

# Topics - MINDS MAPS included (Daily current affairs 7th March 2025



- **Bangus Valley**
- **Medical Wearables**
- **Vitiligo**
- **Women in the Corporate Workforce**
- **zero-for-zero' tariff agreement**
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**By saurabh Pandey**



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# J&K govt. to promote Bangus Valley near LoC for ecotourism

**Peerzada Ashiq**  
JAMMU

The Jammu and Kashmir government on Thursday announced a new set of rules for Bangus, a far-off tourist spot near the Line of Control (LoC) in north Kashmir, in a bid to promote it as an ecotourism destination.

The decision comes in the wake of unplanned and uncontrolled growth in the traditional tourist hotspots of Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Sonamarg.

## CM's announcement

"To maintain ecological balance, the department concerned has focused on avoiding construction of massive buildings and hotels. The aim would be to develop the area as an ecotourism destination," Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said, while speaking in the



**New destination:** Tourists waiting for a hot air balloon ride at Bangus Valley in J&K. FILE PHOTO

Assembly.

He said the department would focus on creating basic recreation facilities, rain shelters, public conveniences, signages, lighting, and waste disposal facilities for visitors.

Bangus lies close to the LoC in north Kashmir's Kupwara district. After Gurez, Machil and Keran, Bangus is one more addition to the list of tourist spots near the LoC.

Once a militant infiltra-

tion route, Bangus is around 100 km away from Srinagar, with two bowl-shaped valleys perched at an altitude of 10,000 feet.

Work on the basic facilities, according to Mr. Abdullah, would be underta-

ken after the Deputy Commissioner, Kupwara, identifies land parcels in consultation with the Forest department. "Once the land parcels are identified, the necessary permissions and no-objection certificates shall be sought on the Parivesh Portal for forest clearance," Mr. Abdullah said.

## Guest houses

To safeguard the livelihood of local shepherds, nomads, and other inhabitants of the Valley, Mr. Abdullah said the J&K Tourism Department had initiated the process of registering paying guest houses in the area. "This will help to preserve and promote local culture, traditions, and cuisine, and would be an immersive travel experience for tourists," he added.

At present, 19 paying

guest houses in the proximity of Bangus Valley are registered with the Department of Tourism, Kashmir.


## Fresh measures


The fresh measures towards ecotourism are being taken as record numbers of tourists are visiting the Valley, leading to uncontrolled constructions in the favourite tourist places of Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Sonamarg, posing a threat to the environment.


Officials told the J&K Assembly that notices were issued against 269 unauthorised constructions in Pahalgam over the past two years.


"The Pahalgam Development Authority (PDA) has been conducting demolition drives whenever necessary to curb illegal construction activities in the area," the government told the House.

# Bangus Valley (Mapping )

 **Location:** Bangus Valley is situated in the northern region of India, specifically in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

 **Scenic Beauty:** The valley is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, lush green meadows, and snow-capped mountains.

 **Biodiversity:** It is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, making it a significant ecological area.

 **Tourism Potential:** The valley has immense tourism potential, offering opportunities for camping, hiking, and exploring natural beauty.

 **Cultural Significance:** The area is rich in cultural heritage, with local traditions and practices that reflect the region's history.

 **Wildlife:** The valley supports various wildlife species, contributing to its ecological importance.

**Summary:** Bangus Valley is a picturesque location in Jammu and Kashmir, known for its stunning landscapes, biodiversity, and potential for tourism and adventure activities.

# Medical wearables tech: an early warning system for your health

Whether a fitness enthusiast uses a smartwatch to track her daily activity or a diabetic patient utilises a continuous glucose monitor to check blood glucose levels, these devices promise real-time data and valuable insights to help both patients and healthcare providers make informed decisions

Somita Pal

**O**ver the past decade, patient care has seen a paradigm shift, with advancements in medical wearables turning out to be a powerful catalyst in the management of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

These gadgets are no longer merely lifestyle accessories but are increasingly becoming essential tools that empower individuals to monitor their health in real-time and take a more proactive approach to their healthcare management.

Healthcare professionals say this tech has helped elevate people's awareness about risk factors of lifestyle diseases like heart disease and diabetes and has changed their focus from reactive healthcare approaches to more proactive and preventive care.

