

History In Making: CEC



Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Wednesday expressed immense satisfaction with the voter turnout in the ongoing Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections, calling it a historic moment for the J&K.

Addressing the press at Delhi, Kumar said that the enthusiasm with which voters were participating across the valley and Jammu marks a strong statement of support for democracy.

"We are very happy that voting is taking place across the entire valley and Jammu with extreme fervor and enthusiasm," Kumar said. The sight of long lines of voters in different parts of the region, including Srinagar, is a powerful visual of democratic participation.

Kumar said that the significance of the turnout in areas where calls for boycott had previously been common. "Even in areas where there used to be calls for disruption, there are people around in long queues since morning," he said.

He described how voters, standing peacefully in queues under the trees of Chenar and in high mountain | [More on P6](#)

Phase-II: J&K Records Over 56% Turnout, Srinagar Lowest



KO Photo | Abid Bhat

Observer News Service

Srinagar: More than 56 per cent voters on Wednesday exercised their franchise in the second phase of polling for 26 seats in Jammu and Kashmir assembly polls.

The polling passed off peacefully, officials said. Addressing a press

conference here, J&K Chief Electoral Officer P K Pole said the second phase recorded a turnout of 56.05 per cent.

Pole said the percentage was tentative as polling was going on at some places like Hazratbal and Reasi.

He said the polling was peaceful and by and large smooth. | [More on P6](#)



KASHMIR REGION:

- Central Shalteng: 29.09%
- Chanapora: 26.95%
- Eidgah: 34.65%
- Habba Kadal: 18.80%
- Hazratbal: 30.66%
- Khanyar: 24.00%
- Lal Chowk: 30.44%
- Zadibal: 28.36%
- Beerwah: 62.50%
- Chadoora: 54.16%
- Charar-e-Sharief: 66%
- Khansahib: 67.70%
- Ganderbal: 53.44%
- Kangan (ST): 67.60%

JAMMU REGION:

- Gulabgarh (ST): 72.19%
- Reasi: 69.09%
- Mata Vaishno Devi: 80%
- Mendhar: 69.67%
- Poonch Haveli: 72.71%
- Surankote: 72.18%
- Budhal: 66.95%
- Kalakote-Sunderbani: 66.37%
- Nowshera: 69%
- Rajouri (ST): 70.56%
- Thanamandi: 68.44%

20 Of 26 Segments Record Lower Participation Than 2014

Press Trust Of India

Srinagar: As many as 20 of the 26 assembly segments that went to polls on Wednesday in the second phase of voting in Jammu and Kashmir have registered lower voter turnout than that in the 2014 assembly elections.

According to the data of the Election Commission of India, the overall voting percentage in the 2014 polls was above 60 per cent for the assembly segments in the six districts that went to polls on Wednesday.

J&K Chief Electoral Officer P K Pole, while giving the data for Wednesday's polling, said an estimated 56.05 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the six districts.

Pole said the data was tentative and can go up

Budgam:
2014: 66.32% | 2024: 51.13%

Charar-e-Sharief:
2014: 82.44% | 2024: 67.44%

Budhal:
2014: 82.50% | 2024: 68.58%

Habbakadal:
2014: 21.31% | 2024: 18.39%

slightly as polling was going on at some polling stations even at 6.45 pm.

There were 25 assembly segments in Srinagar, Ganderbal, Budgam, Reasi, Rajouri and Poonch districts in the 2014 polls. However, the number increased by one seat to 26 in these six districts following the delimitation exercise undertaken in 2022.

While five assembly segments in Srinagar district recorded a higher turnout than | [More on P6](#)

LG Congratulates Voters, Election Officials



Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has extended hearty congratulations to the voters of the second phase of Assembly Election for turning out in large numbers to exercise their franchise. In a social media post, the Lieutenant Governor applauded the spirit of the people to strengthen the democratic values and for upholding the rich democratic traditions.

"I would like to congratulate voters of Reasi, Poonch, Rajouri, Ganderbal, Budgam and Srinagar for turning out in large numbers to exercise their franchise. I applaud the spirit of the people to strengthen the democratic values and to uphold our rich democratic traditions."

