







## Soothing salvo

The GST Council has held out hope for some relief for insurance consumers

Meeting for the second time after the 2024 general election results, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council on Monday sought to calm some of the rising clamour against the 18% indirect tax levy on insurance premium payments. A new Group of Ministers is being formed to urgently recommend tax changes for life and health insurance policies, with an assurance the Council would meet again in November to take a call on its report. This marks a notable shift from last month, when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had staunchly defended the levy in Parliament, noting that States earn a large chunk of these revenues and Members of Parliament, who took on the Centre on the matter must liaise with States' Ministers as they are a party to the Council's decisions. It must be noted that a reconsideration of GST levies on insurance had come up at least three times under the Council's aegis, starting a year and a half since the GST's July 2017 launch, but the status quo was preferred each time.

What is plausibly different this time around is that the government's own have echoed the sentiment. While Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has averred that the GST levy on life insurance premium is tantamount to taxing the uncertainties of life, the BJP's now-critical allies such as the TDP and Jana Sena Party have also sought a rollback of the levies on health and life insurance. Perhaps not unrelated is the government's post-poll decision to desist from tom-tomming GST's buoyant monthly collections, perceived by many as a celebration of high levies on consumers. GST revenues just from health insurance premia rose over 54% between 2021-22 and 2022-24, yielding ₹8,262 crore last year. One hopes that any reduction in the GST on health covers considered by the Council is not selective or limited, for instance, to group policies or senior citizens or with a cap on the cover, and it is ensured they translate into real cuts in premia payments. After the COVID-19 pandemic, while awareness levels about health cover needs have risen, hospitalisation and insurance cover costs have spiked even faster. Given India's inadequate public health systems, a serious disease or malaise afflicting a single family member can push an average household into poverty. For life covers, the Council could take a more nuanced approach by extending most relief to pure term insurance policies that help families tide over shocks, rather than to myriad market-linked investment products offered by the industry in the guise of insurance. If, in the Council's wisdom, helicopter services availed on a 'shared seat' basis must attract only 5% GST, insurance policies surely deserve more benign taxation too.

## Future, at last

Tennis gets a settled look with the rise of a new generation

One of the toughest tests for a modern-day tennis player is to maintain excellence all year round. The season starts in early January and ends only in mid-November, traversing continents, different time zones and a multitude of playing surfaces. The first and the last Grand Slam tournaments themselves are separated by roughly eight months, making success in both – even though they are similar hard-court Majors – one of the most impressive feats. Since the turn of the millennium, only Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic (thrice each) and Angelique Kerber had managed to win at Melbourne Park and Flushing Meadows in the same year. What Janik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka achieved in New York, of winning their maiden US Open singles titles to go with their Australian Open crowns from earlier in the season, is thus an ode to their fitness, consistency and all-round playing ability. For Sinner, the twin successes bookend a career-best year, the recent doping cloud he came under notwithstanding. He won the Masters 1000 trophies in Miami and Cincinnati, ATP 500s in Rotterdam and Halle, reached the semifinals at French Open, quarterfinals at Wimbledon and rose to No.1 in the world. Sabalenka, World No.2, has been just as prolific, winning Cincinnati, reaching the final at Madrid and Rome, and making the quarters at Roland-Garros.

While their triumphs will no doubt embellish their respective careers, the accomplishments will, in all probability, shape the future of tennis. Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have now split 2024's four Slams, and for the first time since 2002, there is no winner from the legendary trio of Federer, Rafael Nadal and Djokovic. Their ascent has also come at a time when tennis needed variety. Sinner's clinically efficient and workman-like game, and Alcaraz's all-court dazzle and razz-matazz make the upper echelons of men's tennis an eclectic place instead of the one-dimensional hub it was threatening to turn into with the rise of players like Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev. Meanwhile, Sabalenka's victory has made 2024 the first year since 2014 without a first-time women's singles champion at the Majors, a clear sign that the WTA Tour has finally settled down. Like Sinner-Alcaraz, there is the Sabalenka-Iga Swiatek duopoly, with the pair having secured seven of the past 11 Slams. While Sabalenka – also the Australian Open winner and US Open runner-up in 2023 – has been consistent, with seven semifinals or better finishes at her last eight Majors, Swiatek is a five-time Slam champion and the No.1 from April 2022 for all but eight weeks. All of which proves that tennis' brand-new era is well and here.

Africa figures prominently in China's worldview and in the conduct of its foreign policy in the 21st century. During the past 24 years, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has emerged as an all-encompassing and effective platform for dialogue, interaction and planning between the two sides. African countries, despite their reservations and grievances, have found it useful to enhance their proximity to China. Unlike the previous decade, African governments and institutions of multiple hues now find it increasingly more comfortable to deal with their Chinese counterparts. In this light, the outcomes of the Ninth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, which just concluded in Beijing, merit a dispassionate scrutiny.

As scholar George Yu noted in 1968, 'studying China in Africa is much like pursuing a dragon in the bush. The dragon is imposing, but the bush is dense'. In the latter half of the 20th century, especially in its last decade, China laid the foundations of a strong partnership with Africa. This has blossomed during the FOCAC era which began with the first summit held in Beijing in 2000. Since then, a total of five conferences took place in Beijing and one each in Ethiopia, Egypt, South Africa, and Senegal. The Beijing summit last week confirms China's consistency and steadfastness in pursuing its goals relating to Africa. They are economic, political and strategic in nature, reflecting Beijing's long-held view that Africa is vital to the world's future – therefore, it should be motivated to stand alongside China.

### The main elements

A careful look at the 30-paragraph-long Beijing Declaration of the latest summit reveals its key elements.

First, the jointly negotiated document which bears predominantly the stamp of Chinese draftsman, has six sections, namely outlining the high-level 'China Africa Community with a Shared Future'; fostering 'synergy' between China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), AU's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 UN Agenda for sustainable development; the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI); and spelling out the review and outlook for FOCAC.

Second, both sides have committed themselves to expanding exchanges on governance, modernisation and poverty reduction so that modernisation based on 'the characteristics of their own civilisations' is promoted. Further, they favour 'mutually beneficial and inclusive economic globalisation' that focuses on the concerns of African countries. China supports Africa in increasing Africa's influence and role in global governance. The declaration states: 'Africa



Rajiv Bhatia

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With African governments finding it more comfortable to deal with China, the recent FOCAC conference needs objective scrutiny; there are takeaways for India

appreciates it that China is the first country to support the AU in joining the G20. Besides, the parties stand for an equal and orderly multipolar world, and for necessary reform and strengthening of the United Nations (UN), including its Security Council.

Third, there is little new in the goal to promote synergy involving Chinese, African and UN plans for development as this has been often articulated in the past. However, China has now hailed progress in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and expressed readiness to sign a framework agreement for economic partnership with Africa. On the issue of financing projects and businesses in Africa, the Chinese side astutely shifted responsibility by calling on financial institutions and commercial creditors to participate in debt treatment for African countries.

Fourth, China's three flagship plans – GDI, GSI, and GCI – have been firmly embedded into the purportedly strategy to create a common path to all-round security and development paradigm. The declaration, for example, voices China's support for increased UN funding for Africa's independent peace operations, counterterrorism activities and maritime security challenges. Further, the document waxes eloquent in highlighting the need for joint action for deepening dialogue among cultures and civilisations.

Fifth, the concluding section points to the transfer of responsibility of Africa's FOCAC co-chair from Senegal to the Republic of the Congo and confirmation that the tenth conference will be held in 2027 in Congo.

### Beneath the surface, a familiar template

The international media produced numerous headlines while covering Chinese President Xi Jinping's keynote address at the inauguration of the Beijing Summit, unaware that it sticks to a familiar template used on such occasions in the past. He presented the offer of new financing amounting to nearly \$51 billion in soft loans, grants and investment promotion to African nations. He identified 10 partnership actions relating to trade connectivity, green development, industrial chain cooperation, and health, as he did in the past. On the surface, his big announcements such as provision of 60,000 training opportunities for women and youth, invitation to 1,000 members of African political parties to visit China, and training for 7,000 military and police personnel from Africa sound impressive, but opacity will prevail about the degree of their implementation in the future as it did in the past. What, however, is noteworthy on this occasion is China's decision to give all 33 African least developed countries zero tariff treatment for 100% tariff lines. When

implemented, it could boost African exports to China.

Concerning the growing multi-dimensional cooperation between China and Africa, three principal perspectives should be factored in. First, the Chinese view is that a natural partnership exists between China, the largest developing country in the world, and Africa, the continent with the largest number of developing countries. With its own economic success, China has shown an alternative path to modernisation which is different from westernisation. The Chinese path is highly relevant to Africa, according to this school.

