

DECCAN HERALD

The Power of Good

on Sunday

International journals wrongly measuring India's AI success: FM

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Utah calling

Go fossil hunting or visit the famed Arches National Park in America's western state

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Draped garments are deeply rooted in Indian culture and stir up strong emotions, not to mention nostalgia

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This book offers sharp insights into the history of temple democratisation, especially in South India

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Sindhi table

The Partition has remapped Sindhi cuisine, reclaiming and forgetting recipes along the way

Quickly



Trump rejects Iran's Hormuz proposal

US President Donald Trump on Saturday rejected a truce deal proposed by Iran that Tehran said could have reopened the Strait of Hormuz within a week. "I reject their proposal," Trump said. "They want to make a deal where they open the Strait as they're losing," he said.

Details on Page 9

US, China set up AI dialogue, ink tariff pact

The US and China agreed to set up a dialogue on artificial intelligence-related incidents, operationalise boards of trade and investment and a \$30 billion reciprocal tariff reduction arrangement, during the visit of China's President Xi Jinping to the US.

Details on Page 9

2 Naga civilians killed in Manipur attack

Suspected militants shot dead two Naga civilians and injured two others in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Saturday, officials said. The incident took place around 3 pm at Kalenjang village, near Naga-majority Senapati district.

AI cam reads guitar as pillion, fines Rs 500

An artificial intelligence-enabled traffic camera in Bengaluru has apparently mistaken a guitar case being carried by a motorcyclist for a pillion rider and issued a Rs 500 fine for not wearing a helmet. The incident came to light after the rider received an e-challan alleging that a pillion rider had violated the helmet rule.

Details on Page 5



CCPA fines Amazon, Flipkart Rs 10L

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed penalties of Rs 10 lakh each on Amazon and Flipkart, and Rs 5 lakh on JioMart, for selling and advertising an unregistered agro-chemical product called 'Cyclosi-none Herbicide' on their platforms.

Four lion cubs die in Shivamogga zoo

As many as four lion cubs born to Asiatic lioness Sara died in zoo-cum-safari at Tyavarekoppa near here four days ago. The incident came to light on Saturday.

Details on Page 7

Scrapping India's old vehicles remains a long, bumpy ride

Five years after the vehicle scrappage policy was launched, inadequate facilities, poor incentives and uneven access continue to hamper formal recycling

PAVAN KUMAR H HUBBALLI, DHNS

With little space in his apartment and no authorised Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facility (RVSF) nearby, disposing of his father's 30-year-old scooter was not easy for Hubballi resident Kumar.

The scooter had been lying unused for nearly five years. Its fitness certificate had not been renewed and taxes had not been paid. An unauthorised scrap dealer on the outskirts of Hubballi offered Kumar Rs 5,000 for it. "I could have taken it to an authorised facility in Bengaluru, but they would have paid only Rs 2,000-Rs 3,000. The cost of transporting the scooter to Bengaluru and arranging the required documents would have been more than that," he says.

Kumar decided to go ahead with the local scrap dealer, but took precautions. He visited the yard on the day the scooter was dismantled and recorded the entire process on video. He also informed the local police station and the concerned RTO in writing, hoping to avoid



DH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

legal complications later. He feared that any misuse of the vehicle number could land him in trouble as long as it remained on official records. Informing both departments offered some protection.

INSIGHT

"It's been three years now. The police have given me an acknowledgement letter, but the RTO is yet to respond," he adds.

For Goa-based retired banker Pradip Matha, however, the choice was

deliberate. He wanted his 2009 Maruti SX4 to be scrapped through an RVSF, a government-authorised facility operated by private companies, even though a private buyer was offering him Rs 2.35 lakh for the well-maintained car.

The RVSF offered him only Rs 56,000. The incentives available to him were limited because the vehicle was scrapped in Goa and the new vehicle was purchased in Karnataka, where the applicable concessions are lower.

