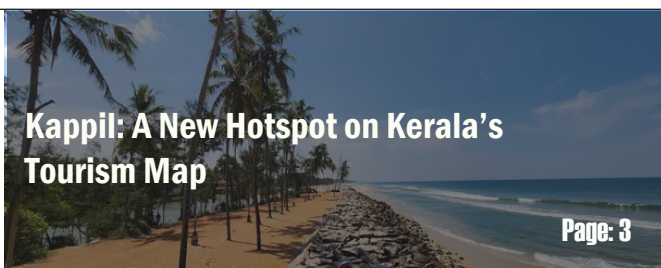




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Smart Roads Turn into a Smart Trap

Aneena P Anil
Thiruvananthapuram

Thiruvananthapuram's status as a smart city, residents are now stuck between the smart roads. The city was selected in the third phase of the Smart City Mission in 2017. Twelve smart roads, with the combined efforts of the Public Works Department (PWD) and the KRFB (KERALA ROAD FUND BOARD), were inaugurated in May 2025. However, the roads began to collapse within a few months.

The Killipalam-Attakulangara smart road, opposite Kothuval Street, was recently dug up for maintenance after a sewage line leak was discovered. Following the Kerala Water Authority's inspection, officials confirmed that the issue arose because old pipelines had not been replaced with new ones during the reconstruction, and proper checks had not been carried out. The sewage line required urgent replacement, forcing authorities to dig up the road once again.

The Water Authority and the KRFB accuse each other,



A stretch of a Smart City road in Thiruvananthapuram deliberately excavated for maintenance work, months after its inauguration. PC: Indian Express

with the former claiming that the KRFB and its contractors are responsible for resolving the issue, while the latter insists that maintenance is the Water Authority's responsibility. A certain amount had been given in advance to the Water Authority for sewage reconstruction and for corporation roads. The money was allocated to replace old pipelines, and in case of pipe damage, manholes were to be

constructed every 10 meters. However, the Water Authority has denied these allegations.

A Smart City Project engineer stated, "The engineers and the technical department were totally against granting permission to dig up the road, but due to the prevailing circumstances and political pressure, they were forced to approve it." Reports also indicate that KSEB now seeks permission to excavate another smart

road, Thycaud-Norka-Gandhi Bhavan Road, to lay cables, as it was reconstructed in a hurry and there was insufficient time to place the cables underground before the road's inauguration. However, the proposal has not yet been approved.

The roads were renovated with the assurance that no further demolitions would take place and that any future issues would be addressed through alternative methods.

During the inaugural function, Minister of Public Works Department P. A. Mohamed Riyas mentioned that the roads were designed keeping long-term urban planning in view. He also emphasized that the smart road infrastructure will eliminate the need for repeated digging for utility repairs. Dedicated ducts and special maintenance chambers have been installed to carry out such works without damaging the roads.

The issue has significantly affected the public, disrupting daily life. Traffic congestion became a major challenge as lanes were reduced, leading to delays for buses, taxis, and private vehicles. Public transport schedules were disrupted, making daily travel longer, resulting in overcrowding. Beyond these tangible inconveniences, the frequent excavations have weakened public trust in the Smart City project, undermining its claim of durable, low-maintenance roads.

This situation highlights the administrative irresponsibility and lack of foresight of officials in overlooking basic matters

before construction. It also points to poor coordination between various departments, and this seems to be the case with many other projects. The question that arises is whether this is being done deliberately to misuse public funds. Smart roads are being demolished in a 'smart' way, and so are the officials' words. Roads alone shouldn't be smart; the authorities should be as well.

If similar practices continue, then even future projects may face the same fate, impacting not just infrastructure but the overall credibility of urban development initiatives. Public accountability, stringent project monitoring, and transparent communication are essential to restore people's confidence. Authorities must ensure timely execution with proper groundwork to prevent such issues from recurring. Continuing this approach and proposing new projects without accountability will not change the situation. They should plan for the future, not just the present, and people should be wise enough to make the right choices for the sustainable urban growth.

30th IFFK Unveiled

Lydia Saji
Thiruvananthapuram

The 30th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), organised by the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy under the



Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Kerala, will be held in Thiruvananthapuram from December 12 to 19, 2025. The festival will screen over 200 films across 16 venues including Nishagandhi and feature key segments such as In Conversation, Open Forum, Meet the Director, Homage,

Aravindan Memorial Lecture, Book Release, Panel Discussion, and Exhibition. The Malayalam Cinema Today category will include 12 films, while 7 films will be

showcased under Indian Cinema Now and 14 films will compete in the International Competition.

Special packages will highlight 10 films by past Lifetime Achievement Award winners and 20 films that previously won the Suvarna Chakoram for Best Film at IFFK. The festival is expected to draw wide participation and serve as a major cultural event for the state. It aims to provide a platform for cinematic celebration and artistic appreciation.

Hostel Safety Under Scanner in Kazhakoottam Following Assault Incident, Raising Concerns

Ramya Roy
Kazhakoottam

Following the recent assault incident at a hostel in Kazhakoottam, serious concerns have been raised about safety lapses and lack of regulation in private hostels and paying guest accommodations in the area.

Several women residents alleged that basic security measures were missing or poorly maintained. "CCTV cameras exist, but many do not work and no one monitors them," said a resident of a girls' hostel, adding that complaints about safety were often ignored.

Another student alleged that the hostel was unlicensed and unregulated. "We later found out there was no proper



registration or governing authority monitoring the hostel. Because of this lack of accountability, complaints were dismissed," she said.

A resident highlighted the absence of safety checks. "There were no fire safety inspections or security audits. The assault was tragic, but not surprising — safety was never a priority," she said.

Hostel owners, however, said they operate under limitations. "The incident is

deeply concerning. Managing security and discipline is challenging, especially without clear government guidelines," said a hostel owner.

Responding to the incident, the Kazhakoottam Constable Police said the investigation revealed systemic failures. "The hostel had no functional CCTV, no visitor verification, and no trained security personnel. These lapses directly contributed to the

crime," the officer said.

Police have since inspected hostels in the area. "Hostels operating without approval were issued notices and instructed to regularise operations or shut down," the CPO added.

The incident has sparked renewed demands for mandatory licensing, regular safety audits, and strict enforcement of security norms to prevent similar crimes in the future.

"There were no fire safety checks, no inspection of security systems. Safety was never a priority."

- A Student Resident

Guardians of the Dravidian Legacy

Inside the Menamkulam institution preserving South India's linguistic heritage

Jyothy Susan James

Thiruvananthapuram

In the quiet village of Menamkulam, just outside Thiruvananthapuram, stands an institution that has silently protected a vital part of India's cultural history. The Dravidian Linguistics Association (DLA), built on the vision of pioneering scholars, is more than a research centre it is a living archive where old scripts meet new research, ensuring that the Dravidian languages remain alive and relevant.

The DLA was founded in 1971 to study, document, and preserve the Dravidian languages Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, and others. The idea was proposed by Prof. V. I. Subramoniam, Head of Linguistics at Kerala University, with support from Prof. R. C. Hiremath of Karnataka University and Prof. Mahadeva Sastry of SV University. What began as a small academic initiative has grown into a strong network of over 1700 members, all dedicated to keeping Dravidian heritage alive through research and collaboration.

Among the DLA's most remarkable achievements is the International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics (IJDL), launched in 1972. Initially managed by Kerala University, the journal faced closure due to financial hurdles, but the DLA took it over and has maintained



Dravidian Linguistic Association in Menamkulam. PC: Lydia Saji

uninterrupted publication every January and June since.

Today, the IJDL is circulated to major universities and linguistic departments in India and abroad. It remains a respected platform for scholarly research, and only life members of the DLA can contribute to it. Alongside it, the Association publishes DLA News, a monthly bulletin that shares linguistic updates, research highlights, and conference reports.

DLA also established the International School of Dravidian Linguistics (ISDL) in 1977. The ISDL promotes advanced research on Dravidian history, language, and culture. It also studies Dravidian speaking migrants and the influence of Dravidian traditions in India and abroad.

Another important focus of the ISDL is the documentation

of tribal and endangered languages, ensuring that even small linguistic communities find a voice in the broader Dravidian narrative. Senior scholars are invited for research, and fellowships are offered to encourage new studies.

Every year, the DLA organises the All India Conference of Dravidian Linguists in different states, bringing together experts and young researchers to share their findings. Themes often include the origin and evolution of Dravidian languages, as well as the role of digital tools and artificial intelligence in preservation. The 2026 conference, to be held in Punjab, aims to extend discussions on Dravidian linguistics beyond South India reflecting the Association's commitment to spreading awareness across the country. The DLA Library, with

its collection of over 40000 books, is one of the most valuable linguistic repositories in India. It houses rare works, thesis, and manuscripts that serve as reference for researchers worldwide.

The Dravidian Linguistics Association remains a beacon of cultural preservation, reminding us language is more than communication it is identity, history and memory. As modernization and technology reshape society, institutions like the DLA and ISDL ensure Dravidian languages continue to thrive. By studying, teaching and speaking these languages, scholars and communities keep alive stories and wisdom of generations, linking the ancient with the modern and ensuring the Dravidian legacy endures for centuries.

Renowned Media Educator Dr. Syed Amjed Ahmed Passes Away

Jyothy Susan James

Thiruvananthapuram

Syed Amjed Ahmed, founding director of the Educational Multimedia Research Centre (EMMRC) and former professor and Head of the Department of Communication and Journalism of the Kerala University passed away in Bengaluru on 13 October 2025. He was 76.

Dr. Ahmed was a respected teacher, researcher and mentor who inspired generations of students through his passion for media education and research. His contributions earned him a place among the top five communication researchers in the country, leaving a lasting legacy in the academic world.

