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Prof (Dr.) Anil Vashisht, Pro Vice-Chancellor

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Prof (Dr.) Sanjay M Johri

EDITOR

Dr. Mohit Sharma

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Dr. Iftikhar Alam

DESIGN & INFOGRAPHICS

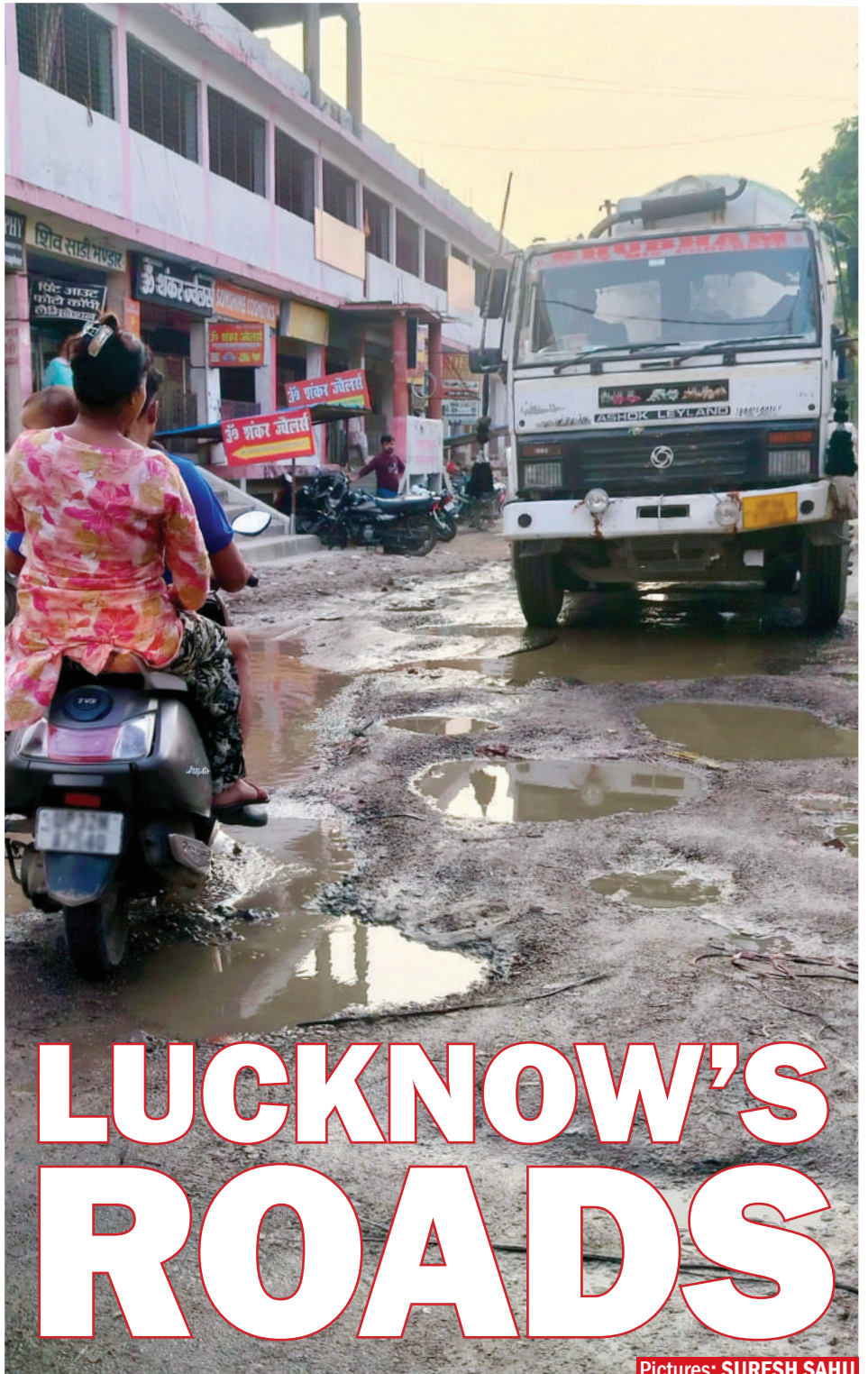
Abhishek Singh

STUDENT EDITORIAL TEAM

Supriya Srivastava, Maria Siddiqui & Bhavna Soni

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LUCKNOW'S ROADS

Pictures: SURESH SAHU

A tale of uneven journeys

Lucknow's roads...

MOHIT SHARMA

Assistant Professor, Amity School of Communication

Lucknow, the city of heritage and heart, is also a city of contrasts, especially when it comes to its roads. While some stretches gleam with fresh tarmac and neatly laid footpaths, others resemble rugged trails, testing the patience and resilience of daily commuters.

