



DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

LEADING HEALTH, POPULATION AND FAMILY WELFARE STORIES OF THE Day
Thursday 20260910

El Nino puts India on high health-risk radar, says WHO

WEATHER WATCH

HEAT STRESS | Can worsen cardiovascular, respiratory, kidney and metabolic illnesses

DENGUE | WHO flags India at high/very high risk

LEPTOSPIROSIS | High/very high risk, particularly with heavy rain and flooding

MALARIA | High/very high risk in parts of Northeast India

COMMUNICABLE DISEASES | Risk may increase with displacement or reduced access to healthcare



EL Nino 2026: What Happens Next?

JULY-SEPT 2026
Rapid development towards a strong El Nino

AUG-OCT 2026
Expected to exceed strong El Nino thresholds

END-2026
Event expected to peak towards end of the year

Anuja.Jaiswal@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: With dengue cases rising in several parts of the country, a WHO assessment has flagged India among nations facing high or very high health risks as a strengthening El Nino event alters weather patterns across South Asia.

El Nino is a periodic warming of surface waters in central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean that can disrupt weather patterns around the world, influencing rainfall and temperatures far beyond the Pacific.

WHO's Global Public Health Situation Analysis - El Nino 2026, released on Sept 5, has identified India as being at high or very high risk, with most of South Asia expected to experience drier-than-normal conditions and above-normal heat during Aug-Oct.

The warning comes at a time when vector-borne diseases are already rising in parts of the country. In Delhi, 90 dengue cases were reported in Aug, the highest monthly tally this year, taking the total to 311 by Aug 29. Malaria

cases also rose from 17 in July to 53 in Aug, taking the year's tally to 119, according to Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

The agency does not link current dengue or malaria cases directly to El Nino, but calls it a risk modifier, with impacts depending on local weather, vulnerability and health-system capacity.

For India, heat is a key concern, with higher temperatures potentially causing heat exhaustion and heat-stroke and worsening cardiovascular, respiratory, kidney and metabolic illnesses.

Extreme heat may also affect maternal and newborn outcomes. Other concerns include malnutrition, food insecurity and worsening non-communicable diseases. Changes in rainfall and water availability could affect food production, while heavy rain and flooding can increase the risk of leptospirosis, particularly where sanitation and drainage are poor. WHO has also flagged the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders, where displacement could increase the risk of cross-border disease transmission.

Pollution from open waste burning triples in cities during winter: study

Jacob P. Koshy

NEW DELHI

Open waste burning rises sharply in winter across different categories of Indian cities, with the average incidence, quantity of waste burned, and associated emissions as much as three times higher than in summer, according to a working paper by the World Resources Institute (WRI) India.

The findings come as cities approach the post-monsoon period, when falling temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions typically make it harder for pollutants to disperse.

The study, based on field surveys from 2019-2026 in 11 polluted Indian



Tier 3 cities recorded the highest incidence of open waste burning in winter, among the cities examined. FILE PHOTO

cities, the names of which have not been disclosed, found that Tier 2 cities, with their population between 500,000 and five million, had the highest quantities of waste burned among the cities examined.

Tier 3 cities, however,

recorded the highest winter incidence of burning, at an average of 49.6 incidents per square kilometre per day, compared with 46 in Tier 2 cities, and 39.4 in Tier 1 cities.

Open waste burning was not the dominant source of citywide particu-

late pollution, and contributed less than 1% of total citywide PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ emissions in the cities assessed. But because it happens closer to homes, streets and waste dumps, it can increase short-term exposure to toxic smoke.

The burden, the report assessed, was also strongly associated with socio-economic conditions. Poorer areas recorded substantially more burning than higher-income areas, with the highest incidence in the study, at nearly 84 incidents per square kilometre per day, recorded in the poorer areas of Tier 2 cities during winter. The researchers say the pattern points to disparities in waste collection and other municipal services.

M.P. govt. hikes MBBS interns' stipend by 50% amid protests

Mehul Malpani

BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday announced a 50% increase in the monthly stipend of MBBS interns, after three days of protests by hundreds of medical interns in Bhopal and several rounds of discussions between their representatives and authorities.

Two policemen were also attached to police lines in connection with the action against protesters on Monday.

The decision comes amid various doctors' bodies, including the Madhya Pradesh Junior Doctors' Association (JUDA), boycotting routine medical services like OPD across the State, and senior doctors and teachers' groups extending support to the interns. The move brought cheers to the protesters in Bhopal and other parts of the State.

Deputy Chief Minister and Health Minister Rajendra Shukla said on X that the decision was taken after discussions with the re-

presentatives of interns, JUDA, and Medical Teachers' Association (MTA). At present, the stipend is ₹14,337 per month. "Swift decisions with sensitivity in the interest of the youth. After dialogue with the delegation of interns, JDA, and MTA, a decision was made to increase the stipend by 50%," he wrote.

