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'Revised FAME II  
subsidies to be game changer'



P  
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'Cong will have relook at  
Art 370 revocation'

P  
5



Does a plant-based diet really  
help beat Covid?

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10

## In brief

Indian-origin  
journalist wins  
Pulitzer prize

Megha Rajagopalan, an Indian-origin journalist, along with two contributors has won the Pulitzer Prize for innovative investigative reports that exposed a vast infrastructure of prisons and mass internment camps secretly built by China for detaining hundreds of thousands of Muslims in its restive Xinjiang region. Ms Rajagopalan from BuzzFeed News is among two Indian-origin journalists who won the US's top journalism award on Friday. Tampa Bay Times' Neil Bedi won for local reporting. Neil Bedi along with Kathleen McGroarty has been awarded the prize for the series exposing a Sheriff's Office initiative that used computer modelling to identify people believed to be future crime suspects.

**Some actions by Indian Govt inconsistent with democratic values: Top US official**

India remains the world's largest democracy with a strong rule of law but some of the Indian government's actions, including restrictions on freedom of expression, have raised concerns that are inconsistent with the country's democratic values, a top US official has told lawmakers. Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Dean Thompson's remarks came during a Congressional hearing on Democracy in the Indo-Pacific on Wednesday at the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia and Nonproliferation. "India remains the world's largest democracy with a strong rule of law and independent judiciary and enjoys a strong and growing strategic partnership with the United States," Mr Thompson said.

**No evidence to suggest children will be more affected in third wave**

There appears to be no substantial evidence to suggest that children will be more affected or have greater illness severity due to COVID-19 in the anticipated third wave, according to a new report. The Lancet COVID-19 Commission India Task Force prepared the report after convening an experts group comprising leading paediatricians from the country to examine the issue of paediatric COVID-19 in India. It said the infection's symptomatology in children in India appears to be globally comparable. Most children with COVID-19 are asymptomatic, and amongst those symptomatic mild infections are predominant.

## TODAY

### ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:  
Jyestha & Shukla Paksha  
Panchangam

Tithi : Tritiya: 09:39 pm

Nakshatram: Puravas: 07:00 pm

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam: 05:09 pm - 06:47 pm

Yamagandam: 12:16 pm - 01:53 pm

Variyam: 05:59 am - 07:43 am; 12:00 pm - 05:15 am

Gulika: 03:31 pm - 05:09 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 04:24 pm - 06:08 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:50 am - 12:42 pm

### HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy  
Temp: 38/22

Humidity: 32%

Sunrise: 05:41 am

Sunset: 06:51 pm

Current Weather Conditions  
Updated June 12, 2021 5:00 PM

### OBTUSE ANGLE



## Telangana seeks hike in FRBM rate to 5%

ML MELLY MAITREYI  
■ HYDERABAD

Buffeted by untamed revenue shortfall and mounting Covid-related expenditure, Finance Minister T. Harish Rao on Saturday requested Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to increase the FRBM rate from four per cent to five per cent of GSDP to enable Telangana State to go for more market borrowings.

Due to the lockdown imposed again to contain Covid-19, the State had suffered a revenue loss of Rs.4,100 crore in May. The suggested hike in FRBM rate would enable the State to give a boost to economic activities and employment generation once again, he said.

Participating in the virtual 44th GST Council meeting held mainly to discuss the report submitted by the GoM on giving GST concessions

on Covid-19 relief items like liquid medical oxygen,

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The Centre has in a way denied a report that claims Covid-19 deaths are being under-reported in Telangana. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare refuted the suggestion made in a report published by the international magazine The Economist that "the coronavirus has killed six times more people than official numbers in Telangana".

The Economist in an article titled 'More evidence emerges of India's true death toll from Covid-19' on Saturday said, "Another recent study of one state, Telangana, based on insurance claims, suggests that the virus has killed as many as six times more people than official numbers admit".

The Ministry, in a release on Saturday, responding to the report in the magazine, said, "Another evidence given is the study done in Telangana based on insurance claims.

Again, there is no peer reviewed scientific data available on such study" and added, "Studies which are used by the magazine as an estimate of excess mortality are not validated tools for determining mortality rate of any country or region."

Both MoHFW and The Economist were referring to an analysis of Covid-19 insurance claim

patterns highlighted by the Chennai-based management consulting firm Proxima. The analysis found that states like Gujarat and Telangana had a much higher percentage of insurance claims being made against recorded Covid-19 cases and deaths, compared to the national average.

Chief Justice of India Justice NV Ramana and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao during the luncheon hosted in CJI's honour by Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan at Raj Bhavan on Saturday

many of the errors in data entry pertained to name, extent of the land etc. Several applications had been kept pending muta-

## Center rejects report on 'under-reporting' of Covid deaths in TS

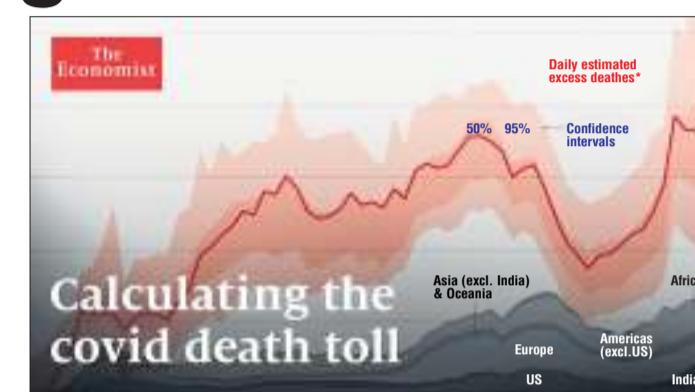
NAVEENA GHANATE  
■ HYDERABAD

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Hospitals, States must audit Covid deaths: AIIMS chief

NEW DELHI: A 'mis-classification' of Covid-related deaths by hospitals and state governments can be unhelpful in India's efforts to form strategies to fight the pandemic, one of the country's top doctors has said. For a better picture of mortality in these circumstances, they must perform a death audit to reconfigure the numbers, according to Dr Randeep Guleria, Director of the AIIMS Delhi. His comments come amid reports and allegations of various state government underplaying the number of deaths. In MP, for instance, there seemed to be a mismatch between official figures and the number of last rites performed in April.

## 2 lakh new pattadars to get RythuBandhu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The number of farmers identified to get Rythu Bandhu assistance is likely to go up by 2 lakh this season, thanks to Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's decision to address pending grievances and have the revised data uploaded through the Dharani portal.

The government had set June 10 as the cut-off date and asked officials to prepare a fresh list of all eligible farmers for Rythu Bandhu assistance. The list is being finalized, according to sources. The Rythu Bandhu amount will be credited to the accounts of farmers from June 15 in time for the Vaanakalam agricultural operations.

For a long time, changes could not be made in Dharani portal due to technical problems, though



## CM, prominent persons call on CJI

Justice Ramana to visit Yadadri today  
PNS ■ HYDERABAD

On Saturday, many VVIPs called on Chief Justice of India Justice N V Ramana; who has come to the State for the first time after assuming charge as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan organised a luncheon in honour of Justice Ramana, who is staying at the Raj Bhawan. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and several prominent persons attended it.

KCR, who received the CJI at Raj Bhavan upon his arrival on Friday, met Justice Ramana again on Saturday.

As many as 748 doctors died in the first wave of the pandemic. Despite health care workers being

In total,  
719  
doctors  
across  
the  
country  
have died  
due to  
Covid.

inoculated first, the number of doctors who died in the second wave is nearly same as in the first wave.

IMA president Jayalal, in his letter, also stated that doctors suffered a higher viral load and case fatality ratio as a community.

## Eatela quits as MLA, Speaker accepts, vacancy notified

Says bye-poll will be fought between KCR's family and people  
■ Huzurabad constituency vacancy notified  
■ Parties get into another election mode

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former health minister Eatela Rajender formally cut off his long ties with the TRS party by resigning as MLA of the Huzurabad constituency here on Saturday. He immediately announced his decision to fight against the 'feudal and dictatorial' rule of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao that he averred had undermined the democratic aspirations of people in the separate State.

Eatela paid tributes at the Martyr Memorial at Gun Park before handing over his resignation letter, addressed to the Speaker, to the Legislature Secretary V Narasimha Charyulu at his office in the State Legislature. He was accompanied by former MLA Enugu Ravinder Reddy, former Karimnagar ZP chairperson Tula Uma and several supporters.

The Speaker subsequently accepted his resignation and the vacancy in the Huzurabad constituency was notified and conveyed to the Election Commission of India by the Secretary, Legislature. It all happened in a matter of couple of hours.



## Sharp political strategy behind KCR's proposed surprise visits

SNCN ACHARYULU  
■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's proposed surprise visits across the state are intended to give a befitting reply to the opposition party's criticism that he has confined himself to Pragati Bhavan and his farm house, according to TRS circles. There is also a political strategy behind the Chief Minister's plan.

KCR has announced that he will undertake surprise visits across the state after June 19, mainly to assess Palle Pragati and Pattana Pragati programmes as well as the functioning of Panchayat and



Municipal officers across the state.

There is also a political angle to the CM's plan. Apart from former health minister Eatela Rajendar, some senior leaders are also going to join BJP soon. Against this background, KCR does not want to

Danish midfielder Christian Eriksen collapses on field

■ DENMARK

Denmark star Christian Eriksen collapsed on the pitch in Saturday's Euro 2020 game against Finland in Copenhagen, causing the suspension of the match in the first half. Danish players were in tears as medical staff tried to revive the Inter Milan player, who suddenly collapsed near the touchline.

"The UEFA EURO 2020 match in Copenhagen has been suspended due to a medical emergency," UEFA said in a short statement. The previously raucous crowd at the Parken Stadium in the Danish capital fell silent after the 29-year-old fell to the ground near the end of the opening period, with his teammates gathering around him. After around 15 minutes Eriksen was stretchered off the field followed by the rest of the Denmark team, while Finland's players also left the pitch.

## Citizens turn to freelance during pandemic, trend may stay forever

P:3



based party, fighting for the welfare of the poor and neglected people of the entire society.

Accordingly, the party's culture of holding small cadre meetings should be continued as they help the party connect with masses at the ground level and strengthen it, she said.

She also told her party workers that during her four tenures as the state chief minister, the BSP government had done countless work for the entire society and its weaker sections, but the subsequent governments stopped them due to their casteist and communal mindset.

She also sought to impress upon the party leaders and workers that "unlike other parties, BSP is a cadre-

## Mayawati to reorient BSP's image as sarv samaj party

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

BSP president Mayawati on Saturday asked her party leaders and workers to connect with every section of the society and expand its base to improve the party's poll prospect in the next year's assembly elections.

Seeking to reorient the party's image, she told party leaders and workers to remember that the Bahujan Samaj Party is a sarv samaj party, committed to achieving the objective of Sarv Jan hitay, Sarv Jan sukhy (serving interests of all, ensuring the welfare of all).

Mayawati gave the directions in a meeting held here to examine the party's preparedness for the next year's assembly elections.

The BSP president recently expelled two senior leaders, including the BSP's legislature party leader

Cautioning party men against leaders who give more importance to their personal interests than those of the party, she said the party men should have more trust in the cadre than such leaders who are more interested in serving their own interests while pledging by names of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram.

Ultimately such people harm themselves more than the party, even if they realise it later. It is important to be careful of such people, the former chief minister cautioned its party leaders and workers.

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expelled two senior leaders, including the BSP's legislature party leader

# Covid orphans in TS to get mobile phones with emergency numbers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

With an aim to ensure safety of children who lost their parents to Covid, the Department of Women Development and Child Welfare has decided to give them mobile phones containing all the necessary numbers including that of the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) as well as helpline and emergency numbers.