A visitor driving through Kalidas Marg, Vikramaditya Marg, Mall Avenue, or Hazratganj is likely to be impressed by the well-maintained infrastructure. These VIP zones boast smooth roads, efficient drainage, and pedestrian-friendly pathways. "Surely, the rest of the city must be just as well-kept," one might assume.

But that assumption quickly fades when one ventures beyond these polished corridors. In areas such as Malhaur, Chinhat, Kaiserbagh, Chowk, and parts of Gominagar Extension, the story is starkly different. Here, potholes are a daily encounter, footpaths are a rarity, and water-logging during monsoons is a seasonal ordeal.

"It's like a free body massage," jokes a local commuter, referring to the bumpy rides that have become a daily ritual. The humour, however, barely masks the frustration. Residents travelling from Chinhat to Rustle Court via Malhaur and Bhawara often find themselves navigating through dozens of potholes, some deep enough to swallow a tyre whole.

The monsoon season, far from being a relief, exposes the frailty of these roads. "The roads don't just wear out, they disintegrate," says Narendra Pandey, a long-time resident. "It's not erosion; it's



a revelation of how poor the construction quality really is." Shashi Kant Yadav, a resident of Chinhat, has become adept at dodging potholes. "The landscape has changed, but the roads haven't. In fact, they've gone from bad to worse," he says with a resigned smile.

Lucknow Nagar Nigam, which oversees an area of 568 square kilometers, is responsible for maintaining thousands of kilometers of pakka, semi-pakka, and kachcha roads. While central highways fall under NHAI, state highways under PWD, and newer colonies under LDA, the bulk of everyday roads, especially in residential areas, are the Nagar Nigam's responsibility. Despite claims of annual road construction and repair, many barely survive a single season. "VIP roads are repainted every six months," says Kripal Singh, a local transporter. "The rest are left to fend for themselves."

Officials often cite budget constraints or contractor inefficiencies. But behind closed doors, some admit that a nexus between officials and contractors is to blame for the recurring poor quality. "It's

a cycle we haven't been able to break," confesses one civic official. Even colonies developed by the Housing Board and LDA aren't spared. Shubham Upadhyaya from Indiranagar laments, "Despite repeated complaints, the road outside my house remains untouched. It's like driving through a battlefield." The despair is palpable. "We've stopped expecting change," says Moulik Banerjee, a disheartened commuter. "Every plea for better roads falls on deaf ears."

And yet, amidst the frustration, there remains a flicker of hope. Residents continue to raise their voices, and perhaps one day, Lucknow's roads will truly connect its people, regardless of their post-code. Until then, the city's commuters continue their daily journey, hoping for smoother rides and fewer bumps.

Perhaps, with sustained public engagement and transparent governance, Lucknow's roads will one day reflect the dignity and grace of the city itself. And when that day comes, the journey through its lanes will be as pleasant as the destination. ■

Happy cabbies! 'Strike' that!

AAROHI SEEM

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

The ongoing cab driver strike in Lucknow has reached a critical juncture, challenging the resolve

of the drivers while also testing the patience and resourcefulness of numerous daily commuters.

The city's mobility infrastructure is experiencing unprecedented strain, as major ride-hailing services are stalled due to the boycott. In the absence of affordable

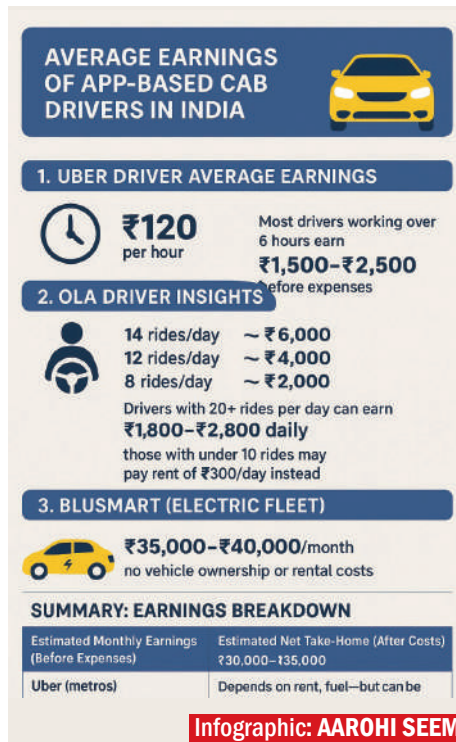
app-based cabs, pressure has shifted onto public transport and personal networks. However, neither has been able to fully absorb the disruption.

The middle class in Lucknow, who previously depended on ride-hailing apps for various transportation needs,

now finds itself facing a daily logistical challenge. Simple tasks like commuting to work, getting to the hospital quickly, or attending appointments have become stressful and time-consuming endeavours. "We've had to reorganise our entire routine," said Antra Singh, a working mother from Rajajipuram. "I now leave home 45 minutes early to catch a crowded bus or arrange a lift from a co-worker. It's exhausting."

