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Centre approves Rs 20,000-crore push for manufacturing, ports, airport and postal infrastructure



NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved five major infrastructure-related initiatives, which include strengthening domestic manufacturing, expanding transport infrastructure, improving regional connectivity and modernising postal services across the country with a combined outlay of nearly Rs 20,000 crore.Among the key decisions are the approval of a Rs 11,000 crore scheme to boost the Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) manufacturing ecosystem, development of a second container terminal at Kamarajar Port in Tamil Nadu at an estimated cost of Rs 4,288 crore and construction of a green-field airport at Doloo in Silchar, Assam, with an investment of Rs 2,014 crore.The Union Cabinet also decided to continue with the Postal Operations Scheme and Estates Management Scheme for the Department of Post with a total outlay of Rs 2,532 crore.Briefing media after the meeting of the Union Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the decisions reflect the government's commitment to self-reliance, infrastructure-led growth, regional development and improved public service delivery.Under the scheme for enhancement of the CIE manufacturing ecosystem, the government will invest the amount earmarked for over eight years, from 2026-27 to 2033-34. "To be implemented by the Ministry of Heavy Industries, the scheme seeks to promote domestic manufacturing of construction equipment and components, reduce import dependence and strengthen India's position in the global market,"the Minister said.The scheme will cover seven categories of equipment that are currently fully or largely imported, including tunnel boring machines, off-highway trucks, excavators, cranes, loaders, piling rigs and drilling machines, he said, adding that it has two components: sales-linked incentives and grants for establishing a dedicated CIE testing facility in the country."India's construction and infrastructure equipment industry is currently the world's third largest, after China and the United States, with a market size of approximately Rs 97,500 crore in 2024-25. With rapid expansion in infrastructure, particularly roads, ports and housing, the industry is projected to more than double to around Rs 2.28 lakh crore by 2029-30," the government said in a statement.The Union Cabinet also approved the development of a second container terminal at Kamarajar Port Limited in Tamil Nadu under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. "The project, estimated to cost over Rs 4,288 crore, will be implemented on a Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer basis," Vaishnaw said.Spread across 111 acres, the terminal would have an annual design capacity of two million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), the Minister said, adding that the project would enhance the port's capacity to handle transshipment cargo and cater to rising container traffic.It will serve Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, drawing cargo from major industrial and commercial centres, including Chennai-Sriperumbudur-Oragadam, Hosur, Bengaluru, Sri City and Tirupati.In another significant decision, the government approved a green-field airport at Doloo in Silchar, Assam, at an estimated cost of Rs 2,014 crore. "The project is intended to address the operational and space constraints of the existing civil enclave at Silchar Airport, which is located on defence land, while meeting growing passenger demand," the Minister said.The proposed terminal will cover more than 12,000 square metres and handle 800 passengers during peak hours. It will incorporate modern passenger facilities, sustainable green-building features and provisions for future expansion. The airport is expected to improve air connectivity across South Assam and neighbouring regions, boost trade and tourism, unlock economic opportunities and strengthen the Northeast's integration with national and international growth corridors.The Cabinet further approved the continuation of the Postal Operations Scheme for 2026-27 to 2030-31, with an allocation of Rs 1,041 crore. The scheme will focus on modernising the postal network, strengthening mail and parcel operations, improving rural connectivity and making postal services more accessible and citizen-centric.Additionally, the Estates Management Scheme of the Department of Posts will continue with an outlay of Rs 1,491 crore. The initiative aims to upgrade postal infrastructure through the construction, reconstruction and renovation of post offices and residential colonies, introduce uniform branding and preserve India's heritage postal buildings.

SC sets aside Allahabad HC order directing CBI, ED to verify DA allegations against Rahul Gandhi



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Wednesday set aside the Allahabad High Court's directions to the CBI and ED to verify allegations of disproportionate assets against senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, directing the High Court to first decide whether the petition seeking a probe was maintainable.A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana remitted the matter to the Allahabad High Court for fresh consideration, including the question of maintainability.The Bench said, "All the impugned orders passed by the High Court are set aside. The matter shall be placed before the Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court for constitution of a fresh Bench, which shall commence the proceedings afresh in open court. All contentions of the parties, including those pertaining to the maintainability of the writ petition, are kept open."The order came after the Supreme Court heard a petition filed by Vignesh Shishir, a Karnataka-based BJP worker, alleging that Gandhi had assets disproportionate to his known sources of income and had spent Rs 60 crore on foreign trips.In May, the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court had directed the CBI and ED to verify the complaint. On July 20, it pulled up the CBI over its affidavit.Gandhi, through Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, challenged the High Court's orders in the Supreme Court, arguing that the proceedings were "unknown to law" and amounted to a "witch-hunt". He also argued that he had not been heard before the directions were issued.On August 17, the Supreme Court deferred the proceedings and restrained the agencies from filing their reports.The Supreme Court has now directed that Gandhi be made a party to the proceedings and heard afresh. It also disposed of his transfer petition seeking the transfer of the case to the Allahabad High Court.The fresh Bench will first examine the maintainability of the petition, including whether a private citizen from Karnataka can file a writ petition in Allahabad seeking a CBI-ED probe against the Leader of the Opposition.

PM Modi, Sukhbir to share stage after seven years on December 8 in Moga joint rally



CHANDIGARH: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a joint SAD-BJP rally on December 8 in Moga, marking the first major show of strength after both parties entered into a re-alliance following yesterday's announcement ahead of the 2027 Punjab assembly elections.PM Modi and SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal will the stage after a gap of seven years. The gathering is expected to set the tone for the alliance's campaign, with both parties aiming to showcase their combined cadre base.Modi would return to the same politically significant town in the Malwa belt, thirty years later to announce the revival of that alliance.Modi's visit, coincides with the birth anniversary of former Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal and it will be keenly watched for the reasons he cites for the reunion of the estranged partners.Equally significant will be the parallels he draws with the late Akali leader's vision of the alliance, as articulated in the historic Moga Declaration adopted at the Shiromani Akali Dal's 75th anniversary conference on February 24 and 25, 1996.The Moga Declaration described the Akali-BJP alliance as rooted in the principles of Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiyat.It also envisaged the Akali Dal evolving into an inclusive regional force by expanding its reach among Punjabi Hindus and moving beyond its predominantly panthic image.Moga has long been the preferred launch-pad for election campaigns or major political announcements because of its central location in the Malwa region.Akali Dal launched its election campaigns from the district in 1996, 2006 and 2011, before returning to power in 1997, 2007 and 2012, respectively. Notably, Malwa accounts for 69 of Punjab's 117 assembly seats (59 per cent).Preparations for the event at Moga's Killi Chalian Village have already started by the SAD, but the venue has now been shifted to the Moga grain market.Senior party Balwinder Singh Bhunder confirmed that PM Modi is attendance at the rally, as preparations were being stepped up for a joint mobilisation exercise."It will be a joint show with the alliance partner BJP and we will shortly hold a meeting to finalize preparations. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be there on the rally on December 8," Bhunder said.Modi and Sukhbir last shared a public platform on November 9, 2019, during the inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor, when Parkash Singh Badal was also present.The leaders had appeared together at Gurdwara Ber Sahib in Sultanpur Lodhi before heading to the Integrated Check Post at Dera Baba Nanak, from where Modi flagged off the first batch of pilgrims to Pakistan.SAD walked out of the alliance over the three farm laws in September 2020. Three years later, Modi met the Badal family again in Chandigarh in April 2023 to offer condolences condole Parkash Singh Badal's death and few months back he again met Sukhbir in Parliament.The December 8 announcement will mark their formal return to a partnership that shaped Punjab politics for nearly a quarter of a century. Whether the revived alliance can recreate, or even come close to, its 1997 electoral performance remains to be seen.

