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ONCOLOGIST R. RAVI KANNAN OF THE CACHAR CANCER HOSPITAL AND RESEARCH CENTRE WINS 2023 RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARD

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 01, 2023 03:45 am | Updated 07:14 am IST - CHENNAI

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Surgical oncologist R. Ravi Kannan. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Surgical oncologist R. Ravi Kannan, Director of the Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (CCHRC) in Assam, is one of the Ramon Magsaysay Awardees for 2023. He is credited with revolutionising cancer treatment in Assam through people-centric and pro-poor healthcare.

Dr. Kannan hails from Chennai, where he earlier worked at the Cancer Institute, Adyar, before moving to Silchar in 2007. He became the Director of the CCHRC in that year.

According to the citation on the website of the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, under Dr. Kannan's leadership, the CCHRC became a full-fledged comprehensive cancer hospital and research centre. From having limited facilities when he came on board, the hospital now has 28 departments covering oncology, pathology, radiology, microbiology, epidemiology, tumour registry, and palliative care. From 23 personnel, the hospital now employs 451 persons.

The hospital introduced pro-poor initiatives such as free treatment, food and lodging, *ad hoc* employment for caregivers, and a homecare programme as patients could not continue their treatment due to difficulty in travelling long distances, and cost, with the underlying reason being poverty. Hospital team members travelled long distances to train family members in pain management and palliative care, and provided free medicines. As a result, patient compliance rate in treatment rose from 28% to 70%.

The CCHRC now provides free or subsidised cancer care treatment to an average of 5,000 new patients annually, catering to approximately 20,000 poor patients for treatments and follow-ups, the citation read.

Dr. Kannan said the award belongs to all who had joined hands to make the lives of those suffering from cancer better. He said they were now focussing on "decentralising cancer care by setting up smaller hospitals in different parts of the State and also in Tripura so that people do not have to travel far to reach a hospital for treatment".

Satellite clinics have been started in Karimganj, Hailakandi, and Dima Hasao districts, he said.

“We have to go near people and focus on prevention, treatment, and cancer care. We need a lot of support for infrastructure and equipment, which are one-time investments, but what we need most is human resources, which is a recurring requirement,” Dr. Kannan, who is also a recipient of the Padma Shri award, said.

(With inputs from PTI)

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ARE NATURAL DISASTERS MAN-MADE?

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September 01, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 08:53 am IST

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The damaged Kiratpur-Manali road following heavy rainfall, near Pandoh in Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh. | Photo Credit: PTI

Torrential rains in several parts of north India, particularly Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, damaged highways and buildings, and took hundreds of lives. While a warming Arctic is said to be a cause for the unusually heavy rains, years of haphazard planning and construction have multiplied the tragedy. Are natural disasters man-made? Vimal Mishra and Lubaina Rangwalla discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Jacob Koshy**. Edited excerpts:

Every year, particularly in the monsoon, we witness extreme natural calamities. However, this is also the result of poor planning. To what extent are natural disasters man-made?

Lubaina Rangwalla: The scale of natural disasters that we now see across the world are definitely man-made. Some sections of the population are more vulnerable to them and more at risk than others. We need to figure out systems and solutions that can be channelised specifically towards this large pool of people. We need to build stronger systems from the bottom up and learn to do it collectively.

Vimal Mishra: Humans have played an important role in enhancing the risk from climate hazards. The frequency and intensity of hazards have increased, and anthropogenic climate change has played a major role in that. We have built on floodplains, encroached water bodies, and planned our cities without thinking about sustainability. So, humans are responsible. Not fully, but we have played a considerable part in increasing the problem. But we should find solutions and learn from our failures.

While natural variability and anthropogenic causes have a role to play, India was affected by natural disasters even before the framing of climate change as a catalyst. Whether excessive flooding in Mumbai or landslides in the hills, do you see disaster-preparedness having evolved over the years?

LR: There are a few different ways in which the landscape of disasters in India has changed. We are constantly talking about the importance of urban planning and how the movement of people to urban centres has affected natural landscapes. Some [landscapes] have changed drastically and exceeded their carrying capacity and this has exacerbated the extent of loss and damage in these areas. I don't think that agencies regulating the manner in which cities, villages and towns have urbanised have kept up. It is heart-wrenching to see a beautiful ecosystem

crumble; it is a failure of planning in understanding how to ensure that certain critical ecosystems are kept alive and natural systems are kept at the core of the way we live.

In Mumbai, we have seen floods viscerally and the city has continued to grow. Mumbai has its own Disaster Management Agency. It has been engaging with the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, which develops models to predict floods better. Also, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's storm-water drainage department has, in the last decade, built larger water-holding tanks. Mumbai has been able to perform much better in this regard than, say, Delhi, which is seeing recurrent floods. With the kind of sea-level rise expected and the coastal inundation projected in the coming decades, I am not confident that some of the planning decisions that we have made are very wise.

If you consider the historical development of cities everywhere, it is the story of urbanisation. Increased population density means greater dependence on fossil fuel and greater climate-disruptive anthropogenic forces. So, in one sense, aren't we caught between the devil and the deep sea?

VM: Development translates to infrastructure growth. However, we don't pay enough attention to whether our development pathways are sustainable. Sustainability means emphasising not only economics, but also society and environment. Any sustainable development will consider the environmental implications. So far, we have just run behind the economics, you know, the land holdings, finding cheaper land, filling the water bodies, removing palaeochannels (deep underground stores of groundwater) and destroying natural drainage systems. So, yes, we are caught in the trap and we are facing a lot of challenges because of that. The only solution is adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, implementing careful urban planning, and creating roads and streets keeping these in mind.

LR: I don't think we are at a dead end. We are developing and growing, and people will need houses, jobs and services. But as Dr. Mishra said, we have allowed certain business-as-usual practices to persist in city planning. We did a workshop with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's storm-water drainage department about a year ago. Stakeholders from planning, design, landscape firms, private developers, community-based organisations, and citizens who have been impacted by landslides, disasters and routine flooding were present. At the end of it, the workshop led to the realisation that cities had to start thinking of long-term solutions. It comes down to understanding that there are no quick-fix solutions to what we are going through; we will have to think about long-term risk assessments, vulnerability assessments, and understand how socioeconomic drivers are worsening the problem in certain communities compared to others in the city.

We have building codes to determine how and where structures and roads ought to be constructed. Municipal authorities are trained and clearly know what to do. So, is it the case that knowledge already exists but our experts are unable to implement them for various reasons, or is there genuinely a lack of knowledge among city planners in terms of accounting for climate hazards and natural disasters?

VM: Knowledge is never complete. We learn new things every day and have some knowledge from past events, but the challenge is most often from a lack of awareness, or from ignoring a risk. And the risk is not clearly estimated or defined when we implement a new infrastructure project. Let's say we are going to build a new highway in a mountainous region and we have to calculate the risk from an extreme weather event. We will have some idea of it based on past events; it is not that nobody knows what to do. The problem is, most of the time this risk is underestimated. Why? Because often, we don't have a complete record that informs planners about current and upcoming disasters. Data sets are often pretty old and do not directly provide

sufficient information about the future. If you talk about the Himalayan territory, for instance, we have a very limited understanding because of an inadequate observational network. So, if you go and survey how many rainfall recording stations we have, what is the density of rainfall, I would say they are fewer than that we have in other parts of the country where it is easier to manage, install, monitor, and take care of such infrastructure.

LR: There are excellent institutions even within the government that are constantly monitoring and understanding the scale of the climate crisis in terms of rainfall patterns, trends, and the ways in which risk is becoming more pronounced in certain regions versus others. I think the disconnect is in the ways in which decisions continue to be taken. And while we understand that there are certain regions that are increasingly becoming more flood-prone, what we really have to do is think transformatively. We have to analyse the implications of imposing a strict carrying capacity in certain regions and not allowing for more urbanisation to happen in certain areas or restricting certain ways in which infrastructure is built. This need to constantly shorten travel time and to make it easier to connect tourist destinations, for example, has run counter to the ways in which we in the environment space have been talking about preserving, conserving, and building stronger relationships with ecosystems. These two desires are also part of the schizophrenic nature in which government agencies function. These desires are constantly at conflict. And so, it's not so much the knowledge. If you really want to make the right decisions, you will bring in experts from both private and public agencies and you will have very good solutions on the table, current and modern ways of understanding the scale of a disaster, where the risk is, and what kinds of solutions should be modelled around it. Whether there is political will to take action in that manner is the question.

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NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS: ON THE ASIA CUP

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September 01, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:10 am IST

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The Asia Cup, a tournament originally launched to promote Asian solidarity in cricket, is often caught between the fissures that define Indian subcontinental history. Started in 1984 with bonhomie between the big three — India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — the championship soon became captive to the political issues that cropped up between these nations with the India-Pakistan narrative being the primary basis for grudges. Still the continental skirmish has developed deep roots, lasted the distance, embraced new teams such as Bangladesh, Afghanistan and even had Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates. And when the 16th edition commenced at Multan in Pakistan on Wednesday, even Nepal was in the fray. The latest edition also had its share of heartburn. Originally scheduled to be entirely held beyond the Wagah border, India's refusal to tour Pakistan forced a compromise with Sri Lanka stepping in as a co-host. Pakistan bristled and then got practical and it is a sad reality that India's last tour of its neighbouring country happened during the 2008 Asia Cup in Karachi. Much water has flowed down the Indus but old wounds continue to fester. The current version has six teams split into two groups leading towards the super-four stage before concluding with the final at Colombo on September 17.

It is a travesty that matches involving India and Pakistan are reduced to guest appearances within ICC events and Asia Cup jousts. Away from the diplomatic crossfire, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will look at the Asia Cup as a preparatory stage for the World Cup commencing in India during October. The Indian squad will try to fix the missing links in the coming weeks but with K.L. Rahul, Shreyas Iyer and even Jasprit Bumrah winging back from injuries, there is anxiety. The last named did well as a leader during the recent T20Is in Ireland and yet the Indian line-up looks unsettled. Much will hinge on the batting thrust that skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli can lend while Suryakumar Yadav needs to find his feet in ODIs. Incidentally this Asia Cup will consist of ODIs while in some of its previous avatars it had dallied with T20Is. Sri Lanka too is in a transitory phase but the most heartening story would be Afghanistan's resilience even if back home the Taliban's restrictions tend to suffocate life and sport. Meanwhile Bangladesh, yet to win the Asian title, gets another tilt but all eyes will be glued to Saturday's India-Pakistan tussle at Pallekele. This contest may offer clues to the Asian angle in the upcoming World Cup.

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MOST AVIAN FLU OUTBREAKS IN INDIA REPORTED FROM POST-MONSOON TO PRE-SUMMER SEASON: STUDY

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September 01, 2023 09:34 pm | Updated 09:35 pm IST - NEW DELHI

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Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses, H5N1 and H5N8, have been one of the leading causes of avian diseases worldwide, resulting in severe economic losses and posing potential zoonotic risk. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses, H5N1 and H5N8, have been one of the leading causes of avian diseases worldwide, resulting in severe economic losses and posing potential zoonotic risk. The viruses are known to cause infections in humans with a history of close contact with infected poultry, resulting in mild-to-severe respiratory disease and even fatality. Now, a study has shed more light on outbreaks of HPAI in India.

According to the latest research paper “Spatio-temporal distribution and seasonality of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 and H5N8 outbreaks in India, 2006-2021”, published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research, a total of 284 H5N1 outbreaks were reported since 2006 with a surge in 2021. The initial outbreaks of H5N1 were predominantly in poultry. Similarly, since 2016, 57 outbreaks of H5N8 were also reported, predominantly in wild birds.

It further noted that most of the outbreaks of HPAI were reported between post-monsoon and pre-summer season (i.e. between October and March), with their peak in January, during winter.

Apart from poultry, bird species such as owl, Indian peafowl, lesser adjutant, crows, and wild migratory birds such as demoiselle crane, northern pintail, and bar-headed goose tested positive for HPAI.

“Studies on the seasonality of HPAI outbreaks would help in the development of prevention and control strategies. Recent human infections of H5N1 and H9N2 viruses highlight the need to strengthen surveillance in wild, resident, migratory birds and in poultry,” noted the paper.

For the paper, data on the occurrence and locations of outbreaks in India and affected bird species were collated from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations database and grouped by month and year. The distribution and seasonality of HPAI H5N1 and H5N8 viruses were analysed.

As of December 2021, H5N1 virus outbreaks were documented on a large scale among poultry and wild birds in more than 77 countries. And as of March 2022, 863 human cases of avian influenza (AI) H5N1 were reported worldwide with an average case fatality ratio of 53%.

According to the paper a significant rise in HPAI outbreaks in domestic and wild birds had been reported in October 2021, signalling expanded virus circulation. The first human case of H5N1 virus infection in India was reported in June 2021, coinciding with the monsoon season in the country.

“The HPAI H5N1 viruses are constantly evolving globally through complex genetic changes, which have infected poultry, wild birds as well as humans,” noted the study.

As per the paper, the first HPAI H5N1 outbreak in India was reported in 2006 from Navapur, Maharashtra, followed by a series of outbreaks annually. Later, from 2007 to 2010, most of the outbreaks were reported from the eastern and northeastern States but predominantly from West Bengal. Odisha reported outbreaks from 2011 to 2020, with the highest in 2018. The H5N8 virus was first reported in India in November 2016, with mortality in wild birds from five States, and Kerala reported most number of events (25). There were no reports of H5N8 from India in the years 2018 and 2019.

A sudden rise in the number of H5N8 outbreaks was reported from 2020 onwards, indicating a probable reintroduction of the virus.

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INDIA THAT IS BHARAT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON A NAME GAME

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September 07, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:32 am IST

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India and Bharat have both evoked the same emotions among patriots for decades, but these labels of pride have now been weaponised for narrow political ends. The Bharatiya Janata Party government at the Centre has decided [to use Bharat instead of India in some official communication and documents](#), a practice that its representatives say will now expand. 'India, that is Bharat,...' is how the [Constitution of India](#) names the country, and the use of one or the other has been largely contextual all this while. The cultural echoes of Bharat have never been in doubt, and the current hype around it is more about a campaign to discard the use of India, as if both cannot exist in harmony. India, according to this telling, is a foreign imposition, and hence unsuitable for national dignity. Bharat, linked as it is to various ancient sources, goes beyond the geographical and cultural landscape that constitutes the modern republic of India. In that sense, both names are an outcome of India's nation-building journey. Labouring to tease out the foreign from the native in the expanse of this nation that hosts a multitude of ethnic, linguistic, and genetic diversity and that has been formed as a result of millennia of migrations and cross-currents of human interactions serves no purpose other than creating new flashpoints in society.

This farcical hubbub hoisted upon the country should have been allowed to dissipate and recede, but the knee-jerk reaction of the Opposition gave it the aura of a fundamental identity question before the nation. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has been asking for privileging the use of Bharat over India for long, but the Opposition bloc's decision to label itself INDIA as an acronym also might have influenced the BJP's hurry in the naming exercise. Far from demonstrating a nation's strength and pride, the government's name game undermines the confidence and soft power of the nation. Bharat has been part of popular culture, political and cultural idioms, and literature across many Indian languages. Similarly, India is also used by millions within and outside the country who yearn for its progress. It is possible that contexts and constituencies of these proper nouns might vary, but that is the very reason to desist from attempting to impose the use of one and edge out the other. Whether it is India or Bharat, the essence of the meaning that it conveys remains the same. The needless juxtaposition of the two names should not affect the bonding of the inhabitants in the pursuit of a misplaced cultural combat. Let India and Bharat coexist as they have always been.

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BUILDING CONSENSUS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE G-20 SUMMIT IN DELHI, INDIA'S PRESIDENCY

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September 08, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 09:25 am IST

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India's big moment as [host of the G-20 Summit](#) will arrive this weekend, as world leaders gather in New Delhi for the main event marking the year of its presidency. The group is seen as a more egalitarian version of the G-7 as it includes the leadership of the developing world, and is now the "pre-eminent forum for global economic cooperation". At the start of its presidency last December, it was clear that India would be hamstrung by several events. The global economic headwinds, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, meant a challenging environment for New Delhi in ensuring that all countries were willing to contribute resources for imperatives such as climate finance, and investment in health and poverty alleviation. The Ukraine conflict and the sanctions against Russia were next, practically splitting the G-20 down the middle. This made forging a joint statement even last year difficult. But Indonesian President Joko Widodo was able to ensure a tenuous consensus by travelling to Moscow and Kyiv and enlisting India's support. India's presidency also came amidst continuing bilateral tensions with China over its border moves. This has become an additional problem for India's G-20 Sherpa team as China has played spoiler at many a meeting. The government's decision to hold the G-20 summit two months early, instead of in November, the practice, has given officials less time to ensure that the Leaders' declaration is ready; some of the heavy lifting on building consensus will now be left to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to handle.

In the face of such odds, India's efforts to ensure the vitality of the G-20 process have been valiant and also a well-thought-out one. Mr. Modi made it clear from the beginning that India would not take sides in the Ukraine conflict, and instead focused on issues affecting the global south, holding a summit of developing countries, putting issues of food, fertilizer and energy security, multilateral reform and global governance above geopolitical issues. India even hosted the Voice of Global South Summit. Mr. Modi also championed the induction of the African Union into the G-20, which will be a feather in India's cap if it goes through. Internally, the Indian G-20 presidency has been marked by a distinct effort to "democratise" the process by holding 220 meetings across 60 Indian cities, which, though colossally expensive, has ensured a showcasing of India's diversity. India's G-20 moment is already memorable, but the days ahead will be crucial in cementing its legacy. That legacy hinges on ensuring a truce among its fractious members, that allows for a consensus over the vision of "One Earth, One Family, One Future" in the next few days.

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OFFERING HOPE AND HEALING IN THE DARKEST MOMENTS, ONE CALL AT A TIME

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September 10, 2023 08:41 am | Updated 08:42 am IST - HYDERABAD

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A college professor found herself in the depths of despair, contemplating ending her life while she was alone at home. As she stood on the brink of making a decision, she got a lifeline. The professor decided to reach out to 'Roshni' suicide prevention helpline, which changed the course of her life.