The burden isn't limited to professionals. Small business owners, school-children, senior citizens, and those with medical needs are also struggling. Many elderly residents, who depended on app-based cabs for doctor visits or grocery runs, now find themselves stuck at home. "These companies made big promises when they entered the market—flexible hours, decent pay, etc.

Now, after years, we're barely surviving," said Shakeel Ahmad, a cab driver on strike. His frustration is echoed across cab stands, where rows of parked cars



symbolise both protest and desperation. The strike's impact extends beyond passengers and drivers. Delivery services are

short of drivers, tourists are finding it difficult to explore the city's attractions, and hotels and small businesses are reporting fewer customers.

"We used to get customers from the airport who would stop by for lunch or snacks," said Neeru Verma, who runs a small eatery near Hazratganj. "Now, with no cabs, they head straight to their destination—or cancel plans entirely." This chain reaction underlines how transportation is not just a service but a vital link in the city's economy.

The Lucknow strike reflects a wider challenge facing Indian cities: balancing the rights of service providers with the needs of consumers. While drivers have the right to protest against unfair practices, prolonged disruption without alternatives risks alienating the very public whose support is crucial.

As Lucknow waits for the strike to end, the hope is not only for services to resume but also for a system that evolves to be fair, efficient, and collaborative. ■

Climate change in focus

Media as a catalyst for awareness

MARIA SIDDIQUI & BHAVNA SONI

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

"Critical issues such as ground-water scarcity, changing farming practices, and the effectiveness of renewable energy projects need to be studied deeply by students as part of their Climate change course," emphasised Mr. Sudhir Mishra, Resident Editor, Navbharat Times Lucknow, while addressing students at the Amity School of Communication (ASCO) on August 28.

The Centre for Media Studies (CMS) at ASCO hosted a thought-provoking session on "Climate Change and Media Perspective." It may be mentioned that Mr. Mishra had been conferred an Honorary Professorship at ASCO by Hon'ble Chancellor and Chairman, Amity University, Dr. Aseem Chauhan, during the 2024 convocation.

With nearly three decades of experience in journalism, Mr. Mishra has



consistently brought together political satire, environmental activism, and digital innovation to create impactful storytelling. Sharing insights from his creative journey, he discussed his film, Ghuspaihiya, which blends narrative storytelling with sharp socio-political critique. The session closely aligned with ASCO's academic focus, as students are currently undertaking a course on climate change, culminating in capstone projects. During the interactive discussion, students sought guidance on locally relevant areas of research.

"The session was really informative; his suggestions for our capstone projects gave us practical direction," said Ashka Jain, a BJMC student.

Another student, Supriya Srivastava, shared that she felt motivated to act for climate conservation after listening to Mr. Mishra and drawing inspiration from his work. The session left students with a renewed sense of purpose—to use their voices, whether through reporting, filmmaking, or social media, to contribute meaningfully to the growing conversation on climate change. ■

Rethinking fashion

Green is the new black

ZEHRA ABIDI

Master of Advertising & Marketing Management

Fashion today is more than just clothing—it's an expression of identity, status, and lifestyle. Trends now shift as quickly as an Instagram swipe. Yet, behind the glossy ads and glittering runways, lies a pressing question. "Is 'green' truly sustainable, or just another marketing ploy?"

The phrase, 'Green is the new black', has become a popular slogan as sustainability rises in fashion. Brands proudly showcase recycled fabrics, ethical practices, and eco-friendly collections. But critics argue that 'sustainable fashion' often contradicts itself. "We see brands calling themselves eco-friendly while releasing new collections every week," says 21-year-old student Rhea Mehta. "How can endless production ever be sustainable?" At the centre of this paradox is fast fashion.

According to the UN, the fashion industry contributes nearly 10% of global carbon emissions—more than aviation and shipping combined. Producing just one cotton shirt consumes enough water to quench a person's thirst for over two years! Yet, millions of such shirts are manufactured annually, worn only a handful of times, and discarded—fueling a destructive cycle that satisfies consumer demand but devastates the planet.

Despite these realities, a growing wave of young consumers is demanding change. Gen Z, in particular, has been vocal about ethical consumption and climate concerns. A recent Business of Fashion survey found that 62% of Gen Z shoppers prefer buying from sustainable brands, even if it costs more. "For us, fashion isn't just about looking good," says fashion design student Aarav Kapoor. "It's about feeling responsible. It doesn't feel right to wear something made by underpaid workers or harmful to the environment."



