

sunday pioneer

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75% Indian villages declared ODF Plus,
says Jal Shakti Minister

India needs to grow
AT 8% FOR
transformational changes

Harish Rao:
TELANGANA'S
health and wealth

QUOTE OF THE DAY
Everything is leaking under the KCR government. KCR cancelled the exams and punished the students although the mistake was made by someone else. Who gave the authority to KCR to play with the lives of the unemployed through leaks? If KCR has any shame he should resign immediately. The HC order to conduct the Group-1 preliminary examination again is a severe blow to KCR.
- Revanth Reddy, TPCC chief

DON'T MISS...

Visakhapatnam records a 23%...

Deputy Transport Commissioner GC Raja Ratnam stated that there has been a 23% reduction in road accidents in the Visakhapatnam district over an eight-month period compared to the corresponding period in the previous year. Between January and August of 2022, the district experienced 996 traffic accidents, but this year, there has been a substantial decrease in the number, down to 767 accidents. "Visakhapatnam has marked a significant achievement by..."

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Enthusiasts for people-to-people...

A two-day conference to revive the ham radio movement with a special focus on the technical aspects of amateur radio and to boost people-to-people relations across regions opened in Santiniketan on Saturday. It brought together 170 delegates from different parts of India, Bangladesh and the US, who will take part in various sessions like amateur radio application procedures, high-frequency radio and digital radio. "Ham radio is a hobby that refuses to die because it has reinvented itself with new..."

-PAGE: 5

TRAI for boosting telecom infra in...

TRAI has issued recommendations for bolstering telecom infrastructure in North East, suggesting parleys with the state governments to harmonise their respective 'right of way' policies with related Central rules, as well as favouring provision of electricity to telecom sites on priority at utility tariffs. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) noted that while a number of initiatives have been taken by the government to improve telecom connectivity in the northeastern...

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How ducks, geese and swans see...

Each year, millions of birds fly into power lines, wind turbines and the other man-made structures that litter the open air space. These collisions frequently result in the death of birds and, if power systems go down, disrupt our lives and pose financial challenges for power companies. Numerous bird species, including macaws in Brazil, geese and swans in the UK, and blue cranes in South Africa have been found to be susceptible to collisions with power lines. But any flying bird can fall victim to such a collision. In some places, these collisions happen so often that they can jeopardise local populations of endangered species. But birds are highly evolved flying machines. They can fly in tightly packed flocks that weave and turn to our delight and wonder. So why do...

-PAGE: 10

SKILL DEVELOPMENT SCAM

CID GRILLS NAIDU

● The TDP president moves SC for quashing his FIR

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president N Chandrababu Naidu faced intense interrogation by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) as part of its inquiry into the multi-crore Skill Development Corporation scam on Saturday.

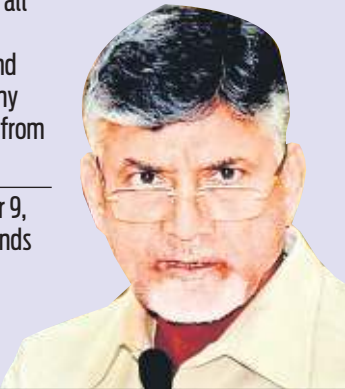
A team comprising nine seasoned CID officials, under the leadership of Deputy Superintendent of Police M. Dhanunjayudu, arrived at Rajahmundry Central Prison, where Chandrababu Naidu is currently lodged. The questioning session commenced at 9:30 a.m. and continued until 5 p.m. Prior to the commencement of the interrogation, Naidu underwent a thorough medical examination. The inquiry took place in a conference hall, with Naidu's legal counsel, D. Srinivas, observing the proceedings from a distance. Naidu is being granted a five-minute break for every hour of questioning to consult with his attorney.

The prison authorities have taken all necessary precautions, including providing access to medication and ambulance services, to address any potential health concerns arising from the stress of the interrogation. For Naidu, a 73-year-old political veteran with a 45-year-long political career, including 14 years as Chief Minister, this experience marks an

■ The questioning session commenced at 9:30 a.m. and continued until 5 p.m. Prior to the commencement of the interrogation, Naidu underwent a thorough medical examination.

■ The prison authorities have taken all necessary precautions, including providing access to medication and ambulance services, to address any potential health concerns arising from the stress of the interrogation.

■ Naidu was arrested on September 9, for allegedly misappropriating funds from the Skill Development Corporation, leading to a purported loss of over Rs 300 crore to the state exchequer.



entirely new chapter as he faces questioning by law enforcement officials over allegations of corruption.

The CID was allowed to question the former CM in the jail premises considering the paucity of time, health, and age of the former chief minister, helping him avoid the nearly 200 km-long journey from Rajamahendravaram central prison to the CID office in Mangalagiri.

Meanwhile, a day after the Andhra Pradesh High Court dismissed his petition to quash the FIR against him

in the skill development scam case, the former chief minister and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief moved the Supreme Court on Saturday.

The lawyers representing the TDP chief filed a Special Leave Petition (SLP) in the apex court seeking an urgent hearing in the matter. The Vijayawada ACB Court on Friday extended the custody of Naidu for two days for questioning him in a skill development case. The CID custody ends on Sunday.

2

2

MOTHKUPALLY TO KCR



Why silent on Naidu's arrest?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Minister Motkupally Narasimulu strongly condemned the arrest of former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.

"KCR should respond to Chandrababu's arrest. KCR worked in Chandrababu's government. I was in the NTR government. If KCR responds by keeping politics aside, it will be good for democracy. I am in the BRS. I am personally responding to Chandrababu's arrest. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy helped Chandrababu by putting him in jail. Chandrababu will win the AP election. Former CM Rajasekhara Reddy did not do evil things like Jagan," Mothkupally said.

He said that he is going to launch a protest against Chandrababu's arrest. A one-day protest will be held near NTR Ghat on Sunday, he added.

Speaking to the media after paying his respects near NTR Ghat, Motkupally lashed out at Jagan. He warned Jagan to remember that his kingdom would not last forever. "Chandrababu was arrested against constitutional norms without the permission of the Governor. Arresting Chandrababu without his name in the FIR is evil.

2

TDP distorting facts in Naidu's case: Karumuri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Civil Supplies Minister Karumuri Venkata Nageswara Rao has reiterated that TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu had diverted Rs 371 crore under the guise of a Skill Development scam. He has been arrested and jailed in Rajahmundry Central Jail with substantial evidence against him.

Additionally, a quash petition filed by Naidu, claiming the case to be fabricated, was dismissed in the High Court last Friday.

Currently, CID police have taken custody of him and are conducting an interrogation.

However, TDP-affiliated social media groups are distorting facts, asserting that Chandrababu's arrest

That the TDP is uninterested in engaging in discussions within the Assembly but is endeavoring to garner sympathy from the media. If discussions about the scams and Chandrababu's arrest were held within the Assembly, the truth would be revealed to the public. However, the TDP is attempting to propagate the narrative that Chandrababu's arrest is a vengeful government action.



was unjust and illegal.

Minister Rao stated that the TDP is uninterested in engaging in discussions within the Assembly but is endeavoring to garner sympathy from the media.

If discussions about the scams and Chandrababu's arrest were held within the Assembly, the truth would be revealed to the public. However, the TDP is attempting to propagate the narrative that

Chandrababu's arrest is a vengeful government action. The Minister pointed out that even though they have spent Rs 1.5 crore on their legal defense, they are focusing on the technical aspects of the arrest rather than addressing Naidu's involvement in the Skill scam.

Even TDP supporters do not believe that Chandrababu is innocent.

The Minister continued by emphasizing that Naidu's 14-year tenure as Chief Minister was marked by numerous scandals, whereas during Chief Minister Jagan's administration, a focus has been on implementing welfare schemes for the impoverished population.

2

Boy murdered, body dumped in sea

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The picturesque port city of Visakhapatnam is in a state of shock and turmoil following the gruesome murder of a 16-year-old boy within the jurisdiction of the One Town police station.

The young victim, whose identity has been disclosed as 'Chinna,' met a horrific end as he was mercilessly slain, wrapped in a gunny bag, and discarded into the waters of the sea.

The investigation has rapidly unfolded as local police grapple with the baffling circumstances surrounding this heinous crime.

2

3 workers electrocuted in oil palm orchard

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Tragedy struck on Saturday when three persons lost their lives due to electrocution while engaged in repair work on a bore at a palm oil orchard in Uppalapadu village, located in the Gandepalli mandal.

The incident occurred when Galla Nagaraju (25), the owner of the palm oil field, enlisted the services of bore mechanic Killi Nagu (38) from Jagampet and his assistant, Bodireddy Suribabu (40), to extract and repair an old submersible motor from a bore. To facilitate the motor's removal, they installed three iron pipes in a conical configuration.

As they were in the process of



extracting the motor, one of the iron pipes made contact with an overhead live 11 KV electric wire, leading to the instant electrocution of all three individuals. Local law enforcement has initiated an investigation, and the bodies have been transferred to the government general hospital for postmortem examinations.

2

IF CONG COMES TO POWER

Will amend women's quota Bill: Mallikarjun Kharge

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday said his party would amend the women's reservation bill if it comes to power at the Centre in 2024.

There are no major legal complications in implementing the bill right now but the Narendra Modi government putting it off for 10 years, he said. While supporting the bill in Parliament, the Congress demanded that it be implemented with immediate effect and a quota for women from Other Backward Classes (OBC) be included in it.

"When our government comes in 2024, the first thing we will do is make amendments to the bill," Kharge said, addressing a party rally in Jaipur in poll-bound Rajasthan.

The Constitution (128th Amendment) Bill, which seeks to reserve a third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women, was passed by Parliament earlier this week. It was the first bill to be taken up and passed in the new Parliament building.

In his address, Kharge alleged that the then president Ram Nath Kovind was not invited for the foundation laying of the new Parliament building because he is 'untouchable'.

If the foundation laying was done by an untouchable, then naturally it would have to be washed with Gangajal (water from the



President Droupadi Murmu was not invited for the inauguration of the new Parliament building while many others, including actors, were invited. "This is an insult to the president."

Ganges)," he said, referring to the former president's caste.

Kharge said President Droupadi Murmu was not invited for the inauguration of the new Parliament building while many others, including actors, were invited.

"This is an insult to the president," he said.

"...Lok Sabha is summoned by the president and not by the prime minister. But there is no place for (the president) and then they say that they respect women a lot," he said.

2

TDP knows scam is real: Vijayasai

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Member of the Rajya Sabha and YSRCP national general secretary V Vijayasai Reddy has said that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) knows that the skill scam is real and that is why the party is resorting to provocative actions not to discuss it in the Assembly and intentionally boycotting the sessions.

The MP recalled that the Constitution clearly says that everyone is equal before the law and no one has any exceptions.

He pointed out the TDP for their strange claims like 'How do you arrest a 74-year-old man? If Naidu did not commit any crime, he would come out innocent, he said.

The MP said that the case was made more complicated by misrepresentation.

He said that the CID court had remanded the case because of prima facie evidence and had not taken into account the quash petition which was not maintainable.

OBTUSE ANGLE



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The third 'Vande Bharat Express' from the State of Andhra Pradesh will be flagged off by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (through Video Conference) on September 24, 2023. The train will connect the two major Southern Capitals of Vijayawada and Chennai with the pride of Indian Railways - Vande Bharat Express. Importantly, this is the first Vande Bharat Train between Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

This indigenous semi-high-speed train starts from Vijayawada railway station and connects with

Puratchi Thalaivar Dr MG Ramachandran Central Railway Station in Chennai city. En route, the train provides a stoppage facility at Tenali, Ongole, Nellore, and Renigunta railway stations providing rail passengers the option to travel to either city in both directions. The distance between Vijayawada and Chennai will be covered within a short span of 6 hours and 40 mins. Importantly, the train goes via Renigunta, providing an opportunity for pilgrim passengers from both States to visit the Temple town of Tirupati.

The train provides the fastest connectivity between Vijayawada



The train provides the fastest connectivity between Vijayawada and Chennai, in this route. Filled with the latest state-of-the-art technological features, it provides the most convenient, comfortable, and safe travel option for passengers from all the two connecting Southern states.

and Chennai, in this route. Filled with the latest state-of-the-art technological features, it provides

the most convenient, comfortable, and safe travel option for passengers from all the two connecting

Southern states. It also gives a fillip to the socio-economic development of the people in the region by expanding employment opportunities and strengthening the inter-dependencies between the people of the two southern states.

The regular train service of the Vijayawada - Chennai - Vijayawada Vande Bharat Express will commence its operations from September 25, 2023. The train is composed of 8 coaches (7 AC Chair Car coaches & 1 Executive Chair Car coaches) with a carrying capacity of 530 passengers. The train will be in service 6 days a week, except Tuesday.

Shortage of iron ore leading to low productivity in RINL

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Due to the lack of prompt response to the Save Our Soul (SOS) pleas made by Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, employees and stakeholders, who are urging the authorities to restore regular iron ore supply from National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC)'s Bachelu and Kirandul mines in Chhattisgarh, the public sector company headquartered in Visakhapatnam is compelled to run its plant at a minimal production capacity.

The profound shortage of working capital has exacerbated the circumstances, compelling RINL to further reduce its production levels. This has pushed the steel plant into a precarious situation, as NMDC, with which RINL has a longstanding agreement for iron ore supply, has reiterated its incapability to provide the complete allocation of the primary raw material from Chhattisgarh and has suggested that RINL procure it from their mines in Karnataka.

Despite the Chhattisgarh mines being located within a distance of less than 500 km,



obtaining iron ore from Karnataka necessitates transportation over a distance of 900 km, resulting in an additional cost burden ranging from Rs 800 to Rs 1,000 per tonne. NMDC, also under the Ministry of Steel, has conveyed to RINL that due to a shortfall in supply, partly due to heavy rains, they are unable to guarantee regular deliveries from Chhattisgarh.

In a letter addressed to Union Steel Secretary Nagendra Nath Sinha, GVL Narasimha Rao, BJP national spokesperson and Member of the Standing Committee on Finance, requested the Ministry of Mines to engage in resolving the predicament confronting RINL. He highlighted that currently, RINL possesses

a mere four-day supply of iron ore, while the facility necessitates a minimum stock of 10 days to operate two blast furnaces and 15 days to operate three blast furnaces. The Member of Parliament expressed significant apprehension about this situation, emphasizing the importance of timely intervention.

Reliable sources shared with The Pioneer that starting from August, NMDC has reduced its daily supply from three or four rakes to just one or two, thereby compelling RINL to significantly curtail its production. A senior official explained that there is currently no production in the Kirandul block, and efforts are underway at the ministry level to resolve this matter in the broader interests

of both RINL and NMDC.

Calling for a resolution to the ongoing deadlock, D Adinarayana, RINL recognized union leader and AITUC national vice-president, emphasized that it was largely due to RINL that NMDC was able to thrive and overcome its financial challenges from 1989 to 2001. Notably, RINL remains NMDC's primary customer, and the company's head office is located in Hyderabad. RINL continues to contribute a significant portion, accounting for 30 percent of NMDC's turnover and profits.

He mentioned that back in 2006, NMDC made a commitment to provide iron ore from the Bailadila/Bachelu deposits, with a capacity of up to 11 MTPA. In line with this, the Government of India granted approval for RINL's expansion to a production capacity of 7.30 million tonnes per annum.

To achieve steel production at full capacity, NMDC was expected to deliver 6 to 7 rakes of iron ore daily, including fines, lumps, and sized ore. It's worth noting that the ore from Chhattisgarh boasts a superior grade quality compared to the ore available in Karnataka.

‘Visakha Vandanam’ to CM Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Non-Political Joint Action Committee wholeheartedly supported Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy's decision to make Visakhapatnam the administrative capital, effective from Vijayadashami. They've organised a welcoming celebration called "Visakha Vandanam" for the Chief Minister's arrival. During a meeting chaired by the Joint Action Committee Chairman Professor Lajapatirai here on Saturday, YSRCP regional coordinator YV Subba Reddy reiterated that Jagan Mohan Reddy had made the decision to establish three capitals four and a half years ago to promote balanced development across the state, especially after the state's bifurcation in 2014.

Industry Minister Gudivada Amarnath highlighted the effectiveness of the Visakha Garjana initiative in conveying their aspirations nationally. He mentioned the Chief Minister's commitment to governing effectively from any part of the state and plans to expedite the move to Visakhapatnam. A committee is being formed to address accommodation-related issues for government offices.

Minister Amarnath repeatedly emphasized that the YSRCP government supports the development of Amaravati and Rayalaseema alongside



Uttarandhra. The Joint Action Committee will warmly welcome the Chief Minister on Vijayadashami considering suggestions from its members.