Following the decision, the interns called off their sit-in near the CM's residence in Bhopal.

The interns had earlier faced police action during their protest.

One Health Mission work is in progress: ICMR DG's letter to MP

Express News Service

New Delhi, September 9

SEVERAL ACTIVITIES such as syndromic surveillance, integrated animal-human-wildlife surveillance, and waste-water surveillance are being undertaken through the National One Health Mission, said Dr Rajiv Bahl, ICMR DG, in a letter to Rajya Sabha member Ajeet Gopchade.

The DG also said that waste-water surveillance of 13 priority pathogens across 47 cities will be expanded to 75 cities in 2027.

This comes after the

member called for a time-bound national biosecurity and biodefence strategy to tackle bioterrorism, bio-warfare, and laboratory-based biological accidents, and emerging infectious disease.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has extensively worked with stakeholders on a draft National Biosecurity Policy, the MP also said.

Five genomic and metagenomic hubs have been established to strengthen capacity for detecting novel or unknown pathogens, the DG said in his letter.

Analogue alarm: How synthetic paneer takes a Gondola ride to your plate

Anjali Singh & Nikhil Sharma | TNN

Standing outside a closed, gate that looks like the entrance to a foundry, the man who identifies himself as Imran asks what we want.

"Paneer," we say. "Do you take large orders?"

"Any quantity," he replies. "We supply to many places in Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad. Within a day, we can supply as much paneer as required to Chandigarh."

Imran wasn't exaggerating. There would be few lives in Delhi-NCR and the vast agglomeration of towns and villages around it that the foundry-like units operating in



A cement box containing slaked lime (chuna), which is used to give analogue paneer its colour, in Haryana's Gondola village

a cluster here – Gondola village in Nuh's Punahana block – would not have touched.

Their chief produce – synthetic paneer (also known

as analogue or non-dairy paneer) is cheap, lasts a long time, and needs no dairy.

▶ Slaked lime, P 4

किशोरों में आत्महत्या के विचार दो गुना तक बढ़े

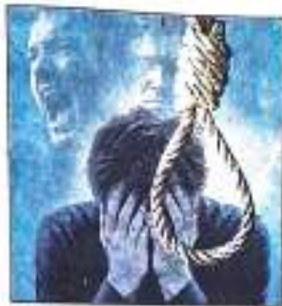
■ तरलजीत कौर

नई दिल्ली। बदलते दौर में किशोरों में आत्महत्या करने और खुद को नुकसान पहुंचाने की प्रवृत्ति बढ़ रही है। एक हालिया शोध के अनुसार, सबसे चिंताजनक पहलु यह है कि बीते दस वर्षों में ही किशोरों में खुदकुशी के विचार दो गुना तक बढ़े हैं।

वर्ष 2026 में प्रकाशित चाइल्ड एंड एडोलेसेंट साइकिएट्री एंड मेंटल हेल्थ के एक अध्ययन में 2016 और 2023 के बीच भारतीय किशोरों में आत्महत्या से जुड़े व्यवहार की

तुलना की गई। इसमें कोविड के बाद की स्थिति भी शामिल की गई। दक्षिण भारत के नौ स्कूलों में कक्षा 7 से 9 के 11 से 17 वर्ष के विद्यार्थियों पर हुए अध्ययन में आत्महत्या के प्रयास 2.1 फीसदी से बढ़कर 6.6 फीसदी, आत्महत्या के विचार 4.7 से बढ़कर 11.6 फीसदी बढ़ गए। खुद को नुकसान पहुंचाने की घटनाएं 8.5 से बढ़कर 15.2 फीसदी पहुंच गईं।

अध्ययन में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य संबंधी परेशानियों, बुलिंग और साइबर बुलिंग, शहरी परिवेश और परिवारिक संरचना को



जोखिम से जोड़ा गया। नेशनल क्राइम रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो (एनसीआरबी) के अनुसार, दस वर्षों में छात्रों के आत्महत्या करने की दर 80 फीसदी

छात्रों की आत्महत्या के मामलों में 80% की बढ़ोतरी

एनसीआरबी की एक्सिडेंट डेथ्स एंड सुसाइड्स इन इंडिया 2024 रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, 2024 में देश में 1,70,746 आत्महत्याएं हुईं, जबकि 2023 में यह संख्या 1,71,418 थी। इसके विपरीत छात्र आत्महत्याओं की संख्या 2023 के 13,892 से बढ़कर 2024 में 14,488 हो गई। 2014 में यह आंकड़ा 8,068

बढ़ गई है। दक्षिण भारत के स्कूलों पर हुए अध्ययन में पता चलता है कि किशोरों में खुद को नुकसान पहुंचाने की घटनाएं भी लगभग दोगुनी हो गई

