

Interesting insights emerge on human lifespan

IFE expectancy in India at the time of independence was approximately 30-32 years. This rather low figure was driven by widespread poverty, inadequate healthcare, malnutrition, and high infant/maternal mortality rates. Since 1947, life expectancy has more than doubled, rising to over 70 years in recent years. This is, by itself, considered to be a major milestone as it reflects an improved public health care in the country. With about 65 per cent of Indians currently under the age of 35 and the median age speculated to be around 29, lifespan is a constant subject of interest. With a senior citizen population of around 11 per cent of the

total, many a time the statement 'age is just a number' is bandied about in social circles. It thus becomes interesting to know how a human being's lifespan can be computed; some recent studies are helpful in this regard. Genetics may explain about half of a person's lifespan, a study has suggested, pointing to a far more significant role of genetics than indications from earlier research. The findings, published in the journal *Science*, show that once mortality due to external factors such as accidents or infections are accounted for, "heritability of human life span due to intrinsic mortality is above 50 per cent".

Researchers from Israel's Weizmann Institute of Science and Karolinska Institutet in Sweden pointed out that understanding the heritability of human life span is central to ageing research, yet measuring genes' influence on longevity remains a challenge. Earlier studies have estimated that life span may be 15-33 per cent heritable across varied populations, with a typical range of 20-25 per cent, they said. The researchers show that the estimates "are confounded by extrinsic mortality -- deaths caused by extrinsic factors such as accidents or infections". While genes linked to lifespan have been identified, external environments

like disease or living conditions can exert a powerful influence on how long one lives and often obscure or confound potential genetic effects, they said. "Extrinsic mortality systematically masked the genetic contribution to life span in traditional analyses," the authors wrote. The team added that historical data from twin studies -- often explored for understanding how genes interact with environment and contribute to noticeable traits -- lack sufficient cause of death information to correct for extrinsic mortality.

"We use mathematical modeling and analyses of twin cohorts raised together and apart to cor-

rect for this factor, revealing that heritability of human life span due to intrinsic mortality is above 50 per cent," they said. "Correcting for extrinsic mortality raises the estimate for the heritability of human life span in twin and sibling studies to (nearly) 55 per cent, more than twice previous estimates and in line with heritability of most human traits," the team added. All the same, for humans around the world, it would be far more important to add life to years than add years to life as another popular saying goes. With quality of life under constant strain owing to prevailing socio-economic conditions, lifespan, whether inherited or lived

LETTERS

Duty exemption on cancer drugs is a life-saving move

In a major initiative, the Union Budget 2026-27 has given customs duty exemption on cancer medication drugs and brought down life-saving medications at affordable rates, which is a widely appreciable initiative. One must remember that cancer patients are increasing by over a million every year in India. Another good augury is the government's proposal to establish over 200 cancer care centres across the nation. One fondly hopes that this will bring a huge relief to cancer-inflicted patients and their families from the middle- and low-income groups.

Saketh Sirasanagandla, Hyderabad

Middle class ignored, yet again

THE 2026-27 Union Budget ignores the middle class by retaining income-tax slabs and rates, while increasing securities transaction tax. The super rich are incentivised by write-offs of their loans and lower class is enjoying the benefit of freebies and free/subsidised housing. However, the middle class has to bear the brunt huge education costs, EMIs for essential consumer goods and rising house rents on the one side and loss of job security and rising unemployment or underemployment owing to technological progress and adverse changes in labour codes, on the other side.

P R Ravinder, Hyderabad

High-speed rail corridors must include Warangal

THE Union Budget 2026-27 has announced three high-speed rail corridors for Hyderabad connecting Pune, Bengaluru and Chennai, projecting them as "growth connectors." However, the complete omission of Warangal—the second-largest city of Telangana and a major educational, industrial and cultural hub—is deeply disappointing and economically short-sighted. Equally concerning is the proposal to divert nearly half of the rail traffic through the Bibinagar-Nadikudi section. Instead of upgrading Kazipet into a modern transit hub, the current plan risks turning it into a congestion bottleneck. Warangal has been repeatedly assured of a railway manufacturing unit and redevelopment under the Amrit Bharat Stations Scheme. I urge the Ministry of Railways and the Telangana Government to re-examine the corridor alignments and include Warangal-Kazipet in the high-speed rail framework, ensuring that Telangana's development is not confined to Hyderabad alone.