Chairman Lajapatirai said that making Visakhapatnam the administrative capital will lead to growth in Uttarandhra. He proposed open discussions and unity-building among those with differing opinions and highlighted widespread support for Visakhapatnam as the capital. He proposed open discussions and unity-building for anyone with differing opinions on the matter of the three capitals. He mentioned that he had recently visited 53 loca-

tions and found that an overwhelming 98 percent of the population supported making Visakhapatnam the administrative capital. Lajapatirai highlighted Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's alignment with the decentralization vision of Amartya Sen.

Professor Balamohan Das announced "Visakha Vandanam" as the welcoming event for the Chief Minister and proposed establishing various government offices in different regions, including Kurnool, Visakhapatnam, and Amaravati. Professor Vijayakumar expressed appreciation for the decentralization of administration, deeming it a fortunate development.

Renowned journalist Sivashankar recommended arranging a civic reception within the city to celebrate the Chief Minister's visit to Visakhapatnam, emphasizing the need to ensure that the program instills a sense of ownership among the people.

Senior party leader Koya Prasad Reddy highlighted YS Rajasekhara Reddy's role in driving industrial progress in the Visakhapatnam region and noted that Rajasekhara Reddy had prioritized regional development. He also acknowledged that Jaganmohan Reddy is taking significant steps towards the comprehensive development of various regions today.

‘Protection of rights of sex workers’ children imperative’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a resolute declaration, Kesali Apparao, Chairperson of the Andhra Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (APSCPCR), underscored the imperative of ensuring that the children of survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)/Sex Workers in the State are afforded their full rights and entitlements, devoid of stigmatisation and discrimination. He asserted that these young individuals should have unfettered access to quality higher education, mirroring the privileges granted to all other children.

Apparao made these impassioned statements while serving as the chief guest at a state-level workshop titled "Rehabilitation Rights of Survivors of Human Trafficking and Implementation of Welfare Schemes for Children of Victims of Trafficking and CSE." The workshop was joint-



ly organized by APSCPCR, HELP, and VIMUKTHI, and it took place this on Saturday.

During his address to the workshop's participants, Apparao highlighted the sobering demographic profiles of survivors of trafficking and sex workers. He noted that a staggering 80-90 percent of them hail from backward castes, marginalised communities, and economic minority

groups. Furthermore, many of these individuals have endured one or more of the following harrowing experiences: child marriage, domestic violence, income insecurity, caste-based violence, forced migration or displacement, or gender-based violence. Tragically, their lack of access to recovery services and other opportunities compounds the impact on their overall well-being.

Apparao expressed deep concern that not only are these women affected by these dire circumstances, but their children, the second generation, are also ensnared in this vicious cycle. He disclosed that a comprehensive survey, conducted in collaboration with HELP and Nagarijuna University, is currently underway to assess the status of children born to survivors of

trafficking and victims of CSE/Sex Workers. Based on the study's findings, APSCPCR is committed to making comprehensive recommendations to the government, urging them to provide these children with the full spectrum of state support services they rightfully deserve to enable their holistic development.

The workshop was attended by Adilakshmi, a Member of SCPCR, HELP Secretary Ram Mohan Nimmharaju, ANU Social Work HOD Saraswathi Raju Aiyer, Ex-Member of SCPCR V Krishna Kumar, and representatives from various NGOs and CBOs actively engaged in supporting sex workers in the united Prakasam.

Guntur, and Krishna districts. HELP staff and VIMUKTHI leaders also participated in this significant event, which aims to bring about positive change in the lives of vulnerable children across the state.

CID chief rebuts Lokesh’s claims on skills training

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Criminal Investigation Department (CID) chief N. Sanjay, has alleged that TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh is spreading lies by saying that nearly 2 lakh students were trained under the SIEMENS programme. This claim, as per CID findings, is entirely baseless. The deceptive act took place during the 2015-2016 period when a swindle of Rs 371 crore transpired under the guise of a 90:10 financial arrangement. The perpetrators have attempted to obfuscate the facts by suggesting they trained a vast number of students in the state.

Sanjay disclosed that the previous government allocated a sum of Rs 745.56 crore over four years for skill development, excluding the SIEMENS project. However,

certain leaders are wrongly attributing all the credit to SIEMENS and the APSSDC project, which, in reality, had minimal impact on enhancing students' skills.

The CID's investigation has unearthed questionable timelines in the allocation of funds to Design Tech by APSSDC. On December 5, 2015, APSSDC assigned third-party evaluation work to CITD (Central Institute of Tool Design). Astonishingly, on the very same day, a substantial sum of 185 crore was released to DesignTech. Subsequently, on January 29, 2016, Rs 85 crore and on March 11, 2016, Rs 67 crore were disbursed.

Even more perplexing is the fact that, even before receiving the third-party evaluation report from CITD, which was dated March 22, 2016, APSSDC had already released approximately 337 crores, con-

stituting 90% of the total project cost of 371 crores.

Furthermore, CITD was manipulated by Siemens (SISW), being pressured to justify the release of 90% of funds during the evaluation process. In the deposition provided by Shujayat Khan to the CID, who was the principal director of CITD at the time, he stated that he was not informed that an independent evaluation was necessary. His actions were solely based on information received from Siemens and APSSDC officials, lacking the means to accurately assess the software's value.

These events not only raise concerns about the responsible allocation of public funds but also necessitate a thorough investigation into the procedures and decisions that allowed such significant fund diversion without proper evaluation or justification.

CID grills...

Continued from Page 1

On September 12, Chandrababu Naidu filed a petition in the state high court seeking directions to quash the FIR registered against him in the skill development scam case. He is currently lodged at Rajahmundry Central Prison, where the state CID officials interrogated him for over 7 hours on Saturday. Naidu was arrested on September 9, for allegedly misappropriating funds from the Skill Development Corporation, leading to a purported loss of over Rs 300 crore to the state exchequer.

TODAY	
ALMANAC	
Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Navami:	Sep 23 12:18 PM to Sep 24 10:23 AM
Dashami:	Sep 24 10:23 AM to Sep 25 07:56 AM
Nakshatram:	
Purva Ashadha:	Sep 23 02:56 PM to Sep 24 01:41 PM
Uttara Ashadha:	Sep 24 01:41 PM to Sep 25 11:55 AM
Rahukalam:	4:37 PM to 6:07 PM
Yamagandam:	12:08 PM to 1:38 PM
Varjyam:	09:06 PM to 10:35 PM
Gulika:	3:07 PM to 4:37 PM
Amritakalam:	09:08 AM to 10:39 AM
Ambijit Muhurtham:	11:44 AM to 12:32 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Cloudy
Temp: 33°
Humidity: 79%
Sunrise: 5:57 AM
Sunset: 6:02 PM

Updated: September 23, 2023 5:00 PM

Naidu’s role in skill development...

Continued from Page 1

Yesterday, on Friday, Chandrababu made a virtual appearance before the ACB judge, vehemently denying any involvement in the alleged scam. He also accused the TDP of supporting yellow media outlets, which he claims have been spreading false propaganda against the YSRCP government.

Minister Botsa clarified that the government is not levying any accusations against Siemens, the company involved in the project, but rather questioning the circumstances surrounding the agreement. He inquired why the company failed to invest its promised Rs 3,000 crore and why the government disbursed Rs 371 crore when Siemens didn't uphold its end of the agreement. Botsa

challenged Chandrababu to provide a response to these queries.

He stressed that the YSRCP government is committed to working with integrity and has zero tolerance for corruption. Whenever irregularities come to light, prompt action is taken without any negligence.

In a democratic system, those in power must act responsibly, safeguarding public funds and adhering to ethical principles.

Minister Botsa strongly condemned Telangana Speaker Pocharam Srinivasa Reddy's remarks suggesting that Chandrababu's arrest lacked proper justification. He questioned whether a leader in a responsible position should make such statements and suggested that if Pocharam believes

Chandrababu is innocent, he should discuss it with the Telangana Chief Minister.

In response to media inquiries, Botsa revealed that Siemens had distanced itself from the agreement, asserting that the substantial expenditure for Skill Development training, amounting to Rs 500 per cluster, was unnecessary. Siemens had received Rs 55 crore for software, and there was no reason for the additional expenses.

Botsa also noted that if government officials are implicated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), they will be held accountable. On the day of fund disbursement, officials explicitly stated that they were acting on the orders of then-CM Chandrababu, leaving no room for ambiguity.

Why silent on Naidu’s...

Continued from Page 1

With a budget of seven or eight crores can Chandrababu hope for Rs 371 crore? Chandrababu will not engage in vengeful acts. He is not a criminal like Jagan. Jagan is arrogant as he is drunk with power. I hoped Jagan would win elections at this NTR ghat. At my word, Dalits united for Jagan and he won. Jagan has a history of throwing his mother out of the house. Jagan did injustice to Sharmila although she went on a Padayatra for him. Jagan is a dictator ruling a kingdom without a capital. All states including Telangana have capitals except AP. His mad-

ness has reached its peak. Jagan is ruling through fear. Democrats in AP should wake up," Mothkuppalli said. He demanded that Jagan should apologize to the people regarding Chandrababu's arrest and that he would go to Rajahmundry soon and visit Nara Bhuvaneshwari. If possible, I will also visit Chandrababu in jail, he added.

Dalits will not vote for Jagan in the next elections. Jagan must pay for Chandrababu's arrest. Jagan is a Chief Minister who no one wants. He has no regard for Dalits. During Jagan's rule, including that of Dr Sudhakar there were murders of Dalits in Kakinada, Pulivendula and Chirala, Mothkuppalli said.

TDP distorting facts...

Continued from Page 1

He also questioned why individuals like PA Srinivas were sent to the USA and Manoj Vasudev Parthasani (MVP) fled to Dubai if Naidu was not involved in any wrongdoing. He alleged that these actions were taken due to their collusion with Naidu in various scams.

Furthermore, Minister Rao alleged that while Naidu is in Rajahmundry jail, Lokesh, along with Balakrishna, is conspiring to assume control of the party. Drawing a parallel to Naidu's past actions towards NTR, he claimed that Lokesh and Balakrishna are plotting to betray him and are devising plans covertly.

Criticizing Balakrishna's conduct in the Assembly, the Minister humorously commented that when the Hindupur MLA slapped his

thigh, it appeared as though the Assembly building might collapse, given its temporary structure. He also noted that Yanamala Ramakrishna, who served as Finance Minister during Chandrababu's tenure, has been reticent about speaking on the scam.

Karumuri asserted that while the entire country is observing the welfare schemes being implemented by Jagan Mohan Reddy's administration, the TDP-supporting Yellow media is attempting to tarnish the government's reputation. He highlighted the progress made during Jagan's four years in office, including advancements in education, healthcare, agriculture, and transparent governance. These efforts have resulted in a significant reduction in poverty rates from 11 percent to 6 percent in the state, positioning Andhra Pradesh as a leader in

Will amend women’s quota...

Continued from Page 1

The Congress leader also questioned the Narendra Modi government's intention behind bringing the women's reservation bill, saying the BJP does not want to give reservation to women even though it does not say so. Kharage said Sarojini Naidu was the first woman president of the Congress and asked, "In 100 years, has any woman become president of BJP or RSS?"

He said the BJP thought of the women's reservation bill just ahead of elections as several opposition parties have formed the INDIA bloc. "When Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and I together came up with the idea of INDIA, the women's bill came to their mind," he said.

Kharage said the special session of Parliament was called

for five days because Prime Minister Modi had to show off the new Parliament building and it ended in four days. Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are for discussion on people's issues and resolving them, not for the purpose of "exhibition", he added. Targeting the BJP over the women's reservation bill, Kharage said when the erstwhile Congress-led government brought a bill for women reservation the BJP had opposed it.

"...it was stopped because of them and today they are roaming around as heroes. These people are smart," he said.

"These people neither have clear intentions nor clear policies. They just make speeches. We supported the bill, but it will be implemented in 2030.... In 10 years, neither Modi nor others will be there," he said.

3 workers electrocuted in oil palm....

Continued from Page 1

Former MLA Jyothula Nehru visited the accident site to inquire about the incident and expressed condolences to the bereaved families. Three Workers Electrocuted While Performing Repairs in Palm Oil Orchard Kakinada, September 23: Tragedy struck on Saturday when three individuals lost their lives due to electrocution while engaged in repair work on a bore at a palm oil orchard

in Uppalapadu village, located in the Gandepalli mandal.

The incident occurred when Galla Nagaraju (25), the owner of the palm oil field, enlisted the services of bore mechanic Killi Nagu (38) from Jaggampet and his assistant, Bodireddy Suribabu (40), to extract and repair an old submersible motor from a bore. To facilitate the motor's removal, they had installed three iron pipes in a conical configuration.

Tragically, as they were in the process of extracting the

motor, one of the iron pipes made contact with an overhead live 11 KV electric wire, leading to instant electrocution of all three individuals. Local law enforcement has initiated an investigation, and the bodies have been transferred to the government general hospital for postmortem examinations.

Former MLA Jyothula Nehru visited the accident site to inquire about the incident and expressed condolences to the bereaved families.

Boy murdered...

Continued from Page 1

The body of the boy has been shifted to King George Hospital (KGH) for a thorough postmortem examination.

One Town police registered a case.

The police are trying to ascertain the possibility of family disputes or any other underlying factors that may have led to the murder.

Min inaugurates drinking water taps

611 property ownership certificates also handed over to beneficiaries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Housing Minister Jogi Ramesh on Saturday inaugurated 213 fresh drinking water taps with a cost of Rs 70 lakhs under the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme in Penumalli village of Pedana mandal in Krishna district. Later, the minister distributed property ownership certificates to 611 beneficiaries living on Gramakantam lands in Nelakondapalli, Kongancharla (Kummarigunta) villages of Pedana mandal and Korlapadu villages of Bantumilli mandal under YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhu Hakku Bhu Raksha scheme at the Penumalli Secretariat.

On this occasion, the Minister said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's aim was to pro-



vide fresh drinking water to every house across the state under Jal Jeevan Mission scheme. As part of this, in Penumalli village of Pedana mandal, 213 taps were installed in the village with Rs 70 lakhs.

Under YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhu Hakku Bhu Raksha Scheme, the lands and houses in Gramkantham were measured and re-surveyed with modern technology across the state with the aim of providing

On this occasion, the Minister said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's aim was to provide fresh drinking water to every house across the state under Jal Jeevan Mission scheme.

property ownership rights. He said that a survey has been conducted in every village in the entire state and registration of documents is being provided to owners of land and houses. As part of this, property ownership rights have been given to 262 people in Nelakondapalli village, 121 in Kongocharla village, and 228 in Korlapadu, he said.

Pedana MPP R Vani, Guduru

MPP S Madhusudan Rao Pedana Market Yard Chairperson Charumathi, Penumalli Sarpanch Ramanaidu, MPDO Reddaiah, Tasildar Madhusudan Rao, RWS DE Incharge Hema Sravanti, Sarpanches of various villages, MPTCs, local leaders and mandal officers of various departments participated in this programme.

Vishnu slams TDP leaders for unruly behaviour in Assembly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Planning Board Vice Chairman and MLA Malladi Vishnu said that the behavior of the opposition leader in the Legislative Assembly is despicable. He criticised that Telugu Desam has failed miserably in playing the role of a responsible opposition. He said that TDP members are trying to turn the Assembly where public issues are discussed into a political platform.

He said after Chandrababu was arrested in the corruption case, people hated Telugu Desam legislators who were behaving inappropriately by tearing papers and throwing them at the podium, abusing the Speaker and the Chief Minister.

Vishnu said that the entire state is observing TDP's row-



dyism in the Legislative Assembly. He said that it is necessary for all the democrats to condemn the unruly behavior of the Telugu Desam by bringing down the respect of the Legislative Assembly in a democracy.

MLA Vishnu on Saturday as part of the Gadapa Gadapa programme visited 61 division

262 secretariat. He was accompanied by EE (Engineering) Srinivas, DEs Gurunatham, Ramakrishna, Co-option members Nandepu Jagadish, Leaders Nalam Babu, Bhogadi Murali, RS Naidu, Medepalli Jhansirani, Nagamani, Meesala Balanagamma, Venkateswara Rao, Sachivalaya staff participated in the programme.

Photography contest for 'Swachha' Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada City Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar here on Saturday released the photography contest poster as part of Indian Cleanliness League 2.0 aimed to create awareness about cleanliness and environment in the city.

Mayor Bhagyalakshmi said that photography has the power of visual storytelling and the ability to drive meaningful change, that the active participation of citizens in keeping Vijayawada clean and green is important. She stated that Vijayawada Municipal Corporation will encourage all the citizens of the city to create awareness about the ill effects of plastic and garbage on our city through the photography contest that a clean environment is our responsibility.