Second, a sober African view recognises the benefits and risks of close partnership with China, but as pointed out by Paul Nantulya of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the FOCAC-centered process is still largely shaped by "a donor-recipient dynamic where African countries mostly take a back seat while China initiates most of the agenda". Third, the prevalent American perception has been presented by Michael Schuman of the Atlantic Council who argues that China's interest in the developing world is shaped by Xi Jinping's anti-Americanism. He is of the opinion that the aim of Mr. Xi's strategy is to build a coalition of states within the Global South to act as 'a counter weight' to the U.S. global alliance. A more sophisticated viewpoint was articulated by a European foreign minister visiting India in 2019. He cautioned against interpreting the Chinese role in Africa 'in black and white terms'. It was doing some good as in the health and education fields and it was also expanding its power and influence on the continent, he noted.

### The import for India

Finally, what are the takeaways for India from the latest FOCAC Summit? At least three seem fairly obvious.

First, consistency in cultivation of Africa at the highest political levels is a must. After holding three India-Africa Forum Summits, India paused its Africa-centered conference diplomacy in 2015. Almost a decade has elapsed since then. Second, strong historical bonds, ideological contributions and stirring rhetoric are useful, but they must be backed by financial generosity. This demands substantial additional resources for fuelling India-Africa cooperation. Without them, our diplomatic and business initiatives would become handicapped. Third, Africa's place in the list of India's diplomatic priorities must be reviewed. If the continent enjoys a high priority, the Indian polity must be enabled and encouraged to act accordingly.

India's Africanists have presented a range of practical policy choices to the government. What is now needed is stronger political will.

# UAE-India ties are rooted in affinity, trust and respect

During the visit of Sheikh Khaled, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, to Delhi this week, there was one engagement that had emblematic significance for him and for the ties between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India.

Visiting Rajghat, His Highness planted a tree in memory of Mahatma Gandhi, following the example of his father, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, in 2016, and his grandfather, the founding president of our country, Sheikh Zayed, in 1992.

The three trees, planted by three generations of the past, current and future leaders of our country, within the span of three decades, will stand side by side, a symbol of the deeply-rooted and growing ties between our two countries: embedded in the past but reaching towards the future. At first glance, our countries appear to be very different. India is almost 40 times larger than the UAE in size and is also the most populous country in the world. There are more than 1,000 Indian citizens for every Emirati citizen. Our economies too are founded on different strengths: agriculture is a key pillar of India's economy, for example, but only makes up less than 1% of the UAE's GDP. And while we both emerged as modern nations in the 20th century, our histories and governance are very different. Yet, the strongest ties between nations are those where common interests and values are enriched by complementary strengths and diversity, embracing difference rather than seeking to paper over it.

**Deep connections, of people and progress**  
The secret of the success – and distinctiveness – of the UAE-India relationship is the way it is rooted in affinity, trust and respect, derived from generations of human connections. Just as trees depend on strong roots to draw the water and



Reem Al Hashimy

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Minister of State for International Cooperation and the UAE Special Envoy to the Republic of India

Given their long history of connections, the two countries are determined to keep growing and innovating together

nutrients they need for growth and to hold them fast in tough times, partnerships between nations must have these qualities in order to thrive.

Ours has always been a relationship about people and progress. The first trade links between the Arabian Gulf and India go back thousands of years, as people, goods and ideas crossed back and forth across the ocean. Pottery discovered in recent archaeological excavations in Abu Dhabi shows connections to the Indus Valley civilisations of more than four millennia ago. In our parents' time, many Emiratis travelled to India for medical treatment, and when my children catch the typical colds and flus of childhood, I turn to Indian homeopathic medicine first, before other remedies.

### Strength of the expatriate community

The UAE is home to more than 3.5 million Indians, the largest expatriate community in our country. Our success is built on our leaders' far-sighted commitment to tolerance, inclusion and the empowerment of women and minorities, and we are grateful for the contribution Indian nationals make to the strength and vibrancy of our economy. The degree of connectivity between our countries can be seen in the simple fact that there are more than 1,500 flights between the UAE and India every single week.

When a relationship is founded on respect and a sincere inclination towards partnership and collaboration, there is no limit to what can be achieved. In February 2022, India became the first country with which the UAE signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Trade negotiations often take years, if not decades, and are sometimes abandoned due to insurmountable differences. We were able to agree our partnership agreement within six months, because of the trust and affinity at the

heart of our relationship. In its first year of operation, our bilateral trade jumped by over 15%. We have signed billions of rupees of additional investment deals, and plan to go much further.

Sheikh Khaled recently attended the inauguration of the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi Abu Dhabi, which is the first overseas branch of the prestigious university. We have exchanged agreements on topics including health innovation and renewable energy, crucial to our nations' and the world's future. During the Crown Prince's visit, further co-operation agreements will be signed, including on civil nuclear technology: a domestic success story for the Emirates, but one rooted in international co-operation. India's research into nuclear desalination to produce clean drinking water – which has obvious importance for a desert country such as the UAE – is one example of the many opportunities which our partnership can enable advances not just in green energy production but also in medical technology, scientific research, agriculture and industry.

### Ties that will flourish

Like his grandfather, Sheikh Khaled planted an amaltas tree, *Cassia fistula*. His father, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, planted the mousli tree (*Mimusops elengi*). Amaltas trees grow fast, embodying optimism and renewal, while the slower-growing mousli points us to the virtues of stability and patient trust. As the UAE and India continue to develop our comprehensive strategic partnership, these different qualities symbolise our approach. We can have confidence in our mutual affinity and respect and our long history of connection, but also be determined to keep growing and innovating together, renewing our partnership and finding new ways to flourish.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Levy on policies

It is to be a great relief, especially for senior citizens and pensioners, if the new Group of Ministers is able to review the GST tax rate on health and life insurance policies (Page 1, September 10). The GST levy is a heavy burden that weighs down on the limited financial strength of the middle class and salaried sections, as well as senior citizen pensioners. **N. Visweswaran,** Chennai

The high premium for medical and health insurance is discouraging the common man from buying himself adequate medical coverage. The need for medical insurance for a considerable sum has become imperative given how expensive hospital bills have become. The current tax percentage is almost a fifth of the premium. The rule that once the sum assured is fixed, the policyholder cannot take coverage for a lesser sum

when renewing the policy is perhaps a way to ensure that there is a flow of money to insurance companies. If taking medical and health insurance is to aid the policyholder, the government must be considerate. **V. Lakshmanan,** Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

### Focus on race courses

Yesterday it was the iconic Ooty race course and earlier Hyderabad, Bangalore and

Bombay. Now the spotlight is on the Madras Race Course, which is being subject to bureaucratic and political whims, without any thought being given to the heavy damage that it does to the entire economic ecology.

### Corrections & Clarifications

An editing error. The Kolkata rape and murder incident happened on August 9 and not August 5, as mentioned in a front page report, "SC asks West Bengal doctors to resume hospital duty today" (September 10, 2024).

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Land prices being what they are, no course can afford to pay the dues calculated by the revenue surplus generated. However these are more than made up by indirect and direct tax generation. The large-scale unorganised

employment generation is also no small matter. We are well aware of what forces will be at play once these lands go back to the government.

The media needs to make out a case for the retention of these spaces before they become concrete jungles.

**Srinivas Gade,** Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.



# SCIENCE

## With their ancestors' help, weak cancer cells can form tough tumours

In past studies, scientists have tried to understand drug resistance by separating the corresponding cells from a larger population, making copies of them in the lab, and investigating them. The researchers behind a new study realised this approach removes an important bit of context that could affect the cells' prospects

Joel P. Joseph

**S**cientists have cracked the mystery of how some cancer cells that ought not to survive could actually take help from their "neighbours" to succeed and form drug-resistant tumours instead.

Drug resistance is one of the world's major crises of the 21st century. When a pathogen that causes an infection or disease becomes drug-resistant, drugs that could cure these conditions become less effective. Pathogens acquire this ability in the form of certain genetic mutations, although some non-genetic factors are also in play.

When a cancer takes root in a person's body, the cancer cells can also become drug-resistant in the same way. Simple logic dictates that when the person takes a drug to destroy these cells, the drug-resistant cells will proliferate while the non-resistant cells won't. However, the genetic changes that conferred drug-resistance to the cells will also have undermined their overall 'fitness'. When the person isn't taking a drug to treat the cancer, the drug-resistant cells should thus have a harder time surviving than their non-resistant peers. They are said to suffer a 'growth penalty'.