थी, यानी एक दशक में 80% हुई। वहीं, 2023 में जर्नल ऑफ अपेक्विट डिऑर्डर्स में प्रकाशित शोध में 2014 से 2021 तक के एनसीआरबी आंकड़ों का विश्लेषण किया गया। शोधकर्ताओं ने कहा, खुदकुशी का जोखिम कम करने के लिए रोकथाम के उपग्रहों के साथ जोखिम के साधनों तक पहुंच सीमित करना अहम है।

हैं। विशेषज्ञों का कहना है कि इस मामले में परिवार, शिक्षक और संस्थाओं को विशेष तौर पर सतर्क रहना चाहिए।



रहें सतर्क, दिल्ली में बिक रहा डिटर्जेंट से बना पनीर

जागरण संवाददाता, नई दिल्ली : अगर आप खुले बाजार से पनीर खरीदकर खाते हैं तो सावधान हो जाएं। दरअसल, दिल्ली में डिटर्जेंट से बना पनीर बिक रहा है। यह आपकी सेहत को भारी नुकसान पहुंचा सकता है। खाद्य सुरक्षा विभाग ने चार दिन पहले ही जनकपुरी मंडी में जांच के दौरान मॉसिथेटिक पनीर पकड़ा था। इसमें से 150 किलो डिटर्जेंट पनीर नष्ट कराया गया। साथ ही खाद्य सुरक्षा विभाग ने खोया मंडी, मोरी गेट, बाग टीवार और संजय मार्केट में भी कार्रवाई की। मौके पर जांच किए गए 28 नमूनों में चार में डिटर्जेंट मिला। स्वास्थ्य मंत्री डा. पंकज सिंह ने त्योहारी सीजन को देखते हुए खाद्य पदार्थों की जांच तेज करने



जनकपुरी मंडी में खाद्य सुरक्षा विभाग ने 150 किलो पनीर कराया नष्ट, 28 नमूनों में चार में मिला डिटर्जेंट

और डिटर्जेंट पनीर सहित असुरक्षित सामग्री बेचने वालों के खिलाफ कड़ी कार्रवाई के निर्देश दिए हैं।

जनकपुरी मंडी में डिटर्जेंट मिला पनीर पकड़े जाने की पुष्टि खाद्य सुरक्षा विभाग की कार्रवाई से हुई है।

ऐसे करें पहचान

- पनीर में साबुन या रसायन जैसी गंध
- असामान्य स्वाद या बहुत ज्यादा चिकनापन
- बहुत ज्यादा सफेद, असामान्य रूप से मुलायम या रबर जैसा
- पैकेट वाला पनीर खरीदते समय लेबल, सामग्री और निर्माता की जानकारी जरूर देखें

हालांकि, विभाग को अभी इसका पता नहीं चल सका है कि इसे किसने भेजा और कहां से आया। दिल्ली के और किन बाजारों में इसकी आपूर्ति हुई। बताया गया कि मेवात से दिल्ली-एनसीआर तक

ऐसे पनीर की आपूर्ति और आजादपुर मंडी, नांगलोई व द्वारका मोड़ समेत कई वितरण केंद्रों तक पहुंचाया जाता था। इसके अलावा दिल्ली में पनीर की सप्लाय अलीगढ़, मेवात, अमरोहा, संभल, मुरादाबाद, रामपुर, मेरठ और बरेली से भी हो रही है।

डिटर्जेंट पनीर में क्या मिलाया जाता है : डिटर्जेंट पनीर में वनस्पति तेल, पाम आयल, सोया, मिल्क पाउडर, स्टार्च और अन्य पदार्थों के साथ डिटर्जेंट व अन्य रसायनों के इस्तेमाल किए जाते हैं। जिनका उद्देश्य पनीर को सफेद, मुलायम और असली जैसा दिखाना होता है।

आयोडीन से जांच : आयोडीन से घर पर पनीर में स्टार्च की मिलावट की जांच की जा सकती है।

Front-of-pack Labels: Food Inc Serves a Different Play in Court

Industry body bats for per-serving consumption benchmark rather than FSSAI's 'per 100 gm' plan

Shambhavi Anand

New Delhi: The All-India Food Processors' Association (AIFPA), which counts packaged food companies such as Nestle, Coca-Cola, ITC, Haldiram and others among its members, has intervened in the Supreme Court seeking that the proposed front-of-pack nutrition labels ((FOPL) be based on per-serving consumption rather than a uniform per 100 gram or 100 ml benchmark.

This comes after the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) told the top court that it was considering mandatory red hexagonal front-of-pack warning labels for packaged foods and beverages high in nutrients such as sugar, salt or saturated fat. The food regulator was pulled up by the court for not implementing the FOPL even after a decade of deliberations.