Apart from these 85 children, there are 138 children in Hyderabad alone, who lost their single parent to Covid.

He said that these children, who count over 200, have been given monthly ration kits in collaboration with an NGO as an immediate relief.

If a child has been orphaned but has a guardian, then such child is sent to the guardian.

"Each family is being given a mobile phone whom they can contact in case of any need for help. They are also being provided with monthly ration kits," said Akkeshwar Rao. The DWO said that if a child is orphaned and has no guardian to look after, then those children are shifted to the 57 child homes across the city where all the needs and cares of that children will be looked after by the department.

The DWO mentioned that in Hyderabad district alone, 10 children were rendered completely orphaned as their par-

ents succumbed to Covid and 75 children have lost their parents because of some other reasons during the pandemic.

These children, as per the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) rules, are then being put for adoption and before adoption, both the children and the adopting parents are counselled by counselors, he added.

Further speaking, Rao said that to make sure that education of these orphaned children is not interrupted, the department is getting these children admission into Government hostels, Government Model Schools and BC (backward classes) Residential schools in Telangana.

Moreover, a financial assistance of Rs 2,000 per child is also being provided by the department.

Akkeshwar Rao added, "All these children either with their guardian or at the children homes are checked upon very frequently, to counsel them and to know their mental and physical health."

Three teams have been con-

stituted with each team consisting of a doctor, Auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), one member from DCPO unit and a supervisor. "Every week these three teams have to visit these children's homes and conduct health checkups. If any child is found to be having COVID symptoms, then we send that child for further diagnosis. Separate rooms have been dedicated for isolating children with COVID symptoms," said Akkeshwar Rao.

"If in case in a family both the parents have tested positive for Covid and the child/children have been tested negative, the department has come up with 4 transit homes across the city that look after those children whose parents have been tested positive to COVID. Once the parents are recovered, the children are then sent back to their parents."

Akkeshwar Rao stated that all the necessary precautions are being taken and prepara-

tions are being made to deal with an expected third wave of COVID-19.

"Separate dedicated isolation rooms have been created at the 57 Children homes. 4 transit homes have been made ready to take care of children during isolation and further the we have tied up with the Nature Cure Hospital here in Hyderabad to provide treatment to those children who have been tested positive to COVID."

Balamani, the grandmother of two orphaned girls said, "The initiative of the Women Development and Child Welfare department has been helpful as they have promised to look after the education of my granddaughters and further they have been providing us with ration. Now, they have given us a mobile uploaded with all the numbers saved in it so that whenever we face a problem, we can call them for help."

In Proxima's view, the said article is based on extrapolation of data without any epidemiological evidence". The Center said that the States and UTs had been urged through formal communication, multiple video conferences and through deployment of Central teams for correct recording of deaths in accordance with laid down guidelines. States consistently reporting lower number of daily deaths were told to recheck their data. A case in point was the Union Government's note to the State of Bihar to provide detailed date and district wise break-up of the reconciled number of deaths to the Union Health Ministry.

According to the IMA, more than 1,400 doctors have lost their lives since March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in India. On June 7, the IMA wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his personal intervention to resolve the pleas put forward by the apex medical body concerning the safety of medical professionals.

Over 4.70 lakh persons were administered with free vaccines in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits under the massive vaccination drive organised for people falling under the high-risk category.

When the drive commenced on May 28, a total of 21,815 persons were vaccinated and since June 6, every day more than 34,000 persons are being administered with the vaccine.

On Saturday, a total of 39,212 beneficiaries received the free vaccine shot.

According to GHMC officials, persons working in grocery shops, rythu bazaars, grocery shops, salons, laundry service, pan shops, markets (vegetable, fruits, flowers, chicken, meat and fish) as well as street vendors were categorised as high-risk groups.

The civic body officials are visiting the markets and public places to enrol eligible persons for free vaccine. The beneficiaries are initially being enrolled in the State government's app. At the vaccination centre before the person takes the shot, the details are entered in the app. The drive is also being monitored by senior officials.

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# Citizens turn to freelance during pandemic, trend may stay forever

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Coronavirus pandemic has resulted in record layoffs and cuts to planned expansions across the state. It's difficult to fully gauge the fallout, but lots of jobs were lost in the last one year due to Covid.

However, despite the grim employment outlook, there is a silver lining for those willing to seize the opportunity. As full-time staff positions dwindle, contract and freelance work is actually picking up steam. This includes highly technical roles, including software development, statistical analysis, and big data applications. Companies still need work to get done and are beginning to get a better sense of what a remote, on-demand workforce can accomplish. If companies pay only for vital tasks as they're needed and are able to choose from a wider range of geographically dispersed workers, they can better manage the bottom line.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic last year the number of freelance workers has almost doubled. With more than 1.5 million freelance workers nationwide, the sector has grown by 46 per cent since Coronavirus last year.



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With jobs being lost due to the lockdown, people are going for these freelance jobs to earn money. The freelance jobs were available before too in some sectors like DTP work, data entry, telecallers' job and others. However, in the recent times the scope of freelance work has increased manifold.

At present freelance work is available in areas like photo-shop, mobile app development, web designing, teaching, tutoring, content writing, copywriting, sales and marketing, search engine optimization, 3D modelling, game development, translation and photography as well.

While on one hand people, who have lost their jobs are getting hooked to these types of

freelance work that gives one the opportunity to work from home at ones time and pace, people who are employed and working from home are taking up freelance jobs to use their spare time and earn some extra money.

Many small software companies in these Covid conditions are also completing their projects with freelance workers.

Most of the opportunities for

these freelance workers in India come from abroad.

Until last year only a few people were interested in doing freelance work. But now there seems to be a huge craze for freelance work. Not only young people, but also women and middle-aged persons are showing interest in freelance work. There is no particular reason for that. Many are now moving in this direction due to the opportunity to work from home, opportunity to work without investing any money, flexible working hours and opportunity to use ones skills and experience.

Freelance work however, is not as easy as it sounds. It also has some rules. Generally, if someone wants to work as a freelancer, s/he first needs to register their names on some online websites. Currently, the most popular sites in the country for freelance work are Upwork, 99Designs, Truelancer, Freelance India etc.

After getting registered a freelancer may bid for the jobs available and if chosen must complete the work within deadline. Money gets transferred online.

The sale of spurious seeds came down due to the joint raids carried out by the task force teams across the State, said Agriculture Minister Singireddy Nirjan Reddy here on Saturday.

Expressing satisfaction over positive results achieved by the task force teams comprising officials from the police and agriculture departments, the Minister appreciated the officials for striving towards Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao's objective of making Telangana free from spurious seeds.

"We have created such a situation among seed dealers that they are now scared of resorting to selling spurious seeds," he said at a meeting conducted at the Ranga Reddy district Collectorate office here to review the measures taken to control the sale of spurious seeds.

Director-General of Police M Mahendar Reddy, Principal Secretary to Government, M Raghunandan Rao, IG North Zone Y Nagi Reddy and other officials also attended the meeting. The Minister said a few dealers were still selling

substandard quality seeds at some places. The State government was also exploring making amendments to the existing laws meant for selling seeds and making Telangana free from spurious seeds.

The menace of selling spurious seeds was reduced drastically because of the joint operation of the police and agriculture departments, Mahendar Reddy said, asking officials to prepare a report on problems faced during the raids along with suggestions to initiate more stringent steps to eradicate the menace.

Nagi Reddy said history-sheets would be opened against dealers, who are found to be repeatedly selling sub-standard quality seeds. The history sheets would be sent to the police station concerned for maintaining a constant vigil on errant dealers.

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Eatela speaking 'out of frustration': Cong leader

PNS ■ HEDERABAD

What it appears that former minister Eatela Rajender was speaking 'out of frustration' and it was still a mystery why he failed to speak about Telangana martyrs all these days. Congress leader Padi Kaushik Reddy has lamented.

Speaking to the media at his residence at Kondapur on Saturday, Kaushik Reddy, who had contested as a Congress candidate from the Huzurabad constituency in 2018 elections, asked him how he had purchased assigned lands given to SCs and STs holding a responsible position as a minister. Eatela should explain to the people of Huzurabad about his illegal activities, Kaushik Reddy demanded.



## Telangana police the best in country: Home Minister

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

The law and order situation was effectively maintained after the Telangana state was formed and the Telangana government has strengthened the police system by according top priority, Minister for Home Mohammed Mahmood Ali said on Saturday.

The Home Minister inaugurated the town police station building at Sangareddy constructed at a cost of Rs 1 crore on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, Mahmood Ali said the police department was performing well in protecting the law and order situation. As many as 80,000 police constables and sub-inspectors were appointed in the state after the Telangana state came into being and 20,000 more police personnel would be recruited this year. The government has established 'SHE teams' for exclusively protecting the women in the state and similarly, Bharosa centres were set up.

The women were given a 33 per cent quota in the recruitments, the Home Minister added.

Mahmood Ali said the Telangana government has allocated a huge budget to the police department by increasing the staff, modern vehicles and technology and Preventive Detention (PD) Act was strictly enforced in the state. The Telangana police were the best

in the country as they were serving the people with friendly behaviour. Stating that even the thieves got fearing to commit any crime, he said the police personnel were tactfully catching the culprits within two hours after the crime incident and the Telangana police were at the forefront in controlling the crimes.

When the doctors and medical staff gave treatment for the

corona, the services of the police personnel were fantastic in containing the virus, the Home Minister said and added that they were extending services during hot Sun and even during the heavy rains by risking their lives. He lauded the services of the police on the occasion saying that they were giving an assurance to the people that they were available 24/7.

Telangana Legislative Council Protec chairman Bhupal Reddy said the law and order were improved after the separate state came into being in Telangana and the government provided all facilities to the police if the best law and order is required.

Police department Housing Corporation Chairman Damodara Rao, IGP Stephen Ravinder, Sivasankar Reddy, district Superintendent of Police Chandrasekhar Reddy, Additional Collector Veera Reddy, former MLA Chintala Prabhakar, police personnel and others were present.

## Fulfill KCR's birthday wish: Minister Koppula

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLY

Minister for Welfare Koppula Eswar said the people should fulfil Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's birthday wish to complete the construction of Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple atop the Sripadakshetra Ramunigundala hill and it should be flourished as a great devasthanam in the State.



Minister Koppula Eswar on Saturday visited the site where the temple construction was proposed. Ramagundam MLA Korukanti Chander handed over the temple construction map to the Minister. Meanwhile, the MLA and Zilla Parishad Chairman Putta Madhukar performed special rituals at the temple.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Koppula Eswar said Ramagundam MLA Chander's vow on the day of KCR's birthday to build the temple for Sri Venkateswara Swamy was the best religious initiative. With the man-

said Chief Minister KCR was extending all support to the physically challenged persons after the Telangana state was formed. The Telangana government was giving a helping hand to all sections and CM KCR was providing Rs 3,000 pension per month to the differently challenged people to lead a respectable life. Since the beneficiaries were facing difficulties with ordinary tricycles, battery cycles would be given to them with which they could travel up to 40 km with a speed of 25 km. It would be very useful to the challenged persons, he said.

Koppula Eswar said the government was planning to distribute support sticks, laptops and other equipment as the CM KCR was striving hard for the welfare of the challenged people. Stating that MLA K Chander has sought setting up of a school for deaf and dumb children, the Minister said efforts would be made to set up it in Ramagundam.

## Chief Whip Dasyam calls for protection of child rights

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Everyone must strive hard for protecting children rights and the government was taking all measures to eliminate child labour in the state, Government Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhakar has said.