The person on the other end of the helpline lent an ear to the distraught professor, patiently listening as she poured out her woes. Gradually, as the conversation unfolded, the professor's grip on the step-ladder she was about to push away began to loosen. With the helpline's support, she decided to get off the step-ladder and regain control over her life.

The following day, the professor, accompanied by her husband, visited the Roshni centre in Hyderabad. They met the volunteer who had been there for her during that critical moment. Overwhelmed with gratitude, the husband tearfully thanked the volunteer for saving his wife's life.

Vidya, the volunteer who convinced the professor against taking any extreme step, is among the 70 trained individuals working at the Hyderabad-based-Roshni helpline centre. These volunteers undergo training to become empathetic and non-judgmental listeners. When individuals in crisis dial the helpline number, the volunteers guide them through their darkest thoughts, helping dispel the emotional clouds that shroud their minds and empower them to face their challenges with renewed strength.

When callers exhibit suicidal tendencies, Roshni volunteers go the extra mile. At the end of each call, they seek the individual's consent to follow up within 24 hours, providing continuous support during their journey to recovery. "When we call them again and the same person answers it, we take it as a achievement," says one of the volunteers.

On average, the Roshni helpline receives approximately 30 calls a day, with 10 involving individuals with suicidal intentions, three to five with concrete suicide plans, and the rest from people grappling with various forms of distress or depression. "The number increases during the examination season. We start getting calls from January itself where parents and students seek help from us," says Ananda, a volunteer.

Tragically, higher educational institutions have already reported 20 student suicides in 2023,

including nine cases from Central institutions and seven from the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT). Kota, Rajasthan, has witnessed an average of three suicides each month, bringing the year's total to 20 incidents.

“One may not realise but family problems are also one of the reasons children take this step. Nobody says it out loud that there is a problem in the family and children end up thinking that the quarrels are happening only in their family,” said Nirmala, a volunteer.

Every year, on World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10, Roshni provides a ray of hope with a call to shatter the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

In times of emotional breakdown, there is always someone ready to listen at Roshni's helpline number. Reach out to them at 8142020033/44. The helpline operates from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day.

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HISTORIC MOMENT IN GLOBAL ENERGY SECTOR: GLOBAL BIOFUELS ALLIANCE (GBA) ANNOUNCED AT G20 EVENT

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Biotechnology, Genetics & Health related developments

Global energy sector has witnessed a historic moment today with announcement of the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit.

GBA is an India-led Initiative to develop an alliance of Governments, International organizations and Industry to facilitate adoption of biofuels. Bringing together the biggest consumers and producers of biofuels to drive biofuels development and deployment, the initiative aims to position biofuels as a key to energy transition and contribute to jobs and economic growth.

Announcement of the GBA showcases the action oriented nature of India's positive agenda as G20 President and representing the "Voice of the Global South".

GBA will support worldwide development and deployment of sustainable biofuels by offering capacity-building exercises across the value chain, technical support for national programs and promoting policy lessons-sharing. It will facilitate mobilizing a virtual marketplace to assist industries, countries, ecosystem players and key stakeholders in mapping demand and supply, as well as connecting technology providers to end users. It will also facilitate development, adoption and implementation of internationally recognized standards, codes, sustainability principles and regulations to incentivize biofuels adoption and trade.

The initiative will be beneficial for India at multiple fronts. GBA as a tangible outcome of the G20 presidency, will help strengthen India's position globally. Moreover, the alliance will focus on collaboration and will provide additional opportunities to Indian industries in the form of exporting technology and exporting equipment. It will help accelerate India's existing biofuels programs such as PM-JIVANYojna, SATAT, and GOBARdhan scheme, thereby contributing to increased farmers' income, creating jobs and overall development of the Indian ecosystem. The global ethanol market was valued at USD 99.06 billion in 2022 and is predicted to grow at a CAGR of 5.1% by 2032 and surpass USD 162.12 billion by 2032. As per IEA, there will be 3.5-5x biofuels growth potential by 2050 due to Net Zero targets, creating a huge opportunity for India.

Countries and organizations which have already joined GBA

19 countries and 12 international organisations have already agreed to join.



RKJ/M

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G20 LEADERS' SUMMIT BEGINS IN NEW DELHI TODAY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: G20

The first ladies and spouses of G20 member countries experienced the Agricultural prowess of India first-hand, in a one-of-a-kind exhibition organized by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare at IARI Campus, Pusa, today. The event featured a range of captivating components, such as a millet-focused live cooking session led by celebrity chefs Kunal Kapur, Anahita Dhondy, and Ajay Chopra, as well as the display of cutting-edge agricultural technology from prominent Indian startups, interaction with Indian women agri-champions, 'Agri-Street'.

The spouses made their way to the exhibition area, prior to that they had a brief pitstop at the 'Rangoli Area', which featured two massive 'Millet Rangolis'. The beautiful artworks were prepared using millet grains and local Indian motifs. The first rangoli captured the theme of "Harmony of Harvest" unveiling India's deep-rooted agricultural traditions. This installation showcased India's agricultural strength, emphasizing women's pivotal roles in enhancing agricultural resilience. Curated with indigenous toys symbolizing women's diverse agricultural contributions, millets, and rustic terracotta pots, this captivating Rangoli became a major highlight of the event. The second rangoli piece echoed India's cultural philosophy - "The World is One Family", emphasizing global unity. India as a prominent agriculture nation, plays a crucial role in global food security. The second rangoli, thus, celebrated India's global commitment towards unity and sustenance.



In the exhibition area, the spouses witnessed the dynamic Agri-startup ecosystem, where 15 Agri-startups showcased their innovative tech solutions to address ground-level challenges and digitize agriculture. Climate Smart Agriculture, Innovation in Agriculture Value Chain, Agri-logistics & Supply Chains, Quality Assurance for Sustainable Consumption, and Millets: Sustaining Health, Empowering Agriculture, were a few themes that were covered in the exhibition. Additionally, diverse members of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) from across the nation displayed a range of edible products marketed nationwide, aligned with the theme 'Empowering Rural Prosperity through Collective Agriculture.'



An enthralling 'Live Cooking Session' showcased a wide variety of millet-based culinary delights. This event was aligned with the celebrations of the International Year of Millets. It was helmed by three celebrity chefs - Kunal Kapur, Anahita Dhondy, and Ajay Chopra, who were joined by two culinary experts from the ITC Group, chef Kusha and chef Nikita. In the designated 'Live Cooking Area,' these five chefs prepared a 'full course meal' with a special focus on millets. This meal encompassed appetizers, salads, main courses, and desserts.



Chef Anahita, Chef Kunal, and Chef Ajay were each responsible for crafting a starter, main course, and dessert. For instance, Chef Anahita created a Raw Banana Barnyard Millet Tikki topped with puffed Amaranth. Meanwhile, Chef Kunal whipped up a delightful Jowar-Mushroom Khichda. Finally, Chef Ajay brought the multi-course millet experience to a close with a Millet Thekua and a Lemon Shrikhand Mille-feuille dessert. Within the exhibition, there was a dedicated culinary section that showcased millet-based dishes from all G20 member countries, paying homage to each nation that participated in the event.

The exhibition also highlighted India's Research and Development achievements via the stalls presented by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), demonstrating the latest innovations in precision agriculture, agricultural technology, and mechanization advancements driving sector growth. Each stall showcased specific crop advancements backed by government

initiatives. Some of the key stalls focused on themes like the journey of the Basmati revolution, its role in the prosperity of millions of Basmati farmers, and its status as a 5 billion USD forex earner. Another stall highlighted India's status as the "Land of Spices" emphasizing the wide variety and global fame of Indian spices, along with future scope. A neighbouring stall provided insights into the nutritional and medicinal significance of mushrooms, their extensive diversity in India, and their potential for export. Additionally, the esteemed guests also viewed the sensor-based system that facilitated the real-time monitoring of environmental conditions during the transportation, storage, and ripening of bananas, among other interesting exhibits of ICAR.

The 'Agriculture Street' was another major component of the exhibition curated by the Ministry, serving as a captivating journey into India's agricultural legacy and offering insight into its vibrant past as well as the future. Here the Ministry presented a comprehensive view of agricultural practices, uniting experts, scientists, and farmers under one roof. This street was composed of nine interactive stalls, each adorned with rustic decor, creating an immersive environment for the spouses of G20 Head of States. Here, they could explore the diverse facets of agriculture, with a particular emphasis on millets. It also highlighted India's initiatives aimed at enhancing food and nutritional security. One of the key highlights of the Agri Gully were the exhibits of Lahri Bai, a young female farmer from Dindori, Madhya Pradesh who conserved more than 150 indigenous seed varieties including about 50 varieties of millet seeds in her two-room hut earning the title of 'Millet Queen' of India.



After the event concluded, the G20 Spouses received a token of appreciation in the form of a hamper. The hamper's contents were carefully chosen to represent India's vibrant cultural and artistic heritage. These items included handwoven stoles crafted from silk sourced from the Sal forests of Chhattisgarh, a handcrafted bell metal figurine created using an ancient lost wax technique reminiscent of the method used for the iconic 'Dancing Girl' artifact from the Harappan civilization (3300 BCE to 1300 BCE), and a Cheriya Painting.



The visit provided the First Ladies and Spouses with an understanding of the progress India has made in the agricultural sector, including the area of millet farming. The women farmers who were invited from 10 millet producing states which are Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Assam symbolize the grassroots-level changes occurring and interacting with them allowed the first ladies and spouses to gain insight into the evolving millet value chain in the country. Renowned chefs curated a remarkable feast to emphasize the versatility of millets and Indian cuisine to the distinguished guests, while Start-Ups and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) showcased their latest technologies and products, creating a unique and memorable experience for all those in attendance.





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THE ABYSS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Regionalism, Communalism & Secularism

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Police security at a damaged church in Jaranwala, Pakistan | Photo Credit: AFP

The horrific visuals of [burning churches in Faisalabad](#), Pakistan, that went viral last month reconfirmed the rapid descent of the country into the abyss of religious extremism. At last count, 21 churches, dozens of Christian homes, and hundreds of Bibles had been sacrilegiously torched.

This horrendous barbarity was allegedly perpetrated by the extremist group, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) on the basis of the rumour that torn pages of the Koran with blasphemous words scribbled on them were found near a Christian colony. Shockingly, this disinformation was diffused through mosque speakers.

The situation was redeemed to some extent after several Pakistani clerics mustered the moral courage to condemn the violence. The chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, in a televised press conference, apologised with folded hands to the Christian community.

He said, “We are ashamed; we seek forgiveness (hum sharminda hain; hum ma’afi ke talabgaar hain).” Another cleric, Mufti Taqi Usmani, called the burning of churches as “highly condemnable (intihaa’i qaabil-e-muzammat).”

Editorial | [In the name of god: On how dangerously sectarian Pakistan is](#)

The incoming Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Qazi Faez Isa, for his part, sent out a strong message to the biased judiciary of his country by personally distributing food packets to the Christians of the violence-hit Jaranwala tehsil in Faisalabad district. He put the onus on common Muslims to protect non-Muslims and their places of worship from the extremists.

In stark contrast, only a handful of Indian clerics came forward to condemn the church burning — Muhammad Rahmani of the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre, Waris Mazhari, Abdul Khaliq Nadwi, and Mufti Athar Shamsi of the Kairana-based Al-Quran Academy.

Hardly any Muslim political party, “public intellectual”, or religious organisation barring the Jamat-e-Islami Hind denounced the anti-Christian violence. Their cold aloofness is unreasonable and callous because in 2017, the Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind (JUH) had reportedly displayed its humanitarianism by seeking permission from the Home Minister of India and the

Bangladesh government to carry relief material to the camps of Rohingya migrants in Cox's Bazar and even "build a colony for the Rohingya Muslims".

Therefore, it would be unfair and unIslamic if prominent Muslim organisations such as the JUH and All India Muslim Personal Law Board remain silent now on the anti-Christian violence in Pakistan. Their passivity has the potential to aggravate the distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims and would snatch away their moral right to champion the cause of Muslims in India.

In one of the most powerful statements in human history on justice, the Koran (in 4:135) categorically commands Muslims to be honest testifiers of truth and unswerving establishers of justice (*koonu qawwameena bil qist*) even if it goes against themselves, their parents, close relatives, or anybody irrespective of their social, relational or financial status (*wa lau ala anfusikum awil waalidayni wal aqrabeena in yakun ghaneeyan au faqeeran*).

And in the context of religious violence, the Koran warns (in 22:40) that if peace-loving people do not repel (*daf'u*) rampaging mobs, it would result in the destruction of monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which god is commemorated in abundant measure (*lahuddimat sawaamiyu wa biya'un wa salawaatun wa masaajidu yuzkaru feeha usmullahi kaseeran*).

To paraphrase Scott Fitzgerald, if most Muslim societies find themselves wrecked on the shoals of intolerance it is because, over the centuries, supremacist theologians allowed the life-affirming teachings of the Koran to be overridden by sectarian edicts, thus inculcating a sense of negativity towards non-Muslims.

For instance, a fatwa issued by Saudi cleric Muhammad bin Salih al-Uthaimin warns that "it is not permissible for anyone to believe that a religion other than Islam is permissible, that it is allowed for a person to worship by it... if he believes this, then the scholars have declared that he is a disbeliever, who is outside the pale of Islam" (Fatawa Arkan-ul-Islam, p.292).

The obdurate mindset behind such fatwas refuses to realise that freedom of religion is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Koran which (in 2:256) states that "there shall be no compulsion in religion" (*laa ikraaha fid deen*).

Caliph Umar put this injunction into practice when he assured the people of Jerusalem that their "churches will not be inhabited [by Muslims] and will not be destroyed. Neither they, nor the land on which they stand, nor their cross, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted" (The History of al-Tabari, Volume 12, translated by Yohanan Friedman, pp191-192).

Therefore, the few courageous Muslim clerics who condemned the attacks on Christians in Pakistan must realise that the Muslim world has reached a stage where mere condemnation of extremism is not enough. What is needed is a complete re-evaluation of Muslim theology to bring it in consonance with the humanitarianism of Islam's locus classicus — the Koran.

To begin with, hadiths and fatwas that violate the letter or spirit of the Koran should be questioned and disregarded on the basis of the axiom that humanly-authored books cannot countermand the book of God. There can be no better way of telling the world that extremism of the kind displayed by Pakistani mobs is not rooted in the Koran or the authentic teachings of the Prophet.

A. Faizur Rahman is Secretary-General of the Islamic Forum for the Promotion of Moderate Thought. E-mail: themoderates2020@gmail.com

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THE LARGER PROJECT OF SUBVERTING THE IDEA OF INDIA

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

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“It is only the electorate that now has the power to decide if they want to live with this particular idea of ‘One India’.” | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The government’s [‘simultaneous elections’](#) agenda goes much further than the other ideas of ‘oneness’ it propounds; it will spell a deepening of centralisation

It would be dangerous to dismiss the fresh impetus to introduce “simultaneous” elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies as yet another gimmick in the run-up to the next general election scheduled for 2024.

Editorial | [Tiers apart: On the ‘one nation, one election’ trial balloon](#)

While [several committees since 1999 have examined the proposal, the push to introduce and make permanent simultaneous polls once every five years](#) has come over the past decade, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi often speaking about its desirability. This, however, is perhaps the first time that a high-level committee is headed by a former President of India, a most unusual appointment that is meant to impose a stamp of legitimacy on the recommendation.

Of all the “One India” decisions taken by the Union Government since 2014, this proposal is the most important. If carried through, it will further centralise power in New Delhi, strengthen the hold of national parties when in office, and reduce the importance of regional parties. This is the immediate political purpose behind putting in place and codifying a system of simultaneous polls.

The idea is being sold under the garb of saving expenditure and avoiding the disruption of administration during elections. The argument that elections somewhere in the country throughout the year disrupt ‘hard work and good governance’ and are an expense we can ill-afford is a simplistic one. It yet appeals to a section of an electorate that is unhappy with bureaucratic and insensitive governance.

However, there has been a substantial body of analysis by independent commentators pointing out both the false rationale for and negative implications of introducing such a system. The burden of government expenditure on elections is not so large as to warrant such a change. The

Model Code of Conduct need not come in the way of governance ahead of elections. Governance does indeed become affected when elections happen to be held in one State or the other every year. But this is only when the party holding office in New Delhi is forever in an election mode. When the ruling party or coalition at the Centre refuses to take national decisions fearing what impact it will have in one State or the other, then governance is disrupted. And it becomes an even bigger problem when the ruling party sees every election from a municipal election upwards as a must-win poll and all its senior functionaries spend as much time on campaigning as on governance. (As [Y.V. Reddy, the chairman of the Fourteenth Finance Commission, pointed out five years ago](#) in a wide-ranging discussion of this idea, elections are meant to hold governments accountable for their record of governance, and yet when they turn out to be frequent they are being faulted for disrupting governance.)

An argument made in favour of legally mandating simultaneous polls draws on evidence from one study conducted of voting percentages between 1971 and 2004 which showed that voter turnout in the States is lower when Assembly elections are held separately from those to the Lok Sabha. But this argument is only a rationalisation for the simultaneous polls idea. A higher voter participation is to be welcomed but it should be increased through other means rather than with a set of measures that will turn parts of the Constitution upside down.

A number of scholars and commentators have also pointed out that one way or the other, major constitutional changes will need to be made to the constitutional terms of the legislature and rules for unseating a government. After the first round of curtailing/extending the tenure of elected State governments, making simultaneous polls a permanent feature will require either fixed term governments, or the end of no-confidence motions, or “super-majorities” to unseat governments, or greater powers in the hands of the President/Governors, or a combination of such drastic changes. The alterations will in effect change the Basic Structure of the Constitution. All of this will reduce the importance of State governments, with the idea of federalism being given a body blow. There will be a corresponding concentration of power in New Delhi.

The entire “One Nation, One X” agenda is part of a political project with the message that only one government, one political party and one leader can deliver and will transform India. The steady expansion over the years of Union government into the States’ domain in providing social and economic services, the intolerance of the Bharatiya Janata Party towards any political party unless it is a supporter, and the multi-dimensional projection of the Prime Minister as a leader who will change India as no one has before are part of this political project.