"Record voter turnout is a shining example of vibrant and progressive democracy. I also appreciate the remarkable contribution of the election officials, JKP, and security forces for smooth, free, fair and peaceful polling in 26 Assembly | [More on P6](#)

'Old Faces Fail To Impress': Srinagar Sees Low Turnout

Syed Mohammad Burhan

As the second phase of voting for Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections in 26 Assembly Constituencies concluded on Wednesday, the voter

| [More on P6](#)



KO Photo | Abid Bhat

Foreign Diplomats Capture Poll Mood In Kashmir

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A 15-member delegation of foreign diplomats took everybody by surprise at a polling station at Central Kashmir's Budgam on Wednesday. The diplomats stated that their purpose is to "observe polling and

to see how democracy is working on ground."

The high-level delegation comprises senior diplomats from the USA, Mexico, Spain, South Africa, Norway, South Korea, Panama, Singapore, Algeria, Philippines, Somalia, Guyana, Nigeria, Tanzania and

Rwanda.

The members of the delegation said that they have come to Kashmir on the invitation of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Government of India as part of the outreach program. The delegation took a stroll at a Budgam | [More on P6](#)

BALLOT BREAKDOWN: WHAT DROVE VOTERS TO THE POLLS?

First-time Voters Seek Better Education Opportunities

Majid Nabi

Srinagar: In several parts of the Srinagar city, excited first-time voters cast their ballots in the hopes that the next administration will support underprivileged students with welfare programs and scholarships.

Many young boys and girls said that they voted for "a dramatic finale to the decade-long suffocation that people in Kashmir endured without an elected government."

"We genuinely don't support or oppose any political parties; all political parties, whether national or local, strive for development, peace, and prosperity. We wish to bridge the gap created by Kashmir's | [More on P6](#)

'Electricity Bills, Drug Crisis' Women Voters Voice Their Concerns

Dabirah Hassan

Srinagar: Amidst the buzz of elections in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, the air was thick with voices eager for change. As women lined up at polling stations, they pressed concerns about 'skyrocketing' electricity bills and the escalating drug crisis in Kashmir.

An elderly woman, waiting for her turn to vote at a polling station in the heart of Srinagar city on Wednesday told a visiting foreign diplomat that she is concerned about the erratic electricity supply and the rising bill amounts.

"The electricity supply has been destroyed and tariff meters have been installed. Now they say water consumption will also be metered," the

woman in her late 60s told the US Deputy Chief of Mission in Delhi, Jorgan K Andrews.

While the woman refused to identify herself, she said she spoke her heart out hoping that the diplomat's intervention will bring some relief to poor people from the rising electricity bill amounts.

Unaware that foreign diplomats were invited here only to witness the Assembly poll process, the woman said she is hopeful that the "Angrez" will take up the matter with the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mehmooda, a septuagenarian from the old city's Kawdara, said the new administration, which consists of local representatives, will pull the valley out of its political quagmire. | [More on P6](#)

'New Govt Will End Bureaucratic Hegemony'

Majid Nabi

Srinagar: Despite recording a comparatively low turnout than the other five other districts in the second phase of assembly elections on Wednesday, voters in Srinagar's downtown cast ballots in favor of 'statehood' and the overall development of the city.

People in the downtown believe that maiden assembly elections following the abrogation of Article 370 would put an end to 'bureaucratic hegemony' and open the doors for the city to develop. Nonetheless, many electors chose not to participate in the electoral process this time around, citing the annulment of the special constitutional status of J&K.

Notably, compared to the Lok Sabha | [More on P6](#)

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In our latest podcast, we present Irshad Mushtaq, founder of MI Securities. In addition, he is a financial expert who has helped countless individuals and businesses navigate complex financial landscapes. In this episode, we discussed different investment strategies, personal finance tips, and wealth building. The full video will be released soon on our YouTube channel. Subscribe Kashmir Observer channel for the latest updates.