Where is the accountability?: Kharge slams Modi govt over anaemia report, questions success of schemes

The Congress on Wednesday slammed the Centre over a report on malnutrition and anaemia in the country, asking where the accountability is after 12 years of the Modi government.Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asked how can India realise its demographic dividend when millions of its women and children continue to suffer from malnutrition."The Modi Govt's own ICMR-SAMPADA report reveals that 55.9% of women of reproductive age are anaemic. Nearly two-thirds of adolescent girls and boys are deficient in Vitamin B12. 42% of children aged 1-4 years are anaemic. In Gujarat, 66% of women of reproductive age and 57% of young children are anaemic," Kharge said on X. The Modi government's emphasis on "mild" anaemia cannot obscure the fact that nearly 30% of women of reproductive age suffer from moderate or severe anaemia, the Congress chief said.The latest NFHS-6 also reveals that nearly one-third of children are underweight and one in five suffers from acute malnutrition, Kharge said."Consider the Government's own financial records. Over Rs 1.13 lakh Cr released under Saksham Anganwadi, POSHAN 2.0 and predecessor schemes in six financial years. Over Rs 2,500 crore gap between funds released and utilised under POSHAN 2.0 in just four years. Nearly 44% of funds released under the original POSHAN Abhiyaan remained unutilised," he pointed out.Kharge further said the share of Women and Child Development in the Union Budget has nearly halved -- from 0.96% in 2015-16 to 0.50% in 2025-26.After 12 years of the Modi government, multiple nutrition schemes, fortified rice and iron supplementation programmes, where is the accountability?" Kharge said.The Congress on Tuesday cited an official report that showed Gujarat faring poorly in terms of anaemia prevalence in 2023-25, and asked whether Union Health Minister J P Nadda would survive the release of this "damning report".Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, had pointed out that the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has just put out a report titled "Anaemia and Micronutrient Deficiencies Across the Life Course in India".In Gujarat, 61.4 per cent of adolescent girls (10-19 years), 63.8 per cent of adult women (20-59 years) and 66.2 per cent of women in reproductive age (15-49 years) were found to be suffering from anaemia during 2023-25, Ramesh said on X."Only Chhattisgarh fared worse. The corresponding figures for the best performing state Kerala were 21.4 per cent, 28 per cent and 29.1 per cent, no doubt high but nowhere near the levels prevailing in Gujarat, which for some years has been propagated as a model state by the prime minister and his cheerleaders," Ramesh

Is this the Pakistani sunset?

It's not Pakistan, but the North Koreans who are garnering all the global attention, these days. The testing of a whole family of missiles, topped up by a Hydrogen bomb has grabbed all the eye balls. But, nearer home for south and south Asian countries, another scene of an old play continues to be enacted. Pakistan continues to calibrate terrorism in Afghanistan and India. A state has been reached where most of the world has begun to hyphenate 'Pakistan & North Korea' together as rogue states.

In the case of North Korea, at least their internal situation is very much under control, be it by means fair or foul. However, in Pakistan's case the internal situation is in turmoil. For too long have they harboured too many terrorist organisations. Now, these establishments have found firm anchorage and challenge the authorities. Their leadership roams at will, often makes statements to the press and seem to be unaffected by the law enforcement agencies or the honourable legal institutions that can otherwise get a Pakistani prime minister to resign.

Parallel with the tanzeems finding firm anchorage in Pakistan, has gone on this business of exporting terror to neighbours. The Afghans are fed up. India has been informing the whole world. The Americans have off late stated it loud and clear. Even its all-weather friend China joined the chorus in the BRICS summit on September 4 to name the terrorist organisations that operate from its soil. The American President's speech on the new Afghan policy chastised Pakistan unequivocally. His stark statement conveyed that at least 20 organisations, in the American list of terrorist groups, operate from Pakistan.

Trump also promised to cut off aid that has so long been used to target American service personnel in Afghanistan. Pakistan, a nation living on doles even after seven decades of independence, has been justifiably shaken. Pakistan has reacted to Trump's threat with varying tones, tenors and pitches. While the foreign minister talked about distancing themselves from terrorists, the defence minister reiterated the old parody; these organisations are the strategic partners of Pakistani Army. The new prime minister has kept his own counsel.

Perhaps an equally harsh blow was delivered in the BRICS meet in Beijing, when the joint statement of the participating countries named terrorist outfits operating out of Pakistan by name. The role of honour included Lashkar-e-Tayiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The fact of even China, Pakistan's sole all-weather friend, teaming up with the rest, surely causes enough consternation at Islamabad. In the recent past, the Russians have seemingly gone soft on Pakistan. The Indians leaning the American way may have been one of the primers. It surely is also driven by the desire to make Afghanistan more costly for the Americans.

However, it's doubtful whether the correct payback time is now for all that the Americans did to them when they ran Afghanistan in the 1980s. The reasons are simple. The USSR broke up in part due to its overreach, with Afghanistan being the biggest bleeding wound. No one knows why not to get into Afghanistan, better than the Russians. While relating with Pakistan, Russians will surely understand the losses it will incur in terms of its most lucrative arms market and a long history of a robust relationship. Pakistan has been a frontline state in the US lead Global War Against Terror. For the frontline state to lose its pole position and being identified as being part of the problem, is a huge shift.