"I had a patient in her early 40s sometime ago, who started using an Apple Watch and noticed an unusual heart rate," says Nagesh Waghmare, a cardiologist from Mumbai, adding that though the patient was asymptomatic, blood tests revealed that she was pre-diabetic and had high lipid levels. "She improved her diet and focused on other lifestyle changes, including exercise. Now, all her parameters are normal. There are many examples like hers where we have managed prevention of the disease," Dr. Waghmare says.

**A seismic shift post pandemic:** Medical wearables such as smartwatches, fitness trackers, and biosensors are electronic devices designed to be worn on the body to monitor and manage various health parameters: blood sugar levels, heart rate, physical activity, sleep patterns, and even blood oxygen levels.

Whether a fitness enthusiast uses a smartwatch to track her daily activity or a diabetic patient utilises a continuous glucose monitor (CGM) to check blood glucose levels, these devices promise real-time data and valuable insights to help both patients and healthcare providers make informed decisions.

While CGMs are predominantly used for diabetes management, other medical wearables are making waves in cardiac and respiratory health. Rahul Baxi, a diabetologist in Mumbai, notes that the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted approval to the Apple Watch to detect atrial fibrillation, a serious heart condition.

"There have been numerous instances where the Apple Watch has alerted individuals about irregular heart rates, allowing for early intervention and the prevention of life-threatening complications," he says.

Wearables have also played a vital role in monitoring respiratory health, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Devices that track respiratory rates, oxygen saturation, and pulse rates have become essential tools for patients with chronic respiratory conditions such as asthma or COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point for the adoption of wearable preventive devices. "There is a clear distinction pre- and post-COVID-19. After



Wearable tech has helped elevate people's awareness about the risk factors of lifestyle diseases. Photograph used for representational purposes only. GETTY IMAGES

the pandemic, the wearable medical market has exploded. People are now more aware of the importance of monitoring their vitals," Dr. Waghmare explains.

During the pandemic, devices such as pulse oximeters became household essentials and the trend has only accelerated since then. "Today, people in their 40s and 50s are increasingly using Fitbits, Apple Watches, and other devices to monitor their heart rate and blood pressure, helping them stay more informed about their health," he adds.

## Empowering patients

The visual feedback that devices offer often serves as a wake-up call, encouraging healthier lifestyle choices, say healthcare experts.

"CGMs have helped patients see how their sugar spikes after eating certain foods, and it motivates them to make changes," says Dr. Baxi. For instance, a patient might notice that their sugar levels rise more after eating idli compared to rotis, prompting them to choose healthier alternatives. "This real-time data makes a far greater impact than just telling someone to avoid certain foods," he adds. "It empowers them to take control of their health. We are seeing patients who are tracking their sleep quality, physical activity, and stress levels and are taking proactive steps towards maintaining long-term health."

This constant data flow is crucial for the early detection of health issues. For instance, patients with cardiovascular conditions can receive immediate alerts if irregular heart rhythms are detected, allowing for timely interventions before complications arise.

"Wearables have shifted the focus from reactive treatment to proactive prevention, enabling individuals to monitor their health continuously and

With CGMs, I can monitor my patient's condition from anywhere in the world and make real-time adjustments to their insulin dosage.

seek medical attention before major issues arise," says Rushikesh Patil, a cardiologist in Mumbai.

## Better patient-doctor interaction

The virtual feedback that devices offer also enhances the interaction between patients and doctors, particularly in the realm of tele-health. By integrating data from wearables, tele-health platforms provide healthcare providers with a comprehensive view of a patient's health before consultations. This allows for more accurate diagnoses and the development of personalised treatment plans.

Remote patient monitoring has been significantly improved by wearable devices such as CGMs, which allow healthcare providers to monitor patients from afar and make real-time adjustments to treatment plans.

Dr. Baxi, for instance, has used CGMs to consider their patients' blood sugar levels remotely. "With CGMs, I can monitor my patient's condition from anywhere in the world and make real-time adjustments to their insulin dosage," he says. This level of monitoring was not possible before the advent of wearables, making healthcare more accessible and convenient for the patient.