"With the Certificate of Deposit (COD) from the

RVSF, I was hoping to get at least a 25% discount on road tax for my new car and the mandatory special discount from the manufacturer, which depends on the models. However, I received very little in incentives. In all, I received only Rs 1.30 lakh for scrapping the vehicle," he says.

The e-Vahan website of

the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) states that India has more than 390 million registered vehicles and that by 2030 nearly 50 million of those vehicles could reach their end of life. While not all of these vehicles need to be scrapped, the figure underscores the scale of the challenge. As per the government's statement in the Parliament, older and unfit vehicles pollute the environment 10 to 12 times more than fit vehicles and pose a risk to road safety.

Following interventions by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal over air pollution in Delhi and the National Capital Region, including concerns over the role of old and unfit vehicles, India began formalising its largely unregulated vehicle-scrapping system in 2015.

In 2021, the country introduced the Vehicle Scrappage Policy (Voluntary Vehicle-Fleet Modernisation Program), with six main objectives: to reduce

the number of old and defective vehicles, achieve a reduction in vehicular air pollutants in line with India's climate commitments, improve road and vehicular safety, achieve better fuel efficiency, formalise the vehicle scrapping industry and boost the availability of low-cost raw materials for the automotive, steel and electronics industries.

The Union government estimated that the policy could attract more than Rs 10,000 crore in investment and create around 35,000 jobs, while boosting automobile sales by around 8% and contributing 0.5% to GDP growth.

When the policy was announced in March 2021, the government estimated that India had around one crore vehicles — including two- and three-wheelers, light motor vehicles and medium/heavy commercial vehicles — that were over 15 years old or had reached their end of life and were fit to be scrapped.

► Vehicle scrapping, Page 4

When even the best campuses fail their students



Activists protest outside IIT-B's Powai campus, seeking a fair investigation into a student's death by suicide. PTI

Premier institutions must look beyond academic excellence to help students stumble, recover and believe in their future

GURUCHARAN GOLLERKERI

There is something profoundly unsettling about a student dying by suicide inside one of India's prestigious educational institutions. The campus may have world-class laboratories, brilliant faculty, counsellors, wardens and mentors for student welfare. Yet, all these can prove irrelevant if young people feel alone at the very moment they most need another human being. In a perceptive and prescient insight, psychologist Bhavana C.J., writing in this newspaper recently, observed, 'Knowledge does not make one immune to distress. Suicide prevention cannot be left to the individual alone.'

India's young have long believed in a social contract: study hard, work hard, play by the rules, and life can be better than that of our parents. India has always been unequal and privilege has always

opened some doors more easily than merit.

Yet the belief that effort could alter one's destiny has remained one of the great drivers of Indian aspiration. Few institutions embody that bargain more powerfully than the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc). Today, that belief appears to be under strain.

The SUNDAY STORY

Education is not merely a qualification; it is a promise of mobility, dignity and possibility. That is why the recent suicides of students at IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi and the Indian Institute of Science are so disturbing.

The circumstances surrounding individual suicides remain subject to investigation and it would

be simplistic to reduce any suicide to a single cause. But when such tragedies recur in institutions of eminence, we must ask the question: what are our institutions capable of seeing and what do they fail to see?

The first mistake would be to assume that the answer lies simply in providing more counsellors — all these premier institutions have long-standing counselling and student-support systems.

The real question is whether a student who is struggling will actually use them. A student may fear being judged, worry about confidentiality or believe that seeking help is an admission of failure.

If the institution itself is experienced as an evaluator, disciplinarian or gatekeeper of the student's future, its support systems may not automatically feel safe.

This is why student welfare cannot be outsourced to the counselling centre. The institution itself must be part of the intervention. A professor who notices a withdrawal, a warden who recognises a change in behaviour, a mentor who creates the space to talk, a grievance officer who responds without prejudice — these are not peripheral actors in student welfare. They are part of the institution's safety net.

Nor should every institutional failure be converted into an individual medical problem.