An equally big issue is the tap being closed for funds to flow. Pakistan received US $3.5 bn in 2011 as compared to less than US $1 bn in 2016. Other than West Asians donors, there is only China left to fund. There are sound reasons for the Pakistani GDP growth rate to tumble. If the new American approach gathers momentum in the days ahead, Pakistan could be headed for sanctions that might just hasten the process. If they do try and stage another major attack in India, the sanctions may not be too far away.

In the interim, with American funding on the wane, Pakistan has opted for the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) bandwagon. The China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC) is the crown jewel of BRI. It passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory that's disputed between India and Pakistan, and then traverses across the length of Pakistan to terminate at the Chinese funded Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea that's been leased to a state run Chinese company for 40 years. The Pakistani government has not been able to sell the CPEC concept to its people. Pakistanis are not inclined to believe that CPEC will prove to be a high octane growth driver for their economy.

On the contrary, they are worried about landing in a debt trap, losing their strategic autonomy, detrimental impact on social cohesion and aggravation of insurgent/violent movements in Baluchistan and other regions that the CPEC arteries will pass through. Of all CPEC's impacts, the affect on an already fragile social cohesion is the most worrisome. As CPEC progresses, attacks on the assets being created will only increase, thus prompting the Pakistani state to respond in a heavy handed manner. It will, sooner or later, initiate a vicious cycle of violence between government forces and Islamist tanzeems.

The Americans have apparently distanced themselves from Pakistan, for good. The Chinese are feeling the heat with the gradual rise in the number of nations viewing Pakistan as the nursery of global terror.

Disability rights over time



In 1992, the United Nations announced that December 3 would be observed every year as International Day of Persons with Disabilities. While disabled persons continue to struggle to secure employment and navigate their way around with poor infrastruture, and are still treated as "others", it is worth recalling the advances in legislation on disability over the years.

The disability rights movement gained momentum in the 1970s when disability was started to be seen as a human rights issue. This is when the UN General Assembly proclaimed in 1976 that 1981 would be the International Year of Disabled Persons. Later, 1983-1992 was marked as the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2006 was a big step towards viewing persons as "subjects with rights" and not "objects of charity". (India is a signatory to the UNCRPD and ratified it in 2007.) Further, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges to "leave no one behind". It states that persons with disabilities must be both "beneficiaries and agents of change". However, attitudinal, institutional, and infrastructural barriers remain, with the World Bank stating that 15% of the world's population experience some form of disability and that they "on average, as a group, are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities".

In 2011, the World Health Organisation came up with a world report on disability for the first time. Its introduction showed how disabled persons aren't "other people", but that all of us at some point will be "temporarily or permanently impaired" and those "who survive to old age will experience increasing difficulties in functioning." In India, according to the 2011 Census, 2.21% of the population has one or multiple types of disabilities, making the country home to one of the largest disabled populations in the world. World Bank data suggest that the numbers are nearly four-five times higher. Legislation moved forward last year in India when the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed, replacing the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. The 2016 Act recognises 21 kinds of disabilities compared to the previous seven, including dwarfism, speech and language disability, and three blood disorders.

The new Act also increased the quota for disability reservation in higher educational institutions from 3% to 5% and in government jobs from 3% to 4%, for a more inclusive society. However, legislation alone is not enough; implementation remains abysmal. For instance, data from the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People show that 84% of seats for persons with disabilities lie vacant in top universities. While we have a long way to go in implementing these laws, we must also keep in mind that a one-size-fits-all approach is unhelpful for disabled persons. Levels and types of disabilities differ and so do needs.

Financial inclusion in rising India



"I dream of a digital India where mobile & e-banking ensures Financial Inclusion" "Financial Inclusion" is the way the Governments strive to take the common man along by bringing them into the formal channel of economy thereby ensuring that even the person standing in the last is not left out from the benefits of the economic growth and is added in the mainstream economy thereby encouraging the poor person to save, safely invest in various financial products and to borrow from the formal channel when he need to borrow. Lack of financial inclusion is costly to society and the individual.

As far as the individual is concerned, lack of financial inclusion forces the unbanked into informal banking sectors where interest rates are higher and the amount of available funds much smaller. Because the informal banking structure is outside any legislative framework, any dispute between lenders and borrowers cannot be settled legally. As far as the social benefits are concerned, financial inclusion increases the amount of available savings, increases efficiency of financial intermediation, and allows for tapping new business opportunities. State sponsored universal banking has therefore contributed to greater economic diversification in rural areas than is the case in more competitive banking environments.

With structural adjustment programs being introduced in the 1980s and 1990s, financial market reforms swept over many developing countries. At the beginning of 20th century, India had insurance companies (both life and general) and a functional stock exchange Scope of the financial inclusion is not limited to only banking services but it extends to other financial services as well like insurance, equity products & pension products etc. Thus, financial inclusion is not just about opening a simple bank account with a branch in an unbanked area. Adding the common man into the mainstream economy has other advantages as well as on the one hand it helps inculcate the vulnerable section of the society to save money for its future and the rainy days, take benefits of the economic activities of the country by participating in various financial products like, banking services, insurance & pension products etc., on the other hand, it helps the country to increase the rate of "capital formation" which in turn, give a push to the economic activities in the economy by channelizing the money from every nook & corner of the country.

In the absence of people of a country financially included in the mainstream, they often tend to park their savings/ invest in the non-productive assets like land, buildings & bullion etc. While, financially included people can easily avail the credit facilities, whether they are sitting in the organised or unorganised sector, urban or rural sector. Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) are the classic examples for providing easy & affordable credit to poor people and have got written innumerable success stories. This phenomenon of financial inclusion also helps government plug gaps & leakages in public subsidies & welfare programmes as government can directly transfer the subsidy amount into the account of the beneficiary rather than to subsidise the product.

In fact, the Government has even saved by around more than Rs. 57,000 crores in its subsidy bill and has ensured that the benefit of the subsidy reaches to the real beneficiary directly to him/ her. The NDA government led by Prime Minister Sh.Narendra Modi made itself committed, since beginning of its term, to give special emphasis on the financial inclusion of every person of the country. One of the most crucial of the several steps taken by this government is JAM- Jan Dhan, Aadhar & Mobile. Jan Dhan Yojna - with a view to increase the penetration of banking services and to ensure that all households have at least one bank account, a National Mission on Financial Inclusion named as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna was announced by Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi in his independence speech on 15th August, 2014 & the scheme was formally launched on 28th August, 2014. Within a fortnight of its launch, the scheme entered into the Guinness Book of records for opening a record number of bank accounts.