In recognition of his academic excellence the UGC awarded him the Emeritus fellowship. He also led notable research collaborations with the Department of Electronic Media at Bangalore University.

After earning his MSc in Geology from Bangalore University, Dr. Ahmed shifted his focus to communication studies and went on to complete an MS in Communication from the same institution. He began his professional career at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore (IIMB) before joining



Dr. Syed Ahmed

University of Calicut as a faculty member. Later, he became the Head of the Department of Mass Communication, where his academic leadership and research work made a lasting impact.

Dr. Ahmed was instrumental in founding the EMMRC at University of Calicut in 1998, the first centre of its kind in Kerala established with support from the University Grants Commission (UGC). The centre pioneered the use of media and information technologies to grow higher education.

The Department of Communication and Journalism, Kerala University, expressed deep sorrow over the demise of Dr. Syed Amjed Ahmed, recalling his invaluable contributions as a teacher and researcher.

The department noted that his legacy would continue to inspire future generations of media scholars.

Waves of Change: Vizhinjam Port Alters Coastal Life

Traditional fishermen face coastal erosion, reduced access to fishing routes and mounting livelihood challenges as port construction advances.

Gokul R J

Thiruvananthapuram

The Vizhinjam Port Project, once hailed as a milestone in Kerala's economic ambitions, has cast long shadows over the lives of thousands of coastal residents. What was envisioned as a gateway to global maritime trade has instead turned into a daily struggle for survival for the traditional fishing community of Vizhinjam and its neighbouring villages. The Vizhinjam port project has severely impacted the local fishermen community through displacement, increased coastal erosion, and disruption of traditional livelihoods. The construction has caused extensive damage to fishing grounds, blocked sea access, and led to significant house destruction due to erosion disproportionately affecting

the community's economic and social wellbeing. Breakwater construction and dredging activities have not only damaged the ocean floor but also blocked crucial access routes to the sea. Entire stretches of coastline have been wasted away, washing out homes and forcing many families to live in temporary shelters. While the government has offered compensation and rehabilitation packages, many affected residents say these measures fall short. "The sea that once fed us has now turned against us" says a local fisherman. Experts warn that the port's impact extends beyond economics. The erosion and ecological imbalance could have long term consequences for Kerala's fragile coastline. According to environmental scientist Dr. Beena Francis,



A view of the Vizhinjam Port project along Kerala's southern coastline. PC: PTI

the continuous dredging and breakwater expansion have altered the natural wave patterns, intensifying erosion in nearby coastal belts. This is not just about Vizhinjam; the effects are being felt as far as Poovar and Valiyathura.

Environmentalists and activists have urged the

government to conduct a comprehensive study on the environmental and social damage before expanding the project further. They argue that the current Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) does not fully capture the scale of destruction caused to marine biodiversity and

local livelihoods. Fishermen claim their traditional rights are being ignored in favour of corporate interests. Despite repeated assurances of sustainable development, resentment continues to grow among the displaced families.

Many have joined hands with civic and church based

organisations demanding a permanent rehabilitation package, employment opportunities and a voice in policy decisions.

Government officials claimed that the project will eventually benefit the region through job creation and infrastructural growth. However critics argue that such promises ring hollow to those who have lost everything. The once vibrant fishing harbours now echo with uncertainty. "We don't oppose development," says Leela, a fisherwoman from Mulloor. "But development should not mean destroying our homes," she adds. As the port cranes rise above the shoreline, the people who have lived by the sea for generations watch their future being reshaped by forces that is ultimately beyond their control.



Kappil: Tourism Boom Transforms Once- Quiet Coastline into a Growing Hotspot

Sara Sajeeb

Thiruvananthapuram

Once a quiet coastal village tucked between the Arabian Sea and Edava backwaters, Kappil in Kerala's Kollam district is fast emerging as one of the state's most promising new tourist destinations. A surge in both domestic and international arrivals is transforming the local economy, boosting resort occupancy, and opening new opportunities for small vendors and service providers.

According to figures from Kerala Tourism, the state welcomed a record 21.9 million domestic tourists in 2023, marking a 16% rise from the previous year. While established destinations like Kovalam and Varkala continue to draw crowds, Kappil's unique blend of serene beaches, backwaters, and cliffside views is attracting travellers seeking a quieter, nature-rich experience. Recognizing its potential, the Tourism Department has included Kappil in a nine-kilometre beach development master plan stretching from Aliyirkkam to Varkala. The plan envisions upgraded facilities, better access roads, improved parking, and waste-management systems all aimed at positioning the Varkala-Kappil stretch as a major international beach tourism hub.



A view of the beach-backwater landscape at Kappil, Kollam. PC: Wanderboat AI

The upswing in visitors is already paying dividends. Resorts and homestays in and around Kappil are reporting higher occupancy rates, particularly during weekends and festive seasons. "We're seeing a steady rise in inquiries, especially from young travelers and families looking for peaceful waterfront stays," said the manager of a mid-range resort overlooking the Kappil backwaters. Local vendors, too, are sharing in the windfall. Street-food stalls, coconut sellers, handicraft artisans, and boat operators are experiencing brisk business as tourists explore the area's backwater routes and beachfront promenades. Taxi drivers and auto rickshaw operators have also benefited from increased local transport demand. A recent policy paper from the

Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) noted that tourism in regions like Kappil can "significantly enhance income for micro and marginal enterprises," citing the multiplier effect on food stalls, homestays, and local crafts.

In addition to traditional sightseeing, new ventures in water sports and boating are taking shape. Local entrepreneurs are launching kayaking and pedal-boat services on the Kappil Lake, while wellness retreats and eco-resorts are marketing the area as a slow-travel destination. The "destination diversification" campaign by Kerala Tourism aimed at promoting lesser known spots is expected to further draw attention to Kappil, easing the tourist load on crowded Varkala while spreading the benefits of tourism

across nearby communities. However, rapid growth has its downsides. Locals and lifeguards warn that safety infrastructure has not kept pace with the tourist surge. Several incidents of drowning have been reported in recent

years, with just one or two lifeguards manning long stretches of beach.

Environmentalists also caution that unchecked resort expansion and inadequate waste management could harm the delicate ecosystem of cliffs and backwaters.

Authorities have promised that upcoming phases of the beach master plan will prioritize safety, environmental protection, and inclusive local growth. For now, Kappil stands as a symbol of Kerala's evolving tourism story where a tranquil fishing village is transforming into a vibrant, sustainable travel destination. If the balance is maintained, resorts, vendors, and residents alike could find in tourism not just a source of income, but a model for community driven growth.

Dr. Sivaranjini Wins Landmark Battle: FSSAI Bans Misleading 'ORS' Labels Nationwide

Sara Sajeeb

Thiruvananthapuram

Hyderabad-based pediatrician Dr. Sivaranjini Santosh has successfully compelled the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to ban the misleading use of the term "ORS" on sugary drinks and beverages across India following her eight year campaign starting in 2016 after noticing children's health deteriorating from mislabelled products. She achieved this victory by filing public interest litigation, raising awareness among parents and regulators, and providing scientific evidence to FSSAI.

The FSSAI directive, issued on October 14, 2025, explicitly prohibits any product from using the term "ORS" unless it strictly follows the World Health Organization's ORS formula, which specifies precise levels of sodium, potassium, and glucose. Products that fail to meet these standards but continue to use the ORS label could now face legal action, fines, and mandatory relabelling. Dr. Sivaranjini first noticed that many commercially marketed "ORS" drinks contained excessive sugar and inadequate electrolytes, which could worsen dehydration in children rather than treat it. She highlighted the potential health risks to pediatric associations and parents, emphasizing that these products exploited a medically recognized term for commercial gain.

The campaign involved multiple strategies: documenting misleading products, raising public awareness through media and social platforms, formally



Dr. Sivaranjini

writing to FSSAI, and eventually filing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Telangana High Court in September 2024. The legal pressure combined with public scrutiny finally led the FSSAI to act decisively. Industry resistance was significant, with some companies attempting to bypass earlier directives issued in 2022 and 2024. However, the 2025 ruling leaves no ambiguity, making it mandatory for all manufacturers to comply with WHO ORS standards if they intend to use the term "ORS" in branding or labelling. State regulators and licensing authorities are now tasked with enforcement.

Dr. Sivaranjini's victory is being hailed as a landmark public health achievement, ensuring that children and vulnerable populations are protected from misleading labelling and unsafe products. Her persistent fight demonstrates the power of sustained advocacy and scientific evidence in shaping regulatory policy. While vigilance is still required to enforce the ban nationwide, this ruling sends a clear message: misleading medical claims will no longer be tolerated in India's food and beverage industry.

IMFK 2025: Where Media Meets Truth and Peace

Aneena P Anil

Thiruvananthapuram

Under the theme "Media for Truth, Media for Peace," the Kerala Media Academy held the International Media Festival of Kerala (IMFK) at Tagore Theatre, Thiruvananthapuram, on September 29, 30, and October 1 and 2. Organised by the Kerala Media Academy in association with the Information and Public Relations Department and the Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ), the festival emerged as a significant platform for global media discourse.

The Honourable Chief Minister of Kerala, Sri Pinarayi Vijayan, inaugurated the festival. The program commenced with the Palestine Solidarity Conference, highlighting Kerala's longstanding support for the Palestinian cause. Palestinian Ambassador Mr Abdullah Abu Shawesh delivered a poignant address, underlining the devastating impact of the ongoing conflict and



Panelists engage in a discussion on "From Illikkunnu to the Internet" at the International Media Festival 2025, organised by the Kerala Media Academy. PC: Jyothy Susan James

emphasising the importance of media in countering misinformation.

On September 30, Chief Minister Sri Pinarayi Vijayan presented Mariam Ouedraogo from Burkina Faso with the Media Person of the Year 2025 Award in recognition of her courageous voice that brought the pain and hope of the African continent to the world. The VPR National Awards and the Media Academy Awards were also distributed at the festival.