► Student welfare, Page 4

WORLD'S NOT

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LIMITED PERIOD OFFER

Student welfare, Page 4

Hurdles to formalising scrapping

Vehicle scrapping

from Page 1

An end-of-life vehicle ecosystem needs two major components: Automated Testing Stations (ATSS) to identify vehicles that are no longer roadworthy, and Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities to dismantle and recycle them in an environmentally controlled manner. Data from NITI Aayog shows that both components are inadequate and unevenly distributed.

Experts also point out that, along with poor infrastructure, inadequate incentives for vehicle owners and a lack of public awareness are hindering the formalisation of vehicle scrapping and resulting in financial losses and environmental damage.

Ashish Verma, Convener, IISc Sustainable Transportation Lab, Bengaluru, says, "India's vehicle scrapping policy has not delivered the scale of fleet renewal that was expected. The problem is that scrapping an old vehicle alone does not guarantee that it will be replaced by a cleaner or more efficient vehicle. Unless the policy creates strong economic incentives for owners, ensures convenient access to authorised scrapping facilities and integrates scrapping with broader sustainable mobility policies, its impact on emissions and fleet modernisation will remain limited."

He says the Centre's current policy mostly encourages replacing a Bharat Stage (BS)-III vehicle with a BS-VI vehicle. "India, given the scarcity of raw material to manufacture new vehicles and the cost of producing a fossil-fuel replacement, should move towards electric mobility not just at the personal vehicle level, but also in public transport," he says.

Uneven infrastructure

According to NITI Aayog, India needs at least 235 RVSFs but currently has a shortfall of 106 facilities. Nearly 70% of the existing facilities are concentrated in four states. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number, with 93 RVSFs (operational and approved), while its estimated requirement is only 17. Karnataka requires 18 RVSFs, but currently has only three operational facilities. Tamil Nadu requires 23 but currently has only four. All north-eastern states, except Assam, had no approved RVSFs as of March 2026.

Officials in the Karnataka Transport Department informed DH that as of 2023, there were at least 14.36 lakh end-of-life vehicles in the state, of which only 16,904 had been scrapped as of September 20, 2026.

According to the NITI Aayog report, as of September 2025, only 156 ATSSs were operational across 16 states and union territories, against an estimated requirement of 441.

Karnataka, for instance, had three operational ATSSs against a requirement of 33. The report says the concentration of facilities in a few states has left large parts of the country without adequate access to automated fitness testing. This regional imbalance makes it difficult to identify unfit and end-of-life vehicles on the roads, undermining the shift from age-based scrapping to fitness-based assessment. NITI Aayog also flags instances of improperly issued fitness certificates at some facilities, further weakening the system. It recommends establishing at least one ATSS in every district and expanding credible and accessible testing infrastructure.

Speaking to DH, a senior Transport Department official requesting anonymity said, "By automating the inspection process, we could reduce the scope for human error and subjectivity. Every stage of the test will be governed by machines, ensuring uniformity and fairness." The ATSSs are capable of evaluating multiple parameters, including braking efficiency, emissions, alignment and suspension, without manual intervention. Vehicle owners can visit any of these centres to obtain their fitness certificate, which will be valid across the country.

The NITI Aayog report states that only 25% of end-of-life vehicles are being screened at ATSSs across India, while the remaining 75% are being certified

manually.

Greater awareness

Harshajith R, operational head of Bengaluru-based Suhas Automotive Private Limited, says that there is greater awareness in the North about the benefits of scrapping vehicles with authorised dealers. "The majority of northern states face severe air pollution problems. The Supreme Court and National Green Tribunal have identified old and unfit vehicles as major sources of pollution and have time and again issued orders mandating the removal of such vehicles from the roads," he says, adding that with some state governments offering better incentives, the RVSF services has become a major industry in the North.

His RVSF has a capacity to dismantle at least 1,000 vehicles a month. However, on average, it scraps only 350-400 vehicles. "Government vehicles are the most commonly scrapped at our unit," he says, adding that the unauthorised sector dominates the scrapping of private vehicles.

Many private vehicle owners prefer informal dismantlers as they not only offer higher immediate cash payments, but also require minimal documentation.