Vidyasagar Reddy Kethiri, Hanumakonda-506009

Oppn has chosen rhetoric over reason

THE Opposition's criticism of the Union Budget 2026-27 appears less an exercise in economic scrutiny and more of reflexive political ritual. Ignoring fiscal constraints, global uncertainty, and inflationary pressures, it has chosen rhetoric over reason. The budget's calibrated focus on capital expenditure, infrastructure push, fiscal consolidation, and targeted welfare reflects pragmatic governance, not indifference. To dismiss these measures as "anti-people" without credible alternatives only exposes an unwillingness to engage with hard economic realities.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

Unbecoming of Cong, DMK and TMC

THE Congress, TMC and DMK have indulged in irresponsible fault-finding over the Union Budget, branding it with a variety of pejorative labels rather than engaging with its substance. Such rhetoric is uncalled for at a time when the economy demands constructive debate and policy seriousness. Instead of offering credible alternatives or acknowledging fiscal constraints, the Opposition has chosen theatrics over analysis. Budgetary scrutiny is vital in a democracy, but reducing a complex financial exercise to slogan-driven criticism only weakens parliamentary discourse and does little to advance national economic interests.

Sakunthala K R, Hyderabad

Should the Centre fund development projects in states?

THE Union Budget sets out how the Centre will spend money on national priorities like national highways, railway corridors, power grids, defence, and large infrastructure projects. States, on the other hand, prepare their own budgets to meet local needs like irrigation canals, hospitals, schools, and village roads. Transfers from the Union Budget to states happen in several ways. First, tax devolution: a constitutionally mandated share of central taxes recommended by the Finance Commission. Second, grants-in-aid: funds given to states to cover revenue deficits, disaster relief or special needs. Third, centrally sponsored schemes: programmes like MGNREGA or PMAY, where both Centre and states share costs. Fourth, central sector schemes: fully funded by the Centre but implemented in states, such as PM-KISAN. Chief Ministers often criticize the Union Budget because it does not announce state-specific projects or increase their share of funds. They feel their states are ignored when allocations are shown only in aggregate. The Union Budget builds national infrastructure, while state budgets decide local development priorities.

Dr O Prasada Rao, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

Govt changes timing of Urdu schools during Ramzan

BENGALURU: The Karnataka government has decided to change the school working hours for Urdu-medium primary, upper primary and high schools across the state during the month of Ramzan in the academic year 2025-26. State Home Minister G Parameshwara on Monday said calling the government's move as appeasement of minorities was not right. The decision applies to all government, aided and unaided Urdu-medium schools and follows a review of existing orders and a representation submitted by the Karnataka State Primary School Education Association (R), Bengaluru, a government circular said.

Read more at
<https://epaper.thehansindia.com>



PROF MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

YEARS back, every village and settlement had a lake—protected by a raised embankment, a katta. The lake was not merely a water body but a living institution. Its embankment was guarded by local deities—Katta Maisamma, Ganti Katta Maisamma, Pochamma—symbols of collective memory and ecological discipline. The deity stood there as a reminder and a silent message: do not breach the bank, do not pollute the water and do not encroach upon the commons. Cut to the present times. At most places, the lake is gone. The embankment is gone. But the deity remains.

Massive temples have replaced modest shrines. Expensive cars are driven in for rituals. Lemons are tied, pumpkins broken and garlands draped. There is a ticket for the vehicle and another for Ashtottara. Water is sprinkled to complete the ritual—often drawn not from the vanished lake, but from a purchased plastic “water bubble.”

Faith without water, development without life: Faith continues. Ecology does not. This is not a criticism of belief. Every society has its rituals. Even rockets sent into space are adorned with lemons, ginger,

and tamarind. Belief is not the problem. Selective belief is. We remember the deity but forget her purpose. We worship the guardian but destroy what she guarded.

From wells to water bubbles:

Every backyard once had a well. No one asked where the water came from—it was right there. Today, in apartments and gated colonies, no one asks about water sources. Buyers ask about parking, lifts, and amenities. Water is assumed. If there is a shortage, they say: ‘buy a water bubble.’

Plastic bottles have replaced public water systems. We buy packaged drinking water bottles oblivious of whether they are mineral water or ordinary tap water. We have even forgotten how to ask for pure water, because purity has been outsourced to a label.

This is not a consumer



When lakes disappear, and bottled water becomes the norm, it is not culture that has failed—it is constitutional governance that must be blamed. When citizens are forced to rely on plastic bottles instead of public water infrastructure, the State has abdicated its duty. When faith is commercialised, and ecology is ignored, governance loses moral legitimacy.

choice. It is a governance failure. The Supreme Court, in several judgments, questions this failure of the Union and State governments. The apex court has held that the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution inherently includes the right to clean drinking water, sanitation, and a healthy environment. For instance, last year the Supreme Court while giving its ruling on M/s Landmark Ventures vs MPPCB & Ors, explained: “The right to life inherently includes the right to enjoy a pollution-free environment... and thereby has also recognised the right to clean drinking water as a fundamental right.” (2025 INSC 131)

The Court further emphasised that the State must regulate water supply, safeguard water bodies, and prevent health hazards to protect this right. While focused on sanitation in court premises, the Supreme Court in Rajeeb Kalita vs Union of India (2025) affirmed access to sanitation as part of Article 21, grounding it in earlier jurisprudence which linked environmental and public health rights to life and dignity. (2025 INSC 75)

In a case of A P Pollution Control Board vs M V Nayudu

Supporting constitutional jurisprudence:

Beyond these, the Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasised in decisions such as M C Mehta vs Union of India and related environment cases that:

Protection of the environment, water, and air is integrated with the right to life under Article 21;

The State has constitutional duties under Article 48-A (environmental protection) and the public trust doctrine to preserve natural resources;

Sanitation and access to clean water are essential for human dignity.