There is the larger well-known ideological agenda of denying India its strength in heterogeneity. It is instead a complete homogeneity that is valued — one nation with one dominant religion and one dominant language, if not one nation with one religion and one language. Where earlier the unifying message was unity in diversity in this land of heterogeneous peoples, communities, traditions and languages, the aim now is to impose a unity with a ‘oneness’. A stamp of homogeneity to wipe out the unique Indian character of diversity.

This will not be an easy task to accomplish even for a political formation with a 100-year-old ideological programme. To turn one of the current slogans on its head, the character of a civilisation with some thousands of years of history cannot be changed during a few terms of a government, however brute its majority in Parliament. This will not be for want of trying though.

The “One Nation, One Election” agenda goes much further than “One Nation, One Tax”, “One Nation, One Ration Card” and the like in imposing this “oneness”. If implemented, it will permanently increase multifold the administrative and political centralisation of power in the hands of the Union Government and correspondingly weaken the States.

We have been in the midst of a fortnight of frenetic political activity. A special session of Parliament has been convened by a government which has still not laid out its agenda. This will be an unusual sitting convened by a government which is otherwise only interested in ramming through legislation without debate. We have had the noise about “Bharat” and whether henceforth the country will be officially called only Bharat and not, as now, “India” and “Bharat”. All this on top of the new push for holding simultaneous polls which has been bandied about since 2014.

When and what will the high-level committee on simultaneous polls recommend? We do not have to guess what a committee that has been given a set of made-to-order terms of reference and seems to be packed with the king’s men will come up with. (The lone member from the Opposition had little option but to opt out of a committee that was suddenly announced without any prior consultation.)

How do we deal with such a proposed subversion of the Constitution? A Parliament that has been neutralised, a judiciary that is supine, a media that is largely subservient and a civil society that has been emasculated will not be able to resist the government’s plans. It is only the electorate that now has the power to decide if they want to live with this particular idea of “One India”.

C. Rammanohar Reddy is a senior journalist

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IN A HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT, THE G20 NEW DELHI LEADERS' DECLARATION 2023 HAS INCORPORATED THE CHAIR'S STATEMENT WHICH WAS ADOPTED AT THE G20 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN GANDHINAGAR

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

G20, under the Indian Presidency, has been inspired by the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, of an Amritkaal where Nari Shakti (the power of women) is celebrated in all spheres of the economy and society. Building on this vision, India's G20 Presidency has shifted the focus for the first time from women's development to women-led development.

In a historic achievement for gender equality, women empowerment and women-led development, the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration 2023 has incorporated the Chair's Statement which was adopted at the G20 Ministerial Conference for Women Empowerment in Gandhinagar on 2nd - 4th August 2023.

The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration 2023 focuses on 'Enhancing Economic and Social Empowerment', 'Bridging the Gender Digital Divide', 'Driving Gender Inclusive Climate Action' and 'Securing Women's Food Security, Nutrition and Well-Being'.

Most importantly, the Leaders of the G20 agreed to the creation of a Working Group on the empowerment of women to support the G20 Women's Ministerial which will convene its first meeting during the Brazilian G20 Presidency. This commitment by G20 Leaders is truly a reflection of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India's consistent support for gender parity and gender equity which has helped G20 countries reach this milestone.

India's collective and unwavering dedication to championing 'Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls' has now secured a firm place within the G20 New Delhi Leaders Declaration 2023. This would not have been possible without the active involvement and support of G20 leaders, delegates, speakers and representatives from G20 countries and guest countries viz. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, European Union, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkiye, United Kingdom, USA, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Singapore, Spain, Oman and UAE, through the course of the Indian Presidency, across the W20 engagement group, EMPOWER initiative and Ministerial Conference on Women Empowerment (MCWE).

The Ministry of Women & Child Development extends its congratulations to all members of Women 20 and G20 EMPOWER for the successful outcomes under their respective engagements which were duly reflected in their communiqués and which in turn, have found place in the 'G20 New Delhi Leaders Declaration 2023'. With its focus on women-led development, India's G20 Presidency became a torchbearer for progress for women empowerment worldwide, with six in-person international conferences and 86 virtual international meetings focusing on issues of gender equality. These include G20 EMPOWER and W20 meetings chaired by Dr. Sangita Reddy (Joint Managing Director- Apollo Hospitals

Group) and Dr. Sandhya Purecha (Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee) respectively. MWCD expresses appreciation for the efforts of State Governments, Central Ministries, NIFT, Knowledge Partners especially UN Women, FICCI, CII and others who partnered with the Ministry on the theme of Women led Development and in the organization of the various international events and exhibitions.

Local artisans, craftspersons, women in unconventional areas and women entrepreneurs who showcased their products, skills and services through exhibitions at in-person international conferences and panel discussions gave much of their valuable time and efforts, for which the Ministry of Women and Child Development expresses sincere appreciation.

Under the leadership and desire of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to make G20 a People's Presidency, Jan Bhagidari or Citizen's engagement became a hallmark of India's G20 Presidency. MWCD applauds the enthusiastic engagement of over 300,000 citizens, who were engaged through Janbhagidari events ranging from walkathons to flash mobs. The events showcased Women-Led Development and women community leaders, artisans, Self Help Groups, SMEs, corporates, and business entities from various states played an active part to make India's G20 Presidency a truly people's event.

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G20, under the Indian Presidency, has been inspired by the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, of an Amritkaal where Nari Shakti (the power of women) is celebrated in all spheres of the economy and society. Building on this vision, India's G20 Presidency has shifted the focus for the first time from women's development to women-led development.

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MONKEYPOX SURVEILLANCE HELPS IDENTIFY VARIANT OF VIRUS CAUSING CHICKENPOX

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 09, 2023 02:42 pm | Updated 11:33 pm IST - NEW DELHI:

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File photo of test tubes labelled as “Monkeypox virus positive and negative”. Monkeypox disease symptoms are frequently mistaken for chickenpox, as their clinical presentations often closely resemble each other. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology (ICMR-NIV) has for the first time found the presence of Clade 9 variant of varicella zoster virus (VZV) in India.

“The multi-country [mpox \(monkeypox\) outbreak across the globe](#) has led to the systematic surveillance of [mpox cases](#) in India. During the surveillance of mpox, we encountered cases of VZV in suspected mpox cases amongst children and adults,” said the new study published in the *Annals of Medicine* journal. This study focused on the genomic characterization of VZV in India.

Chickenpox or varicella is caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV), a herpesvirus with worldwide distribution. It establishes latency after primary infection, a feature unique to most herpes viruses.

Also Read : [Explained | All we know about the monkeypox virus outbreak so far](#)

It added that this is the first study reporting the circulations of VZV clade 9 in India, whereas the variant is the most common strain in circulation in countries such as Germany, the UK, and the USA.

Monkeypox disease symptoms are frequently mistaken for VZV, as their clinical presentations often closely resemble each other. There is a need for clinical differentiation between mpox and VZV for accurate diagnosis, said the study.

It added that despite infection with the VZV clade 9 strain there were no significant indications of heightened disease severity in the patients.

“Further studies warrant investigating the recombination patterns among wild-type and vaccinated populations to explore the evolution to help in disease monitoring and surveillance of VZV infections in India,” it noted.

For the study, scientists took a total of 331 suspected cases, of which 22 cases were positive for monkeypox virus infection (15 from New Delhi and seven from Kerala), while 17 were positive for Enteroviruses and one case was confirmed as Buffalopox virus.

Of these 331 suspects, 28 were positive for VZV, with primary presentation of vesicular rashes all over the body. The other clinical manifestations included fever (82%), myalgia (46%), headache (36%), fatigue (29%), loss of appetite (14%), and lymphadenopathy (11%).

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RIDDING INDIA OF FOOD INSECURITY

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September 12, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 12:16 am IST

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'A shrinking ability of households to finance their food requirement is evident also in studies undertaken in India itself' | Photo Credit: AP

India may be the fastest growing large economy of the world, but it is also facing accelerating food-price inflation. The rise in the price of food first accelerated sharply in 2019, and has climbed in most years thereafter. In July this year, annual inflation exceeded 11%, the highest in a decade. An implication of continuing high food-price inflation is that a section of the population could be facing hardship in consuming food of adequate nutritional value.

We now have some evidence to this effect. The 'State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates the proportion of the population across countries unable to afford a healthy diet (reported in this newspaper on August 31, 2023, under a datapoint). The figure for India in 2021 is devastating to note — an estimated 74% of the population cannot afford a healthy diet. Given a population of 1,400 million, this makes for approximately one billion Indians. A shrinking ability of households to finance their food requirement is evident also in studies undertaken in India itself.

A study reported in this daily (August 30, 2023 under a datapoint), of the trend in the price of food in Mumbai city over 2018-2023 found that while the cost of preparing a thaali at home has risen by 65%, in this period, the average wage of a manual worker rose by 38% and that of a salaried worker by 28%. The implied reduction in purchasing power is considerable, and it would be reasonable to expect that food consumption has been impacted. This would be in line with the reported rise in the prevalence of anaemia, mostly induced by nutrient deficiency, in the latest National Family Health Survey undertaken over 2019-21. Over 50% of adult women were estimated to be anaemic. This suggests that the FAO's finding, that over half of India cannot afford a healthy diet, is plausible. Even if we were to assume that the agency has overestimated numbers by 100% we would be left with 500 million people in this category. This is larger than the population of all the countries of the world other than China.

Ensuring that Indians have access to a healthy diet is the most important task of economic policy today. Macroeconomic policy, relied upon to control inflation, has proved to be useless in the context. The Reserve Bank of India has failed in this task, with the inflation rate mostly higher than the target for four years by now. Its approach of contracting output when the inflation rate rises — misleadingly termed "inflation targeting" — does nothing to manage food inflation stemming from the supply side. Central banks are incapable of solving this problem, it must be said within any time frame. It is necessary to intervene on the supply side to ensure that food is

produced at a steady price by raising the yield on land.

India has rich experience in this area, having engineered a Green Revolution in the 1960s, but it is not being tapped. At the time, reeling under extreme food shortage following two successive droughts, the government orchestrated a supply-side response by providing farmers with high-yielding seeds, cheap credit, and assured prices through procurement. This succeeded spectacularly. Within a few years India was no longer dependent on food imports.

If there was a single event that aided India's quest to be self-reliant in the highly polarised climate of the Cold War, it was this. Western economists have pointed to the success of the United States' mission to land a human on the moon as an example of an entrepreneurial state. However, to have engineered the Green Revolution in India at a time when it was a desperately poor country challenged by having to ensure food security to a staggeringly large number is perhaps more significant.

With hindsight, we can see that mistakes were made, among them the rampant use of chemical fertilizer, fuelled by subsidy, which degraded the soil. There was also the reliance on procurement prices rather than productivity increase to ensure farm incomes, which fuelled inflation. We also see that the policy was almost exclusively focused on cereals rather than pulses, the main source of protein for most Indians. However, rather than carping about the errors made in an extraordinarily successful economic policy intervention, we should be correcting them now. At the same time, we should focus on the specific goal of lowering the cost of producing food. The first Green Revolution had a specific agenda — of making India self-sufficient in food. In this it succeeded eminently, and in a remarkably short time, but without paying any attention to the cost of producing food. For this, a second agricultural revolution is needed now. To contain the rising price of food would require action on many fronts; a mission mode is necessary. As for policy, it is clear that procurement prices, cash transfers, the Public Distribution System, and priority lending required of public sector banks are not sufficient. Yield increasing interventions on the farm are needed to at least contain the cost of production, if not to actually lower it. Agricultural yield is lower in India than in East Asia, pointing to the potential for an increase. Attention is needed to extend irrigation to 100% of the net sown area, an end to restrictions on leasing of land, a quickening of agricultural research and the re-institution of extension.

Expanding on each of these proposals would be in order. It has been pointed out for some time that increased public expenditure on irrigation is not reflected in an increase in irrigated area — whether due to waste or the diversion of funds has not been established. The ongoing fragmentation of already small land holdings lowers the capacity for productivity-enhancing capital investment, for which leasing is a solution. India's network of public agricultural research institutes needs to be energised to resume the sterling role they had played in the 1960s. Finally, extension has now more or less vanished from where once the gram sevak was a familiar figure in the village, playing a crucial role in the dissemination of best practices. It must be revived. These initiatives should be dovetailed into a programme for the manifold increase of protein production, which India is severely deficient in.

In all the areas identified above, the role of States is crucial. In the 1960s, the States that were chosen for the spread of the new technology worked closely with the central government. This would have to be replicated in order to make a difference to the country as a whole, with the central government taking the States along in a spirit of co-operative federalism. At the same time, it may be asked if the States are playing their part to enhance agricultural productivity rather than relying on food allocations to their Public Distribution System from the central pool.

But, a non-ideological approach would be needed, whether at the Centre or in the States, if a

difference is to be made. A noticeable feature of the first Green Revolution was that by relying on private enterprise, the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, chose a capitalist approach (with the objective of making India self-sufficient in food), unmindful of any damage that would be caused to her socialist image. It was the Green Revolution that made the first dent on poverty in India. So, the poor did benefit from this strategy. Similarly, now, in order to ensure that all Indians have permanent access to a healthy diet, no approach consistent with ecological security must be off the table.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is an economist

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HINDUS HAVE TO GIVE SANATANA DHARMA PROFUNDITY

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Regionalism, Communalism & Secularism

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September 12, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 09:21 am IST

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Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin is welcomed by supporters at Paramakudi in Ramanathapuram district. | Photo Credit: PTI

Babasaheb Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* contains hard-hitting critiques of Hinduism. He writes, "I have... no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed, and I say there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion." Was that a call to eliminate Hinduism? No. He was targeting the Hinduism that is practised thoughtlessly, controlled by a select group, and is casteist at its foundation because he also goes on to suggest ways in which Hinduism can be reformed.

Many from Brahminical castes believe that caste is a natural social order based on occupation and an inherent feature of Hinduism. The progressives among them call for an end to the violence perpetrated around caste, not caste itself. They tie themselves up in knots trying to explain the differences between *varna*, *jati*, and caste, while ignoring history and reality. To them, Ambedkar's words, read alongside his other frontal attacks on Hinduism, would have been, and remain, offensive.

How any strong criticism of a thought or idea is comprehended depends on the environment, place, time of utterance, and its interpretation. Some among those who are today accusing Tamil Nadu Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin of demanding the end of their belief system have been comfortably appropriating Ambedkar who once said, "I will not die as a person who calls himself a Hindu." Ambedkar did not mean that he was a believer at any point of time. But he was a member of Hinduism's ugly social order because of the accident of birth. Before he died, he gave up that membership.

The [expression 'Sanatana Dharma' today](#) is used as a synonym for Hinduism, its ritualistic and philosophical practices, and sometimes as an umbrella term that encompasses all the religious and spiritual traditions of pre-Islamic ancient India. These overarching usages are new. That these have been propagated mainly by Brahminical sections is also undeniable. Meanings are not constant; they are added, deleted, built upon, twisted, overturned. The import of a word also changes with place, time, context, and reason. This is true of Sanatana Dharma too. I grew up in a Brahmin home where most religious functions of the caste were conducted. I learned *shlokas* and verses from the Vedas and Upanishads. Stories from the Puranas and epics were part of my upbringing. I was not told that this faith was Sanatana Dharma. It was Hinduism to me. Some

would call it Brahminism, not Hinduism. That too would be accurate.

The term Sanatana Dharma was mainly used by seers and scholars at theological or spiritual lectures, or within deeply ritualistic circles. These individuals also mainly belonged to and catered to Brahminical sections. Pious non-Brahminical Tamils do not call themselves *sanatanis*. They worship Mariamman, Kamatchi, Siva, Muruga and other dieties and see themselves as part of the Hindu *madham* (faith or religion). So, the general usage of this term as a synonym for Hinduism is duplicitous.

Over the past century, and more so in the recent decades, Hindutva extremists have weaponised the term Sanatana Dharma. The meanings that they have given to this phrase is what has led to the pushback. Sanatana Dharma has not been used as a compassionate, welcoming, and introspective phrase. It is used to offend, or in a self-congratulatory manner to prove that it is better, older, and more sophisticated than every other way of believing. The words Sanatana Dharma and Hindutva have been coupled by the Hindu right wing. Many who spout these words carry out attacks on Muslims, Christians, and Dalits. But the blame does not lie only with the perpetrators of these specific crimes. Those who use political, religious, spiritual, and social platforms to instigate them must take responsibility. This kind of Sanatana Dharma is expressly a tool for discrimination.

There are those who defend this term who refuse to recognise their own casteist nature. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat recently said, "There has been a history of social inequality in our society. We kept our own people backward based on a social system. Even when their life became akin to animals, we didn't bother. And this continued for at least 2,000 years. So as long as this discrimination exists, reservation must continue." But he speaks of caste discrimination only in relation to reservation. Where is the acknowledgement that caste is a living evil that needs to be annihilated? Every caste-privileged Hindu must recognise their own instilled 'casteness', and change. There are Hindu pontiffs and spiritual seekers who continue to justify *varna*. There is no critical examination of the texts or calling out of caste discrimination, which is established and propagated by textual and practical methods.

Many spiritual commentators address individuals with caste privilege, but never force them to recognise their own bigotry. Those who now claim that Sanatana Dharma encompasses all Hindus distance themselves from caste violence which originates from someone belonging to another caste. They do not accept any responsibility for the actions of their *sanatani* brethren.

Those desirous of protecting Sanatana Dharma must realise that people from within the Hindu faith have to work towards giving it profundity. As Ambedkar said, "Hindus must consider whether the time has not come for them to recognise that there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing *sanatan*; that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society." He was not referring to cosmetic changes, but demanding a philosophical churn.

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SPOTLIGHTING ANOTHER BORDER POINT, THE 'ROGUE CHANNEL'

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Defence related developments

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September 13, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:51 am IST

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'The aptly named Harami Nala ("rogue or treacherous channel" in English) is one of the most inhospitable places along the border' | Photo Credit: ANI

In early August this year, the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, visited "Harami Nala" and the Border Observation Posts (BOPs) of the Border Security Force (BSF) in that sector in the Sir Creek area of Kutch, Gujarat, along the India-Pakistan international border. The aptly named Harami Nala ("rogue or treacherous channel" in English) is one of the most inhospitable places along the border. It has also been at the centre of cross-border mischief and exploitation by infiltrators. Media clips showed the Home Minister visiting BOP 1170 to take stock of the situation and he rightly averred that it is now impenetrable as a result of round-the-clock border vigilance.