Over four days, IMFK

2025 hosted panel talks, interactive sessions, an AI workshop, photo exhibitions featuring journalists killed in Gaza, and an exhibition titled Real Kerala Stories. Discussions included topics such as Mirroring the Truth, Accidental Journalism, AI @ News, Kerala Real Story and Media, and Media Studies in the Cyber Age. Other highlights were the RJ hunt, photography contest, quiz competitions, and a concert by the Folkgrapher live band.

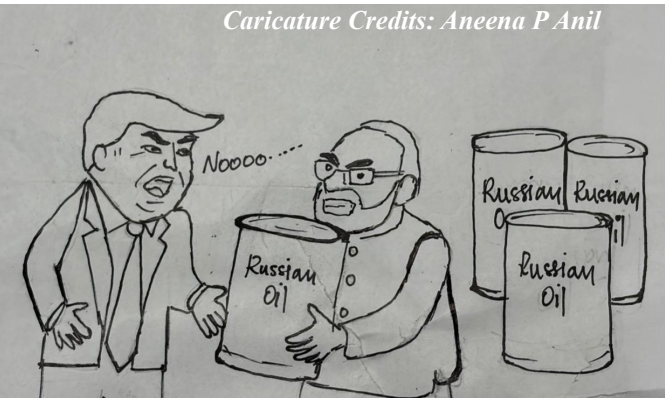
One of the main attractions

was the photo exhibition "Big Salute to Gaza," which paid tribute to more than 300 journalists who lost their lives in Gaza's conflict zones. Each image reflected their courage, along with the suffering and resilience of people living amidst war, leaving viewers heartbroken.

The event concluded with the "Save Gaza" programme at Manaveeyam Veedhi, featuring talks by prominent journalists and media personalities, drawing public attention..

Sanctions Knock, Oil Answers!

Energy security continues to outweigh sanctions pressure in India's oil policy



Caricature Credits: Aneena P Anil



When Journalists Becomes The Target In Gaza

The war in Gaza has taken countless lives, but the killing of journalists stands out as one of its most disturbing features. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, more than two hundred journalists and media workers have been killed since October 2023, mostly by Israeli strikes. This number is not only shocking — it is higher than the journalist deaths recorded in World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Afghanistan conflict combined. No modern war has seen journalists die at this scale, and the United Nations points out about a genocide committed by Israel in Gaza.

What makes this tragedy harder to digest is that most of these journalists were Palestinians reporting on their own devastated communities. Their final posts showed destroyed homes, overcrowded hospitals, hungry families — the everyday reality of a population under relentless bombardment. With foreign reporters largely blocked from entering Gaza, these local journalists were the last remaining voice from inside. When Israel's attacks killed them, it also killed many of the stories the world needed to hear.

Compared with earlier wars, where journalists were at least recognised as non-combatants, Gaza has become a place where simply holding a camera makes you a target. Many international organisations have accused Israel of systematically silencing witnesses, and even if investigations are still ongoing, the pattern is too stark to ignore. When so many reporters die in one conflict, it raises serious questions about whether Israel is treating information itself as a threat.

The human toll of this is heartbreaking. Families lose their loved ones, children lose parents, and Gaza's society — already pushed to its limits — loses the people who could speak to the outside world. For journalism everywhere, this sets a terrifying precedent. If Israel can operate with impunity while journalists die at such numbers, what message does that send to young reporters? That truth-telling is a deadly act?

In the end, the killing of journalists is not just another tragic chapter of this war. It is a direct blow to humanity's right to know. And if the world does not hold Israel accountable for this silencing, we risk losing not only the truth about Gaza, but our belief that truth matters at all.

When the Law Silences the Innocent

Jyothy Susan James

In a country that proudly calls itself the world's largest democracy, it is painful to see how laws meant to protect people are now being used to silence them. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) was created to fight against terrorism and keep our nation safe. But over the years, it has slowly turned into a weapon against citizens, especially those who dare to question or speak up.

The UAPA, first introduced in 1967 and amended several times. It was designed to deal with activities that threaten India's sovereignty and integrity. However, the 2008 and 2019 amendments gave the government and investigative agencies more power. It allows individuals, not just organizations, to be branded as "terrorists," without sufficient evidence or trial.

A law that takes long time

The UAPA gives the government and police enormous powers. Once someone is arrested under this law, getting bail is nearly impossible. The trial may take years, sometimes even a decade. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, only about 3% to 2.2% of UAPA cases end in conviction. That means 97% of those accused are either acquitted or waiting endlessly for justice.

Stories of suffering

One that still in the minds of many of us is the life of Father Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old priest who spent his life for fighting for the rights of tribal people. In 2020, he was arrested under UAPA by accused of having links with extremist groups. Despite his age and illness, he was denied bail and died in custody in 2021 before his trial even began. His only real "crime" was speaking for the voiceless. There are also students, journalists, and activists who are behind bars today for simply attending in protests or writing against government policies. Using such a strict law against ordinary citizens is

a serious threat to democracy. People start to feel afraid to speak or write their opinions. When the government sees every critic as an enemy, freedom of speech loses its meaning. Even the courts have noticed this problem. The Division Bench of Abhay S. Oka and Augustine George Masih, while hearing the instant appeal challenging the impugned judgment of Patna High Court, emphatically reiterated that when a case is made out for a grant of bail, the Courts should not have any hesitation in granting bail. "The allegations of the prosecution may be very serious, but the duty of the Courts is to consider the case for grant of bail in accordance with the law. "Bail is the rule, and jail is an exception" is a settled law". In some cases, the Supreme Court has said there is not enough evidence, but by the time bail is given, the person has already spent years in jail.

The essence of Indian democracy lies in cooperative federalism, where both centre and state work together with respect for each other's powers. But by using UAPA to override state authority, the centre risks turning that cooperation into control. For example, under Section 6(5) of the NIA Act, the Central government can order the NIA to investigate a case anywhere in India.

In several cases, this has caused tensions between States and the Centre, especially when cases involving political or social activists from regions. This kind of central overreach not only violates the spirit of federalism but also politicizes the investigation process. It is time for the government to listen. National security and counterterrorism measures are important, but that cannot justify punishing innocent people. There must be clear rules, quicker trials, and better checks before branding someone as a terrorist. The law should protect the nation, not by destroying the people in it. Every innocent person under detention or relieved from detention is a reminder of our democracy. The government must remember that a secure nation cannot be built by silencing its own people.

Think Twice Before You Share

Ramya Roy

Fake news has become one of the most concerning global challenges in the digital era. It spreads rapidly across social media platforms and strongly influences public opinion. What once appeared as occasional misinformation has now grown into a deliberate manipulation of facts, often used to promote political, religious or social agendas.

In today's computerized age, online platforms and algorithm driven feeds allow fake news to reach millions with just a click. Studies show that sensational or controversial content attracts more attention than verified information, making misinformation spread faster. Its consequences are serious and can lead to political division, social unrest, violence and confusion among the public.

Evolution of Fake News in the Novennium

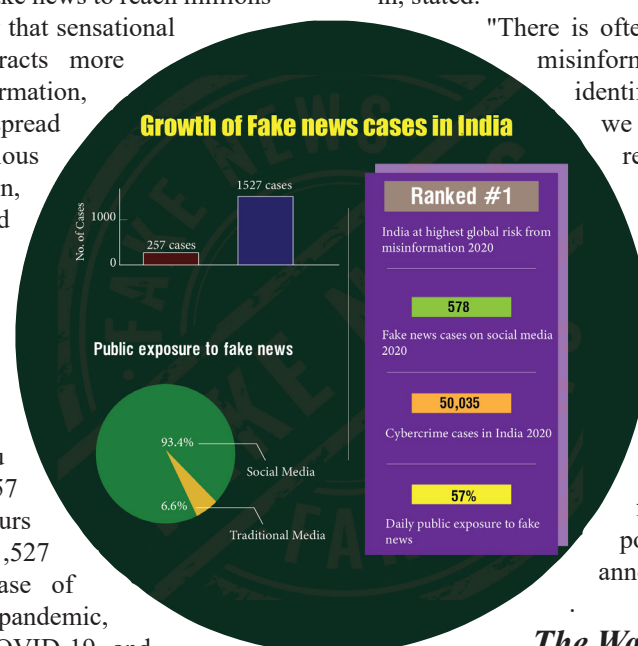
According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), India recorded 257 cases of fake news and rumours in 2017. This number rose to 1,527 in 2020, marking an increase of nearly 500 percent. During the pandemic, misinformation related to COVID-19 and lockdowns largely contributed to this rise. In 2024, the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report identified India as the country at the highest risk from misinformation and disinformation. The NCRB also reported 578 instances of fake news on social media in 2020, along with a total of 50,035 cybercrime cases. A study conducted on Understanding the Impact and Influence of Fake News found:

- 57.5% of respondents encounter fake news every day.
- 93.4% see it on social media, compared to only 6.6% on traditional media.
- 46.2% consider fake news a serious social issue.
- 53.8% believe it is spread intentionally to mislead the public.
- 59.4% have witnessed fake news affecting public opinion or causing harm.

Interestingly, 20.8% admitted that fake news influenced their decision making. About 55.1% believed the government had a role in the spread of misinformation during the Ram Mandir inauguration. Additionally, 94.4% felt that social media platforms must take greater responsibility for controlling it. Fact checking means verifying information before accepting or sharing it. Sabloo Thomas, a fact checker at Newschecker. in, stated:

"There is often a thin line between opinion and misinformation. Fact checkers must clearly identify what is misleading. For videos, we divide them into key frames, run reverse image searches, use AI tools to detect manipulation and verify links through trusted platforms such as Scam Detector or official government websites."