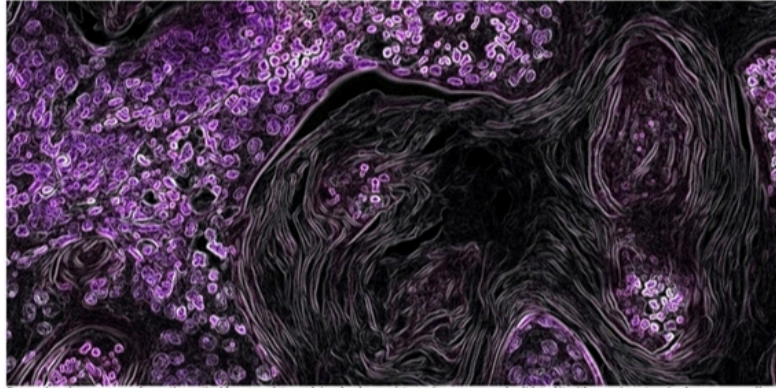
How the evolutionarily less-fit cells survive such conditions is a puzzle scientists have been trying to solve for years.

### A complex ecosystem

In past studies, scientists have tried to understand drug resistance by separating the corresponding cells from a larger population, making copies of them in the lab, and investigating them further. The researchers behind the new study realised this approach removes an important bit of context that could affect the cells' prospects: the influence of other cells in their surroundings, especially the ancestors from whom they "deviated" by accumulating genetic changes.

Jeff Maltas, a postdoctoral research fellow at Cleveland Clinic and the lead author of the study, said scientists have appreciated the idea of tumours as a complex ecological system. He said his team's idea came from multiple disciplines plus previous reports of high mutation rates within a tumour that had changes in pH and oxygen levels, among other conditions.

In a study published in 2022, for example, some members of the same team of researchers and others showed that even in the absence of a drug, drug-resistant mutant cells undergo large changes in growth rate. The authors attributed this to the environment in



Researchers have proposed a mathematical framework to explain why drug resistance is common and validated it with experiments using lung cancer cells. This is a representative image of Kras-driven lung cancer cells. ERIC SNYDER/U.S. NCJ

which the cells existed.

### A surprise in a model

Conventionally, mutated cells have a certain growth rate in the presence of a drug and a lower one in its absence. In the new study, the researchers built a mathematical model based on the idea that these growth rates depend on the presence of a drug and on the cells' environment. When cultured alone, drug-resistant cells grew more slowly than the cells from which they were "descended." But when these cells and their ancestors were cultured together, the former grew much faster.

The model also revealed that the more ancestral cells there are in the same culture, the drug-resistant daughter cells also proliferated faster — so much so that the growth penalty vanished. The resulting tumour would be resistant to the drugs to come.

The researchers also found that even when there is no drug, the interactions between the evolving drug-resistant cells in the tumour's environment still promoted drug resistance. The implication is that drug-resistant cells could be present in larger numbers, perhaps more than a clinician or medical researcher might expect, even before treatment begins.

The authors wrote in their paper that their work "both complements and builds off of recent studies from a wide range of disciplines, ranging from theoretical population genetics and ecology to clinical trials across several biological kingdoms."



Drug resistance is one of the major crises of the 21st century. When a pathogen that causes an infection or disease becomes drug-resistant, drugs that could cure these conditions become less effective.

### The ancestral advantage

The researchers proposed a mathematical framework to explain why drug resistance is common and validated it with experiments using lung cancer cells.

First, they engineered three drug-resistant mutations in lung cancer cells in the lab and grew them together with different amounts of drug-sensitive ancestor cells. Then they observed how the different abundances of mutations in the cells affected their growth rate.

The mutations they picked to engineer are commonly seen in lung cancer patients. They found that all the drug-resistant cells grew slower than their ancestors when grown in isolation. But when grown with their ancestors, they built up faster. The researchers also grew two types of drug-resistant cells together without the ancestor, and their growth rate didn't increase. That is, interactions between evolutionarily different cells didn't provide any growth advantage. Only interactions with ancestral cells did.

The idea that a mutation's frequency or relative abundance dictates how fit the cells that have it are is not new, but

experts said the current study emphasises this idea in the context of cancer cells accumulating drug-resistant mutations.

### Clue to a new treatment

"A key conclusion... is that the ecological environment can greatly impact the phenotype of the mutant being studied. Removing that mutant from the ecology leads to an incomplete scientific picture," Maltas said.

Mohit Kumar Jolly, an associate professor of bioengineering at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said, "Most, if not all, current therapies in the clinic do not consider the impact of these interactions, and this study reveals how considering this important dimension can help potentially design more effective therapies."

The researchers also said their findings could be extendable to any evolving system, including viruses that mutate and bacteria that acquire resistance to antibiotics.

The study also indicated a potential new target for developing drugs to fight cancer and infectious diseases. "If this phenomenon is as general as we think," Maltas said, "future treatments may be developed to disrupt the ecological interactions themselves, leading to higher cure rates." The study was conducted by scientists from Cleveland Clinic and Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland. The findings were published in the journal *PRX Life* in June 2024.

(Joel P. Joseph is a freelance science journalist and researcher. joelpjoseph2009@gmail.com)

### THE GIST

Researchers have shown that even in the absence of a drug, drug-resistant mutant cells undergo large changes in growth rate. This was attributed to the environment in which the cells existed

When cultured alone, drug-resistant cells grew more slowly than the cells from which they were 'descended.' But when these cells and their ancestors were cultured together, the former grew much faster

If this phenomenon is general, future treatments may be developed to disrupt the ecological interactions themselves, leading to higher cure rates

### BIG SHOT



Solar panels under construction on the sea in Binzhou, in eastern China's Shandong province on September 8. AFP

### QUESTION CORNER

## The kindest cuts

**Q: Why doesn't cutting hair hurt?**  
**A:** Hair is made of dead epithelial cells strengthened by a protein called keratin. The

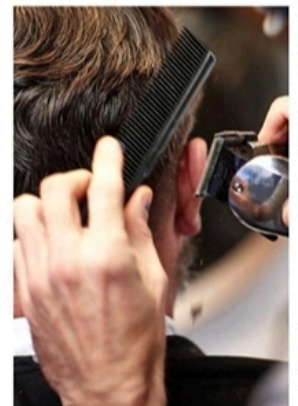
epidermis — the upper layer of the skin — descends into the dermis, the inner layer, to form flask-shaped structures. These structures, called hair follicles, have a group of epithelial cells that form a bulb.

Below this bulb is the hair papilla, which consists of connective tissues supplied richly with blood vessels and connected by nerves. This region supplies nourishment to the hair's root cells.

The epidermal cells of the hair root divide rapidly. As new cells form, the old cells are pushed upwards in the form of hair.

Beyond the bulb region, the cells die and become horny with the addition of keratin. As the dead cells continue to add up rapidly in the root, the shaft grows in length and pierces through the epidermal layer and projects out as hair. Hair normally grows about 18 cm in a year.

Thus the root is the only living part of the hair. When hair above the skin is cut, it doesn't hurt. If the hair is pulled out, the sensory nerves in the hair papilla trigger a pain sensation.



The root is the only living part of the hair. When hair above the skin is cut, it doesn't hurt. If the hair is pulled out, the sensory nerves in the hair papilla trigger a pain sensation GETTY IMAGES

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## Montelukast: overused and dangerous

In February 2018, Harry Miller, a 14-year-old British teenager, died by suicide after struggling to cope with mental health issues for two years. Miller, who had been suffering from asthma, had been prescribed montelukast on an ongoing basis for those two years. A couple of years after this incident, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) added a 'black box warning' to montelukast and the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, U.K. issued a health warning saying the drug could cause serious neuropsychiatric adverse effects. Several patient advocacy groups across the world have been lobbying for the restricted use of this drug. While caution is being exercised everywhere, the sale of this drug in India is unregulated, largely irrational, and seems to be increasing exponentially.



**Lancelot Pinto**  
Consultant pulmonologist and epidemiologist at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai. Views are personal



**Sanjitha Muneeswaran**  
Postgraduate student in the Department of Respiratory Medicine at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai. Views are personal

Montelukast, developed by Merck and Co., was approved by the FDA in 1998 and marketed under the brand name 'Singulair'. The oral medication was approved to be prescribed daily for long-term use as a 'preventer' or 'controller' of asthma and allergic rhinitis. There is universal consensus, based on multiple comparative studies, that as a treatment for asthma, the drug is inferior to inhaled corticosteroids, which are considered first-line therapy for the control of the disease. For allergic rhinitis, most guidelines across the world recommend intranasal corticosteroids and/or antihistamines; montelukast is not recommended first-line therapy.

### Unrestricted use in India

Yet, it is widely prescribed in India. There are multiple reasons for this. Patients prefer short-term oral medication over long-term inhalers and topical nasal sprays. Inhalers are often thought to have an addictive potential and are considered unsafe. There is also stigma associated with the use of inhalers, and patients do not want to be seen by their family and

While caution is being exercised everywhere, the sale of this drug in India is unregulated, largely irrational, and seems to be increasing exponentially

peers as needing inhalers to breathe. In the treatment of children, parents are often concerned about the effect of inhaled corticosteroids on growth, and montelukast has been considered to be safe in comparison. This is despite the fact that poorly controlled asthma can have far more deleterious effects on growth and development than those caused by inhalers. There also appears to be widespread ignorance of the adverse effects of the drug in India, resulting in rampant over-the-counter use. Even among physicians, the adverse effects of the drug do not appear to be widely known, as evidenced by the cavalier prescribing practices. Most prescriptions even for the common cold appear to have the drug in combinations for short-term use.