Mayor Bhagyalakshmi stated that Swachha Vijayawada is the main theme of these com-



petitions organized as part of Indian Cleanliness League 2.0. She explained that for a clean and clean Vijayawada, people can make a reel of 30 seconds to 2 minutes each for an Instagram post about the effect of plastic, the effect of garbage before/after cleaning.

She stated that the photos and videos for Instagram reels and informative videos are useful to the people and can be sent to the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation.

VMC Commissioner Swapnil said that the first prize of Rs 20,000, the second prize

of Rs 10,000 and the third prize of Rs 5,000 will be given to the best choice for photography and post.

He further said that regarding the Instagram reel, the first prize will be Rs 30,000, the second prize will be Rs 20,000 and the third prize will be Rs 10,000 for the best choice.

The Commissioner stated that all the citizens of Vijayawada city should show their talent and their responsibility towards a clean Vijayawada by participating in the photography programme.

'Hard work & dedication are cornerstones of student success'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

VIT-AP University, announced the successful culmination of its 3rd Convocation ceremony, celebrating the academic accomplishments and achievements of the Class of 2023. The event took place on Saturday at the university's picturesque campus, marking a significant milestone in the journey of the graduating students.

Speaking on the occasion Dr Justice B Siva Sankara Rao, Chairman, The Judicial Preview Committee Government of AP said, "Hard work and dedication are indisputably the cornerstones of student success, and Convocations serve as a day to mark the culmination of their accomplishments. The day serves as an inspirational reminder of the power of commitment and diligence, motivating students to pursue their ambitions with assurance."

Ashish Sharma, Director, Microsoft attended as the Guest of Honour said Students who work hard and stay dedicated are more likely to per-

Ashish asserted that Convocation is not just an end but also a new beginning as it signifies the commitment to lifelong learning and the pursuit of excellence, as education is a continuous journey.

severe through challenges and setbacks. He further said that they develop resilience, the ability to bounce back from failures, which is a crucial life skill. Ashish asserted that Convocation is not just an end but also a new beginning as it signifies the commitment to lifelong learning and the pursuit of excellence, as education is a continuous journey.

G Viswanathan, Founder & Chancellor of VIT, in his presidential address said that the grand 3rd Convocation at VIT-AP University symbolises the institution's dedication to nurturing talent, fostering acade-

mic excellence, and moulding future leaders. It stands as a testament to the hard work, determination, and resilience displayed by the Class of 2023.

VIT-AP University conferred degrees to a diverse group of students from various academic disciplines, including Engineering, Management, and Science. Several students were recognized for their outstanding academic achievements, receiving awards and accolades for their exceptional performance throughout their academic journey. During the ceremony, a total of 1611 students graduated, including 16 gold medalists and 70 rank holders, across Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. programs in Engineering and Management.

Sankar Viswanathan, Vice President of VIT group of Institutions, Dr SV Kota Reddy, Vice - Chancellor, Dr Jagadish C Mudiganti, Registrar, Dr N Madhusudan Rao -Dean Academics, Dr Khadeer Pasha Deputy Director Students welfare and others were present.



Students showcase talent at elocution competition

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Students of Maris Stella College showcased their verbal prowess during the 57th A.D. Shroff Memorial Elocution Competition held by the MSC Department of Economics at the college campus here on Saturday.

Addressing the students, the Head, of the Department of Economics, Dr. K. Swaroop Kumar explained that Ardeshr Darabshaw Shroff, an industrialist, banker, and economist co-founded the Forum of Free Enterprise. He elaborated that Shroff complained about the indifference with which the State treated entrepreneurs, and sought active

support to the private sector to bring about rapid industrialisation in the country. The students articulately expounded on the topics - "Is the Indian rupee ready to emerge as a global reserve currency, and what steps should the government take to achieve this goal?"; "Is the Indian economy on track to becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2025?"; "Is unemployment a bigger problem than unemployment? Recent steps to Skill India."

The students engaged in a spirited competition during the elocution event in which heads of various departments acted as judges for the competition.

Engg student killed in accident

PNS ■ CHILAKALURIPET

An engineering student died on the spot and another was severely injured in a bus accident near Chilakaluripet in Palnadu on Saturday.

According to the police, the deceased student identified as Sheikh Wajeeda is studying second-year engineering at a private engineering college. Every day, her father Abdul Rasheed drops her at the college on a two-wheeler. While the duo were crossing a major junction, a private travel bus going from Coimbatore to Vijayawada lost control and hit their two-wheeler. Later, the bus also hit three two others who were crossing the road.

Wajeeda fell under the rear wheels of the bus and died on the spot. Abdul Rasheed, Katta Krishna, and Yesu Kumar were seriously injured. Locals shifted the injured to Chilakaluripet government hospital. Katta Krishna is a second-year intermediate student at a private college. He was shifted to a private hospital in Guntur as his condition was critical.

Visakhapatnam records a 23% reduction in road accidents

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Deputy Transport Commissioner GC Raja Ratnam stated that there has been a 23% reduction in road accidents in the Visakhapatnam district over an eight-month period compared to the corresponding period in the previous year. Between January and August of 2022, the district experienced 996 traffic accidents, but this year, there has been a substantial decrease in the number, down to 767 accidents.

"Visakhapatnam has marked a significant achievement by becoming the first city in the State to report a decline in accidents. The District Road Safety Committee, under the leadership of the District Collector and District Road Safety Chairman, has been consistently convening meetings to address road safety concerns," added GC Raja Ratnam.

The Commissioner pointed out that the Greater



Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has initiated several road safety projects at various stages of implementation, which further contribute to the region's safety initiatives.

Providing further elaboration, GC Raja Ratnam emphasized that a sum of Rs 21 crore has been allocated and disbursed for a range of road safety endeavors. Out of this allocation, the funds have been meticulously allocated as follows: Rs 1.17 crores for the installation of speed breakers

and road line markings, Rs 8 crores for pothole repairs, Rs 11.40 crores designated for parking area development, and Rs 43.30 lakhs invested in junction enhancements. Moreover, an amount of Rs 42.50 lakhs has been allocated for underpass enhancements, Rs 1.38 crores for the installation of median grill structures, and Rs 54.05 lakhs for road lighting.

The Deputy Transport Commissioner (DTC) added, "In addition to these infrastructure improvements, we have taken strong measures against

drunk driving, resulting in 4,145 cases being registered against offenders from January to August. Offenders faced a total fine of ₹50.88 lakhs, with some individuals being assigned community service as part of their penalty. Those found guilty of drunk driving had their driving licenses suspended for a duration of three months."

Expanding on the initiatives aimed at reducing accidents, the Deputy Transport Commissioner (DTC) noted that awareness campaigns have been carried out in educational institutions, including colleges and schools. These programs have been jointly organized by the transport and police departments to impart knowledge and sensitize the community about road safety. DTC also called upon the public to maintain ongoing collaboration with the transport and police departments to continue lowering road accidents and ensuring the safety of all residents in the district.

UNDER 14, 17, AND 19 SCHOOL GAMES FEDERATION OF AP

Two talented students from each school be trained for nationals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Commissioner of School Education and President of the School Games Federation, S Suresh Kumar, said that at least two talented students from each school should be identified and trained as national-level athletes. Under 14, 17, and 19 School Games Federation of Andhra Pradesh organised a workshop and executive committee meeting with the School Games Secretaries of all districts at the State Office of Samagra Shiksha on Saturday. He launched the book 'Under 14, 17, 19 School Games Federation of Andhra Pradesh, Workshop and Executive Meeting with District School Games Secretaries'.

Suresh Kumar said that the government is providing sports equipment to the schools, and wants to create awareness about the use of sports equip-



ment in the 'School Complex' organised every month. He further said that in schools that do not have PETs within the school complex, a local teacher should be identified and entrusted with the responsibility of promoting sports among the students. He explained that all government and privately owned schools should register in the 'Fit India' app and participate in Quiz, Khelo India, Quit India Pledge, etc. related to it and upload the related information without fail. He further explained that 'School sports complexes' are being held like never before in the state, so the PET teachers

should participate in those meetings and develop their school and sports.

ASPD Dr KV Srinivasulu Reddy said that so far sports equipment has been provided to schools in 12 districts and the rest of the districts will be provided before October 16 according to the plan. He explained that 17 items for senior secondary schools, 14 items for primary schools, 9 items for primary school and 17 items for high school are provided for age-appropriate sports equipment such as volleyball, net, throw ball, handball, tennis court, yoga mats, football, short put etc.

'Students should be abreast of technological advancements'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) Scientist P Sunil who was the chief guest of the Freshers' Day programme of Sarada Educational Institutions briefed about the latest technology in space and said that students should be aware of the updating technology. He said that if the students have discipline, leadership qualities, expressiveness and various skills along with studies, they will excel and reach their goal.

The Freshers' Day celebration was held in a frenzied atmosphere with student dances and fashion shows, ramp walk, and students show-



casing their talent by playing melodious music with musical instruments.

YSR University Registrar Radhika Reddy who was the chief guest advised the students to first concentrate on their studies, set their goals, and explore to achieve them.

Managing Director of Sarada Educational Institutions Y Sharada Devi said that according to the current education system, students should use technology and study diligently. She said that things like pressure should be used as a good platform for that. She said that the aim of the college is that the students should not only study but also participate in extracurricular activities.

India is on cusp of tech revolution: Krea varsity Chancellor

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

India is at the critical juncture of its growth story and academics will play a pivotal role in driving the economic and societal development of the country. Envisioning this, Krea University and JSW Group collaborated to establish the JSW Academic Building to provide an enabling environment that would contribute to India's roadmap for economic growth and sustainable development. Krea University has an enviable legacy of making exceptional contributions to India's development efforts that have actively shaped the economic landscape of the country so far. JSW Group signed its collaboration with Krea University through its CSR arm, JSW Foundation.

Narayan Vaghul,

Chancellor, Krea University says, "The country is on the verge of a scientific and technological revolution. Our goal is to nurture students who possess critical and analytical thinking skills and who can actively contribute to the country's social development by asking pertinent questions. To us, the quality of education is of utmost importance. We aim to produce a generation of students who will make a significant impact. Each brick within the university will resonate with our collective dreams. We must create an impact with values that can unify our society. With JSW's lending hand, we will be able to march forward, towards a better future."

The inaugural event commenced with Vice-Chancellor



Professor Nirmala Rao welcoming the dignitaries and the guests. Addressing the gathering, Professor Rao said,

"Krea University has a very special mission, to cultivate the next generation of global leaders empowered to navigate

the complex problems of the twenty-first century. JSW shares our passion and determination for this mission and

we are grateful for their support in this journey. We value this partnership immensely and, as a token of our gratitude, we dedicate our academic building to the JSW foundation."

Speaking on the occasion, Sajjan Jindal, Chairman of JSW Group said, "We are immensely proud to inaugurate this state-of-the-art JSW Academic Building at Krea University. This is a testament to our commitment to foster excellence in education. The collaboration between JSW Group and Krea University signifies our shared vision for empowering future leaders with a holistic and innovative learning environment. Together, we aim to shape minds that will drive positive change in India and at the global stage."

Provide basic amenities to SC colonies: Collector

PNS ■ ONGOLE

District Collector BS Dinesh Kumar directed the officials to take steps to provide basic amenities to the colonies where the Scheduled Caste population is high.

The Collector held a meeting here on Saturday with the officials and reviewed the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Adarsha Gram Yojana scheme in the district.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that the authorities should focus on providing adequate infrastructure in these villages and removing the social and economic gaps between the Scheduled Caste people and the non-Scheduled Caste people.

In this direction, drinking water-sanitation, education, medical, social security, rural roads-housing, electricity, agricultural policies, financial inclusion, digitization, and livelihood - skill development should be provided priority basis and steps should be taken to improve the living standards, he ordered the officials.

District Social Welfare



Officer Lakshma Naik explained to the Collector that 99 villages have been selected under the Pradhan Mantri Adarsha Gram Yojana scheme in Prakasam district in two phases to provide facilities, adding that it has been decided to undertake 500 works in these villages.

Responding to this, the Collector directed that steps should be taken to complete these works expeditiously and discussions should be held in this direction with the contrac-

tors who have already undertaken the works. The Collector said that if there is a problem of funds (fund gap) it should be brought to his notice.

The Collector told the officials to identify the tasks to be undertaken, a meeting should be held with the villagers and their needs should be known, and then the officials of the concerned departments at the mandal level should hold a joint meeting and prepare a department-wise action plan with necessary measures by

October 20 th.

The Collector directed that the departments concerned play an active role in implementing the scheme in the same spirit, which was introduced with the aim of transforming the villages where SCs live and providing them with all the basic facilities they need.

DRDA PD Ravikumar, ICDS PD Madhuri, DEO Subba Rao,ZP CEO Jalireddy and SE Kondaiah were among those who were present.



Ex-Minister Akhilapriya's indefinite fast foiled

PNS ■ NANDYALA

The police foiled the indefinite fast of former minister Bhuma Akhilapriya by forcibly shifting her to her residence in the wee hours on Saturday.

Bhuma Akhilariya embarked on indefinite fast in protest against the arrest of TDP chief and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at RK Function hall in Nandyal. She observed the indefinite fast flanked by her brother Bhuma Jagat Vikyat Reddy.

A large number of police led by DSP Maheshwar Reddy went to the fasting camp and forcibly shifted them to their residence. Later talking to the media, Akhilapriya said that he would continue the fast at her residence.



Poverty rate down to 6% due to welfare schemes

PNS ■ ELURU

State Planning Board vice-chairman Malladi Vishnu has said that the implementation of welfare schemes under the Navaratnalu programme has helped to bring down the poverty rate from 12% to 6%.

Malladi Vishnu held a meeting with the Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh and Navaratnalu programme executive vice chairman AN Narayana Murthy on sustainable development goals and reviewed various issues.

Speaking on the occasion, Malladi Vishnu said that due to the coordinated efforts of the officials and public representatives, they were implementing the standards prescribed by NITI Aayog in the pursuit of sustainable development goals. "In the pursuit of sustainable

development goals, special attention has been focused on education and medicine, reducing maternal and child mortality, taking measures to prevent anemia and malnutrition in pregnant women, infants and children, taking measures to prevent drop-outs and ensure that school-going children stay in schools, providing complete infrastructure in schools," Malladi Vishnu stated.

He said that the planning board would review to achieve the goals set in 8 aspects at the field level. The Anganwadi workers, ANMs and teachers should check that all pregnant women, infants, women, children, school boys and girls in the district are provided complete nutrition kits without anemia and nutritional deficiency and they use them.

Out of the 7467 drop outs, 5985 drop outs have been re-admitted to school and steps should be taken to re-admit the rest of the children, Vishnu asked the officials. Navaratna Program Executive Vice Chairman AN Narayana Murthy said that AP is an example for carrying out development and implementing welfare schemes simultaneously.

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh said that in the district special measures are being taken to prevent anemia and malnutrition among pregnant women, infants, women, children and school children. ITDA PO M Surya Teja, Nuzvid Sub-collector Adarsh Rajendran and DRO Suryanarayana Reddy were among those who were present.

Heavy rain likely in AP in next 24 hours

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Heavy rain is likely to occur at isolated places in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next 24 hours, Meteorological Centre said on Saturday.

In a daily weather report here, it said that thunderstorms accompanied with lightning are likely to occur at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next 48 hours and in Rayalaseema during the



next 24 hours.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers is likely to occur at many places or at a few places in North Coastal

Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next seven days.

Very Heavy rainfall occurred at one or two places in Sathya Sai district of Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours. Rain occurred at few places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and at many places in Rayalaseema during the same period. Southwest monsoon has been weak in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and active in Rayalaseema, the report added.

‘Govt. committed to women’s financial empowerment’

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Municipal Administration Audimulapu Suresh reiterated that the government is committed to women's financial empowerment.

The minister flanked by Collector AS Dinesh Kumar and ex-minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy inaugurated the 'Jagananna Mahila Mart' at a new vegetable market in the Mahila Swasthya bhavan on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that the government

is establishing Mahila Marts in a bid to create a market for the products of self help group women.

Collector Dinesh Kumar said that the Mahila Mart was set up to provide a platform to the women to sell their product and the mart was being set up by the MEPMA.

The Jagananna Mahila Mart was registered as a mutually aided cooperative society in which there are 43,786 members. MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, MLA Balineni Srinivasulu Reddy, State MEMP Mission director Vijaylakshmi and mayor Gangada Sujata also spoke.



Minister Roja takes a dig at Lokesh

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

YSRCP minister Roja took a jibe at TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh for touring to the national capital a week after his father and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu was arrested in connection with the multi-crore skill development scam case.