Infographic: ZEHRA ABIDI

This shift in mindset has forced both luxury houses and high-street retailers to rethink their strategies. Brands are experimenting with vegan leather, biodegradable textiles, and clothing rental models. Once overlooked, thrift stores are now booming, while resale platforms such as Depop and Poshmark thrive. "The stigma around second-hand fashion is disappearing," explains sustainable design professor, Ananya Sen. "Thrifting is not only acceptable but also a statement of creativity and ecological awareness."

Still, challenges remain. Greenwashing—when companies exaggerate or misrepresent their eco-initiatives—is rampant. A brand might advertise a collection as 'eco-friendly' because it uses 5% organic cotton, while the rest of its supply chain remains harmful. This leaves

consumers confused about what's genuinely sustainable and what's just clever branding. Ultimately, solving fashion's sustainability dilemma requires more than brand initiatives. Consumers play an equally critical role. Small yet meaningful actions—buying less, reusing more, and choosing quality over quantity—can collectively drive change. "We don't need 20 green dresses to save the planet," reminds ecofeminist activist Leha Thomas. "We just need to love the ones we already own." Perhaps the greatest reinvention fashion needs today is learning to slow down. In an industry obsessed with what's next, sustainability cannot be reduced to a fleeting trend. If green is truly the new black, it must outlast the season—not as a buzzword, but as a lasting way of life. ■

Forever denim, forever Levi's

Born in San Francisco, Levi Strauss founded Levi Strauss & Co. to create durable clothing for workers. Levi's is committed to greener fashion by using organic and eco-friendly fabrics, reduced water use in production and long-lasting designs

For me, Levi's is comfort and style in one. No matter what, I know it will suit me, and I'm not even scared to try new items

Sana

YUVIKA SINGH

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Step into any college campus or a music festival, and you'll find one name stitched into generations of wardrobes. Welcome to Levi's! What started as a small business in the 1800s has become a top choice for people when it comes to denim. At its heart, it's known for its quality and durability. Students, working professionals, or celebrities, these jeans are popular with all.

"For me, Levi's is comfort and style in one. No matter what, I know it will suit me, and I'm not even scared to try new items," says Sana, a 20-year-old college student. From skinny jeans to straight cuts and relaxed fits, Levi's has kept pace with fashion's changing moods, yet never lost its classic appeal. The 501 Original jeans, first designed over a century ago, remain a bestseller even today. Beyond denim, the brand offers jackets, t-shirts, and accessories, creating full looks that feel both effortless and cool. The brand also focuses on sustainability, using eco-friendly materials and inclusivity, which are things that people look for these days.

What makes Levi's special is its timeless style. "I like that Levi's doesn't just follow trends. It sets them," says Ritika, a 19-year-old college student. "Even my mom still wears her old pair of jeans and



jackets, and it looks cool." Levi's pieces are easy to pair with anything and give a cool and classic look that always stays relevant.

This intergenerational appeal has been amplified through bold collaborations. Levi's partnership with Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh, injected a cultural and youthful energy into the brand, and generated unprecedented attention.

Diljit's confident and unapologetic style resonates deeply with Levi's DNA, making the collection an instant hit. "When Levi's announced the Diljit Dosanjh collaboration, I instantly wanted to get my hands on it. The vibe is so new, trendy, and unapologetically stylish, just like Diljit," shared Arjun, a 21-year-old college student.



Pictures: YUVIKA SINGH

Levi's has managed to stay relevant by honouring its heritage and embracing the future. That's why, from one generation to the next, people keep coming back, not just for the denims, but for a brand that feels like a second skin. ■



Potholes, traffic chaos and danger

Lucknow's monsoon reality

The much-awaited monsoon showers may have brought relief from the scorching heat, but for Lucknow's residents, they have once again turned into a nightmare as roads crumble under relentless waterlogging. From intermittent drizzles to heavy downpours, the rains have left behind broken stretches, giant potholes, and flooded streets—making daily commutes both difficult and dangerous.

Across key areas of the city—Hazratganj, Alambagh, Indira Nagar, and Gomti Nagar—roads have caved in, with gaping holes appearing almost overnight. The waterlogging has not only damaged the city's already fragile infrastructure but has also triggered massive traffic snarls and heightened safety risks. For motorists, especially

two-wheeler riders, wading through submerged lanes and unseen potholes has become a life-threatening challenge.

Residents blame the crisis on poor drainage and repeated patchwork repairs that barely last until the next spell of rain. Every monsoon lays bare the lack of long-term planning, quality construction, and sustainable urban infrastructure. Beyond the inconvenience, the broken roads increase the risk of serious accidents and even threaten the foundations of nearby buildings.

Until authorities address the root causes, the rains that should refresh the city will continue to expose its cracks—literally and figuratively.

