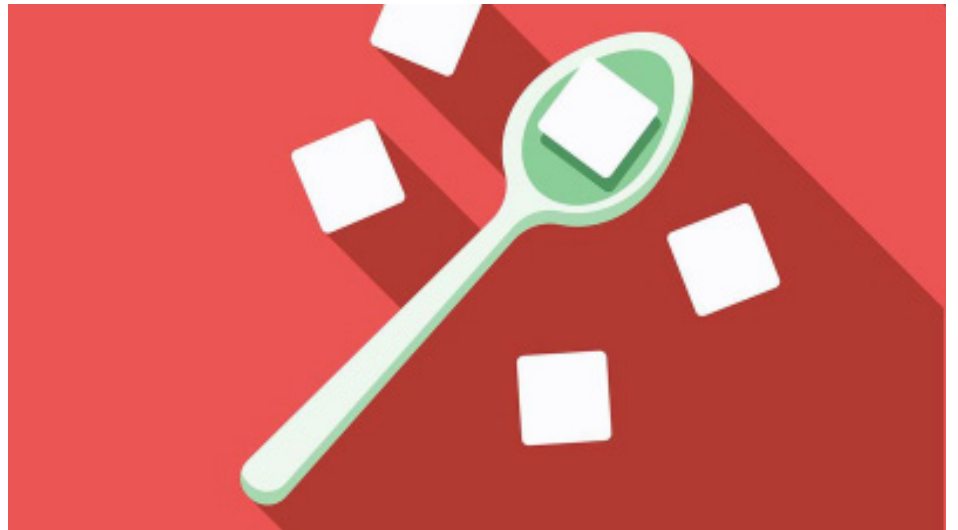
child, the company recommends feeding twelve scoops or 100 grams of baby food every day. This means the baby consumes 24 grams of sugar each day. This is a harmful practice, say experts. “A baby is only familiar with the taste of breast milk. Lactose, which is a naturally occurring form of sugar, is less sweet. When a child is shifted from breast milk to complementary foods, extra sugar is being fed. Extra sugar in a young baby’s diet creates unnecessary pressure on the baby’s pancreas, leading to production of excess insulin which may lead to diabetes and obesity in future,” the member said. Addition of ingredients like maltodextrin to improve flavour and texture is harmful as the white starchy powder of maltodextrin has a higher glycemic index (GI) than table sugar. GI is a measure of how quickly a food causes blood sugar to rise. The member further added that excess sugar gets converted into triglycerides, a form of fat which gets stored in liver leading to fatty liver and insulin resistance that causes diabetes. An estimated 101.3 million people in India could be diabetic, a study co-published by the Indian Council of Medical Research stated.

Will an FSSAI probe be enough to curb the practice of misleading labels?

In September 2022, the FSSAI put out a draft notification which stated that high fat, sugar, salt (HFSS) food means a processed food product which has high levels of saturated fat or total sugar or sodium. The draft notification was released to explain what a HFSS food would consist of and how to warn consumers against it on front-of-the-pack labelling of the food packet or beverage bottle. It implied that if a product derives more than 10% of total energy (kcal) from sugar and/or saturated fat, then the product was high on fat and/or sugar. However, the FSSAI has kept the regulation open-ended on whether companies need to declare fat, sugar and salt content on the front of the pack or not. It has also batted for ‘health rating stars,’ and not warning labels. “Warning labels are upfront and inform the consumers if a product is high on fat, salt or sugar. Health stars can be misleading. A consumer does not have the time or knowledge to calculate if a product is high on sugar, based on the FSSAI’s definition,” said Dr. Arun Gupta, Convener of the Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPI) and former member of the PM’s Council on India’s Nutrition Challenges.

What is the way forward?

According to Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2019, sugar is allowed in milk cereal-based complementary food, Dr. Gupta points out. The regulation says that lactose and glucose polymers shall be preferred carbohydrates for food and infant nutrition. Sucrose and/or fructose shall not be added, unless needed as a carbohydrate source, and provided the sum of these does not exceed 20% of total carbohydrate. “The regulation permits sugar, hence the regulation needs to be re-looked,” he says. Hence, the first step, Dr. Gupta ex-



plains, would be to bring about a comprehensive regulation to clearly define what is ‘healthy,’ and ‘unhealthy,’ which encompasses all beverages and food products. “There is a draft notification on front of pack labelling and high fat, sugar, salt foods which has received comments from all stake holders and after that has been put in cold storage,” Dr. Gupta says. The underlying problem is marketing and pushing it to unsuspecting consumers.