On the occasion of World Day against Child Labour on Saturday, Dasyam Vinay Bhakar participated in a programme organized by the District child labour elimination Department at Circuit Guest House here on Saturday. He expressed concern that because of their poor financial conditions, illiteracy and others reasons, the parents in rural areas were encouraging children to work. It was a matter of sadness that the golden future of the children was becoming dark.

He said the states were



allowed to promulgate special laws for the welfare of the boys and girls under rule 15 of the Indian Constitution and as per Section 23 of the Constitution, the law has opposed the working of children and making them goods' in the market. The government was implementing various welfare schemes to eliminate child labour and protect children's rights. But, out of ignorance, some people were sending their children for work. The

Telangana government was taking many measures to eradicate child labour and the officials were creating awareness on the welfare of the children. The children identified in the work would be admitted to welfare gurukul schools. The people who allow children below 14 years in the work, would be punished as per the Juvenile Justice Act, 2005 and it was a punishable offence for the owners under the 1986 Act, he added.

## Cong demands withdrawal of GO to pay court fee

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress party Dubbalki constituency in-charge Cheruku Srinivas Reddy on Saturday alleged that the state government had paid Rs.58.95 crore towards court fee instead of punishing the officials who committed to mistakes despite the court order in connection with Mallanna Sagar project.

The Congress leader demanded the state government should withdraw the GO issued in this regard immediately. The problem of farmers whose lands were acquired for irrigation projects, could have been resolved with the amount paid towards the court fee, he said. Speaking to the media on Saturday at Gandhi Bhavan along with PCC general secretary Judson, Srinivas Reddy said that though government not cared for the welfare of the farmers it supported the offi-

cials, who committed mistakes.

It may be recalled that the revenue department issued a GO No.208 on June 7 releasing budget Rs.58.95 crore towards pending contempt cases posted in High Court to get relaxation from treasury control and quarterly regulation orders by way of obtaining supplementary estimates during the financial year 2021-22. The government released the amount to pay court fees towards pending contempt cases posted in HC. Most of the cases were related to Mallanna Sagar and other projects.

## Speculations rife over TPCC chief post

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Speculations are rife that the Congress high command in New Delhi may announce the TPCC chief anytime from now as all the aspirants of the much-coveted post including TPCC working president and Malkajgiri MP A Revanth Reddy, Bhongir MP Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and former MP Madhu Yashki Goud camped in Delhi was any indication.

The Telangana Congress leaders said that the party high command may announce the new TPCC Chief's name tonight or tomorrow. They said that these leaders are in Delhi to make last-minute efforts to grab the post. However, the close aides of these leaders ruled out the rumours saying that they were in the capital on some private work. Speaking to 'The Pioneer', Komati Reddy Venkat Reddy said that he went to Delhi to expedite developmental works in his constituency and he has no political activity in Delhi. He hoped that the party high command may pick him up for the post considering his long political career.

The party circles said CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka was also camped in Delhi. When contacted, however, Bhatti clarified to 'The Pioneer' that he was not in Delhi and he was present in Telangana state and ruled out the speculations.



## MLA Vivekanand inspects vax centre

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALKAJGIRI

MLA KP Vivekanand inspected the vaccination centre set up at Sarojini Gardens in Kutubullapur circle on Saturday.

Former Municipal Vice-Chairman Jayaram, former councillor Ranga Rao and others participated.

CMRF cheques disbursed: Uppal MLA Bethi Subhash Reddy disbursed Chief Minister Relief Fund (CMRF) cheques to the beneficiaries at his camp office here on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said the government was functioning with the only aim to protect the people from the corona pandemic. Appealing to the people who were extending services must have their jab, he said and added that the government was committed to providing vaccination to all the people.

Speaking on the occasion, Subhash Reddy said the state government would assist the poor people and the credit goes to Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao that various welfare schemes were introduced for the different sections of the society.

## 'KTR and team behind land irregularities'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP vice-president and former MLA NVSS Prabhakar has alleged that the TRS working president and IT Minister KT Rama Rao's team was involved in the land irregularities in the state. His team was there behind every land transaction that was taking place under HMDA limits and about 70 TRS MLAs were facing allegations of land encroachment.

Speaking to the media at the BJP state office here on Saturday, Prabhakar said the state government has taken up 13-link road construction for the sake of TRS leaders violating the HMDA master plan. The plan was changed accordingly to benefit the TRS leaders to increase the value of their lands.

## Get ready for seventh phase Haritha Haram, officials told

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The district officials must prepare with proper planning for the seventh phase of the Harithaharam programme, Sandeep Kumar Sultan, secretary of Panchayat Raj said on Saturday.

Addressing a video conference with Additional Collectors, DRDO Project Directors, forest officials, DPOs and Zilla Parishad CEOs over the Harithaharam on Saturday, he said the saplings should be planted as per the targets given in the current year and the officials have to identify the places to plant the saplings and made registrations online. The pits should be dug with the help of collyes of employment generation scheme and saplings should be planted at multi-level on both sides of R&B and panchayats roads.

Sandeep Kumar said the officials should chalk out strategies which saplings would be shifted from which nursery and steps should be taken to ensure 100 per cent growth of saplings planted last year. Big size saplings should be planted beside the dead plants. Every household could be given six saplings and ensure that they must plant them properly. The panchayats secretary have to do a door-to-door survey and list out the saplings people wished to plant and record them in the registers.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister's OSD Priyanka Verghese commended that nurseries were developed through the panchayat raj department this year. But the Chief Minister has noticed that the plantation was not up to the mark on both sides of the roads and he observed it during the

visit to Nizamabad district. This time, the forest officials, DRDO, DPO and other concerned departments should work with coordination and plant saplings at a multi-level. Every plant should be protected and they have to send daily reports with details of the plantation.

Panchayat Raj Special Commissioner Raghunandan Rao said along with Harithaharam, special plans were given for sanitation in every village panchayat and the officials have to take it up on a priority basis. With the onset of monsoon, seasonal diseases may erupt and hence priority should be given to sanitation, he added.

Additional Collector Manu Chowdhary said a target was set to plant 80 lakh saplings in Nagarkurnool district this year and around 62 lakh plants were ready in nurseries.



Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and MLC Kadiyam Srihari called on Justice N V Ramana at Raj Bhavan in Hyderabad on Saturday. (Right) TPCC President N Uttam Kumar Reddy offering a bouquet to Justice Ramana and greeting him on his appointment as Chief Justice of Supreme Court.

## Essential items distributed to children orphaned by Covid

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The district administration would make all efforts to stay support to the children orphaned by the corona and eight children lost both mother and father, while 165 children left with a single parent in the devastation created by the Covid, Nagarkurnool District Collector L Sharman said on Saturday. He said the state and the central governments were assisting the children orphaned by Covid. Sharman distributed kits of essential commodities to the guardians of the children, who lost both parents or single parent due to corona at the camp office here on Saturday. The kits were provided by the district women and child welfare



department.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said apart from providing free education to the 8 children orphaned by Covid, they would be given monthly stipend till they attain 18 years of age and the premium would be borne by the PMCF. He directed the Child Protection Officer Intiyaz to complete the registration process for the children.

## Digital survey of land for food processing zone ordered

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

District Collector S Venkateswara Rao has ordered the revenue officials to conduct a digital survey of land identified for setting up a special food processing zone.

After visiting the Salloni palli forest area in Hanwada mandal of Mahabubnagar district on Saturday, the Collector directed the Survey Land Records AD Srinivas to identify the complete government land and conduct the digital survey. Earlier, the officials of revenue and forest have identified several sites suitable for the food processing zone in the outskirts of Venkatapur, Hanwada, Eronipalli and Salloni palli areas and reported to the Collector. He visited the Salloni palli area in Survey No 718 and asked the revenue officials about the

extent of the area in the forest area and land in the government possession. He asked the Survey Land Records officials to start the digital survey from Sunday onwards.

Earlier, the revenue officials identified 200 acres of land, but the Collector asked them to more the number of acres that may be needed to set up the zone. The Collector was accompanied by Revenue Additional Collector K Seetharama Rao, DFO Gangireddy, Survey Land Records AD Srinivas, Hanwada Tehsildar Bakka Srinivas and

others. Meanwhile, District Collector Venkateswara Rao inspected the new Collector building which was under construction in Mahabubnagar on Saturday. He directed the officials to complete the minor works pending as early as possible.

The Collector directed the R&B Executive Engineer Swamy to make ready the helipad, internal roads, compound wall, lift, parking tiles, landscape, plantation and other works. Venkateswara Rao inspected the electric room, server room, NIC, Collector Chambers, meeting halls, other chambers, toilets, elevation and vehicle parking area. Additional Collector (Revenue) K Seetharama Rao, R&B DE Sandhya and others were present.



# Digvijay says Cong will have 'relook' at Art 370 revocation; BJP hits out

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Digvijay Singh's purported comments in a clubhouse conversation that the revocation of Article 370 and stripping Jammu and Kashmir of statehood was an "extremely sad" decision and his party will have a "relook" at the issue have triggered a row, with the BJP accusing him of speaking against India and in agreement with Pakistan.

Singh's remarks to a person, who the BJP said was a journalist of Pakistani origin, was seized by the saffron party leaders to hit out at the opposition party with its spokesperson Sambit Patra demanding statements from Congress president Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi on the issue.

"The decision of revoking Article 370 and reducing the statehood of J&K is extremely, I would say, sad decision,



and the Congress party would certainly have a relook on the issue," Singh said, according to bits of conversation available on social media.

He was responding to a question about the "way forward" on the issue once the Modi government is gone.

## PM urged to treat river bank erosion

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Saturday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to treat large-scale river bank erosion in Malda and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal as a national disaster and release adequate funds for mitigation.



In a letter to the prime minister, the senior Congress leader, who is also the party's state unit chief, said that large chunks of fertile lands have been lost to the Ganga, which flows through the two minority-dominated districts, rendering lakhs of people homeless and making them neo-refugees."

"They become landless and lose their livelihood. Sometimes, poverty leads to an increase in crimes. It creates neo-refugees with many social

problems," the letter read. Citing an example of the problems faced by the erosion-affected people, Chowdhury said a colony of such people from Malda has come up in Mumbai's Byculla area, where they are branded as Bangladeshi infiltrators as they have also lost their documents to the erosion.

"During the UPA regime, a large fund was sanctioned for the above issue. I request you to kindly release adequate funds to check the land erosion and protect the life and livelihood of the affected people," he said.

Chowdhury represents Berhampore Lok Sabha constituency in Murshidabad district.

Ganga flows through Malda before entering Murshidabad, where it splits into Bhagirathi that flows south through West Bengal and Padma which flows east into Bangladesh

## 4 swept away while crossing stream

PNS ■ SINGRAULI (MP)

Two women died, while a minor girl went missing, after four persons were swept away while crossing a stream amid heavy rains at a village in Madhya Pradesh's Singrauli district, police said on Saturday.

While one of the victims managed to swim to the banks, bodies of two women have been recovered and a nine-year-old girl is still missing, Sarai police station in-charge Santosh Tiwari said.

The incident occurred at Koni village, about 70 km from the district headquarters, on Friday evening, when the victims went to the forest to collect wood, but got caught in the downpour, the official said.

Two women in their 30s and the girls aged nine and 10

years were swept away while crossing Chumia nullah, he said.

While the 10-year-old victim managed to swim to the banks and was found by the rescue team in the early hours of the day, the body of the girl's mother was found about 9 km from the accident spot and the other deceased woman was found at Doodhmania village in the morning, he said.

The search is on for the nine-year-old girl who is still missing, the official added.