### With antihistamines

What is especially worrying is the unrestricted use of the drug in combination with antihistamines. This is unscientific, as the drug is approved for use as a controller, and not as a short-term reliever medication, as is being widely marketed. A prescription of montelukast for 10 days is unscientific. Patients possibly benefit with time-tested antihistamines, such as levocetirizine, loratadine or fexofenadine, in combinations, while being exposed to the adverse effects of montelukast. Such combinations appear to be driven by profits — combining antihistamines with montelukast often triples the price of the drug. This is true, despite the patent on the drug expiring in 2012. Industry sources inform us that over 193 registered brands offer such combination treatment in India. The annual sales of montelukast were more than ₹2,400 crore during the April 2023-24 period. Less than 3% of these sales are potentially guideline-based, i.e. the sales of the drug alone; the rest are in irrational and unindicated combinations with

antihistamines, oral bronchodilators, and mucolytics.

Concerns related to the drug are not a recent phenomenon. They were investigated as early as 2009, when an FDA review reported serious post-marketing concerns regarding the neuropsychiatric adverse effects. There is growing recognition that the drug can cause aggression, nightmares, depression, and cognitive impairment. It has been associated with deaths by suicide. A study from the University of Oxford, published in JAMA in 2022, concluded a much higher risk of anxiety and insomnia, among other neuropsychiatric adverse effects, from this drug. Large studies in Denmark, the U.S., Korea, and the U.K. have suggested a strong association between the use of the drug and serious mental health issues.

As pulmonologists, we notice a trend of aggressive marketing of montelukast in combinations by the pharmaceutical industry. Every major pharmaceutical company markets the drug in combination with an assortment of quick-acting, reliever medications. Our ENT colleagues have experienced a similar trend. This possibly explains the 25% growth in sales over the past year (industry sources).

### Time for regulators to step in

Regulators need to step in to ensure that the abuse of this drug stops, and that these health concerns are amplified among both physicians and patients. Not only will this protect citizens from a harmful drug, but it will also ensure that patients are prescribed inexpensive and time-tested options for short-term use, and better ones for long-term use. In a country where post-marketing surveillance tends to be limited, and mental health issues are largely under-reported and stigmatised, we need to raise awareness and prevent an epidemic of neuropsychiatric adverse effects, especially in young children.

## Steering through troubled waters

Questions on the Yettinahole Project continue to haunt the government

### STATE OF PLAY

**Sathish G.T.**  
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The Congress government in Karnataka, which has been struggling to deal with controversies raised by the Opposition as well as its own internal squabbles over leadership, got a much-needed break from bad press when it inaugurated the ambitious Yettinahole Integrated Drinking Water Project last week. The project aims to harness 24.01 tmcft of water from the catchment area of the Nethravathi River, which originates in the Western Ghats and flows through the hilly Malnad districts and coastal area, to provide water to seven arid districts of southern Karnataka.

However, the project, which is being implemented at an estimated cost of ₹23,251 crore, has been controversial since its inception. It has its genesis in a report submitted by Dr. G.S. Paramashivaiah, who retired as Superintendent Engineer with the State government, on providing permanent irrigation facilities for arid districts by diverting excess water from west-flowing rivers. The Yettinahole project is part of what he had initially recommended in his report.

Paramashivaiah himself was unhappy with the way the project was being planned, arguing that it should be implemented in its entirety. The people of the Malnad and coastal regions too have been opposing the project, alleging that it would affect both the Western Ghats, a biodiversity hotspot, and the people who depend on the Nethravathi in the downstream. Despite these protests, in 2012, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) govern-

ment, led by D.V. Sadanaga Gowda, gave administrative approval for the project.

Activists then moved the National Green Tribunal (NGT) opposing the project. They maintained that the government was implementing it without obtaining forest and environmental clearances. However, their petitions were quashed by the principal bench of the NGT in 2019, which upheld the government's argument that the project was meant to provide drinking water in arid areas.

The Congress government, led by Siddaramaiah, laid the foundation stone for the project in Chikkaballapur in 2014. The first stage has now been inaugurated. The Water Resources Department assessed that 24.01 tmcft of water could be lifted by diverting streams of the Nethravathi — Yettinahole, Kerihole, Hongadahalla, and Kadumane Holla — at eight locations. When completed, the project will benefit the Tumakuru, Kolar, Chikkaballapur, Bengaluru Rural, Ramanaagur, Hassan, and Chikmagalur districts.

Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who also holds the Water Resources portfolio, gave special attention to clearing the hurdles involved in executing the project in the last one year. At the inaugural ceremony, the Chief Minister and he said that they would clear the remaining hurdles in acquiring land required for

the gravity canal and feeder canals, and ensure that the project is completed by March 2027.

However, this won't be an easy task, as people in the Malnad and coastal areas continue to oppose the project. The residents of Kolar and Chikkaballapur have raised doubts about whether they will get the water assured by the government, given the yield.

Some experts who have assessed the availability of water in the project area say that there could be only 9.55 tmcft of water available and not 24.01 tmcft, as projected by the government. Mr. Siddaramaiah has instructed officers to conduct a survey to tap water from a few more streams further below the project area, while arguing that shortage is no more than 5 tmcft. However, his statement has caused more worry among environmentalists. Kishor Kumar, one of the petitioners before the NGT, said that such a move will damage the forests further.

During heavy rains in July this year, several landslides were reported in parts of Sakaleshpur taluk in Hassan district. Some of the locations were close to the places where the Yettinahole project work had been executed. The residents of these areas blamed the project for the tragedy, while officers of Visweswaraya Jala Nigam Limited, which is executing the project, argued that the project had nothing to do with the landslides.

While the people in drought-prone areas need long-term solutions to the drinking water crisis that haunts them every summer, the multiple issues surrounding the Yettinahole project show how hard it is to find them in a sustainable and amicable way.

## Explaining the close contests in swing States

Battleground States have middling urbanisation and college graduate numbers, and a diverse mix of racial and religiously non-affiliated voters

### DATA POINT

**Srinivasan Ramani**  
**Jasmin Nihalani**

An earlier Data Point focussed on the importance of swing States in deciding the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential polls. Here, we explain why these States are battlegrounds by looking at the background variables of voters, such as demography, religion, geographical type, and college education.

Urban voters largely favour the Democrats, while rural voters largely favour the Republicans. Voters who identify themselves as religiously unaffiliated tend to prefer the Democrats, while Protestants and evangelical voters prefer the Republicans. Voters of the Black/African American community distinctly favour the Democrats. College-educated white voters are largely Democratic voters, while non-college educated white voters are overwhelmingly Republican.

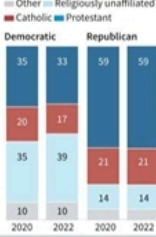
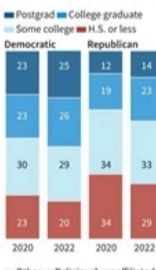
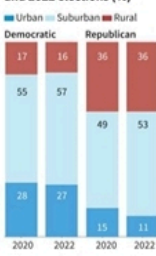
When these variables are broken down State-wise, we find that States with higher urban populations (with exceptions) tend to favour the Democrats, while those with higher rural populations vote Republican. Swing States have middling urbanisation (measured as an index by 38.com), i.e. they have a mix of rural, suburban, and urban voters. That is why they are competitive with near equal numbers of Democratic and Republican voters. They also fall somewhere in the middle when we look at the share of the population who are college graduates.

States such as Georgia have a relatively higher number of voters who identify themselves as Christian, but Georgia has a relatively higher share of Black voters, which makes it competitive. States such as Pennsylvania and Michigan have a lower share of Black minority voters, but also a relatively high share of religiously unaffiliated voters, and so they are competitive.