The FSSAI proposed thresholds would draw on the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition's Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024, which use a per 100 gram or 100 ml reference for determining whether a pro-

Industry Objects

AIFPA sought FOPL based on per-serving consumption



Proposed thresholds are linked to ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines 2024, per 100g/100ml basis

Uniform warning-label regime could disproportionately hurt traditional foods and MSME, AIFPA



FSSAI has proposed mandatory red hexagonal warning labels for HFSS food, beverage

duct is "high" in these nutrients.

"The proposed 'high-in' thresholds, being absolute values per 100 g/100 ml, do not appear to have been independently cross-checked against this percentage-of-daily-intake approach," AIFPA said in the court filing, adding that the "existing regulation already reflects a percentage-of-daily-intake, per-serve methodology".

The food industry has long argued that different food categories should be assessed according to the quantities in which they are normally consumed rather than applying the same 100-gram benchmark across products.

For instance, the nutrient content of pickle could be assessed against a 5-gram serving while buttermilk could be assessed against a 100-gram serving.

Currently, packaged food companies are required to disclose nutritional information on labels, including total sugar, added sugar, total fat, saturated fat and sodium in

bold letters and relatively increased font size per pack along with how much they contribute to the recommended daily limit on the back of the pack.

There is currently no mandatory front-of-pack warning that explicitly identifies a packaged food as being high in fat, salt or sugar.

In its affidavit filed on September 9, AIFPA said the ICMR-NIN guidelines prescribe daily dietary limits and not regulatory cut-offs intended to classify individual packaged foods. It argued that converting those recommendations directly into fixed per 100-gram thresholds could overlook the amount of a product that consumers eat.

AIFPA, in the court filing, said that a uniform warning-label regime could disproportionately affect traditional foods and smaller food businesses, particularly MSMEs, because of reformulation costs and limited research and development capabilities.

AS DEMAND RISES FOR TRADITIONAL & HEALTHY FOODS

Pickles, Honey & Curry Pastes Gain Weight in Export Basket

Honey led the basket at \$208 million in FY26, nearly doubling from \$105.3 million in FY19

Anoushka Sawhney & Kirtika Suneja

New Delhi: Indian kitchen staples such as pickles, curry pastes, and honey, along with other condiments, are becoming a larger part of the country's export basket as global demand for traditional, authentic flavours and healthy foods grows.

Exports of 11 items, including pickles, honey, mixed seasonings, curry pastes and jams, grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.4%, rising to \$576.2 million in FY26 from \$372.9 million in FY19. Meanwhile, imports of these items remained low at \$61.9 million in FY26.

In quantity terms, exports of this category rose at a CAGR of 3.7%, reaching 373.8 million kg in FY26 from 289.4 million kg in FY19.

"China is the dominant player in this sector but we are also being seen as a good supplier of these products," said an official. "Moreover, we have been able to meet the demands and non-tariff measures of developed countries which are the biggest consumers of such items."

Honey accounted for the largest share of this export basket, with

Gaining Ground

Food exports are rising

Natural honey leads

Pickles & seasonings gain popularity

New markets emerging

Exports (\$ million)	FY19	FY26
Natural honey	105.3	208.0
Mixed condiments & seasonings	48.8	113.3
Jams & jellies	145	109.4
Vinegar-preserved plant parts	59.1	106.4
Curry paste	6.3	11.6
Tomato ketchup & sauces	4.6	11.0
Chili sauce	1.7	7.9
Mayonnaise and salad dressings	0.9	4.3
Soya sauce	0.8	1.9
Marjoram, oregano	0.4	1.7
Mustard flour & mustard	0.1	0.8



FY26 shipments valued at \$208 million, up from \$206.5 million in FY25 and \$105.3 million in FY19. The US remained the largest market for Indian honey with exports reaching \$157.8 million in FY26, followed by the UAE (\$15.9 million), Saudi Arabia (\$5.2 million), and Portugal (\$3.9 million). Israel emerged as a new market, with exports at \$2 million in FY26.

"Maximum residue limits, origin labelling and traceability of honey have helped meet quality norms and pushed exports," said

an industry representative.

Mixed condiments and mixed seasonings made up the second-largest category in this export basket, with their shipments more than doubling to \$113.3 million in FY26 from \$48.8 million in FY19.

Exports of mango, citrus and other fruit jams, jellies and marmalades, the third-largest category, stood at \$109.4 million in FY26. However, this was lower than the \$125 million recorded in the previous year, largely on account of lower prices and demand in the in-

ternational market, unfavourable currency movements and international developments like sanctions against Iran and Russia.

Pickled fruits and vegetables were also among the top export categories, with shipments rising to \$106.4 million in FY26 from \$59.1 million in FY19. The UK was the largest buyer, with exports reaching \$24 million in FY26, followed by the US at \$12.5 million and Germany at \$9.8 million.

"While Africa is showing good demand, the Latin American markets are yet to open up for most of these products," the official said.

Exports of curry paste, tomato ketchup and tomato sauces also increased, touching \$11.6 million and \$11 million, respectively, in FY26.