He added that skilled individuals now manipulate visuals so effectively that tracing the original source has become difficult. However, he pointed out that ordinary users can also fact check by searching official portals and cross verifying major announcements



The Way Forward

Fact checking organisations such as Alt News, BOOM Live, Factly, AFP Fact Check and PolitiFact play an important role in fighting misinformation globally. Experts believe that addressing fake news requires a combined effort involving personal responsibility, media literacy and stronger regulations on digital platforms.

The study also showed that more than 51% of respondents strongly believe that fact checking can reduce the spread of fake news, highlighting the need for critical thinking in the digital world.

Ultimately, every user has a responsibility to think carefully before sharing any content and ensure that truth, not misinformation, shapes the narrative of our online world.

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E-Waste: The Dirty Side of Digital World

Raisa Rakhsanda

We love our gadgets, the shiny new phone, the faster laptop, the latest smartwatch. Technology excites us, connects us and makes life easier. But have you ever stopped to think about what happens to the old devices we replace? They do not just vanish. They become part of a rapidly expanding global pile of electronic waste, known as e waste, which is rising faster than we can process it.

Every year, the world discards more than 62 million tonnes of e-waste. According to the United Nations Global E-Waste Monitor 2024, that is heavier than the Great Wall of China. Yet only around 22 percent of this waste is recycled properly. The remaining majority ends up in landfills or burning yards, releasing toxic chemicals into the air, soil and water, causing long term environmental damage.

Inside our gadgets are hazardous substances such as lead, mercury and cadmium. These materials do not just harm the planet, they also harm us. The World Health Organization warns that unsafe recycling methods release toxins that can lead to lung infections, skin disorders and impaired brain development, especially among children who are often exposed to such conditions.

In regions like Seelampur in Delhi and Agbogbloshie in Ghana, informal recycling workers, including minors, spend hours breaking apart old phones, computers and cables to extract small amounts of copper or gold. Reports from Reuters and The Guardian show that many of them work without gloves, masks or protective clothing. They inhale toxic fumes and handle harmful materials with their bare hands, often without understanding the risks. Many wealthy countries contribute to the crisis. Instead of

recycling electronics responsibly, they export them to developing nations under labels such as used goods or second hand donations. Investigations by AP News and Le Monde reveal that most of these products are actually non functional waste. They arrive in poor condition and are burned or dismantled in unsafe surroundings.

There is still hope. Technology companies such as Apple, Dell and Samsung have introduced buy back, trade in and recycling programmes, as mentioned in their sustainability reports. The European Union Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive enforces strict laws to control e-waste. Scientists are also working on modern recycling systems using artificial intelligence and robotics to separate valuable materials safely.

However, meaningful change begins with each of us. Before replacing a device, try to repair it or upgrade parts instead of buying a new one. Donate gadgets that still work. Recycle responsibly through authorised e waste centres. Even simple actions such as using products for a longer period or choosing brands with responsible recycling policies can make a difference.

Every time we upgrade, we leave behind more than just an old device. We leave behind a mark on the environment that affects ecosystems and future generations. It is time to rethink how we use and discard technology. What truly matters is not the next device we purchase, but the world we leave behind.



Are Govt. Hospitals Becoming Graveyards?

Negligence, commercialization, and the growing crisis in India's public healthcare system

QUICK SNAPSHOT

INSTITUTIONAL DELIVERIES

- Public Hospitals: ~64%
- Private Hospitals: ~36%

C-SECTION RATES

- Private Sector: ~47%
- Public Sector: ~14%
- WHO Recommended Ideal: 10-15%

INFANT MORTALITY (per 1,000 live births)

- India: 27
- Global Average: 17.3

MATERNAL MORTALITY (per 100,000 live births)

- 2014-16: 130
- 2016-18: 113
- 2018-20: 97

HEALTH SPENDING

- Karnataka Health Budget (2024-25): Rs. 15,145 crore
- National Health Expenditure: ~3.28% of GDP (2021)

MBBS COST STRUCTURE

- Private Medical Colleges: Rs. 50 lakh - Rs. 1.5 crore
- Public Medical Colleges: Very low / subsidized

Darshan D N

Government hospitals were once seen as the lifeline for India's poor, places where people regardless of wealth could seek healing and care. Today, however, they often symbolize neglect and apathy. With privatization deepening, a harsh divide has emerged: the rich access quality healthcare, while the poor are left to navigate an unreliable public system.

In Karnataka's 2024-25 budget, the state allocated ₹15,145 crore for the health sector. Yet for many citizens, even basic medical care remains difficult to access. Reports from districts such as Mandya and Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) describe families alleging negligence during childbirth in government hospitals, leading to tragic outcomes. In one case, relatives claimed that demands for money delayed treatment. In another, a newborn died after a C-section. Similar incidents have been reported across the country. In Salem, Tamil Nadu, a 2013 case drew widespread criticism after a woman from Andhra Pradesh gave birth on the roadside when the hospital reportedly refused admission over a payment dispute. These stories illustrate the widening gap between public health policy and day-to-day medical practice.

Part of this crisis stems from how medicine in India has evolved. With MBBS seats in private colleges costing lakhs or even crores, medical education has increasingly become an investment. Many government doctors divide their time between public hospitals and private clinics, blurring the line between service and business. One patient recalled being told, "My duty hours are over. Come to my private clinic and I'll treat you there."

The consequences of such systemic issues are evident in national health outcomes. According to global data, 17.3 infants die for every 1,000 live births worldwide, while India's infant mortality rate stands at 25.8 per 1,000. Behind these statistics are human stories of loss, many of which families attribute to delayed care, poor infrastructure, or lack of accountability.

While public hospitals struggle, private facilities often exploit the opposite end of the spectrum: financial vulnerability. Studies indicate that 47.4% of deliveries in private hospitals in India are C-sections, significantly higher than medical necessity alone would dictate, raising concerns that surgical births may be driven by convenience and profit rather than clinical need. One in five women reportedly undergoes a C-section that could have been avoided, exposing them to long-term health risks.

Amid this bleak landscape, the story of Sulagitti Narasamma offers a striking reminder of what medical service once meant. A traditional midwife from Krishnapura village in Tumakuru, she delivered over 15,000 babies using natural birthing methods, never charging a fee. Without formal education, she learned midwifery from her grandmother and practiced with compassion and skill. For her lifelong service, she received the Padma Shri in 2018 and the D. Devaraj Urs Award in 2012. Her work exemplified natural births with quicker recovery, fewer complications, and healthier infants, standing in stark contrast to today's intervention-heavy, profit-driven model.

India's healthcare crisis is not only about budgets and infrastructure. It is also about ethics, accountability, and empathy. Even with considerable public spending, corruption and mismanagement prevent resources from reaching patients. Reform must prioritize strict monitoring of hospitals, transparent grievance systems, and swift consequences for negligence.

Public hospitals require investment not only in equipment but also in dignity, ensuring that the poor are treated with respect rather than disdain. Citizens too must be educated to move away from superstition and unnecessary surgical interventions. Healthcare, at its core, should remain a public service rooted in compassion and duty. If government institutions fail to uphold this promise, India risks losing not only lives, but also its fundamental belief that every citizen, rich or poor, deserves care, dignity, and a chance to live. True progress cannot be measured merely by economic growth, but by how a society protects its most vulnerable. The future of healthcare depends on whether the system chooses profit or people.

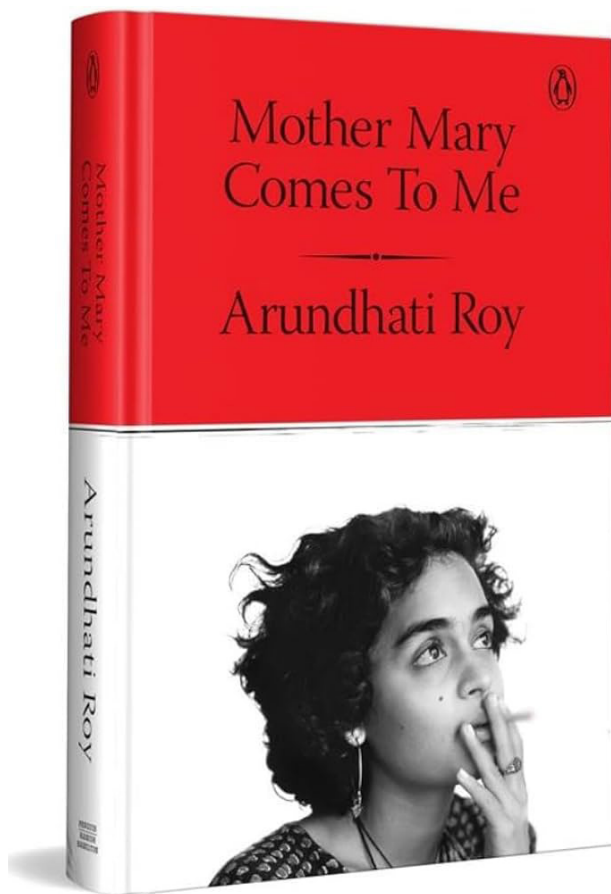


Reflections on “Mother Mary Comes to Me by Arundhati Roy”

Aiswarya B Asok

When I started reading Mother Mary Comes to Me, I was immediately drawn in. The book felt honest, emotional and deeply real. Arundhati Roy speaks openly about her life, her thoughts and especially her complicated relationship with her mother, Mary Roy. I appreciated how she interwove her personal journey with the political issues she cares deeply about, making the memoir both intimate and meaningful.