Large scale achievement was made by opening 29.46 crores accounts by Mid-August, 2017 out of which 17.61 crores accounts were in rural/semi-urban areas and the rest 11.87 crores in urban areas. The additional benefits on opening an account under Jan Dhan Scheme is the customer is issued a RuPay Debit Card having inbuilt insurance cover of Rs 1 Lakh. Besides, an overdraft (OD) facility of Rs 5,000/- is granted to the customer for satisfactory operation of account for 6 months. A life cover of Rs 30,000/- has also been granted to customers for opening the accounts up to a certain time period.

The scheme has been a great success and the 99.99% households out of the 21.22 crores households surveyed have been covered under this scheme by December, 2016. More than 44 lakh accounts have been sanctioned OD facility of which more than 23 lakh account holders have availed the facility involving an amount around 300 crores. Insurance & Pension schemes—In order to provide social security system for all citizens and especially to the poor and under-privileged people, the present government launched Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojna and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna.

The former scheme i.e., Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojna (PMSBY) covers the persons within the age slab of 18 to 70 years and a risk coverage of Rs 2 lakhs is provided at an affordable premium of Rs 12 per annum only. As per the date 12th April, 2017, around 10 crore people were enrolled under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha BimaYojana (PMSBY). The later scheme, i.e., Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna covers the persons within an age slab of 18 to 50 years having a bank account. The life cover of Rs 2 lakhs is provided to the insured payable in case of death of the insured due to any reason. As on 12th April 2017 3.10 cr person were enrolled under PMJJBY.

Atal Pension Yojna—A scheme launched in 2015 is open to all bank account holders in the age group of 18 to 40 years and they can choose different contributions based on the pension amount. Under this scheme monthly pension is guaranteed to the subscriber and after him to his spouse and after their death, pension corpus as accumulated till the age of 60 years is returned to the nominee of subscriber. Central Government also contributes 50% of the contribution subject to a maximum of Rs 1000 per annum. As on 31st March 2017 a total of 46.80 lakh subscribers have been enrolled from Atal Pension yojana with a total pension worth of Rs1713.214cr. Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana: All those who subscribe to the VPBY from 15th August 2014 to 14th August 2015 will receive an assured guaranteed return of 9% under the Policy. Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojna – Scheme launched in April, 2015 to provide formal access of financial facilities to Non Corporate Small Business Sector.

Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign

The President administered the Swachhta Hi Seva Pledge whereby the Nation resolved to create a clean healthy and new India. Addressing the gathering the President said "India is fighting a decisive battle for cleanliness and hygiene. Cleanliness is not the responsibility of only sanitation personnel and government departments; it is a multi-stakeholder national movement." Mahatma Gandhi had once famously said "sanitation is more important than political freedom.

" This statement underscored the criticality of sanitation in society. Inspired by these words, on August 15, 2014, the Prime Minister gave a clarion call to the Nation from the ramparts of Red Fort to fight filth and open defacation, change old habits and achieve a Swachh Bharat by 2019, to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. He further said that "women's pride is an important issue in our villages today. The practice of open defacation must be stopped. Toilets must be built and used." The aim of the Swachh Bharat Mission is to achieve a clean and open defacation free India by October 2, 2019.

The objectives are generating demand for toilets leading to their construction and sustained use by all household members, promoting better hygiene behavior amongst the population and improving cleanliness by initiating solid and liquid waste management projects. The financial allocations under the Swachh Bharat Mission increased from Rs.2850 crores in 2014-15 to Rs.6525 crores in 2015-16, to Rs.10,500 crores in 2016-17, to Rs. 14000 crores in 2017-18. In the last 3 years, under the Swachh Bharat Mission, 48,264,304 toilets were constructed. Open Defacation Free Villages reached 2,38,966. Individual toilet coverage increased from 42 percent in 2014 to 64 percent in 2017. 5 States have declared themselves open defacation free.

The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has said that the progress achieved is encouraging to reach the goal of an Open Defacation Free India by October 2, 2019. The Swachh Bharat Mission sought to reform the sanitation sector with the primary focus being on behavioral changes as the fundamental tool for achievement of Open Defacation Free outcomes. Inclusiveness under the Swachh Bharat Mission was achieved by designing public and community toilets keeping in mind the special needs of menstruating women, the elderly, the specially abled and small children. Further the Mission sought to promote gender sensitive information, education and communication/ behavioral changes. The Mission issued Gender guidelines in 2017 and Menstrual management guidelines in 2015. An innovative monitoring and evaluation system was put in place. The Swachh Sarvekshan was conducted for rural India and revealed that Mandi (Himachal Pradesh) and Sidhudurg (Maharashtra) were the cleanest districts in India. The Swachh Sarvekshan assessed 22 Hill districts and 53 Plain areas. National level monitors were hired to carry out sample-based checks of sanitation coverage and open defacation free status across the country.

A massive survey covering 92000 households in 4626 villages across the country is being conducted. An additional 200 villages located on the banks of Ganga are being surveyed. Eminent personalities like Amitabh Bacchan was nominated as the Brand Ambassador for Swachh Bharat Mission and celebrities like Sachin Tendulkar and Akshay Kumar attended champion collector conclaves for motivational purposes. The Swachh Bharat Mission maintained a significant social media engagement for enhancing awareness levels and a newsletter Swachhta Samachar Patrika was published on a regular basis. A recent Bollywood film titled "Toilet – Ek Prem Katha" based on the Swachh Bharat Mission witnessed considerable box office success.

From owning a home to feeling at home



S. Indira Gandhi owns a brand-new house now. She is one of the first few from Sri Lanka's hill country Tamil community – that has a two century-history in the island – who can call this home, and the piece of land beneath it, her own. A full-time worker in a tea estate, the 33-year-old, along with her husband, is busy giving finishing touches to her cement-walled home in Dayagama, in Nuwara Eliya district in the Central Province. They have recently cut a path leading to the entrance of their home, where saplings bearing sprightly pink flowers pop up from either side. For the young couple, the home is much more than a secure place of residence, or a permanent dwelling.

From the time the British brought down hundreds of thousands of Tamils from south India in the 19th century to Sri Lanka, successive generations have been toiling in the country's plantations. Even today, most of them live in colonial-era line rooms — closely packed match-box like dwellings on the hills and many still work in the estates in difficult working conditions and with poor wages. Their story is better known as the global rise of the famed Ceylon Tea, a product that fetches precious foreign revenue, about $1.2 billion in 2018.