Suresh Achari, South Regional Head of Karnataka's first RVSF, Mahindra MSTC Recycling Pvt Ltd, says nearly 50% of the state's unfit-for-road vehicles are being dismantled through unscientific methods by the unorganised sector. "Informal dismantlers often have a clear economic advantage over formal RVSFs as they offer owners Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 more than us. Formal scrapping involves obtaining NOCs, clearing tax/penalty, and providing insurance and other documentation. However, the informal sector often does not follow this procedure," he says, adding that people do not realise that scrapping with RVSFs helps them avail several government benefits, including concessions in road tax, discounts from car manufacturers and, most importantly, protection from legal consequences.

Small dismantlers have traditionally purchased old vehicles, removed reusable components and sold metal and other materials through established scrap markets. Khalid Majid, an unauthorised scrap dealer in Hubballi, says he dismantles on average three to five vehicles a week. "Our contacts with mechanics and showrooms help us find customers. The only document I check for is the registration certificate (RC) book," he says.

While an authorised RVSF is required to undertake treatment, depollution, dismantling, segregation and scrapping in accordance with prescribed rules and send recovered materials to registered recyclers or refurbishers, Khalid says he only extracts items from a vehicle that get him additional income, while residues such as batteries, oil, tyres, plastics and other components are stored at his workshop.

As per experts, informal dismantling can leave hazardous fluids and waste untreated, increasing the risk of soil and water pollution, fires and exposure to toxic substances. It can also take recyclable materials out of the formal recycling chain.

NITI Aayog in its paper has identified the weak financial viability of RVSFs, procedural bottlenecks, inadequate infrastructure and low consumer awareness as some of the key barriers to formalisation.

Experts also highlight that the scrapping policy is falling short on its other objectives, especially in terms of environmental protection and metal recovery.

Scrapping or driving sales?

Researcher Gaurav Gupta of the Centre for Energy Regulation, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, in his paper, *Rethinking India's vehicle scrapping policy: A lifecycle energy and policy effectiveness perspective*, argues that India's vehicle-scrapping policy could fall short of its environmental objectives if scrapping old vehicles becomes primarily a mechanism for driving sales of new ones.

"While replacing an ageing vehicle does reduce tailpipe emissions, particularly when the new vehicle is significantly cleaner, manufacturing a replacement also consumes energy, raw materials and generates substantial

The gaps in scrappage system

India's vehicle fleet is growing rapidly, with around 39 crore vehicles on the road as of 2023 and more than two crore vehicles added every year

India had around one crore End-of-Life Vehicles (ELVs) in 2020, a figure projected to rise to nearly five crore by 2030

The growing number of ELVs poses risks to road safety and the environment — both on the road and during scrapping

Safe, sustainable scrapping remains a challenge amid limited formal facilities, procedural hurdles and low public awareness

WHAT ARE END-OF-LIFE VEHICLES?
Vehicles declared unfit for road use, those with cancelled registrations and those voluntarily declared as waste by their owners

HOW VEHICLE SCRAPPING WORKS



Disposal of a vehicle begins with owners identifying a lawful disposal option, usually through online searches, referrals or local repair shops

Vehicle owners weigh formal and informal scrapping options based on financial returns and convenience

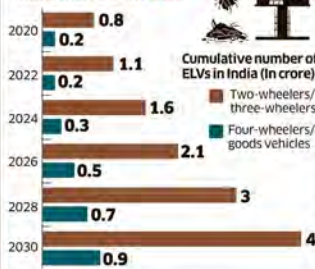
Under the Government's Voluntary Vehicle Fleet Modernisation Programme (VVMP), launched in 2021, old and unfit vehicles can be voluntarily scrapped through the formal system, with incentives available to owners

Vehicles due for mandatory fitness testing are assessed at Automated Testing Stations; those found unfit are eligible for scrapping

Vehicles opting for the formal scrapping route are sent to a Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facility (RVSF) for environmentally safe dismantling and disposal

Many owners also opt for informal scrappers, despite not receiving government incentives and Certificate of Deposit, because they offer higher prices and faster service