A Hindustan Unilever Limited annual report of 2022 states that the company partnered with the Zilla Parishad of Pune in the midday meal programme to add Horlicks, cited as a ‘health food drink,’ to existing take-home rations, which were planned to be provided to children across 4,600 anganwadi centres covering 1.45 lakh children aged between three and six. Also, under the Infant Milk Substitutes

Act, infant foods cannot be promoted via advertisements. However, rules are flouted, and social media influencers often promote baby food, Dr. Gupta says. “Strong action needs to be taken against illegal ads,” he adds. Over the past week, the spotlight has returned on high sugar content in flavoured malt-based milk powders and baby food. Government authorities are warning against branding such items as “healthy” and have called out the allegedly misleading promotion and marketing tactics while loading products with added sugar. In its Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations 2018, the FSSAI said that only if total sugar is less than 5g per 100g in a product, it can claim to be ‘low on sugar.’ According to Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2019, sugar is allowed in milk cereal-based complementary food, Dr. Gupta points out.

Yashoda Hospitals pays Rs. 5.11 crore in property tax, get Rs. 26.92 lakh rebate

Hyderabad: Under the Early Bird Scheme for the financial year 2024-25, a total of 11 medical facilities in different parts of the city belonging to Yashoda Hospitals paid Rs. 5.11 crore towards property tax, receiving a total rebate of Rs. 26.92 lakh.

The management of the hospital met GHMC Commissioner Ronald Rose on Tuesday and handed over the cheques. While GHMC is targeting to collect around Rs. 1,200 crore through this scheme, Rs. 230 crore was collected up until April 15.

The scheme, which commenced on April 1 offers a five per cent rebate to those who pay their property tax in full before April 30. The rebate is only for the current financial year’s property tax. With only a week left for the Early Bird Scheme, Citizen Service Center (CSC) at GHMC Head Office, and circle-level offices will be open for payment of property tax even on Sundays. They will operate from 8 am to 8 pm, a press release said. Ends

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Centre aims seven-fold jump in wheat procurement from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar this year

Amid the heat of the ongoing Lok Sabha electioneering, the Centre has announced plans to significantly increase wheat purchase from non-traditional States of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar and set a target of seven-fold jump in procurement to 50 lakh tonnes in the ongoing 2024-25 marketing year. Further, even as the ban on outbound shipments of wheat continues, "it will be a dream for us to export now", Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra told reporters on April 4. "U.P., Bihar, and Rajasthan have been contributing much less than they could have. We are targeting total wheat procurement of 310 lakh tonne this year. Of which, we are hoping to procure at least 50 lakh tonne from three non-traditional procurement States alone," he said.

While Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar put together contributed only 6.7 lakh tonnes to the Central pool during the 2023-24 marketing year (April-March), the Union Food Ministry has decided to procure 16% of the total wheat procurement target of 310 lakh tonne set for 2024-25. Wheat procurement at Minimum Support Price (MSP) is normally undertaken by the Centre's nodal agency Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State agencies. However, cooperatives Nafed and NCCF have also been roped in with a procurement target of five lakh each this year. Wheat MSP has been fixed at ₹2,275 per quintal for the current year. Since October, the Centre has been working with these three States to increase the procurement level. "Various steps have been taken to address the gaps and it should help boost procurement levels in three States," he said. Asserting that 2024

general elections is unlikely to affect wheat procurement operations, the Secretary said the increase in wheat procurement from non-traditional States will help restore allocation of wheat under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and other welfare schemes. "The allocation of wheat has been reduced to 184 lakh tonnes annually from the previous 230-240 lakh tonnes under various welfare schemes in view of lower procurement in the last two years," he added. Mr. Chopra also said the Centre has not directed traders to avoid buying wheat from farmers till the government completes procurement. "No such instruction has been given to traders," he added.

Highlighting steps taken to strengthen wheat procurement in non-traditional States, the Secretary said the procurement window has been advanced/extended to March instead of April 1, set up a dedicated farmer helpline to address procurement-related queries, intensified media publicity of MSP rate, and drying facilities have been provided for early harvested crop. Besides, the government has advanced farmer registration from January 1 instead of March 1, simplified farmers' land record verification, including tenant farmers, given flexible procurement targets to agencies. More importantly, the Secretary said the government has decided to ensure transfer of MSP to bank accounts of farmers within 48 hours, streamlined procurement incidental burden for farmers, smoothed banking-related issues such as Aadhaar integration with bank accounts. "The government has also opened more procurement centres targeting production hotspots, set up mobile pro-