Following the transition from being stateless to becoming citizens in 2003, the ongoing change from being landless to owning a modest house on a small plot marks another significant shift for the community. Neither was an outcome of state benevolence. In fact, both followed persistent struggles by the nearly million-strong community and larger political dynamics. Houses such as Indira Gandhi's have been built by the Indian government as part of an initiative to construct 14,000 dwellings for Hill Country Tamils, to supplement the Sri Lankan government's own efforts towards providing housing in the region. In an earlier project, India built 46,000 homes in the island's Tamil-majority North and East for the war-displaced.

Malayaha (Hill Country) Tamils are quick to appreciate India's attention to their community. As Tamils of most recent Indian origin here, they have been invisible not just to the Sri Lankan state, but also to New Delhi and Tamil Nadu for most part. Without doubt, they feel some affinity towards Tamil Nadu and India, through ancestral and cultural links. "My father gave me that name because I was born the day Indira Gandhi died," says her namesake, smiling brightly.

All the same, many in her generation feel that the oft-used "Indian-origin" tag is both dated and distant. "Even my national ID defines me as a 'Sri Lankan estate worker'," says her husband, K. Vijayakumar. "We are people of this country." That is how they would like to frame their demands to the state – in the unmistakable voice of a rightful citizens, without tags that bear the baggage of uneasy histories.

In an apparent recognition of that emphatic voice, the Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe government put out an ambitious National Plan of Action for the social development of the plantation community, spanning five years beginning 2016. Among other initiatives, the plan envisions building 1,60,000 homes, financed partly with a government grant and the remaining with a 7.5% interest-loan. About 30,000 homes have been constructed so far.

For pensioner E. Sellappan, his new home in Hauteville Puram, built by the Minister of Upcountry New Villages, Estate Infrastructure and Community Development, is the only asset for his children. "This sonde veedu (own home) is the first recognition of my labour for my 36 years' work at the estate," he says. The government points to its share of challenges. Despite a widespread campaign from workers for 20 perches land each, the government could manage only seven (about 2,000 square ft). "Finding land is our main challenge. The plantation companies are rather reluctant to part with productive land, or end up giving land that has no easy access to the main road," says M. Vamadevan, an adviser to the Minister.

The gap between required resources and the actual allocations is also glaring. While the national action plan points to an estimated 15 billion Sri Lankan rupees investment in 2018 needed for the project – it will cost 70 billion rupees over five years – the annual allocation in the recent budget is only 2 billion rupees. Housing is only one of the many long-ignored demands of the workers, who face historic neglect and exploitation. From education, to health to fair wages, many of their concerns remain unaddressed.

"Even if wasps attack us, we have to put in our own money and get treated. Our struggle for a minimum wage of 1,000 (Sri Lankan) rupees earlier this year also failed after our political leaders signed a collective agreement with the companies. We are now stuck with 630 rupees a day," says estate worker R. Pushparani, squinting her eyes against the glaring sun, while she rapidly plucks tea leaves with both hands. In pointing out their current reality, she highlights the difference between a few workers owning homes, and all of them feeling at home.

Singing carols can make you happy, boost mental health

Love to be part of the choir singing Christmas carols? Singing in groups could not only make you happier, but also help improve mental health conditions like anxiety and depression, according to new research. The finding showed that people who took part in a community singing group maintained or improved their mental health. Community singing had positive effects on people's mental health, while for some it was a key to their recovery or maintenance of health, for others it induced fun and happiness.

Moreover, the combination of singing and socialising was an essential part of recovery because it promoted an ongoing feeling of belonging and well-being that often lasted a day or more as well as improved social skills and confidence. "We found that singing as part of a group contributes to people's recovery from mental health problems," said lead researcher Tom Shakespeare, Professor at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

For the study, published in the BMJ journal Medical Humanities, the team analysed participants who took part in the Sing Your Heart Out (SYHO) project -- an initiative which runs weekly singing workshops, aimed at people with mental health conditions as well as the general public. The research project followed the group for six months and undertook interviews and focus groups with participants, organisers, and workshop leaders.

Taking part on a weekly basis provided structure, support and contact that helped people improve their mood, feel good, and function better in day-to-day life. "We heard the participants calling the initiative a 'life saver' and that it 'saved their sanity'. Others said they simply wouldn't be here without it, they wouldn't have managed - so we quickly began to see the massive impact it was having," Shakespeare said.

This treatment can extend life of people with Parkinson's disease

According to a study, a treatment called deep brain stimulation (DBS) is linked to longer survival for Parkinson's patients. Researchers at the Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital in Illinois found that patients who received stimulation via an implanted device had a modest survival advantage compared with those treated with medication only. Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder. It affects neurons in the brain that produce dopamine. Its cause is currently unknown, and so far there is no cure. Parkinson's itself is not fatal, but complications related to the disease often lead to death.

Common symptoms of Parkinson's disease include tremor, slowness of movement, limb rigidity, and walking and balance problems. People with Parkinson's disease have a shorter life expectancy than those without the disease. Previous studies have shown that DBS can improve motor function in people with Parkinson's disease. The treatment involves electrodes surgically inserted into specific areas of the brain. An impulse generator battery--similar to what is used in pacemakers--is also implanted, under the collarbone or in the abdomen. The battery creates electrical impulses that the electrodes deliver to the brain tissue.

Dr. Frances Weaver, lead author on the study, explained the benefit of DBS: "Overall, DBS surgery has been viewed quite positively by both patients and providers. There is an immediate effect on patients who have DBS on their motor function--the dyskinesia [involuntary muscle movements] is either gone or greatly reduced. The patient can move around and do things they hadn't been able to." While deep brain stimulation may improve function compared with those who do not receive it, little evidence exists on whether the treatment has any benefits to life expectancy.

To answer that question, the researchers looked at data for 611 Veterans with Parkinson's disease who had a deep brain stimulation device implanted. They compared this with data on 611 Veterans with Parkinson's but without the device. The data came from VA and Medicare administrative files from between 2007 and 2013. The researchers found that patients treated with deep brain stimulation survived an average of 6.3 years after the surgery, versus 5.7 years for the non-DBS patients after the date they might have gotten surgery based on their match to a surgery patient—a difference of eight months.

The researchers had paired each DBS patient with a clinically and demographically similar non-DBS patient–for example, in terms of age and symptom severity–and tracked survival from the date when surgery either took place, for the DBS group; or might have theoretically taken place, for the non-DBS group. The average age of veterans in the study was 69, reflecting the higher prevalence of Parkinson's among older people. The older age of the study group could have led to more deaths from age-related conditions, but the researchers point out that a majority of the causes of death for those who died during the study period were related to Parkinson's disease.