Taking to X, Roja said the TDP father-son duo still think that they can hide their wrongs from the public with the help of friendly media. She said the current dispensation will expose every corruption, in which your father is involved, to the public. And, those who were indulged in corruption will face action. They can't escape the prison.

The minister asked the TDP scion about his whereabouts. Criticising Lokesh for fleeing the Andhra Pradesh state at a

time when his father is languishing in jail (in skill development scam case), Roja wondered if Lokesh will keep his word after challenging the ruling party for a public debate on corruption. She said his father-in-law and TDP MLA Balakrishna fled the Assembly to avoid facing questions on party chief involvement in a case related to the misappropriation of funds. The government is ready to prove that Naidu was involved in corruption and we challenge the Opposition party to refute the charges.

Tourism Minister Roja took a jibe at TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh for touring the national capital a week after his father and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu was arrested in connection with the multi-crore skill development scam case.

Procession of ‘Swarna Ratham’ organised

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

On the sixth day evening of the ongoing Srivari Salakatta Brahmotsavam in Tirumala, TTD observed 'Swarna Rathotsavam' (the festival of the Golden chariot) on Saturday between 4 pm and 5 pm.

Malayappa Swamy gave darshan to His devotees in a grand manner along with Sridevi and Bhudevi.

Devotees, especially women, participated with enthusiasm to pull the cart all along the four mada streets chanting Govinda Namas.

The TTD EO AV Dharma Reddy and others were present.



Malayappa rides ‘Gaja Vahana’

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

As part of the Srivari annual Brahmotsavams in Tirumala, Malayappa Swamy rode on the majestic 'Gaja Vahana' along the

Mada streets. Malayappa enthralled the devotees by riding on the huge golden elephant carrier which is a symbol of richness and royalty.

TTD EO AV Dharma Reddy and others were present.

Polling stations should be convenient to voters: Collector

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector P Prashanthi said that the polling stations should be set up in such a manner that the voters could exercise their franchise easily.

The Collector conducted a surprise inspection to polling stations 51, 53, 57 in Palakoderu village and polling station 46 at Mogallu village on Saturday and inquired about the facilities and amenities in the polling centers.

Speaking on this occasion, District Collector Prashanthi ordered that the polling stations should be set up in such a way that the voters could exercise their right to vote without difficulty.

She said that infrastructure such as electricity; drinking

water and toilets should be provided. She said that the doors and windows of the polling centers should be strong.

She said that the facilities of the polling stations should be increased depending on the number of voters. She suggested that a ramp should be set up so that the elderly, pregnant women and the disabled can easily exercise their right to vote. District Collector Prashanthi directed the concerned officials to strictly follow the rules and regulations of the Election Commission to avoid any mistakes.

Housing construction PD Dr.Ananda Kumar, Tahasildar Sk. Hussain and MPDO N M Gangadhar Rao were among those who were present.



‘Ganga Avatara’ dance steals the show

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

On Saturday night, the sixth day of Srivari Salakatta Brahmotsavam, the performances of art groups organized under the auspices of TTD Hindu Dharmic Projects during the 'Gaja Vahana Seva' brought more spiritual joy to the devotees.

A total of 250 artists belonging to 10 groups from Andhra, Tamil Nadu,

Pondicherry, Kerala, Orissa and Rajasthan performed, adding enhanced grandeur to the vahana seva.

Ganga Avatarana dance performance by 25 artists of Sri Lalithambigai Troupe from Pondicherry dressed as Brahma, Lakshminarayana, and Bhagiradha praying to Lord Shiva. Ganga stood as a special attraction. A 28-women

team from Adoni entertained with kolatam and another 25-member young woman from the state of Kerala dressed in traditional Kerala attire danced Karakattam.

Artists from Rajasthan performed the Gangaur dance wearing the guises of village deities of the rural areas of Rajasthan. Odissi dance by 25 artists from Orissa attracted the devotees.

Maha Yagam solemnised for Naidu’s release

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

RajasyamaLa Maha Santhi Yagam was solemnized at Gogulapadu village in Rompicherla mandal on Saturday for the safety and early release of former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Large number of people including women took part in the Rajasyamala Maha Yagam.

A huge procession was taken out as part of the yagam today. TDP senior leader and former MLA GV Anjaneyulu, Kanna Lakshminarayana, Chadalavadu Aravinda Babu



and differently abled corporation former chairman Gonuguntla Koteswara Rao were among those who took part in the Maha Yagam.

They told the media that they had invoked the gods and goddesses for the safety of Naidu and his early release from the prison.

TELANGANA STATE HC ORDER TO HOLD GROUP I EXAM AGAIN

Hard blow to KCR govt: Revanth Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC President Revanth Reddy said that the High Court order to hold the Group-1 (Preliminary) examination again is a hard blow to the KCR government. This is the result of the destruction of institutions under KCR's rule, he said.

Revanth sent an open letter to Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao regarding proceedings after the cancellation of the Group-1 (Preliminary) examination.

In his letter, Revanth criticised KCR saying that his unjust rule will be punished by students and the unemployed. From the beginning of the Telangana

movement, students and youth from Osmania University and Kakatiya University stood by it and kept the need for a Telangana State alive. Youth and students played a vital role in the Telangana movement from the 1952 Mulki and Non-Mulki movement, from the first phase of the movement in 1969 to the third phase in 2014, he said.

He said that he expected that KCR would correct the mistakes based on past experience and hold the exam efficiently this time but KCR exposed his shallowness in conducting the exam and his ill intentions.

It is the government's minimum

responsibility to set up a biometric system and to provide OMR sheets with hall ticket numbers. But this "honourable" regime did not record biometrics and OMR sheets were given without hall ticket numbers, he said.

He said the HC order to re-conduct the Group-1 preliminary examination is a severe blow to KCR. This HC verdict has proved that the KCR government has failed to conduct the Group-1 exam again. This situation would not have arisen if strong action had been taken when the TSPSC question paper leak came to light. At that time KCR cancelled exams and punished students even

though the mistake was made by someone else. Telangana's unemployed have lost confidence in the TSPSC, Revanth said. In this context, the Congress hopes to provide assurance to Telangana's unemployed. The youth of Telangana need not despair. A Congress government will come in three months and everything will be set right, he said.

Revanth said that only if the KCR government is dissolved can the filling of vacant posts be done transparently. If there has to be fair recruitment in Telangana, the only way is to remove the KCR government and bring the Congress to power, he added.

Credit goes to women

Modi on passage of Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament

PNS ■ VARANASI (UP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday gave credit to the women of the country for the passage of the women's reservation bill in Parliament and said the power of women's leadership has been proved in every period in history.

Modi said this while addressing an all-women public meeting in his parliamentary constituency Varanasi, where the women showered flower petals on him for the Parliament's nod to the women's reservation bill.

Talking about the recent approval to the Constitution (128th Amendment) Bill, referred to as the "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam", by Parliament, the prime minister said, "Women's leadership may be a modern system for the rest of the world, but we are the people who worship Mother Parvati and Ganga before Mahadev."

He was addressing the "Nari Shakti Vandan Samaroh" organised at the ground of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Uttar Pradesh Chief



Minister Yogi Adityanath accompanied Modi at the function.

"This Kashi of ours is also the birthplace of a brave woman like Rani Lakshmi Bai. From brave women like Rani Lakshmi Bai during the freedom struggle to Mission Chandrayaan in modern India -- we have proved the power of women's leadership in every period.

"Take the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam for example. This law was pending for three decades. But today, it is your strength that even those political parties had to support it in both Houses of Parliament who never got tired of opposing it ear-

lier," Modi said.

Giving credit to the women of the country for this, he said, "Because you, the mothers and sisters, have become aware and united, all the political parties of India are afraid and are trembling and that is why this bill was passed -- this is your strength."

Striking a chord with the voters of Varanasi, Modi said "your MP from Kashi got the privilege" of getting the women's reservation bill passed in Parliament.

"Kashi is the holy city of Mother Kushmanda, Mother Shringar Gauri, Mother Annapurna and Mother Ganga. The glory of their power is attached to every part of this place. Vindhyavasini Devi is also not far from Banaras.

"The city of Kashi has also been a witness to the virtuous deeds and management of goddess Ahilyabai Holkar and hence, after the historic Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam was passed in Parliament, I came to Kashi first to seek blessings from all of you. It is my good fortune that you are blessing us in such large numbers," he said.

World is getting linked with India through cricket

Varanasi (UP): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday laid the foundation stone of an international cricket stadium in Varanasi and said that through the game, the world is 'getting linked' with India. Highlighting that the design of the stadium dedicated to Lord Mahadev has instilled a feeling of pride among the citizens of Kashi, he said the facility would witness great cricket matches while young athletes would get an opportunity to train at the international level. Modi said recent sporting successes of India were due to a changed approach as now sports have been linked with fitness, employment and career of youths. Compared to nine years ago, this year's sports budget has been increased threefold, he said. "Through cricket, the world is getting linked with India" and many new countries are playing cricket leading to a greater

number of matches, he said, adding this stadium will cater to the rising demand for such facilities in the coming years. To be built near the Ring Road in Rajatalab area here at a cost of about Rs 450 crores and spread across an area of more than 30 acres, the stadium is likely to be ready by December 2025. The Uttar Pradesh government said it has spent Rs 121 crore to acquire the land for the stadium while the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will spend Rs 330 crore on its construction. The spectators' gallery of the stadium would resemble the steps of the ghats of Varanasi. This will be Uttar Pradesh's third international cricket stadium after Kanpur and Lucknow. Addressing the gathering, Modi said he is visiting Kashi exactly one month after India reached the Shiv Shakti point on the moon where Chandrayaan landed.

NIA confiscates SFJ terrorist Pannu's properties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tightening its noose around Canada-based "designated individual terrorist" Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, the NIA confiscated a house and land of the self-styled general counsel of the outlawed Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) outfit in Punjab's Amritsar and the Union Territory of Chandigarh on Saturday, an official said.

The action, which comes as a big boost to the country's crackdown on the terror and secessionist network being operated from various countries, including Canada, followed confiscation orders passed by the Special NIA Court, SAS Nagar, Mohali (Punjab), a spokesperson of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said.

The official said the properties confiscated include a 46-kanal (5.7 acres) agricultural land at Khankot village in Amritsar and a one-fourth share of a house in Chandigarh's sector 15/C area.

These properties were earlier attached following orders passed by the government in



two different cases, the spokesperson said, adding that they have now been confiscated on the court's orders under the relevant section of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in a case registered on April 5, 2020. This is the first time that properties of an absconding accused of the NIA have been confiscated under section 33(5) of the UAPA.

The case was originally registered on October 19, 2018 under various sections of the Indian Penal Code at the Sultanwind police station in Amritsar city and later, transferred to the NIA. A total of 10 accused, including Pannu,

have so far been chargesheeted in the case.

Pannu has been on the NIA's radar since 2019, when the anti-terror federal agency registered its first case against the terrorist, who has been playing a major role in promoting and commissioning terror acts and activities, and spreading fear and terror in Punjab and elsewhere in the country through his threats and intimidation tactics.

Non-bailable warrants of arrest were issued against Pannu by the Special NIA Court on February 3, 2021 and he was declared a "Proclaimed Offender" (PO) on November 29 last year.

INDIA CORNER

Aamir Khan donates Rs 25 lakh towards Himachal Pradesh disaster relief fund



Superstar Aamir Khan has donated Rs 25 lakh towards the Apada Rahat Kosh to provide succor to the rain-affected families in Himachal Pradesh, the state government said in a statement on Saturday. Expressing his gratitude to the Hindi film actor, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said that the

DUSU polls: ABVP wins 3 central panel posts, NSUI one



The RSS-affiliated ABVP on Saturday won three out of the four central panel posts of the Delhi University Students Union (DUSU) and the Congress' student wing NSUI bagged one, according to officials. Tushar Dedha of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) won the post of DUSU president, defeating NSUI's Hitesh Gulia. The Congress student wing's Abhi Dahiya bagged the post of vice-president. ABVP's Aparajita and Sachin Baisla won the posts of secretary and joint secretary, respectively. The counting of votes for the DUSU's central panel posts of president, vice-president, secretary and joint secretary concluded on Saturday evening. The election was held on Friday. The DUSU elections have always seen a direct fight between the ABVP and the National Students' Union of India (NSUI). The ABVP won three of the four seats in the 2019 elections as well. The DUSU elections were last held in 2019. The polls could not be held in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 while possible disruptions to the academic calendar prevented their conduct in 2022. Twenty-four candidates were in the fray for the four posts this year. Chandar Shekhar -- the chief election officer for the polls -- said the university recorded a voter turnout of 42 per cent. Around one lakh students were eligible to vote in the election. While the voting percentage was higher than in 2019 when a turnout of 39.90 per cent was recorded, it failed to surpass the nearly 11-year-high figure of 2018.

Angry locals blame cops for teen's death, create ruckus at hospital



Police personnel were rushed to tackle chaos at a hospital in Maharashtra's Palghar district in the early hours of Saturday after an injured teen, who apparently tripped trying to escape cops, was declared dead, an official said on Saturday. While the police claimed that Vinod Bhoir (18) most likely suffered a heart attack while fleeing and died, the boy's relatives said he was beaten up. According to a senior police official who spoke to the media at the hospital in Virar, Bhoir and his friends were near a Ganpati pandal at Agashi-Kolhapur village when a patrol vehicle from Amala Sagari police station reached the spot around 2.45 am. Seeing the cops, Bhoir and his friends panicked and started running but he tripped and fell down and suffered injuries, said the official. Bhoir was rushed to a hospital, where doctors declared him dead. Angry local residents blamed the police for his death and kicked up a ruckus at the hospital, prompting authorities to call the cops. Fearing that the situation could go beyond control, more personnel were called in. Later, two relatives of the teen told the media that Bhoir was beaten up by the police. He was playing on his mobile, said one of them, claiming that three of the policemen from the patrolling team were drunk. The relatives said the police were not even ready to take an injured Bhoir to the hospital and did so only after the villagers insisted. Bhoir was to be shifted to another facility but the police fled from there, said the relatives. They said the villagers then took the teen to the second hospital but by that time he had died.

Suspected terrorist arrested by NIA amid ethnic unrest in Manipur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The NIA has arrested a suspected terrorist for his alleged links with Myanmar-based rebel groups and conspiring to wage war against India by exploiting the current ethnic unrest in Manipur, an official said.

Moirangthem Anand Singh was arrested from Manipur and brought to New Delhi for questioning, a spokesperson of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said.

Singh was one of the five persons arrested by Manipur Police for possessing weapons looted from police armoury. The arrest had led to agitation by the majority community, who were claiming them to be village defence activists.

A local court had granted bail to all the five on Friday. However, Singh was immediately placed under arrest and whisked away to an undisclosed location before being brought to the national capital.

The official said Singh was

arrested in a case related to a "transnational conspiracy" by Myanmar-based leadership of terror groups to wage war against the government of India by exploiting the current ethnic unrest in Manipur.

The case was registered suo moto by the NIA on July 19 in New Delhi and investigations revealed that in furtherance of the conspiracy, the proscribed terror groups are recruiting over ground workers, cadres and sympathisers to augment their strength to carry out attacks on security forces and opposing ethnic groups by exploiting current unrest in the state. They are collecting arms, ammunition and explosives by unlawful means, including plunder and pillage of government facilities and resources, the spokesperson said. After Singh was brought to Delhi on Saturday, he was produced before a jurisdictional court which remanded him in police custody for a period of five days, the spokesperson said.

Role of lawyers evolved to address myriad challenges: CJI



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Saturday said the role of lawyers has evolved to address myriad global legal challenges in an era characterised by ever-increasing globalisation.

He said rapid technological advancement has created "complex legal issues", with lawyers leading the way in navigating this landscape. While the judiciary definitely bears the responsibility of administering justice and upholding the rule of law, lawyers play an equally vital role, he stressed.

"In an era characterised by ever-increasing globalisation, the role of lawyers has evolved to address myriad global legal challenges," the CJI said while speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Bar Council of India's (BCI) 'International Lawyers Conference 2023' here.

He said lawyers ensure that clients and governments adapt to technological changes while upholding legal rights and regulations, covering areas like cybersecurity, data privacy and intellectual property. "Lawyers also bear significant commercial responsibility, driving economic growth by helping clients and governments enhance business efficiency and cross-border operations.

Rahul Gandhi: Why is PM afraid of caste census?

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday advocated for a caste census and asked why Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "afraid" of it as well as demanded the immediate implementation of reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

A bill to reserve one-third of seats in the legislative bodies for women received the parliamentary nod on Thursday as the Rajya Sabha voted unanimously in favour of it.

The 128th Constitution amendment bill, referred to as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, will now require the approval of a majority of



state assemblies. It will be implemented after a delimitation exercise to redraw parliamentary and assembly constituencies based on a census which the government has said will be commissioned next year.

