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HIV must be on public agenda: experts

Jencilin Elisabeth J

As the US decides to cease marking World Aids Day - a tradition observed since 1988 - for many LGBTQIA+ groups in India the shift feels unsettling, raising concerns about whether India will continue to keep HIV awareness visible.

India's HIV response has been built through steady public campaigns, community outreach and years of activism. These efforts have helped more people access treatment and created safer spaces for queer and trans communities, but the progress remains unstable. When a major country like the US goes quiet, it is a reminder that political attention can fade quickly and India must actively choose to keep HIV on the public agenda.

However, stigma still shapes everyday life for people living with HIV. Jaya, general manager at Sahodaran in Chennai, says that the fear of being judged continues to push people into silence. "Even educated families hide an HIV diagnosis," she says. "People still confuse HIV and AIDS, and many are afraid to speak openly about it." Discrimination in healthcare settings adds another barrier. "Some people avoid hospitals because they expect to be treated badly," Jaya adds. That fear often delays treatment and keeps people from seeking regular care.

World AIDS Day serves as a reminder that visibility is not symbolic but necessary. As global attention shifts, India now faces the responsibility of staying vocal and ensuring that people living with HIV are not left behind.

SamaBhav festival ignites gender dialogue

V Priyanka

The Bengaluru edition of the SamaBhav Travelling International Film Festival became a forum for gender equity, diversity and inclusion discussions on December 1 and 2. Organised by Rushes Film Society of the School of Communication and Media Studies of St Joseph's University in collaboration with Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), the festival used cinema as a tool to examine masculinity, consent and representation, urging students to question social assumptions shaping their lives. Marking the seventh international edition of SamaBhav, the inaugural session featured MAVA co-founder and executive director Harish Sadani alongside university faculty. Speakers highlighted



Student moderators from Rushes Film Society lead a panel discussion during the Film Festival Clint Lenard

the need for film-based dialogue to dismantle patriarchal structures and foster gender-sensitive public culture. "I was struck by how the woman's role in a home was considered beneath a man's," Sadani said. "But I was inspired by the example of my father and realized that not all men need to be the same." he added. The release of the festival catalogue and a two-

minute thematic trailer set an engaged tone for the screenings that followed. The first day showcased short films and documentaries addressing violence, care and resistance. Films such as *Bas Ab Bahut Ho Gaya*, selections from the PLURAL Youth Video Festival and *Vakil Avr Eddara? Is The Lawyer There?* explored issues like marital rape and

the necessity of legal reform. *Giraki Twirl, Veni, Because, Kuzhantha Baby, Khuda Hafiz Good Bye* and the documentary *Call Me Dancer* deepened conversations on empathy and identity. Discussions led by journalist-academic Prachi Pinglay, public health expert Meher Suri and gender rights advocate Harish Sadani connected these films to broader debates on masculinity,

familial control and individual agency. Day two expanded the focus to caste, sexuality and resilience through films such as *Society Barks, If, Project Priyo* and *We, The Puffcorns of India*. Counsellor-activist Vinay Chandran and filmmaker-researcher Sudeep Pagedar moderated discussions on bullying, queer and trans rights, political polarisation and migration. The festival closed with Payal Kapadia's acclaimed *All We Imagine as Light*, reflecting on women's labour, intimacy and urban vulnerability. Distinctive to the St Joseph's edition was its pedagogical approach.

Student volunteers from Rushes Film Society supported curation, moderation, documentation and logistics under faculty supervision, while MAVA's involvement linked the festival to a long-

Karnataka police seizes out-of-state vehicles

Ashutosh Ranjan



Karnataka police seizing vehicle registered in Puducherry X

In a post on X, a user shared a picture of Karnataka police seizing vehicles registered in Puducherry and other states for operating in the Hubballi-Dharwad region without paying Karnataka State taxes. Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy ordered to

diligently impose Karnataka State tax on all vehicles with All India Tourist Permits (AITP) to process in the state. With growing concerns to the safety, the construction of emergency doors in all the buses has been made mandatory. Speaking to *The Beacon*,

Umashankar BP, Additional Commissioner for Transport and Secretary of State Transport Authority, stated that the decision has been made as a long-term strategy, although the objective is not to meet the 14,457 crore revenue collection target for 2026. However, the income generated from the Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) buses would remain the primary source of revenue generation. The drive aims to curb irregularities and ensure strict compliance with local vehicle laws of the state. The Motor Vehicle Inspectors and

Traffic Police Squads will actively do the identification process of vehicles registered in different states through the number plates and state taxes would be collected for further functioning of the vehicle in the state.