'The government is perceived with fear'

It is the people, the party and the state I represent. There is no turnaround story on the politics of development that belongs to me as I am from a progressive party and one of the most developed states in the country. Our story is that of a developed state working towards being a hyper developed state. My government believes in keeping politics off of development and focusing on the betterment of people in every sphere. A government that delays development stands in the way of the people's right to a better tomorrow.

We live in a time when the government is perceived with fear. No government should be viewed as authoritarian, rather as a collective institution of people. No state can achieve fast paced development without its government being the best service provider. I'm sure textbooks, news articles or social media platforms have told you at some point about our high standards of living, HDI, male female ratio, life expectancy rates, literacy rates, low infant and maternal mortality rates and other such indices along with our exemplary palliative care far ahead of most developed countries. We are extremely proud of achieving them, but are not hung up on them. There is no point in repeating them here, instead I would like to tell you where we are headed.

This is not something to bring up only in election manifestos or while seeking votes. At the end of every day, we have to have served the people of our state and country. A way that we have brought accountability to our work is by issuing the first annual progress reports to show that our promises weren't empty. This also helps keep people in the loop. Our Navakerala action plan which was started a year ago has been our answer to the bottom-up approach. Its ideology is simple, your birth should not determine your future. For development to take place we must ensure that people are able to contribute. We are focusing on providing opportunities to those most dependent on the government. Those who access public healthcare, education and housing.

While shifting the lens onto these spheres along with waste management we want to build people up so that they can reach their potential without having to worry about their basic necessities. The housing scheme provides every individual with a right to a house and includes those currently living in poor housing conditions. Education standards shouldn't be reduced to be accessible.

Instead we are bettering public education to be at par with international standards. As far as healthcare goes, government hospitals are the last resort for many people and private hospitals are becoming more expensive every day. It is surprising that a sector that produced many like Florence Nightingale in the past is producing millionaires and billionaires today.

We are changing that by providing more beds, better facilities and cheaper life-saving medication. Our lifestyle disease screening which will be available to every individual of the state prevents health problems such as cholesterol, diabetes and blood pressure, from taking away the future of many families. Waste management is essential for every citizen. Without which soil, air and water quality will deplete drastically. This is why we believe in handling waste management to create a safer environment for the people of Kerala. One area that we have not performed up to the mark in the past is water conservation. Water has become a scarce commodity.

It is scary that inter-state disputes are taking place over water.

We can compete amongst our sister states, but not fight. We are serious about water conservation and are going to adopt more preservation mechanisms in the coming years. We have started to conserve our rivers and water bodies but more investment is required in this area. Even though it is a part of the Navakerala action plan, I would like to specifically speak about this just to emphasise its importance. Speaking of basic necessities, I'm sure nobody here will disagree that an accident victims chances of survival should not be dependent on their bank balance. Yet it has always been this way.

To fight this inequality we introduced the special trauma care scheme. The 48 hours after an accident is called the critical period. The treatment one receives during that time determines their survival rate. Our policy is that the victim should not be taken to the hospital based on their ability to pay the bill, but the one closest to the accident site. The government will use insurance to pay the hospital directly. This is in line with our belief that a human life's value is not something expressed in monetary terms. There have been many debates on whether corruption should be attacked from the bottom or the top. We believe in attacking it from both sides and crushing it.

At all levels there should be zero tolerance towards corruption. This is only possible if the government, judiciary and the media work with a much higher vigilance. It is not just about checking corruption that has already taken place, but preventing it from happening at all. You may think that it's easy for us to talk about corruption when we are one of the least corrupt states in the country. For us this is not a matter of pride. The word 'least' implies that we still have corruption and our goal of being corruption-free hasn't been achieved yet. Corruption is something that reduces efficiency, productivity and takes away from development. Without which resource mobilisation would increase tremendously.

People often let corruption and bribery demand go unreported out of fear that the corrupt flock together and protect each other. We will put an end to this. We are going to apply modern technology, algorithms, etc. to achieve this. Under this government, the only people who should fear are the corrupt themselves. We have seen the numbers and percentage points of those living in poverty reduce over the years. This may help a lot of people sleep at night in peace, but not us. Human beings aren't statistic points. Even one person left to suffer is a failure at every level. The idea of putting growth and development into percentage over actual changes in the standard of living is an outdated idea.

We have not achieved any success until the last hungry person is fed, the last sick person treated, the last child educated and the last homeless person has shelter. We want to make Kerala one of the most liveable place on earth. Safety of women and children, awareness, speedy correction of all types of crimes need to be included. Police modernisation is an integral part of that as criminals are getting more technology savvy. Governments need to out pace them. Credibility of the police force also needs to be improved drastically. We are modernising the police force not only in terms of equipment. We believe in bringing the best technology, awareness and most importantly humanity to the field.

Making Chennai a water-wise

The public discourse on Chennai's ongoing water crisis has been along predictable lines. Source augmentation, deepening of waterbodies and giving rainwater harvesting a renewed emphasis are among the suggestions being made, apart from demand-side management. But these ideas, however well-meaning they may be, have their limitations. There is a compelling need for a paradigm shift in the way the water crisis is being viewed. When it comes to source augmentation, in the last 40 years, a couple of major projects were taken up for Chennai to tap both fresh water and sea water.

The Krishna Water Supply Scheme or Telugu Ganga Project (1996) and the New Veeranam Project (2004) were implemented using two important inter-State rivers — the Krishna and the Cauvery, both of which depend on the southwest monsoon (June-September). Though the Krishna Water Supply Scheme, if realised fully, can take care of at least half of the Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA)'s projected water demand of 1,721 million litres a day (MLD) for 2020, Tamil Nadu has not received the assured quantum from Andhra Pradesh even once in the last 20+ years. As regards the Cauvery project, the 'upper-riparian attitude' of Karnataka determines the flow to Tamil Nadu. In effect, realisation of water by Chennai hinges on nature and inter-State ties, both of which are, more often than not, unpredictable.

Another source since 2017 for the city has been the abandoned stone quarries located on the outskirts, from where water is drawn for public water supply after treatment. Further, two desalination plants of 100 MLD each were commissioned in 2010 and 2013. Work has begun on another desalination plant of 150 MLD while steps are on to set up another 400 MLD unit. However, given the costs and environmental concerns, it is unlikely that Chennai can afford to stretch this option beyond a point.