According to a BSF release, the Home Minister laid the foundation stone for a mooring place at Koteshwar in Kutch and also inaugurated the newly constructed Chidiyamod-Biarbet Link Road and OP Tower in the Harami Nala area. Mr. Shah tweeted that he had inaugurated a 9.5 metre tall observation post tower equipped with high resolution pan-tilt-zoom cameras, to bolster intelligence-gathering capabilities. This will come up at BOP 1164, further up north from BOP 1170, along the "vertical line" of the International Boundary (IB). The great advantage of the new tower, worth 3 crore, and others coming up at BOPs 1165, 1166 and 1169 (apart from three more in the Creek area), is that they will provide live camera feed and continuous surveillance over the open stretch of water and mudflats surrounding Harami Nala.

These initiatives, together worth 361.35 crore, are being rolled out in pursuit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a "secure border". The Mooring Place project, with an allocated budget of 257 crore, will make a huge difference by allowing berthing, repairs and maintenance for bigger vessels, including the floating BOPs, thus bolstering the BSF's capabilities in the Creek area.

Harami Nala is a natural water body, approximately 25 kilometres long that flows west to east from Pakistan into Kutch just south of the Vighakot sector, flanked by vast marshy mud flats that are affected by low and high tides. About 22 odd kilometres of the channel lie on the Indian side of the "vertical line" of the IB between India and Pakistan which itself is not contested.

The water body has some unique characteristics. The tidal waters surge from the Pakistani side

and, over the years, the channel is extending further on the Indian side. On the Pakistani side lies the Chini-Bandh (China Bund, just north of Bondho Dhoru), built with Chinese assistance to prevent the tidal waters from inundating areas on their side. On the Indian side, there is a desolate emptiness over the entire spread of the Harami Nala, except in the rear areas at considerable distance from the IB, where factories that have come up to produce salt, bromide and other chemicals carried by mineral-rich waters.

The Harami Nala is extremely rich in fishing, especially prawns. Moreover, the formidable marshy terrain through which it runs makes it impossible to approach or patrol on foot even during low tide. Treacherous tides, morass and mirages are matched by scorching temperatures (above 50° Celsius) in summer.

In contrast, the Harami Nala has always been more accessible from the other side. Pakistani fishing boats try and make their way up the many small creeks to surreptitiously enter the Harami Nala on the Indian side, drawn by the plentiful catch. In the past, they did so with impunity. There was the added risk of infiltration by terrorists and drugs and arms smuggling.

In the past, the entry point of the Harami Nala on the Indian side could not be approached by the BSF personnel due to a lack of infrastructure. They had to wade through deep slush to launch small patrol boats into the channel from areas to the rear. This situation improved after a set of all terrain vehicles (ATVs) were procured from Italy and stationed at border pillar 1175, the last such observation post at the time. It also helped that special scaffolding was put up on the bank of the channel in the rear areas on the Indian side where troops could bivouac for watch duties and be rotated in the ATVs. Speed boats, tethered alongside, also began to make a difference in terms of preventing ingress by Pakistani fishing boats.

Such measures were not foolproof until an embankment was constructed along with a road to enable access to the very mouth of Harami Nala where it enters India. After 2014, the Narendra Modi government gave particular emphasis to border and coastal security. In the past nine years, the Ministry of Home Affairs has ramped up the creation of composite BOPs all along the border, including in the Creek and Harami Nala area. A modern composite BOP 1175 was constructed in 2016 and BOP 1170 in 2022. The construction of embankments and road infrastructure along the “vertical line” of the IB have enabled the new observation posts to come up between border pillars 1164 and 1153 in a manner that infiltration can be nipped in the bud at the entry points along the IB.

This is the first ever visit by any Home Minister. The BSF personnel in this sector, including the commandos (called Creek Crocodiles) and the force’s water wing, have benefited from focused guidance and leadership at the highest political level. When he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi visited several BSF posts, recalls J.S. Bhalla, former DIG (Ops) of the BSF. On one of his visits to the Rann of Kutch, Mr. Modi was apprised about the drinking water problem at the BOPs in Vighakot and the surrounding areas. He ensured that piped Narmada river water was supplied to the BOPs.

Sujan R. Chinoy is the Director General of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

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PROBE AND PROBITY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE EVOLUTION OF ANDHRA PRADESH STATE SKILL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SCAM CASE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Executive: Structure, Organization & Functioning ; Ministries and Departments of the Government

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September 13, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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Sifting through allegations of corruption and malfeasance against politicians, especially those in the Opposition, after cases are filed by a successor-government in Indian States is a knotty exercise. In States such as Andhra Pradesh, relations between the ruling regime and the Opposition have transcended political and ideological contestation and have veered deep into outright hostility and vendetta as seen in the ongoing rivalry between the ruling Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party and the Telugu Desam Party. Prima facie, the allegations by the Andhra Pradesh CID (AP-CID) about malfeasance in the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation's functioning in 2014, are grave. The predecessor government (TDP) is accused of releasing funds for a skill development scheme for unemployed youth in the State, and allegedly diverting a major portion to shell companies, based on fake invoices, even as private partner entities which were roped in to invest in the scheme had not put in their requisite share. The AP-CID has claimed that there were other rule violations in the implementation of the scheme, even as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) launched a separate inquiry based on the FIR filed by the AP-CID in December 2021 leading to arrests of individuals who had purportedly benefited from the transfer of money from the government. The [AP-CID has now named the former Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu \(TDP\), as the prime accused, leading to his arrest](#), with its Economic Offences Wing seeking to establish the link between him and other private beneficiaries of the government's release of money for the scheme.

A look at the evolution of the case, with Mr. Naidu being named the prime accused only recently, raises the suspicion of whether political vendetta is also guiding the investigations. Irrespective of the merits of the case, his incarceration will be seen in the light of the zealotry of agencies such as the ED to use arrests, especially those involving the political Opposition, as a political weapon in various cases. Rather than relying on documentary evidence in its investigations, the ED's recourse to high-profile arrests is now being replicated by State agencies as well. The onus is now on the AP-CID to establish a clear link between Mr. Naidu and the alleged irregularities in the scheme. Dealing with malfeasance and corruption cases is no easy task for State agencies. But if they are to tackle the problem of corruption in governance, such agencies must not be seen to be doing the bidding of the party in power. Else, such actions only result in the cynicism of the electorate about corruption and erode their trust in institutions.

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NO FILTER: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON SECTION 6A OF DELHI SPECIAL POLICE ESTABLISHMENT ACT

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Judiciary in India: its Structure, Organization & Functioning, Judges of SC & High Courts, Judgments and related Issues

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September 13, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:22 am IST

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A Constitution Bench of [the Supreme Court has ruled](#) that its [2014 verdict, invalidating Section 6A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act](#), the law that governs the CBI, will have retrospective effect from the day the provision was introduced in 2003. Section 6A provided that any investigation into corruption charges against officials of the rank of Joint Secretary and above, can begin only after the Central government's approval. It was introduced to restore the Centre's 'Single Directive', a set of instructions to the CBI on the modalities of holding an inquiry. In the landmark case of Vineet Narain (1997), the apex court had struck down the directive on the ground that a statutory investigation cannot be impeded by administrative instructions. Six years later, Section 6A was introduced to restore the prior approval requirement. However, in 2014, the Court struck down this section too, holding that it violated the norm of equality by extending its protection only to a class of public servants and not everyone. The latest judgment rejects arguments by some who are facing investigation that they should be given the protection of Section 6A as they were charged with offences that date back to the time before the 2014 judgment, when the provision was in force. The Court has reiterated the position that post-Constitution laws cannot be inconsistent with the Constitution and when they are so declared by a court, the invalidation is with effect from their inception.

The judgment is of limited applicability now, as it will impact only allegations that date back to the period between 2003 and 2014. The law as it stands now is quite different. In 2018, when the Prevention of Corruption Act was amended, Section 17A was introduced to make the government's previous approval a mandatory requirement before any probe can be begun into decisions or recommendations made by a public servant. This initial stage filter has been created even while sanction is necessary for prosecuting any public servant at the stage of the trial court taking cognisance of the charge sheet. A prior approval requirement for initiating an anti-corruption probe is not inherently desirable. In its 2014 judgment, the Court had observed that such provisions are destructive of the objective of the anti-corruption laws, block the truth from surfacing and sometimes result in a forewarning to those officials involved as soon as allegations arise against them. It may be necessary to have safeguards to filter out frivolous inquiries into the conduct of public servants making crucial and bona fide decisions, but it is equally in the interest of the public that these provisions do not become a shield for the unscrupulous.

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NIPAH BREAKS OUT AGAIN IN KERALA, CLAIMS TWO LIVES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 12, 2023 06:07 pm | Updated September 13, 2023 07:04 am IST - New Delhi/Kozhikode

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Staff members install a sign reading “Nipah isolation ward, entry strictly prohibited” at a hospital in Kerala’s Kozhikode district on September 12, 2023. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Nipah scare returned to Kerala, with [two deaths reported from Kozhikode district](#) on Tuesday. Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya confirmed that the deaths were due to [Nipah virus](#).

He said four suspected cases are currently under surveillance and their samples have been sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune. A Central government team of four experts has also been sent to Kerala to assist the State government in surveillance and reduction in the response time, said the Minister.

Dr. Mandaviya added that government medical colleges in Kerala were issued guidelines on the precautions to be taken and also provided with protective kits. “This isn’t a new virus, and we have some experience with this,” said the Minister.

Asked if India is looking at importing drugs to treat the Nipah virus patients, the Minister said that “no such cause or need has presented itself as of now.”

“The Ministry hasn’t been alerted to any such need currently. The patients are being managed well but in case there is any requirement we will definitely look into it,” he said.

Previously, deaths due to Nipah virus infection were reported in Kozhikode district in 2018 and 2021.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, in a social media post on Tuesday, said the State government was viewing the two deaths seriously and the health department has issued an alert in the district.

He also said that there was no need to worry as most of those who were in close contact with the deceased persons are under treatment.

Earlier in the day, State Health Minister Veena George who reached the district, chaired a high-level meeting to evaluate the situation and said that all precautionary steps are in place.

The State Health Department formed core committees for surveillance, sample testing and research management, contact tracing, and patient transportation management, among others.

“Following the deaths, surveillance procedure and contact tracking has been initiated. Hospitals and the health workers have been instructed to follow the infection control protocol, including wearing of PPE kits,” said the State Health Minister while advising that people should avoid unnecessary hospital visits.

The State government has set up a control room in Kozhikode and advised people to use masks as a precautionary measure.

(For top health news of the day, [subscribe](#) to our newsletter *Health Matters*)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Nipah has a relatively high case fatality ratio, and is an emerging zoonotic disease of public health importance in the South East Asia and Western Pacific WHO Regions.

“Nipah virus infection is a zoonotic illness that is transmitted to people from animals and can also be transmitted through contaminated food or directly from person to person. Among infected people, it causes a range of illnesses, from asymptomatic (subclinical) infection to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis,” WHO noted in its information bulletin.

(With PTI inputs)

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WHAT CAUSED MOROCCO'S EARTHQUAKE? A GEOLOGIST STUDYING THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS EXPLAINS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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September 12, 2023 03:41 pm | Updated 04:07 pm IST

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A military helicopter delivers aid in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Talat N'Yaaqoub, in Morocco September 12, 2023. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The epicentre of Morocco's [devastating earthquake](#) on 8 September was in the High Atlas Mountains, about 71km south-west of Marrakesh. Moina Spooner, from The Conversation Africa, asked Jesús Galindo-Zaldivar, who has been carrying out research on the formation of the [Atlas mountains](#) and the geology of the area, about the factors which led to this situation.

What research have you been doing in Morocco's Atlas mountains?

The Atlas Mountains are a fascinating range in north-west Africa, spanning Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. They're situated south of the main Eurasia and Africa (Nubia) tectonic plate boundary.

This area doesn't usually have a lot of earthquakes compared to other places near the edges of tectonic plates, where the movements of plates will cause intense seismic activity. But in 1960 the [Agadir earthquake](#) caused a lot of damage and loss of life.

I'm part of a team of geologists, geophysicists and [geodesists](#) from various Moroccan universities and Spanish institutions carrying out research in the area. We want to understand this mountain range's development and its position at the edge of a continental plate boundary. Studies of seismic activity, gravity and other geophysical phenomena allow us to understand the Earth's deep structure, down to depths exceeding 100km.

Through field geological research, we can detect and analyse faults – fractures or cracks in the Earth's crust along which there has been movement. These movements can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, and they occur due to the immense forces acting on the Earth's tectonic plates.

Finally, using geodetic techniques (GPS recordings) we are able to determine how tectonic plates are moving. This is done by regularly measuring benchmark sites with millimetre accuracy.

What has your research found?

Our [research](#) shows that the Atlas Mountains were formed during the break-up of the [Pangea](#) supercontinent. It is now a mountain range that is actively rising, as evidenced by its high peaks and steep slopes.

The steep slopes of the mountains and the straight lines where the Earth's crust has cracked suggest that there has been recent movement in the Earth beneath this area. It's surprising that there aren't more earthquakes here.

The Atlas Mountains are getting pushed together at a rate of [about 1 millimetre each year](#). This happens because the Eurasian and African plates are moving closer to each other. This squeezing action is responsible for creating the tallest mountains in the area, the southern edge of where these two big plates meet.

What do your findings tell you about this earthquake?

The catastrophic earthquake took place to the north of the western Atlas mountains, south of Marrakesh. According to estimates by Morocco's [National Institute of Geophysics](#) and the [US geological survey](#), the depth is between 8km and 26km.

The earthquake resulted from a geological phenomenon called a "reverse fault". This occurs when tectonic plates collide, causing the Earth's crust to thicken. The stress along these fault lines can induce earthquakes as rocks abruptly shift to release accumulated stress, which is characteristic of a seismic fault.

The 6.8 magnitude implies that the fault responsible for this earthquake is probably around 30km long. This estimate takes into account the [relationships](#) between active fault length and earthquake magnitudes.

So, why don't we see many earthquakes in this area, even though it's a place where the tectonic blocks are moving and the mountains are rising? Earthquakes happen when there's a sudden shift in rocks along a fault line, caused by the release of stored energy that's been building up over time. In this region, there haven't been any major recorded earthquakes before, which suggests that the stress from the plates pushing together has been building up deep underground for a long time. When the stress got too much for the fault to handle, it caused an earthquake.

In this mountain belt faults might not produce earthquakes very often. After the earthquake, the rocks in the area moved and adjusted, but other nearby faults might now be under extra stress, and they could produce smaller earthquakes known as aftershocks that might continue for months or even years.

What should authorities be doing to prepare?

Earthquakes are difficult to predict and cannot be avoided. However, we can mitigate their impact. Through integrated studies of the region's geology, geophysics and geodesy we can find out where there are active earthquake faults. We can also estimate how powerful the earthquakes on these faults could be and how often they might happen again. This helps us understand how strong future earthquakes in a specific area could be. Faults that don't have earthquakes often but can still produce strong ones are a big concern. In the future, finding and studying these types of faults will be a focus of earthquake research.

The best way to minimise earthquake damage is to improve seismic building design codes to withstand the highest possible seismic activity. This will help buildings and other structures hold up better against strong shaking. In addition, it's crucial that traditional homes and rock constructions in mountain villages be reinforced to prevent future disasters. New constructions must be tested and designed cheaply and efficiently, respecting new seismic building standards.

[Jesús Galindo-Zaldivar](#), Professor of Geodynamics, [Universidad de Granada](#)

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UNIFIED APPROACH: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE NIPAH OUTBREAK IN KERALA AND A ONE HEALTH APPROACH

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 14, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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Lightning is unlikely to strike the same place twice, but the [Nipah virus](#) is again wreaking havoc in Kozhikode, the fourth outbreak of the disease in Kerala over the last five years. Caused by a [zoonotic](#) spillover, the transmission of pathogens from animals to humans, the closest reservoir of the virus is fruit bats. With [two persons dying of Nipah this week in Kozhikode](#), and three more persons, two of them relatives of one of the victims, testing positive, and being hospitalised, disturbing memories from the terrifying outbreak of 2018, in which 21 of 23 infected people died, have surfaced. The situation remains very much the same, in terms of treatment options: there is no cure, and supportive care remains the only way to handle Nipah infection even in a hospital setting. Kerala's Health Minister Veena George said hundreds of people on the contact list of the deceased had been put under medical observation. One of them, a nine-year-old child, is on ventilator support. A control room has been opened in Kozhikode to monitor the situation, and all the hospitals in the district would be asked to follow infection control protocols. Sixteen teams have been formed to take forward appropriate containment protocols. A central team has also been sent to Kerala to assist the State government. Neighbouring States have taken preparatory steps to ensure that porous borders do not bring the infection across from Kerala. The State's Chief Minister assured the people via a video message that the State was taking the issue very seriously.

While experiences from the prior outbreaks (2018, 2019, 2021) have given medical teams a toolkit of protocols, across the sectors — management, isolation, containment, and treatment — constant vigil can be the only guard against such outbreaks. The biggest lesson though, from global outbreaks, is likely unlearned yet. Research has shown that anthropogenic activity has a definite hand to play in zoonotic spillovers. In the case of Nipah, rapid expansion of agricultural activity in original habitat zones of the fruit bats has repeatedly shown up on post-factor analyses. As governments mount strategic efforts to control outbreaks and deaths due to infectious diseases, it is increasingly clear that the State needs to initiate a [One Health approach](#) on the way forward. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a deeper appreciation of the One Health concept, which is an integrated, unifying approach to balancing and optimising the health of people, animals and the environment, with the conviction that humans live in symbiosis and that the health of one impacts that of another significantly.

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A MOCKERY OF PEDAGOGIC ETHICS, THE BREAKING OF A BOND

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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September 14, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 09:31 am IST

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'The nation gains little when it enfeebles the school teacher's voice — individual and collective' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

Imagine [a teacher who asks the classmates of her seven-year-old student to slap him](#) one by one. Those who do so softly are asked to hit the boy harder. One is naturally curious to know where the teacher was trained. And, who appointed her as a teacher? The short answer is that the teacher is an educational entrepreneur like tens of thousands of others. She runs her own private school in a village of Uttar Pradesh. Like thousands of other schools like hers, it is recognised by the government. For now, it has been closed down because the incident caused a stir, and perhaps some embarrassment.