The most powerful aspect of the book, for me, was the portrayal of the mother and daughter relationship. Mary Roy comes across as a strong, bold and determined woman who fought many battles throughout her life. At the same time, she could be strict and difficult. Arundhati writes about this without holding back. She even refers to her mother as “Mrs. Roy,” symbolising the emotional distance and complexity in their bond. While reading, I



found myself understanding both perspectives, the daughter who felt immense pressure and the mother who held high expectations. I also loved Roy’s writing style. Her descriptions of childhood by the Meenachil

River were breathtaking. Her reflections on politics, Hindu nationalism and the Narmada protest were clear and impactful. She touches on her greatest accomplishments and her most vulnerable moments, such as the fame from The God of Small Things and the humiliation of being taken to court and even spending a day in jail.

Though the memoir explores heavy themes, it also carries warmth and touches of humour. I initially planned to read just a few pages but the writing was so compelling that I finished the entire book in one sitting. Even the crimson red cover stood out to me as it beautifully reflects the emotional intensity of the story.

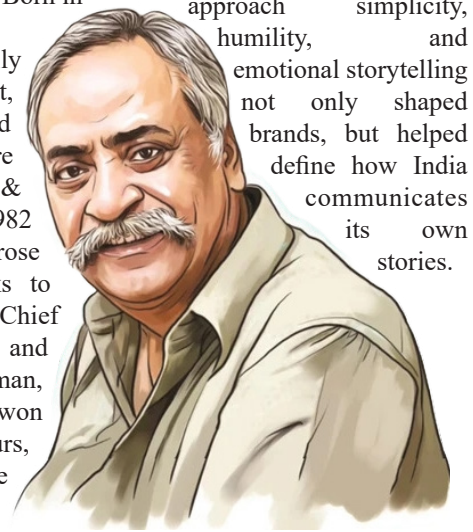
Mother Mary Comes to Me felt like Arundhati Roy was revealing her true self. It is raw, emotional and beautifully written. I believe this book is perfect for anyone interested in themes of family, identity and resilience, told in a simple yet deeply powerful voice.

Piyush Pandey, Iconic Indian Adman, Dies at 70

Sara Sajeeb

Piyush Pandey, widely regarded as the father of modern Indian advertising, passed away early Friday morning at the age of 70. Pandey, who spent more than four decades at Ogilvy India, was known for his deeply human, culturally rooted campaigns for brands like Fevicol, Cadbury, and Asian Paints. His work helped transform India’s advertising landscape, replacing English-heavy, western-style messages with stories in the voice of local life. Born in Jaipur in 1955,

Pandey initially dabbled in cricket, tea testing, and construction before joining Ogilvy & Mather India in 1982 as a trainee. He rose through the ranks to become Global Chief Creative Officer and Executive Chairman, India. Pandey won many honours, including the Padma Shri in



2016 and the LIA Legend Award in 2024. He was also the first Asian jury president at Cannes Lions. Leaders across the country have paid tribute. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called his contribution “monumental,” while Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman remembered him as “a titan and legend of Indian advertising.” Anand Mahindra reflected on Pandey’s warmth and energy, calling him a friend whose “irrepressible zest for life” was as memorable as his creativity. Pandey’s signature approach—simplicity, humility, and emotional storytelling—not only shaped brands, but helped define how India communicates its own stories.

Aditya Raj Bharghav on Faith, Caste and Moral Choice

Anand A

‘Only To You I surrender’ Written and directed by Aditya Raj Bharghav is a unique attempt to explore the realm of faith and morality from the premise of rural Karnataka. It went on to win the prestigious Competition Short Fiction: Best Film award at the 17th International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala and was subsequently released in theatres gathering immense audience appreciation for its intricate portrayal of caste hierarchies and the question of morality. It has been a daring attempt from the domain of short fiction in the contemporary in trying to dismantle the caste dynamics woven into the basic fabrics of the society itself.

A theft disrupts the delicate order of Shivarama’s respected household striking a blow to his pride and ego. His pursuit of restoring the sense of control turns to rituals and vows, fracturing the lives around him. As faith and morality collide, the story leaves a haunting question: who will God truly stand by—the oppressor hiding behind rituals or the oppressed seeking refuge in an act of helplessness?

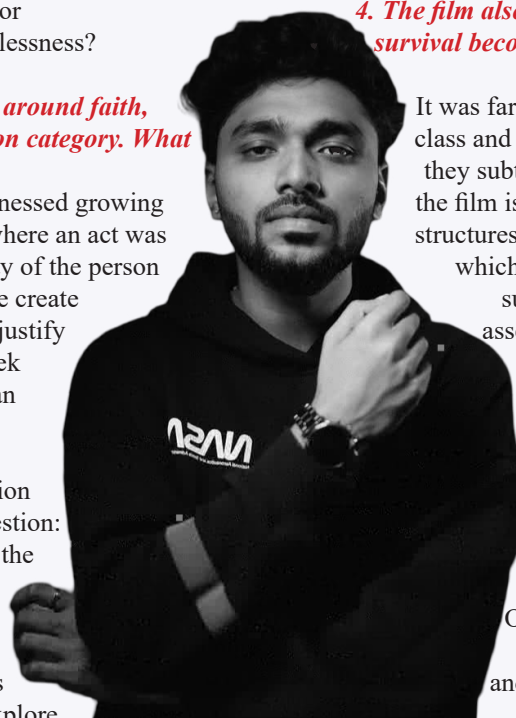
1. The theme of the film does have a unique dimension as it revolves around faith, morality etc which is surprising for a film falling into the short fiction category. What made you choose this specific story and why?

The genesis of this film lies in the confusions and contradictions I witnessed growing up within a world rigidly shaped by caste hierarchies. I saw a world where an act was deemed right or wrong not by its own moral weight, but by the identity of the person committing it. This generated a torrent of questions within me: Did we create God in our own image, tailoring divinity to serve our own biases and justify our actions? Why is it that we feel empowered to commit a wrong, seek forgiveness through ritual, and then simply repeat the cycle, rather than ever truly accepting accountability?

If God is universal and compassionate, why does such profound division persist in His name? The film emerged from this central, haunting question: When a mistake is made from both sides—one born of arrogance and the other of sheer helplessness—who does God truly stand with? The oppressor, who has spent a lifetime impressing God with rituals and chants, seeking forgiveness for his sins? Or the oppressed, who in a moment of ultimate desperation, seeks refuge in an act that challenges the very morality he has been taught? This story was my attempt to explore this divine dilemma, not to provide answers, but to give form to a question that has long simmered within me.

2. The actors in the film gave a lasting impression. I was also surprised by the fact that the main character was also your own grandfather. Were there any special grooming sessions for them?

I did not groom any of the performers. I just made them believe the situation. That’s the best part of working with non-actors; they don’t take cinema seriously and just live in the moment. Their innocence made them believe whatever I said, and they just behaved that way. When I said, “You are angry now,” they believed the story I narrated to them, and they became angry.



3. Most of the directors do have some take-aways from their own films. What was your vital take-away from the movie?

The most vital takeaway for me was the profound strengthening of my own instincts. The entire filmmaking process - from shooting to editing was a series of decisions made in the moment, guided solely by what felt authentically right for the story. There was no time for second-guessing or over-analysis.

This experience taught me that true instinct doesn’t emerge from external influences or references; it comes from a place of pure presence and connection to the work. Trusting that immediate, intuitive feeling became my most important directorial tool, and the film itself is the proof of its power.

4. The film also delves into the political intricacies of class and caste hierarchies where survival becomes a privilege and dreams become luxury. Was that part of a deliberate attempt or a reflection?

It was far more of an organic reflection than a deliberate attempt. These elements of class and caste hierarchies weren’t elements I consciously set out to dissect; instead, they subtly found their way into the screenplay on their own. The entire premise of the film is woven from flashes of my childhood memories, and these intricate social structures are an inseparable part of that lived reality. They are the backdrop against which life’s dramas unfold. So, in telling this story truthfully, that world - where survival is indeed a privilege and dreams a luxury - naturally and inevitably asserted itself. It is less a political statement and more a personal reflection of the world I have observed.

5. The film ends with a moral dilemma regarding the question of faith, morality and justice. How do you wish this very dilemma among the viewers would be discussed?

I hope the film leaves the audience with a profound sense of questioning - not about the characters, but about the very frameworks we build to judge them. At our core, we are human, and we can be nothing more. Once our basic needs for survival are met, we have created everything else, including our concepts of divinity. We fashioned God in our own image, and when that wasn’t enough, we designed rituals to seek forgiveness for the very systems we perpetuate.

I don’t claim to be an atheist, nor do I claim to know God. I only know that I do not know. And that is the discussion I hope viewers have: one rooted in humble uncertainty. If the God we have imagined truly exists, where would divine compassion truly lie? With the oppressor who has spent a lifetime performing devotion yet perpetuating harm, or with the oppressed who, in a moment of desperate survival, breaks a moral code? If the answer is the former, then we must ask: is God an entity truly universal and compassionate, or is it merely a reflection of our own hierarchies, designed to absolve guilt and maintain power? I want the audience to sit with that discomfort, and to question not just the characters’ choices, but the very nature of the moral and divine scales we use to measure them.



Dignitaries lighting the lamp during the inauguration ceremony.
PC: Global Quest

Project Aksharam Launched for Tribal Children

Sara Sajeeb

Thiruvananthapuram

In a major push to bridge educational gaps among children in tribal areas, Thiruvananthapuram Sub-Collector Alfred O. V., IAS inaugurated Project Aksharam at the Eeyakode and Kurupankala Tribal Community Study Centres. The program was conducted through the joint efforts of Insight for Innovation (a Thiruvananthapuram-based NGO) and Quest Global as the CSR partner.

Along with the District Sub-Collector, the program was attended by Abin N. A., Delivery Manager of Quest Global, and Hema Gopalakrishnan, Founder and CEO of Insight for Innovation. The initiative titled Project Aksharam is being implemented in collaboration with the District Administration and will be carried out in various government and government-aided schools, as well as tribal community study centres. The project aims at community development

through educational interventions, with a strong focus on addressing basic academic gaps among students.