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Renewed Interest In Polls

India invited foreign diplomats to Jammu and Kashmir to witness elections, in a move that reflects New Delhi's growing confidence about the prevailing peace and electoral process in the Valley. Nearly 20 diplomats of select embassies, including of the US, France, Germany, Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia arrived in the Valley to get a first hand experience of the exercise. The invite is designed to send across a message to the world that Kashmir has come a long way in the last over five years. The peaceful nature of the ongoing Assembly elections so far and earlier that of the parliamentary polls attests to this fact. For once, the participation in the poll process harks back to the eighties. Entry of more political parties and independent candidates has made the competition fierce, which, in turn, has got people more involved in the process. Security-wise also, the situation has transformed to a large extent. This has happened incrementally over the period with violence declining sharply, reaching its lowest last year.

Although militancy has revived this year, more so over the past four months, it is confined to hilly areas of Jammu and concentrated in three districts of Poonch, Rajouri and Doda. This poses little threat to plains where the voting will be held. This is why the recent parliament election was one of the most peaceful ever held in the region over the past more than three decades.

The Centre, however, doesn't want to take any chances: It has beefed up the security across Kashmir to ensure peaceful and incident-free elections. Nearly 300 paramilitary companies of CRPF, BSF, SSB and ITBP have been deployed in the valley to ensure that peace prevails.

Both the absence of militancy on the ground and the lack of the boycott call is likely to profoundly impact the election and consequently the outcome. It may or may not lead to an increase in voter turnout. The reason is that the poll boycott has become a default response among a significant section of people, particularly in urban areas. It is an over three decade old habit which may not go away easily.

One thing, however, is sure. For the first time since the advent of militancy in 1989, the people eagerly look forward to participating in the election. However, this approach to the exercise seems driven more by calculated pragmatism than genuine enthusiasm for the restoration of democracy. After six years of a sterile bureaucratic rule, people want an administration that shows some feeling and is accountable for its actions.



Apple Industry Suffers Amidst Election Noise

Showkat Ali

As the apple season unfolds in Kashmir, the atmosphere should be one of optimism and celebration for local growers and traders. However, this year, the early arrival of foreign apples from Afghanistan and Iran has cast a long shadow over the industry. With election campaigns dominating the news cycle, it is vital to highlight the urgent challenges facing our farmers, especially in the apple sector, which is a lifeline for many families in the region.

The situation is particularly concerning as this year, Iranian apples have entered the market weeks earlier than in previous years. This early influx is poised to disrupt local apple prices significantly, which poses a serious threat to Kashmiri growers who rely on their harvest for their livelihoods. The unique quality of Kashmiri apples, celebrated for their taste and texture, is at risk of being overshadowed by cheaper foreign alternatives.

Farmers in south Kashmir are already disheartened by the effects of a recent devastating hailstorm, which resulted in the loss of approximately 60% of their crops. This calamity has left many growers struggling to make ends meet, as they grapple with both the financial and emotional fallout from their losses. With the arrival of foreign apples exacerbating an already difficult situation, many local farmers fear that their hard work will go unrewarded.

The psychological toll of this competition cannot be underestimated. Farmers pour their lives into cultivating apples, nurturing their orchards with dedication and care. Yet, as prices plummet due to the availability

of imported produce, many find themselves unable to recover the costs of production. The impending financial strain is particularly disheartening for those who have invested in their orchards, hoping for a bountiful harvest that could provide stability for their families.

This year's apple yield in Kashmir is notably low, further compounding the challenges faced by local growers. With fewer apples available, the competition with imported varieties could lead to even lower prices, leaving farmers with little choice but to sell at a loss. The situation raises concerns not just about individual farmers but about the broader economic stability of the region, which depends heavily on the success of its apple industry.

To address this crisis, immediate government action is essential. We strongly urge the government to impose a 100% import duty on foreign apples. Such a measure would serve as a protective barrier, allowing local apples to compete more fairly against their foreign counterparts. By leveling the playing field, the government can help stabilize prices and restore hope among farmers who are struggling to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

In addition to implementing protective tariffs, the government must also develop pro-farmer policies that provide support to those affected by climatic challenges. This could include establishing insurance schemes that compensate farmers for crop losses due to severe weather, ensuring they have a safety net in place during difficult times. Furthermore, investing in agricultural research and technology can

help local farmers adopt more resilient practices, ultimately improving yields and quality.