Sharp increase in ELVs



The economic potential
Scrapping vehicles made between 2005 and 2023 could recover 98 million tonnes of steel and save 4.3 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emissions

Certificate of Deposit: Proof of scrapping

Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facility issues a Certificate of Deposit (CoD) after a vehicle is surrendered for scrapping as a proof of scrapping. It enables owners to avail incentives and benefits for purchase of new vehicle

4.3 lakh

Vehicles scrapped at Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities in India from 2021 to Jan 2026

Risks of unauthorised vehicle scrapping

- Release of hazardous fluids
- Uncontrolled disposal of batteries, heavy metal contamination
- Improper dismantling of airbags and refrigerants, leading to emission of toxic gases
- Fire and explosion risks due to crude processing or storage of fuel residues
- Unsafe working conditions for labourers; exposure to toxic substances
- Illegal dumping of automobile shredder residue, including plastics, foams and glass into landfills

Challenges hindering scrapping ecosystem

- Limited availability of Automated Testing Stations (ATSS)
- Regional imbalance in existing ATSS infrastructure
- Non-existent and underutilised Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities
- Complex procedural requirements for deregistration
- Widespread presence of informal scrapping sector
- Low public awareness and misinformation about the process

Short of requirement

Year	Number of Automated Testing Stations (ATSS) set up	Number of Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities (RVSF)
2023	7	15
2024	45	37
2025	71	44
2026*	177	129

*ATSS as of March 2026 and RVSF as of Jan 2026

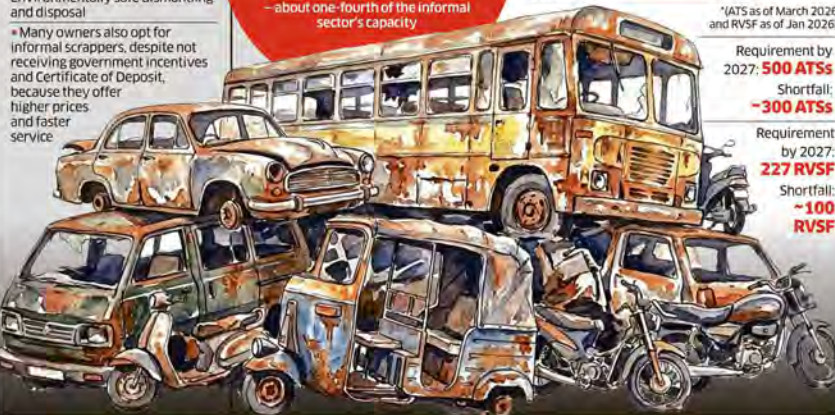
Requirement by 2027: 500 ATSS

Shortfall: ~300 ATSS

Requirement by 2027: 227 RVSF

Shortfall: ~100 RVSF

Formal scrapping remains far below informal capacity
2-3 lakh ELVs/year
Estimated annual scrapping capacity of the informal sector
72,000 ELVs
Scrapped by RVSFs in FY 2024-25 — about one-fourth of the informal sector's capacity



GAPS BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTOR

60-65% price gap: A significant difference in payouts continues to exist between informal and formal ELV disposal channels

Why informal pays more: Lower investment and operating costs, GST evasion, non-compliance with environmental standards and resale of spare parts contribute to the pricing advantage

OEM discounts: Original equipment manufacturers offer discounts on new vehicles against proof of ELV scrapping at an RVSF. However, dealerships often club multiple discounts, making the CoD-linked benefit unclear

Registry gap: Many informally scrapped ELVs remain officially registered, creating discrepancies in vehicle records. But the informal sector remains attractive for its relatively 'simple' and hassle-free process

Varying concessions: Differences in state-level CoD-linked incentives add complexity to formal scrapping

Safety and compliance: RVSFs follow prescribed dismantling and disposal procedures, while informal units often operate outside environmental and safety standards

Sources: NITI Aayog report, Policy Edge, Lok Sabha, PIB, media reports

COMPILED BY DIVYASHRI MUDAKAVI DH GRAPHIC: GURU PRASATH R

CO₂ emissions," he says.