“The growing dependence on new-age media is crucial to the development of children. To achieve that, parents should grow with them. The District Administration will do everything needed to achieve that,” said the Sub-Collector in his inaugural address. He also asked the teachers of the tribal community study centres to show children recently released movies.

The Ooru Moopan (local headman) Raveendran Kaani, in his speech, requested the Sub-Collector to provide a playground for the children, since there are none in the region.

The team from Insight for Innovation stated that the project “will benefit children in the tribal areas by providing educational support and, more than that, co-scholastic activities to help them integrate into mainstream society.”

Unearthing the Past: Kerala University’s Archaeology Department Brings Ancient Lives to Light

Gokul R J

Karyavattom

In the heart of Kerala University stands a department that quietly connects the present with the not-so-distant past as the Department of Archaeology, was established in 1997. What began as a small academic unit has now grown into one of South India’s most distinctive centres for archaeological research, discovery, and preservation.

Since 2001, the department has carried out numerous excavations across Kerala and Gujarat, unearthing artifacts that speak volumes about the lifestyles and cultures of early civilizations. But beyond the digs and research papers lies a deeper story one of passion, preservation, and pride. “Every artifact tells a human story,” says a senior researcher. “When we hold a piece of pottery or a fragment of bone, we are literally touching history. It’s like listening to the whispers of the past.”

One of the department’s most remarkable achievements is its Zooarchaeology facility, the only one of its kind in South India. This specialized lab studies animal remains from bones to fish skeletons to understand how ancient communities interacted with their environment. The



Array of display of fossils at the Archeological Museum, Department of Archeology, University of Kerala. PC: Gokul R J

Ethnoarchaeology section, focusing on fish bones, houses India’s only fish reference collection, a vital resource for studying ancient diets and trade. The department is also home to South India’s only Ceramic Petrology Lab, which examines ancient pottery to reveal the materials and techniques used by past civilizations. “Ceramic analysis helps us trace ancient craftsmanship and the evolution of technology,” explains a Researcher Assistant. Adding to its distinction, the department maintains an Archaeological Museum considered the largest in South India showcasing artifacts that

span from the pre-historic period to the Indus Valley Civilization, the Iron Age and even the Medieval period.

Among its most striking exhibits is a 5000-year-old human skeleton a haunting yet powerful reminder of humanity’s long journey. Outside the lab and museum lies the Archaeological Park where visitors can see stone monuments like the Chumadu Thangi, a three stone structure once used by travellers to rest their loads a simple but poignant glimpse into the lives of ordinary people from centuries ago. For students and visitors alike, the department is more than just an academic centre it’s

a bridge to the past. It brings history out of textbooks and into real life allowing new generations to experience the legacy of those who came before. “Our goal,” says the Head of the Department, “is not just to study the past, but to keep it alive for the future. Every discovery we make adds another chapter to the story of humanity.” With its rare collections, pioneering labs, and dedicated scholars, Kerala University’s Department of Archaeology continues to stand at the forefront of South India’s heritage studies reminding us that to understand who we are, we must first know where we came from.

Rice, Fish and Spice a tale of two kitchens- Malayali and Bengali food diversity

Raisa Rakhsanda

India is a land of diverse tastes, and Kerala and Bengal reflect this beautifully. Kerala, located in the south along the sea, is full of lush greenery and gentle rains. Bengal lies far to the east, where large rivers flow and enrich the land for farming. In Kerala, coconut, curry leaves, spices and tamarind give dishes a strong and warm flavour. In Bengal, cooking is known for the aroma of mustard oil and green chilies. The food is soft, flavourful and often slightly sweet.

Both Kerala and Bengal have traditional dishes that represent their cultural identity. A traditional Sadya is a grand feast served on a banana leaf, consisting of rice, curries, pickles, crispy papadam and various kinds of payasam. Coconut adds richness to almost every



Regional cuisine from Kerala and Bengal.

dish, ranging from chicken to fish curry simmered with tamarind. Popular breakfast items include appam, idiyappam, dosa and idli. During festivals such as Onam, families cook together and share meals as a symbol of love and unity.

In Bengal, rice and fish form the foundation of daily meals. A well-known dish is ilish macher jhol, hilsa fish cooked in a light mustard gravy. Another favourite is chingrir malaikari, where prawns are cooked in coconut milk and aromatic spices. During festivals such as

Durga Puja, people prepare luchi along with payesh, vegetable curry and mutton curry. Eid is celebrated with shemai, polao, roast and kacchi biryani. No Bengali meal is complete without sweets such as rosogolla, sandesh or mishti doi (sweet yogurt).

In both Kerala and Bengal, food is more than a way to satisfy hunger; it is part of life, memory and emotion. Coconuts, spices and rice come from the surrounding soil and sea, reminding people of their deep connection to nature. In Bengal, cooking

and eating are closely tied to feelings and festivities. A simple plate of rice and fish can evoke nostalgia. Every festival has its own special food: pitha during winter, khichuri on rainy days and sweets during almost every celebration.

Although Kerala and Bengal are geographically distant, both show how food can act as a window into culture, history and identity. Meals in these regions are not just nourishment; they are a way to celebrate life, share love and honour nature. From the coconut rich feasts of Kerala to the sweet and mustard flavoured dishes of Bengal, every recipe tells a story of land, water and tradition. Together, they remind us that regardless of the region, food connects people to their past, to their families and to the joy of sharing.

The PM SHRI Scheme and Kerala’s Reluctance to Join

Jyothy Susan James

Thiruvananthapuram

The PM SHRI (Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India) scheme, launched in 2022 by the Central Government, is a centrally sponsored initiative aimed at developing 14,500 model schools across the country. The project focuses on improving infrastructure, teaching quality and overall learning outcomes, setting benchmarks for other institutions to follow. Under this five-year plan (2022–23 to 2026–27), ₹27,360 crore will be spent nationwide, with each school receiving ₹1 crore for its development.

The Kerala government has once again frozen its decision to join the scheme, despite earlier indications that it would participate. Kerala, along with Tamil

Nadu, West Bengal, Delhi and Punjab, had initially refused to sign the memorandum of understanding with the Centre, citing concerns that the scheme might be used to push the National Education Policy 2020. Critics argue that NEP 2020 promotes centralization, privatization and ideological bias, giving the Centre greater control over state education systems.

The state had recently shown signs of agreeing to the scheme after the Centre allegedly blocked funds from other educational programmes, including about ₹1,500 crore under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. However, following renewed discussions and opposition from various education and political groups, the government has halted the process once again.

Homebound: A Poignant Tale of Camaraderie and Resilience



Anand A

Neeraj Ghaywan's new film *Homebound*, which will be India's official entry for the Oscars explores the complexities faced by best friends Chandan Kumar (Vishal Jethwa) and Mohammed Shoaib (Ishaan Khatter) in a caste and religion-based societal structure.

Both want to get the job of a police constable in the state because they feel that the job will give them the desired respectability. With the system taking its own sweet time and the society constantly making them feel less about themselves, life wasn't easy for these two friends, where one belonged to a minority and the other to a backward caste. What we see here is the tough journey of these two individuals.

Based on Kashmiri

journalist Basharat Peer's article in *The New York Times* titled 'Taking Amrit Home', Neeraj Ghaywan is building a solid backstory to that source material. Set against the backdrop of COVID lockdown, *Homebound* strikes like lightning, stirring a storm of emotions—intensely personal, socially charged, and profoundly human. It challenges you to recognize your own privilege while exposing the intricate layers of gender inequality and the contradictions that exist within marginalized communities.

Neeraj Ghaywan's *Homebound* is heartbreaking and emotional, but what makes it so great is how quiet, modest, and non-preachy it is. The movie never drags because of its flawlessly paced two-hour running length. The story is a sharp and moving statement on

our increasing indifference, yet it doesn't feel agenda-driven; rather, it merely serves as a mirror to society. The hurricane shocks you to your core and leaves you numb even if you can't see it coming. The characters never engage in self-pity or despair, even though it is tragic.

Every aspect of the movie is excellent, including the dialogue, technical skill, plot, and performance. Neeraj Ghaywan, Varun Grover, and Shreedhar Dubey's prose is profoundly moving. "Sach bolte hain toh sabse dur ho jaate hain, aur jhooth bolte hain toh khud se" is Chandan's heartbreaking admission of guilt for concealing his caste translating into Tell the truth, and you're alienated from the world. Tell a lie, and you're alienated from yourself.

Every element, from lighting and sound design to cinematography, enhances

the narrative. Benedict Taylor and Naren Chandavarkar's background score adds subtle weight. The film's essence is created by Nitin Baid's editing, Khyatee Kanchan's production design, Rohit Chaturvedi's costumes, and Jogi Mallang's brilliant casting.

The performances are excellent. Ishaan Khatter delivers a career-defining performance—measured, magnetic, and mature. He solidifies his status as one of the best actors of his generation with a commanding on-screen presence and wisdom beyond his years. Vishal Jethwa is equally captivating—unvarnished, truthful, and a complete discovery. He embodies Chandan with such depth and restraint, which is refreshing. As Chandan's mother, Shalini Vatsa makes an enduring impact with elegance. In her brief appearance, Janhvi Kapoor is genuine at best.

Homebound is a well-written movie that captures the mindsets of characters and their desperation beautifully. Towards the end of the film, there are these moments that effectively capture the irony of life. Very rarely do scripts manage to make us backtrack all the things we saw in the initial portions of a movie in order to empathize with characters. *Homebound* is one such intense and melancholic drama that stays with you for some time.

Asia's Largest Soil Museum: Where Kerala's Earth Speaks Through Layers



A display of variety of soils from various part of Kerala.
PC: Lydia Saji

Lydia Saji
Thiruvananthapuram

Located within the Central Soil Analytical Laboratory at Parottukonam in Thiruvananthapuram, the Kerala State Soil Museum and Soil Information Centre stands as a unique space dedicated to showcasing the richness and diversity of soils. Established in 2014, it serves as an educational hub for students, farmers, and researchers alike.