Consumer awareness is another crucial element in this equation. Local communities must recognize the importance of supporting Kashmiri apples, not only for their superior quality but also for the economic well-being of the region. Campaigns aimed at promoting local produce can foster a sense of pride among consumers and encourage them to choose Kashmiri apples over imported varieties.

The apple industry in Kashmir is more than just an economic engine; it is a vital part of the region's cultural heritage and identity. As we navigate these challenging times, it is imperative that we stand in solidarity with our farmers, advocating for policies that prioritize their needs and protect their livelihoods.

In conclusion, the early arrival of foreign apples presents a significant challenge to Kashmir's apple industry. The government must take swift action to impose tariffs and develop supportive policies to safeguard local growers. By doing so, we can help ensure that Kashmir's rich tradition of apple cultivation endures, providing not just economic stability but also preserving the cultural legacy that defines this beautiful region. The time to act is now, for the future of our farmers—and the apple industry—is at stake.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

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Did you know ?

Understanding the Stock Market: A Guide for Beginners

Irshad Mushtaq

The stock market is often misunderstood. Many believe that simply sitting in front of a computer screen and making rapid decisions will lead to wealth. Historically, this approach has caused significant financial losses for numerous people.

The Reality of Stock Trading

Day trading or intraday trading, where you buy and sell stocks within a single trading day, is extremely risky and not typically profitable for most individuals, especially beginners. Instead of making quick money, most people end up regretting their losses when they attempt these methods without sufficient experience.

Investing vs. Trading

The stock market should be viewed as a place where your money works for you over time. True investment is about putting money into stocks, Etf's, shares, or mutual funds and letting it grow over the years. This approach requires patience and the ability to tolerate market volatility.

Starting with Mutual Funds

For beginners, the recommended strategy is to begin with Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) in mutual funds. This allows you to understand the market gradually and build an effective investment strategy. Jumping directly into intraday trading without adequate knowledge and experience is a recipe for disaster.

The Importance of a Diversified Portfolio

A good investment strategy includes a diversified portfolio comprising high-quality stocks, mutual funds, and other financial instruments. This helps spread risk and increases the potential for stable returns.

Developing the Right Mindset

It is crucial to adopt an investment mindset rather than a trading mindset. Investing is about creating long-term wealth, while trading is often seen as a path to quick gains, which is rarely sustainable.

The Competitive Nature of Trading

The stock market is highly competitive. Success in trading requires extensive knowledge, experience, effective money management, and an understanding of technical analysis. These tools are not typically available to beginners.

The Bottom Line

To succeed in the stock market, focus on long-term investments rather than getting caught up in the allure of quick profits through trading. Building wealth through the stock market is possible, but it requires patience, a solid strategy, and the right mindset. For beginners, starting with SIPs in mutual funds is a prudent choice that facilitates learning and gradual growth.

Learn from the insights of @Irshad Mushtaq, Writer, Investor, Entrepreneur & Founder of MI Securities! Connect for valuable financial advice at misecurities@bp.sharekhan.com



This year's apple yield in Kashmir is notably low, further compounding the challenges faced by local growers. With fewer apples available, the competition with imported varieties could lead to even lower prices, leaving farmers with little choice but to sell at a loss



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For women's safety

When we flip through the pages of a newspaper, we come across many incidents of sexual assaults, molestation, sexual harassments, rapes, trafficking, ill treatment of women, violence against women in remote areas, etc. The crime comes

amid heightened concerns about sexual violence in India. It seems that criminals are no longer afraid of the law. It is also evident that many cities in India can no longer claim to be safe for the growing number of working women. We must have remedial or curative measures such as fast track

courts especially dedicated to deal only with these offenses and crimes. These can be made responsible to clear the cases on a day to day basis with fair trial as its core principle. The law should be strong enough so that nobody could ever imagine doing such things. It is time the govern-

ment undertakes drastic measures to put an end to crime against women. I would like to quote that a country which does not respect women cannot become a developed country.

Jubel D'Cruz

How Do Men Balance Sacrifice and Responsibility Today?