Deepening of tanks and lakes, a popular option, is easier said than done. Issues such as the costs involved in removing and transporting the silt and inadequate disposal arrangements have bothered the authorities to such an extent that nothing much has been done. As regards rainwater harvesting (RWH), it cannot be a panacea and site-specific requirements will have to be kept in mind while putting up RWH structures. The model of storing rainwater and reusing it may demonstrate the efficacy of RWH.

Many of the options being suggested to overcome the distress situation faced by Chennai have been tried out in the past. Yet, just one bad monsoon has pushed the city to yet another water crisis. This scenario may get repeated in the future too. Even if there are bountiful monsoon years, the prospects of Chennai becoming a water-surplus city are remote. An official document prepared a few years ago estimated that the CMA, which covers not only Chennai Corporation but also nearby municipalities, town panchayats and village panchayats, will have a shortfall of 1,089 MLD in 2020. Even assuming that the southern peninsula experiences good southwest and northeast monsoons this year, the gap can come down only by a maximum of 400 MLD.

A note available on the website of The Energy and Resources Institute states, quoting the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation, that the average water supply in urban local bodies of the country is 69.25 litres per capita per day (LPCD) against the service level benchmark of 135 LPCD. For a metropolitan city like Chennai, the benchmark goes up to 150 LPCD. If one were to go by the admission of Chennai Metrowater, the service level achieved in March 2018 was 112 LPCD. This is why the need for a paradigm shift becomes all the more important.

Just as in many other Indian cities, the concept of waste-water recycling and re-use has not yet caught the imagination of either the authorities or the public in a big way. The demand-supply gap will be a permanent feature of urban India unless society realises the critical importance of recycling and re-use of water. It needs to be noted here that on an average, 85 litres of water goes waste for every 100 litres utilised.

There is also another reason why the concept ought to be popularised. According to information furnished by the Centre, while urban areas of the country generate 61,948 MLD of sewage on a daily basis, the installed capacity of sewage treatment plants (STPs) is just 23,277 MLD. This means that only 37.5% of sewage generated can be treated. As per a conservative estimate, Chennai generates about 930 MLD of sewage, whereas its STPs can handle 727 MLD. With rapid urbanisation, the space for new plants is hardly available in peri-urban areas of Chennai, a scenario applicable to any other city in India. As a result, the city's rivers and canals have been reduced to carriers of raw sewage. Over and above these reasons, one of the targets set under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN member-countries in 2015, is to halve the proportion of untreated waste water.

Climate Conclave will highlight Telangana's Rs 10,000 crore El Nino plan, says Uttam



HYDERABAD: Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Tuesday directed the officials to ensure that the deliberations of the Telangana Climate Conclave, to be held in December, focus on practical and scientifically proven responses to climate change.During a review meeting held here, the minister said that the conclave should delve into drought resilience, water security, sustainable agriculture and Telangana's preparedness to address the impact of El Nino conditions.He examined programme design, expert participation, investor engagement and presentation plans for the conclave, which will be organised as part of the Telangana Rising Global Investment Summit.During the conclave, the state government will highlight its proposed five-month El Nino preparedness programme worth Rs 10,000 crore, including the execution of works valued at nearly Rs 2,000 crore every month beginning after Sankranti.Jointly implemented by the Irrigation and Panchayat Raj departments, the programme aims to rejuvenate tanks, streams and canals, improve groundwater recharge, expand rainwater harvesting and strengthen water conservation measures across rural Telangana while generating employment during the agricultural lean season.Uttam said: "The presentations will also demonstrate how the government is safeguarding drinking water availability and food security in the face of possible drought conditions.As part of the strategy, farmers are being encouraged to shift from water-intensive paddy cultivation to alternative crops to conserve reservoir levels until the next monsoon season."The conclave is expected to attract environmental experts, scientists, water conservation specialists, community representatives and investors. Around 125 rural representatives, including sarpanches and grassroots stakeholders, will participate in discussions on water security, climate resilience, biodiversity, urban heat management, agriculture and clean energy.Discussions will also be held on the opportunities in renewable energy, green credits, eco-tourism and the circular economy, reinforcing Telangana's push to position itself as a leader in climate-resilient and sustainable development.

CM Revanth Reddy orders comprehensive study on PRTS routes, depots



HYDERABAD: Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Tuesday examined the techno-economic feasibility report of the Personal Rapid Transit System Phase-I and directed officials to conduct a comprehensive study and prepare the plans.During a review meeting of the Municipal Administration Department, officials explained to the chief minister the feasibility of the Kukatpally-Biodiversity alignment via Raidurg, as well as proposals for works from Begumpet Metro Station to Ranigunj via Basheerbagh.The chief minister instructed officials to identify suitable land and study the feasibility of constructing PRTS depots near Necklace Road, Raidurg, and People's Plaza.He also asked them to prepare plans for multi-level parking facilities near the proposed depots.Additionally, Revanth Reddy enquired about the progress of the Koheda Integrated Fruit Market and ordered officials to expedite the works and construct connecting roads to the site.After Cyberabad municipal officials presented designs for a footbridge near HIT Junction, he directed them to build a multi-level parking facility nearby.HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath briefed the chief minister on steps taken to protect local tanks and set up Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) near developed water bodies.

Sandeep counsels Rajgopal, Anirudh against public criticism



HYDERABAD: Congress MLAs Komatireddy Rajgopal Reddy (Munugode) and J Anirudh Reddy (Jadcherla) clarified that their recent remarks were aimed at strengthening the party and securing its victory in the 2028 Assembly elections, not criticising Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy or damaging the party's image.The two legislators met newly appointed AICC in-charge BM Sandeep at the Government Guest House in Hyderabad on Monday night.Sources said Rajgopal Reddy stressed the need to provide good governance, fulfil poll promises and ensure corruption-free administration.He also raised the issue of his son's company being disqualified from the tender process for radial ring roads despite quoting lower rates.He alleged that the move was aimed at accommodating contractors from Andhra Pradesh and other states, resulting in a loss to the public exchequer.Rajgopal Reddy reportedly offered suggestions on strengthening the Congress and discussed welfare schemes and the party's internal situation.Sandeep reportedly asked the MLA to bring any grievances or concerns directly to him instead of making public statements that could damage the party's image.He said the MLA was also free to approach the party high command. Sandeep assured him that he would take up his requests and grievances with the leadership.He also expressed confidence in Rajgopal Reddy's political future in the party and advised him to remain patient.Meanwhile, Anirudh Reddy discussed issues concerning MLAs, constituency-level fund allocation and the party with Sandeep. He clarified that his remarks were not intended to harm the Congress but were aimed at highlighting corruption and the delay in releasing funds to constituencies. He pointed out that TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud had also spoken about corruption.Anirudh Reddy maintained that his demand for funds was made in the party's interest. He also denied making the alleged remark that someone would die if bills were not cleared.Sandeep reportedly stressed the need for the Congress to retain power in the next elections and urged the MLAs to raise their concerns through party channels rather than airing them publicly.Separately, Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar and other senior leaders also met Sandeep and discussed internal party issues and strategies to strengthen the organisation.