## Ganga Dussehra celebrations cancelled due to COVID-19

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

The district will not hold Ganga Dussehra celebrations this year in view of COVID-19 norms, authorities said on Saturday.

Hundreds of devotees participate every year in the festival that involves taking a holy dip in Ganga river.

The daylong festivities and the fair were scheduled for June 20 at Shukartal, Sub-Divisional Magistrate Jayendra Kumar.

At 10 am on Saturday, the

## 8-year-old girl raped in UP village

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

An eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her neighbour in a village here, police said on Saturday, adding the accused has absconded.

Kapil Kumar took the girl to a field on Friday on the pretext of giving her man-gos and raped her, they said.

The girl ran to her home crying and narrated her ordeal to her family, they added. A case was registered at Bhopa police station on her parents' complaint against Kumar under Sections 376 (rape) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Station House Officer (SHO) Deepak Chaturvedi said. The victim was sent for medical examination.

The search is on for the nine-year-old girl who is still missing, the official added.

## Heavy rains lash Mumbai; train, bus services hit

PNS ■ MUMBAI

■

# G7: Why economies are delaying a break with fossil fuel industry

PNS ■ CARDIFF

The climate crisis is certain to be a hot topic at the G7 summit in Cornwall. While the leaders of the world's richest countries agree in theory on the need to reach net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest, they remain faithful to a fossil fuel industry reluctant to substantially change its business model.

A recent report by the International Energy Agency, a typically conservative advisory body, argued for an immediate ban on new fossil fuel projects. But investments by oil, gas and coal companies into finding new sources continue, as does industry lobbying to undermine regulation.

The environment ministers of the G7 countries committed to end funding for new overseas coal projects by the end of 2021.

But 51 per cent of their COVID-19 economic recovery funds – a total of USD 189 billion – paid between January 2020 and



## Betting on the long-term business case

Despite setbacks in volatile markets and oversupply risks, there is still a lot of money to be made from extracting, producing and selling hydrocarbons. Demand for coal has plateaued, but oil and gas demand is predicted to rise at least for the next 15 to 20 years, particularly in emerg-

ing economies such as China and India. This puts G7 leaders in an awkward position. On the one hand, governments need to reboot economic growth after the pandemic slowdown – a profitable energy sector nourished by rising demand abroad is welcome, even though hydrocarbon extraction can be especially polluting in developing countries.

Governmental support for the industry in the form of subsidies or tax breaks artificially inflates the profitability of fossil fuels, in turn making renewables a less attractive investment. Put simply, it is less risky and more profitable to – at least for now – invest in oil and gas.

## Carbon lock-in

The fossil fuel industry continues to shed public support, but it can rely on the fact that it's embedded within a complex system of consumers, suppliers and contractors, politicians and the media. The cause-and-effect relations that define such an intricate system often produce unintended outcomes.

This interdependency is referred to as carbon lock-in. Economies have evolved in such a way that they perpetuate an energy landscape dominated by fossil fuels and plagued by an inability to radically change. Not only does carbon lock-in result in inertia, it causes a tragedy of the commons-type problem.

## Revision to FAME II subsidies to be game changer: EV makers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Electric two-wheeler makers on Saturday termed as "a phenomenal move" by the government to increase subsidy for such vehicles by 50 per cent under the FAME II scheme saying it would be a game changer in the adoption of eco-friendly vehicles.

The government had on Friday made a partial modification of the scheme for Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India Phase II (FAME India Phase II), including increasing the demand incentive for electric two-wheelers to Rs 15,000 per kWh from the earlier uniform subsidy of Rs 10,000 per kWh for all EVs, including plug-in hybrids and strong hybrids except busses.

In the latest modification, the department of heavy industries also capped incentives for electric two-wheelers at 40 per cent of the cost of vehicles, up from 20 per cent in the FAME (II) policy, increasing



the subsidy by 50 per cent per kWh, is a phenomenal move. Sales of electric two-wheelers have grown despite the pandemic and with this additional subsidy, we expect electric two-wheeler sales to disrupt the market, and clock 6 million-plus units by 2025," Ather Energy CEO and Co-founder Tarun Mehta said in a statement. The government's continued support to drive adoption of EVs, with a keen focus on locally built electric two-wheelers will make India the manufacturing hub of EVs, he added. Expressing similar views, Society of Manufacturers of Electric

## HCL provides 17 imported ready-to-use oxygen plants to Delhi govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT firm HCL Technologies on Saturday announced that it has provided 17 ready-to-use imported oxygen plants to the Delhi government.

Vehicles (SMEV) Director General Sohinder Gill said, "It's an important and an admirable decision taken by the government, a move that will bring down the prices of electric two-wheelers nearer to the IC (internal combustion engine) vehicles and remove one of the biggest blockade of the high sticker price of electric two-wheelers." Elaborating further, he said a 'city speed electric scooter' with a range of 100km/charge will now cost less than Rs 60,000 and a high-speed scooter with a range of 80 km will come nearer to the price tag of Rs 1 lakh.

## MTaI concerned over states capping prices

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Medical Technology Association of India (MTaI) on Saturday said states must be restrained from intervening in price control of medical devices and other products, and the national drug price regulator should take decisions in this regard.

The organisation, which represents research-based medical technology companies, said price capping orders by various states on COVID essentials like PPE kits and N95 masks could lead to supply constraints.

"We are at a critical juncture in the fight against COVID and the government and industry are trying to rally together to overcome this situation. At such a time, decisions taken without consulting with the industry will lead to confusion," MTaI Chairman and Director General Pavan Choudary said in a statement.

Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have fixed prices at different points which may create risk of products being sold at multiple price points across the country, he added.

"This will lead to companies incurring additional costs and logistical challenges due to relabelling and may disrupt the availability of these essential products. Companies may also choose not to market the product in the territory where the costs and complexities outweigh the benefits," Choudary said.



This is similar to the orders released by the Kerala government in May and by the Maharashtra government last year, Choudary added.

The points at which the prices have been capped seem irrationally low, which may make this market unviable for the industry, Choudary said.

## MONEY MATTERS

### Infosys automating integration between own platform, CoWIN

T major Infosys on Saturday said it is automating the integration between its own vaccination platform and CoWIN to ease the inoculation process for its staff and their families. CoWIN head R S Sharma had recently said over a dozen entities, including large digital companies like Paytm, MakeMyTrip and Infosys are looking at approval for offering vaccine bookings. "As Infosys is in the process of rolling out vaccines for employees and their family, across our Development Centres in India, we are automating integration between our own vaccination platform and CoWIN to make the programme seamless," Infosys said in an emailed statement to PTI. India has been ramping up vaccination to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. India has so far administered over 24.9 crore jabs to eligible beneficiaries. The government had, last month, released new guidelines for the integration of CoWIN with third-party applications, easing the way for such apps to offer vaccine bookings.



### MaxVIL posts multi-fold rise in Q4 profit at Rs 34 cr

**M**ax Ventures & Industries Ltd (MaxVIL) has clocked nearly 10-fold jump in its consolidated net profit at Rs 33.59 crore for the quarter ended March 2021 and announced its decision to foray into residential real estate business. Its net profit stood at Rs 3.43 crore in the year-ago period. Total income rose to Rs 333.93 crore in the fourth quarter of last fiscal from Rs 258.88 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year, according to a regulatory filing. For the full 2020-21 fiscal, net profit increased to Rs 57.09 crore from Rs 44.09 crore in the previous year. Total income, however, fell to Rs 1,189.91 crore last fiscal from Rs 1,399.49 crore in the 2019-20 fiscal. MaxVIL, a part of multi-business conglomerate Max Group, is into two core businesses – real estate and specialty packaging films. Sahil Vachani, MD & CEO of MaxVIL, said, "Despite FY21 being a year chequered by pandemic induced uncertainties, both core businesses of real estate and packaging films coped exceptionally well."



### Hyundai donates PPE kits, oxygen concentrators

**H**yundai Motor India Foundation, the philanthropic division of automobile major Hyundai Motor India, handed over oxygen concentrators, personal protective equipment kits to the Kancheepuram district administration on Saturday. As many as 25 oxygen concentrators, 5,000 units of N95 masks, 3,100 PPEs, 600 litres of sanitiser were presented to the government headquarters hospital in Kancheepuram, a press release said. The car-maker under the Hyundai Cares 3.0 initiative Project: Back to Life! has expedited the purchase and supply of critical medical equipment ensuring quick dispatch of relief materials to hospitals in the most affected States of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Haryana, New Delhi and Telangana. Hyundai Motor India Foundation trustee Ganesh Mani presented the oxygen concentrators, PPE kits to the government headquarters hospital in the presence of Kancheepuram MLA Ezilarasan, the release added.



### China's internet watchdog issues notices to 129 apps

**C**hina's internet watchdog has issued notices to the operators of 129 smartphone applications, including several news apps, for illegally collecting or using consumers' personal information. Popular news aggregation app Jinri Toutiao developed by TikTok owner ByteDance, alongside Tencent-operated Kuai Bao and Tencent News, Sogou News by New York listed Sogou, and Nasdaq-listed Qutoutiao, were among a group of news apps that received an order from the Cyberspace Administration of China on Friday to rectify their data practices within 15 days. The Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Seven other app categories targeted included fitness, video streaming, online shopping, education, women's health, dating, and app stores. Popular apps included under the order were Tencent-backed fitness app Keep, sports giant Nike's shopping app, video streaming apps such as Tencent's Now Zhibo and Tencent-backed, gamer-focused Huya, as well as online dating platform Zhen Ai.

## DLF sale bookings up 24 pc at Rs 3,084 cr in FY21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"New sales at Rs 3,084 crore for the fiscal despite Q1FY21 being muted," DLF said.

Housing sales were badly impacted during June quarter of 2020-21 because of the nationwide lockdown to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Residential demand had exhibited strong rebound during the later part of FY21. Q1FY22 may be impacted due to the lockdown restrictions," DLF said.

## 'Purple revolution' leading farmers towards Atmanirbhar Bharat

PNS ■ BHADARWAH



"I worked with a multinational company in Delhi for four years before losing my job due to the pandemic last year... I packed my bags and returned to my native village dejected after finding it difficult to get another job," 28-year-old

Anish, a resident of Tipri village, told PTI.

However, he said his decision to return and join his family in growing Lavender revolutionized his life as he became a job provider from a job seeker a year ago.

"I am more confident today than ever before as not only my savings have increased but it gave me immense satisfaction that I am giving jobs to others," he said, thanking the scientists of IIM Jammu for mobilising farmers of this far flung area.

Farmers from Tipri, Lehrote, Khellani, Manwa, Chinta, Trabbi, Koundla, Sharora, Chattra, Dandi, Bhalla and some parts of Athkhar, who have started harvesting their produce of lavender flowers, are expecting a bumper crop this year and opined that switching to lavender farming

has come as a major relief for them during these testing times of corona pandemic.

"When we switched from growing traditional maize crops to aromatic lavender farming 10 years ago, we were discouraged even by our relatives and friends but today all of them look at us as an inspiration.

"During current crisis of pandemic when everybody is worried about losing jobs and businesses, lavender farmers are not only making good fortunes for themselves but also providing jobs to at least 3,000 others during these testing times," Toufeeq Bagban, a young entrepreneur, said.

Growing of lavender not only helped us survive during the hard times of pandemic but its strong aroma also kept Corona at bay and it's proof that not a single positive case

was reported from any of the villages where there are lavender fields," Sarpanch, Neotra Karyan, Om Raj, believes.

The progressive farmers of Tipri village, where all the residents have switched to lavender farming and have become the leading producer of lavender flowers, demand road connectivity to transport their produce to the distillation units. "No doubt lavender farming has changed our fortunes but we have to carry our produce on our back to the distillation centre at Dradhu which is 7 km away from the village for extraction of oil," Anjali Devi, a local resident, said.