Mr. Suresh Sahu, Sr. Campus Photographer takes a tour of city on the conditions of roads. ■





HARIYALI TEEJ



RAKSHA BANDHAN



JANMASHTAMI



GANESH CHATURTHI

AUGUST AURA



Pictures: SHRUTI KAPOOR

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Celebrating unity, tradition & togetherness

SHRUTI KAPOOR

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Imagine waking up to the sound of monsoon rain banging on your window, the smell of sizzling street food and moist earth filling the air. August, in India, is a month that unfolds like a treasured family album, with flags, glowing days, and mirth.

The month kicks off with Friendship Day on the first Sunday, a modern import that's been wholeheartedly embraced by India's youthful spirit. As Rishima Saxena, a 22-year-old psychology student from Lucknow, shares with us, "My favourite festival in August is Friendship Day because it's all about celebrating the people who make life bearable."

This camaraderie seamlessly transitions into a surge of national pride as

Independence Day approaches on the 15th. The tricolour flutters everywhere—from school gates to high-rise balconies—reminding us of the sacrifices that birthed modern India.

Midnight speeches give way to dawn flag-hoisting, joyous celebrations, and cultural programs. While talking to Expressions, Manu Sharma, a teacher, shared that Independence Day is his favorite celebration, as it truly reminds

him of India's unity in diversity. Even after so many years since childhood, the spirit remains unchanged—coming together with neighbours, singing Vande Mataram, and feeling the heartbeat of Bharat.

As the patriotic fervour simmers, August dives deeper into spiritual realms with a cascade of festivals rooted in belief. The sacred Chaturmas period, spanning four months of the monsoon, encourages austerity, vegetarianism, and devotion among Hindus, setting a contemplative tone. Hariyali Teej, celebrated in northern states such as Uttar Pradesh,

Haryana, and Punjab, honours the goddess Parvati.

Then comes Janamashtami, Lord Krishna's birthday. Temples in Mathura and Vrindavan throb with bhajans and tableaux depicting the god's playful leelas. Families create jhankis—miniature cradles for baby Krishna—while daring youth form human pyramids to break dahi handis, echoing the Lord's butter-stealing antics. While talking to Expressions, a devotee, Ritu Kapoor, said, "Janmashtami is closest to my heart—the midnight aartis, the thrill of the handi, and the creamy sweetness of makhan mishri. Even today,

the 56 Bhog are homemade, carrying a faith that feels timeless."

Crowning the month is Ganesh Chaturthi, especially grand in Maharashtra but now all over India. Eco-friendly idols of Lord Ganesh are installed amid chants of 'Ganpati Bappa Morya.'

In a world of fleeting trends, August stands as a testament to enduring values. It's a month where friends become family, faith renews hope, and the nation reaffirms its identity. As the rains taper and September beckons, these anecdotes linger, reminding us that in India's heart, every August is a story worth retelling. ■

Beyond Tunday, Khaste and Kulfi

The monsoon magic of 'anarse ki goli'



Pictures: RAMZI HASAN

RAMZI HASAN

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

LUcknow, anarse ki goli ho jae? For locals, this question sparks instant nostalgia, especially when the monsoon season sets in. The city, celebrated for its legendary Tunday Kababi, Raheem's Kulcha Nahari, Bakse Wale Khaste, and Prakash Kulfi, hides a seasonal treasure, the much-loved anarse ki goli.

At Maulana Sweets, near Gol Darwaza, Chowk, Shahbaaz Aleem, the fourth-generation owner of the 60-year-old shop, continues a legacy with pride. "Between July and October, especially from 4 pm to 8 pm, this sweet sells the most. Just from this, we make around

₹10,000–15,000 profit daily," he shared with Expressions. While most shops sell the traditional version made with rice and sugar syrup, Shahbaaz says his shop is the only one in Lucknow that also prepares khoya waali anarse ki goli, priced at ₹400 per kg, compared to the regular ₹240 per kg.

But the process isn't easy. "The toughest part is mixing sugar syrup into the ground rice. It takes one hour of constant effort, and only a strong person can manage it." Across town, Maqsood Ali, owner of a sweet shop in Golaganj that started in 1975, describes the process: "We take 10 kg of rice and 8 kg of sugar, and after grinding the rice and preparing the syrup, the two are mixed continuously for at least an hour. Later, maida is added, and the mixture is left overnight before

it is sprinkled the next day. That's when it becomes ready to serve." He also mentioned the use of a secret spice that gives his sweet a unique taste and an edge over others.

Beyond being a monsoon delight, anarse ki goli also carries cultural significance. During Saawan, this sweet is gifted to brides as a gesture of love and blessings, symbolising prosperity and happiness in married life. In Muharram, it carries spiritual value too, as Shia Muslims distribute it as tabarruk in Majlis gatherings.