To increase India's market share in premium honey exports, think tank Icrier has suggested promoting Indian Himalayan and Ayurvedic honey as a health and wellness product in Japan, and organic-certified and exotic honey in Europe. Trade watchers said challenges such as post-harvest losses need to be addressed to increase exports of jams, jellies and marmalades, mango pulp and dried fruits.

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Egg, chicken, milk prices: Why they remain high



HARISH DAMODARAN

IN 2013-14, the gross value added from India's livestock sector was about 34% of that from crops. In 2023-24, the last year for which official data is available, that ratio touched 57%.

Simply put, the value of milk, egg, meat and other animal products from Indian farms is steadily approaching that of crops — be it foodgrains, oilseeds, sugarcane and cotton or vegetables, fruits and spices.

This progress is, however, being undermined by spiralling feed ingredient costs.

Poultry, cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats and pigs need carbohydrates. It is their principal source of energy, supplied mostly by maize. Broiler chicken feed contains 55-65% maize by weight, with these at 50-60% for egg-laying bird feed and 15-20% in cattle feed.

Carbohydrates apart, livestock require proteins, minerals (such as calcium and phosphorous), vitamins, dietary fibre, fat (or) synthetic amino acids (methionine and lysine) and other additives. Proteins come mainly from the solid residual cakes/meal after oil is extracted from soyabean, mustard, groundnut, sunflower and cottonseed or rice bran. Broiler feed formulations have 25-30% soyabean meal, while 18-20% for layer feed. Oilseed cakes and meals make up 40-50% by weight in compound cattle feeds.

Soaring costs

The accompanying tables show that the average price of maize at the Alangayam market of Tamil Nadu's Erode district has gone up from Rs 2,537 to Rs 2,759 per quintal between August 2025 and August 2026, and to Rs 2,830 now. The increase is even more pronounced from March 2026.

Prices of soyabean meal (50% protein content) at Madhya Pradesh's Indore, based on quotes at the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, have risen from Rs 38,186 per tonne in August 2025 to Rs 58,156 in August 2026. They have fallen to Rs 50,000 per tonne this month, but are still way above the September 2025 average of Rs 35,327.

Average monthly price of maize

	2025	2026
Jan	2,284	2,365
Feb	2,365	2,535
Mar	2,367	1,817
Apr	2,311	1,893
May	2,210	2,038
Jun	2,331	2,160
Jul	2,444	2,653
Aug	2,537	2,759
Sep	2,371	
Oct	2,482	
Nov	2,345	
Dec	2,308	

Price of Maize: Rs/quintal. Source: Tamil Nadu. Price of Soyabean meal: Rs/tonne, MCDEX spot (indian) database, C/PM of India.

Average monthly price of soyabean meal

	2025	2026
Jan	32,441	42,324
Feb	31,349	44,550
Mar	30,218	44,114
Apr	33,747	45,572
May	33,305	61,967
Jun	33,687	61,681
Jul	34,148	62,980
Aug	36,186	58,156
Sep	35,327	
Oct	34,745	
Nov	36,832	
Dec	36,709	

Monthly average egg prices in Delhi (Rs per 100)

	2024	2025	2026
Jan	605.81	544.68	581.94
Feb	538.41	458.96	502.85
Mar	452.06	421.58	432.77
Apr	306.87	410.77	511.6
May	478.06	488.58	535.16
Jun	480.57	501.8	599.2
Jul	518.23	483.35	670.48
Aug	490.16	503.58	547.32
Sep	538.43	555.03	600.00*
Oct	541.81	573.94	
Nov	602.57	661.07	
Dec	657.1	711.55	

Source: National Egg Co-ordination Committee, *1st Sep 9

The same goes for other protein sources. Groundnut and rapeseed oilcakes are currently trading at Rs 38,000 and Rs 33,100 per tonne respectively, as against their corresponding September 2025 average price of Rs 24,188 and Rs 24,479, according to the Solvent Extractors' Association of India. So are cottonseed (Rs 35,500 versus Rs 30,500) and rice bran (Rs 20,500 versus Rs 13,669) extractions.

"Soybean meal prices have come off their Rs 63,000-64,000 peak. But just when they are easing, maize prices are hardening. It's almost like a ping-pong game being played," noted Divya Kumar Gulati, chairman of CLFMA (formerly Compound Livestock Feed Manufacturers Association) of India.

The impact

The effects are already visible. Egg prices in Delhi are at Rs 600 per 100 pieces, as per the indicative poultry farm-gate rates set by the National Egg Co-ordination Committee (NECC). Retail prices are rising at Rs 7-9 per egg, depending whether they are purchased in 30-piece crates, dozens or smaller lots.

Egg demand and prices generally go up post-Diwali, with the setting in of winter and through the spring season. They drop with the rising temperatures and humidity levels over the summer and early monsoon

Unusual demand

Egg demand and prices generally go up post-Diwali, with the setting in of winter and through the spring season.