News from schools regularly reminds us that the momentum generated by the Right to Education (RTE) Act that was enacted over a decade ago has subsided. The RTE had laid down indicators of quality, and for a while, an attempt was made in a few States to use RTE-compliance criteria for both government and private schools. COVID-19 was not the only factor responsible for the loss of momentum in taking the RTE seriously. Parallel spheres of neglect surfaced in the crucial sector of teacher training.

Since the 1990s, teacher training has become a beehive of small-time entrepreneurs. The regulatory structure of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has not been able to enforce its meticulously worked out norms. In 2008, the Supreme Court of India appointed a commission under the late Justice J.S. Verma to examine the various ailments of teacher training. His magnificent report, submitted in 2012, offered some hope that the training of teachers would gain status and attention, but that hope proved short-lived. Improvement of quality by the inspection raj proved an illusion. Last month, the Supreme Court passed its verdict in a case concerned with teacher training at the primary level. The Court said that the NCTE has not applied its mind while allowing Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree holders to teach at the primary level — BEd is traditionally associated with secondary education).

The Muzaffarnagar (Uttar Pradesh) story — where the teacher asked her students to slap another student — gains further poignancy because the child who was victimised by his teacher is a Muslim.

According to reports, rural leaders, some well known as farmer leaders, have advised the boy's

parents to avoid pursuing the case. Otherwise, these leaders feel, the episode will vitiate communal relations (the district saw riots a few years ago). The teacher herself reportedly saw no reason to be contrite as she considers it her job to control children in order to tackle them. She thought the episode was being blown out of proportion. What are these proportions, one might ask.

One of the many reports written since India's Independence tried to spell out what might constitute appropriate professional conduct by adults who serve as teachers. This report is known as the Teacher Commission report. It was chaired by D.P. Chattopadhyaya. He was a philosopher and his commission included some of the best minds available to reflect on teaching. The report showed how far school teaching in India was from standards and ethics that one might regard as professional. Many decades have passed since that report was submitted and hardly anyone reads it now. A summary of recommendations is available on the Internet for the benefit of students facing an examination such as BEd without attending classes. It is hardly cynical to say that Chattopadhyaya's recommendations are quite irrelevant. The new ethos of education, and not just in U.P., promotes easy instrumentality, and never reflection or introspection. We cannot expect the teacher who asked her students to slap the seven-year-old Muslim boy to reflect for a moment on her conduct.

The Chattopadhyaya report had advocated a well-read, thoughtful teacher who is conscious of her decisions and actions. That view found limited traction in the Indian system, especially in the bureaucracy governing it. It continued to regard the teacher as a minor functionary. During the 1990s, the compulsions of structural adjustment led to the loss of what little dignity teachers of small children had enjoyed. North Indian States had no problem opting to recruit teachers en masse on contractual or ad hoc basis under euphemistic titles. Reckless privatisation implied that market laws should prevail in deciding emoluments. Enrolment grew, but there was no lasting improvement in working conditions. Under the influence of the global policy adviser James Tooley, low-budget private schools multiplied, enabling State governments to merge their own smaller schools in the name of rationalisation.

So, here we are, with a teacher defending her unique style of meting out corporal punishment to a boy. All familiar bells are ringing dutifully, to remind us that human rights, minority rights, and child rights still matter in Uttar Pradesh. No resonating sound, let alone an outcry, can be heard rising from the community of teachers. The reason is simple: there is no such thing as a community of school teachers.

Teachers' Day (September 5, the birth date of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, former President of India and statesman) ought to have reminded us that the nation gains little when it enfeebles the school teacher's voice — individual and collective. It is not a fantasy that Dr. Radhakrishnan would have entertained. He taught in benign times, when institutions of higher learning enjoyed a modicum of freedom and teachers emerged from training colleges with a thought or two about how to look after children. Many still have that ability, and their heads will hang with exhaustion when they read about the Muzaffarnagar incident.

The administrative machinery in U.P. has shut down the school. The teacher, also the school head, made a mockery of pedagogic ethics. The child who suffered her wild imagination will suffer the imprint of his experience. By separately assigning a day for teachers and another one for children, we seem to have forgotten that the two form a bond. No worthwhile education can take place when the bond breaks. The Muzaffarnagar teacher is reportedly not even sorry that she shattered the bond so wantonly. For her, the great advances of child psychology never took place. Nor would she care if told that Rabindranath Tagore and Gijubhai Badheka — who created an Indian version of the Montessorian approach — had pleaded for adult kindness towards children.

Krishna Kumar is a former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the author of Smaller Citizens

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PILOT STUDY ON 'LOW DOSE IMMUNOTHERAPY' CLAIMS EFFECTIVE RESULTS IN TREATMENT OF HEAD AND NECK CANCER PATIENTS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 13, 2023 10:32 pm | Updated 10:44 pm IST - Bengaluru

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A multicentric randomised pilot study on “low dose immunotherapy” taken up by doctors at a private cancer hospital in Bengaluru has claimed effective results on head and neck cancer patients.

“This open-labelled prospective study provides an affordable cancer treatment option in the management of head and neck cancers,” claimed doctors at the HCG Cancer hospital where the study was done.

Addressing presspersons here on Wednesday, Satheesh C.T., Consultant - Medical and Hemato Oncology - and director of Clinical Trials at the hospital said the multicentric study assesses the effectiveness of neoadjuvant therapy combining low-dose immunotherapy Nivolumab and the TPF regimen (docetaxel, cisplatin, and 5-fluorouracil) compared to neoadjuvant chemotherapy (NACT) with the TPF regimen alone.

“It has a potential role in improving the quality of life and longevity of patients with locally advanced carcinoma of the buccal mucosa,” the doctor said.

As part of the pilot study, 12 cases were studied in the 54 - 76 age group. “In the pilot study, standard NACT is combined with low-dose Nivolumab immunotherapy, administering 40 mg every two weeks, as opposed to the full dose of 3 mg per kg of body weight,” Dr. Satheesh explained.

Head and neck cancers pose a substantial global health issue, comprising 4.5% of total worldwide cancer cases with a mortality rate of 4.6%. The burden is exceptionally high in Asia, notably in India, where they make up nearly 35% of all cancer cases among individuals aged 40-60 years. Over two lakh cases of head and neck cancers are detected every year in India.

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NIPAH OUTBREAK

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 13, 2023 09:58 pm | Updated September 14, 2023 07:07 am IST - Kozhikode

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Health officials at the District Nipah Control Cell opened at the Government Guest House in Kozhikode on September 13, 2023. | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

A day after [Nipah infection](#) was confirmed for the third time in Kozhikode district in Kerala, the number of cases rose to five as a healthcare worker from a private hospital, tested positive on Wednesday. The State Health Department prepared a contact list of 789 people, linked to the [two persons who lost their lives](#) due to the infection, and two others under treatment after testing positive for the virus.

The department also released a 'route map' of the two deceased persons detailing their travel history from the day they developed symptoms. The government has restricted big events in Kozhikode till September 24.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is expected to provide monoclonal antibodies for the treatment of the infected persons by Thursday morning.

Kerala Health Minister Veena George earlier told the media in Thiruvananthapuram that the [cases belonged to the Bangladesh strain](#), which was comparatively less infectious, but had a high mortality rate of 70%.

According to official sources, 371 contacts of the first victim, a 47-year-old man from Maruthonkara in Kozhikode, are under medical surveillance. Sixty contacts of his nine-year-old son, who is undergoing treatment at a private hospital in the city, too have been traced. One of his brothers-in-law, a 24-year-old man, has 77 contacts. The health worker who tested positive on Wednesday too was on his contact list. Another health worker on the list tested negative for the virus.

The contact list of the second victim, a 40-year-old man from Ayancheri, has 281 persons. The condition of the infected persons are reported to be stable. A majority of those on the contact list are under isolation at their homes.

The department has sent 11 more body-fluid samples of suspected patients for lab tests at the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune. Currently, 20 people are under medical observation: 13 at the isolation ward set up at the Government Medical College Hospital, Kozhikode, and seven others at a private hospital in the city.

An expert panel of doctors has reportedly said that the 47-year-old victim can be considered as the index patient, from whom the others got infected. The second victim had come in contact with him at a private hospital in the city where the former was undergoing treatment. The first patient died on August 30 and the second patient on September 11.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan earlier held a meeting of Ministers and top government officials to assess the situation. A fever survey conducted by health volunteers covered 313 houses in the affected areas on Wednesday. Nine gram panchayats have been declared as containment zones in the district.

Ms. George said that a State-level control room had been set up at the Directorate of Health Sciences. She said that a mobile lab to be set up by the ICMR would be functional at the medical college hospital by Thursday afternoon for speeding up the lab tests of the samples collected from suspected patients. She also said a team from the NIV would carry out a bat survey. Another team of epidemiologists from Chennai would also arrive in the State to carry out studies.

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SPECIAL MOSQUITOES BEING BRED TO FIGHT DENGUE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 13, 2023 06:10 pm | Updated 06:10 pm IST - Tegucigalpa (Honduras)

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A lab technician holds a strip of dried mosquito eggs inside a World Mosquito Program factory, in Medellin, Colombia on August 10, 2023. | Photo Credit: AP

A dozen people cheered last month as Tegucigalpa resident Hector Enriquez held a glass jar filled with mosquitoes above his head, and then freed the buzzing insects into the air. Enriquez, a 52-year-old mason, had volunteered to help publicise a plan to suppress dengue by releasing millions of special mosquitoes in the Honduran capital.

The mosquitoes Enriquez unleashed in his El Manchen neighbourhood — an area rife with dengue — were bred by scientists to carry bacteria called Wolbachia that interrupts transmission of the disease. When these mosquitoes reproduce, they pass the bacteria to their offspring, reducing future outbreaks.

Explained | [Why is a viable dengue vaccine not yet available](#)

This emerging strategy for battling dengue was pioneered over the last decade by the non-profit World Mosquito Programme, and it is being tested in more than a dozen countries. With more than half the world's population at risk of contracting dengue, the World Health Organization (WHO) is paying close attention to the mosquito releases in Honduras.

In Honduras, where 10,000 people are known to be sickened by dengue each year, Doctors Without Borders is partnering with the mosquito programme over the next six months to release close to 9 million mosquitoes carrying the Wolbachia bacteria.

“There is a desperate need for new approaches,” said Scott O'Neill, founder of the mosquito programme.

Models estimate that around 400 million people across some 130 countries are infected each year with dengue. Mortality rates from dengue are low – an estimated 40,000 people die each year from it – but outbreaks can overwhelm health systems and force many people to miss work or school.

The eggs come from the World Mosquito Program's bio factory in Colombia, where they are bred to carry bacteria that interrupt the transmission of dengue. | Photo Credit: AP

“When you come down with a case of dengue fever, it’s often akin to getting the worst case of influenza you can imagine,” said Conor McMeniman, a mosquito researcher at Johns Hopkins University. It’s commonly known as “breakbone fever” for a reason, McMeniman said.

The *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes that most commonly spread dengue have been resistant to insecticides, which have fleeting results even in the best-case scenario. And because dengue virus comes in four different forms, it is harder to control through vaccines.

Aedes aegypti mosquitoes are also a challenging foe because they are most active during the day – meaning that’s when they bite – so bed nets aren’t much help against them.

Raman Velayudhan, a researcher from the WHO’s Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme, said, “Wolbachia is definitely a long-term, sustainable solution.”

Velayudhan and other experts from the WHO plan to publish a recommendation as early as this month to promote further testing of the Wolbachia strategy in other parts of the world.

The Wolbachia strategy has been decades in the making.

“We worked for years on this,” said Mr. O’Neill, 61, who with help from his students in Australia eventually figured out how to transfer the bacteria from fruit-flies into *Aedes aegypti* mosquito embryos by using microscopic glass needles.

The insects are bred to carry the bacteria Wolbachia, which interrupts the transmission of dengue. | Photo Credit: AP

Around 40 years ago, scientists aimed to use Wolbachia in a different way: to drive down mosquito populations. Because male mosquitoes carrying the bacteria only produce offspring with females that also have it, scientists would release infected male mosquitoes into the wild to breed with uninfected females, whose eggs would not hatch.

But along the way, Mr. O’Neill’s team made a surprising discovery: Mosquitoes carrying Wolbachia didn’t spread dengue — or other related diseases, including yellow fever, Zika and chikungunya.

And since infected females pass Wolbachia to their offspring, they will eventually “replace” a local mosquito population with one that carries the virus-blocking bacteria.

The replacement strategy has required a major shift in thinking about mosquito control, said Oliver Brady, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Since Mr. O’Neill’s lab first tested the replacement strategy in Australia in 2011, the World Mosquito Programme has run trials affecting 11 million people across 14 countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Fiji and Vietnam.

Also Read | [WHO warns of dengue risk as global warming pushes cases near historic highs](#)

The results are promising. In 2019, a large-scale field trial in Indonesia showed a 76% drop in reported dengue cases after Wolbachia-infected mosquitoes were released.

Still, questions remain about whether the replacement strategy will be effective — and cost-effective — on a global scale, Mr. O’Neill said. The three-year Tegucigalpa trial will cost

\$9,00,000, or roughly \$10 per person that Doctors Without Borders expects it to protect.

Many of the world's mosquitoes infected with Wolbachia were hatched in a warehouse in Medellín, Colombia, where the World Mosquito Programme runs a factory that breeds 30 million of them per week.

The factory imports dried mosquito eggs from different parts of the world to ensure the specially bred mosquitoes it eventually releases will have similar qualities to local populations, including resistance to insecticides, said Edgard Boquín, one of the Honduras project leaders working for Doctors Without Borders.

The mosquitoes that hatch will carry bacteria called Wolbachia that interrupt the transmission of dengue. | Photo Credit: AP

The dried eggs are placed in water with powdered food. Once they hatch, they are allowed to breed with the “mother colony” — a lineage that carries Wolbachia and is made up of more females than males.

A constant buzz fills the room where the insects mate in cube-shaped cages made of mosquito nets. Caretakers ensure they have the best diet: Males get sugared water, while females “bite” into pouches of human blood kept at 97 degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius).

“We have the perfect conditions,” the factory’s coordinator, Marlene Salazar, said.

Once workers confirm that the new mosquitoes carry Wolbachia, their eggs are dried and filled into pill-like capsules to be sent off to release sites.

The Doctors Without Borders team in Honduras recently went door-to-door around a hilly neighbourhood of Tegucigalpa to enlist residents’ help in incubating mosquito eggs bred in the Medellín factory.

A constant buzz fills the room where the insects mate in cube-shaped cages made of mosquito nets. | Photo Credit: AP

At half a dozen houses, they received permission to hang from tree branches glass jars containing water and a mosquito egg-filled capsule. After about 10 days, the mosquitoes would hatch and fly off.

That same day, a dozen young workers from Doctors Without Borders fanned out across Northern Tegucigalpa on motorcycles carrying jars of the already hatched dengue-fighting mosquitoes and, at designated sites, released thousands of them into the breeze.

Because community engagement is the key to the programme’s success, doctors and volunteers have spent the past six months educating neighbourhood leaders, including influential gang members, to get their permission to work in areas under their control.

Some of the most common questions from the community were about whether Wolbachia would harm people or the environment. Workers explained that any bites from the special mosquitoes or their offspring were harmless.

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CENTRAL TEAM OF OFFICIALS TO VISIT NIPAH-HIT AREAS ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 14, 2023 08:43 pm | Updated September 15, 2023 06:51 am IST - Kozhikode

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A patient is admitted to a Nipah isolation ward at the Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode on September 14, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

A Central team of officials is expected to visit Maruthonkara and Ayancheri areas in Kozhikode district of Kerala on Friday where [two persons died due to Nipah infection recently](#).

[Five people have so far tested positive for the virus](#), of whom two are dead. The others are undergoing treatment. Restrictions are continuing in at least nine grama panchayats in Kozhikode district, where a holiday has been declared for educational institutions till Saturday.

The Central team reached Kozhikode on Thursday morning and held parleys with State officials. According to sources, they will coordinate with the State departments of Health and Animal Husbandry in taking up containment measures.

The team has members drawn from the National Centre for Disease Control, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bengaluru.

Police on September 14, 2023 put barriers in Ayanchery grama panchayat in Kozhikode district which has been declared a containment zone. | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

The National Institute of Virology, Pune, has set up a mobile testing lab at Government Medical College Hospital, Kozhikode, to test body fluid samples of suspected Nipah patients.

Official sources said that the lab has biosafety level-III standards. Now, there is no need to send the samples of those on the contact list of the infected persons to Pune. There are four scientists and four technicians in the mobile lab. Monoclonal antibodies to treat 25 patients to have reached here.

At the same time, another mobile testing lab under the aegis of the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology too is expected to reach Kozhikode soon to speed up the tests. It has biosafety level-II standards. As many as 96 samples can be tested here at a time and the results will be available within three hours.

Health Minister Veena George said that all the high-risk contacts of E. Mohammadali, the first Nipah victim who died on August 30, will be subjected to lab tests. They will have to isolate themselves for at least 21 days. Medical boards will be constituted in all hospitals where the Nipah patients are being treated. The treatment procedures will be decided by the board.

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STUDY SHOWS COVID-19 VARIANT XBB IS HIGHLY INFECTIOUS, FAVOURS BOOSTER DOSE TO PROTECT PEOPLE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 15, 2023 12:23 am | Updated 12:40 am IST - CHENNAI

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A cohort study, which has indicated that one of Omicron's subvariant, XBB, is highly evasive from available vaccines as 81.1% of the studied infected persons were vaccinated, has highlighted the urgent need for polyvalent vaccines. It also underscores the need for continuous genomic surveillance of SARS-COV-2 to keep a close watch on the emergence of new variants in the community.

Tamil Nadu's State Public Health Laboratory (SPHL), where a whole genome sequencing (WGS) laboratory is functioning, decided to take a closer look at samples that tested positive for XBB variants of Omicron reported from September 2022 to January 2023.

This was following a surge in COVID-19 cases during September 2022 with reports of several breakthrough infections and re-infections in the community.