Ikkz Ikkbal

In the intricate mosaic of life, men assume roles that demand silent sacrifices and unwavering responsibilities. As a responsible husband, a caring father, a devoted son, and a watchful brother, the expectations are boundless, and excuses find no refuge. The paradox lies in the quiet strength men exude when laying down their lives, even in seemingly insignificant ways, for the well-being of their families.

Beyond the stoic exterior lies a rich emotional landscape that men traverse daily. Sacrifices extend beyond the tangible, often manifesting as emotional investments. From the quiet support during a spouse's hardships to the profound joy found in a child's achievements, the art of sacrifice involves navigating these nuanced terrains.

Real-life stories underscore the emotional tapestry of sacrifice, illuminating the resilience required to weather storms and celebrate victories. By acknowledging and embracing the emotional dimensions of sacrifice, men can forge deeper connections within their families.

The weight of responsibility borne by fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons is profound. It is not merely about vocalizing love but demonstrating it through actions that affirm the significance of family. In this silent journey, men challenge themselves to transcend the ordinary and embrace sacrifice as a language of love.

The burden of responsibilities can take a toll on a man's mental well-being. Juggling the demands of work, family, and personal aspirations necessitates a delicate balance. Exploring strategies for stress management, time allocation, and seeking mental health support becomes imperative in maintaining equilibrium at the crossroads of manliness.

Whether it's patiently correcting a child's mistakes or making significant life choices, sacrifice becomes the compass guid-



ing the decisions of a man. The scratched car becomes a metaphor for the trials of parenthood, a symbol of patience and love amid the chaos of everyday life.

The sacrifices men make are not flashy, but they create a symphony of selflessness that resonates through the lives of those they hold dear. It's the quiet support offered to a spouse during challenging times, the tireless effort put into providing for the family, and the sacrifices made to ensure the well-being of children and siblings.

As fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, the challenge is not just to be present but to be actively engaged in the lives of loved ones. The narrative of sacrifice should be woven into the fabric of manhood, transforming responsibilities into cherished

experiences.

As societal expectations evolve, so do traditional gender roles. A comprehensive exploration of how men navigate these changes is crucial. Discussing the evolving definitions of masculinity and how men can adapt to meet the expectations of modern family dynamics can offer insights into the contemporary challenges faced at the crossroads.

In the grand orchestration of life, being a dad stands as a significant experience, a role defined by sacrifice, resilience, and unyielding love. It's the untold stories of men who, despite the odds, rise to the occasion, laying down their lives in small yet profound ways for the harmony of their families. In this symphony of sacrifice, the silent sacrifices

of men become the notes that compose a beautiful melody, echoing through generations, reminding us that being a man is not just about strength but the willingness to sacrifice for the ones we hold dear.

In the tapestry of sacrifices and responsibilities, let it be known that the true essence of manhood lies not in the struggles themselves but in the inspiration drawn from them. Just as a diamond emerges from the crucible of pressure, the sacrifices made by men in fulfilling their roles as fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons illuminate the path towards a profound and meaningful life.

In the quiet moments of sacrifice, there lies a unique opportunity for self-discovery and personal growth. Embracing responsibilities becomes a trans-

In the quiet moments of sacrifice, there lies a unique opportunity for self-discovery and personal growth. Embracing responsibilities becomes a transformative journey, forging resilience and character that echo far beyond the confines of daily routines

formative journey, forging resilience and character that echo far beyond the confines of daily routines. The sacrifices made by men are not mere obligations; they are stepping stones towards becoming the architects of their destinies and the heroes of their own narratives.

As the sun sets on a day filled with silent sacrifices, let the enduring spirit of manhood inspire others. May it serve as a guiding light for those navigating their own paths, reminding them that true strength lies not just in the ability to endure but in the courage to sacrifice for the greater good. In the symphony of life, let every sacrifice be a note that contributes to a melody of love, resilience, and enduring inspiration—a legacy that transcends time and leaves an indelible mark on the hearts of those who follow.

The journey of manliness at the crossroads encompasses a spectrum of experiences, from silent sacrifices to vocalized responsibilities. By embracing the emotional nuances, addressing mental well-being, adapting to evolving gender roles, and fostering open communication, men can navigate these roles with grace, leaving behind a legacy of true manliness defined by love, sacrifice, and responsibility.