urement centres, decide to leverage Self Help Groups, Panchayats, Farmer Producer Organisations," he said. "That apart, the government has ensured institutional preparedness through working capital to agencies to ensure payment of MSP to farmers within 48 hours," he added. The Secretary further mentioned that a Central control room has been set up in the FCI headquarters in Delhi for real-time monitoring of procurement and coordination among various agencies. According to the Food Ministry, six lakh tonnes of wheat have already been procured so far this year from six States — Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar. The procurement from traditional States of Punjab and Haryana will begin soon. On prices of wheat and rice, the Secretary said wheat

flour and wheat prices are stable at present after introduction of retail sale of wheat flour at 'Bharat' brand. About 7.06 lakh tonne of wheat flour has been sold till now. "Even retail inflation of rice remained stable at 13% and 14% for the last two months. About 3.1 lakh tonne of FCI rice has been sold under Bharat brand since February," he added. Asked if the government will revisit the wheat export ban amid estimates of higher production, the Secretary said, "It's a dream for us to export now." The government has banned wheat exports since May 2022 to boost domestic availability and check prices. The wheat production is estimated to be a record 112 million tonne during 2023-24, compared to last year's 110 million tonnes as per the Agriculture Ministry.

Lava sees a definitive resurgence in affinity towards indigenous mobile brands

"Our integrated R&D and manufacturing prowess give us unmatched autonomy to innovate for the nation's needs. We take pride in our self-reliance through in-house design, components sourced locally, and manufacturing facilities with an annual capacity of 42 million handsets. This self-sufficiency insulates us from external vulnerabilities," said Raina. Lava, which started its journey in 2009 through feature phones, completed 15 years in March. It is only surviving indigenous mobile brand amidst Korean and Chinese players in India. The brand claims to have a retail network of over 1.2 lakh counters, over 850 distributors, and 700 plus service centres pan-India. The homegrown company is also the first smartphone maker in India to launch a 5G smartphone (Agni series) in the sub-11k segment. In the last two fiscal years, the company said it witnessed "2x revenue growth" and that "Lava's feature phones owned a 24% market share in April to December 2023 period."

On global expansion, Raina said, "We are expanding globally, leading to a 19%

increase in export revenue this fiscal across feature phones, smartphones, spares and accessories." The company has expanded its footprints to emerging markets like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Qatar, UAE and Bangladesh. "In Nepal, we aim to capture a 25% feature phone and 5% smartphone market share by this year end," expects Raina. Since its inception, Lava claims to have generated more than 50,000 direct and around 8,000 indirect employments. Currently, it has over 3,000 people on its rolls.

Raina further explained, "With 100 employees engaged in R&D, which is the first and only Indian R&D in handset manufacturing in India, Lava has focussed towards building the entire ecosystem of mobile technology, while generating quality employment opportunities." Lava is a contract manufacturer -- meaning they make phone for other brands. The company says that India is emerging as a global mobile manufacturing powerhouse with policies like Production Linked Incentives (PLI). "Lava was the first to introduce Surface Mount Technology (SMT lines) and



foster an indigenous supply chain for components. The company's international acquisition has further strengthened its supply chain dominance," Raina said. On brand value and perception among Indian buyers, Lava sees a definitive resurgence in affinity towards indigenous mobile brands. The company cited a CMR report,

which says it is the only Indian smartphone brand with a 68% customer recommendation and 61% user satisfaction due to its value-for-money proposition. "Consumers resonate with Lava's differentiated experiences through its no bloatware policy, quarterly software updates, and industry-first initiatives,"

The Kotla Factory: In heart of Delhi, a village of sport strugglers

FOR ANKIT Kumar, 21, a state-ranked hurdler, life is an unending race against time. When not trying to beat his coach's stop-watch at the Jawaharlal Nehru (JLN) Stadium, he is trying to stick to the ETA while delivering orders for a quick-commerce grocery app. The son of a welder from Kundli in Haryana, Ankit stays in a windowless room at Kotla Mubarakpur, an urban slum not far from JLN. It's a space that he shares with four others. Ankit's room-mates and close to 1,000 other athletes at Kotla lead a similar double-life. They fund their track-and-field dreams by working as gig workers — the flexibility and independence of the industry allowing them time to move between two very distinct worlds.