The findings and recommendations of the study — clinical characteristics and novel mutations of Omicron subvariant XBB in Tamil Nadu, India — a cohort study - was recently published in The Lancet Regional Health-South East Asia.

T.S. Selvavinayagam, Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, was the study's lead author.

Of the 2,085 COVID-19 samples sequenced during that period, 420 were reported as XBB (20.14%) variants in the State.

Of this, 244 were selected based on collective information to study the clinico-demography of the cohort and 98 were selected for sequence studies. XBB.3 was the predominant sub-lineage of XBB identified in the study population, infecting 139 individuals; 57% of the total cases in the cohort. Next was XBB.1 that was seen in 56 individuals.

The researchers found that for 200 of the 244, this was their first exposure while for 44 others, it was their second COVID-19 encounter among which 25 were infected with XBB.3 variant.

Based on the data, XBB.3 appeared to be more virulent and prevalent within the study cohort, it said.

One of the key findings was that XBB sub-variants were evasive against available vaccines and may be more transmissible, one of the authors, S. Raju, who is the deputy director of SPHL said.

About 81% of the infected persons were vaccinated of which 78.2% were vaccinated with two or more doses and 2.9% were partially vaccinated with a single dose.

Analysis found that age and underlying conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease or secondary complications increased susceptibility to infection rather than vaccination status or prior exposure — 52 individuals reported a single underlying condition and 24 had two or more underlying conditions.

The findings advocated the need to develop bivalent/multivalent booster vaccine for the entire population to protect them from emerging variants of concerns.

The study identified 43 mutations in the S gene across 98 sequences. Of these, two were novel mutations (A27S and T7471) that were not reported previously with XBB sub-variants in the available literature.

Continuous surveillance of viral mutations is critical to identifying emergence of new variants and for developing an effective vaccine.

“The WGS lab will continue to monitor the genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 virus circulating in the community and intends to forecast early warning signals of impending threat due to the emergence of new variants of coronavirus in the community, thereby help reduce the disease burden in the State,” he said.

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LIMITS OF IDENTITY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON FACILITATING PEACE IN MANIPUR

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

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September 15, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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One of the most disconcerting features of the ongoing ethnic strife in [Manipur](#) remains the inability of civil society representatives to rise above their “ethnic” affiliations and work towards peace. This is exemplified by the acts of the [Meira Paibi, an amorphous organisation of Meitei women](#), who have in the past mobilised against armed forces and police excesses, alcoholism, drug addiction and sexual violence in the State. During the conflict that has raged on since early May, however, the Meira Paibi has been working towards disrupting the operations of the Assam Rifles in their attempt to maintain peace, especially in the foothills. These areas, called “buffer zones”, were created to ensure that there is no further escalation of violence between arms-wielding people of the two ethnic communities, but there have been violent attacks with the armed forces unable to act on time because of disruptions, allegedly, by the Meira Paibi among others. Clearly, the situation has been brought to a boil by the looting of weapons by both Kuki-Zo and Meitei groups and their use in the strife. But the inability of the State government and its police and the Union government-deployed armed forces in maintaining peace has also been due to civil society groups supporting those engaging in violence.

Some Meira Paibi representatives had, in a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday, [claimed that they do not recognise the buffer zones](#), calling them “unconstitutional”. The presence of armed forces in peacekeeping is not an ideal solution in most circumstances. But with the ethnicisation of law enforcement, aided by a State government that seems to have lost its legitimacy of power across ethnic divides, leading to demands for a separate administration by Kuki-Zo representatives, the armed forces’ presence and the need for buffer zones to maintain a semblance of peace have become essential in Manipur. Civil society groups such as the Meira Paibi can rise above their narrow ethnic identities to press for justice for women affected in the conflict and thus build solidarity networks that will aid the process of reconciliation and peace-building. Sadly, that does not seem to be the case today. Civil society organisations have whipped up the frenzy of ethnic hatred, partially due to the recurring trauma from the violence, as much as cynical political representatives have. And this has meant that the cycle of violence has endured. History suggests that a breakthrough can only be achieved through non-partisan leadership and civic dialogue among civil society and political representatives. As things stand, for that to happen there needs to be a credible alternative to the current leadership in the State.

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BROADENING THE FIELD: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON SCIENCE AWARDS AND THE SHANTI SWARUP BHATNAGAR PRIZE WINNERS

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September 15, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 08:46 am IST

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After a delay of nearly a year, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has announced [winners of the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar \(SSB\) Prizes](#). With a legacy of over half-a-century, the awards — they comprise a cash prize, citation and salary perks — are awarded annually to scientists under 45 with outstanding work in the fields of biology, chemistry, engineering, mathematics, medicine, earth sciences and physical sciences. Some of India's most accomplished scientists have been awardees and it is not a stretch to say that they are akin to an "Indian Nobel" and fairly coveted. It was unusual then, last year, when the CSIR did not announce awards despite the winners having already been picked before September 26, the institute's foundation day and traditionally the date on which the year's winners are announced. The background to this was the [government's decision to prune prizes to scientists](#). There were too many awards by various ministries, thereby reducing its prestige, a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) communiqué suggested. There were plans to announce one 'big award' akin to a 'Nobel Prize', but none has been announced so far. While the MHA ultimately decided to retain the SSB prizes, the government's long silence on its future did foment concern among scientists of their likely discontinuation.

Science awards, unlike those given for say athletics, are not meant to fete the outcome of a defined, demarcated contest such as a match or a race but are a recognition for industrious work done over time, that have led to significant advances in science or technology. They are meant to encourage the winners to persevere, against the uncertainty inherent in the scientific enterprise, which on average is a financially less rewarding career than several other options a trained scientist could have embarked upon. This year's 12 winners are all male, with 11 from centrally-funded institutions. Within these too, the winners are largely from the Indian Institutes of Technology. While the chosen candidates are certainly deserving, there are surely many more women or researchers from state universities who deserve recognition for their work. And so, rather than reducing the number of awards, there is actually a stronger case for expanding the remit of these awards, given the government's tireless espousal of its commitment to diversity and expanding opportunities to those beyond enclaves of privilege. The success of India's Chandrayaan-3 mission demonstrates that great victories and moments of triumph are built on consistent encouragement while plodding along the dark alleys of uncertainty and failure.

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GOVERNMENT TO TELL SUPREME COURT HOW ESSENTIAL DRUGS PRICES ARE DECIDED

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 14, 2023 11:11 am | Updated 11:25 pm IST - NEW DELHI

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The Centre has agreed to place on record in the Supreme Court its mechanism for controlling the price of life-saving and essential drugs.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati said on September 13 that the government would file an updated affidavit.

The court listed the petition filed by All India Drug Action Network, represented by senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, on October 4.

In November 2022, the government had revised the list and prices of essential medicines.

Under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order of 2013, the work of revising the applicable ceiling price of notified drugs was initiated by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, the government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India.

The Health Ministry, in April, had said that it has been able to cap the ceiling prices of 651 out of 870 essential medicines listed under the National List of Essential Medicines, due to which the approved ceiling price of medicines had decreased by an average of 16.62%.

The court has been hearing the case for years. The petition had raised objections on the formula for drug pricing.

It had said the formula institutionalised “super-profits in the guise of price control, excluded from price control life-saving medicines for diseases such as malaria and TB, excluded all fixed dose combinations which amount to 50% of the market.”

The NGO had said the government’s pricing policy further excluded essential medicines belonging to the same chemical class, besides drugs provided in the national health programmes such as for HIV, diabetes, hypertension and anaemia, medicines with appropriate dosages for children and patented medicines.

The government had at the time countered that the pricing policy was formulated after due and deliberate consultations with the objective to make essential drugs affordable for the common man.

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BHARAT BECOMES THE 13TH COUNTRY IN WORLD THAT CAN ISSUE INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED OIML (INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF LEGAL METROLOGY) CERTIFICATES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Indian Diaspora

OIML is an Intergovernmental organization which was established in 1955. Bharat became its member in 1956. It has 63 Member States and 64 Corresponding Members. Bharat has now become authority for issuing internationally accepted OIML certificate for selling weights & measures anywhere in the world. To sell a weight or measure in the International market an OIML Pattern Approval certificate is mandatory, which Department of Consumer Affairs can issue now.

Bharat follows OIML recommendations and procedures of testing and calibration of weights and measures. The reports prepared by the Legal Metrology's Regional Reference Standards Laboratories are now acceptable to the OIML issuing authorities. Now, Bharat is an authority for issue of OIML pattern approval certificates and can act as support system for indigenous manufacturers. The domestic manufacturers can now export their weighing and measuring instrument worldwide without incurring additional testing fees, resulting in significant cost savings.

Bharat can also support the foreign manufacturers by issuing OIML pattern approval certificates from our certified RRLs. By issuing the OIML approval certificates of weighing & measuring instrument to the foreign manufacturers Bharat will also generate forex in terms of fees etc.

Bharat may now influence the OIML's policies and provide input to the OIML Strategy. This system allows OIML Certificates issued by OIML Issuing Authorities in OIML Member States to be accepted by other participants as the basis for issuing national or regional type approvals for measuring instrument. The other OIML Members can thus issue national type approval certificates without the need for expensive test facilities by relying on these certificates.

Bharat now joins an exclusive group of nations, including Australia, Switzerland, China, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, France, United Kingdom, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, and Slovakia, as the 13th country worldwide, authorized for issuing OIML approval certificates.

Today, we proudly announce Bharat's ascent to the ranks of globally recognized OIML Certificates Issuing Authorities, a testament to our nation's commitment to quality standards and international trade facilitation.

Secretary (Consumer Affairs), Shri Rohit Kumar Singh, shared this significant achievement with the press during a conference, where a presentation and video were presented to illustrate the importance of this accomplishment.

Mr. Paul Dixon, Executive Secretary, OIML-CS, also joined from OIML's Paris Headquarters for the briefing, re-affirming Bharat's role as an OIML Certificates Issuing Authority and assuring continued cooperation.

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OIML is an Intergovernmental organization which was established in 1955. Bharat became its member in 1956. It has 63 Member States and 64 Corresponding Members. Bharat has now become authority for issuing internationally accepted OIML certificate for selling weights & measures anywhere in the world. To sell a weight or measure in the International market an OIML Pattern Approval certificate is mandatory, which Department of Consumer Affairs can issue now.

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NIPAH PUTS KERALA UNDER SIEGE AGAIN

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September 16, 2023 03:15 am | Updated 03:15 am IST

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A health official speaks to the relative of a patient at the isolation ward of the Government Medical College, Kozhikode. | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

A sense of dread is growing in Kuttiadi, a town located on the slopes of the Western Ghats in Kozhikode district of Kerala. Most shops are closed. Very few people can be seen on the road. The masks on their faces are reminiscent of a time not too long ago, when the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the world, and earlier, when the Nipah virus, unknown and exotic, crept into Kerala society.

No one knew it then, but the crisis began on August 30 when a feverish E. Mohammedali, 47, a native of Kallad in the Maruthonkara gram panchayat, not far from Kuttiadi, died at a private hospital in Kozhikode. Hospital authorities declared that he died of pneumonia. Later, Mohammedali's young children, brother-in-law aged 24, and a relative who is just 10 months old were all hospitalised with similar symptoms.

Editorial | [Unified approach: On the Nipah outbreak in Kerala and a One Health approach](#)

Then, on September 11, alarm bells rang when M. Haris, 40, of Mangalad in the Ayancheri gram panchayat near Vadakara, died at a private hospital in Kozhikode. Haris had reported the same symptoms as Mohammedali — high fever, fatigue, and respiratory issues. Doctors suspected that he had died of the deadly Nipah virus, which has a mortality rate of 40% to 75% according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The news of the infections was nothing new for the residents of Kozhikode district, which has seen three outbreaks of the Nipah virus so far. The [first instance was reported in May-June 2018](#). Despite the government's best efforts then, the virus infected 23 people and killed 21 of them from the Kozhikode and Malappuram districts. In June 2019, [a lone case was reported from Ernakulam](#); the person [recovered](#). On August 31, 2021, Mohammad Hashim, 12, of Pazhoor village near Chathamangalam in Kozhikode, had seizures. Hashim, the only child of Wahida and Vayoli Aboobacker, [tested positive for Nipah and died just hours later](#). This is the fourth outbreak in Kerala. So far, [two people have died](#) and [six are undergoing treatment](#).

This time, it was Dr. P. Jyothikumar, a general practitioner in Vadakara, who noticed something amiss when he was consulting patients at home on the morning of September 11. On the CCTV camera, Dr. Jyothikumar saw a patient staggering towards his room. "He was visibly tired. His arms were draped over the shoulders of two others," Dr. Jyothikumar recalled. The patient,

Haris, told the doctor that he had been suffering from high fever for five days. Haris had sought treatment at a private clinic, at government primary health centres, and at the Government Hospital in Vadakara, but his condition had not improved. “We ruled out chances of leptospirosis, dengue fever, malaria, and even leukemia. The patient’s liver function was normal. But I saw that his fingertips were turning blue,” said Dr. Jyothikumar.

Health officials at the Government Medical College, Kozhikode. | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

Since he was unable to diagnose the patient’s condition, Dr. Jyothikumar contacted A.S. Anoop Kumar, a critical care specialist at a private hospital in Kozhikode, for an opinion. Dr. Kumar was among the first to suspect that the patients who had been admitted to his hospital with unusual symptoms in 2018 had been infected with the [Nipah virus](#). “When I told him that this looked like a case of unusual fever with an undiagnosed condition, Dr. Kumar said that a couple of patients with similar symptoms had sought treatment at his hospital as well. Haris was subsequently referred there,” Dr. Jyothikumar said. It was soon established that Haris had visited the hospital where E. Mohammedali had died, since his relative had been undergoing treatment there.

Late on September 11, after the death of Haris, the office of the State Health Minister, Veena George, sent out an alert for Kozhikode district. The body fluid samples of Mohammedali were not sent for lab tests since there was no suspicion then that he had died of the virus. The samples of Haris and four others in the hospital were flown to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, on September 12. The results came that night. George informed an impatient media contingent outside the Government Guest House in Kozhikode that Mohammedali’s child aged nine and his brother-in-law had tested positive for the virus; so had Haris. There was enough evidence to believe that Mohammedali, too, had been infected by the virus. Mohammedali’s samples were also sent to the lab. On September 15, it was confirmed that he had been infected.

Nipah is a zoonotic illness, according to the WHO. Fruit bats of the family *Pteropodidae* — particularly, species belonging to the *Pteropus* genus — are the natural hosts for the virus. Nipah can be transmitted to people through infected animals, such as pigs and bats. In Malaysia, where the first case of the infection was reported in 1998, bats dropped partially eaten food near pig stalls. The virus travelled from bats to pigs and then to pig breeders. In Bangladesh, people were infected when they ate food contaminated by bats, such as raw palm sap. In India, the transmission from one person to another has taken place mainly through respiratory droplets. The virus moves to people who are in close contact with the patient, such as caregivers or medical staff.

While some people may remain asymptomatic, others may show symptoms such as fever, muscle pain, vomiting, headaches, and sore throat. Dizziness, drowsiness, altered consciousness, and neurological signs indicating acute encephalitis may follow. The WHO says people with severe infection get encephalitis and seizures and may end up in coma in 24 to 48 hours.

A pall of gloom has descended on Kallad. Mohammedali, from all accounts, was a socially conscious man. K.P. Rasheed, a resident of Kallad, described his friend as a silent worker, the kind who would make his presence felt even though he stayed in the wings. “He worked for many social causes. We have no words to describe the loss,” he said.

Mohammedali had been working at a private company in Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates for nearly two decades. About a year and a half ago, he returned home to take care of his father, who was paralysed. His house is empty now. All his family members are under medical isolation at a private hospital. Mohammedali’s brother E. Ansar said they are still in shock. “Other than a

skin allergy for which he sought treatment, Mohammedali did not suffer from any other disease as far as I know,” he said over a phone call.

Barriers have been put up in the Ayanchery gram panchayat in Kozhikode district, which has been declared a containment zone | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

The residents of Mangalad are equally upset. Authorities have erected barriers on the way to Haris's house. Haris had been working in Qatar. He had come home a couple of months ago and was planning to return on September 18. Local residents said he had lost his father some five years ago. An active worker of the Indian Union Muslim League, Haris had endeared himself to the people of the village, said the residents. “We don't stay in the same locality. But every morning, we used to meet each other. I still can't believe that he is no more,” his brother M. Nasar said over a phone call.

A. Surendran, ward member in Ayancheri Grama Panchayat, regretted the circumstances in which the residents find themselves. “We cannot even console his family members as they all are in isolation,” he said.

Also read | [Connection between environment and epidemic in focus](#)

The district administration has declared wards in at least nine gram panchayat as containment zones. The movement of people is restricted. All major public events in Kozhikode have been banned till September 24. Schools and colleges have been closed for a few days. On September 14, the police were seen discouraging people on motorbikes from going to areas declared containment zones.

The Union government has sent a team of experts to Kozhikode to assess the situation. Mobile labs have been set up at the Government Medical College Hospital premises to speed up tests of suspected patients. An isolation block too has been kept ready.

While applauding the Health Department for taking steps quickly to contain the infection yet again, health experts and the people have also raised questions about recurring outbreaks of Nipah in Kerala, and particularly Kozhikode, when there are virus-carrying bats elsewhere in the country. Many also wonder why the Health Department still does not have a mechanism to detect such cases quickly and act to prevent deaths.

P.O. Nameer, dean, College of Climate Change and Environmental Science, Kerala Agriculture University, Thrissur, pointed out that it was not clear why these infections were recurring in Kerala, especially in Kozhikode. “We still have no clear scientific proof about the source of the virus in Kerala. Our conclusion that fruit-eating bats are the source of the infection is based on similar episodes from other countries, and after detecting the presence of the virus in bats collected from the affected areas,” he said. There is no evidence to show how the first patient got infected during each of these outbreaks; it is assumed that they ate fruits contaminated with bat saliva or came in contact with the body fluids of bats.

A biodiversity expert, who did not wish to be named, said that Janakikkad, a biodiversity hotspot, is close to Sooppikkada, where the infection was first reported in 2018, as well as Kallad. “We need to know if the bats are coming out of their habitats in search of food. If that is the case, perhaps there is a drop in the number of fruit plants there. One way to stop the bats from coming to human habitats is to plant saplings,” he said.