Dr. Waghmare says wearables have improved the compliance rate to treatment as, traditionally, patients would return for a check-up every few months, leaving long gaps between consultations.

"Previously, we relied on infrequent visits to adjust medication dosages based on blood pressure and heart rate. But now, with wearables, we can monitor these vitals continuously and adjust treatment plans much more effectively," he says.

This real-time data helps doctors optimise medication dosages, ensuring patients receive the best care for their recovery and for the improvement of their long-term survival. "We can confidently adjust the dose of medicines based on real-time heart rate or blood pressure data, which was not possible before these devices," he notes.

## Future of health monitoring

The future of medical wearable technology looks even more promising, with researchers developing innovative health-monitoring tools that will seamlessly integrate into daily life. Smart textiles, for example, are being developed to embed sensors directly into clothing. These smart fabrics could track heart rates, respiratory rates, and even glucose levels, offering non-invasive health monitoring in real time.

Non-invasive glucose monitoring is another exciting area of research. Scientists are exploring methods to measure glucose levels through biofluids such as sweat, saliva, or tears, potentially eliminating the need for devices that puncture the skin. As these technologies continue to evolve, wearable devices will become even more integrated into everyday life, offering seamless and non-invasive health monitoring for all users.

## Affordability, a concern

Despite the numerous benefits of medical wearables, affordability remains a significant barrier, especially in countries like India. Devices like CGMs can be expensive, with the cost of sensors adding up over time. Gaurish Kenkre, general manager and physiotherapist, Atharv Ability, Mumbai, acknowledges that only a small percentage of his patients can afford CGMs and other medical wearables, primarily due to their high costs.

In India, a CGM sensor costs around ₹5,000 for two weeks, which means patients spend roughly ₹10,000 a month. That is not affordable for everyone," Dr. Baxi acknowledges.

However, he emphasises that even short-term use of these medical wearables can provide valuable insights. "For example, even using a CGM for a few weeks can help patients understand how their diet, exercise, and medications affect their blood sugar levels," he says. This information can then be used to make long-term lifestyle changes, improving overall health outcomes.

Dr. Patil says there is also another issue to consider: there are many false positives and false negatives. "Individuals should not panic due to the results; they must consult their doctor," he says.

As technology continues to evolve, medical wearables are set to play an increasingly vital role in healthcare, not just for diabetes management but across various medical fields.

*(Somita Pal is a journalist with nearly two decades of experience covering healthcare in Mumbai. She covers a range of topics, from health, social issues, and civic news. somitapal@gmail.com)*



# Medical Wearables



Definition: Medical wearables are electronic devices designed to be worn on the body, tracking various health parameters like blood sugar levels, heart rate, and sleep patterns.

Evolution: From rudimentary fitness trackers to sophisticated continuous glucose monitors (CGMs), the evolution of these devices has been remarkable.

# The Shift from Reactive to Proactive Care

The integration of medical wearables into daily life has transformed healthcare from a reactive approach to a proactive one. Patients are now equipped with the tools to monitor their health continuously.

**Real-Time Monitoring:** Devices like smartwatches and CGMs provide immediate feedback on health metrics, empowering users to make informed decisions.

# Innovations and Applications of Wearables

Medical wearables encompass a diverse array of devices, each playing a crucial role in chronic disease management.

**Continuous Glucose Monitors (CGMs):** Primarily for diabetes management, these devices provide real-time blood sugar data, enabling timely lifestyle adjustments.

**Smartwatches:** Equipped to monitor heart rate and physical activity, smartwatches serve a dual purpose for fitness enthusiasts and patients alike.

**Respiratory Health:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, wearables began tracking vital respiratory metrics, critical for patients with chronic respiratory diseases.

# Enhancing Patient-Doctor Interactions

The synergy between medical wearables and telehealth platforms is enhancing patient-doctor interactions, creating a more comprehensive healthcare experience.

**Telehealth Integration:** Wearables provide healthcare providers with vital patient data before consultations, enabling more accurate diagnoses.

**Remote Monitoring:** Devices like CGMs allow for continuous monitoring, facilitating timely adjustments to treatment plans



# Future Prospects and Challenges

The horizon for medical wearables looks promising, with ongoing innovations set to redefine healthcare.