The BJP wants the reservation for women to be implemented in "10 years, but we

want it today and OBCs (other backward classes) included in it", Gandhi told a conference of Congress workers here in poll-bound Rajasthan.

The bill was passed in a special session of Parliament that began on September 18 and ended on Thursday.

The session, the Congress leader claimed, was called to change the name of India to Bharat, but instead the women's reservation bill was introduced.

Earlier this month, invitations for a G20 dinner were sent out by President Droupadi Murmu describing her position as 'President of Bharat' instead of the customary 'President of India', triggering a massive

furore with the opposition alleging that the Modi government was planning to drop India and stay with just Bharat as the country's name.

Gandhi said the women's reservation bill can be implemented in Parliament and assemblies today itself, but the central government wants to postpone it for 10 years on the pretext of delimitation and a new census. The Congress wants women's reservation to be implemented today itself, he said.

Demanding a caste census, the former Congress president said, "If we talk about giving participation to OBCs, then it cannot be done without a caste census. So, the prime

BID TO REVIVE HAM RADIO MOVEMENT

Enthusiasts for people-to-people connect

PNS ■ SANTINIKETAN

A two-day conference to revive the ham radio movement with a special focus on the technical aspects of amateur radio and to boost people-to-people relations across regions opened in Santiniketan on Saturday.

It brought together 170 delegates from different parts of India, Bangladesh and the US, who will take part in various sessions like amateur radio application procedures, high-frequency radio and digital radio.

"Ham radio is a hobby that refuses to die because it has reinvented itself with new technology. It is also the second line of communication during natural disasters like floods, cyclones and earthquakes," said Neelkantha Chatterjee, founder-convenor of Oscar



India, a Kolkata-based body that organised the conference.

"But since the ham radio movement cuts across regions, there is a great potential to use it for boosting people-to-people relations between countries," Chatterjee told PTI.

Officials said the government has taken several steps to promote the ham radio move-

ment. "Getting ham radio licenses has become easy, the certification process has got simpler under the present government," said Sachin Kumar, assistant wireless adviser in the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), which is supporting the Oscar Amateur Radio Convention.

Organisers said the conference is aimed at boosting the ham radio movement in North and Eastern India and the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

Ham radio involves the use of the amateur radio frequency spectrum by amateurs for purposes of non-commercial exchange of messages, wireless experimentation, self-training, private recreation, radiosport, contesting, and emergency communications.

"This means that the aspiring hams (ham radio operators) prepare for a relatively simple exam conducted by the Wireless Planning and Coordination (WPC) wing of the Ministry of Telecommunication and acquire a licence which gives them a unique call sign," said Chatterjee.

This call sign reveals the nationality, licence class and a two or three alphabet combination which is unique to the user. Thus, if a call sign reads VU2YYE, it means that the amateur radio operator is from India, since the prefix VU is assigned to India (like all Indian aeroplanes start with VT). The numerical 2 indicates that the ham holds a General licence. Finally, the letters YYE are unique to the licence holder.

Having acquired the callsign, the new ham thereafter proceeds to either build or buy the equipment and get on air' meaning that he or she starts transmitting on the ham radio frequency which is globally common with minor variations and contacting other hams worldwide and speaking to them.

CONCURRENT PLI SCHEME, DEDICATED FUND, TAX SOPS

TRAI plans to spur networking, telecom gear manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

TRAI has mooted 'concurrent PLI scheme' focussing on components and sub-assembly manufacturing to facilitate collaborated production activities, as it released an extensive set of recommendations to promote manufacturing of networking and telecom gear in India through tax benefit, dedicated master fund and other sweeteners.

With a sharp gaze on goals of scaling domestic production and local value addition in global value chains, TRAI in its recommendations favoured additional two per cent benefit under the design-led PLI scheme for product lines meeting a certain criteria, while also talking of a dedicated 'Networking and Telecommunications Equipment Development' fund. In order to spur innovation



and encourage industry's drive towards beneficially owned resident Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), lower corporate income tax has also been recommended. This would apply if the enterprise is continuously engaged in R&D driven manufacturing and attains half of its turnover based on IPRs

owned, TRAI said in its recommendations.

A dedicated Telecom Software Development Fund with initial committed corpus of Rs 1,000 crore should be established under Public-Private Partnership mode with Rs 3,000 crore minimum corpus, by seeking participation

from venture capital funds, TRAI said.

"In context of PLI scheme, TRAI has recommended that there should be a concurrent PLI scheme focussing over components and sub-assembly manufacturing to facilitate collaborated manufacturing activities. Further, the schemes should imbibe local value addition norms in its future-format and higher incentives proportionate to value addition should be available," a TRAI release said.

Under the design-led PLI scheme, it said, beyond the one per cent benefit, another slab of additional two per cent benefit be introduced for such product lines that yield minimum local value-addition of 75 per cent where the components by value terms, used in the manufacturing of the specific end products are manufactured in India.

Kamats Restaurants partners with IDFC First Bank

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Kamats Restaurants on Saturday said it has collaborated with IDFC First Bank for easy registration and recharge of FASTag at its outlets along the highways in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Under this partnership, users can now register for a fresh FASTag or recharge their existing FASTag accounts at Kamats outlets, the restaurant chain said in a statement.

"We are proud to be at the forefront of a convenient digital space in the restaurant industry. By teaming up with IDFC First Bank and integrating FASTag technology into our operations, we are not only making FASTag buying and recharging convenient while taking a meal break on the highways for our customers but also contributing to the digital transformation of India," Vikram Kamat, Founder and Chairman of The Vitskamats Group, said. There are 137 Kamats Restaurants in Maharashtra and Gujarat, including those in the two cities as well as along the highways.



India needs to grow at 8% for transformational changes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has the potential and should aim to grow at 8 per cent annually to bring about transformative changes in the lives of millions of people by around 2050, said noted economist and former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers here on Saturday. India's GDP growth in 2022-23 was 7.2 per cent as against 9.1 per cent in 2021-22. According to the Reserve



Bank of India's projections, India's GDP will likely grow 6.5 per cent in the current fiscal year.

Summers clarified that 8 per cent growth was not his forecast on the basis of current policy, but added, "given India's potential, even in a more challenging world economy, I believe that it is an imaginable goal. "...an eightfold expansion in the economy is transformative in the lives of hundreds of millions of people. I think it is something to target as India defines its greatness in this next century."

Ride-hailing service provider inDrive to register EVs in the metropolis

PNS ■ KOLKATA

California-based ride-hailing service provider inDrive will start registering electric vehicles (EV) on its platform in the metropolis soon, an official of the company said on Saturday. InDrive has already started this registration in Delhi where 100-odd driver-partners have already associated with it, Mohan Pradhan, business development manager, India and Bangladesh, inDrive said. He said that inDrive started operations in India in 2018 and is available across 12 cities in the country including Kolkata. "We have started taking registrations for EVs in Delhi and 100 driver-partners have been already associ-

ated. We will also start taking registrations for EVs in Kolkata and other cities shortly", he said. Pradhan said nearly 10,000 rides in Kolkata are done on a daily basis, adding that the number is approximately 50,000 in other parts of India where it currently operates. He said unlike other ride-hailing service providers available now, inDrive charges the lowest commission per ride from the driver-partners and gives the freedom to the driver and passenger to decide on the tariff. InDrive will shortly start discussions with the insurance companies to provide cover both to the drivers and passengers during rides.

PhonePe's Indus Appstore to take on Google

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

PhonePe on Saturday announced the launch of Indus Appstore developer platform, wooing Android app developers with the promise of zero platform fee or commission for in-app payments, as the digital payments firm made a bold and decisive move to confront the might of Google in the app marketplace with the Made-in-India app store. Akash Dongre, Co-Founder of Indus Appstore rued that app developers are forced to work with only one app store - Google Play Store - for distributing their apps, and vowed that the new offering will be a credible alternative,



more localised, with better app discovery and consumer engagement. The Indus Appstore Developer platform comes with sweeteners - app listings on it will be free for the first year, after which a nominal annual fee will apply. Moreover, the Indus Appstore will not charge developers any

platform fee or commission for In-App Payments. Developers will be free to integrate any payment gateway of their choice inside their own apps. These apps will be listed on the soon-to-be launched "Made-in-India" Indus Appstore, offering a localised experience in 12 languages, tailored for Indian audiences.

more localised, with better app discovery and consumer engagement.

The Indus Appstore Developer platform comes with sweeteners - app listings on it will be free for the first year, after which a nominal annual fee will apply. Moreover, the Indus Appstore will not charge developers any

Scope to grab the space vacated by China in textile sector: SIMA

PNS ■ COIMBATORE

Textile and clothing sectors must have a holistic approach with a long-term vision to seize the opportunity in the global market, industry officials said on Saturday. Textiles and clothing industries are the second largest employment provider after agriculture generating Rs 30,000 crore as Goods and Services Tax revenue and USD 44 billion foreign exchange earnings, officials of Southern India Mills' Association said.

The industries have been facing challenges in the recent past mainly due to structural issues on the raw material front, high cost of production, scale of operation among others, SIMA Chairman S K Sundararaman said. The Association would strive to address structural issues and enhance global competitiveness, he said. According to association officials, the NDA government has been giving major thrust for enhancing the global competitiveness of the textiles and clothing industry



and addressed several issues. "However, the policy pitfalls in certain areas and

delay in strengthening the raw material base, refunding government dues have been

affecting the industry to achieve a sustained growth rate," he said in a press release. Though several States provide attractive incentives, there is an undue delay in disbursing the committed benefits on time resulting in several financial stress for the new investments made, SIMA said. "Under this scenario, it has become essential to have a holistic approach with long term vision not only to grab the space vacated by China in the textile trade but also to achieve a sustained growth

rate," he said.

Sundararaman urged the Union Minister of Textiles Piyush Goyal to exempt VSF (viscose staple fibre) imported under the Advance Authorisation scheme and all the special and value-added fibres and filaments are not manufactured in the country immediately. He expressed hope the free trade agreement with the United Kingdom and the European Union would enable the country to double its exports.

TRAI for boosting telecom infra in NE states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

TRAI has issued recommendations for bolstering telecom infrastructure in North East, suggesting parleys with the state governments to harmonise their respective 'right of way' policies with related Central rules, as well as favouring provision of electricity to telecom sites on priority at utility tariffs. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) noted that while a number of initiatives have been taken by the government to improve telecom connectivity in the northeastern states, there is still a lack of high-speed mobile-



based internet and fixed broadband connectivity, mainly due to the inadequate transmission

bandwidth (optical fibre, Microwave and satellite). "The Northeast states contin-

ue to grapple with a significant digital divide due to various reasons such as inhospitable terrain conditions, poor availability of power supply, transmission media related limitations, poor return of investment prospects for TSPs, and Right of Way (RoW) related issues," the sector regulator said in a release. The Northeastern Region (NER) comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura - together they form part of the East Himalayan region. The latest recommendations

by TRAI assume significance given that while average tele-density of India (as of April 2023) stood at 84.46 per cent, the tele-density in Assam state is 71 per cent and that of Northeast Licensed Service Area consisting of six states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura is 79.6 per cent. The digital divide hampers the region's socio-economic growth, restricts access to essential services and information, and exacerbates the developmental gap between the Northeast and the rest of the country, TRAI noted.

Positive outlook for GOI bonds

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Edelweiss Asset Management Company (AMC) expects increased demand and favorable market conditions for Indian Government Bonds (IGBs) over the medium term at current levels. A research note of the mutual fund house said the inclusion of IGBs in JP Morgan global bond indices - Emerging Markets (GBI-EM) is likely to attract more flows to these bonds, primarily due to the lower correlation of IGBs with other emerging market and global bonds. Foreign portfolio investors

(FPIs) are expected to be drawn to IGBs for their relatively higher yields and better secondary market liquidity, it said. According to the note, the bond market anticipates rate cuts by central banks in developed and emerging economies from the July-September 2024 quarter. Edelweiss AMC recommended 10 to 14-year Fully Accessible Route (FAR) eligible IGBs for their superior risk-reward trade-off. While the positive outlook for IGBs is prevalent, the report acknowledged potential risks that could impact it. These include a sustained

increase in US Treasury (UST) yields and elevated crude oil prices, which may affect market flows and the benign inflation outlook for India. On potential tax incentives for GBI-EM, the report clarified that the Government of India has not offered any additional tax sops to foreign investors. The trading of IGBs by Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) will be conducted in India and settled within the country. All FAR-designated IGBs which matures after December 31, 2026 will be eligible in the index.

MONEY MATTERS

Updater Services garners Rs 288 cr from investors



Integrated facilities management company Updater Services Ltd on Friday said it has raised Rs 288 crore from anchor investors days before the launch of its initial public offering (IPO). The firm has allotted 96 lakh equity shares to 18 funds at Rs 300 apiece, which is also the upper end of the price band, according to a circular uploaded on the BSE website

late Friday night. Among the anchor investors that participated in the bidding are Nomura Singapore, Citigroup Global Markets Mauritius Pvt Ltd, BNP Paribas Arbitrage, Societe Generale, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund (MF), Bandhan MF and Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance Company. The initial share sale, with a price band of Rs 280-300 per share, will be open for public subscription during September 25-27. The Rs 640-crore IPO will comprise a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 400 crore and an Offer for Sale (OFS) of up to 80 lakh equity shares by a promoter and existing shareholders.

High-speed train to ply between Ahmedabad & Sanand



Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday said a high-speed train will start plying between Ahmedabad and Sanand in the next six months. Speaking at the ground breaking ceremony of semiconductor company Micron's plant here, Vaishnaw said Vande Bharat Express trains will also halt at Sanand. "A world class train will start between

Ahmedabad to Sanand. The high-speed train will start very soon, in the next six months," the Railway Minister said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off Jamnagar-Ahmedabad Vande Bharat Express on September 24. Talking about the semiconductor ecosystem, Vaishnaw, who also holds the Communications and IT Minister portfolio, said, the demand for semiconductors is going to increase to Rs 5 lakh crore in next few years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision is to build the future of the country with designed and made in India semiconductors, he said.

SIDBI signs pact with DLAI to boost fintech sector



The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) on Saturday said it has inked an agreement with the Digital Lenders Association of India (DLAI) to boost the country's fintech sector. SIDBI and DLAI have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to this effect. The MoU aims for collaborations with SIDBI to develop standard protocols

to expedite the adoption of digital lending partnerships including alliances between banks and Lending Service Providers (LSPs), co-lending collaborations among others, according to a statement. SIDBI will also provide resource support to eligible DLAI member NBFCs and also explore Assignment and Securitisation transactions, it added. "We are happy to work with the Industry on other important aspects like standard protocols, customer protection, grievance redressal, among others to facilitate faster adoption of digital lending," SIDBI CMD Sivasubramanian Ramann said.

I-T dept asks taxpayers to respond to tax demands



The income tax department on Saturday asked taxpayers to respond to intimation from the I-T department regarding outstanding demands of previous years to facilitate faster clearance of refunds for 2022-23 fiscal. With some taxpayers taking to social media about receiving intimation from the I-T department regarding past

unsettled tax demands, the department in a post on 'X' said, this is a taxpayer-friendly measure where an opportunity is being provided to assesses in line with 'principles of natural justice'. As many as 7.09 crore returns have been filed for income earned in 2022-23 fiscal. Of these, 6.96 crore ITRs have been verified, of which 6.46 crore returns have been processed as on date, including 2.75 crore refund returns. "However, there are a few cases in which refunds are due to the taxpayer, but previous demands are outstanding, the department said," the I-T department said. The Section 245(1) of Income-tax Act, 1961, mandates providing an opportunity to taxpayers to make a representation before adjusting the refund against an existing demand.

'LOW-INCOME NATIONS ILL-EQUIPPED FOR CVD FIGHT'

Even as cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) such as stroke, diabetes and hypertension are claiming millions of people prematurely every year, most healthcare facilities in many Low-and Middle-income Countries (LMICs) are unprepared to treat such patients, says a study. It comes as a wakeup call for India which is already facing burgeoning CVDs epidemic, reports ARCHANA JYOTI

Globally, nearly 18 million premature deaths in 2019 were due to CVD, of which 75 per cent were in LMICs, where they are leading causes of death and Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in adults. Diabetes and hypertension are key risk factors for CVD and amongst the top three risk factors for deaths and disability, globally.