"We try to complete a few orders in the morning before the afternoon sun comes out and we continue later after evening practice. I deliver from 8 pm to 2 am on most days. It affects my post-practice recovery but option kya hai (there's no choice)," says Ankit. As they flock to Kotla from villages in states neighbouring Delhi, many of these youngsters exercise that only "option" they have: undertake the journey to Delhi, hoping the Capital will give them a chance to make it in the impossibly competitive world of track and field. Back home, where there are no coaching and training facilities worth talking of, their dreams run into a series of obstacle courses. For instance, the West UP town of Meerut, known as a sports manufacturing hub, doesn't have a single synthetic track for training. JLN, though poorly maintained, with a patched-up track in the main arena and a practice track that's not fit for elite training, is still the best option for many of these youngsters. They know that they are on their own until they break into the national level, which is when they can hope for some kind of state support. Kotla and its thousand dreams

When Ankit came to Delhi in 2018, he knew where to go. On the athletics circuit, he had heard that Kotla Mubarakpur was the ideal place for those wanting to follow in the footsteps of Neeraj Chopra, India's first-ever Olympic track-and-field gold medallist. It's Kotla Mubarakpur's proximity to JLN and its budget spaces, unlike the more upmarket areas of Defence Colony or South Extension nearby, that draw Ankit and hundreds of others like him to the neighbourhood.

The area's open drains, complex maze of bylanes and the unmissable 'bad elements' don't make Kotla the ideal neighbourhood for those hoping to climb podiums. But as they keep saying around here, "option kya hai?". Sonam (centre), a steeplechase national record-holder from a village in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district, in her rented room in Kotla Mubarakpur. Abhinav Saha Sonam (centre), a steeplechase national record-holder from a village in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district, in her rented room in Kotla Mubarakpur. In one such lane lives youth steeplechase national record-holder Sonam. The daughter of a brick kiln labourer from a Dalit settlement in Hurthala village in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh,

Sonam made Kotla her home when she was 15. She is now 19 and has grown used to the place. "Yahan ki mehak hi alag hai, na (This place has a distinct scent doesn't it)?," she jokes, embarrassed by the foul smell emanating from the litter outside her room. While Sonam, with multiple junior national titles, is among the more accomplished athletes, most of the Kotla athletes are still trying to find their feet. A good number of them are state medallists and regularly take part in private running events for prize money. Sonam had to work as a delivery agent until she broke Parul Chaudhary's decade-old 200m Youth national record at the Khelo India Youth Games last year. She is now part of the Khelo India scholarship, where she receives a monthly stipend of Rs 10,000.

"This is one of the better lanes to live in," assures Sonam's coach Sanjeev. He smiles and adds: "Option kya hai?". Sanjeev speaks for most of the athletes who have made Kotla their home. Their shared sporting dreams have given Delhi's urban landscape another pocket of aspiration. If North Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar is where the country's UPSC aspirants head to and Mandi House attracts theatre artistes, Kotla Mubarakpur has now emerged as a village of sporting strugglers.

The Mukherjee Nagar of sports just as coaching classes and photocopy kiosks mushroom around education hubs, auxiliary businesses catering to the athletes fight for space in this densely-populated area. The neighbourhood's fruit juice shops, kiosks selling boiled eggs, sports apparel outlets and chemist shops are mostly frequented by fit and lean boys and girls. Naveen Kumar is one such beneficiary of the Kotla-JLN ecosystem. His clothes store, which he has been running for over seven years, supplies "foreign reject" apparel to athletes. Hand-me-down domestic branded clothes also make their way to Naveen's collection. If bargained right, a T-shirt can be bought for as less as Rs 50. Stores such as these are lifesavers for athletes living on a shoestring budget. If North Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar is where the country's UPSC aspirants head to and Mandi House attracts theatre artistes, Kotla Mubarakpur has now emerged as a village of sporting strugglers. (Express Photo by Abhinav Saha) "Athletes tell me in advance what kind of apparel they need and I sort it from the pile of clothes that arrive," Naveen explains. "I don't know where they get these clothes from. Once we got a jersey of some school in Australia," says Sonam's coach Sanjeev. Steeplechaser Mohammed Abbas does have issues with Kotla's poorly ventilated rooms and dingy lanes, but is happy to adjust for the convenience that comes with living in the area. "You will get everything here and for a reasonable price. There are good food options and they all treat athletes nicely," says the 19-year-old state medallist who works part-time as a



BPO call agent. Manoj Kumar, co-owner of the popular Kailash restaurant, says 60 per cent of their revenue comes from sportspersons. "I can't give you the number of athletes visiting each day but if you come this evening, you will find them taking up all the tables. There is hardly any space left for others," says the manager. For most athletes, though, eating at a budget dhaba is a luxury so on most days, they cook their meals. In Ankit's room, the responsibilities have been divided. "Two are in charge of cooking, one has to do the cleaning and we also have one person whose job is to run errands (from the third floor)," explains Ankit's roommate, Ashish.

