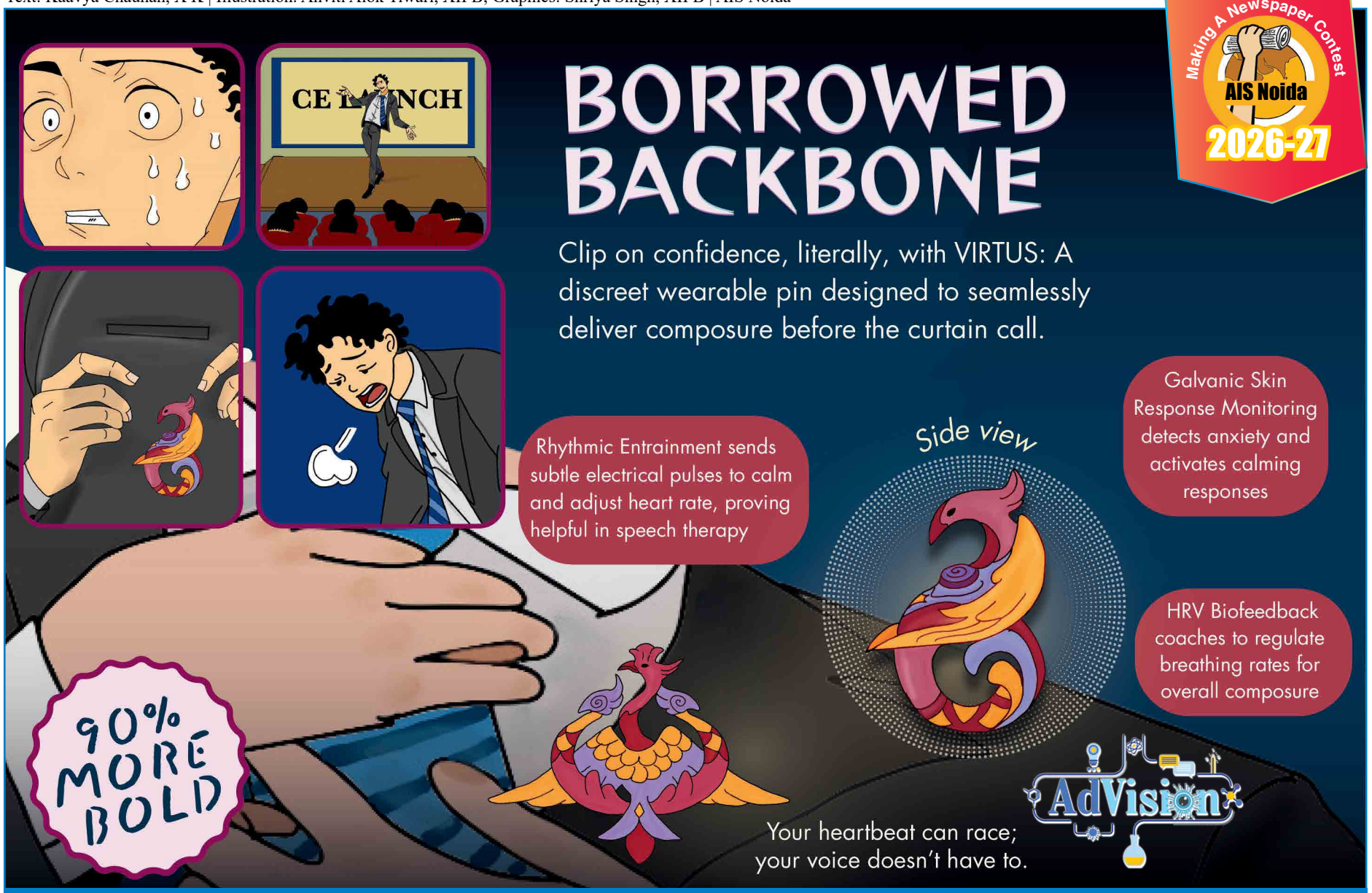
THE GLOBAL TIMES
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2026

Text: Kaavya Chauhan, X K | Illustration: Anviti Alok Tiwari, XII B; Graphics: Shriya Singh, XII B | AIS Noida



DISCLAIMER: Real scientific principles. Fictional ideas with a potential future.

Pika's periodical

A Peek Into The Life Of Rabbits' Cute Yet Crucial Alpine Cousin

Avni Agarwal
AIS Vasundhara 6, VIII B

Every day, when the first light of dawn reaches North America's rocky slopes, an American pika (*Ochotona princeps*) emerges from a maze of loose rocks called talus. It may appear that this tiny mammal, belonging to the rabbit family, has perfectly adapted to cold mountain habitats. But its ordinary morning is a remarkable lesson in ecology.

Foraging mornings

The pika begins its day by scanning for predators before dashing into meadows to forage grasses, herbs, and wildflowers. Instead of eating its bounty right at that moment, it spreads its harvest across the rocks to dry - a behaviour called haying. Once dried, these piles are stashed in rock crevices and serve as their main source of food all winter. Pika might hoard, but they do not hibernate. Their year-round foraging helps maintain healthy alpine plant communities, making them a crucial component of the mountain ecosystem.

Rocky retreats

As the day progresses, with the sun warming the air, the pika retreats beneath the cool talus. The thick fur, meant to protect them from freezing, makes pikas extremely vulnerable to rising temperatures. Sustained temperatures above 25°C can be quite fatal to them. Climate change will trap them as avoiding heat would mean less foraging, smaller hay piles, and less energy to survive winters and raise their young.

Homebodies up high

Built strictly for the cold, pikas rarely venture into the warm valleys between the mountain peaks they call home. A 2025 Journal of Mammalogy study said that this climate-driven isolation is accelerating genetic diversity loss. Fewer exchanged genes also mean less resilience to disease.



Silent calls

These small animals are surprisingly big on using their vocal cords, especially in the evenings. Their calls communicate and warn each other of predators. Nowadays, a pika may receive silence in return, thanks to their shrinking populations. To a hiker, it is only a sound; but to scientists, the silence between their calls are serious indicators of climate change.

For now, bedtime might be safe and sound for the existing pika population. But rising temperatures raise a serious existential question: Can pikas adapt fast enough? Researchers are using temperature loggers, habitat mapping, genetic sequencing, and ecological monitoring to find answers. While the future is uncertain, research brings scientists closer to protecting one of the mountain's smallest yet most important residents. GT

Page editor: Kaavya Chauhan, AIS Noida, X K