This year, prices scaled Rs 725-730 per 100 eggs even in July, with the average of Rs 670.5 a whopping 38.7% higher than last year.

months. The real dip happens in the festival period — from Shrawan (end-July to early-September), Purnima Paksha (late-September to early-October) and Navratri (mid-October), to Diwali and Chhath Puja (early to mid-November) — when many Hindu households avoid eggs.

This year, the NECC-suggested prices scaled Rs 725-730 per 100 eggs even in July, with the average of Rs 670.5 a whopping 38.7% higher than last year (see table). "Many things came together. The extended summer and delayed monsoon rains due to El Niño caused water shortages, leading to heat stress and rising bird mortality rates. Also, July witnessed a spike in both maize and soyabean meal prices," explained Sanjeev Chintawar, chief operating officer of NECC.

While egg prices have since softened, thanks to the onset of Shrawan, the feed cost challenge remains. "In the last four months, layer feed prices have climbed from Rs 24-26 to Rs 30-32 per kg. Feed constitutes 65-70% of the farmer's egg production cost," added Chintawar.

Partridge broiler chicken prices, too, hit Rs 150-plus per kg of live weight across North India in late-June/early-July. Post Shrawan, they have settled at Rs 115-120 per kg. "Broiler feed prices have surged from Rs 40 to Rs 46/kg over the past four months, shrinking the profit margins of farmers.

The two main ingredients in livestock feed — maize and soyabean meal — have seen a sharp cost escalation, with El Niño adding to the problem

Their total production cost now is roughly Rs 110 per kg," said Ricky Thaper, joint secretary of the Poultry Federation of India.

Farmers raise day-old chicks weighing 35-45 gm to 2-2.5 kg slaughter-ready broiler birds over 35-42 days. The cycle is longer for layer hens. These begin laying eggs at 18-20 weeks of age and do so until they are 70-72 weeks old. Each bird lays 250-300 eggs annually.

Looking ahead

Soyabean meal prices have come down somewhat in the last couple of weeks.

This is partly because farmers have sown almost the same area under soyabean in the current kharif (monsoon) season as last year. The condition of the crop, due for harvesting in October-November, is also said to be normal to good so far, with no major insect pest or disease incidence being reported.

El Niño's impact has been less in soyabean relative to other crops, which require more water and fertilisers. Further, some large Indian poultry companies with captive feed manufacturing facilities have contracted soyabean imports, which are estimated at 0.9 million tonnes (mt) in 2025-26 (October-September). It has improved the carryover stocks and likely availability for the new marketing year.

"Our greater concern is maize, where kharif acreage is significantly down (4.1%, going by government data) and the yield outlook isn't also encouraging. Moreover, El Niño could hurt the prospects for the rabi (winter-spring) maize crop," CLFMA's Gulati pointed out.

The US Department of Agriculture has projected India's maize production in 2026-27 at 50 mt, a sharp decline from the record 55.1 mt of 2025-26, which itself was a substantial jump over the preceding year's 43.4 mt.

With sugar prices on the boil, the Narendra Modi government is expected to restrict mills from using any cane juice or high sucrose 'B-heavy' molasses for manufacturing ethanol in the upcoming crushing year beginning October.

If maize prices continue to rise — spilling over into livestock feed costs and ultimately what consumers pay for milk, eggs and meat — there could be a review of even diversion of the feed grain for ethanol production. That would make meeting the existing 20% blending in petrol (E20) itself difficult in 2026-27.

[RAJNATH SINGH] UNION DEFENCE MINISTER

We will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Sri Lankan friends. We strongly believe that real friends stand by each other in thick and thin. Our relationship is of hearts and souls



A question of identity for India's transgenders

The question of a third gender identity has recently acquired a new legal dimension in India. As per the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, passed in March 2026, transgender persons will have to prove their identity through a medical test. This was not always so. The earlier 2019 Act had defined a transgender person broadly, and expressly recognised a person's right for self identification. Medical examinations were not required, coming into play only when a person sought a revised certificate following surgery.

The 2026 Act turns that assurance on its head. It narrows the statutory definition to categories such as hijra, kinner, aravani and jogta, eunuch and intersex persons. Self identification is no longer accepted. To be legally recognised, a person must show that they have undergone surgery or hormone treatment and obtain clearance from a medical board. These conditions will leave many transpersons in a state of limbo, unrecognised and invisible to the State.

But the underlying questions are not new. They have come before the Court in several ways.

In 2014, in *National Legal Services Authority v Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that gender identity is part of personal autonomy and self-expression and cannot be reduced to anatomy or surgical status. It directed the government to recognise a person's self-identified gender as male, female or third gender. Then there is privacy. Three years after *NALSA*, a nine-judge bench in *KS Puttaswamy v Union of India* held that privacy is a fundamental right. This includes personal choice including decisions concerning one's body.