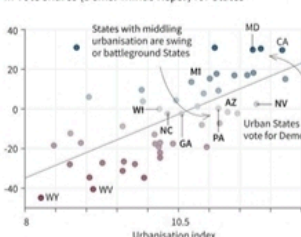
## Swing States are not typical

The data for the charts were sourced from Pew Research and FiveThirtyEight.com (which also provided the urbanisation index). Swing States include Pennsylvania (PA), Michigan (MI), Wisconsin (WI), Arizona (AZ), Nevada (NV), Georgia (GA), and North Carolina (NC)

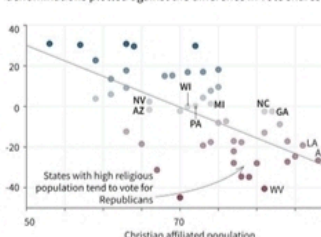
**Chart 1: Democratic and Republican voters in 2020 and 2022 elections (%)**



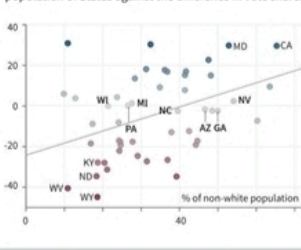
**Chart 2: Urbanisation index is plotted against difference in vote shares (Dems. minus Reps.) for States**



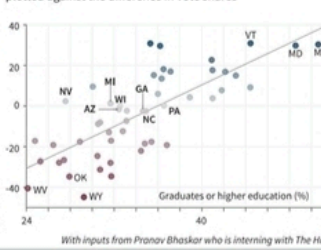
**Chart 3: % of people in States affiliated to Christian denominations plotted against the difference in vote shares**



**Chart 4: The chart plots the share of non-white population of States against the difference in vote shares**



**Chart 5: Share of graduates (or higher degree) in States is plotted against the difference in vote shares**



### FROM THE ARCHIVES

## The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 11, 1974

## Nuclear plants: German help to Pak. likely

London, Sept. 10: According to press reports here, the West German Government is assisting Pakistan in conducting a study to determine the feasibility of setting up a chain of nuclear plants of 50 mw capacity to be located even in distant corners of Pakistan. The Chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, Dr. Khan said these plants would be in addition to the 600 mw nuclear station now being built near Chasma Barrage. Plans were also being worked out for building a nuclear complex near Karachi to meet most of Pakistan's nuclear requirements locally. The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission wanted the country to be self-sufficient in its nuclear need and wanted to manufacture nuclear components in Pakistan. Dr. Khan said Pakistan was in touch with "certain friendly countries to start joint production of nuclear plants. Although he did not name the friendly countries, it is widely assumed that he could be referring to China and possibly the United States.

Dr. Khan said Pakistan had to build itself up as a modern technological society not for the sake of facing India and protecting national integrity but for the "sake of the entire Muslim world which so heavily depends upon Pakistan."

Dr. Khan hoped that except for very large and heavy components and highly sophisticated systems "we will be able to make most of the nuclear power plants ourselves."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 11, 1924

## Assam Cooly exodus.

Calcutta, Sept. 10: The "Forward" Nongong correspondent wires that about 700 coolies arrived at Jakhalabandha on foot from Jerhat (in Assam), a distance of about 150 miles. A Magistrate with the police is attending them and the Commissioner of Assam Valley is also present. They are extremely helpless and are being fed by the public. Some European planters are trying to persuade them to return to their gardens. But the coolies are determined not to return. No steps have yet been taken to repatriate them. Many are suffering, some have already succumbed, several cases of delivery occurred on the way. The local people with some Congress workers are taking great interest and rendering every possible help.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**The number of people who died in the Vietnam storm**

**87** Typhoon Yagi and subsequent heavy rains have triggered floods and landslides in the country injuring more than a 100 people. At least 70 people were reported missing. Typhoon Yagi was the strongest typhoon to hit Vietnam in decades. *AP*

**The Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip since October 7**

**41,020** The toll includes 32 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the health ministry in Gaza. At least 94,925 people have been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the war started. *AP*

**The fine to be paid by Google in the antitrust shopping case**

**2.7** In \$ billion. Google lost its final legal challenge on Tuesday against a European Union penalty for giving its shopping recommendations an illegal advantage over rivals in search results, ending a long-running antitrust case. *AP*

**Number of days for which Internet will be suspended in Manipur**

**5** The State government suspended internet services from September 10 to 15 amid intensified agitation by students. The State Home department said that the decision was taken to curb the use of social media for transmission of hate speech and hate videos. *PTI*

**Number of CRPF personnel deployed to the State of Manipur**

**2,000** The Centre has directed deployment of two fresh CRPF battalions in Manipur. This comes after the withdrawal of two Assam Rifles battalions from the State. *PTI*

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# On ANI's defamation suit against Wikipedia

Why has the news agency Asian News International filed a lawsuit against the Wikimedia Foundation? What has the Delhi High Court asked the Foundation to reveal? Who can make and edit pages on the Wikipedia site? Will Wikipedia be blocked in India?

## EXPLAINER

Aroon Deep

### The story so far:

The news agency ANI sued Wikipedia parent Wikimedia Foundation last month for defamation, due to a description of the news agency as a propagator of government propaganda on the website. Last week, a Delhi High Court judge threatened to order the government to block Wikipedia if the Foundation didn't provide details of the users who made these edits.

### What does the page on ANI say?

When Wikipedia's page for the news agency Asian News International started reflecting new reporting scrutinising the firm's record in 2020, a back-and-forth edit war ensued among users — seasoned editors on one side, and largely new accounts that only edited the ANI page, according to public logs of changes made to the entry — for months. The agency, which largely syndicates video and text feeds from around the country to news channels and other outlets (including to *The Hindu*), was described as "running [a] pro India fake news network aimed at influencing European think tank [sic] against Pakistan," a version of the article then read. Over time, this rough sentence in the page's introduction was smoothed out, annotated, and crystallised into what it says today: that the agency is "accused of having served as a propaganda tool for the incumbent central government, distributing materials from a vast network of fake news websites, and misreporting events on multiple occasions." ANI found the description, along with a longer section detailing these descriptions, defamatory. They sued the Wikimedia Foundation, which runs Wikipedia, in the Delhi High Court earlier this year, seeking ₹2 crore in damages.

In statements to *The Hindu*, the Wikimedia Foundation has stood by the ANI page, saying that the descriptions in that entry are borne out by reliable sources (which include *The Diplomat*, the EU DisinfoLab, and *The Caravan* magazine). Users who have made more than 300 edits and have an account that is at least a month old are free to "improve" the page, the Foundation said.

### What has the Delhi High Court ordered in the case so far?

At the second hearing on August 20, Justice Navin Chawla ordered the company to serve three of its users with a summons to appear in the case, and provide "details" about these users. The demand appeared to be aimed at unmasking the individual editors who made these changes, something that the Foundation has historically not done outside the U.S. Even as the non-profit communicated with ANI's lawyers shortly before the subsequent hearing on Thursday, the latter filed a contempt application. At the Thursday hearing, Mr. Chawla issued a verbal threat to order the Indian government to block Wikipedia if it did not comply. An "authorised representative" of the non-profit was directed to be personally present at the next hearing on October 25.

### Does Wikipedia face lawsuits and censorship threats elsewhere?

Wikipedia has faced bans and lawsuits from around the world by individuals and organisations that have been aggrieved by descriptions of them. In Russia, Wikipedia editors have been targeted with arrests and intimidation since the beginning of

## Wikipedia and some key numbers

In August this year, India recorded the fifth highest number of Wikipedia users — 78 crore — with United States leading the list followed by Japan, Great Britain and Germany. The "free encyclopedia" includes articles in all but two (Bodo and Dogri) of the 22 languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Among them, the highest number of articles were in Urdu, at 2 lakh, followed by Tamil, at 1.5 lakh. Zooming out, globally, the English language had the highest number of articles, closely followed by Cebuano, a regional language spoken in the Philippines.

By The Hindu Data Team

Chart 1: The chart shows the countries with the largest number of Wikipedia users in August 2024

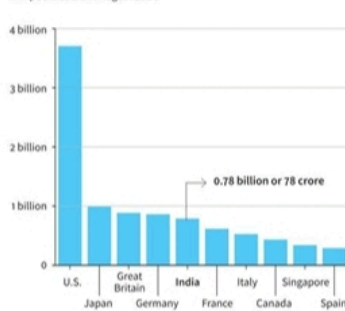


Chart 2: The chart lists the 23 languages spoken in India — including those in the Eighth Schedule — in which Wikipedia articles are available. The bigger the size of the rectangle, the more the number of articles

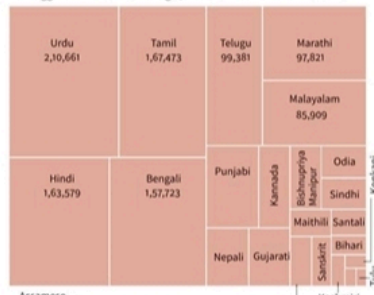


Chart 3: The chart lists the 320 languages in which Wikipedia articles are available. The bigger the size of the rectangle, the more the articles



that country's invasion of Ukraine. In 2019, a German court ordered the Foundation to remove records of an older version of an article about academic Alex Waibel; in the U.S., the firm routinely faces lawsuits, and nearly all cases have either been withdrawn or found in the non-profit's favour, due to the country's ironclad protections for web platforms.

