

# THE BEACON

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## Pollution affects longtime residents

Ameya Krishnakumar

Environmental pollution near the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Organic Chemicals Ltd (HOCL) factory compounds has affected 44 families who have lived there for over 39 years. They were forced to relocate, leaving them without shelter. All 44 families report health problems, including Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) caused by pollution. For the past four years, factories owned by BPCL and HOCL have been producing toxic contaminants that severely affect people's health. Four families seriously impacted at the medical camp have passed away. The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) ordered a site inspection team led by the Deputy Collector of Disaster Management and an Environmental Engineer from the Pollution Control Board to examine the area following complaints from locals in the Chottanikara police station area. After weeks of observation, the team declared the region a zone unfit for habitation. "The families affected by the pollution confronted the authorities; however, they refused to acknowledge reality. To stay secure until returning to new houses, 45 families moved to Hotel Indraprastha in Chottanikara," said Sheena Mohanan, an activist and resident from the affected area. She said they are waiting for a comprehensive compensation package from the authorities to rebuild their homes and start a new life away from the chaos.

## Temperature fluctuations suppress immune functions, spikes cortisol

Anaina Kasim

**BENGALURU:** Doctors say that as temperatures drop, the body must adjust to maintain normal immune function. Sudden or significant changes in temperature can place stress on the body, leading to the release of stress hormones such as cortisol, which can weaken the immune system. During this period of reduced immune strength, viruses and bacteria are more likely to overcome the body's defences, thereby increasing the likelihood of falling ill during weather shifts. The Karnataka State Surveillance Unit reported 269 respiratory cases last week, with a cumulative total of 510 cases so far this month. There is an increase in respiratory cases due to the Cold Wave in Bengaluru. Climate shifts are accompanied by high pollutant concentrations in urban settings, which irritate the respiratory system. Damage to the lungs, along



Cold wave in Bengaluru

www.outlookindia.in

with a weakened immune response, has made people in the city more vulnerable to respiratory infections. When lung tissue is damaged, it becomes harder for the airways to protect against infection. At the same time, the body's defences do not respond strongly, allowing viruses and bacteria to enter more easily and cause illness. Dr Noel Abraham from Metropolitan Hospital, Thrissur,

said, "High cortisol can suppress cytokine production and reduce how effectively white blood cells respond, which can weaken immune function. Cold weather conditions can become even more favourable to the pathogens and bacterial organisms. Many respiratory viruses and bacteria have a higher stability and transmission rate in colder and drier air". Thereby making the body extremely vulner-

able to fight infections like pneumonia and Influenza type A virus (H3N2). Thus, the body takes a longer recovery period from illness, making people more vulnerable to infections, especially children and the elderly. According to Roopesh Jain, School of Biomolecular Engineering and Biotechnology, Rajiv Gandhi Proudयोगiki Vishwavidyalaya, Climate Change and Community Health Preparedness

in India, the Indian Journal of Community Medicine stated, "Despite India's extensive grassroots health network, the Indian community health system faces limitations in climate-responsive health planning and disease surveillance linked to environmental change. Primary healthcare facilities often lack adequate infrastructure, trained personnel and resources to manage climate-sensitive respiratory illnesses, particularly during extreme weather conditions." The paper also mentions that these climate-related changes are reshaping the epidemiological profile of respiratory diseases by influencing disease incidence, distribution, seasonality and severity. There is growing evidence of increased frequency and longer duration of acute respiratory infections and a shift in susceptibility towards younger, older and socioeconomically vulnerable populations.

## India's air travel proves safer than perceived

Allen George Easo

India's aviation sector handles roughly three million flights annually, as the world's third-largest aviation market, and yet the public's concern about safety differs from the data. After the tragic Air India Boeing 787-8 crash in Ahmedabad on June 12, 2025, which claimed 260 lives on board and nearly 20 on the ground, and more recently, Ajit Pawar's death because of a plane crash on Jan 28, 2026, have led to deep concerns about Indian skies' safety. Over the last five years, India recorded an average of 0.87 accidents per million