She said it is not only very cumbersome to transport the produce on backs in sweltering heat, but the non-availability of a motorable road is a major disadvantage for the residents.

The families from different villages of Jammu and Kashmir's additional district Bhaderwah under Union Government's Aroma Mission switched from maize cultivation to growing of aromatic plants and they are happy over their decision in the backdrop of ever increasing demand of lavender oil in the internation-

al market, which earned them good fortunes. At the time of the pandemic and prolonged lockdowns, the farmers were providing jobs to hundreds of labourers, thus becoming a true symbol of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', officials said.

"I worked with a multinational company in Delhi for four years before losing my job due to the pandemic last year... I packed my bags and returned to my native village dejected after finding it difficult to get another job," 28-year-old

"I worked with a multinational company in Delhi for four years before losing my job due to the pandemic last year... I packed my bags and returned to my native village dejected after finding it difficult to get another job," 28-year-old



# the pioneer agenda

FROM THE INSIDE

**The vaccine solution**  
As the Maldives tourism industry faces the  
brunt of rising Covid-19 cases, it is time  
cut the losses & buy effective vaccines

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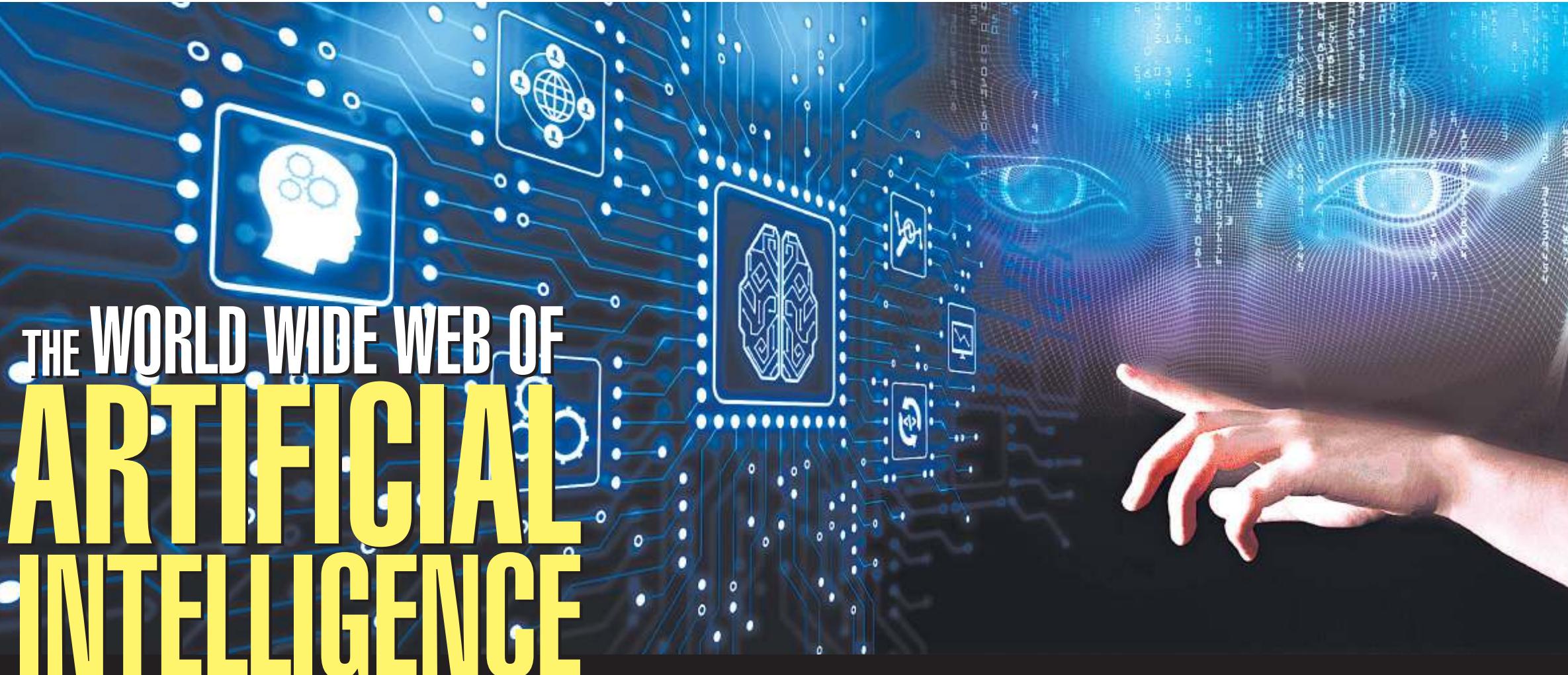


9

**The Shrieks**

*Rape of minor by minors is a clarion call to look within, to wake up and give voice to the calls for help by the 10-year-old that went unheard, says MUSBA HASHMI*

I always knew that saying the unsayable was going to be a powerful thing  
— Phoebe Waller-Bridge



## THE WORLD WIDE WEB OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI can be great to increase the wealth and happiness of humans but we must be making more intelligent choices about when to let it in, writes AKSHAT TYAGI as he warns against the manipulation/misuse of knowledge engineering

Narendra Modi has shown the people of India that he is the only leader who can lead India to become a developed country. The first thing he did in his reign was to eliminate the corruption that was rampant all over India. The corrupt bureaucrats were fired and the black money that was stashed away was brought back to India. The people were fed up of the scams that were taking place in the country. Modi has made sure that the corrupt people are punished and put behind the bars. Modi has shown that the country is secure in his hands. He has made sure that no terrorist would be able to penetrate into the country and destroy the peace that we have in India. He has also made sure that the Chinese are not able to cross the border and conquer any of the Indian territory.

The passage above is neither my opinion nor my writing. In fact, it was not written by a human being at all. It was generated using one of the most advanced language models ever — OpenAI's GPT3. The instruction I gave the model was: *Write an essay about Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ideology*. Using publicly available information it can generate coherent thoughts best resembling a human writer. The model can create new ideas, classify information like moods and intentions, summarise content, chat like an empathetic friend and even write basic computer code. It can often ramble and throw meaningless sentences too, like most humans, I guess.

The model is so good at producing human-like sentences that the company which built it has decided to not give out access to this tool to the general public. They sell the right to use GPT3 to a selected group of people and strongly review what you do with it. They do not permit its use for political campaigns, spam, hateful content, content that incites violence, or other uses that may cause social harm.

Whether the paragraph above is for a political campaign or not is for you to judge, or might depend on where it is published. It can easily qualify as public awareness advertising with some skilful explanation.

Absurd, isn't it? A company limits its customer size when so many others are waiting in line to give them their money. It doesn't have to market its product, it has to keep it quiet and control what you do with it. Imagine you go to buy a new car, and you first have to submit an application describing where you're going to drive it and the car manufacturer says they can anytime decide you're a bad driver and take the car back. You would probably think the car ain't worth the fuss.

And you'd mostly be right. You can do pretty horrible things with a car if you want but the damage is still going to be limited. When you start crashing into other cars and killing pedestrians, the car would either break down or you will soon enough hit a police barrier. This level of insanity is pretty rare not because of the policing by Hyundai or Suzuki, but because there are real-life consequences to such behaviour. You'll land up in jail and the rest of your life would get very difficult.

OpenAI has to go out of its way to make

sure you are not a bad person with ill intentions because the kind of damage AI can do to our democracies, relationships, health and communities are far more severe than we currently understand. And this damage is going to be deeper and more nuanced, like murder without a murderer, a fountain of blood but no knife.

It is the closest we have come to the sci-fi dystopia feared for so many decades. AI doesn't need to be a conscious entity with a desire for power, nor does it need an Iron Man suit to do real damage to real people. When we talk about not-yet-possible AI in anthropomorphic form, we forget a form of it is already here. And until we understand how it can hurt us, we will not know how governments and companies can use it to manipulate common people for greater power.

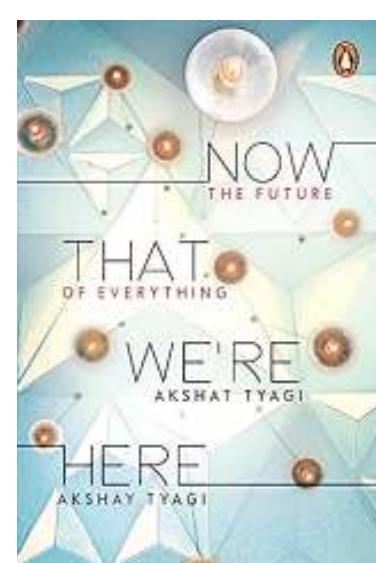
Stuck at homes we are spending more time on social media and the internet than ever. It means more of our beliefs are shaped by a virtual world that we would never verify and experience personally. AI may have had the distant potential to disrupt our lives for years, but now more than ever it has an immediate chance to touch us as we scroll our timelines for sharing SOS messages and distracting ourselves from the horror outside.

### WHY DOES AI CONTENT MATTER?

Let's look at the anatomy of a conversation on social media. For example, you hear about a report of political corruption at the highest levels of government. You create a hashtag like #CorruptionHurts. Your friends and their friends share it, popular pages use the same hashtag and some big celebrities also join in. Twitter picks up your chatter and features it in the 'Trending' section.

The leader in question is of course threatened by this public mobilisation. So they get their own troll army to use the same hashtag to either tweet gibberish, highlighting the corruption of the Opposition or calling the dissenters a gang of hooligans. When the next person tries to click on the hashtag to learn more or search the trend, it will appear to be a partisan issue where one can pick their monster or declare the whole thing a hoax. Unimaginable? We don't know if this was government-sponsored obfuscation but this is what happened during the Russian protests of 2011 when people came out against ballot stuffing and voting irregularities in the elections. After the Russian police detained protesters at Moscow's Triumfalnaya Square, activists created a massive tweetstorm with the hashtag #Triumfalnaya (in Russian). It wasn't much later that the same anti-government hashtag was polluted by pro-Kremlin messages. If you never heard about it, they did a good job.

Scholars call this censorship by noise. AI with its ease of believable content generation at scale will make this problem almost impossible to tackle. Every time that the powerful need to change the narrative and get away with their failings, they wouldn't even have to summon an army of trolls to that. A few skilled employees with access to advanced language models will take care of millions of disgruntled citi-



THE ONLY BULWARK AGAINST AI IS TO BE BETTER-INFORMED CITIZENS. WE SHOULDN'T BE OKAY WITH OUR GOVERNMENT BOASTING ABOUT SELLING OUR DRIVING LICENSE DATA IN THE PARLIAMENT OR USING FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY TO IDENTIFY PROTESTORS. NEITHER SHOULD WE NAIVELY GET EXCITED EVERY TIME A COMPANY TALKS ABOUT A 'PERSONALISED' DIET, MUSIC PLAYLIST, BOOK RECOMMENDATION, CAREER COUNSELLING OR THE NEXT SHINY THING MADE JUST FOR US

zens. Detecting bot accounts and misinformation is already hard for social media companies. What happens when they have to distinguish between the thoughts of flesh beings and silicon avatars?

Even when the political moment is over, imagine how it changes people. If AI can tweet and talk like a person, would you be more alarmed about the account which replied to your post yesterday? Would you be sure they actually agreed with you, are they genuine allies? Suspicion and mistrust can be lethal weapons to make us doubt the reality around us.