The encyclopedia allows nearly anyone to edit posts, even without being logged in. However, some posts on contentious topics are restricted (sometimes for a long duration) to registered users with a track record of making contributions that have been upheld by other users. Norms on the site are decided by the community, and may be enforced unevenly, with articles on less notable subjects suffering from issues like advertising-like language.

### Does Wikipedia content have an ideological bias?

The current policies followed by Wikipedia users do not have an explicit ideological flavour. These include guidelines such as having a "neutral point of view," only including "notable" information and having reliable sources decided by the community. However, the site is often accused of a progressive, liberal bias, something that a few studies have also attested to. Conservative grievances with

Wikipedia users' editorial slant have invariably become part of the discourse around the ANI-Wikipedia case. *OpIndia*, a right-wing news portal that has covered the ANI lawsuit closely, has accused Wikipedia editors of propagating liberal "propaganda" on the site; has previously revealed the identity of an individual editor who started and contributed to the entry on the 2020 Delhi riots; and has criticised the site's description of the riots for allegedly downplaying attacks by Muslim rioters. The portal's editor on Sunday vowed to put out a detailed "dossier" outlining these allegations. Wikipedia's volunteer editors have had a general prohibition on *OpIndia* articles since 2009, with the site being described by a Wikipedia policy page on reliable sources by/for editors as "considered generally unreliable due to its poor reputation for fact-checking and accuracy".

### Has Wikipedia faced criticism for content vandalism in India before?

Wikipedia has faced the Union government's ire at least once in the past due to vandalism. The cricketer Arshdeep Singh's page was briefly vandalised last year, and then Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology Rajeev Chandrasekhar said the vandalism was inconsistent with the government's

principles for the Indian internet. The site's volunteers had quickly addressed the vandalism and restricted the page to experienced editors.

The site also suffers from a weakness under Indian law — unlike social media companies, it has no procedure in place to block access to articles after receiving a court order. In 2019, the Wikimedia Foundation termed a prior draft of the IT Rules, 2021, which enable such blocking orders, as having "the potential to limit free expression rights for internet users across the country".

### Can Wikipedia be blocked?

However, Wikipedia may not be completely immune from arm-twisting or blocking. China, for instance, has had the site blocked for years. While Russia has not blocked the site, it has arrested volunteer editors of Russian-language Wikipedia, and told search engines to mark the site as a violator of Russian laws. Since Wikipedia content is licensed under what is called Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike Licence 4.0, its pages can be legally mirrored to a "fork" setup that can edit and censor its content as per government demands or individual biases. Ruwiki is an example of such a fork, which complies with Russian authorities' narratives on the Russia-Ukraine war.

## THE GIST

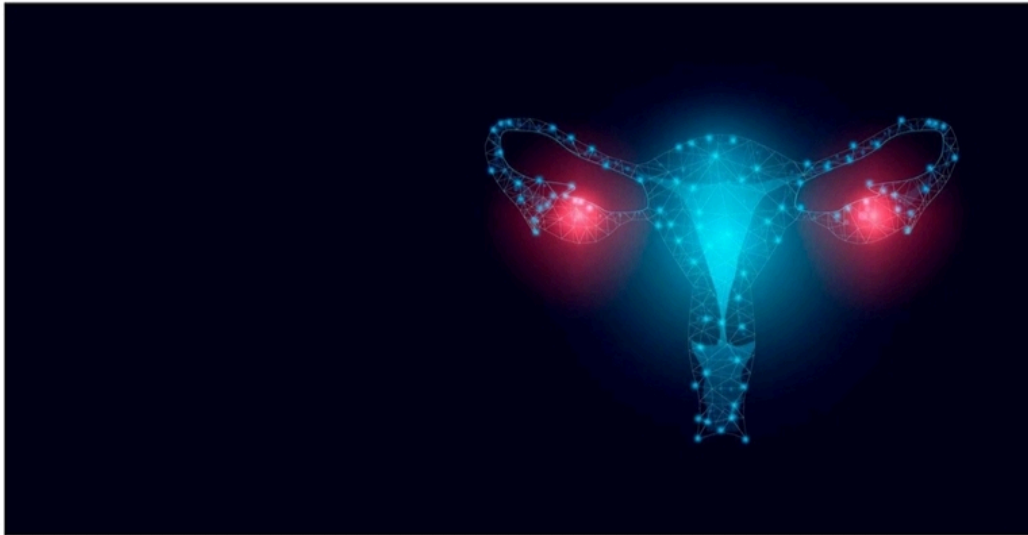
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PULSE-CHECK



GETTY IMAGES

# Understanding ovarian cancer: its causes, symptoms, and screening methods

This September, during Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, understanding the cancer's lesser-known facts — from subtle symptoms to genetic and lifestyle risks — can lead to earlier detection, personalised treatment, and preventive strategies

Anup Rawool  
Vid Karmarkar

Note: The information in this article is provided as such and is not intended as medical advice. If you have any concerns, please consult your physician.

Ovarian cancer is the most lethal gynecological malignancy. It is often called a "silent killer" because its symptoms are non-specific and mimic less serious conditions that lead to late diagnosis and a poor prognosis. In India, ovarian cancer ranks among the top three cancers, contributing to 6.6% of all women's cancers.

In 2022, India reported 47,333 new ovarian cancer cases and 32,978 deaths. These alarming figures highlight the gravity of the disease. Understanding lesser-known aspects of ovarian cancer can enhance prevention, early detection, and treatment efforts, offering hope to patients and healthcare providers.

Unlike other cancers, ovarian cancer presents vague symptoms such as bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, loss of appetite, feeling full quickly, and an urgent or frequent need to urinate. Other signs include indigestion, constipation, back pain, persistent fatigue, weight loss, and postmenopausal vaginal bleeding. These symptoms are often mistaken for common ailments, leading to late diagnosis. A 2004 study reported women with (malignant) ovarian cancer typically experience these symptoms 20 to 30 times a month, and which are more severe than those without the disease. Unfortunately, because of the overlapping nature of these symptoms with other common ailments, they can be dismissed until the cancer has advanced. Healthcare providers must be vigilant when women

report persistent symptoms.

**Cancer subtypes and screening**  
Ovarian cancer is not a uniform disease. It has two main subtypes: type I and type II. Type I tumours are less common, typically diagnosed at an early stage, and have a better prognosis. Type II tumours are more common, more aggressive, usually diagnosed at an advanced stage, and are responsible for most deaths due to ovarian cancer.

The survival rate for patients with ovarian cancer depends on the stage of detection and access to appropriate treatment. Researchers reported in September 2022 that around 20% of patients with advanced ovarian cancer who receive optimal surgery and platinum-based chemotherapy could be disease-free at 10 years and might be considered potentially cured.

Unlike breast or cervical cancer, there are no effective screening tests for ovarian cancer. The CA125 blood test, often included in cancer screening packages, is not recommended for routine screening in women at average risk due to its limited specificity. While CA125 is useful to monitor ovarian cancer after diagnosis, it is less effective at screening asymptomatic women as it can lead to false positives and unnecessary further testing, anxiety, and potentially over-treatment.

Due to the absence of a reliable screening tool, awareness of risk factors and symptoms becomes crucial. Regular consultations with healthcare providers and discussions about family history can lead to earlier detection and better management of ovarian cancer.

**Genes and endometriosis**  
While it's possible to develop ovarian cancer even without a family history of

breast or ovarian cancer, it's the most heritable of all cancers: 65-85% of hereditary ovarian cancer cases involve mutations in the BRCA1 or the BRCA2 genes. Women with these mutations have a significantly higher risk of developing ovarian cancer — up to 50% for BRCA1 and around 15% for BRCA2. Some other genes have also been associated with hereditary ovarian cancer.

Genetic testing allows for personalised risk management, including tailored clinical surveillance, chemoprevention, and prophylactic surgeries, which can reduce the risk of developing ovarian cancer in high-risk women. Endometriosis, a condition where uterine-like tissue grows outside the uterus, has been linked to an increased risk of certain types of ovarian cancer, particularly endometrioid and clear-cell cancers. This said, endometriosis-linked ovarian cancer risk is low and radical measures, such as a bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy, to prevent ovarian cancer alone are rarely justified.

**Lifestyle factors**  
Certain lifestyle factors are linked to ovarian cancer risk. For example, the use of talcum powder in the genital area has long been debated, with mixed evidence about its potential link to ovarian cancer. In the past, some talc products contained asbestos, a known carcinogen, but the evidence regarding modern, asbestos-free talc is still inconclusive. Experts including the American Cancer Society have called for more research to settle these questions. Another emerging area of concern is the use of chemical hair products. Some studies have shown a possible link between the prolonged use of hair dyes and an increased risk of ovarian cancer.