According to Umashankar, fitness certificates of the buses are instructed to be suspended for those without emergency exits. These buses would be reported by the road policing squads, which would later be taken to the Regional Transport Office (RTO) where it has been registered officially along with the drivers.

Hospitals choke on smog in delhi

Karan Siddharth

Dr Saravanan, senior consultant and chairman at Girishwari Hospital, Tamil Nadu, shared an alarming reality that the hospitals are overwhelmed by a continuous surge in respiratory illness caused by pollution as Delhi's air quality has slipped back to "very poor" on December 2. He claimed that the real emergency unfolded inside hospitals across the capital.

Dr Saravanan said, "The OP ward is flooded with patients," noting a 22-25% increase in respiratory cases during high pollution periods. "We're seeing new patients with congested chests, throat irritation and running noses. The elderly, children and those with asthma are most vulnerable, but everyone is impacted in some way". What troubles the doctor the most is, "We are creating new patients every year."

The data backs his claims. According to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Between 2022 and 2024, six government hospitals treated over two lakh acute respiratory illness cases, with hospitalisations jumping to 10,819 in 2024 alone and yet the infrastructure remains the same.

Putin's visit sparks US trade issues

Aakanksha Singh

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India on December 4-5 comes as New Delhi balances two major relationships - its long-standing defence partnership with Russia and its growing economic ties with the United States. As India moves to deepen military cooperation with Moscow, it is also working to finalise the first phase of an important trade deal with the US by the end of 2025.

A key agenda of Putin's visit is a new India-Russia military deployment plan, including joint training, troop exchanges and defence technology collaboration.

Brig. P K Singh (name changed) told *The Beacon* that "training with Russia helps our soldiers handle equipment more confidently," and that "one relationship does not block another."

The timing is said to be sensitive as the US is India's fastest growing trade partner and closely monitors defence ties with Russia after the start of the Ukraine conflict. Economics professor G. Parvathi, DPS, Hyderabad said, "India needs the US for trade and technology, but Russia is important for defence and energy," adding that "reducing cheap Russian oil strengthens India's position."

Conversation held over 'Forbidden Desire'

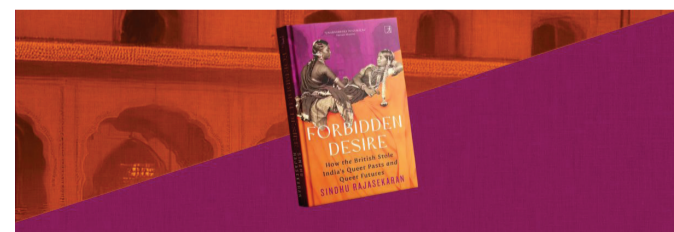
Anne Rose Goerge

BENGALURU:How do we reclaim our histories to build freer futures?

This question was central to an invigorating conversation between Sindhu Rajasekaran and Arundhati Ghosh for "Queer Journeys" at Bangalore International Centre (BIC) on December 3.

The dialogue involved revisiting the British era in India and its role in the erasure of India's far-reaching traditions of gender and sexual diversity, which is highlighted as a compelling narrative in Rajasekaran's "Forbidden Desire".

In conversation with Ghosh,



Cover page of Forbidden Desire

BIC website

Rajasekaran explained how pre-colonial morality reshaped social norms in India, emphasizing that caste played a huge role in determining who was seen as respectable or not.

"Desire in India was not always named - it was just felt," stated Sindhu, noting how the complexity of gender and

sexuality didn't exist in the pre-colonial time, which was free of complicated terminologies and generally fluid in nature.

"We see ourselves now the way the British saw us," pointed out Sindhu, urging modern India to decolonise and unlearn the colonial ways. The India she imagines, she noted, requires no categories to be 'someone'.