The museum features 82 benchmark soil monoliths that represent the major soil types of Kerala. Each model is displayed in a three-dimensional format, offering visitors an interactive and realistic understanding of the state's land resources. Apart from soil samples, the museum also exhibits rocks, minerals, and watershed models that help visitors understand the connection between soil, water, and life.

Every month, the museum welcomes around 800 visitors, most of whom are school and college students visiting in groups. The

Department of Soil Survey and Soil Conservation also organizes one-day training programmes called Mannarivu for farmers and students to spread awareness about soil conservation and sustainable land use.

The Kerala State Soil Museum holds the distinction of being the largest soil museum in Asia and the second largest in the world. It also houses soil collections from 20 different states across India. However, one of the major challenges faced by the museum is the lack of space to include more monoliths. Speaking about this, Assistant Director Winey Rajan explained, "As the number of soil samples and displays increases every year, space constraints make it difficult to expand and accommodate all the exhibits we would like to showcase."

Despite this limitation, the Kerala State Soil Museum continues to play a vital role in promoting awareness about the importance of soil conservation and the need to protect one of the earth's most valuable natural resources.

Spirit of Togetherness Shines Bright at Kerala University Campus Carnival

Gokul R J
Karyavattom

The Kerala University Campus came alive this week as students from various departments joined hands to host a grand Carnival Fest a celebration that transformed the campus into a hub of colour, culture, and youthful energy. From dazzling cultural performances to innovative student run stalls, the event showcased not just talent but also the spirit of unity and dedication that defines campus life.

The highlight of the event was the immense effort put in by more than 200 volunteers, divided into teams of Media Volunteers, Program Volunteers, and Marketing Volunteers. Each group played a crucial role in



Scenes of Culture and Celebration: A Visual Glimpse Into Kerala University's Carnival Fest A colourful showcase of the performances, student-led stalls, and rain-soaked festivities that transformed the campus into a vibrant cultural arena. PC: Hiran H C

ensuring that every moment of the fest ran seamlessly.

Among them, the program Volunteers bore the heaviest responsibilities from managing large crowds to maintaining order during rain soaked day and nights. Many of them worked tirelessly until 5 a.m., ensuring that every event concluded safely and successfully.

"It was exhausting but

deeply rewarding," said one volunteer from the Sociology Department. The campus turned into a mini fairground with food stalls, treasure hunts, and several interactive human interest games organized by different departments. Students could be seen laughing, dancing, and relishing homemade delicacies prepared by their peers.

Departments competed to offer the most creative stalls from eco-friendly craft corners to nostalgia themed games that attracted both students and faculty alike. The Media Volunteers worked behind the scenes, capturing every frame of the excitement, documenting the smiles, and spreading updates across the university's social media platforms.

Meanwhile, the Marketing Volunteers ensured that the fest reached beyond the campus walls inviting alumni, entrepreneurs, neighbouring colleges, and local communities to witness the carnival spirit.

What made the event even more special was the diversity of the volunteer team. The list included both hostellers and day scholars,

representing nearly every department on campus. "It felt like one big family," said a volunteer from the English Department. "There were no barriers everyone worked hand in hand, sharing food, stories, and laughter."

Despite the occasional challenges including unexpected showers and large crowds the festival stood as a testament to what young minds can achieve when united by passion and purpose. As dawn broke after the final night's events, the tired yet proud volunteers watched the emptying grounds with satisfaction. The Kerala University Campus Carnival Fest had ended, but the memories of music, rain, laughter, and friendship will echo across the campus for a long time to come.



Forest Museum at PTP Nagar: A Treasure of Ecology and Heritage



Natural History Museum, PTP Nagar. PC: Aiswarya B Asok

Raisa Rakhsanda
Thiruvananthapuram

The Forest Department's Natural History Museum at PTP Nagar is another spot in the city, maintained by the Kerala Forest & Wildlife Department. This two-storied complex serves as a learning space about Kerala's forests and biodiversity. It has audio-visual presentation facilities and exhibits that display models of wild animals, driftwood, and root systems. Recent reports from the Kerala Forest & Wildlife Department state that the museum has undergone renovations to modernise exhibits and enhance the visitor experience. The upgrades include new multimedia systems, improved lighting, and better

space utilisation. These changes aim to make the museum more interactive and educational for students and researchers.

The museum features models of animals, two stuffed leopards, and a tiger that died during man-animal conflicts in the 1970s. There are also displays on Kerala's forest types, the Western Ghats, and a marine wildlife section. The dioramas and visual displays help visitors understand the state's ecological diversity and conservation challenges. The main theme of the museum focuses on the Western Ghats and their importance to Kerala's biodiversity. It provides insight into the forest ecosystem, from vegetation and wildlife to the role of forests in maintaining

ecological balance.

Even though the exhibits were informative and arranged, there were only a few visitors in the museum. The museum needs more publicity so that local residents, school groups, and foreign tourists can explore this spot.

The museum is open to the public every day except Mondays and on public holidays, from 10:15 AM to 5:15 PM. The entry fee is around ₹5 for adults and ₹4 for children. It is located inside the Forest Complex at PTP Nagar, Vattiyoorkavu.

The Kerala Forest & Wildlife Department is integrating its conservation outreach programs with the museum's educational role. These include awareness drives about human-animal conflict and biodiversity protection. Once renovations are complete, the museum is expected to become a more engaging and interactive learning space.

The Forest Museum at PTP Nagar is a classroom that connects people to Kerala's natural heritage. With more promotion and visitor-friendly initiatives, it could become one of the visited educational attractions in Thiruvananthapuram.

Kerala's Cliffside Paradise Under Threat

Sara Sajeeb
Thiruvananthapuram

Once celebrated as one of Kerala's most stunning coastal destinations, Varkala is now facing serious environmental challenges threatening its fragile ecosystem. Unchecked tourism, poor waste management and rapid coastal erosion are putting immense pressure on this eco-sensitive shoreline in Thiruvananthapuram district.

For decades, Varkala's red cliffs and golden sands attracted visitors seeking leisure and spiritual solace. Today, these cliffs, part of the Warkalli Formation, are showing alarming signs of degradation. Geologists warn that the cliffs are retreating faster than ever. Studies by the Geological Survey of India reveal that the North Cliff has receded by more than 100 metres over the past century, with most erosion happening in the last three decades due to unregulated construction and heavy traffic along the edge. Restaurants, resorts and parking areas have come up in violation of Coastal Regulation Zone norms.

While the cliffs erode above, beaches below are polluted. Papanasam Beach struggles with untreated sewage and plastic waste. Environmental groups recently found microplastic pellets washed ashore, likely from maritime pollution. Locals report that sewage flows directly into drains, causing foul odours and posing health risks. Despite clean-up drives, authorities are unable to manage the waste generated by thousands of monthly visitors.

Although tourism boosts the economy, activists warn that rapid expansion, often backed by outside investors, ignores ecological limits. The proposed Spiritual Tourism project near the historic Sree Janardhana Swamy Temple has drawn criticism for risking both heritage and environment, potentially affecting Varkala's UNESCO tentative listing.

Authorities have begun taking steps. The municipality, with Kerala Tourism, has launched clean-up drives and pledged to enforce the Green Protocol during major events like Vavu Bali, banning single-use plastics. The

National Green Tribunal has sought reports on erosion and illegal constructions. Experts recommend an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan for future development and cliff stabilisation.

However, progress is slow. Waste segregation and sewage treatment are limited, and enforcement of regulations is weak due to political and economic pressures.

Varkala stands at a crossroads between preservation and exploitation. Its cliffs, beaches and spiritual identity are under strain. Experts say that with decisive action, focusing on eco-restoration, scientific monitoring and community involvement, Varkala could become a model for sustainable coastal tourism.

Ultimately, Varkala's future hinges on urgent and sincere action. Balancing tourism, livelihoods and environmental responsibility is essential, as delays could cause irreversible damage. With coordinated governance and responsible tourism, the coastline still has a chance to be preserved.

Tourism thrives, but the ecosystem suffers.

Fodder Grass Museum at Valiyathura: Sustaining Livestock through Green Innovation

Lydia Saji

Valiyathura

Located at Valiyathura in Thiruvananthapuram, the fodder museum stands as a unique and impactful initiative that promotes sustainable fodder cultivation while creating greater awareness among the farming community. Established during 2014–2015 by the then assistant directors of the state fodder farm, the museum showcases 20 varieties of fodder grass. Over the years, it has attracted not only farmers but also agricultural enthusiasts, researchers, and students from various regions, highlighting its growing relevance and influence in sustainable farming practices.

Among the displayed varieties, CO3 has emerged as the most preferred, accounting for nearly 95% of total sales, while CO5 and Super Napier together make up the remaining 5%. The grasses are grown using treated sewage water collected from different parts of Thiruvananthapuram. This process ensures that the entire farming practice remains



Display of variety of fodder at Fodder Grass Museum in Valiyathura. PC: Lydia Saji

organic and environmentally responsible, setting a model for eco-friendly agriculture.

Reports indicate that Kerala requires around 87,000 hectares of land for fodder cultivation to adequately meet its livestock needs, but currently only 32,000 hectares are available. Addressing this challenge, Fahad M, Assistant Director of the State Fodder Farm, stated, "Here in this department, we have only nine acres of land to grow fodder, which is very less. Land availability is the major challenge." He further noted that "the department plans to shift its major production from CO3 to CO5 variety, and it is currently in the testing period," signalling an

effort to improve long-term sustainability.