Studies should be done to explore whether the growing presence of rubber plantations is affecting the bats and their ecosystem, he said. “Another cause of concern could be the high

sound levels from quarries which may be disturbing the bats,” he said. A buffer zone could be created around forest areas so that the bats don’t journey into human habitats, he suggested.

“The main problem from a public health perspective is that the system starts thinking about a disease only after people are affected,” said M. Muraleedharan, national convener, anti-microbial resistance committee, Indian Medical Association. “Often, we jump in to solve an issue when it happens and then forget about it. The public health mechanism should have details about such diseases, their causes, the possible methods to avoid their outbreaks, and the steps to contain them as and when they happen.”

A microbiologist working with a government department said on the condition of anonymity that ground-level health workers need to know more about the initial symptoms of such infectious diseases so that the information can be quickly passed on to higher levels and the spread be stopped. If there is an ‘unusual death’ reported of a person below the age of 50, it should be suspected to be linked with Nipah, he added.

Dr. Muraleedharan said that when the infection was first reported in Kozhikode in 2018, there were plans of conducting a surveillance of bats. However, this has not taken place yet. An isolation block for Nipah at the Medical College Hospital was proposed and a sum of 25 crore set aside for the purpose, but nothing has come of it, he alleged.

The police put up barriers in the Ayanchery grama panchayat in Kozhikode district. | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

Nameer pointed out that in countries such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, the health authorities were able to track the source of transmission of the virus from bats to human beings. In three-four years, they were able to prevent recurrence. “But in Kozhikode, we are yet to identify the spillover mechanism. Only if we identify it can we contain it on a long-term basis and take preventive steps,” he said. “Conducting a systematic bat survey and putting in place a multi-disciplinary team drawn from various departments such as forest, wildlife, and animal husbandry would be useful. That would also help us identify the focus areas to utilise our resources effectively,” Nameer added. The Kerala University of Health Sciences has taken preliminary steps in this regard.

Dr. Muraleedharan said that the State should have a testing lab with Biosafety Level-IV standards so that the samples do not have to be sent to the National Institute of Virology every time there is an outbreak. “Also, when infections are reported, we need to have a permanent protocol to treat the patients in the model of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States. We need to have a system in place that can act immediately as and when infectious diseases are reported,” he said.

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MISPLACED MYSTERY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE SPECIAL SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, THE POLITICS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

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September 16, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 08:52 am IST

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The Government appears eager to keep some enigma around the five-day special session of Parliament, set to begin from September 18. Opposition parties had a point when they complained that the Government did not consult them before calling the special session. As in the parliamentary bulletin issued on September 13, only the [agenda for the opening day](#) is known. The Government has listed the Bill that seeks to change the appointment process of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, which the Opposition is preparing to corner the Government on as it gives the ruling party excessive control over the appointment process. The Government also proposes holding a debate on 'Parliamentary Journey of 75-years starting from Samvidhan Sabha – Achievements, Experiences, Memories and Learnings', an intriguing topic. The listed debate could well be the farewell address to the present Parliament (circular) building which was designed by Sir Herbert Baker and Sir Edwin Lutyens, and inaugurated in January 1927 by Viceroy Lord Irwin as the seat of the Imperial Legislative Council. The new building, which is triangular-shaped, has been waiting to receive parliamentarians since May 28 when [it was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#). It was not used during the monsoon session held between July 20 and August 11. No official explanation has been forthcoming on why the session was not held there.

Viceroy Irwin had presented the circular building as an emblem of "permanence". The building will be retiring at 96 years, four years short of a century. For India's growing population, its Parliament needs to be bigger and, consequently, the building too. But democracy is not about buildings. Parliament, after all, is a place for the Opposition to have its say though the Government might have its way. The Bharatiya Janata Party has an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha and while it may not have similar numerical strength in the Rajya Sabha, it remains the single largest party; thanks to allies and sympathetic parties, no government Bill has been stalled here for want of a majority. Still, the Government evades parliamentary scrutiny and gives no priority to taking the Opposition into confidence. The Government insists that it is going by the book. A meeting of floor leaders of all parties is being convened on Sunday, just 31 hours before the session begins. There is no dialogue between the Opposition and the Government to enable the smooth functioning of the Parliament. Changes to Article 370 were before Parliament on August 5, 2019, without any notice or consultation. If the Opposition parties have needlessly speculated about the agenda and aired their concerns about the special session, the Government is partly responsible.

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INDIA UPS NIPAH SURVEILLANCE, REACHES OUT TO AUSTRALIA FOR MONOCLONAL ANTIBODY DOSES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 15, 2023 05:13 pm | Updated 08:30 pm IST - New Delhi

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Health officials in full protective gear at the Nipah isolation ward of Government Medical College, Kozhikode. | Photo Credit: Thulasi Kakkat

India has reached out to Australia seeking to restock monoclonal antibody doses to combat the Nipah virus and is expecting 20 more doses soon, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) head Dr. Rajiv Bahl said on Friday. He added that the monoclonal antibody has passed the phase-one trial and has been administered to 14 persons globally till now.

Stating that the aim as of now is to ensure that the Nipah virus is contained as fast as possible, he added that aggressive contact tracking is underway.

“The mortality among the infected is very high in Nipah — between 40% and 70% — compared to the mortality in COVID, which was 2% to 3%,” Dr. Bahl said, addressing a press conference. He asserted that all efforts are on to contain the spread of the virus in Kerala and noted that all patients, so far, are contacts of an index patient.

Kerala is currently battling its fourth outbreak of the deadly virus. Two persons have died due to the virus while it has infected at least five others in the Kozhikode district. Several villages have been declared containment zones, and close to 1,000 contacts have been identified, of which over 200 are considered “high risk”.

Speaking about administering the antibody to patients, Dr. Bahl said that the final decision to use this antibody lay with the State government, the patient and the doctor administering treatment.

“ICMR is only making the antibody available for a virus that is known to have a high mortality rate,” he said, adding that none of the 14 people who have used the monoclonal antibody so far had died due to the virus.

Developed in the United States, the antibody was shared with an Australian university as part of a tech-transfer initiative. India got some doses of monoclonal antibodies from Australia in 2018. Currently, doses are available for only 10 patients, explained Dr. Bahl.

Confirming that no one in India has so far administered the antibody, he said that it has to be

administered in the early stage of the infection.

“Made available to India for compassionate use, the antibody is not a treatment. There is no authorised treatment for Nipah. The phase-1 of the trial for this antibody was completed and thereafter no opportunity presented itself to take the research forward. So far the information available with us is that it is safe but we can’t say that this is effective. Having said that, what is also true is the fact that if it helps the citizens in any way we will make it available for use,” said Dr. Bahl.

The monoclonal antibody is used in Australia for the Hendra virus, which is a bat-borne virus that is associated with a highly fatal infection in horses and humans. Numerous disease outbreaks in Australia among horses have been caused by Hendra Virus. Two doses of the antibody have to be given per person, the ICMR head explained.

Asked why Kerala is facing a repeated outbreak of Nipah, he said that the exact reason was still being worked out. “In 2018, we found the outbreak in Kerala was related to bats, but we were not able to understand the exact pathway on how it got transferred from bats to humans. What we know is that it happens during a particular season. Again we are trying to find the pathway this time,” he said.

ICMR also said that while the standard operating protocols for treatment and handling of patients are in place, adequate precautions have to be followed to contain the spread of the virus. “Most of the COVID precautions like wearing a mask, washing hands and maintaining proper hygiene, avoiding contact with an infected person should be followed,” Dr. Bahl said.

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GOVERNMENT IS THINKING OF PERMITTING ACCRUAL OF CARBON CREDITS FOR EXPORTED GREEN HYDROGEN AND GREEN AMMONIA: UNION MINISTER FOR POWER AND NEW & RENEWABLE ENERGY AT 4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION ON CLEAN ENERGY

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Infrastructure: Energy incl. Renewable & Non-renewable

The Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy Shri R. K. Singh has said that round-the-clock renewable energy will cost just about Rs. 6 per unit if green hydrogen is used for storage. Speaking at the Special Ministerial Session of the Fourth International Conference & Exhibition on Clean Energy in New Delhi today, Shri R. K. Singh said that the cost of Green Hydrogen would be cheapest in India and that the Green Hydrogen would become a viable energy storage alternative. "Green hydrogen is cheaper than gas and battery energy storage systems. We have come up with a pilot bid for about 100 MW which we hope will establish the benchmark. Once we are able to use green hydrogen for our energy requirements, all supply chain issues such as availability of lithium-ion batteries will be resolved. We will make green hydrogen and use it as storage. The average price of power in the energy exchange has recently been Rs. 8 per unit, so if our cost for round-the-clock renewable energy comes to Rs. 6 per unit, we are in business. That is what the future is: renewables. The future is here, not far away." The theme of the Special Ministerial Session, held on the closing day of the two-day summit, was "Global Champions for Advancing Clean Energy Innovation & Manufacturing".

The Minister informed the industry that the basic legal framework for carbon market has been formulated and that the government is thinking of permitting the industry gain carbon credits for green hydrogen and green ammonia which is exported from India. With this, the industry will have yet another advantage, which will make Indian industry totally competitive, added the Minister.



"I have written to all industry captains to switch over from thermal to renewables"

The Minister said that the renewable energy industry of India is now world-beating, consisting of majors who can compete anywhere. Shri Singh told the industry that the government has made sure that it has opened the paths for the growth of the industry. "We have been leading with

policy papers, rules and regulations, opening new doors. We came with Green Open Access Rules, where we have given right for anybody to set up capacity anywhere and transfer it to wherever they want. I have written to all industry captains to switch over from thermal to renewables, this shift will also bring down price of energy.”

“We have made the power system friendly to both industry and to consumers”

The Minister informed that the spirit of Electricity Act 2003 is open access and that timelines for grant of open access have been given in the Act. “If grant of open access is not given within the timeline, it will be deemed to have been granted. Somebody will have to answer if it is not given; the person who heads that institution such as a State Electricity Authority will be punished if the law is violated.”

Shri Singh added that the government has made the power system friendly to industry and to consumers. “We came up with consumer rights; we will investigate whether the violation has happened, and we will file a prosecution in the court of law.”

“India is emerging as a manufacturing powerhouse of renewable energy”

Speaking of the rapidly growing energy demand, the Minister said that energy demand of the country will continue to grow rapidly since our economy is growing fast. “We need energy demand as fast as possible to meet this demand. We will make the electricity required for our growth. If our price for round-the-clock renewable energy is anything to go by, then we will not have to go the thermal way, we will adopt the renewable path. About 42% of our capacity is from renewable sources already.”

The Minister pointed out that India is emerging as a manufacturing powerhouse of renewable energy. “Around 88,000 MW renewable energy capacity is under construction and our plan is to add 50,000 MW of renewable energy capacity every year. We are already emerging as an exporter. The world will come to rely on us more and more. So, all those who are setting up capacity have made a good bet. At the same time, we need to keep ourselves at the leading edge of technology.” The Minister added that India is going to emerge as the biggest exporter of solar cells and modules and that more grid capacity is being added.



“RE Investment is coming, era of huge growth for renewable energy”

The Power and New & Renewable Energy Minister said that more and more people are going to come and invest in renewable energy sector in the country. “UAE wants to make investment here, since they see the future here. Getting investment for green transition is not an issue, investment is coming since we have de-risked the system and made the whole system transparent. Every generator’s power bills are totally up-to-date. Legacy dues of discoms have been reduced to less than half of what they were, and this too will be wiped out in next 2 – 3

years. Every genco is now profitable. AT&C losses have come down and the system is totally viable now. Everything has been made conditional on prudential norms.”

The Minister informed that 5.8 million tons of green hydrogen at various stages of capacity is already being set up, under the National Green Hydrogen Mission. “We will be the biggest exporter since our green hydrogen and green ammonia cost is going to be the lowest in the world. And we will come up with another bid for grid scale storage. All that you have to do is to take advantage of the growing demand. Future Renewable Energy Purchase Obligations are going to be issued under the revised Energy Conservation Act. If any obligated entity falls short, they will have to pay a huge penalty.”

The Minister assured the industry that this is an era of huge growth for energy. “I believe all of you are fully confident and capable of the huge opportunities lying there for you. We want Make in India and manufacturing in India. But if you are not competitive and up-to-date, you will not succeed. I want all of you to be world-scale.”

“Potential for India to become a global champion in Renewable Energy”

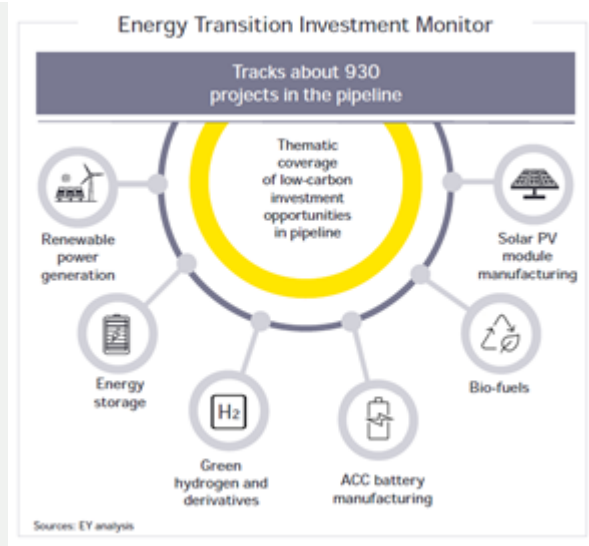
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The report notes that India's energy transition holds potential for India to become a global champion for advancing renewable energy innovation and manufacturing. The report proposes an energy transition investment pipeline and identifies enablers for advancing supply chain resilience. Read the report [here](#).

Launch of a Platform to Track Energy Transition Investments

The event also saw the release of “Energy Transition Investment Monitor”, a collaborative analytics platform for global investors to identify and track energy transition investments (announced, under bidding, permitting, construction, etc.) from concept to commissioning.



The Energy Transition Investment Monitor platform can be accessed [here](#). Upon registration, any user can get full and free access to the dashboard and its features.

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PIB DELHI | Alok / Dheep

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NIPAH OUTBREAK

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 17, 2023 07:45 pm | Updated September 18, 2023 05:10 pm IST -
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Health workers at a Nipah isolation ward at the medical college in Kozhikode on September 17, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

A four-member Central team from the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), Government of India, will carry out field investigations in Kozhikode district from Monday to Wednesday in view of the [Nipah virus outbreak](#).

(For top health news of the day, [subscribe](#) to our newsletter *Health Matters*)

The team, which is expected to arrive on Sunday night, consists of H.R. Khanna, Joint Commissioner (National Livestock Mission), Vijay Kumar Teotia, Joint Commissioner (Livestock Health), and one expert each from the ICAR-National Institute of High Security Diseases, Bhopal, and the Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, Bengaluru.

Nipah is a [zoonotic disease](#) affecting both humans and animals.

The DAHD has directed the team to submit daily reports and advise the Animal Husbandry department on measures for disease prevention keeping in mind the 'One Health' approach.

The Central team will be joined by a team from the State Institute for Animal Diseases (SIAD), Palode.

This team will consist of Sheela Saly T. George, Chief Disease Investigation Officer; Nandakumar, Disease Investigation Officer; and veterinary surgeons. The SIAD team has also requested experts from the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) and the State Forest department to be part of the team.

Last week, the State Animal Husbandry department had stepped up surveillance in the livestock sector in view of the Nipah outbreak in Kozhikode district.

The department had also issued a set of guidelines for farmers and the public.

In pigs, for instance, the disease affects the respiratory system and the nervous system. Chronic cough is a major symptom in pigs. Steps were taken to identify pig farms near the epicentre of the outbreak and put them under surveillance for symptoms.

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[Nipah Virus / Kerala](#)

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INDIA IS AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN ITS HEALTH-CARE JOURNEY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 18, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 05:09 pm IST

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'While India is already one of the leading destinations for patients seeking care abroad, there is adequate headroom for growth' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

In the last few years, India has steadily become a strong voice for various critical issues. Whether it is climate change, electrification, new age manufacturing or the space race, India is at the forefront and even leading the change. This has never been more apparent recently when India became the first country to successfully land a mission near the south pole of the moon and concluded a very successful G-20 presidency, fostering global alignment on a range of key issues.

It is heartening to witness a new India emerging — an India that is ambitious; an India that believes in its destiny to be the global leader; an India that is guided by the heritage of an ancient civilisation but fuelled by the energy, passion and ambition of its youth.

However, this is also the same India that is now the world's diabetes capital; also, millions have hypertension, and its youth are succumbing to heart attacks, cancer, respiratory issues, depression and more.

(For top health news of the day, [subscribe](#) to our newsletter Health Matters)

If left unchecked, India's non-communicable diseases (NCD) burden will be nearly \$4 trillion by 2030. This is one of the biggest roadblocks to India's development and will create an 'age tax' on India's demographic dividend. We must act together, and with urgency to prevent this or else India's decade could turn into a generation of lost opportunity.

I urge the health-care industry to join hands and protect India from this menace by increasing awareness, advocating better lifestyle choices and enabling comprehensive health checks that include proper scans instead of having just blood tests that are simply inadequate to test for many early signs of diseases.

The country has come a long way from 1983 when we started Apollo, and has made tremendous progress on key health metrics. Infant mortality has improved by four times, maternal mortality has improved by seven times and the average life expectancy of an Indian is up nearly 30% from 55 years to over 70 now.

In fact, today, India has world-class health-care infrastructure along with incredible clinical talent that delivers the best in class clinical outcomes at incredible scale and at a fraction of the global price. India's expertise in highly specialised areas such as organ transplants, cardiology, oncology and more has made the country a fast-growing destination for medical value travel (MVT), not just for the price but also for the speed of access and the sheer quality of care.

India has emerged as a global MVT hub, particularly in the fields of oncology, orthopaedics, and robotic surgery. A significant milestone in this journey is the introduction of proton beam therapy technology, making India a regional leader in cancer treatment. Patients from across the globe are drawn to India for its world-class medical expertise, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and cost-effective care.