The 2026 amendment must be tested against these promises. The key question is whether denying a person recognition of self-perceived gender identity violates Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21, and whether compulsory medical-board certification injures dignity, autonomy and personal liberty.

There is also a practical cost. Since the new law was passed, doctors and transgender people have become uncertain about what health care is permissible and the documentation required. Several clinics have paused or delayed hormone therapy and transition surgeries, with doctors worried about the consequences of providing treatment until the legal position is clear. This is an unintended but serious effect of a law

meant to protect a vulnerable population.

The State's position is that once it attaches legal consequences and benefits to a particular category, it must be able to define that category conclusively. On this view, verification is not to question identity, but for the purpose of administering welfare.

But that still leaves the question of means. The government would still have to show why medical assessment should be the measure by which identity is established, and less intrusive methods would not work. There is another difficulty. The Act includes socio-cultural identities such as hijra, kinner, jogta, etc., which are rooted in community, more than medical procedures. The *NALSA* judgment itself recognises that jogtas may often be heterosexual and may or may not cross dress. A medical board would be unable to determine whether a person belongs to a certain community irrespective of anatomy.

The apprehension of misuse rests on the possibility of persons falsely identifying as transgender to access benefits available to the community. However, such speculation should pass the test of proportionality — it must not deprive an entire class of persons of their rights. Where such claims do arise, they can be dealt with on their own facts.

The Supreme Court has not yet decided whether the amendment is constitutional. On August 17, as it heard challenges to the Amendment, the Centre assured the court that existing transgender identity cards (which provide legal recognition and access to certain government benefits) would continue to remain valid while the litigation is pending. This is a relief for those currently holding transgender cards but does little for those whose applications are still being processed or whose cards have already been cancelled.

There is a temptation to reduce this debate to the usual contest between Parliament and the courts, or transgender activists. Instead, it should be understood as a question of how the State should regulate fairly without crossing constitutional limits. With the Court's precedents already in place, Parliament must be careful that it does not inadvertently take away rights that the Court has already recognised.

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Insiyah Vahanvaty



Ashish Bharadwaj

Raids Find Slaked Lime Used To Whiten Paneer

► Continued from P1

Daily, synthetic paneer is delivered in bulk to distributors, mandis and catering kitchens associated with banquet halls. On the plane, it comes packed into ribbons stuffed in petties, kulchais, rolls and pavlovas, and in curries.

Synthetic paneer (also analogue or non-dairy) is everywhere. Gurdwara is among its chief contributors. Last month, Haryana food banned all forms of non-dairy paneer after finding their presence in a large number of samples tested at labs. But the suits that bulk produce paneer do-pel-granaries continue to churn out massive batches as orders flow in. The only difference? Gates are shut, and there's a watch post outside.

"Food safety teams are active in the area," says Ikrar. At another unit in Panabha city workers turned abusive when we inquired about paneer production.

Gurdwara specialises in all forms of synthetic paneer like skinned milk with palm oil and vegetable fat and soy-based soya protein mixed milk solids. Over the years, the demand for cheap paneer has seen manufacturing units proliferate across a single cluster in Kurpur, Panabha (its then headquarter in Panabha, then Gurdwara and Bodi Bodi) in Panchkula and Shikhar in Nagina, among other places. They produce quickly and do whatever it takes to make

their product look the best.

"During recent raids in paneer manufacturing units in Panabha, food safety officials found buckets of slaked lime (chuna) to artificially whiten synthetic paneer," said a food department source. A bulk park-estimate of how much lime near the Gurdwara belt sends out daily according to various officials and distributors these correspondents spoke to, is 30,000-32,000 kg.

Haryana food safety commissioner Manoj Kumar has issued a one-year statewide prohibition under Section 20 (20A) of Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, covering analogue paneer and banning its preparation using milk powder or vegetable oil. Officials have been told to seize stocks and initiate criminal prosecution under PSS Act.

Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat, too, have banned synthetic paneer for a year. Sale and production of analogue paneer is not illegal in India as long as it is correctly labelled, but consumers' poor standards and the impact on health have led to a rethink.

The state's latest testing data underlines the scale of the problem: of 386 paneer samples tested between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2020, 304 failed to meet standards. In many samples, the Buretyro-transferrin (which measures purity) readings and lactose values were significantly below limits, showing regular use of natural milk fat with non-milk vegetable oils.

Food delivery aggregator platforms are acting too. On Aug 10, Zomato announced a no-residue policy on analogue dishes. It said restaurant partners have been asked to transition to natural dairy products, remove analogue-dairy items if an immediate switch isn't feasible, and review supplier product labels and ingredient declarations to ensure accurate menu representation.

"These paneer factories have been proceeding against the NRI regional office. Of them, three units have been closed, closure orders have been received against five-four units are under-house notice, and closure recommendations against one have been sent to head office," NRI deputy commissioner Akhilesh Kumar said.