He says scrapping should not be the default response to an old vehicle. Instead, India could first determine whether the vehicle can be made cleaner and safer through repairs or retrofitting.

His paper proposes technologies such as Diesel Particulate Filters, CNG conversion and hybrid retrofit kits to reduce emissions while extending the life of existing vehicles.

"Retrofitting can avoid the substantial energy and material emissions associated with manufacturing replacement vehicles, particularly for low-use vehicles for which the environmental payback from a new vehicle can take decades. The approach could also offer owners a cheaper compliance option and create skilled jobs in automobile repair workshops," says Gaurav.

He says that retrofitting cannot address structural weaknesses or outdated safety features. They therefore recommend combining it with stringent emissions, fitness and safety testing, along with subsidies, financing, certification standards and trained retrofit workshops. Their proposed model shifts the focus from vehicle age to actual emissions, roadworthiness and safety.

Raw material recovery

Researchers also argue that India may not recover as much of the raw material as expected from the scrapping of aged vehicles.

The Environment Protection (End-of-Life Vehicles) Rules, 2025, which came into force on April 1, 2025, introduced an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework for end-of-life vehicles. The

rules place obligations on vehicle producers to meet specified vehicle-scrapping targets. Under the rules, RVSFs generate EPR certificates based on the quantity of steel recovered from end-of-life vehicles. Vehicle producers can purchase these certificates to meet their EPR obligations.

However, a July 2026 working paper by Moorthy Nair and Abhishek, researchers at International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), states that the existing EPR system may not be sufficient to manage India's growing volume of vehicle scrap.

By 2030-31, India's EPR framework for end-of-life vehicles requires manufacturers to recover at least 18% of the steel used in 15-year-old vehicles. However, the ICCT study estimates that the current EPR trajectory would have enabled recovery of only 12%-14% of steel contained in vehicles

Karnataka looks to retrofit public transport with cleaner technology

Karnataka is taking a multi-pronged approach to remove unfit vehicles from the roads, make public transport cleaner and more fuel-efficient, and strengthen the vehicle-scrapping ecosystem, says Transport Department Secretary Deepa Cholan in a conversation with DH's Pavan Kumar H. Excerpts:

How is Karnataka addressing its growing number of ageing vehicles?

Karnataka currently has three operational RVSFs and ATSS. The government has permitted two more RVSFs in Hubballi and Koppal. NITI Aayog has suggested that every district in the state should have at least one ATSS, which we expect to achieve soon.

Setting up more RVSFs alone will not solve the problem. We also need to create awareness among the public about the importance of scrapping vehicles at authorised centres. At present, only government vehicles that have completed 15 years of service are mandatorily scrapped. The policy does not mandate private vehicles that are more than 15 years old to be scrapped if they are in good condition. Owners can continue to use them by obtaining fitness certificates.

Lack of adequate incentives is said to be one of the reasons for the poor rate of vehicle scrapping... Delhi, given its high pollution levels and ageing fleet, is the only state that has come up with an EV policy with incentives for vehicle owners shifting to EVs. Karnataka will look into these measures. Technology in the automobile industry is changing rapidly. From CNG, we are now moving towards EVs, and hydrogen-powered vehicles could follow. As Karnataka is at the forefront of upgrading its public transport sector, it will closely monitor these innovations and developments.

Is the state looking at retrofitting its public transport fleet?

Yes. KSRTC is exploring the conversion of diesel-operated vehicles to CNG and battery-powered systems, and has submitted a proposal in this regard. Following pilot trials, the corporation will consider adopting the technology across its fleet to extend the service life of its vehicles.

sold domestically between 2006 and 2025. "This indicates that the system is not yet capturing India's full scrap potential."

The paper also highlights that currently around 25% of India's 33.4 million tonnes of ferrous scrap consumption is imported, while automobile scrapping contributes only around 7% of domestic scrap.

Until authorised facilities become more accessible and the economics of formal scrapping work for vehicle owners, India's push to take old vehicles off the road may struggle to deliver the expected results.