BJP Telangana to launch 25-day agitations on local issues from December 1

HYDERABAD: The Telangana unit of the BJP, which hitherto has been focusing on national matters like Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and others, is all set to highlight local issues with the objective of strengthening its base in the state.Starting from December 1, the party leaders will spread out to all 119 Assembly segments as part of a 25-day programme to identify and highlight local issues, and hold agitations to get them resolved.The party will also organise workshops in Hyderabad, Kamareddy and Nalgonda before undertaking this exercise.Speaking to TNIE, BJP state general secretary N Goutham Rao said: "The fee reimbursement issue will be on the agenda again as the academic year comes to a close.The negligence of the government in providing water for irrigation and drinking purposes will be highlighted.""We will also be demanding compensation for farmers as they have been advised not to cultivate paddy. Though the government has not officially advocated a crop holiday, lands which are not suitable for growing other crops will lie fallow. Such farmers should be compensated," he added.Meanwhile, state BJP chief N Ramchander Rao said that the Congress leaders were rattled by the success of "Maha Padayatra" of Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Hyderabad and Nirmal and by the party president Nitin Nabin in Karimnagar."The resounding success of these padayatras indicates that the BJP will form the next government in the state," he said.Addressing the media, he said: "Only BJP can provide a corruption-free administration. Contrary to claims made by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Congress will lose its deposits in 90 seats in the upcoming polls."Mocking Revanth for stating that Rahul Gandhi will become the prime minister, he said that "they would lose power in Telangana and Karnataka as well."

Revathy Sarma: There's plenty more to explore in the world of Bouma

When Bouma hit theatres earlier this month, few could have anticipated the response. Rejin S Babu's gothic mystery thriller has been drawing audiences despite not having your conventional lead star. While it did have familiar faces like Dileesh Pothan, Vineeth, Sagar Surya, Lena, Aditi Balan and Madhupal among its ensemble cast, Revathy Sarma, who essays the central character, an orphan named Celine, has been receiving particularly rewarding responses.Revathy admits she had her doubts about how Bouma would fare with audiences when it was gearing up for release. "I really liked the way the story unfolds, but I knew an experimental subject like this wouldn't be everyone's cup of tea. I trusted Rejin chettan and the technical team, though. And seeing so many established actors come on board made me feel there was something special about the project," she says.Revathy admits that the film's multiple timelines were a little difficult to follow when Rejin first narrated the script, and she was even more surprised by its ending. "I kept wondering when the redemption would come and when we would get to a happy ending. Then he casually said, 'This is where the movie ends.' I was like, 'What? Are you serious?'" she recalls.She was particularly struck by how Rejin's calm demeanour contrasted with his conviction about the film. "It almost doesn't make sense that someone so composed could come up with all this. But he was clear about what he wanted and so passionate about it. I feel his conviction ended up convincing me too," she adds.For Revathy, getting into the skin of Celine was relatively organic, as the character discovers her past alongside the audience. "When a lawyer tells Celine about her past and that her birth name is Sunset, I'm discovering it along with her. Realising that she once had a family and an entire history she knew nothing about is quite overwhelming. It's almost like she's discovering herself," she reflects.Most of Revathy's earlier characters, including Sandhya in Thalavara, came from rural or relatively conventional backgrounds. Celine was quite different. She is an urban woman who lives with her boyfriend Jacob (Sagar Surya) and makes ends meet as a bar singer. But playing Celine becomes a different challenge when she discovers her birth identity as Sunset, a character with a much darker side. "I don't think any of us can really relate to someone like Sunset. The entire setting, from the dinner table and costumes to Rejin chettan's description and direction, helped me get into that space," she says.Revathy also had a say in how Celine's relationship with Jacob was portrayed. She remembers raising concerns about a particular dialogue because she felt it carried an unintended suggestion that a woman was expected to obey her husband. The intuitive actor suggested that it should ideally underline Celine's right to make her own decisions. "Rejin chettan immediately said, 'That makes a lot of sense. Let's work on it.' He then rewrote the dialogue. I could always go to him if I had doubts about a scene or dialogue. He was very clear about what he wanted, but if he felt my suggestion made sense, he was open to changing things. I really appreciated that," she says.Watching the film also brought back some of Revathy's doubts about her performance. She recalls wondering during dubbing if she could have done certain portions better, despite Rejin and her co-star Dileesh Pothan telling her otherwise. But the film's reception eventually put those doubts to rest. "I walked out of the theatre feeling uncomfortable and disturbed, which is exactly what the film intends. When people began sharing their reactions, I

Steven Spielberg's first Western to star Jessie Buckley, Mark Rylance and Cillian Murphy



After entertaining audiences with action-adventure, science-fiction, historical epic and war films, Steven Spielberg is set to direct his first-ever Western film. According to Deadline, actors Jessie Buckley, Mark Rylance and Cillian Murphy are going to feature in the film, an adaptation of Kevin Barry's novel The Heart in Winter. Notably, the upcoming film will have an adapted screenplay by filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson, known for helming critically acclaimed films, such as There Will Be Blood and the 2026 Oscar Best Picture winner One Battle After Another.The story follows a pair of star-crossed fugitives who attempt to carve out a space for themselves somewhere in the Western United States. The producers of the film include Kristie Macosko Krieger, Sara Murphy, Spielberg, and Anderson. In a conversation with Deadline, Spielberg shared that the story is deeply personal for him and Anderson. The legendary director also expressed his excitement to collaborate with his 'dear friend' Anderson for the film.Notably, The Heart in Winter adaptation is set to mark Anderson's first screenplay for a film he himself will not direct. His last directorial venture, One Battle After Another, is also an adaptation, of Thomas Pynchon's novel Vineland.Universal Pictures is attached to oversee the production, and it is also set to release the film through its Focus Features label. The film will bring Steven Spielberg back together with Focus Features and Jessie Buckley after collaborating on Hamnet, which Spielberg produced and earned Buckley a Best Actress Oscar earlier this year. It is also set to bring Anderson back together with the studio after their collaboration on 2017's Phantom Thread. Meanwhile, Universal Pictures served as a distributor for Spielberg's last film Disclosure Day, starring Emily Blunt and Josh O'Connor.

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