Rooms without fans and a ticking body clock The rent for a single room, shared by three or more athletes, ranges from Rs 3,000 to 6,000. Azad Gautam, a middle-distance runner who had to go on a hunger strike to persuade his family to let him come to Delhi, shares a room with three others. The room doesn't have a ceiling fan and Delhi's unforgiving summer months have begun to kick in. "The budget is a little tight this month. We will see if we can get a fan soon," he says. "At least this area has some sunlight; some athletes live in areas where you can't tell if it is night or day," adds steeplechaser Abbas, who lives on the floor above Azad's.

Azad has seen worse — his room in Kotla Mubarakpur is an upgrade from his home in Bulandshahr. "Barish mein chhath tapakti thi gaon mein (At our village home, the roof would leak during the rains). Until my elder brother found a job, we didn't have enough for three proper meals. Woh ek sangharsh tha, aab ye ek sangharsh hai (that was one struggle, this is another)," says Azad, who moved to Delhi early this year.

Ankit Kumar, who works as delivery boy, during a practice session at JLN Stadium. Abhinav Saha Ankit Kumar, who works as delivery boy, during a practice session at JLN Stadium. The "sangharsh" is relentless. With every passing year, the pressure from family to quit and take up a job keeps mounting. Abbas, who has been

trying to win a national-level medal for over five years, compares the lives of Kotla's athletes to those of UPSC aspirants. "Everything is temporary, tension is permanent. Every day before going to bed, doubts creep in. Every morning when we wake up, there is pressure to achieve something. Athletes have a very short career. I know I have very little time left," says the 18-year-old.

Since most athletes are in their early 20s, they know they need to make a breakthrough quickly. They have to make the most of their 20s when their bodies are at peak fitness levels. "We know that we have to get our breakthrough before we turn 28-29. There are many senior athletes at JLN who are still hoping to bag their first national medal. It is tough," says Abbas. A medal at the Athletics Federation of India's national-level meets is the bare minimum these youngsters have to achieve if they hope to ever turn pro. A medal at the nationals makes them eligible for applying in PSUs and other central government agencies. But a national medal in athletics is not easy. "Out of every 100 athletes who start off, only five will eventually be able to make a career out of it. We know this fact but yet we give it everything we have got. We athletes are a little crazy but that's also what pushes us," says Abbas. There's also the stress of societal and family pressure to "settle down". "If I had still been in my village, my parents would have got me married off. My dreams of representing India would have been put to rest. But now that I have come here and earned a name for myself, the mindset of people in my village is changing," says Sonam.

Kanta Prasad, who bagged two medals in long-distance running at the Delhi state meet this year, ran away from his home in Hamirpur district of UP in 2017 to escape marriage. After working in Ghaziabad as an office boy for a few years, he decided he had had enough. "I walked up to an auto and asked him to drop me off at the best athletics stadium in the region. He said it would cost me Rs 150 and dropped me at JLN. I had only seen JLN in photos and was mesmerised by what I saw.

'BJP has nothing to show for last 10 yrs': Satheesan

With Kerala grabbing the spotlight with an excellent result in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and the state contributing the most number of Congress MPs to the Lower House, the party's state unit is likely to be under immense pressure to repeat the achievement as all 20 seats in the state go to polls during the second phase on April 26. Though the state has always been bipolar in nature politically, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been attempting to rise as the third alternative. In an interview with Vishnu Varma, Leader of Opposition in the state assembly VD Satheesan, who is overseeing the Congress campaign in the state discusses the preparations, key issues and the importance of this year's elections. Edited excerpts:

Senior Congress leader AK Antony has said that this is a do-or-die election for the party and its future. Do you agree with his view?

This election concerns not just the Congress party, but also the country. The question is whether the country will continue to exist or not. There is a lot of concern and insecurity among a vast section of people including minorities. There is a fear that anything could happen if they (BJP) get a third term. Congress is the only hope for all these people. The INDIA bloc has been formed naturally out of these fears and the Congress leads it. So the number of seats in the Congress has to go up.

What issues are the Congress party raising in its election campaign in Kerala?

First, we must overthrow this fascist government at the Centre which is creating communal polarisation and dividing people. Second, the BJP has nothing to project in terms of achievements in the last 10 years. We are attacking the so-called Modi "guarantees" and questioning them on the rise in fuel prices, LPG prices, black money, unemployment and decline in farmer incomes. We are also talking about the anti-incumbency of the state LDF government, especially the fiscal crisis. Kerala is heading into a major debt trap and all development activities are stalled. We have also alleged an unholy nexus between the BJP and the state CPM. There is a meeting point of the 'Congress-mukt Bharat' slogan of BJP and the anti-Congress mindset of the state CPM.

BJP leaders claim that the party will win a few seats this time in Kerala and that its vote-share is growing. Are you concerned?