### MANY LIVES OF AI

Even though an AI program has a predefined objective, we don't quite know how it will go around achieving that objective. There is no simple mathematical function AI follows to get the outputs from the inputs, even though it has been designed purposefully to get those specific outputs. We can observe and study how it behaves by adjusting levers in a controlled environment, but we still don't know what kind of relation it develops between the input and output and whether these relations can be translated into real-world properties at all.

Many traditionally human-intensive jobs are already being augmented by tech, making people's skills less central to the equation. Ever had a bad day and a worse Uber driver who wouldn't pay any heed to the Google Maps' traffic-congestion warnings? He thinks he knows these streets better than any American corporation ever will. He knows which route is shorter and quicker because driving is what he has spent his life doing. There's no point fighting to persuade each other when confirming both his and Google's hypothesis that the traffic will cost you more time than taking a bad option. Even when he surrenders to your arguments about Google Map's algorithm and takes that unintuitive path to drop you at the destination on time, he still cribbs about the path not taken. In any case, he is always right.

Of course, the algorithm is not always right. We selectively remember the times it didn't alert us about the diversion, but there is a logic behind its accuracy that we generally trust. It gathers data from millions of other cars, analyses the historical traffic-movement patterns of a neighbourhood and predicts the soon-to-be congestion on your path.

Even though this sophisticated synthesis of data has been around for a while, it has gained increasing traction in the past decade. Never before have we had the capacity to collect these many data points nor the computing power to make any meaning of them. Just fifteen years ago, the best way to predict the shortest and quickest path to a destination was individual human intelligence. And that largely meant you were a frequent commuter of that route to have formed at least a stable opinion of traffic movement. The more outgoing you were, the more personal data you had, the smarter your decisions turned out to be.

In this pre-Google Maps era, individuals with greater social freedom turned out to be better decision-makers. To be clear, this wasn't

a difference of intelligence or any other genetic advantage; it was merely a case of a larger pool of data. The compounded benefit of better decision-making strengthened their position as better deserving of making important decisions. It created a self-serving cycle that kept improving the decisions made by them, earning them even greater power. These pocket machines work the same way but have the data of all the earth's drivers combined and augment drivers to be much better at their jobs.

That's just one example of how a combination of AI and algorithms changes our lives every day right now. It impacts who has the power to lead and who is left behind.

### NOW THAT WE'RE HERE

When a breakthrough in AI happens, it can be deployed before any government can blink an eyelid. There limits to how we can regulate a technology the creation of which doesn't even need an office building let alone a registered GST address. It doesn't come asking for environmental and labour permits. Governments can attempt to control big corporations from following some ethical principles and defining what's okay. Sadly, Indian politicians and bureaucrats are highly unlikely to lose sleep over the design and data of AI anytime soon.

The transport ministry will be better off beginning the work of mitigation now rather than after all the driving jobs in transportation are lost. Transport minister Gadkari may or may not be around to defend his position of not letting autonomous driving happen in the country. India spent a lot of effort wooing Tesla to India when the car maker's ultimate pitch is vehicles that can drive themselves. We want Tesla's factory jobs but fear its main product. India is like a man in his midlife crisis who likes looking at children but not spending time with them.

The only bulwark against AI is to be better-informed citizens. We shouldn't be okay with our government boasting about selling our driving license data in the parliament or using facial recognition technology to identify protestors. Neither should we naively get excited every time a company talks about a 'personalised' diet, music playlist, book recommendation, career counselling or the next shiny thing made just for us.

AI can be great to increase the wealth and happiness of humans but we must be making more intelligent choices about when to let it in. Exciting technology solutions should not steal our attention from things that matter and make life worthwhile. If there are no vaccines in a country, talking about a facial authentication system for efficient distribution is like talking about interior design for cloud castles. Sounds fancy but is pretty useless. Or even deadly.

The writer is the founder of WorkHack and a Rajeev Circle Fellow. AI and Automation is one of the ideas in his book, Now That We're Here: The future of everything (published by Penguin), amongst Design, Data, Behavioural Economics and so much more



SUSTAINABILITY IS NO LONGER  
ABOUT DOING LESS HARM. IT'S  
ABOUT DOING MORE GOOD  
—JOCHEN ZEITZ

# THE VACCINE SOLUTION

As tourism industry faces the brunt of rising Covid-19 cases in the Maldives, now might be the time cut the losses and buy the more expensive, but more effective, vaccines, writes SONU SHIVDASANI

**T**he Maldives, along with Dubai, the Seychelles, the United Kingdom, and Israel, are counted among the most vaccinated countries as of now. But while Israel and the UK are seeing the virus almost disappear, the Maldives, Dubai, and the Seychelles are witnessing the opposite, with cases skyrocketing.

In the Maldives, the number of cases has risen from a low of 19 per day in December to over 2,000 in late May, the number of deaths, 45, represents one third of all deaths that we have suffered since the beginning of the pandemic. This is in spite of the fact that 58% of the population has received one vaccine shot, and 30% has received both.

#### THE HUMAN AND ECONOMIC TOLL

The recent rise in cases in Male has led to hospitals overflowing with patients, and a tragic rise in deaths. Out of the 125 Covid-19 deaths in the Maldives, 45 occurred during the past month. While the fatality rate remains extremely low (0.2% of people who caught Covid-19 in the Maldives have died), that statistic doesn't provide much solace to those who have lost loved ones.

The high case load in recent weeks has also inflicted economic damage. Out of the top ten markets this year, four are no longer able to travel. Indians (the number two market this year) are no longer permitted to visit the Maldives. Germany, the UK, and France (markets number three, seven, and nine) have put the Maldives on their red lists. In the UK, citizens returning home from the Maldives have to quarantine in a miserable hotel for 14 days.

According to the Maldives Inland Revenue Authority (MIRA), US dollar revenues collected in January 2021 were USD 46 million — just 1% down on January 2020. But in January, things were looking good. Now as many countries' citizens cannot travel here, and revenues in May and June are likely to be similar to October 2020 — 58% down on the year earlier. On an annualised basis, this could cost the Government as much as USD 250 million in lost revenues.

#### THE UNDERLYING REASON

One reason could be the choice of vaccine. The first vaccine Israel used was the Pfizer-BioNTech. They also have an excess supply of Moderna. Dubai and the Maldives had a similar vaccination program using a combination of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine and Sinopharm. The Seychelles is the most vaccinated country in the world but has relied almost exclusively on Sinopharm.

At Soneva, we consulted six leading infectious disease experts from around the world to assist us with our Covid strategy. Unfortunately, the feedback on the Chinese vaccine was not great.

According to one of the experts: "The mRNA vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer) are the only ones with published data showing high performance even against the new virus variants. The Chinese vaccines that are being used in many parts of the world appear to be only weakly protective, from the limited amount of information available... The problem is that we do not have reliable data on the Chinese vaccines."

Shared another expert: "Sinopharm, unlike the vaccines noted above, is more of a 'classical' vaccine design (i.e. inactivated whole virus) — the kind of vaccines which have been trialed (and failed) for decades for combating seasonal Coronavirus. Although the Sinopharm licensing studies suggest the vaccine has 80% effectiveness, the trials had very few people over 60 years and I have concerns about Sinopharm's effectiveness in older individuals in particular. Whether Sinopharm will provide more or less resilience to emerging Covid variants, such as the new strain found in India remains unclear."

When one considers the relative performance of countries using different vac-

cines, as well as the feedback of these experts, it would seem that Sinopharm may not be as effective as we have been led to believe.

#### PROTECTING A PATIENT FROM CATCHING THE VIRUS VS PROTECTING THE PATIENT FROM GETTING SERIOUSLY ILL

All data shows that while some vaccines are more effective in preventing you from catching the virus, all the vaccines are generally effective in preventing serious illness and, most importantly, death. As one of the experts consulted said: "Even the weakly protective vaccines may be quite helpful in preventing serious disease or death."

While the number of cases have spiked, and last month, 5 out of 45 fatalities were from people who had already received a second dose of the vaccine, the performance in the Maldives in terms of fatalities is amongst the best in the world. A few months ago, the survival rate here was 99.7%. It is now 99.8%. This is second to Singapore at 99.95%. It is also a commendable performance when compared to India (98.88%), the U.S. (98.21%), Germany (97.6%), and the U.K. (97.16%). The Seychelles at 99.65% is slightly behind

**ACCORDING TO MIRA,  
US DOLLAR REVENUES  
COLLECTED IN  
JANUARY 2021 WERE  
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the Maldives. So, whilst the vaccines might be less effective in preventing one from getting the virus, they are generally protective against serious disease and death. There are more deaths in Male at the moment simply because there are many, many more cases.]

#### A NEED FOR PERSPECTIVE

As we discuss the benefits and drawbacks of different vaccines, it is important to remember that the experience in the Maldives, is that if one gets Covid, one has a 99.8% chance of survival.

Furthermore, it is important to remember to boost one's immunity. Immune-boosting diet, rich in foods including garlic, turmeric, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, and red onions is considered to be of great help. As is popular Ayurvedic herb, Andrographis Paniculata. Fortunately, we have had no fatalities among the people who tested positive at our resort.

Dr. Abdul Slocum, a Turkish Oncologist, who treated his cancer patients that caught Covid recently shared: "We used anti-coagulants, anti-biotics, anti-virals as conventional therapeutics together

with high dose vitamin C, Andrographis, Thyme extract etc. as complementary therapies and all of our patients have gotten better with such treatment." So, irrespective of whether one has had the vaccines or not, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is still very important to ensure that one does not succumb to this disease.

#### MIXING AND MATCHING VACCINES

Call it the way forward, but if the Maldives wants to get both the health and economic long-term benefits of its vaccine roll-out, it might consider changing the brand of vaccines it uses for second shots. There is little information on the effects of combining Sinopharm with other vaccines. However, a recent article in the Lancet finds that pairing the Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines appears to increase the likelihood of mild to moderate side effects, but no serious outcomes were reported. In fact, the article goes on to say that:

"MIT Technology Review reports that such an approach could become more common if mixing and matching Covid-19 vaccines is proven to boost the overall level or duration of immunity — as tantalizing, early evidence suggests might be the case."

"Several trials ..... have been launched to examine the question MIT Technology Review reports, including a study in Spain assessing the viability of mixing a first doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine with a second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech, as well as a study between AstraZeneca and Russia's Gamaleya Institute examining how AstraZeneca's vaccine works in combination with Russia's Sputnik V vaccine."

Early evidence suggests that it is possible to combine vaccines and change course. The Pfizer vaccine is considerably more expensive than other options. Covishield is generally available for somewhere between USD 2.4 per vaccine (if you can get hold of the shots, that is). The cost of the Pfizer vaccine is approximately USD 25. Israel was the first to receive a large amount of Pfizer because they offered the company 23 Euros vis-a-vis the 12 Euros the E.U. countries were offering. It is my understanding that Dr Reddy's Laboratories, the Indian manufacturer of the Sputnik V vaccine, proposed a price of USD 14 for the vaccine.

However, as I mentioned earlier, we are starting to see a big drop in tourism as a result of the spike in cases. The economic consequences could affect MIRA's revenues by as much as USD 10 million to USD 20 million per month — considerably more than the cost of more expensive vaccines. Now might be the time our losses and buy the more expensive, but more effective, vaccines.

The writer is the CEO and Joint Creative Director of Soneva



# The low hanging fruit of agroforestry

India was the first country to adopt a national agroforestry policy in 2014. However, most farmers are reluctant to embrace this ecologically and socially sound practice due to lack of policy support, write ELISA VALLETTE & SIJO ABRAHAM

**A**groforestry designates land-use systems that deliberately integrate woody perennials (trees, shrubs, palms, bamboo, etc.) with crops or animals. The "forest" within the "agroforestry" can be an existing native forest, the edge of a forest or a planted forest by the land's owner. But agroforestry should not be reduced to the addition of trees. Agroforestry is a regenerative agricultural practice which, through topsoil regeneration, enables biosequestration that is the capture and storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Moreover, agroforestry seeks to optimise the vibrant interplays within local ecosystems to make farms more productive, self-sustained and resilient without a lot of external human inputs. Indeed, the dynamic ecological equilibrium between trees and crops increases biodiversity while improving natural water cycles and enhancing ecosystem services.