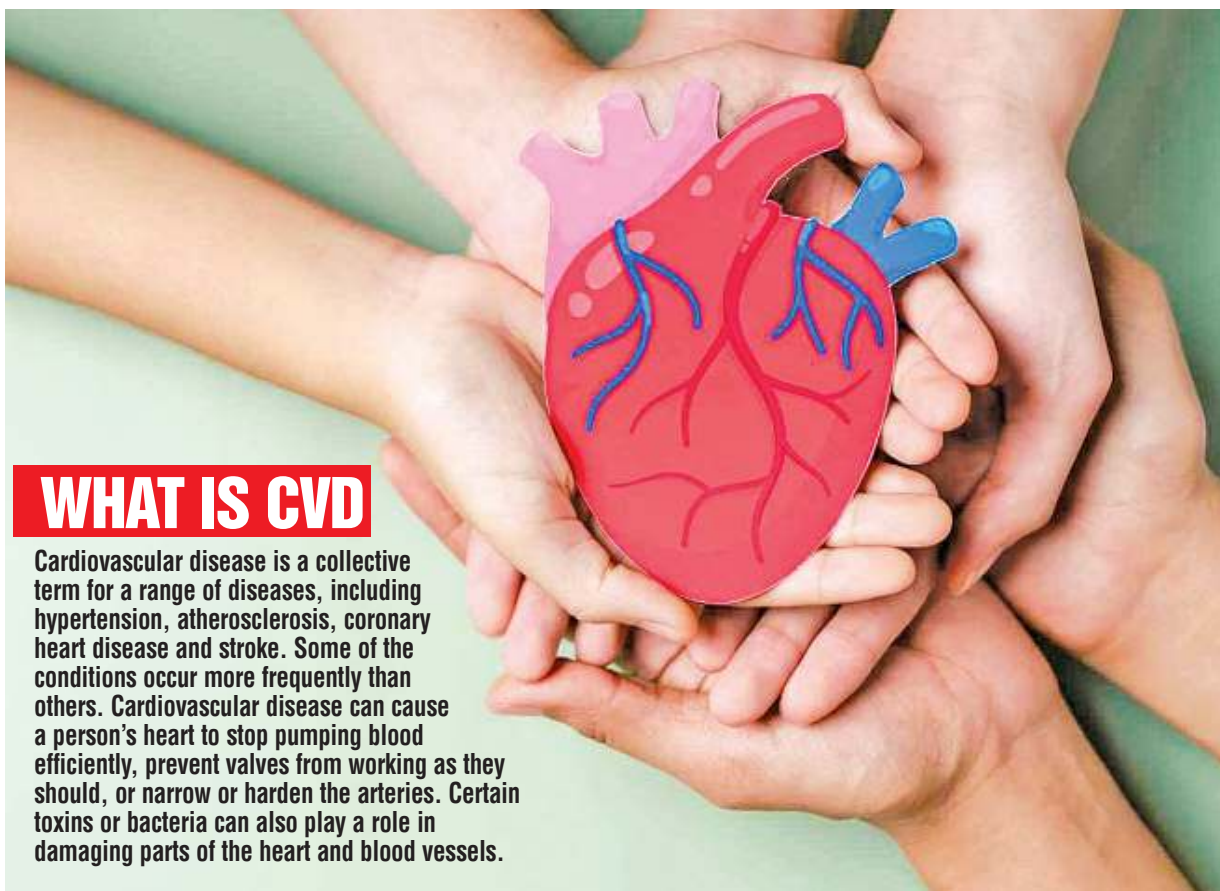
Publishing their findings recently in PLOS Global Public Health, an international team of researchers led by the University of Birmingham, looked at readiness to provide care for HIV or CVD in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, Malawi, Nepal, Senegal, and Tanzania.

They discovered that most facilities are unprepared to deliver services to treat or manage cardiovascular disease risk factors (CVDRF) such as diabetes and hypertension.

However, the increased investment in facilities to treat HIV – received as part of the drive to meet UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets – may form part of a solution to tackle CVDRFs, which have been relatively neglected in terms of receiving global funding and attention. The study authors found that if facilities are able to provide HIV care, they are much more able to supply care for CVDRFs.

They found that despite UN targets to reduce CVDRF, facilities were significantly less ready to provide CVDRF care than HIV care, even though despite years of investment in HIV, facilities were often not ready to fully provide care for HIV.

Lead author Professor Justine Davies, from the University of Birmingham, commented: "We've had global targets to reduce burden of CVDRFs since 2011, but tackling the problem requires healthcare services to have all the ingredients to care for patients



WHAT IS CVD

Cardiovascular disease is a collective term for a range of diseases, including hypertension, atherosclerosis, coronary heart disease and stroke. Some of the conditions occur more frequently than others. Cardiovascular disease can cause a person's heart to stop pumping blood efficiently, prevent valves from working as they should, or narrow or harden the arteries. Certain toxins or bacteria can also play a role in damaging parts of the heart and blood vessels.

– including staff, facilities, medicines, or equipment.

"Given the long-term financial investment and advocacy for HIV, we looked to see what readiness to provide care could be achieved with good long-term investment. We then compared readiness for CVD care with that of HIV care. We found that, despite years of investment in HIV, facilities were often not ready to fully provide care. But we found that the situation for CVD was far worse."

Neil Cockburn, another lead author on the paper from the University of Birmingham, commented: "There needs to be a large scale up of investment to ensure facilities are ready to provide healthcare for people with

CVDRF if global targets are to be met.

"Our findings provide policy makers, funders, and researchers evidence of where there are gaps in service provision which need to be filled to enable achievement of current global health goals."

The researchers found that in individual countries, readiness across all healthcare facilities to handle CVDRF was generally lower than for HIV. There were consistently weaknesses in information, staffing and medicines. Lack of readiness of facilities to provide CVDRF care in rural and primary care facilities threatens SDG 3.8 to provide high quality universal healthcare for all.

According to health experts,

high blood pressure, air pollution, tobacco use, and elevated LDL cholesterol are among the leading contributors to CVD deaths.

Yet another study published in PLOS One, has called for a multifaceted approach to prevention that includes fiscal, inter-sectoral, public health and health-service level interventions at all—primordial, primary, secondary as well as tertiary—levels.

"Several interventions have already been tested in various low-to-middle income countries and have shown to improve the CVD burden in a cost-effective manner. For example, the Disease Control Priorities report of the World Bank enlists an essential package of interven-

tions that can prove beneficial," say the authors.

"Some of the interventions enlisted include taxation on tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages, regulations on processed and salt-rich food, ban on trans-fatty acids, improvements in built environment and introduction of school health programs to encourage physical activity, task-sharing or task shifting in cardiac care, improving screening activities and better use of combination therapy."

In India too, the situation is grim. The Asian Pacific Society of Cardiology (APSC) recently published a report revealing that heart failure alone leads to 1.8 million hospitalisations each year in India.

Experts have been calling to tighten the noose around the companies marketing highly processed food which are mostly responsible for a spike in CVD with kids also being impacted.

For instance, a report, titled 'THE JUNK PUSH: Rising Ultra-processed Food Consumption in India — Policy, Politics and Reality', has recommended stronger policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing.

Most of the products analysed as part of the study are widely consumed brands mainly targeted at children. These included packaged products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) or ultra-processed foods (UPF), such as chips, cookies, sweets, soft beverages, instant noodles, sugary cereals, frozen meals, ice cream, bakery items, and chocolates.

According to the document, their advertisements were found to be in violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, with some of them even violating the Food Standard and Safety Act, 2006, as they hid crucial information related to nutrients of concern.

"None of the legal frameworks or guidelines in India has the potential to stop most of the misleading advertisements of prepackaged junk or HFSS foods, or to ban misleading claims or warn people about the risks to health," said Dr Arun Gupta from Delhi-based nutrition think tank Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPI) which has prepared the report.

He said that cardiovascular disease risk factors starting in childhood have important implications for health, quality of life, health care costs and societal costs across the whole life course. Facing challenges with resources, it is time to work on prevention rather than waiting to be cured, Dr Gupta said matter-of-factly.

HEALTH BRIEFS

CADILA PHARMA PHASE I CLINICAL TRIAL FOR CHICKEN POX SHOT: SEC RECOMMENDS NOD FOR TRIAL

The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) on vaccines, which reviews proposals and advises the Drugs Controller General (India) in matters for biologicals and post approval change proposals, has recommended granting nod to Gujarat-based Cadila Pharmaceuticals to conduct phase I clinical trial for its chicken pox vaccine.

The decision was taken in a recent meeting last month of the SEC after the company submitted a revised phase I clinical trial protocol for grant of permission to conduct the trial for Varicella-Zoster Virus (VZV) vaccine.

The pharma firm had earlier submitted its proposal for grant of permission to conduct Phase I clinical trial of its Varicella-Zoster virus (VZV) vaccine along with preclinical data and it was considered in a SEC meeting held on May 16.

The SEC, during then, after detailed deliberation

recommended that the company should submit single dose toxicity data as per the provisions of the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019.

Further, it recommended, the firm should revise the phase I clinical trial protocol with some changes such as the volume of blood to be withdrawn for analysis should be reduced.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Varicella (chicken-pox) is an acute, highly contagious disease caused by varicella-zoster virus (VZV), a member of the herpesvirus family.

"Only one serotype of VZV is known, and humans are the only reservoir. Following infection, the virus remains latent in neural ganglia and in about 10-20% of cases it is reactivated to cause herpes zoster, or shingles, generally in persons over 50 years of age or immunocompromised individuals," it said.

THIS ROBOT CAN NAVIGATE LIVING LUNG TISSUE TO DETECT TUMOR

Scientists from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Vanderbilt University in the US have developed a robot that can autonomously traverse human lungs, enabling physicians to reach tumours that are extremely small and hide deep within tissues.

The robot with an autonomous steerable needle can go from "Point A" to "Point B" while avoiding important structures, such as tiny airways and blood vessels, in a living laboratory model.

"This technology allows us to reach targets we can't otherwise reach with a standard or even robotic bron-

choscope," said Jason Akulian, from the UNC Department of Medicine. "It gives you that extra few centimeters or a few millimeters even, which would help immensely with pursuing small targets in the lungs," he added.

The robot, detailed in the journal Science Robotics, is made of several separate components. A mechanical control provides controlled thrust of the needle to go forward and backward and the needle design allows for steering along curved paths. The needle is made from a nickel-titanium alloy and has been laser etched to increase its flexibility.

QCI CALLS FOR HEALTHCARE QUALITY INTERVENTIONS IN RURAL AREAS

The Quality Council of India (QCI) has highlighted the importance of initiating healthcare quality interventions in rural areas and tier 2 and tier 3 cities with the launch of Digital Health Accreditation Standards for Hospitals among others.

In order to achieve the goal of patient safety, the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) has recently released new standards including 1st Edition of Digital Health Accreditation Standards for Hospitals, Entry Level Certification Standards for Dental Clinics, Care Home Accreditation Standards and 3rd Edition of Accreditation Standards for Dental Service Providers among others to ensure patient safety at the grassroots level.

The NABH is a constituent board of QCI, set up to establish and operate accreditation programmes for healthcare organisations.

Jaxay Shah, chairperson, QCI, said, "We believe that quality change begins at the very foundation of our healthcare system, not limited to only metropolitan cities but also in the rural and tier 2 and tier 3 cities of India."

Dr RP Singh, secretary general, QCI said, "Recognizing the profound significance of quality and well-being of patients, a robust quality ecosystem in healthcare is not only crucial for elevating our healthcare industry but also for positioning it firmly on the global map."

Dr. Atul Mohan Kochhar, CEO, NABH emphasized on the intricate link between technology and patient safety.

NEUBERG DIAGNOSTIC STRENGTHENS ITS POSITION IN SECTOR

Neuberg Diagnostics Private Limited, a prominent player in the diagnostics sector with a global presence, has announced the successful merger of Neuberg Supratech Reference Laboratory, Ahmedabad, and Neuberg Anand Reference Laboratory, Bangalore, into Neuberg Diagnostics Private Limited. This merger has been facilitated through an NCLT court-based process, further solidifying Neuberg

Diagnostics' position as a frontrunner in the diagnostic industry.

Dr GSK Velu, chairman and managing director of Neuberg Diagnostics said, "The merger marks a significant step forward in our journey to provide unparalleled healthcare solutions. By integrating these renowned laboratories, we reinforce our commitment to delivering excellence in diagnostics and patient care."

TECHEAGLE, AIIM JODHPUR BID TO REACHOUT TO TRIBALS

TechEagle, India's leading drone delivery company, announces partnership with AIIMS Jodhpur to deliver healthcare essentials for the tribal population. Its state-of-the-art, hybrid e-VTOL Drone, Vertiplane X3 took off for its maiden flight from Sirohi carrying medicines to Waloriya, a location inhabited by the tribal population. AIIMS, Jodhpur is recognised as a "Centre of Excellence

(COE) for Tribal Health" by the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Vikram Singh Meena, founder & CEO of TechEagle said, "Time is the most crucial dimension when we talk about emergency healthcare as every second is important in such a scenario and by deploying innovative solutions such as drones a lot of time could be saved and in turn lives."

DECODED: How toxic proteins accumulate in Alzheimer's, Parkinson's?

When Tau protein -- part of the brain's infrastructure -- gets knotted up into tangles, it turns toxic to injure brain tissue, causing tauopathies, a group of neurodegenerative brain diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other brain diseases, researchers have found. The HEALTH PIONEER shares the findings published in the journal Molecular Psychiatry

Under normal circumstances, tau protein is part of the brain's infrastructure, important for stabilizing neurons into their proper shapes. But sometimes tau gets knotted up into tangles and turns toxic, injuring brain tissue and causing tauopathies, a group of brain diseases characterized by problems with learning, memory and movement. Alzheimer's disease is the most common tauopathy, but the group also includes Parkinson's disease, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and several rare genetic conditions.

In search of ways to prevent these destructive tau tangles, researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis have identified a key step in their development. Intervening at this step potentially could forestall the destructive cascade of events that results in brain damage, the researchers said. The findings are published in the journal Molecular Psychiatry.

"Tauopathies are devastating diseases that have limited treatment options right now, and they all have this feature of tau aggregation," said senior author Celeste Karch, PhD, a

professor of psychiatry. "We've been thinking for a long time about whether there are factors that impact that common process of tau aggregation and if so, whether we could target those factors as a novel approach to treatment. These findings move us one step closer to finding a way to intervene and stop the process of tau aggregation that leads to dementia."

First author Reshma Bhagat, PhD, a postdoctoral researcher, came up with the idea of looking for such factors among a group of RNA molecules known as long noncoding RNAs (lncRNAs) that are not translated into proteins. Historically, RNA has not been considered an active element in biological processes, and most disease research has not focused on them. Only in the past decade have scientists recognized that these RNA molecules can play critical roles in disease processes. Bhagat became interested in lncRNAs because they are involved in regulating diverse cellular processes and have been implicated in cancers.

To investigate the role of lncRNAs in tauopathies, the researchers started with skin



cells from three people with a genetic tauopathy, each of whom carried a different mutation in the tau gene. Using molecular techniques, the researchers converted the skin cells into brain neurons that carry each of the three mutations. For comparison, they used a molecular technique known as CRISPR to correct the mutations in some of the skin cells before converting them into neurons. In this way, they were able to obtain human brain cells with and without tau mutations, which didn't require using human brain tissue.

Using these cells, the researchers identified 15 lncRNAs that were significantly increased or decreased in brain cells with tau mutations compared to their genetically matched controls. One lncRNA in particular stood out: SNHG8, which was low not only in the three human brain cells with tau mutations but also in mice with a tau mutation and in brain samples from people who had died of any of three different tauopathies: Alzheimer's disease, frontotemporal lobar degeneration with tau pathology, or progressive supranuclear palsy. In other

words, SNHG8 levels were down in tauopathies regardless of mutation, species or disease — all signs that point to its role in a common pathological process.

Further investigation revealed that neurons with low SNHG8 levels also had high levels of stress granules, RNA-protein complexes that form to help cells survive stressful situations such as excessive heat or low oxygen and disintegrate once the threat passes. Stress granules are rich in tau, and therein lies the danger. If too many stress granules form or if they con-

tain mutated tau particularly prone to tangling — as is the case in genetic tauopathies — stress granules can kickstart the aggregation process by concentrating tau.

"If we could somehow target this stress-induced protein-aggregation pathway, maybe we can inhibit the development of tau pathology," Bhagat said.

Bhagat went back to the human neurons with tau mutations, the ones she had developed out of skin cells from tauopathy patients. These cells exhibited persistently low levels of SNHG8 and high levels of stress granules. By replacing the missing SNHG8, she was able to bring down the levels of stress granules in such cells.

"That's really the killer experiment," Karch said. "That shows that lncRNAs are impacting stress granule formation and that this pathway can be targeted to treat, potentially, a variety of tauopathies."

Bhagat, Karch and colleagues are working on identifying compounds that can shore up SNHG8 levels and looking at the effects of such compounds in animal models of tau aggregation and tauopathy.