Who Are The Buyers?

A supplier described an organised distribution network connecting NRI's manufacturing units with Delhi-NCR's catering and food businesses. Vehicles, he said, leave early morning carrying "freshly prepared synthetic paneer" to Delhi, Gurgaon and surrounding areas. The vendors are making the case for it. A commercial buyer paying Rs 340 for a kilogram of full-cream paneer could produce the cheapest vegetable soybean paste and vegetable soybean paste with a cream oil, perhaps for Rs 200-250 per a catering order of 1,000kg. This is a saving of Rs 140.

Sources told TOI synthetico-paneer is sold to distributors or Khanda Mandi, Sa-

BEYOND PANEER: DAIRY THAT ISN'T

WHAT IS AN ANALOGUE DAIRY PRODUCT?

PSSAI uses the term for products in which non-dairy ingredients, partly or wholly replace milk constituents, while the finished product is made to look, taste or behave like a conventional dairy product

WHERE ELSE IS DAIRY BEING REPLACED?

CHEESE

vegetable oils, starch, emulsifiers and sometimes milk proteins are used to mimic processed cheese. It may melt or stretch like real cheese



CREAM

vegetable fat-based creamers can substitute for dairy cream. These products can be legally sold when clearly identified as non-dairy; the issue arises when they are passed off as fresh cream

GHEE

Non-milk fats are engineered to replicate ghee's aroma, colour and cooking properties. The substitution matters because ghee is a premium product, sold largely on perceptions of purity



KHOYA

Non-milk fats and other ingredients recreate khoya's dense, crumbly texture. Once incorporated into bars, pods or gulab jamuns, substitution can be difficult to detect



CHHENA

Non-dairy fats and proteins can be used to mimic chhena. For sweets such as rasgulla and sandesh, where cooking can mask differences in texture



WHAT THE RULES SAY

1. Regular full-fat paneer must contain at least 50% milk fat or a dry-matter basis and can be sold loose

2. Medium-fat and low-fat paneer must be sealed and labelled, with the applicable fat category declared

THE FIVE-TIER PANEER MARKET

₹340/kg

Pure full-cream 'milk' paneer

Supplier described as entirely milk-based, the premium variety

₹250/kg

Skimmed milk + vegetable fat

Uses palm/vegetable fat to lower costs while retaining a baby texture

₹200/kg

Skimmed milk + milk powder

₹200/kg

Soy + dairy hybrid

Roughly 50% soy and 50% dairy ingredients

₹120-150/kg

'Flavour soya' 'milk'

Cheapest variety, described as predominantly soy-based, with about 20% milk, sold in compressed blocks

ben Masdani Gurdwara Road, and Anand Mandi in Gurgaon and at Janakpuri, Uttam Nagar and in the east in Delhi. Mostly, for banquet halls, closed kitchens and local dairy shops. Hopes, Pabai and Rishi were the other centres that produce synthetic paneer.

Chief Sanjay Vyas, also known as Brown Chef India, said texture and taste (on of for chefs, though they're no substitute for lactating) "As he spends years in kitchens, via deserts an interest with ingredients," he said. Good, fresh paneer (crumbly rather than stretching like cheese or rubber, he explained) — it typically has a soft, slightly grainy milky feel and a fresh, milky flavour whereas analogue products are too unnaturally smooth, tight or rubbery and taste more elastic or processed.

But he cautioned this isn't foolproof. "Some products are made very well and can be difficult to identify without checking the ingredients or doing a proper test." His message for restaurateurs was simple — transparency. "Analogue paneer should be mentioned clearly on the menu, preferably with the ingredients or what it is made from in brackets."

Is There A Health Impact?

Panabha's endorsement by Gurdwara Jivhar said the concerns beyond analogue paneer simply being different from the dairy product. "It's

never as commonly consumed as an important source of protein, particularly by vegetarians, but analogue paneer can be deficient in protein because its preparation is fundamentally different and may rely on vegetable fats, palm oil, starches and emulsifiers," he said.

Regular consumption of products high in saturated fat, he added, could contribute to weight gain, obesity and increased LDL cholesterol, with longer-term risks, including insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, particularly when eaten frequently. "The bigger issue is that a low-cost substitute should not be mistaken for a nutritionally equivalent food."

Sandhi Sharma, clinical nutritionist and dietician at May Hospital, Gurgaon, said, "The health impact depends on the formulation, serving size and frequency of consumption. Some analogue products can be higher in saturated fat, refined starch, calories, sodium and, lower in protein and calcium than dairy paneer. Consistently consuming them may result in poor nutritional outcomes. There is no scientific proof that properly controlled analogue paneer poses health and safety issues, so there is no need for unnecessary panic."

Manpreet Singh, senior secretary of National Restaurant Association of India, said good restaurants don't serve analogue paneer because "that's against the grain of the business."

Man gets 14 years