Farmers need to register to purchase fodder, and the selling process is conducted on a rotational basis to ensure fair access among regular customers. On average, around 70 farmers visit the facility every week, mainly from regions such as Vizhinjam and nearby rural areas. Each farmer is allotted a fixed quota to prevent overuse of limited resources, with fodder priced at ₹30 per bundle or ₹3 per kilogram. Reflecting on the outcome, Agricultural Assistant Biju M.D. said, "Farmers often come back and share positive feedback about how this fodder has improved milk production. They are very

satisfied with the results.

The museum achieves a production rate of 200–250 metric tons per hectare, whereas farmers typically attain around 180–190 metric tons due to reliance on hybrid varieties. To further support agricultural development, the department conducts training programmes aimed at educating farmers on efficient cultivation methods and the nutritional advantages of grass-based feeding. Fodder, being naturally richer in protein, is considered the primary and healthiest feed option for cattle.

The museum's efforts focus on reviving the traditional practice of natural feeding and motivating farmers to adopt sustainable, environmentally conscious techniques. Most of the showcased varieties have been developed by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, while others such as Suguna, Susthira, and Supriya—introduced by the Kerala Agricultural University—are yet to be brought into the facility for large-scale production and sale, marking future scope for expansion.

From Pensions to Pay Hikes: Kerala Govt Announces Major Welfare Scheme

Sara Sajeeb
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced key welfare measures following the Cabinet meeting on October 29.

The major highlight is a 4% increase in social welfare pensions, raising the amount from ₹1,600 to ₹2,000. The government will spend ₹13,000 crore annually. Additionally, women aged 35 to 60 from socially and economically backward sections holding AAY or PHH cards and not receiving any pension will get ₹1,000 per month, benefiting 3,33,400 women with ₹3,800 crore allocated.

Government employees, teachers and pensioners will also receive a 4% DA and DR hike with their November salary. Honorariums have been increased: ₹1,000 for Anganwadi workers, helpers, pre-primary teachers and ayahs, ₹2,000 for guest lecturers and ₹50 daily for school cooks.

ASHA workers will receive ₹1,000 more, and

Kudumbashree ADS units will get a ₹1,000 working grant. Rice under the public distribution system will now cost ₹30 per kg, and rubber support price has been raised to ₹200 per kg.

A Connect to Work Scholarship of ₹1,000 per month has been introduced for eligible students aged 18 to 30, with ₹600 crore allocated annually.

All measures take effect from November 1. The Chief Minister said the government remains committed to welfare and development despite financial challenges. The decisions are expected to provide relief to vulnerable and marginalised sections of society, strengthen social security mechanisms, and support key sectors such as education, healthcare, and agriculture. By increasing pensions, honorariums, and financial assistance schemes, the measures aim to improve household incomes, reduce economic stress, and ensure a more inclusive growth process, while sustaining livelihoods across the state amid financial constraints.



The Indian women's cricket team celebrate their victory after sealing a berth in the World Cup final.

Karyavattom Campus Shines with Sporting Excellence and University-Level Achievements

Sara Sajeeb
Thiruvananthapuram

Karyavattom Campus of Kerala University has recorded notable progress in sports, reflecting strong institutional support and student excellence. Ahead of the upcoming Kerala University Women's Cricket Tournament, the University Union distributed essential cricket equipment to the Women's Cricket Team. The initiative aims to enhance training facilities

and encourage players, reaffirming the campus's commitment to promoting women's participation in sports.

Campus athletes also delivered impressive performances at the Kerala University Inter-Collegiate Athletic Meet. Vaishnav V.S., a first-year M.Sc. Data Science student, won Gold in the Decathlon, showcasing exceptional all-round ability. In the 5000-metre race, Adharsh Madhav from the Department of Russian

secured Silver, while Jayahari S., a second-year M.Sc. Chemistry student, won Silver in Boxing in the below 55 kg category.

Adding to these achievements, the Inter-Collegiate Women's Badminton Team finished as runners-up, reflecting consistent performance and teamwork. Highlighting individual excellence, Dibisha, a first-year B.Sc. Psychology student, has been selected to participate in the National Level Tennis

Tournament in Bangalore, marking a proud moment for the campus and inspiring aspiring sportspersons.

Sports Club Secretary Jithin Krishna congratulated all the athletes and appreciated the support of the University Union. He expressed confidence that with continued encouragement and facilities, Karyavattom Campus will achieve greater success in university, state, and national-level sports events for the future.

Thiruvananthapuram Crowned Champions at Kerala State School Sports Meet 2025

Gokul R J
Thiruvananthapuram

The 67th Kerala State School Sports Meet, widely known as the "School Olympics," concluded at the Chandrasekharan Nair Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram. The eight-day sporting extravaganza, which began on October 22, brought together over 20,000 student athletes from across the state, competing in more than 40 sporting disciplines. Host district Thiruvananthapuram emerged as the overall champions, securing 1,825 points, followed by Ernakulam and Kozhikode. Education Minister V. Sivankutty presented the championship trophy during the closing ceremony.

Events were held across 12 venues in Thiruvananthapuram, including athletics, aquatics, and inclusive categories for differently-abled students. The meet witnessed 17 new athletics records and 17 aquatics records, underlining the state's rising standards in school-level sports.

It also served as a stepping stone for students aspiring to represent Kerala in national school games. In a major announcement, the Kerala government pledged to build homes for 50 deserving athletes from underprivileged backgrounds and to train every student in at least one sport starting next academic year.

The meet was organized under the Kerala State School Sports Council's supervision, following the Olympic model of multi-discipline competition. Thousands of volunteers, teachers, and officials ensured smooth conduct across venues. Top performers T.M. Athul (Junior Boys) and Adithya Aji (Senior Girls) were named Best Athletes of the Meet, receiving gold medals and scholarships.

The successful completion of the 67th edition reaffirmed Kerala's reputation as a sports-forward state. As the sun set over the closing ceremony, the Education Minister declared the meet a "symbol of youthful energy, unity, and the spirit of Kerala."

Rising from Trivandrum's Coast to Asia's Stage: The Long Journey of Sanju Samson

Gopi Chand A
Thiruvananthapuram

In the shimmering cricketing universe of India, the story of Sanju Samson stands apart: from the modest seaside village of Pulluvila in Kerala to the high-stakes arena of the Asia Cup 2025. This is a story of talent, perseverance, domestic struggles, and finally selection on the continental stage.

Born on 11 November 1994 in Pulluvila, a coastal village near Vizhinjam in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, Sanju Samson hails from a Malayali family. His father, Samson Viswanath, was formerly a police constable with the Delhi Police and represented Delhi in the Santosh Trophy as a football player. His mother, Ligy Viswanath, is a homemaker and he has an elder brother, Saly Samson, who represented Kerala at the junior level. Though born in Kerala, Sanju spent his early years in Delhi: he lived in the police residential colony in GTB Nagar, North

Delhi, and studied at Rosary Senior Secondary School. His cricketing training included hours under coach Yashpal at the D L DAV Model School academy in Shalimar Bagh. When he failed to make Delhi's U-13 team for the Dhruv Pandove Trophy, his father took the decision to move the family back to Kerala, leaving the Delhi Police job. In Kerala, Sanju and his brother continued their cricketing journey.

Back in Kerala, Sanju quickly soared through age-group cricket. In 2007, representing Kerala at U-13 level, he amassed 973 runs in five matches in the KSCA Inter-State Under-13 tournament. In the 2008-09 Vijay Merchant Trophy for U-16s he blazed a double century off 138 balls against Goa and finished as second highest run-scorer with 498 runs including two centuries and two fifties. He made his

first-class debut for Kerala in November 2011 in the Ranji Trophy and his List-A debut followed shortly. Though his domestic journey saw ups and downs including a stint as Kerala captain in the 2015-16 Ranji season where he began with a century but struggled for

consistency it also included high points in 2017-18, he was Kerala's leading run-scorer with 627 runs in seven matches. For many Indian players, the IPL becomes

a major launchpad and Sanju Samson's story is no exception. He made his IPL debut in 2013 for the Rajasthan Royals. Over the years he established himself as a powerful wicket-keeper-batsman and later captained the franchise. Samson's international

break came in 2015 when he made his T20I debut for India. His ODI debut followed in July 2021 against Sri Lanka. For several years, though, his place in the national side remained irregular despite flashes of brilliance, questions of consistency loomed. In T20Is, he recorded three centuries which is a rare feat for an Indian wicket-keeper

batter. He also developed a strike rate above 150 in multiple series.

On 19 August 2025, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the 15-member squad for the Asia Cup to be held in the UAE, and Sanju Samson was among the selected players. His inclusion sparked significant debate. With the return of Shubman Gill into the T20 setup, Samson's usual opening role was under threat. Former Indian player Irfan Pathan opined that Samson "might not get a place in the playing eleven". Meanwhile, batsman turned coach Mohammad Kaif backed him strongly, noting Samson was the "most senior player in the squad" and deserved a one-down role.

On 10 September, it was confirmed that both Samson and Gill made the final eleven for India's campaign opener against hosts UAE in Dubai, although Samson was shifted to the middle order while Gill reclaimed the top order

berth. While his selection for Asia Cup 2025 marked a major milestone in Samson's career, his role remains in a state of flux. Analysts pointed out that with the team dynamic changing, he might need to adapt to batting lower down the order, a shift from his preferred opening slot. His childhood coach echoed the same, saying Samson was "ready to bat down the order" if required. From the fishing village sands of Pulluvila to the gleaming stadiums of the Asia Cup, Sanju Samson's journey exemplifies the modern Indian cricketer's arc: early promise, domestic trials, IPL breakthroughs and national opportunity.

As the 2025 Asia Cup unfolds, Samson's role may well define the next chapter of his international career. Will he reclaim his position as a top order batter, or reinvent himself as a versatile middle-order finisher? Time will tell. For now, the cricketing community watches a boy from Kerala living his dream on Asia's stage.