Despite its ancient origins, the practice of agroforestry declined at the expense of intensive agriculture promoted during the green revolution in the 1970s. Today, the agriculture sector suffers from climate change while still largely contributing to it. Indeed, agriculture is responsible for 16% of India's annual greenhouse gases emissions, making it the second most polluting sector. However, the flip side of the coin is that climate change threatens agriculture, on which about 58% of India's

population depend on as their primary source of livelihood. Thus, increased socio-environmental concerns have sparked renewed interests for agroforestry practices. Agroforestry provides the opportunity to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions from agriculture, capturing atmospheric carbon, while simultaneously helping farmers to adapt to harsher climate conditions. Already practised on 13.5 million hectares in India, the potential to expand is enormous, especially for the 80% of small-holders farmers in the country with two hectares of land or less. Numerous low-hanging fruits stem from tapping into this potential.

While at first glance agroforestry did not seem profitable, today's socio-environmental crisis makes this long-neglected practise an undeniable solution. According to the Restoration Opportunities Atlas, India has 87 million hectares of land that could benefit from agroforestry, 952.5 million tons of above-ground carbon could be sequestered by just a 20% increase in tree cover. Beyond climate change mitigation, agroforestry farmers are better equipped against climate variations. Although decades of intensive agriculture have depleted soils and threatened natural ecosystem services, regenerative agriculture could repair these damages and conserve soils.

For instance, while agriculture devours and tends to contaminate

water, agroforestry favours and takes advantage of natural water cycles. Also, scientific evidence shows that trees stimulate evaporation and transpiration thereby increasing local rainfalls. Then, as the roots of trees extend deeper than annual crops, water can more easily infiltrate into the ground, preventing floods and making communities resilient in the face of natural disasters.

Roots also take up nutrients from deeper layers of soil that otherwise cannot be reached by the crops and prevent the groundwater

from being contaminated by excess fertilizers or manures. In addition to efficient water management, forest's inherent native biodiversity helps prevent pest attacks and soil erosion. Therefore, agroforestry allows restoration of depleted soils, maintenance of biodiversity and climate resilience.

These environmental benefits coincide with socio-cultural positive externalities for farmers and consumers. Indeed, agroforestry diversifies types of crops, makes harvests more resilient, and there-

fore secures farmers' livelihood. It also boosts agricultural productivity since, on smaller plots of land, agroforestry grows more food than mono-crops per hectare, alleviating the current pressure on land. This maximisation of potential yields is all the more pleasing as harvests prove to be more nutritious. Therefore, agroforestry provides hope for long-term food security to a growing nation. However, several barriers prevent agroforestry from becoming a mainstream practice.

First, since 2014, the policy

rather than alleviating political obstacles has added confusion. Indeed, the creation of a national agroforestry board, which aimed at aligning existing programmes and providing better coordination between the ministries of agriculture, forest and rural development, never gained enough authority. Therefore, despite successfully simplifying regulations, the enabling legal environment is shadowed by an ambiguous governance system.

Secondly, the policy offers farmers extension services and capacity-building training. However, inadequate awareness failed to popularise these policy initiatives. Non-governmental organisations such as Saytrees, who have helped more than 700 farmers, planting 1500 fruit trees over the past 4 years, act as useful bridges between national programs and on-the-ground realities.

Wider local-knowledge dissemination might still be insufficient to overcome farmers' reluctance since at first sight, agroforestry might not seem profitable. Indeed, yields might decrease in the first few years until the soil quality has fully recovered. To counteract perceived risks during the transition phase, the policy should provide safety nets so the farmers can change without risking their livelihood in addition to information about agroforestry's longer-term benefits.

Another major obstacle the policy failed to address is the lack

of clear land ownership rights which discourages farmers from planting trees, perceived as a long term investment. Social discriminations along with gender, caste or tribal lines further force farmers to focus on short term yields and profits. Therefore, for the agroforestry policy to be successful, it is essential to first clarify land tenure rights while subsidising access to land, water, technology and credit across caste and communal barriers.

Finally, despite the stated objective of the policy to boost market linkages, rural farmers still encounter difficulties to find outlets for these products. However, the growing demand given the popularity to buy local, organic and nutritious-indigenous varieties, should incentivise farmers to overcome these supply-chain gaps.

To conclude, despite the agroforestry policy seeking to extract agroforestry's tremendous benefits, farmers still face many challenges to make the transition. Therefore, complementary services and additional support, especially during the transition phase, should work in synergy with the agroforestry policy. India has already established itself to be a global agricultural powerhouse and by the successful implementation of agroforestry, it could champion sustainable agriculture and inspire other nations to adopt and implement similar policies.

The writers are Fellow, Anant Fellowship for Climate Action





# The Shrieks

Rape of minor by minors is a clarion call to look within, to wake up and give voice to the calls for help by the 10-year-old that went unheard, says MUSBA HASHMI

**O**n a usual busy morning of May 24, a 10-year-old girl left her house to play with friends, only to return with a trauma that will continue to haunt her for many years to come. The incident is of Rewari, Haryana, where a group of about seven boys, all minors except for one who is 18, raped the girl in a school building. This was not all. The accused went a step ahead and filmed the act. The video went viral in no time.

It was not until a villager informed the girl's parents about the video that the family came to know about the horrific incident. One can only imagine what trauma the little one must have suffered that made her take to silence.

While rape is not something we haven't heard of before, the fact that boys as young as 12 don't shy away from committing such acts is what is both shocking and unfortunate.

What made these young ones take to such heinous crimes? There can be no one answer to this. But it gives us a reality check of the society we live in and the world we will be leaving behind for the generations to come.

"The young ones are the most vulnerable of all. We don't know what exactly might have happened that led to such a crime, but we can anticipate that it was because of the company those boys shared. The 18-year-old was indeed aware of what he was doing, and he might have lured other boys into the crime," Pukit Sharma, a clinical psychologist, says.

#### WATCH YOUR KIDS

The only way out here is to have a close eye on your child's friends. The parents must take charge of the company that their child shares. Keep a look at what your child does when alone. The need is such that even children as young as ten are having access to mobile phones and WiFi; this increases the risk of internet abuse.

"Parents must monitor the watch and search history when their child uses the phone. There are times when a child ends up watching inappropriate videos or ads, not because he searched for it, but because it appeared as a suggestion. It is all toxic and addictive. Hence, try to put your phone in kid-safe mode before giving it to your child; this will eliminate any chances of incorrect use of the Internet," Sharma opines.

He adds that many children grow up with difficult emotions such as loneliness, hatred, aggression and envy because of our current social structures; this makes them hardened and aggressive and predisposes them to such criminal behaviours.

#### DISCUSS AND EDUCATE KIDS

Pooja Sareen, advocate, women and child rights activist, says that parents' biggest problem is not opening up with their children. "The biggest problem in India is that the parents do not open up with children on a very critical subject such as sex, sexual needs and sexual restrictions, what should be and should not be done. Most of them watch web series with their children that are often full of abusive words and sexual and love-making scenes. While some skip them, others don't think that the child is juvenile, or a teenager. It is disheartening to hear some parents say 'dekhne do, ladka hai, seekne do, isi ne sambhalna hai'. We read too many articles on child rapes, rape on children by children or juveniles and we have read about 'Bois locker room' too; this is one way to expose the young minds towards such a sensitive topic, and due to the lack of proper guidance, they fail to understand what is right and wrong," Sareen says.

The lack of dialogue on sexual crimes at the school and community level is the reason behind



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PLAYS

— POOJA SAREEN,  
ADVOCATE, WOMEN AND  
CHILD RIGHTS ACTIVIST

**A 10 or 12-year-old, when committing a crime, won't think of the consequences. A child cannot comprehend a crime at such an age and calculate the actions. As most people say, it is nothing but a result of criminal mentality, and it is because they are not educated enough about right and wrong. They see what is happening in their family or area and replicate it**

— Urmī Chudgar, Lawyer, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights

the increasing cases. The more educated children are about such acts and crimes, the instances of such cases will reduce. "The Government should work towards the prevention of such crimes because the general trend is to respond to a crisis and not prevent it. Also, children don't fall under the vote bank, and the Government thinks that work for children is more charity-driven; this shows in the budget as well, where only 0.6 per cent is spent on child protection. They often see investment and result as two parallels, but the need is to merge the two and work on things. You can't expect results if you don't invest. The investment here is to be done in the prevention of such crimes," Urmī Chudgar, Lawyer, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, tells you.

Experts emphasize that educating children and creating awareness is the only way to reduce these crimes. "A lot of moral preaching is the need of the hour. We need to educate children about consent and rape punishments. Sadly, the school's curriculum covers sex education as a mere topic. But does it cover STI, STDs, AIDS, rape, pregnancy after rape, the complications that rape victims go through and the psychological treatments they require? The answer is no. All these topics should be covered with the help of examples and suggestive role plays," Sareen opines.

#### A MIRROR TO SOCIETY

Sareen adds that rape by a 10-year-old or a 6-year-old, is not just an example of a mentally sick and frustrated child, but it also holds a mirror to the parenting, teaching from school, friends and highlights the dearth of efforts made on him. "Such news makes headlines every other day. We read them, think about them and often forget. The question is: are the boys only to be blamed? And not their parents who fail to teach them the difference between right and wrong," Sareen asks.

#### DO WE NEED STRICKER LAWS?

While many people demand that there should be stern laws for such heinous crimes, Chudgar feels that the current laws are sufficient. "Amending the laws and increasing the punishment is not the way forward. When the Nirbhaya Case happened, there was a change that 16-18 years olds also could be tried as adults in case of heinous crimes; this in itself is a deviation in the principle of the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act. Also, because India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) bringing in such changes in the law that are against the benefit of the child are not in line with the principle of JJ Act and UNCRC. Hence, the need is for proper implementation of the existing laws and not thinking of newer

ones. The POCSO and Juvenile Justice Act are strong enough," she emphasizes.

She adds that it is not because of the loopholes in the law that juveniles are taking to such crimes thinking they will get away with it; instead, it is because they commit a crime without thinking of the consequences.

"A 10 or 12-year-old, when committing a crime, won't think of the consequences. A child cannot comprehend a crime at such an age and calculate the actions. As most people say, it is nothing but a result of criminal mentality, and it is because they are not educated enough about right and wrong. They see what is happening in their family or area and replicate it. So, parents have to work with their children from the beginning. And especially when a crime has been committed, and they are in the shelter homes, there has to be intensive counselling to make them realize and understand that what they have done will have consequences on them as well. They should not think that they are juveniles and will get away," Chudgar tells you.

#### VICTIMS HESITATION TO REPORT

While these cases are fortunate enough to make headlines and reach public notice, hundreds of cases go unnoticed and even unreported. The reason being public shame and harassment that follows. Some people even doubt the law and think they will not get justice.

"Some people think that reaching out to the court and attending the hearings will further traumatise the survivor. But in such cases, the law has several provisions for the survivor. There's a separate room for the vulnerable survivors. There's no lawyer or the culprit in the room. The survivor is accompanied by a support system and can put her point forward. There are no direct questions thrown on these young survivors. Not only this, but the law even allows them to avoid multiple visits to the court. If they want, the survivor can give out their statement in one go. Also, when they need to be questioned, police don't go in uniform," Chudgar explains.