BJP came second in Thiruvananthapuram the last two times. In Thrissur, there was a minor difference between the LDF and BJP candidates while the UDF candidate was ahead. These are the only two seats. Nowhere in Kerala are they posing a threat to mainstream candidates. There's no space for BJP here and they are irrelevant. But our fear is that the CPM is trying to make space for the BJP in Kerala. CPM's main enemy is Congress. By targeting us, they are making space for the BJP. We are a secular state and very few people are voting for BJP. The secular

thinking among Hindus here is more compared to other states in India. That's why BJP is not winning any seats.

The Kerala CM has been targeting the national leadership of Congress for its alleged silence on CAA. Do you oppose CAA and is it a part of your campaign?

In our manifesto, we have made it very clear that from 2019 onwards, we have been fighting against CAA. The chief minister is trying to mislead the people of Kerala. He is lying. In 2019 in Parliament, our MPs like Shashi Tharoor, NK Premachandran opposed the CAA bill and we voted against it. The LDF is trying to appease the BJP by not withdrawing the CAA cases. Even when the Centre recently notified the rules of CAA, we organised agitations across Kerala.

The stand of the Left and the Congress is broadly the same on issues like CAA, UCC and the Manipur violence. Don't you think the minorities in Kerala would be confused on who to vote for? Won't it end up affecting the UDF's chances?

There is insecurity and concern among minorities about the return of BJP. What is the alternative? CPM is seriously contesting only 19 seats in India out of 543 including 15 in Kerala, two in Tamil Nadu, one in Rajasthan and one in Tripura. Their situation in Bengal is very bad. So people know that they (CPM) cannot remove the Modi government without the support of Congress (at the national level). All secular people know that and they want the Congress strength to go up. No party can form a non-BJP government at the Centre without the support of Congress.

In 2019, UDF won 19 out of 20 seats in Kerala and the state sent the most number of Congress MPs to Lok Sabha. Isn't there great pressure on the state unit to repeat such a fantastic result?

Definitely. We lost the Alappuzha seat last time by around 10,000 votes. This time, we will win the seat. Last time, though we won Kottayam, the Kerala Congress (M) later defected to the LDF. We will win Kottayam also. There is a very evident trend against both governments in Kerala. There is also a silent trend against the Modi government across the nation. Whenever governments commit excesses, the people silently watch and react. The arrest of Kejriwal, the release of electoral bonds data and the freezing of Congress accounts will affect the ruling party.

In an election where women votes and representation of the female gender are considered highly significant, the UDF has only 1 woman candidate out of 20 in Kerala while LDF has 3 and NDA 5. Comment?

We took a political decision to field most of the sitting MPs this time. In Alappuzha, we have fielded AICC (general secretary) KC Venugopal because he is the best bet. We are sorry that we could not field more women candidates. But at the same time, when a vacancy came up in Rajya Sabha, we sent Jebi Mather, a woman, to the Upper House. So (the low



number of women candidates) will be compensated in the upcoming elections.

The Left leaders, particularly Kerala CM, have been talking about the frequent defections from Congress to BJP and how the party cannot be trusted. How do you counter it?

I want to ask the Kerala CM that when he was the state secretary of CPM, its senior-most leader and former finance minister V Viswanatha Menon left the party to join the BJP and contested elections. It was the first case of a senior mainstream party leader in Kerala joining the BJP. The second case was the Left MLA Alphons Kannanthanam joining BJP and becoming a union minister. So, senior leaders from CPM have left the party. In contrast,

no senior leaders of Congress have left the party in Kerala.

But children of former Congress CMs like Padmaja Venugopal and Anil Antony have left Congress to join BJP?

They are not senior leaders and they are irrelevant. If they are not keeping intact the legacies of their fathers, what can we do?

Is there a financial challenge for the Congress to fight this election? Do you have enough money to run the campaign?

It's a very tough challenge, but surprisingly people are realising this fact. When our workers are door-to-door campaigns, the people are giving us donations of ₹50, ₹100 and ₹500. We are struggling. But we are not considering money as the major factor.

Elon Musk defends crackdown on bot operations on X

New Delhi: Some people are running huge bot operations on the micro-blogging site X, which is reducing the content quality to a great extent, Elon Musk said on Saturday, as he defended his decision to act on spam accounts which resulted in many users losing followers. Earlier this month, the social media platform kicked off the exercise to remove bots. "I'm just talking about people running massive bot spam operations that unequivocally reduce the quality of content," the billionaire responded to a follower. He clarified that the ban on fake engagement refers to those who use bots to artificially inflate their engagement. "Botting for fake engagement," said the Tesla CEO.