**Innovative Technologies:** Smart textiles and non-invasive glucose monitoring are at the forefront of wearable technology, offering seamless health monitoring.

**Affordability Issues:** Despite their benefits, affordability remains a barrier, especially in regions like India where CGMs can be prohibitively expensive.



Students wearing Michael Jackson masks at an awareness rally on vitiligo in Chennai. FILE PHOTO

## Harnessing gut microbiome to halt vitiligo

Ramya Kannan

The current decade will probably be known as the decade of the gut, given the incredible number of significant biological connections we are making between the gut and human well-being. However, this is not about the gut per se; this is about the role of gut-friendly bacteria in the process of re-pigmentation, particularly in persons with vitiligo.

Vitiligo is a chronic auto-immune disorder where the body's defence system begins to attack the pigment-producing cells and causes de-pigmented white patches on the skin. While usually the condition can be only cosmetic, these patches on the skin can be stigmatising for the patient, particularly if they are present on the face or arms, and thus obnoxious to others. New research from Northwestern University from a pre-clinical trial in mice has shown that a natural compound derived from gut-friendly bacteria significantly slows down the progression of vitiligo and may restore pigmentation. The findings, if substantiated through rigorous double-blind random control clinical trials, could offer hope to millions affected by the autoimmune disease.

It is estimated that vitiligo affects 0.5% to 2% of the global population and is linked to other health challenges, including for some persons, higher risks of cardiovascular disease, psychological distress, and endocrine disorders. The prevalence of vitiligo in India has been invariably reported between 0.25% and 4% of dermatology outpatients across studies from India, and up to 8.5% in Gujarat and Rajasthan, as per a paper in the *Indian Dermatology Online Journal*. Studies and observations have recorded an erosion of self-confidence among those with vitiligo, resulting in an impact on the mental health of the individual.

**Vitiligo affects 0.5% to 2% of the global population and is linked to other issues, including higher risks of cardiovascular disease, psychological distress, and endocrine disorders**

"The results in our model were astonishing," says I. Caroline Le Poole, professor of dermatology and microbiology-immunology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "We found that administering a microbial compound weekly to vitiligo-prone mice significantly suppressed disease progression. It made a spectacular difference in an aggressive model of the disease." The results of the study were recently published in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*.


"We are trying to understand the pigment cell and how it works. Vitiligo patches can be a big deal for patients, particularly during adolescence and youth," Dr. Le Poole explains in a video call. While acknowledging the renewed global interest in what microbiomes can do for health, she adds that she was interested first in the effect of the gut microbiome on antibody-mediated autoimmune disease, here in the development of vitiligo patches.


Dr. Le Poole and her colleagues administered a microbial product weekly to vitiligo-prone mice over an 18-week period. By the end, pigment loss on the mice's backs was reduced by 35%. The product reduced killer T cells that attack the skin's pigment and increased protective regulatory T cells, which are typically scarce in vitiligo patients. "This simple microbial compound could work as a standalone therapy or in synergy with existing treatments," Dr. Le Poole says.

However, she adds that it is necessary to intervene as early as possible and that the effects might not be as dramatic or efficient in advanced disease. There are typically two peaks in persons with vitiligo: – in adolescence, and then, again,

# Vitiligo

**Chronic Autoimmune Disorder: Vitiligo** is characterized as a chronic autoimmune disorder affecting the body's pigment-producing cells.

 **Skin Depigmentation:** The condition leads to the development of de-pigmented white patches on the skin.

 **Social Stigma:** While primarily cosmetic, these patches can cause social stigma, especially when located on visible areas like the face or arms

# GUT MICROBIOME Role

- gut microbiome's impact on antibody-mediated autoimmune diseases, specifically vitiligo.
- 🐭 An 18-week study involved administering a microbial product to vitiligo-prone mice weekly.
- 📈 The treatment resulted in a 74% reduction in pigment loss on the mice's backs.
- ✂️ The microbial product decreased harmful killer T cells and increased protective regulatory T cells in the mice.
- 💡 that this microbial compound could serve as a standalone therapy or complement existing treatments.
- 🧪 The research highlights the potential of microbiome-based therapies in autoimmune conditions.