Thus, in a city that is already a paradise for food lovers, this short-lived delicacy continues to live in the hearts of Lucknowites, not just as a snack but as a symbol of tradition, festivity, and togetherness. ■

Conversing with ChatGPT and not friends! You've got to be kidding me!

SUPRIYA SRIVASTAVA

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

At around 2 a.m., a sleepless student types her worries, not to a friend, not to a diary, but to ChatGPT! And she's not a rare species. Around the world, countless people are whispering their unspoken fears into a chat window, searching, not for answers, but for comfort.

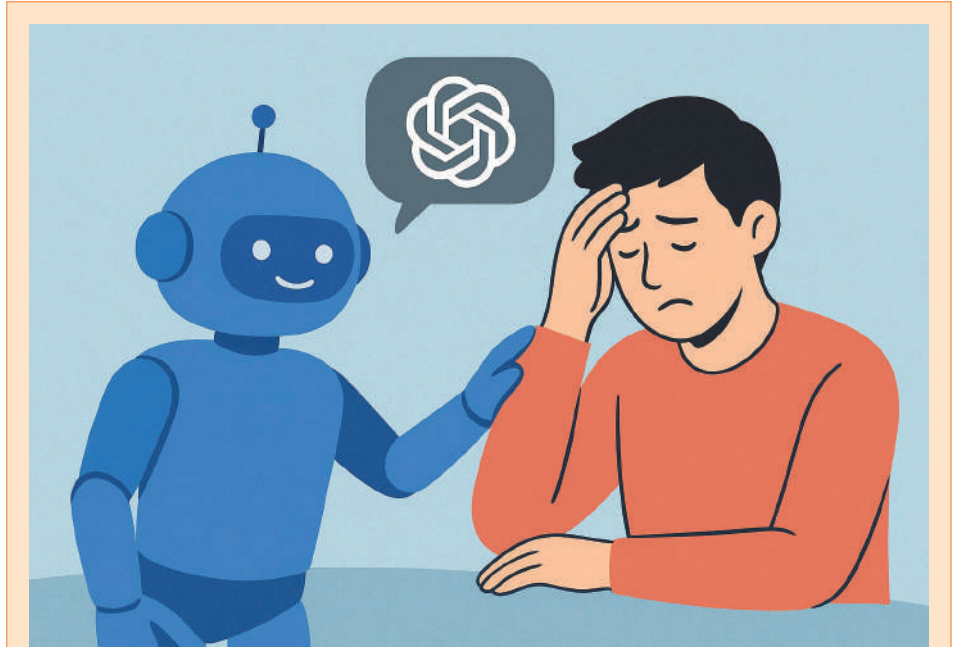
When artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT were first released, most people imagined them as practical machines that could provide quick replies, writing assistance, coding support, or productivity tips. Few predicted that these tools would quietly evolve into a digital companion, a judgement-free space, and for many, a silent companion. With family or friends, there's always the fear, 'What if they don't understand?' 'What if they judge me?' But with AI, this hesitation simply melts away. People type their rawest, most unfiltered thoughts, knowing that the chatbot will simply respond.

While talking to Expressions, a psychology student, Dishita Singh, from Amity University, Lucknow, shared, "Sometimes I just tell ChatGPT how lonely I feel, or if I want to have a breakup. Sometimes I even talk to it as if it's my only partner. I know it's not a human, but the replies make me feel heard and calm me down. I don't always want advice; I just want someone to listen."

Another reason is availability. Unlike a busy friend or an out-of-reach relative, AI is awake at all hours. This presence can be reassuring to someone who is struggling with late-night worry or anxiety.

"Preparing for UPSC is a lonely path," shares Kartika Pal, an aspirant from Delhi.

"Friends don't always understand the burden, and family wants more than just comfort. At times, I just open ChatGPT and vent my frustrations. It doesn't complain or pass judgment and is available at all hours, for instance, 3 a.m., before



60% in the paid tier, reported having a romantic relationship with the chatbot.

Students dealing with depression reported feeling therapist-like support from it.

replika.com

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, warned that your private conversations with ChatGPT are not always private. During legal proceedings, the staff can use the user data of the therapy sessions, and these chats will not have legal protections like with physical therapy sessions.

businessinsider.com

an exam. Sometimes, it feels like a silent companion walking this journey with me." Experts believe that this demonstrates how modern life promotes isolation. Families are busier, friendships are scattered, and many young people feel increasingly unheard. Technology, in this scenario, steps in.

But not without the risks. Dr. Yashasvi Verma, a counsellor, explains, "AI cannot replace human relationships, but it provides a first step for many who are afraid to talk. People should understand when and where to use it."