Have your say

To express your opinion, e-mail us at: insight@deccanherald.co.in

Student welfare, from Page 1

Building institutions that students can trust and turn to

Mental-health professionals are indispensable, but distress can also be produced or intensified by the way an institution teaches, assesses, disciplines and relates to its students.

The Supreme Court's National Task Force on Mental Health of Students and Prevention of Suicides in Higher Education Institutes has drawn attention to the institutional dimensions of student distress.

Assessment deserves particular attention. In the age of artificial intelligence (AI), universities have to rethink what they reward. If assessment remains a relentless sequence of high-stakes examinations in which one poor performance can feel catastrophic, we may inadvertently magnify the psychological consequences of failure. There are alternatives: open-book and AI-enabled examinations, oral examinations, projects, simulations and iterative assessment. These do not lower standards.

Instead, they can make assessment more authentic while giving students opportunities to recover. Failure should be feedback, not finality.

Complaint mechanism

Grievance redress is equally important. Institutions may have formal mechanisms for complaints involving harassment, discrimination, academic disputes or other concerns. But the existence of a mechanism is not the same as having trust in that mechanism. Students need to believe that speaking up will not expose them to retaliation, stigma or further disadvantage. The task, therefore, is not simply to process complaints but to build confidence that the institution will listen and act fairly.

And when a tragedy occurs, institutions need something that is often in short supply: humility. The immediate responsibility is to establish facts, communicate with compassion and resist the temptation to

construct a narrative before the facts are known. An institution should be able to say: This went wrong. Here is what we know. Here is what we do not know. Here is what will change.

Every student suicide should also trigger a structured institutional review — not to assign blame, but to learn. Were concerns raised? Were there unresolved grievances? Were there barriers to seeking help? Did a disciplinary or academic process contribute to the student's sense of isolation? What happened after the previous death? That last question is perhaps the most important. Inquiry without institutional learning becomes a ritual. The review should therefore end not merely with observations but with an action plan: what will change, who is responsible, and how and when the governing body will review progress. An institution that mourns but does not learn risks repeating the conditions that may have contributed to the tragedy.

Student welfare

Student welfare should also be measured differently. Counting counselling sessions tells us little on its own. Institutions should know how quickly students can access help, whether students seek support before reaching crisis, whether follow-up actually happens, whether grievances are resolved within reasonable time and whether students trust faculty and administrators enough to approach them. The IISc Students' Council survey of 1,035 respondents, following the two suicides in August, offers an important reminder. Eighty-eight per cent wanted student representation on the Wellness Committee, while half identified academic workload as a contributor to mental distress. The message is larger than a demand for more counsellors. Students are asking for a voice in shaping the systems meant to support them.

That matters because a university is a

human community. A community must do more than just protect students from crisis. It must create conditions in which young people can struggle without feeling that struggle is a verdict on their self-worth.

That means programmes that challenge without crushing; assessments that allow students to recover from setbacks; faculty authority without humiliation; hostels where students experience belonging rather than mere residence; grievance systems that students trust; and a culture in which asking for help is seen as an act of maturity rather than weakness.

There is also a larger question here, one that extends beyond IITs and IISc. Today young people are entering a world in which technology is transforming professions and artificial intelligence is beginning to unsettle even the most secure assumptions about work. The responsibility of the university, therefore, is not simply to

prepare students to compete. It is to prepare them to navigate uncertainty without losing their sense of agency, dignity and possibility.

India's premier institutions have demonstrated that they can build centres of intellectual excellence, their next challenge is equally important: to build institutions that are humanly dependable — institutions that notice, listen, respond and learn. The finest university is not one where nobody struggles. It is one that ensures that struggle does not have to become loneliness; where failure does not become finality; and where the promise that effort can open a future remains credible even when a student stumbles.

That is what student welfare is about. Not merely preventing tragedy, but nurturing and preserving hope.

(Gurucharan Gollerkeri is Director, School of Social Sciences, Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences, Bengaluru)