# Women in corporate leadership, the lived reality



Once again, the world will celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, 2025 and companies will attempt to showcase steps taken toward the inclusion and the increase of women in the workforce. Yet, the lived reality of women in or trying to enter the corporate workforce is starkly different.

The recent instance of rolling back diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes in the United States federal government, which also encourages the private sector to end DEI preference hirings, highlights the challenges and the barriers to increasing women's participation in the workforce. Women, who comprise 48% of corporate America's workforce, are reeling from the aftershock of this order and are now facing the threat of identity erasure.

## A ripple effect

It may be easy to brush aside this order as an issue that plagues only the United States. However, the effects of a dip in DEI hirings and women's exclusion can have severe repercussions in all parts of today's globally connected world. Regardless of where one is situated globally, conversations relating to the participation of women in the corporate workforce are significant.

While DEI may simply be a corporate mechanism to make small inroads into women participation in the workforce, especially at an entry level, at present, even such an entry mechanism has not really increased women's participation in leadership roles. For instance, in India, women have been historically marginalised from the workforce and comprise about 35.9% of the worker population ratio; the number is starker at the senior and middle management levels where women account for only 12.7% leadership roles as of 2024.

It is easy to brush aside DEI as being a fabricated gesture of tokenism, where women placed in companies are viewed as sufferance or an obligation rather than finding a way at the table on their own merit. Of course, while DEI may help women make an in-road into leadership roles in companies and have a semblance of a level playing field, their performance and ability to consolidate their position will depend on their



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Policy changes in the United States highlight the challenges and the barriers to increasing women's participation in the corporate workforce; these have global relevance

own performance and further normalise the presence of women at all levels of the workforce.

## The effect of legal mandates

Over the past decade, Indian legal mandates can be credited to help increase the presence of women in the corporate workforce especially at the senior level. In 2014, the Companies Act, 2013 mandated that at-least one-woman director should be placed on the board of certain class of public limited companies, and in 2015, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) mandated that at least one independent woman director be appointed to the board of India's top 1000 listed companies. Thus, it is largely due to a legal mandate that companies are attempting to uphold best practices of gender diversity. The inclusion of women directors on the board of NSE 500 listed companies has increased more than threefold, from 5% in 2011 to 18% in 2023.

Research across the world finds that organisations also greatly benefit from women in leadership roles. At a fundamental level, the presence of women increases the depth of the talent pool available in the workforce. Women provide informational diversity gained from different educational and career trajectories and distinct social and professional network associations and offer a participative, democratic leadership style that stimulates robust discussion, drives a richer challenge and delivers greater value. Additionally, women tend to focus on relationship building, foster greater stakeholder commitment and assist in formulating strategies that address stakeholder concerns while also overseeing better monitoring, broader human capital management, and communication channels which increase corporate accountability and reduce corporate risks.

When companies have more women in senior management and leadership roles, they begin to appear on lists of the most admired and ethical companies, best companies to work for, and best corporate citizens, thereby also serving the agenda of companies from an optics perspective and feeding into a virtuous cycle of benefits.

Key identified areas where women leaders bring greater dividends are corporate

governance, strategic proposition oversight, risk management, shareholder and stakeholder value, gender and society, and environmental responsibility, all of which are important facets of running an efficient and clean corporate ship which contributes to economic parity.

## What real change is

While token participation of women in companies may be a way out for some companies to demonstrate commitment towards gender

diversity in the workplace, women are truly effective corporate leaders when they are given actual power and responsibility and not merely appointed to positions as a token for gender diversity or to serve the agenda of their male benefactors. It is only when a greater number of

C-Suite/KMPs (top-level executives in an organisation and Key Managerial Personnel, or KMPs) are women, and, in addition, more independent directors and chairpersons of committees of the board and board committees are women, that they are truly effective corporate leaders. Importantly, the remuneration of women that is at parity with their male counterparts is a key indicator that women's presence in the corporate workforce is real and robust.

While we do have a lot to celebrate on the occasion of Women's Day this year, it is important to keep in mind that there are still significant steps that companies and regulators must take in order to ensure that women's participation in the corporate workforce, especially in senior leadership roles, is strong, contributes meaningfully toward corporate governance and is not just a token concept that is aimed at gaining brownie points from stakeholders. Women's participation in the workforce must be promoted for its many benefits and must not fall victim to the dominant political narrative.