ENVIRONMENTAL AWAKENING
GADGIL'S REVEALING MEMOIRS

Professor Gadgil's *A Walk Up the Hill* sheds light on the crisis in the Western Ghats, unveiling widespread illegal activities, and conflicts between the Church and political entities, writes **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

The memoir, “*A Walk Up the Hill*,” authored by Professor Madhav Gadgil, a distinguished environmental scientist who headed the government-appointed Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), is poised to make a significant impact in India. The WGEEP was established by the Central Government through an order dated March 4, 2010.

The panel's mandate included assessing the current ecological status of the Western Ghats region, demarcating areas within the Western Ghats region in need of designation as ecologically sensitive, and recommending the notification of such areas as Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZs) under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986. Additionally, the panel was tasked with making recommendations for the conservation, protection, and rejuvenation of the Western Ghats region, following a comprehensive consultation process involving the people and governments of all concerned states.

The report by the Gadgil committee was presented to then Union Minister for Environment and Forest Jairam Ramesh on August 30, 2011. This, in itself, was a rare event, as a committee usually submits its final report years after it was constituted, availing as many extensions as possible so that the head of the panel and members could continue receiving funds indefinitely.

Though Prof Gadgil was told that the WGEEP report would be made public on September 21, it was not to be. The Government had a change of heart, and the panel members were instructed not to discuss the contents with the public or the media. The Delhi High Court had to intervene to make the report public, and the Ministry for Environment and Forest uploaded it on its website.

The reasons behind the ministry's initial opposition to releasing the report were numerous. What the Gadgil committee members witnessed during their studies across the Western Ghats was shocking. A cabal of private industrialists, contractors, and elected representatives of the people were involved in plundering the ecologically fragile Western Ghats, despite the resistance of both the local population and the local self-governments. Although the Constitution of India demands that no industrialisation or commercial exploitation of ecologically and environmentally sensitive regions should be undertaken without obtaining green clearance from the local population and the Gram Sabhas, these laws were blatantly violated by politicians, religious leaders, and contractors whose sole ambition was to make more money without making any investment.

“The Western Ghats, the mountain chain running parallel to the west coast of the Indian peninsula, covers an area of 1,60,000 sq km over a stretch of 1,600 km spanning across the States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. All over the world, such mountains, endowed as they are with high levels of environmental heterogeneity, are treasure troves of natural diversity. In the Western Ghats, the annual rainfall ranges from as much as 8000 mm in the southwestern corner of upper Nilgiris to a mere 500 mm in the Moyar gorge just 30 km to its east... The Western Ghats are no ordinary biome. They constitute the water tower of peninsular India, providing water to 245 million people and draining a large part of the country's land surface,” writes Gadgil.

The studies conducted by Gadgil and other ecologists have confirmed the fact that Western Ghats have become an ecological hotspot. Only 7 per cent of the Ghat's primary vegetation has survived and it has 51 critically endangered species. Climate change will cause further stress. Observations and inferences made by Gadgil and others have proved to be true as the entire area that comes under the shadow of the Ghats experience unexpected torrential downpour, landslides and even dry spell lasting months.

The verdant forests and greenery of the region have given way to barren lands. Unabated felling of trees and uncontrolled mining and quarrying have taken its toll as the forest and mining mafia have taken control of the entire stretch. Readers may be remembering forest brigand



“THE SHOCKING DISCLOSURES MADE BY THE ECOLOGIST ARE WHAT HE CAME ACROSS IN THE WESTERN GHATS. THE FORESTS, RIVERS, MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS ARE ON DEATHBED AND ARE ON LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS. THE WESTERN GHATS HAVE BEEN EXPLOITED TO THE HILT BY THE MINING AND TIMBER MAFIA. THE REGION COULD NOT WITHSTAND ANY MORE INVASIONS ON ITS ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY”

Veerappan kidnapping Kannada matinee idol Rajkumar to the Sathyamangalam forests in Tamil Nadu. The reason for the kidnapping was the turf war between various mafia groups engaged in looting the forest wealth, including exotic trees and mining of costly granites from the reserve forests in the Ghats, though Gadgil has steered clear from this part.

The shocking disclosures made by the ecologist are what he came across in the Western Ghats. The forests, rivers, mountains and valleys are on deathbed and are on life support systems. The Western Ghats have been exploited to the hilt by the mining and timber mafia. The region could not withstand any more invasions on its environment and ecology. The WGEEP committee, after a series of brainstorming sessions, suggested to the government that enough was enough and it was time to put a full stop to mining activities and tree felling. Some of the crucial recommendations made by Gadgil and his colleagues include no special economic zones, no new hill stations, rescheduling reservoir operations to improve downstream flows, participatory sand auditing and strict regulation of sand mining, rehabilitation of mined areas with special focus on reviving water resources, promoting organic agricultural practices and precision agricultural practices, strictly controlling use of dynamite and other explosives to kill fish, no mining in areas demarcated as Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ1), where mining exists it should be phased out in five years, by 2016 illegal mining to be stopped immediately, etc. The report was submitted to then minister Jairam Ramesh.

The UPA governments began its hide and seek game with the Gadgil committee report and it refused to divulge the details of the same. The Delhi High Court intervention made the ministry upload the report on its

portal. But the report caused an earthquake in Kerala. The church reacted as if it had seen red despite the fact that it remained a closely guarded secret. Then Bishop of Idukki Mathew Aanikuzhikkattil issued a laity message with instruction to read the same on weekly congregations. He said in the message that the attempt has a diabolic nature and has been conceived to evict the population from the forests. The bishop also alleged that the report if implemented would make hundreds of thousands of people staying in the region homeless and destitute. The campaign was of the same style as we saw in the aftermath of the Citizen Amendment Bill getting legislated in Parliament. A campaign was unleashed across southern India alleging that the Bill was an attempt to get rid of a particular community from India.

Jolted by the stance of the church, the then Kerala Government passed a resolution in the Assembly condemning the Gadgil committee report. Though Gadgil was a fellow traveller, his comrades in the State had no qualms in lambasting the report. The resentment by the church led the Centre to appoint a committee headed by space scientist Kasturirangan to study the viability and feasibility of the Gadgil report. Kasturirangan did what he was asked to do and the story ended there. The Western Ghats continue its downward slide without any interruption. The man-animal conflict has become a regular event in the region as elephants, leopards and tigers come out of the forests in search of drinking water and a square meal which would sustain their lives. Who cares?

Even as Gadgil recounts his Western Ghats odyssey, another equally important study from Chennai-based CPR Environment Research Centre led by Dr Nanditha Krishna has more shocking

disclosures to make. Sacred groves across India, home to local flora and fauna and mini biosphere reserves have shrunk and most of them have disappeared altogether from the face of the earth. “Sacred groves represent an ancient Indian conservation tradition protected by local people out of reverence, respect and fear. These untouched patches of forest contain some endangered rare and threatened medicinal plant species. The rural folk conserve and preserve species diversity that are the last remnants of native vegetation,” explained Dr Nanditha Krishna, the first winner of Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskaar for her relentless campaign against destruction of sacred groves which are known as Swami Shola, Koil Kadu in Tamil Nadu, Pavithra Vanam in Andhra Pradesh, Kavu in Kerala, Mawflong in Assam and Meghalaya, Mangaoon in Western Ghats, Dev Vana in MP and Karnataka.

This is a unique conservation style which makes use of religion and tradition to preserve ecology as a natural heritage. Wherever there are sacred groves, they are adored as spiritual retreat. Before concluding, let me draw readers attention to what SK Pottekat, the legendary travelogue writer, wrote in 1955 about his experience in Finland. “Pine trees are the main source of income for European countries. When one cuts down a pine tree, he has to convince the authorities that six pine saplings have been planted?” Did we have such laws in India at any time?

(The writer is special correspondent, The Pioneer)



Khalistan terror: Globalised 21st century challenge

The rise of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the 1980s posed a threat to India's territorial integrity. Since then, it has transcended the borders of India. The way the 21st-century Khalistan movement is shaped and propagated to its followers is markedly different from the violent upsurge of the 1980s. It is much more globalised now. While hardcore advocates like Amritpal Singh have followed in the footsteps of the Bhindranwale cult, the worldwide network of Khalistani sympathisers has provided the movement with an easier source of sustenance than in the past.

The history of Khalistan lies in the roots of Sikhism. The revered Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak in Punjab in the 15th century. It boasts more than 25 million followers worldwide, with Sikhs constituting a minority group in India, making up less than 2 per cent of the country's total population of 1.4 billion today. However, they are a majority in their home State of Punjab.

The word "Khalistan" signifies the establishment of an ethno-religious sovereign state for the Sikhs, referred to as the land of the Khalsa. This is defined as the "land of the pure." Additionally, Khalsa encompasses both a community of believers who consider Sikhism their faith and a group of initiated Sikhs. Devout orthodox Sikhs are ritually admitted to this community upon reaching puberty. The very concept of Khalsa was established by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, in the year 1699.

However, the demand for the establishment of Khalistan is a relatively recent development, originating during the period of British colonialism in India. It primarily emerged in the Punjab region. Some proponents of Khalistan assert that their envisioned state encompasses the current Punjab State, while others advocate for the inclusion of the Punjab region in Pakistan, along with a demand to incorporate other significant neighbouring states such as Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and the Chandigarh region.

Furthermore, Shimla and Lahore are considered the two potential capitals of Khalistan. The original call for the formation of Khalistan was, in fact, a response to the Pakistan Resolution of 1940. This resolution, also known as the Lahore Resolution, was authored and prepared by Muhammad Zafarullah Khan and ratified by the All India



Muslim League on March 23, 1940. The term "Khalistan" was first coined by Dr VS Bhatti to signify an independent Sikh State in March 1940.

The primary objective behind the Khalistan demand was to secure better representation for Sikhs in political institutions and to establish a homeland for the community. After the partition of India in 1947, the Sikhs were deeply affected as Punjab was divided into two parts — one remained with India and the other with Pakistan. This further fueled the demand for a Sikh homeland.

The Canadian connection to the Khalistan movement is longstanding. The current controversy surrounding Khalistan has strained the relationship between India and Canada, particularly after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in Canada's Parliament that there were credible allegations linking Indian Government agents to the June murder of the Sikh separatist leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The Indian Government promptly denied any involvement in Nijjar's killing. It is evident that Trudeau is attempting to avoid openly addressing the issue of

the growing Khalistan movement in Canada.

India has repeatedly accused Canada of continuously supporting the Khalistan movement, which is banned in India. However, this movement enjoys widespread popularity among a substantial section of Sikhs worldwide.

What Trudeau is doing today amounts to nothing more than resorting to vote bank politics in Canada. According to Indian estimates, nearly 8,000-9,000 Khalistani radicals exert influence over approximately 15 gurdwaras, using them as centres for fundraising and garnering support for political parties in Canada. Their primary sphere of influence lies in political mobilisation in Brampton, Ontario, as well as Vancouver and Surrey in British Columbia. Instead, Trudeau should have recognised the gravity of the situation and cooperated with the Indian Government in expelling all Khalistani activists from his country.

The day will come when they may pose a potential security threat to Trudeau's fellow citizens. There is an abundance of evidence pointing to

the growth of Sikh militancy in Canada. In June 2020, Indian intelligence agencies issued a warning that criminal gangs based in Canada, comprising Indian expatriates from Punjab, including Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), are directly providing funding to the Khalistanis. The infamous Dhaliwal and Grewal gangs, operating in the British Columbia Province and involved in a drug-trafficking network, have connections to Gurbatwant Singh Pannu of the SFJ. Additionally, another notorious syndicate called the Brother's Keepers of Vancouver has been linked to these gangs.

Furthermore, the SFJ is establishing close links with the Pakistani establishment and agencies in order to reignite the Khalistan movement. It is reported that the SFJ is diligently working to organise a referendum for self-determination on the issue of Khalistan. Canadian authorities must take note that SFJ activists in Punjab and the Tarai region of Uttar Pradesh are consistently receiving substantial funds from gangs based in that country.

Pannun has issued a threat to Indo-Canadian Hindus, urging them to leave Canada and

return to India. In a public video message, he stated, "Indo-Canadian Hindus, you have renounced your allegiance to Canada and the Canadian Constitution. Your destination is India. Leave Canada and go to India."

This has sparked another diplomatic dispute between India and Canada. This will result in significant economic losses for both nations. Moreover, the expulsion of diplomatic staff from both sides, along with visa restrictions, will only lead to a severe strain in their bilateral relations.

"While there is currently no active insurgency in Punjab, there has been ongoing support for the Khalistan movement in the State. Consequently, successive Central governments issued repeated warnings about Khalistanis attempting a resurgence and seeking to influence the youth of Punjab."

Moreover, Punjab's political instability, fueled by infighting within the Congress and the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party to power, has created an environment where neighbouring Pakistan, its state agencies, and Sikh extremist factions based in Canada have been relentless in their efforts

to destabilise Punjab in recent times.

The warning issued by Ganga Singh Dhillon was stark: "We are not seeking just a piece of land. We are looking for a territory where Sikhs can safeguard their women and children. Where a Sikh can determine his own destiny — where our religious shrines are not subject to being overrun by army tanks. You can call it an independent Punjab, a sovereign state, or Khalistan. What we are requesting is a homeland for the Sikh nation" ("Give us Khalistan and leave us in peace," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, July 21, 1985).

However, Harjot strongly contends that the emotional attachment with Punjab among Sikhs is relatively recent and does not trace back to the early days of the Sikh community as some Khalistan ideologues might assert today. It is the convergence of history and geography, discourse and space, territoriality and metacommentaries that has transformed Punjab into Khalistan. Both Punjab and Khalistan are human-made constructs, and there is nothing inherently natural about them (Harjot S Oberoi, 'From Punjab to

Khalistan: Territoriality and Metacommentary, Pacific Affairs, Spring 1987)

Answers to these underlying currents are not very difficult to find in a globalised world. We are all part of a flat world where identities and cultural insignia are often overshadowed by economic desires, in contrast to what we experienced in a pre-globalised era. Migration has become a way of life. As more and more Sikhs migrated abroad, particularly to the US, the UK, and Canada for a better life, these extremist elements started relying on this extensive diaspora for their sustenance.

Back in India, all these groups are banned, and authorities are closely monitoring their activities and local connections. Consequently, they have found Canada to be a favourable ground for promoting and motivating many youths to support their agenda. For a long time, Khalistanis have been organising against India in Canada, and successive administrations in Ottawa are well aware of this.

Trudeau should not have aligned himself with one of the banned terror groups in India. He is well aware that he is on the wrong side. These Khalistanis have no allegiances; they simply want to keep their agenda alive so that their supporters and sympathisers remain intact for the long run.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended a helping hand to Trudeau, and he should have responded by taking decisive action to eradicate these criminal gangs from Canadian soil altogether.

We all must understand that terrorists recognise no religion or boundaries. They are enemies of civil society and universally recognised liberties of modern society. They stand against peace and humanity. As two democracies, India and Canada must join forces in the fight against Khalistanis. It is now time to prevent them from spreading their agenda and destabilising peace in both countries. The resurgence of the Khalistani movement is a warning signal for both Punjab and all of India. This must be addressed with a superior security and intelligence strategy and network. Undoubtedly, Delhi today possesses much stronger anti-terror infrastructure and more robust leadership than it did in the 1980s to deal with Bhindranwale-like symptoms.

(The writer is currently president of the Global Research Foundation)

The rise of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the 1980s threatened India's integrity. Today's Khalistan movement is more globalised, with a worldwide network of sympathisers. Khalistan movement has ties to Canada, straining India-Canada relations. Khalistanis aim to influence Sikh youth in Punjab. Addressing this threat requires a robust security and intelligence approach. It is imperative for India and Canada to collaborate against terrorism, transcending boundaries and religions.



MAKHAN SAINIA

PERSPECTIVE

India's healthcare in uncertain times

Health insurance is vital, especially during unpredictable times like the Covid-19 pandemic. It helps cover medical expenses and provides financial security. India has made progress in healthcare accessibility through schemes like RSBY and AB-PMJAY, aiming to leave no one behind



DIPANSHU NIJANANDI

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, individuals experienced the unfortunate loss of their loved ones, and a significant portion of them also had the dual burden of losing both loved ones and financial resources while their hospitalisation for treatment. There exists a well-known adage that posits food, clothing, and shelter as the fundamental necessities of human existence.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge an additional element that is often overlooked by the majority of individuals: the acquisition of health insurance. The natural world displays a significant degree of unpredictability and predictability, which is mirrored in the fragility of human existence. Any form of misfortune has the potential to lead to varying degrees of harm, ranging from minor injuries to severe consequences, including loss of life. Sickness or disease does not give advance notice before affecting the human body.