The action came as porn bots flooded X in the last few months. Earlier this week, Musk announced that new X users may be charged for posting content on the micro-blogging site. The Tesla and SpaceX CEO said, "Unfortunately, a small fee for new user write access is the only way to curb the relentless onslaught of bots." "Current AI (and troll farms) can pass 'are you a bot'



with ease," the billionaire commented. He also said that Chinese short-video platform TikTok should not be banned in the US, even though such a ban may benefit the X platform. "Doing so would be contrary to freedom of speech and expression. It is not what America stands for," Musk posted.

In Tamil Nadu's Sriperumbudur, dreams of a better future

For someone who grew up running through verdant fields of paddy, squeezing your life into a 10x12 sq feet cubby hole is never easy. It gets worse when there are eight other people under the same cracked concrete roof. And that's on a good day. Yet, there is no doubt in V Keerthika's mind that she is better off. In life, and at work. Work is the drab assembly lines of Sriperumbudur. In the last three years, the 28-year-old has held three separate jobs in the industrial powerhouse of a town on the outskirts of Chennai. Every evening, she returns to her crowded room that she rents for ₹1,500 a month, in the hope that her station will rise with the next job she holds. Her tryst with the town began in the shadow of Covid. In 2021, as the pandemic ravaged the country, Keerthika sat along with 68 other women in a line for six days a week, eight hours a day, hunched over an assembly line in a Foxconn facility. Her job was to check the colour quality of the iPhone. "I was very proud to hold an iPhone every day," she said. "I felt important that I was part of a global company and the entire factory was run with just us women. Even our supervisors were women." In the factory that manufactured the world's most coveted mobile phones, trajectories such as that of Keerthika were common – young, educated women from the agrarian hinterland dazzled by the lure of working for the world's second most valuable company. For many – Keerthika estimated around 70% of the employees were women – it was the first taste of freedom from their orthodox homes, and also their first real money.

"In our village, women weren't going out for work but I convinced my parents. Because of that my family situation has improved," she said. "I loved the job. I got paid ₹14,000, the highest income in my family ever." But behind the shimmer of her new salary, a storm was brewing. Work hours often spilled beyond the prescribed limit, bathroom breaks were frowned upon, and the food was inedible. On occasion, workers fell ill. In hostels where Keerthika lived, surveillance was common and blunt, they were forced to sleep on the floor, and the authorities clamped a limit on water usage in toilets. Eventually, her family found her a match, she got married and returned to her village, roughly 300 km away, where her parents worked as farm hands.

It was just as well. Days later, Foxconn temporarily closed its facility on December 18, 2021 after protests over a major food poisoning episode which left 159 employees hospitalised. Eventually, the factory reopened in January 2022. "Throughout the episode, I was in touch with my friends because I was worried about their safety," said Keerthika. The relief was short-lived. Back in Tiruvarur, the college graduate found little prospects. She briefly worked in a private company as an administrator for ₹6,000, less than half of what she was making in Sriperumbudur.

By the summer of 2022, she was back. She took a job at electronics company Korea Fuel Tech India. The hours were brutal, and sometimes her health gave way,

but getting paid a commensurate salary was like a drug. "There are so many companies here and we can easily find a job. We don't need much experience. The skills are easy to pick up. It gives me confidence." She now works in the security team of a private company. With her new salary of ₹18,000, she feels financially stable. She also takes up extra shifts which earn another ₹5,000 a month, allowing her to send money back home. "I have taken care of my ageing parents. And I helped my two younger sisters and a younger brother study," Keerthika said, adding proudly that her salary helped all her siblings go to private colleges. "And it was all due to Sriperumbudur." An hour's drive out of Chennai, the town of roughly 200,000 people first jumped into the news in 1991, when former PM Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated near the town. Today, the hub boasts of at least 500 companies that manufacture automobiles and electronics such as Hyundai, Salcomp, TVS, and Pegatron. Between neat, tree-lined avenues are rows upon rows of mechanised facilities, assembly lines and factories, bright green boards outside them announcing government-mandated details. In many ways, it represents the strides made by the state with the second-largest economy and is often touted as proof of the success of the Dravidian model of development.