Additionally, frequent use of hair straighteners, relaxers or pressing products that release formaldehyde gas — a known carcinogen — may elevate the risk of developing ovarian cancer. Again, more research is required.

**HRT, menopause, and genetic counselling**  
Hormone replacement therapy (HRT), commonly used to alleviate menopausal symptoms, has been linked to a higher risk of ovarian cancer even when used for less than five years. Postmenopausal women considering HRT should weigh this risk against the benefits and explore alternatives with their healthcare provider to make informed decisions.

For women with a family history of ovarian or breast cancer, genetic counselling is a valuable tool. This process helps identify individuals at risk for hereditary cancers and provides tailored guidance on preventive measures and potential treatments. Through personalised risk management strategies, genetic counselling can improve outcomes and help reduce the likelihood of developing ovarian cancer.

Ovarian cancer may be elusive, but knowledge is power. This September, during Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, understanding its lesser-known facts — from subtle symptoms to genetic and lifestyle risks — can lead to earlier detection, personalised treatment, and preventive strategies. Empower yourself and others with this knowledge — it can save lives.

Anup Rawool is a Clinical and Cancer Geneticist and the founder of Sahaj Genetics Clinic, Comprehensive Medical Genetics & Counselling Center. Vid Karmarkar is the founder and CEO of Canseva Foundation.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

K. Subrahmanian  
Upendran

"Had a good night's sleep?"  
"Oh yes. In fact, I fell asleep as soon as I hit the sack."  
"Went out like a light, did you?"  
"No, there was no power failure at our place yesterday."  
"Power failure?"  
"Didn't you say something about the lights going out?"  
"Lights going out? Oh, yes. I asked you if you went out like a light. Do you know what it means?"  
"No."

"If someone goes out like a light, he/she falls asleep or becomes unconscious suddenly."

"Well, I didn't become unconscious. I merely fell asleep. Went out like a light as you said."

"Good. How's your grandfather? Is he still mad at your father for not taking his advice?"

"No, he has cooled down."  
"That's good. So, does he sit watching the goggle box all day?"

"Goggle box?"  
"Yes, goggle box is an informal word for television."

"TV. Is called the goggle box? I didn't know that. I know it is called the idiot box, but why goggle box?"

"Before I answer that, let me tell you how the word is pronounced. The 'o' sounds like the 'o' in 'hot', 'got' and 'not'."

"So it's goggle. Goggle box."  
"Do you know what goggle means?"  
"Doesn't it mean to stare at something with your eyes wide open?"

"Yes, that's part of the meaning. You see when you goggle at someone, you stare at him/her with your eyes open because you are surprised by what you see. I can say 'I goggled at the new shirt he was wearing.'"

"I think I understand now why TV. is called the goggle box. Most people who watch it have their eyes wide open."  
"And many of them have their mouth wide open too!"

"And while we're on the subject of television, I'd like to know why so many women are particular about what their nose looks like."

"What are you talking about?"  
"I watch a lot of foreign programmes. Every now and then some woman says 'You must excuse me. I'd like to powder my nose ... Why are you laughing?'"

"I'm sorry. Please continue."  
"Why do they keep powdering their nose so often?"

"Well, some time ago, we talked about asking for the bathroom in a direct and indirect manner. Do you remember?"

"Of course, I remember. That's when you talked about something called euphemism."

"That's right."  
"But what's the connection between powdering one's nose and going to the bathroom?"

"If a lady says I'd like to powder my nose, it means she wants to use the bathroom. It's an indirect way of asking you where the bathroom is."

"Powder-room' or 'powdering room' is a women's cloakroom or lavatory in a public building."

"That's very interesting."  
Published in The Hindu on May 4, 1993.

## THE DAILY QUIZ

The September 11 attacks, commonly known as 9/11, were coordinated terrorist suicide attacks carried out by the al-Qaeda against the U.S. in 2001. A quiz on that fateful day

Sindhu Nagaraj

- crash?
- QUESTION 1**  
On the morning of September 11, 19 terrorists hijacked how many commercial airliners scheduled to travel from the East Coast to California?
- QUESTION 2**  
The hijackers crashed the first two planes into the Twin Towers of the WTC, and the third team succeeded in striking the Pentagon. Where did the fourth plane
- QUESTION 3**  
What is the term for the global counter terrorist military campaign initiated by the United States following the September 11 attacks of 2001?
- QUESTION 4**  
The U.S. invoked which article of the NATO to call upon allies to fight the al-Qaeda? How many times has the U.S. invoked this article?
- QUESTION 5**  
Regarding the 9/11 attack, one of the sites is termed Ground Zero. Which is it?



**Visual question:**  
This image is credited to which photographer? What is the photograph called?

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. This country topped the medals table with 220 medals in the Paris Paralympics. **Ans: China**
2. These two Indian athletes became two-time gold medal winners at the Paris Games. **Ans: Shooter Avani Lekhara and shot putter Sumit Antil**
3. India recorded a one-two in athletics for the first time in this event. **Ans: Men's club throw F51 event**
4. This athlete became the first Indian to win medals at three consecutive Paralympics. **Ans: Mariyappan Thangavelu (High jump T42 class)**
5. India's youngest Paralympic medalist. **Ans: Armless archer Sheetal Devi**
6. The reason Dutch cyclist Caroline Groot and Iranian powerlifter Ahmad Aminzadeh made news. **Ans: First and last of the 549 gold medal winners at the Games**
- Visual: Name this neutral athlete. **Ans: Ihar Boki**
- Early Birds:** Varghese Joseph| Tamal Biswas| Tito Shildaditya| Kevin Toms Skaria

Please send in your answers to  
dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

## Word of the day

**Sodden:**  
wet through and through; thoroughly wet

**Synonym:** soppy

**Usage:** The playing fields were sodden after the rains.

**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/soddenpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /sɑːdn/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'







# THE ASIAN AGE

11 SEPTEMBER 2024

## Why is BJP worked up about Rahul's China, RSS remarks?

"Insult" is perhaps the favourite word that India's right-wing politicians use to spin their own narrative about the politics of their opponents. They would like the people to believe that this nation — its past, and present — has been nothing short of perfect and that anyone who wants to throw light on its sordid side are "insulting" it. The BJP has been the best at working this strategy and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has been its most frequent victim.

Mr Gandhi was thus found "insulting" India in the speech that he delivered at the University of Texas in Dallas the other day. If Union minister Giritraj Singh is to be believed, in fact, he even said that Mr Gandhi is a traitor and "always promotes China over India", also that it seems to him that he is thriving on China's money and hence feels obliged to go abroad and promote its brand.

What is it that Mr Gandhi said about India that invited the label of "traitor"? Reports say that in his speech the Congress leader underscored the need to focus on manufacturing in India. Painting the gloomy picture of employment generation not only in India but in the West, too, Mr Gandhi said that India, the United States and other countries are facing the problem of unemployment while China is not as it is dominating production. There is no shortage of skills in India and the country could compete with China only if it starts aligning itself for production, Mr Gandhi reportedly said.

It is a universally acknowledged fact that the East Asian nations, first Japan, then Taiwan and lately China, have leveraged their availability of cheap manpower to become manufacturing hubs of the world. They all started on the lower strata of the value chain and moved upwards slowly, in the process, bringing economic prosperity to their people. As time went by, they invested hugely in research and development, and have become a major presence. The government of India has tried to play a big role in making it happen through policy and funding.

The government led by the BJP, Mr Giritraj Singh's party, introduced in 2014 "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", an ambitious project that called upon industries in India and abroad to "Make in India". The project indeed notched substantial gains, especially in defence production, but failed to turn India into a major manufacturing hub for the world. At a time when India is facing the highest-ever figures of unemployment, the BJP and the government will do well to make the necessary changes in policies and funding patterns and handhold industries instead of bectoring Mr Gandhi.

Mr Gandhi's observation that the RSS is an anti-woman organisation has also got to the nerves of the BJP and its spokespersons. The RSS calls itself a voluntary organisation and says it is working with a vision and mission to "carry the nation to the pinnacle of glory through organising the entire society". True, it has a women's wing, but it is the duty of the BJP leaders who take up the cudgels on behalf of the Sangh to explain why a body that wants to "organise the entire society" should list its primary membership to men. The party must also realise that untimely, unhistorical and unsubstantiated attempts to term Opposition members "traitors" will eventually lose their punch.

## Insurance GST: Pressure shows

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council reached a broad consensus on reducing taxes on health and life insurance premiums. Based on the recommendations of a Group of Ministers, which was set up specifically on this issue, a final decision would be taken in the next Council meeting in November.

The genesis of the demand lies in a letter written by Union minister Nitin Gadkari to finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 31 calling for the withdrawal of tax on insurance premium as he felt it is akin to taxing uncertainty of life. The demand was immediately endorsed by Opposition parties, including the Congress, and the allies of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Though it is expected to cost Rs 200 crores for the Central exchequer, all political parties appear to have decided to bite the bullet.