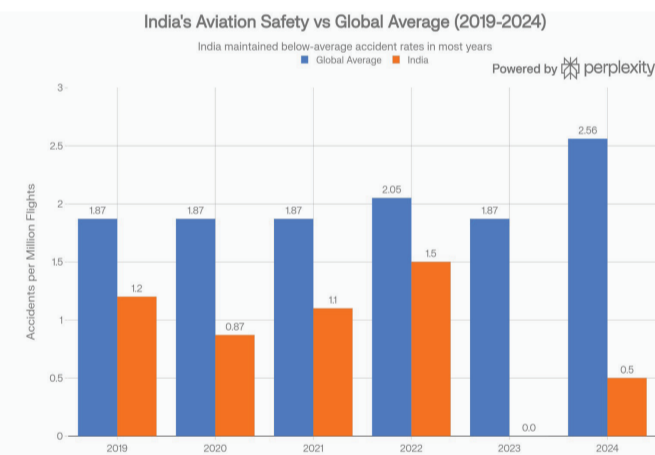


Chart 1

Perplexity Labs

departures, and in 2023, India posted zero accidents per million departures, which placed it well below the global average of 1.87 per million flights. However, Asia-Pacific's

sub-regional data analysis reveals that India, which is grouped within the South Asia region by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), is sitting in a sub-

region with a five-year fatal accident rate that averages 0.59 per million departures, which is much higher than the global average of 0.14. Within the wider Asia-Pacific region, the accident rate stood at 0.78 per million departures in 2023, compared to a global rate of 1.87, suggesting that India's "safety crisis" is seen differently on a global scale. With 40.6 million flights globally in 2024, even a below-average accident rate will turn into more absolute crashes. India's third-place ranking in aviation traffic means raw crash counts will attract more attention than in countries with smaller aviation traffic.

## Mental health apps replace professionals

Niranjana Jayan

**BENGALURU:** Young people between the ages of 15 and 29 are increasingly turning towards mental health apps as the first response to help cope with anxiety and stress, often without understanding their limitations and the threat to privacy when it comes to sharing personal data online, according to clinical psychologist Ansh Bharara. A recent study by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) identified serious credibility and privacy issues in mental health apps. Over 65 per cent of the apps did not mention the engagement of mental health experts, around 41 per cent lacked accurate data retention policies, and only 23 per cent of users are guided towards professionals. The study also found that up to 48 per cent of apps offered no option to clear personal data. "Apps evolve into replacements instead of a bridge," said Bharara. He warned about the self-help loop that delays treatment for weakening anxiety, depression and trauma-related syndromes. Additionally, he stated that people are often drawn to such apps because they feel safer, more private, and less intimidated than consulting a professional, especially when stigma and consultation costs remain barriers.

## Magic Mushrooms: A movie drowning in confusion

Akhil Raj

**Magic Mushrooms** (2026), directed by Nadirshah, attempts to blend romance, comedy, fantasy, and emotional drama but ends up feeling all over the place. The film follows Ayon, a jobless young man from Kanjikkuzhi, and his relationship with Janaki. What starts as a simple love story soon shifts into an emotional, over-the-top drama with surreal moments and not-so-smooth transitions. Vishnu Unnikrishnan delivers a performance that feels familiar from his previous roles, while Akshaya Udayakumar showed us glimpses but is



Magic Mushrooms movie poster

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limited by weak character writing. Several experienced supporting actors appear briefly, but the script fails to give them sufficient character depth or purpose. The biggest issue is the screenplay. The story lacks focus and raw emotion, jumping from scene to scene rather than building a meaningful narrative. Much of the humour feels forced,

relying on outdated memes and exaggerated scenes that fail to connect with modern audiences. Technically, the film has moments of creativity, but they do not make up for its confused direction. Magic Mushrooms is an ambitious idea, but it's weighed down by poor structure and unclear storytelling.

## Marching in the Dark inspires strength

Harivalagan E

**BENGALURU:** Marching in the Dark wasn't just a narrative; it was meant to create a space where women could share their grief and find strength. The director of this documentary, Kinshuk Srujan, described Sanjeevani as a co-writer, noting that her sense of dignity and purpose helped shape the story's tone. The Marathi documentary 'Marching in the Dark' was screened at the Bangalore International Centre on Wednesday. This documentary showcases the strength of farmer widows during India's agricultural crisis. The story follows Sanjeevani Bhure,

a young Maharashtrian widow, rebuilding her life after her husband's suicide. Sanjeevani's character expresses the film's core message of patience and strength. She raises her children while working on the family farm with her brother-in-law, stitches clothes for income, and secretly pursues a BA degree. Her life changes when she joins the Maitri Gat support group, where shared grief creates an understanding among other widows. The film portrays how ordinary women transform loss into strength.

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