The fuel running this powerhouse is its female workforce. "In Foxconn alone, there are 25,000 women working. There is no data on the total number but we estimate it to be around 65,000 in Sriperumbudur," said a labour department official who did not wish to be named. Experts say that this vast pool of educated women is a key reason behind Tamil Nadu galloping ahead in industrialisation. In 2022-23, Tamil Nadu rose to the top spot as the exporter of electronic goods, nearly tripling in a year at \$5.37 billion from \$1.86 billion in the previous year, according to data by the National Import-Export for Yearly Analysis of Trade (NIRYAT). 40% of smartphones from India were exported from Kancheepuram district (of which Sriperumbudur is a part), according to NIRYAT. 43% of all women factory workers in India came from Tamil Nadu. Sriperumbudur, and especially its women, are now at the heart of India's manufacturing push in critical sectors such as mobile phones, trying to cash in on a world economy trying to diversify away from China due to geopolitical worries. K Kanagavalli doesn't know about China. When the 37-year-old came to work in Sriperumbudur in 2008, there were no iPhones either. A generation before Keerthika, Kanagavalli was among the first group of women workers who came to work in this hub, in the first wave. Back in the mid 2000s, Nokia, then the world's largest mobile phone company, set up a factory, its largest, in Sriperumbudur. A clutch of its suppliers followed. But the company would go on to be laid low by the touchscreen revolution that it ignored, and the factory by regulatory trouble. For the last nine years, Kanagavalli has worked at an aluminium



filtration company. "I'm exposed to dust. This has given me a skin allergy. Initially, my face was filled with pimples and rashes; now that I've been doing it for nine years, my body has become used to it," Kanagavalli said. "Some of my colleagues wheeze often. We all go to the dermatologist at least once a month." Yet, she cannot get out of the industrial hub, because outside, the only jobs available are that of a coolie or as a beneficiary of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGs). "I work in an air-conditioned office. Compared to what's outside, I'm living a good life so the skin allergies seem like a small price to pay," she said.

She now earns ₹25,000 monthly, only ₹10,000 less than her husband. The double income has ensured that her older daughter can study microbiology at a private college while her younger daughter is enrolled in a private school. It has given her more heft at home, and the ability to run the show. Across Sriperumbudur, this is the new normal. D Vanmathi moved here in 2021 with her family after her husband – the only male member in the family – was killed in a road accident. Now, her mother is a caretaker at the creche where staff leave their children, her older sister a supervisor and she is a security guard. When she first came to Sriperumbudur, she worked as a labourer at a company which manufactures products for medium and heavy commercial vehicles. "I had to stand for eight hours and deal with heavy machinery. And we had a target to complete every hour," said Vanmathi. "I often cried thinking why I was born as a woman." The work gave her stomach and back pain. And yet, she woke up at 3.30am to cook for her eight and six-year-olds before reporting to duty by 6am. The 29-year-old is more content now, having joined as a security guard in another private company for ₹16,500 a month. "I am happy now. The financial independence lets me steer my life," Vanmathi said. The women here now often come together – pooling money in medical emergencies, helping each other during family weddings or bereavements, or just finding an outlet for fun. "The men working one-floor below us always joke that our floor always has money," she said.

In any such industrial corridor in the heartland – think of Ghaziabad, Gurugram or Kanpur – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would hold the edge. But in Sriperumbudur, listed among the biggest Lok Sabha constituencies in the state, it is the two Dravidian giants that have held a stranglehold on the seat. The constituency comprises six assembly segments across three districts – Madhavoyal, Ambattur and Alandur in Chennai, Pallavaram and Tambaram in Chengalpattu district and Sriperumbudur in Kancheepuram district. Five of these are held by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and a sixth by its ally Congress. In 2019, DMK leader TR Baalu won by a massive 500,000, flipping the seat from the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) which had won it in 2014, courtesy a massive wave of women's support in favour of late chief minister J Jayalalithaa, for whom it would be her last general election. A smattering of other political parties – such as the AMMK, PMK or NTK – have never found much favour especially among the women, who form the majority of the local electorate. "We have only chosen between the DMK and AIADMK except once when the Congress won," says Kanagavalli. "This time too it will be one of the Dravidian parties who will win." This time, in the rest of the state, there is (at least on paper) a triangular contest between the DMK-led alliance, AIADMK, and the BJP-led coalition, which includes TTV Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (a breakaway faction of the AIADMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi, the Tamil Maanila Congress, Indiya Jananayaka Katchi and Puthiya Needhi Katchi. In Sriperumbudur though, the DMK's rising sun symbol blankets the campaign, clearly ahead of the two-leaves symbol of the AIADMK. BJP ally TMC(M) is the third force fighting here. Many issues in this election are national – DMK's Baalu has campaigned on Tamil pride, the importance of showcasing the Dravidian model of development, upholding federalism and scrapping the National Education Policy, 2020 and the Citizenship Amendment Act. "Sriperumbudur is all about inclusive growth which is our Dravidian model of governance," said deputy secretary of DMK's I-T wing, Salem Dharanidharan.