Virender Gaur vs State of Haryana (1995):

The Supreme Court reiterated that: “Article 21... the protection and preservation of environment, ecological balance free from pollution of air and water, sanitation... are essential for enjoyment of life with human dignity.” (1995) 2 SCC 577. This decision emphatically placed water and sanitation within the ambit of Article 21 rights.

In a case of A P Pollution Control Board vs M V Nayudu

(1999), although primarily an environmental pollution and public trust doctrine case, the Court explicitly tied environmental protection, Natural resources, including water bodies, are held by the State under the public trust doctrine—they are not commodities to be sold or

protected and preservation of environment, ecological balance free from pollution of air and water... are integral facets of the right to healthy life under Article 21.”

This reinforced that a hygienic environment and clean water are essential to life and dignity.

Hygiene: From discipline to convenience:

There was a time when the first act on returning home was washing one's hands and feet. Earthen pots cooled water naturally. People drank without touching the vessel—the madri tradition—an act often dismissed as superstition, but deeply rooted in hygiene. Even hot coffee was sipped that way.

Today, we walk into homes with shoes on. We drink by putting bottles to our lips. Half-used plastic bottles are discarded. Caps are left open; water spills onto smooth floors, causing slips and broken bones. Dustbins fill with plastic and wastewater. This, we are told, is “modern civilisation.” What has changed is not merely the habit, but our relationship with water, waste, and responsibility.

Constitutional failure behind the cultural shift:

The Constitution of India does not speak the language of nostalgia. It speaks the language of duty.

Article 21 guarantees the right to life—not mere survival, but life with dignity. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that this includes the right to clean drinking water, sanitation, and a healthy environment.

visitors, capturing higher value. Similarly, tribal youth can be trained as cultural ambassadors, tour guides, and event managers, fostering a spirit of entrepreneurship that reduces migration to overcrowded cities.

The path ahead:

The government of Telangana state has already shown commendable dedication in organising the massive Sammakka Saralamma Jatara. The machinery is in place; the intent is visible. The next step is decentralisation and frequency.

We need not wait for the stars to align for a biennial Jatara to celebrate tribal culture. By creating a robust calendar of smaller, frequent festivals, we can turn every district into a cultural hub. This approach respects the sanctity of the massive annual pilgrimages while acknowledging that culture must be a living, breathing, and earning part of daily life.

Transitioning to frequent tribal festivals is not just about celebration; it is a strategic economic policy. It is about taking the spirit of the ‘bangaram’ offering—which symbolises wealth and purity—and ensuring that wealth flows back into the hands of the people, for whom the forest is their home.

(The writer is a former OSD to former Union Civil Aviation Minister)

Frequent conduct of tribal festivals can propel TG and AP economies

NOMULA SRINIVAS RAO

ing local economies in the tribal hinterlands.

Moving beyond the 'boom and bust' cycle:

Currently, the economic benefits of tribal festivals are concentrated in short, explosive bursts. During the Sammakka Saralamma Jatara, local traders, transporters, and artisans see a windfall. But once the deities return to the forest and the temporary shelters are dismantled, the economic silence returns.

By institutionalizing a calendar of frequent tribal festivals—perhaps monthly or quarterly circuits across districts like Adilabad, Bhadrak, Kothagudem, Visakhapatnam, and East Godavari—the two Telugu states can create a sustainable economic ecosystem. Regular events would mean a steady stream of income for local populations rather than a once-a-year lottery. It transforms the narrative from “pilgrimage management” to “cultural economic activity.”

Untapped potential of tribal entrepreneurship:

The primary beneficiary of frequent festivals would be the tribal entrepreneur. Our tribal belts are reservoirs of unique craftsmanship and organic produce that the urban market desperately craves but rarely accesses.

Handlooms and handicrafts:



There is a pressing need for the state governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to transition from relying solely on “mega-events” to hosting regular, frequent tribal festivals. Such a shift could be the master key to unlocking rural entrepreneurship and revitalizing local economies in the tribal hinterlands.

up food stalls regularly, turning home kitchens into micro-enterprises. This not only monetizes traditional knowledge but also preserves culinary heritage.

Tourism as a force multiplier:

The jatara proves that people are willing to travel for an experience. However, the modern tourist—especially the younger demographic—seeks “experi-