End note: The issue of women in the corporate workforce, especially on company boards, is of great significance and merits deep research into various facets. Thought Arbitrage is undertaking such a study which maps the patterns of women on corporate boards by using qualitative and quantitative research methodologies over a 10-year period, involving about 1,000 companies.



## **Topic→ Women in the Corporate Workforce**

As the world prepares to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, 2025, it is imperative to delve into the complexities surrounding women's roles in the corporate sphere. Although strides have been made towards inclusivity, the reality paints a far different picture, especially in light of recent legislative shifts that threaten to undermine these advances.

### **The Current Landscape: DEI Rollbacks and Women's Workforce Participation**

#### **The Impact of DEI Initiatives**

- Recent policies in the U.S. federal government have rolled back diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, impacting women who constitute almost 48% of the workforce.
- The exclusion from DEI hiring practices poses a threat of identity erasure for women in corporate America.

# Women's Representation in Leadership Roles

## Statistics and Legal Mandates

Women occupy only 12.7% of leadership roles in India, highlighting the disparity in representation. Legislative frameworks, like India's Companies Act of 2013, have mandated at least one woman director, increasing women's participation on boards significantly.

## Benefits of Women in Leadership

Organizations with women in leadership positions enjoy diversity in thought and enhanced corporate governance.

Female leaders contribute to better decision-making and stakeholder engagement

# **The Importance of Authentic Inclusion**

## **Tokenism vs. Genuine Representation**

**Tokenism often results in women being seen as obligations rather than valued leaders.**

**Authentic inclusion requires power and responsibility to create meaningful impact.**

## **Conclusion**

**As we approach International Women's Day 2025, it is crucial to recognize the ongoing challenges women face in the corporate workforce. While celebrations are in order, meaningful steps must be taken to ensure that their participation is not merely tokenistic but genuine and impactful**



## CITI calls for 'zero-for-zero' tariff agreement with the U.S.

The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) has urged a 'zero-for-zero' tariff agreement with the U.S. for textile and apparel trade. The U.S.-India trade balance in textiles and apparels remains strongly in India's favour. In 2024, U.S. imports from India stood at about \$10.8 billion, whereas U.S. exports to India were limited to just \$0.41 billion, with cotton making up 50.6%. With reduced tariffs, exports to the U.S. could surge to \$16 billion in the next three years, CITI said.


## **zero-for-zero' tariff agreement**


- **The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) has urged a 'zero-for-zero' tariff agreement with the U.S. for textile and apparel trade. The U.S.-India trade balance in textiles and apparels remains strongly in India's favour**

## “ZERO FOR ZERO” TARIFF

 A "zero for zero" tariff agreement involves two countries eliminating tariffs on all traded goods.


 This agreement creates a completely free trade zone between the participating countries.

 No import duties are imposed on goods from either country under this arrangement.

 It is a reciprocal agreement, meaning both countries must agree to lower their tariffs to zero.

 The result is a fully duty-free trade relationship between the two nations.

 Such agreements can enhance trade volume and economic cooperation.

 This type of trade agreement can lead to increased market access for businesses in both countries.



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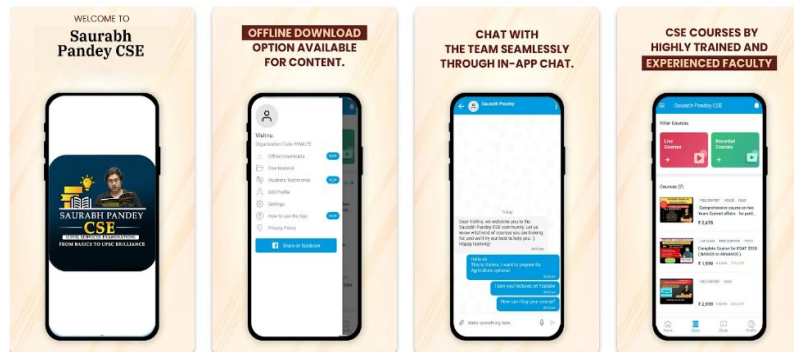
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