It is nothing but a result of a lack of knowledge and awareness related to law. It's high time we should start creating awareness instead of just talking about it. "In the rural areas, the Asha workers can be trained and educated about the law, and they can further pass on the knowledge to the people. The Government can organise short informative sessions on such topics. Further, hoarding and posters can be put in public places. It is said that you tend to remember things that you have read for a long time. Posters will prove to be helpful as they will initiate that dialogue and also educate people about such sensitive topics," Chudgar opines.

## TALES OF HORROR



● Six people have been arrested this month for allegedly raping a 16-year-old girl in Mumbai.

● Another minor was allegedly sexually assaulted by four youths near Shivamogga, last year. The girl was taking care of her mother at a COVID care centre when the incident happened.

● In November, 2020, a 68-year-old priest was arrested for raping a 10-year-old at his daughter's home in Bengaluru.

● An eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a 70-year-old man in a village in Uttar Pradesh. The girl was playing around when the incident happened.

● A man was held for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl and filming the act and sharing it on social media. The accused was arrested for repeatedly raping the minor girl for the past one year.

#### NEED TO STREAMLINE TECH USE

Both Sareen and Chudgar agree with Sharma that the unrestricted use of technology is also leading to such crimes. "Giving them gadgets is a key to easy access to sex. Especially during the lockdown, when both classes and tuitions have gone online, how fair is it to not mentor them on what's essentially a part of them. I beseech to all parents, hold hands of your children, educate them on sex. Educate them on repercussions of rape, talk to them as friends, they need you," Sareen says.

And the even more horrifying trend that is, of course, a result of technology — shooting videos and posting them online, is becoming infamous. Chudgar says that it is part and parcel of technology. "It is a strange world that we live in. Not only children but even adults have the habit of recording whatever is happening near them; this is both good and bad. However, being in possession of child pornographic material is a crime in itself; it is again because of the lack of awareness that people don't shy away from recording and circulating such crimes. The need is to educate people about the wise use of technology because there's not much we can do about this infamous trend," she suggests.





## G7 adopts global infra plan in pushback to China's 'belt and road'



The Group of Seven rich nations will announce on Saturday a new global infrastructure plan as a response to China's belt and road initiative, a senior official in U.S. President Joe Biden's administration said.

The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity, said the United States would also push the other G7 leaders for "concrete action on forced labour" in China, and to include criticism of Beijing in their final communiqué.

"This is not just about confronting or taking on China," the official said. "But until now we haven't offered positive alternative that reflects our values, our standards and our way of doing business."

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a multi-trillion-dollar infrastructure scheme launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping involving development and investment initiatives that would stretch from Asia to Europe and beyond.

More than 100 countries have signed agreements with China to cooperate in BRI projects like railways, ports, highways and other infrastructure.

According to a Refinitiv database, as of mid-last year, more than 2,600 projects at a cost of \$3.7 trillion were linked to the initiative, although the Chinese foreign ministry said last June that about 20% of projects had been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Japan city uses tsunami lessons for Covid vaccinations

Tamio Hayashi, 77, doubted he could ever navigate the internet systems set up to register for COVID-19 vaccines across most of Japan.

He hated the idea of using the "troublesome" systems that have broken down and befuddled older residents, hobbling Japan's inoculation push.

Luckily, local officials in his small, northeastern town helped him through the red tape and he got his shots - a rarity in Japan, where the authorities are racing to inoculate the vulnerable elderly population before the start of the Summer Olympics in just six weeks.

"This way is great," Hayashi told Reuters after he and his wife got their second doses at a local gymnasium. "You just get a notice that says come on such-and-such a day."

Soma, a rural city 240 kilometres (150 miles) north of Tokyo that was devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, has surged ahead of most of the country in vaccinations and aims to reach people as young as 16 by the end of July, just as the Olympics are getting underway.

Japan lags far behind other advanced economies in vaccinating its people - 12% have received at least one shot, according to a Reuters tracker, compared to France, the next lowest in the Group of Seven industrial powers at 42%, and

the most advanced, Canada, at 63%.

Soma's nimble, homegrown approach eschews the reservation systems and fragmented efforts common across Japan. The city has inoculated 84% of its elderly - versus about 28% nationwide - now injecting younger generations and aims to reach people as young as 16 by the end of July, just as the Olympics are getting underway.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga wants to have Japan's elderly population fully vaccinated by July and all adults by November. But that will require boosting shots to a million a day from the peak so far of around 700,000.

### WORK FROM HOME EFFECT

## Count of males seeking emotional counselling sees upward trend

PNS ■ PUNE

The national lockdown imposed last year due to coronavirus had reportedly witnessed a rise in the number of complaints from women about domestic violence, abuse by family members, psychological disorders, emotional outbursts and other issues.

But counsellors say that they have been observing a trend over the past few months in which men are increasingly coming forward to complain about a host of issues, including strain in relationship with spouse and work-related stress as a large number of professionals continue to work from home due to the restrictions during the second wave of the pandemic.

Officials and the counsellors from Pune police's Bharosa Cell that was set up to offer help to women, children and senior citizens in distress, said since September last year, men are increasing coming forward with complaints.

Assistant police inspector Sujata Shanmee of the cell said that it had received a total of 2,074 complaints in 2020.

"Of these, 1,283 complaints came from women, while in 791 cases the complainants were men. In 2021, till April, we have received 729 complaints from women and 266 from men," she said.

Advocate Prathama Sadavarte, one of the counsellors with the cell, said that during the strict lockdown last year, they started receiv-

ing more complaints from women about domestic violence abuse, emotional outbursts, psychological confinement and husbands and in-laws' tendency of taking them for granted.

"But post-unlock (September onwards), complaints from men also increased and they were about mostly work-related stress and extended working hours due to work from home mode, she said.

She said that if both the spouses are working, they are generally sympathetic towards each other's job responsibilities. However, if one spouse is not working, then he or she may not get full idea of the hardships that the other one is facing on the professional front.

Giving an example, she said, "A male professional had approached us saying that he has been working from home since the last lockdown. He complained that just because he is at home, his wife expects him to help in household chores.

The husband had failed to communicate to her his work-related woes, as a result of which both of them started arguing.

While counselling them, we realised that both of them had not given space

to each other which was required, she said.

"During the counselling sessions, we asked them to start giving compliments about each other's work and spending more time with each other, she added.

Sadavarte said that there is a perceived notion that such cells and helplines are generally women-centric, but the lockdown has changed that notion and men have also found a platform where they can share their emotions.



### Villagers pray to 'goddess corona' to rid them of the virus

Indian villagers have erected a shrine to "goddess corona" and are offering her prayers in the hope that divine intervention can banish the deadly virus.

Devotees in Shuklapur village, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, have been offering prayers, holy water, and flowers at the bright yellow shrine where they have placed their idol of "Corona Mata", since they erected it this week.

"Maybe with her blessings the villagers, our village, and everyone else get some relief," one villager, who gave her name as Sangeeta, said on Friday.

India was hit hard by a surge of coronavirus infections in April and May but there are signs the worst could be over.

Authorities reported 84,332 new cases on Saturday, the lowest daily tally in more than two months, health ministry data showed. Read more COVID-19 has killed 367,081 people in India, according to government data. The Shuklapur villagers' prayers have not been fully answered - there are still some cases in the district - but the numbers are also sharply lower than they were at the height of the pandemic.

## Does a plant-based diet really help beat Covid?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, it's been suggested that certain foods or diets may offer protection against COVID-19. But are these sorts of claims reliable?

A recent study published in BMJ Nutrition, Prevention and Health sought to test this hypothesis. It found that health professionals who reported following diets that are vegetarian, vegan or pescatarian (those that exclude meat but include fish) had a lower risk of developing moderate-to-severe COVID-19.

Additionally, the study found that those who said they eat a low-carbohydrate or high-protein diet seemed to have an increased risk of contracting moderate-to-severe COVID-19.

This may make it sound like certain food preferences - such as being vegetarian or a fish eater - may benefit you by reducing the risk of COVID-19. But in reality, things aren't so clear.

### Self-reporting and small samples

First, it's important to underline that reported diet type didn't influence the initial risk of contracting COVID-19. The study isn't suggesting that diet changes the risk of getting infected. Nor did it find links between diet type and length of illness. Rather, the study only suggests that there's a link between diet and the specific risk of developing moderate-to-severe COVID-19 symptoms. It's also important to consider the actual number of people involved. Just under 3,000 health professionals took part, spread across six western countries, and only 138 developed moderate-to-severe disease. As each person placed

their diet into one of 11 categories, this left a very small number eating certain types of diet and then even smaller numbers getting seriously ill. This meant, for instance, that fish eaters had to be grouped together with vegetarians and vegans to produce meaningful results. In the end only 41 vegetarians/vegans contracted COVID-19 and only five fish eaters got the disease. Of these, just a handful went on to develop moderate-to-severe COVID-19. Working with such small numbers increases the risk of a falsely identifying a relationship between factors when there isn't one what

statisticians call a type I error. Then there is another problem with studies of this type. It's observational only, so can only suggest theories about what is happening, rather than any causality of diet over the effects of COVID-19. To attempt to show something is actually causal, you ideally need to test it as an intervention that is, get someone to switch to doing it for the study, give it time to show an effect, and then compare the results with people who haven't had that intervention. This is how randomised controlled trials work and why they are considered the best source of evidence.

When it comes to trying to determine the best diet for protecting against COVID-19, the truth is we don't have enough quality data even with the results of this study, which are a small data set and only observational. And a further issue is that the study didn't look at the quality of people's diets by assessing which foods they actually ate. This is another reason why it needs treating with caution. Self-declared diet types or food questionnaires may not capture information on the variety and type of foods eaten for instance missing details about how much fresh or processed food someone eats, how meals are eaten and with whom. And as alluded to above, self-reported data on what people eat is also notoriously inaccurate. The bottom line is: the name of what you call your diet is far less important than what you actually eat. Just because a diet is vegetarian or pescatarian doesn't automatically make it healthy. For now, the robust evidence isn't there to suggest that being vegetarian or pescatarian protects against COVID-19 so there's no need to rush to switch your diet as a result of this study. However, what we do know is that keeping active, eating a sensible healthy diet and keeping our weight in check helps to fortify us against a wide range of health issues, and this could include COVID-19.

**Chinese researchers find batch of new Coronaviruses in Bats**

A mid-renewed calls to probe into the origins of COVID-19, Chinese researchers said they had found a batch of new coronaviruses in bats. The newly found viruses in the bats include one that may be the second-closest yet (genetically) to the COVID-19 virus, CNN reported. The researchers say that their discoveries in southwestern China show just how many coronaviruses are there in bats and how many have the potential to spread to people. In a report published in the journal Cell, the Chinese researchers from Shandong University said, "In total, we assembled 24 novel coronavirus genomes from different bat species, including four SARS-CoV-2-like coronaviruses." The samples were collected from small, forest-dwelling bats between May 2019 and November 2020. The researchers say that they tested urine and feces as well as taking swabs from the bats' mouths. According to the Chinese researchers, one of the viruses was very similar genetically to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that's causing the ongoing pandemic. "It would be the closest strain to SARS-CoV-2 except for genetic differences on the spike protein, the knob-like structure that the virus uses when attaching to cells," they said. "Together with the SARS-CoV-2 related virus collected from Thailand in June 2020, these results clearly demonstrate that viruses closely related to SARS-CoV-2 continue to circulate in bat populations, and in some regions might occur at a relatively high frequency," they wrote.



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