It is one of the few occasions that an initiative for a government decision is traced to any person other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi — something unlike Mr Modi. Though the BJP appears to remain confident, it seems shaken by the lower than expected majority in the Lok Sabha. It also indicates growing pressures on the Modi 3.0 government in accommodating the interests of its allies.

While the decision to withdraw tax on insurance has strong moral grounds, it is not based on sound administrative logic because essential goods like medicine, and paramedical services like diagnostics attract a GST of 12 per cent. At some point in time, one could raise a question on how medicines and preventive diagnostics could attract a 12 per cent tax. Similarly, even an extremely poor person pays the same amount of tax when he buys any particular commodity as a rich person would. It is always known to everyone that a tax levied on goods and services is considered a regressive tax, yet no one across the world could do away with it.

If the Modi government coming under political compulsions seeks to review the GST on insurance, it will open a Pandora's Box. It should, therefore, frame clear guidelines to govern such demands in future.

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Kasturi M.

## All that India's women really need is respect and equality

In the aftermath of the recent rape and murder case at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, the Supreme Court has declared that the nation cannot afford to wait for another rape for change to happen on the ground. This stark observation by the highest court of the country underscores a grim reality — that in India a woman is raped every 20 to 30 minutes. However, it is always women who are often expected to prove their innocence.

As a society, we have traditionally framed this issue as "violence against women", rather than recognising it as "men's violence against women". This change in wording is crucial as it correctly identifies the problem as rooted in male behaviour. However, holding the perpetrators accountable challenges the patriarchal system that shields men and suppresses any dialogue that demands their taking responsibility.

The expectation for women to validate their experiences highlights a systemic issue where violence against women is often seen as a women's problem rather than a broader societal issue. Every day, 110 rape cases are reported in India, with 40 per cent involving minors, while many more go unreported. According to a Thomson Reuters Foundation study, India is ranked as the most dangerous country for women.

Unfortunately, efforts to improve women's security often appear to be more about political posturing aimed at gaining votes rather than genuine

Subhani



## Manipur: Local ethnic 'war' turns into a national crisis



Wasbir Hussain

It began as a local ethnic "war" between the majority Meiteis and the minority Kuki tribal people, but 16 months down the line, the violence in Manipur has clearly become a national security issue with charges of "external" elements fishing in troubled waters. The violence suddenly escalated during the past ten days, but the disturbing part has been the use of sophisticated drones carrying payloads of rocket-propelled grenades to attack civilians. And, there has been one instance where a long-range improvised "missile system" was used that killed a 78-year-old Meitei priest at the ancestral home of Manipur's first chief minister M. Koirang near the INA Memorial in Moirang, in the state's Bishnupur district.

The use of drones and the long-range projectile that was fired from a distance of at least 7 km is what made the state and Central security establishment sit up and take a deeper look at the prevailing situation. The use of these weapons meant that the attackers, whichever side they belonged to, could strike at will from their safe locations and create havoc if they wanted to. Besides, it has also raised questions as to the source of these weapons because Manipur shares a 358-km-long porous border with strife-torn Myanmar. This is a serious cause for worry because civil war-torn Myanmar has a number of militias active along the border with the northeastern Indian states and having in their possession — sophisticated weapons and military hardware even for sale to rebels.

Already, Manipur has turned out to be one of the most militarised states in

the country. Within months of the ethnic violence starting on May 3, 2023, agitated mobs, mainly in the Imphal Valley, looted weapons belonging mostly to state security forces. Estimates say around 5,000 automatic and semi-automatic weapons and 500,000 rounds of ammunition have been looted from armouries and other facilities belonging to the Manipur police. So, a group of people in the Imphal Valley suddenly had a lot of arms and ammunition in their hands, and this during a blistering ethnic clash added to the security challenge in the state. On top of this, the Valley-based Meitei insurgents who had bases across the border in Myanmar appeared to have returned home in the wake of the war in Myanmar between the military junta and the pro-democracy militias.

In the hills, the spotlight, right from the start of the ethnic upsurge, has been on the 2,000-plus Kuki rebel cadres (officially listed under the banner of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), who has been on a Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Centre and the state government since 2006. These Kuki rebels have been accused by groups in the Imphal Valley of leading the attacks of the Meiteis, along with others, a charge these SoO groups have denied. Manipur chief minister N. Biren Singh and his government wants the SoO agreement abrogated. The SoO agreement, basically a ceasefire deal, expired in February last and has not been officially renewed, although the rebels are supposed to be still staying at the 14 designated camps. The leaders of these groups

There is a move to withdraw at least two battalions of the Assam Rifles from the hill areas, something the Kukis are upset about and are opposing, saying it's required to stay for their safety

under true say that their weapons are under double lock and key, with one set of keys with the state authorities. But, despite such claims, the SoO groups have continued to be accused by leaders and organisations in the Imphal Valley of being involved in attacks on Meiteis. During the past few days, from Friday to Sunday, chief minister Biren Singh chaired two Cabinet meetings and met governor Laxman Prasad Acharya twice, alone on Saturday and along with several ministers and MLAs. The chief minister clearly told the Centre, through the governor, to vest full powers on the state government to deal with the situation and give the charge of the Unified Command of security forces to the state. The fact that the chief minister has even made such a demand (law and order is in any case a state subject) is because Article 355 is supposed to be in force in Manipur for more than a year now. What is Article 355? The provision states that it shall be the duty of the Union to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance. By asking the Centre to be more proactive (not in so many words though) and seeing the charge of the Unified Command, the state leadership in Manipur seeks to send out a message that it does not have the full authority or final say as of now in handling matters on the ground. Besides, chief minister Biren Singh once again reiterated the demand for abrogation of

the SoO agreement with the Kuki rebel groups, fencing of the border with Myanmar and stricter implementation of the ban on the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar. The FMR, that allowed people of both India and Myanmar to go up to a distance of 16 km into the territory of the other country, has been discontinued after the ethnic violence.

This indicates the fear or suspicion of the Biren Singh government that elements from Myanmar could be adding the Kukis in the ongoing battle as the border regions of Myanmar are inhabited by people belonging to the same Kuki-Chin group. "I am not against the original Kukis. Our threat is from the Kuki immigrants who have been coming in from Myanmar," Mr Biren Singh has said.

Drawn into the vortex of the conflict is a section of the Central security forces, particularly the paramilitary Assam Rifles, the nation's oldest paramilitary force that traces its origin to 1835. The Meitei groups and leaders accuse the Assam Rifles of being supportive towards the Kukis and therefore not playing a neutral role. The Assam Rifles, however, denies the charge of accusation. Nonetheless, there is a move to withdraw at least two battalions of the Assam Rifles from the hill areas, something the Kukis are upset about and are opposing, saying the Assam Rifles is required to stay for their safety against the "onslaught from the Valley".

If there is no end to the violence in sight, there is also a strong possibility of a brokered peace between the two sides. The tragedy in Manipur, therefore, is likely to continue and become a long-drawn battle.

Wasbir Hussain, author and political commentator, is editor-in-chief of Northeast Live, Northeast India's only satellite English and Hindi news channel. The views expressed here are personal.

## LETTERS WHY NOT MANIPUR

The reluctance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to act decisively on the question of Manipur is impossible to understand. His critics will forever remind him of his failure to visit Manipur when the state required a helping hand. Now the fires are once more spiralling out of control as violence has seen a resurgence in the state with an ex-Army official lynched and more houses belonging to BJP leaders set on fire. Use of drones in the violence means a bigger threat to peace and stability in the region. While the BJP is leading from the front in its demands to replace Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, it is doing nothing similar for Manipur where the situation is far worse.

Anthony Henriques

Mumbai

## NO TIME FOR KUKIS

THE CAUSE of the persistent sociopolitical distress in Manipur has remained too distant for Delhi. The strife is unending and the state has long been left to fend for itself. It would appear that in comparison, the Ukraine and even the Gaza conflicts are far more tractable as we see Delhi being sought as a mediator in both. Armed with successful outcomes in one or even both cases, it might be hoped that Delhi would eventually put that experience to good use in Manipur. Charity need not begin at home.

R. Narayanan

Nav Mumbai

## CBJ'S PRIORITY

IS THE CBI more interested in solving the graft case at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital rather than the rape-murder case? It has become evident after the CBI lawyer's turning up annoyingly late to oppose the bail plea for the rape-murder accused when the case came up for hearing at the Sessions court on September 6. Initially, only an assistant investigation officer on behalf of the CBI was present at the court when the case came for hearing. The CBI counsel appeared only after the judge took strong exception to this. The judge was even heard asking whether he should grant bail to the accused in such a situation.

Sujit De

Kolkata