The MIT Media Lab study (2025) found that people using ChatGPT showed lower brain activity and memory recall, suggesting that overdependence on AI can reduce creativity and critical thinking. Many people now turn to ChatGPT as their 'doctor on demand,' trusting its words over real medical advice. This dangerous habit can turn health crises into delayed treatments.

And yet, the pull is undeniable. In its calm replies, people find something human conversations don't always guarantee: being heard patiently. ■



The invisible hands behind those shiny floors

BHAVNA SONI

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

When booking a ticket for a 9:15 a.m. movie, I noticed something that stayed with me more than the film itself. The shops in the mall were still closed, and the food court carried a faint smell of cleaning liquid. From upstairs came the steady sound of mops moving across the floor. It reminded me that before any shopper or moviegoer walks in, there are people already hard at work—cleaning, polishing, and setting everything in place. This is the quiet, unseen work of the housekeeping staff, whose day starts much earlier than ours.

Ramesh Kumar, 42, has been working as a housekeeper in the mall for almost three years. With a feeble smile, he says, “The mall wakes up with us. Before the lights come on for customers, we are already here, making sure everything looks perfect—wiping every corner, cleaning every glass door, scrubbing every single tile.” He admits that the work can be exhausting, especially during back-to-back shifts, but there’s a quiet pride in his voice. “Yes, it’s tiring. But when I see the floors shining and people walking without noticing a single mark or stain, I feel like I’ve done my job well. That’s the real satisfaction.”