While it is indeed accurate that money cannot purchase life itself, it can provide assistance in navigating challenging circumstances for both indi-

viduals and their families. In contemporary society, possessing a robust health insurance coverage is imperative due to the prevailing uncertainties. It is a cornerstone of personal financial planning, encompassing an individual's comprehensive financial inflows and outflows.

A significant portion of the population lacks awareness regarding medical inflation, of medical inflation, which is the highest form of inflation. Specifically, it compounds at an annual rate of 15 per cent. This implies that a medical treatment currently priced at ₹10,00,000 will escalate to ₹40,00,000 over a period of ten years. Therefore, one may comprehend the significance of possessing a comprehensive health insurance policy.

Undoubtedly, India's healthcare infrastructure has shown significant progress in recent years. In order to provide universal access to healthcare services for all citizens inside the nation, the government has implemented various measures. The Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-



PMJAY) are India's two main public health insurance schemes. RSBY was established in 2008 to offer those living in poverty access to health insurance. The scheme has now been combined with the 2018-born AB-PMJAY. This programme was created to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its overarching promise to "leave no one behind".

Aiming to cover 100 million households, or around 500 million individuals, nationwide with health insurance, is AB-PMJAY. As of April 2023, data from the National Health Authority shows that over 50 million hospitalisations under AB-PMJAY had been authorised, with a total cost exceeding ₹80,000 crore. Additionally, the programme has enrolled over 23,000 hos-

pitals nationwide, which offer beneficiaries a wide range of medical services.

As of March 2022, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) reported 62 non-life insurance companies in operation, with 29 offering health insurance products. In addition, the country possessed a total of six autonomous health insurance carriers.

According to data from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), the health insurance market in India has experienced significant growth over a period of time. As of March 2022, health insurance companies had accumulated a total of INR 64,230 crores in premiums, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 15.2 per cent. During the corresponding time period, a total of 7.69 crore policies were successfully sold, indicating a growth rate of 12.6 per cent compared to the previous year.

In today's era, it is crucial for individuals to protect their families by obtaining comprehensive health insurance coverage to guard against unforeseen medical emergencies.

There are some crucial factors to take into consideration before purchasing a health insurance policy:

- 1) The sum insured ideally should be 15 to 20 times of your annual income.
- 2) Purchase super top up policy along with base insurance policy to increase sum insured cover, once your base policy cover will exhaust then super top up will come into existence.
- 3) If you are a family person then go for family floater plans.
- 4) Claim settlement ratio should be above 95 per cent.
- 5) High number of network hospitals with cashless treatment facilities.
- 6) Pre and post hospitalisation expenses should be covered.
- 7) Less waiting period for named ailment and pre-existing diseases.
- 8) No claim bonus or cumulative bonus in case of claims also should be there.
- 9) No room rent capping should be there in the policy.
- 10) Policy should have day care, in-patient care treatment, ICU cover and ambulance cover up to sum insured with-

out any capping.

11) Automatic unlimited recharge or restoration benefits should be there for unrelated or the same illness without any waiting period.

12) Covid-19, Ayush treatments, domiciliary hospitalisation and organ donor cover should be there up to sum insured.

13) Ideally claim settlement should be done within 30 days of last document submission to the hospital or insured by the insurance company.

14) No Co-payment clause should be there.

Given the substantial cost of healthcare in India, the inclusion of health insurance is an essential element in individual financial strategising. Health insurance provides individuals and families with a sense of security by safeguarding them from the economic strain caused by medical emergencies. This is made possible by the availability of many insurance plans and the benefits offered by insurance providers.

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As world’s problems grow challenging, head of the United Nations gets bleaker

At the annual meeting of world leaders last year, the UN chief sounded a global alarm about the survival of humanity and the planet. This year, the alarm rang louder and more ominously, and the message was even more pressing: Wake up and take action right now. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' assessment, delivered in his no-nonsense style, aimed to shock.

We are becoming "unhinged," he said. We are inching closer to "a great fracture." Conflicts, coups and chaos are surging. The climate crisis is growing. Divides are deepening between military and economic powers, the richer North and poorer South, East and West. "A new Rubicon" has been crossed in artificial intelligence.

Guterres has spoken often on all these issues. But this year, which he called "a time of chaotic transition," his address to leaders was tougher and even more urgent. And looking at his previous state-of-the-world speeches, it seems clear he has been headed in this direction for quite some time.

In his first address to world leaders in 2017 after taking the helm of the 193-member United Nations, Guterres cited "nuclear peril" as the leading global threat.

Two years later, he was warning of the world splitting in two, with the United States and China creating rival internets, currency, trade, financial rules "and their own zero-sum geopolitical and military strategies." He urged vigorous action "to avert the great fracture."

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. The global response Guterres called for never happened; richer countries got vaccines and poorer ones were left waiting. At last year's leaders' gathering, his message was almost as dire as this week's: "Our world is in peril and paralysed," Guterres said. "We are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction." This year, his message to the presidents and prime ministers, monarchs and ministers gathered in the vast General Assembly hall was unambiguous and stark.

"We seem incapable," Guterres said, "of coming together to respond."



“We cannot inch towards agreement while the world races towards a precipice, Guterres said. We must bring a new urgency to our efforts, and a shared sense of common purpose.

The pact represents your pledge to use all the tools at your disposal at the global level to solve problems before those problems overwhelm us. The secretary-general said he knows reaching agreement will be difficult. ‘But,’ he said, it is possible.

THE WORLD’S FUTURE, AND THE UN’S

At the heart of Guterres' many speeches this week is the very future of the United Nations, an institution formed immediately after World War II to bring nations together and save future generations from war. But in a 21st-century world that is far more interconnected and also more bitterly divided, can it remain relevant?

For Guterres, the answer is clear: It must. The Cold War featured two superpowers the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union. When it ended, there was a brief period of US-dominated unipolarity after the breakup of the Soviet

Union and its dissolution into a dominant Russia and smaller former republics. Now it is moving to a more chaotic "multipolar world" and creating, Guterres says, new opportunities for different countries to lead. But Guterres' key argument is rooted in history. He says it teaches that a world with many power centres and small groups of nations can't solve the challenges that affect all countries. That's why strong global institutions are needed, he told leaders on Thursday, and "the United Nations is the only forum where this can happen." The big question, upon which Guterres is now laser-focused, is whether an institution born in 1945 a

time when the tools to address chaos and fragmentation were more rudimentary can be retooled and updated to tackle today's challenges.

"I have no illusions," he said. "Reforms are a question of power. I know there are many competing interests and agendas. But the alternative to reform is not the status quo. The alternative to reform is further fragmentation. It's reform or rupture." That is the conundrum sitting in the UN chief's lap: Can 193 nations with competing agendas undertake major reforms?

To meet the challenge, Guterres has called on world leaders to attend a "Summit of the Future" at next September's UN global gathering, and in the coming year to negotiate a "Pact for the Future."

At a meeting Thursday to prepare, he told ministers that the pact "represents your pledge to use all the tools at your disposal at the global level to solve problems before those problems overwhelm us." The secretary-general said he knows reaching agreement will be difficult. "But," he said, "it is possible."

A SENSE THAT THINGS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY BROKEN

Time, Guterres says, is against the United Nations and countries that support the return of united global action. Perhaps that is why his words grow more dire each year.

He points to new conflicts like Ukraine, more intense geopolitical tensions, signs of "climate breakdown," a cost-of-living crisis and the debt distress and default that is bedeviling more countries than ever.

"We cannot inch towards agreement while the world races towards a precipice," Guterres said. "We must bring a new urgency to our efforts, and a shared sense of common purpose." That's easier said than done, as this week's high-level meetings and the priorities and problems they raise make clear.

Can all the UN's far-flung nations unite behind a common purpose? Whether that happens in the next 12 months remains to be seen. Certainly there is support. Consider Bahamas Foreign Minister Frederick Audley Mitchell, addressing the global gathering Friday night.



“Specifically investigates the connection between the acoustic characteristics of coughs and the varying levels of pneumonia severity in COVID-19 patients.”

Cough sounds analysed for assessing Covid severity

A cough analysis could soon reveal disease severity in COVID-19 patients, researchers said.

Differences in cough sounds depending on the severity of the respiratory condition were observed, the research team led by the Institute for Bioengineering of Catalonia (IBEC), Barcelona, Spain, said.



lected between April 2020 and May 2021 at Hospital del Mar in Barcelona.

These differences may reflect the progressive respiratory system changes in patients with COVID-19, they said.

Jane's signal processing group at IBEC developed the methodology and algorithms for the acoustic analysis of cough signals collected via smartphones.

Further, cough analysis can serve a dual purpose - early Covid detection and remote monitoring of disease progression, the authors said, adding that further research involving more patients was needed to validate these study findings.

During emergencies and in regions with limited medical infrastructure, the method could prove useful in the prompt identification and isolation of Covid patients, enabling implementation of control measures and medical care, said senior co-author of the study and researcher at the Hospital del Mar, Joaquim Gea.

Despite being Covid-oriented, the study paved the way for applying this model in the context of other respiratory conditions, the researchers said, adding that the method presented a potential predictive, simple, and accessible tool to assess the risk of suffering severe pneumonia.

Biologists in race to help largest and rarest tortoise species

While the average lifespan of North America's largest and most rare tortoise species is unknown, biologists have said it could span upward of a century.

So saving the endangered species is a long game one that got another nudge forward on Friday as US wildlife officials finalised an agreement with Ted Turner's Endangered Species Fund that clears the way for the release of more Bolson tortoises on the media mogul's ranch in central New Mexico.

The "safe harbour agreement" will facilitate the release of captive tortoises on the Armendaris Ranch to establish a free-ranging population. US Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams said the agreement, which offers private landowners protections from regulations, can serve as a model as officials look for more innovative ways to work within the Endangered Species Act.

Dozens of people gathered for the release on Friday of 20 more adult tortoises on the property, which is already home to 23 of them as well as dozens of juvenile ones. With the sun high in the sky and temperatures nearing 90



degrees (32 degrees Celsius), the release was held off until the evening to ensure their well-being.

The tortoises usually spend about 85 per cent of the time in their earthen burrows, which in some cases can be about 21 yards (20 metres) long.

Shawn Sartorius, a field supervisor with the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the results of the breeding and restoration efforts for the slow-reproducing and long-lived animals will not be known in his lifetime.

"What we're doing here is establishing a population here that can be handed off to the next generation," Sartorius said.

It's a step toward one day releasing the tortoise more broadly in the Southwest as conservationists push the federal government to consider crafting a recovery plan for the species.

Workers uncover eight mummies and pre-Inca objects in Peru

Some archaeologists describe Peru's capital as an onion with many layers of history, others consider it a box of surprises. That's what some gas line workers got when their digging uncovered eight pre-Inca funeral bales.

"We are recovering those leaves of the lost history of Lima that is just hidden under the tracks and streets," Jesus Bahamonde, an archaeologist at Calidda, the company that distributes natural gas in the city of 10 million people, said Friday.

He said the company's excavation work to expand its system of gas lines over the last 19 years has produced more than 1,900 archaeological finds of various kinds, including mummies, pottery and textiles. Those have mostly been associated with burial sites on flat ground.

The city also has more than 400 larger archaeological sites that have turned



up scattered through the urban landscape. Known as "huacas" in the Indigenous Quechua language, those adobe constructions are on top of hills considered sacred places.

The number of relics isn't surprising. The area that is now Lima has been occupied for more than 10,000 years by pre-Inca cultures, then the Inca Empire itself and then the colonial culture brought by the Spanish conquerors in 1535.

Lima until it was incorporated into the Inca Empire in the late 15th century, scholars say.

Archaeologist Roberto Quispe, who worked in the trench, said the funeral bundles probably hold two adults and six minors.

Sometimes, the archaeological finds prove to be from more recent times. In 2018, Quispe and other archaeologists working in the La Flor neighbourhood found wooden coffins holding three Chinese immigrants buried in the 19th century.

Archaeologists found the bodies next to opium-smoking pipes, handmade cigarettes, shoes, Chinese playing cards, a Peruvian silver coin minted in 1898 and a certificate of completion of an employment contract written in Spanish and dated 1875 at a hacienda south of Lima. The eight burial bundles were found near some braised chicken restaurants and a road that leads to Peru's only nuclear power station.

Devoid of 'brain', jellyfish seen to learn from past experiences, new study finds

The ability to learn from past experiences could be independent of possessing a "central brain" like the one that humans, mice and flies possess, according to latest findings of a study in jellyfish.

Instead, the jellies saw obstacles and employed associated learning, that involves making mental connections between sensory stimulations and behaviours, to guide themselves through murky waters and around underwater tree roots to snare prey, the scientists from Germany and Denmark demonstrated in Caribbean box jellyfish (*Tripedalia cystophora*).

These "seemingly simple" jellies, no bigger than a fingernail and living in mangrove swamps, have a complex visual system with 24 eyes embedded in their bell-like body, they said.

Shedding light on the evolutionary roots of learning and memory, the study findings challenge previous notions that advanced learning, including learning from prior experiences, requires a centralised brain, they said in their study published in the journal *Current Biology*.



"Learning is the pinnacle performance for nervous systems," said first author Jan Bielecki of Kiel University, Germany.

"Looking at these relatively simple nervous systems in jellyfish, we have a much higher chance of understanding all the details and how it comes together to perform behaviours," said senior author Anders Garm of the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

The researchers observed the jellyfish for 7.5 minutes in a tank dressed with gray and white stripes to mimic a mangrove environment.

They saw that while initially the jelly bumped into these seemingly far stripes frequently, by the end of the experiment, it had on average distanced itself from the wall more by about a half and quadrupled the number of successful pivots to avoid collision.

How ducks, geese and swans see the world - and why this puts them at risk

Each year, millions of birds fly into power lines, wind turbines and the other man-made structures that litter the open air space. These collisions frequently result in the death of birds and, if power systems go down, disrupt our lives and pose financial challenges for power companies.

Numerous bird species, including macaws in Brazil, geese and swans in the UK, and blue cranes in South Africa have been found to be susceptible to collisions with power lines. But any flying bird can fall victim to such a collision. In some places, these collisions happen so often that they can jeopardise local populations of endangered species.

But birds are highly evolved flying machines. They can fly in tightly packed flocks that weave and turn to our delight and wonder. So why do they fly into things?

According to our latest research, the answer lies in how they see the world. We found that looking directly ahead is simply not that important to many

species of duck, geese and swans.

HOW BIRDS SEE THE WORLD

Exploring the reasons behind why birds are victims of collisions has led to new ideas that challenge our fundamental perception of what birds are. In the past, scientists have described birds as "a wing guided by an eye".

This implies that flight has been central to moulding bird vision throughout their evolution. But now it is safe to conclude that a bird is instead best characterised as "a bill guided by an eye".

Rather than flight, the main driver of the evolution of bird vision has been the key tasks associated with foraging, in particular detecting food items and getting the bill to the right place at the right time in order to seize them.

Alongside the detection of predators, this is the task that bird vision has to get right day in, day out. Birds differ in how much the view from each eye overlaps (called the binocular field of view).

The more the eyes look straight



ahead, the more the view from each eye will overlap much as human eyes do thus broadening the binocular field.

For a bird such as a duck, with its eyes positioned high up on either side of the head, the view from each eye will be

very different (with smaller binocular field). We measured binocular field size across a broad range of 39 species of duck, geese and swans. We found that the key driver of diversity in vision between species is their diet and how they forage for food. Birds that primarily use their vision to locate foods such as seeds, or selectively graze on plants, tend to have broader binocular fields.

However, the binocular fields of species like mallards and pink-eared ducks are much narrower.

These birds rely less on their eyes for foraging and more on touch cues from their bills. The vision of birds like these instead provides them with a comprehensive view of the region above and behind their heads. Birds certainly need to have some visual coverage in front of them. But with eyes placed high on the side of the head, resulting in a very narrow binocular field, they are restricted to retrieving rather scant detail from the distant scene ahead.

What matters to them more is placing

their bill accurately at a close distance and seeing who is coming at them from the side or from behind.

This finding is not confined to ducks, geese and swans. It probably generalises to all birds, except perhaps some owls (which have more front-facing eyes and rely upon sound to locate prey). The great majority of birds are therefore vulnerable to collisions.

However, it is larger birds like geese, swans and bustards that face real problems. Their restricted forward vision is compounded by flying fast and being unable to change direction quickly.

These birds also often fly in flocks, and at dusk and dawn when the light level is lower.

WARNING BIRDS OF HAZARDS AHEAD

Understanding the vision of birds from the perspective of foraging and predator detection improves our understanding of what causes collisions. But, more importantly, it allows us to do something about it.