In roles diverse, with love embraced,

No excuses found, but care embraced.

Responsibility, a noble song,

Manliness in actions strong.

Husband, father, son, and brother,

In love's symphony, they discover.

No excuses voiced, just bonds so dear,

Family's strength, crystal clear.

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OPEN AI's Strawberry Programme

Can it deceive humans?

Shweta Singh

OpenAI, the company that made ChatGPT, has launched a new artificial intelligence (AI) system called Strawberry. It is designed not just to provide quick responses to questions, like ChatGPT, but to think or "reason".

This raises several major concerns. If Strawberry really is capable of some form of reasoning, could this AI system cheat and deceive humans?

OpenAI can program the AI in ways that mitigate its ability to manipulate humans. But the company's own evaluations rate it as a "medium risk" for its ability to assist experts in the "operational planning of reproducing a known biological threat" – in other words, a biological weapon. It was also rated as a medium risk for its ability to persuade humans to change their thinking.

It remains to be seen how such a system might be used by those with bad intentions, such as con artists or hackers. Nevertheless, OpenAI's evaluation states that medium-risk systems can be released for wider use – a position I believe is misguided.

Strawberry is not one AI "model", or program, but several – known collectively as o1. These models are intended to answer complex questions and solve intricate maths problems. They are also capable of writing computer code – to help you make your own website or app, for example.

An apparent ability to reason might come as a surprise to some, since this is generally considered a precursor to judgment and decision making – something that has often seemed a distant goal for AI. So, on the surface at least, it would seem to move artificial intelligence a step closer to human-like intelligence.

When things look too good to be



true, there's often a catch. Well, this set of new AI models is designed to maximise their goals. What does this mean in practice? To achieve its desired objective, the path or the strategy chosen by AI may not always necessarily be fair, or align with human values.

True intentions

For example, if you were to play chess against Strawberry, in theory, could its reasoning allow it to hack the scoring system rather than fig-

ure out the best strategies for winning the game?

The AI might also be able to lie to humans about its true intentions and capabilities, which would pose a serious safety concern if it were to be deployed widely. For example, if the AI knew it was infected with malware, could it "choose" to conceal this fact in the knowledge that a human operator might opt to disable the whole system if they knew?

These would be classic examples of unethical AI behaviour, where

cheating or deceiving is acceptable if it leads to a desired goal. It would also be quicker for the AI, as it wouldn't have to waste any time figuring out the next best move. It may not necessarily be morally correct, however.

This leads to a rather interesting yet worrying discussion. What level of reasoning is Strawberry capable of and what could its unintended consequences be? A powerful AI system that's capable of cheating humans could pose serious ethical,

legal and financial risks to us.

Such risks become grave in critical situations, such as designing weapons of mass destruction. OpenAI rates its own Strawberry models as "medium risk" for their potential to assist scientists in developing chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons.

OpenAI says: "Our evaluations found that o1-preview and o1-mini can help experts with the operational planning of reproducing a known biological threat." But it goes on to

say that experts already have significant expertise in these areas, so the risk would be limited in practice. It adds: "The models do not enable non-experts to create biological threats, because creating such a threat requires hands-on laboratory skills that the models cannot replace."

Powers of persuasion

OpenAI's evaluation of Strawberry also investigated the risk that it could persuade humans to change their beliefs. The new o1 models were found to be more persuasive and more manipulative than ChatGPT.

OpenAI also tested a mitigation system that was able to reduce the manipulative capabilities of the AI system. Overall, Strawberry was labelled a medium risk for "persuasion" in Open AI's tests.

Strawberry was rated low risk for its ability to operate autonomously and on cybersecurity.

Open AI's policy states that "medium risk" models can be released for wide use. In my view, this underestimates the threat. The deployment of such models could be catastrophic, especially if bad actors manipulate the technology for their own pursuits.

This calls for strong checks and balances that will only be possible through AI regulation and legal frameworks, such as penalising incorrect risk assessments and the misuse of AI.

The UK government stressed the need for "safety, security and robustness" in their 2023 AI white paper, but that's not nearly enough. There is an urgent need to prioritise human safety and devise rigid scrutiny protocols for AI models such as Strawberry.

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