While talking to Expressions, Mamta Kumari, 46, explains, “In the food court,

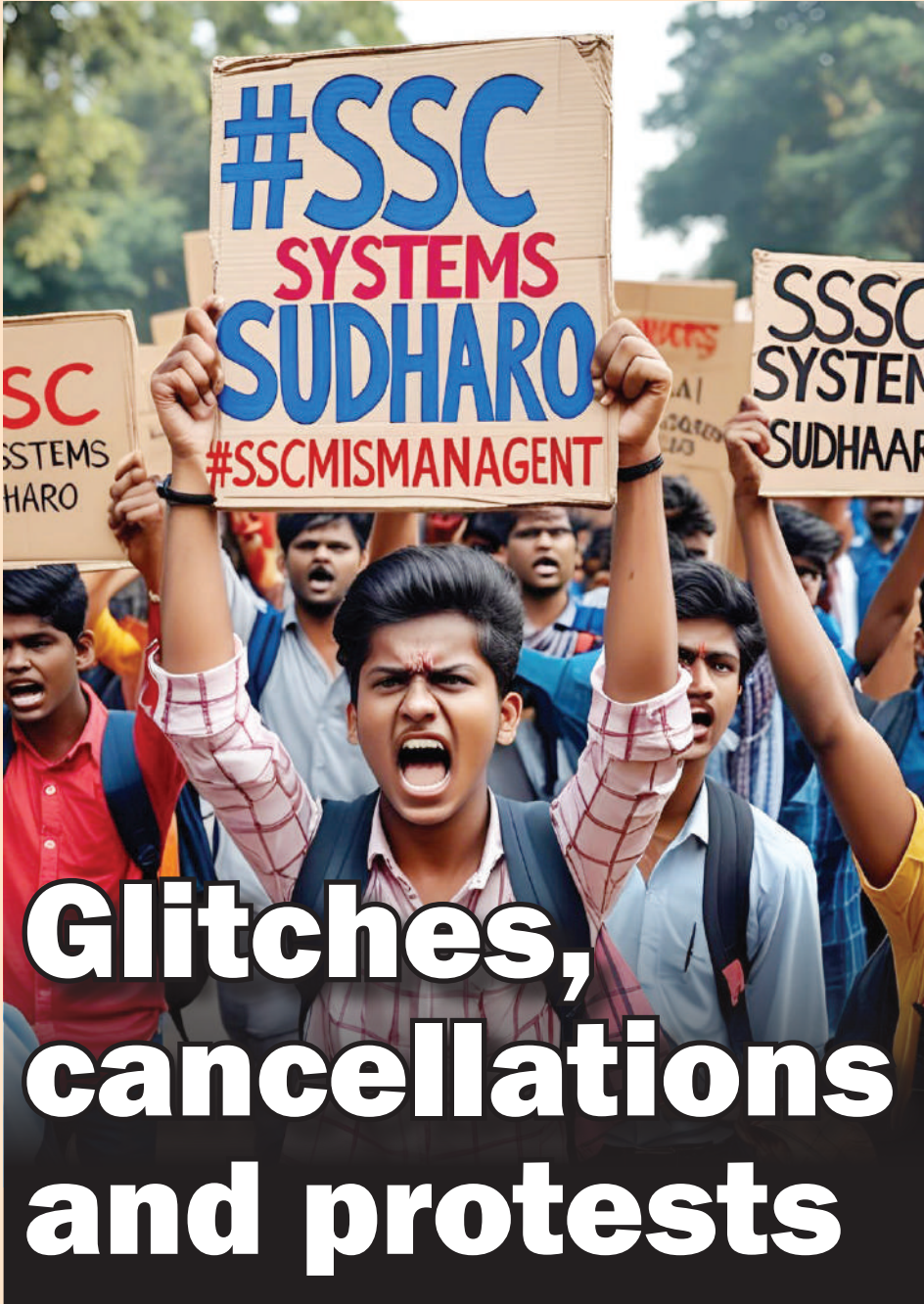


Pictures: BHAVNA SONI

we have to be on our feet for hours. The moment someone finishes their meal, we need to clear the table, wipe it down, and make it ready before the next person sits. It has to be quick—no one likes waiting.” She pauses for a moment before adding, “I don’t expect much from people, but whenever someone smiles at me or says, ‘thank you,’ it feels like my hard work is seen and appreciated.”

Suneel explains, “When the floors are spotless, the glass is shining, and the washrooms are clean, hardly anyone stops to notice or say a word. But the moment there’s even a little bit of dirt or something out of place, we get called immediately—and most of the time, it’s with loads of disappointment.”

Shoppers walk across spotless floors, admire the gleaming glass windows of the stores, and breathe in the faint freshness of a recently cleaned food court—but rarely do they stop to think about the people who make it possible. We hardly realise the hours they put in, the endless mopping that leaves their backs aching, the constant contact with cleaning liquids that leaves their hands damp and rough, and the fact that their hard work often goes unnoticed. You might not always notice them, but the comfort and cleanliness you enjoy in the mall is because of their hard work. Every spotless floor, every shiny railing, and every fresh smell is their doing. They blend into the background, yet their efforts touch thousands of people every single day. Maybe next time, instead of just walking past, you could look at them, smile, or give a small nod. That little gesture can make them feel seen and appreciated—a small bridge between the people we notice and the ones we often overlook. ■



Glitches, cancellations and protests

Inside the SSC Phase-13 mess

ASHKA JAIN

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

If you've been on social media lately, you would have probably noticed hashtags such as #SSCMisManagement and #SSC_System_Sudharo trending. Why? Because thousands of students across India are furious about the way the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) Phase-13 exams were conducted.

Months of preparation, long journeys, and heavy expenses ended in chaos for many candidates—either their exams were abruptly cancelled, or technical glitches made it impossible to complete the test.

The SSC conducted the Phase-13 recruitment exams between July 24 and August 1, 2025, across India. The expected routine process of filling government posts quickly transformed into a nightmare.

Candidates reported issues such as non-functional computers, broken keyboards and mouse, poor infrastructure, and sudden cancellations. As a result, students initiated protests. What began in smaller cities soon spread to Delhi, with hundreds assembling at Jantar Mantar and the CGO Complex. Teachers and coaching mentors joined the movement, thereby amplifying the students' concerns. Additionally, disturbing videos emerged online, depicting peaceful pro-

testers, including women, being manhandled by the police. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube quickly transformed the situation into a national discussion.

After days of silence, SSC chairman, S. Gopalakrishnan, finally addressed the issue. He denied any paper leaks, insisting that none had occurred since 2018. He also clarified that the new exam vendor, Eduquity, was not responsible for paper setting or center allocation, and blamed glitches on the delayed rollout of new security software. SSC announced re-tests for about 2,500 affected candidates and that the rest of the process would continue as scheduled.

But technical failures weren't the only concern. In Uttarakhand, police uncovered a 'solver gang' that used remote desktop software to take over candidates' computers and answer questions on their behalf. Phones, laptops, and other devices were seized during the raid, showing how deep digital crime has infiltrated public exams.

Behind the hashtags are real human stories. Mahek, a 25-year-old from Lucknow, spent half her savings preparing for SSC-CGL. Now, her trust in the system is shaken—she wonders whether her hard work will pay off at all. Arjun, from Kanpur, recounted waiting outside his center for hours in the scorching sun while staff scrambled to fix servers. At 5 p.m., he was told his exam was cancelled. His parents had taken out a loan for his coaching. "It felt like all my preparation was wasted in that single moment," he said. Cancellations and mismanagement cause anxiety, financial strain, and immense mental stress.

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, was meant to curb malpractice. But laws alone cannot fix flawed systems if enforcement remains weak. Even the perception of leaks or unfair practices erodes public trust and undermines the credibility of the system.

SSC now promises vendor reviews, better software, and AI-based tools. But statements are not enough. The real test lies in whether candidates regain faith in the fairness, compassion, and transparency of the examination process.

So here's the question for the government and the authorities: Are you truly listening to the silent fears of millions of aspirants who have pinned their futures on these exams? ■