Orthopaedic procedures, including joint replacements and spinal surgeries, are conducted by highly skilled surgeons using minimally invasive techniques. This attracts patients seeking top-notch orthopaedic care at competitive prices.

Robotic surgery has also gained popularity, with India's hospitals adopting robotic-assisted techniques for precision and faster recovery. The country's expertise in this area draws international patients seeking minimally invasive, high-precision surgical interventions.

MVT is gaining strategic importance given its ability to create employment as well as earn foreign exchange. While India is already one of the leading destinations for patients seeking care abroad, there is adequate headroom for growth.

Moreover, fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors is crucial for realising this vision. Public-private partnerships can help create a conducive environment for MVT by jointly investing in infrastructure, promoting medical tourism, and setting up international health-care accreditation bodies.

'India's expertise in highly specialised areas has made the country a fast-growing destination for medical value travel' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming health care worldwide, and India has the potential to be at the forefront of this revolution. The country possesses a vast pool of talented data scientists, engineers, and health-care professionals who can drive innovation in AI-driven health-care solutions.

One of the key areas where AI can make a significant impact is in diagnostics. AI-powered tools can enhance the accuracy and efficiency of medical diagnoses, leading to faster treatment decisions and better patient outcomes. Additionally, AI can help predict disease outbreaks, analyse health-care data, and optimise treatment plans, expediting health-care procedures, and revolutionising drug discovery ultimately making health care more personalised and effective.

India has already made strides in AI applications for health care, but it must continue to invest in research and development, foster collaborations between academia and industry, and create an ecosystem that encourages innovation. Doing so can position India as a global leader in AI-driven health-care solutions, exporting its expertise to benefit health-care systems worldwide. AI expenditure in India is expected to reach \$11.78 billion by 2025. It is expected to add \$1 trillion to India's economy by 2035.

India stands at a pivotal moment in its health-care journey. By reimagining its health-care model, the country can position itself as the global destination for medical value travel, a powerhouse in AI-driven health-care solutions, and a leader in combating NCDs. To achieve this vision, India

must prioritise community health, foster public-private partnerships, and invest in innovation and research. With concerted efforts and a commitment to excellence, a healthier and more prosperous India can be built for generations to come.

Dr. Prathap C. Reddy is Founder and Chairman, Apollo

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PM EXPRESSES HAPPINESS ON SANTINIKETAN BEING INSCRIBED ON THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Relevant for: null | Topic: Miscellaneous Facts

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has expressed delight on Shantiniketan becoming part of UNESCO World Heritage List.

Shri Modi posted on X :

"Delighted that Santiniketan, an embodiment of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's vision and India's rich cultural heritage, has been inscribed on the @UNESCO World Heritage List. This is a proud moment for all Indians."

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DEADLY OUTBREAK

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 17, 2023 02:32 am | Updated September 18, 2023 05:10 pm IST

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The [Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala in 2018](#) was, in retrospect, the first true outbreak people had witnessed in living memory. For a population fed, on screen, with pacy narratives, dizzying tales of disease, horror and death, the 2018 Nipah virus (NiV) outbreak was a horrifying reel-to-real conversion. In the latest outbreak in Kozhikode, [six have tested positive](#) and [two died](#). NiV, with its periodic outbreaks in Kerala (fourth, now), has come to symbolise the fear and paralysis that encircle emerging diseases in modern times.

(For top health news of the day, [subscribe](#) to our newsletter Health Matters)

A zoonotic disease that jumped from animals to humans as a consequence of a 'zoonotic spillover', NiV underlines the fact that anthropogenic causes are driving the new pandemics of the world. As these diseases emerge with stunning regularity, with their power to disrupt life, and alter the social fabric, it is incumbent upon those who rule, and those who heal, to acknowledge the dramatically changing disease factors, and the need to address health care more holistically.

'Nipah' comes from the Malaysian village where the first such outbreak was reported in 1998. There were reportedly over 250 cases among farm and workers in slaughter houses. Sayantan Banerjee et al record in *Intractable Rare Disease Research*, in 2019, that initially encephalitis-like symptoms came to notice, but doctors soon discovered that apart from the neurological manifestations, there was acute respiratory distress syndrome and respiratory failure with multi-organ dysfunction syndrome. Slowly, the world learnt of this new strain of disease where the pathogen was a paramyxovirus, and the vectors included pigs and fruit bats. Since then, India has seen several outbreaks of NiV, mainly in Kerala (2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023), but also in Siliguri in 2001, and a relatively small outbreak in 2007 in Nadia, West Bengal.

The closest reservoirs of infection in Kerala are fruit bats, and it is believed that consumption of fruits or berries contaminated with bat spittle might have caused the outbreaks. In other areas — Bangladesh and West Bengal — the consumption of date palm sap, again contaminated by bats, was behind the outbreaks. As far as therapy goes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that currently there are no licensed treatments available for the NiV infection. Treatment is limited to supportive care, including rest, hydration and treatment of symptoms as they occur. A few doctors have reported that the anti-viral, Favipiravir, has some activity against NiV. The m102.4 monoclonal antibody is under development and evaluation.

It was when NiV hit Kozhikode district, in Kerala, in 2018, where 21 of 23 persons infected died, that the attention of not merely the health system, but also the public in general was willy nilly

drawn towards the virus. Notably, Kerala's handling of the outbreak also provided solid lessons for public health emergencies — isolating patients, contact tracing, quarantining, triaging, implementing infection control protocols, etc.

Human-to-human transmission turned out to be how Patient Zero — Mohammed Salih — of Perambra in Kozhikode contracted his infection. His brother had died just the previous week, and had had similar symptoms. Health care workers were also affected, even in the recent outbreak, so it can be transmitted via the nosocomial route too. The high mortality rates, along with the risk to health care workers and plausible multimodal transmission, emerged as causes for concern.

It is clear now that a piecemeal handling of the particular outbreak will not do. Larger factors are at play, and a more comprehensive approach towards health care itself is needed. Nations must be cognisant that anthropogenic activity, in terms of rapidly expanding agricultural fields, and destruction of the original habitats of wild animals, and overall pan-seasonal changes wrought by climate change are contributory factors. Increasingly, the One Health approach is being advocated. According to the WHO, 'One Health' is an integrated, unifying approach to balance and optimise the health of people, animals and the environment. It is key to prevent, predict, detect and respond to health threats.

Ideally, it involves mobilising multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at varying levels of society to work together to address root causes and create long-term, sustainable solutions. One Health involves the public health, veterinary, and environmental sectors, and is particularly relevant for control of zoonoses.

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XPert MTB/RIF MOLECULAR TEST FOR TUBERCULOSIS DIAGNOSIS TO COST 20% LESS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 20, 2023 02:50 am | Updated 02:50 am IST - CHENNAI

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Danaher Corporation will provide the cartridges at a reduced price to the Global Fund and to less-developed countries eligible for Cepheid's Global Access Programme. Representational file image. | Photo Credit: K. Murali Kumar

Danaher Corporation, which sells the Xpert MTB/RIF molecular test for diagnosing tuberculosis (TB) and rifampicin resistance, has announced a lowering of the price of its standard TB test cartridge to \$7.97, a 20% reduction from the current price of \$9.98 in low- and middle-income countries. The announcement comes in the wake of mounting international pressure to drop the price by 50%.

Danaher Corporation will provide the cartridges at a reduced price to the Global Fund and to less-developed countries eligible for Cepheid's Global Access Programme, according to a Danaher Corporation press release.

Danaher Corporation says that by cutting the price to about \$8, the company will be selling the test at cost and will not be earning any profit. In addition, the company also announced that it will bring in an "internationally accredited third-party" to validate the actual cost on an annual basis and adjust the price, if necessary. This arrangement has been made so that the company earns no profit from the sale of these cartridge.

"Dropping the price is indeed significant, but it is not applicable to Xpert MTB/XDR test that is used for diagnosing the most severe form of TB, which will remain at about \$15," Stijn Deborggraeve, Diagnostics Advisor, MSF Access Campaign, Geneva, told *The Hindu* over telephone.

Dr. Deborggraeve said the arrangement with an internationally accredited third-party to assess the actual cost of the test annually will mean that if the cost of the cartridges declines with increased volume, the price of the tests will drop further. "It is important that the third-party makes the cost of production of Xpert MTB/RIF molecular test public. The company should also drop the cost of other diagnostic tests for HIV, and Hepatitis C, and Hepatitis B," Dr. Deborggraeve said.

According to a Global Fund release, in 2022 alone, an estimated 20 million Xpert cartridges were procured, and the new agreement will enable over five million more tests to be provided,

thus significantly expanding access to communities that need it the most.

India uses both Cepheid's Xpert MTB/RIF and Truenat molecular tests; Truenat is produced locally by Molbio Diagnostics.

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LIBYA DAM COLLAPSE: ENGINEERING EXPERT RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT MANAGEMENT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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September 19, 2023 06:01 pm | Updated 06:21 pm IST

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Rescuers and relatives of victims set up tents in front of collapsed buildings in Derna, Libya, Monday, Sept. 18, 2023. Some 11,300 people died when two dams collapsed during Mediterranean storm Daniel last week sending a wall of water gushing through the city, according to the Red Crescent aid group. A further 10,000 people are missing, and presumed dead. | Photo Credit: AP

More than 11,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands are missing following the [catastrophic collapse](#) of two dams in the eastern Libyan city of Derna. The dam collapse came after an extreme storm, Storm Daniel, slammed into the north African country. The Conversation Africa's Moina Spooner asked water resources and engineering expert Nadhir Al-Ansari, who has researched the design and safety of dams, to provide insights into the disaster.

How does extreme weather affect the stability of dams?

Dams are usually built to withstand heavy rainfall or drought. The design and construction of a dam takes into consideration all possible effects. All factors, including the type of building materials, the design of the foundation and the stability of a dam, as well as expected floods and earthquakes and even military action, are taken into consideration when planning a dam.

Aside from how the dam is constructed, there should be safety provisions in place. For instance, in cases of storms, the engineers should release the water to ensure that a dam's maximum carrying capacity is not exceeded.

In the Libyan case, I believe that the management of the dams was not good. The engineer responsible for the dam should have made sure the water did not exceed the dam's upper carrying capacity. When he noticed that a huge volume of water was entering the reservoir he should have released large quantities of water to keep its level lower than the upper limit.

Research shows that the [main causes of dam failure](#) are foundation problems (40%), inadequate spillway (23%), poor construction (12%) and uneven settlement (10%). A site for a dam will not always be level because dams are built in mountain areas, but the designers must take that into consideration. The dam design must suit the topography. Among the rarer causes of dam failures are acts of war (3%), defective material (2%) and earthquakes (1%).

In Libya's case, bad management appears to have been the cause of the dam's collapse.

[Also Read | Libya investigates dams' collapse after flood killed over 11,000](#)

Could this tragedy have been avoided?

Yes, if the responsible people operating the dams had opened the gates to release water. When those responsible for the water management of the dam ignore heavy rainfall then one can expect such disasters to occur.

Dam managers should also know each dam's catchment area and how much rainfall is forecast. This requires coordination between meteorologists and the staff responsible for the management of dams. When heavy rainfall is expected, the meteorology department should inform dam managers who can then make arrangements for the release of water to keep it within the dam's operational limits. This is the usual practice in all the dams I've [studied in Iraq](#).

In this case, there must have been a breakdown in communication between meteorological department and engineers managing the dams.

[Infographics | Mapping Libya's flood damage](#)

How do engineers and authorities typically monitor the structural integrity of dams?

Dams should have a regular inspection programme that takes into consideration all parts of the dam. All [countries](#) with dams, whether in the US, Iraq or Sweden, have regular inspections. There should be instruments for monitoring cracks in a dam's walls and any changes in its structure. Once identified, they must be attended to immediately.

In Libya's case, if they had opened the sluice gates to keep water within the dam's carrying capacity, the collapse of the dams would have caused less damage.

[Also Read | Libya's flood-ravaged Derna struggles to cope with thousands of corpses](#)

Are there emerging technologies or innovations to improve safety?

There are a number of models and techniques and each dam has its own model or technique that the designer suggests. Planning for extreme weather events is usually done at the design stage of the dam. The designer is meant to give a thorough report on the stability of the dam against various factors, including weather.

Different scenarios are given according to the water level in the reservoir of the dam to prevent dam failure. The government concerned should know what to do in case of dam failure, guided by the design information. For instance, in [my study](#) of Iraq's Mosul dam, which took place after the dam was constructed, I suggested that a protection dam be built downstream to secure the safety of the downstream area and its population. Safety steps can be taken even after construction of the dam.

The other safety measures relate to housing and other developments in areas downstream. In Libya's case, there was poor planning. The areas downstream from the dams should not have been used [for housing](#).

Ultimately, the dam failure in Libya could have been prevented, or at least the losses could have been minimised, if the engineers on site had released the water from the reservoir once the

storm started.

[Nadhir Al-Ansari](#), Professor, [Luleå University of Technology](#)

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Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

As the proceedings of the Parliament shifts to the new building on Tuesday, the Prime Minister announced the new name of the old parliament building which will be called "Samvidhan Sadan" (Constitution House). The old Parliament Building which was designed by British architects Sir Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker and was completed in 1927 witnessed some of the great moments in Indian history like the passing of India's constitution.

"I appeal to you, and I hope you will consider it after deliberation. Now that we are going there (the new parliament building), the glory of this house should never decline. We shouldn't just call it the 'old parliament'. I request, if both of you permit, that this building should be known as 'Samvidhan Sadan' so that it always serves as an inspiration for us. When we call it 'Samvidhan Sadan', the memories of those great people who once sat here in the Constituent Assembly get linked to it. We shouldn't let go of this opportunity to offer this gift to the coming generations," NDTV quoted PM Modi as saying.

PM Modi paid his tribute to "every brick" of the old Parliament building and said the [members of Parliament](#) will enter the new Parliament with new hope and confidence. The sources have revealed that the old Parliament building will be conserved as an archeological marvel of India.

PM Modi touched on several topics during his address on Monday from the [Lok Sabha elections](#), and [G20 summit](#) to the success of India's lunar mission to Chandrayaan-3. PM Modi also remembered the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and said, "Today when we are entering the new Parliament building, when the 'grih pravesh' of Parliamentary democracy is taking place, the witness to the first rays of Independence and that which will inspire generations to come - the holy Sengol - that which was touched by India's first Prime Minister Pt Nehru...That is why, this Sengol connects us to a very important past..."

"Chandrayaan-3's skyrocketing success fills every countryman with pride. Under India's presidency, the extraordinary organizing of G20 became an occasion to make unique achievements like getting the global desired impact. In the light of this, the symbol of modern India and ancient democracy - proceedings in the new Parliament building begins today," PM Modi added.

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ICMR NOD TO CONDUCT TRUENAT TEST TO DETECT NIPAH

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 20, 2023 09:02 pm | Updated September 21, 2023 02:27 am IST -
Thiruvananthapuram

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A teacher conducts an online class at a school in Kozhikode on Tuesday after local authorities closed all educational institutions in the district following an outbreak of Nipah. | Photo Credit: -

Kerala has been accorded sanction by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) to use Truenat test to diagnose Nipah. Hospitals with BSL 2 level labs can perform the test. The standard operating procedure for the same will be prepared, Health Minister Veena George has said.

This means that NiV diagnostics can be performed by more labs in the State. Samples found to be positive for NiV through Truenat can be sent to the labs in Kozhikode or Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospitals or to Institute of Advanced Virology in the capital, she said, while addressing the media here on Wednesday.

The State was able to contain Nipah effectively and limit its spread because of the efficient work done by the Kozhikode district surveillance team right from beginning to identify the index case in this outbreak, she said.

No new cases of Nipah have been reported since. Four people who tested to be positive continue to be under treatment, including the nine-year-old who happens to be the child of the deceased index case. The child's condition has improved further and he is no longer on oxygen support. The other three people are also making a good recovery, Ms. George said.

Of the 323 samples tested for Nipah so far, 317 have been found to be negative. Till now, six cases have been found to be positive, including two deaths. A total of 980 persons on the contact list are under isolation now, including 11 who have been isolated at the Kozhikode MCH.

The Health department will conduct a serosurveillance study amongst those included in the high risk contacts to learn more about the disease epidemiology.

The State will focus on evolving a long-term surveillance strategy for Nipah. Already 81 samples had been tested this year after suspecting NiV. Nipah surveillance is part of the State's Aarogya Jagratha calendar and training has been given to healthcare workers as part of the Nipah protocol, she said.

Though the incubation period is 21 days, the State will observe another 21-day period when surveillance measures will be in full swing. The control room will thus function for 42 days. Measures are being taken to strengthen activities under One Health initiative, involving other related departments, she added.

Principal Secretary (Health), Mohammed Hanish, was also present at the press conference.

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LEGISLATING CHANGE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE PASSAGE OF THE WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL IN THE LOK SABHA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

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September 21, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 09:23 am IST

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The [passage of the women's reservation bill in the Lok Sabha](#) almost three decades after it was first tabled in Parliament is a welcome move that can finally shatter a political glass ceiling. With women Members of Parliament comprising only about 15% of the strength of the Lok Sabha, the gender inequality in political representation is stark and disturbing. The [128th Constitution Amendment Bill, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam](#), seeks to amend this by reserving a third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and legislative Assemblies for women. It has a 15-year sunset clause for the quota, that can be extended. Considering the fraught history of the struggle for women's reservation, and several false starts despite the Rajya Sabha passing it in 2010, it is laudatory that the first Bill to be introduced in the new Sansad Bhavan has been passed in the Lok Sabha. But its implementation will be delayed as it has been tied to two factors, delimitation and the Census, and therein lies the rub. It is unfortunate that implementation is being linked to delimitation, for the principle of having a third of seats reserved for women has nothing to do with the territorial limits of constituencies or the number of Assembly or Lok Sabha constituencies in each State.

Women will thus not have access to 33% reservation in the 2024 general election. The Bill also mandates that as nearly as one-third of the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be set aside for women. The Opposition is demanding an internal quota for women of Other Backward Classes, but this should not be used as a ruse to delay implementation. In the meantime, proposals should be fine tuned to ensure that when it becomes an Act, it is not mere tokenism for women's political representation. It is a fact that local bodies are better represented, with the share of women in panchayati raj institutions well above 50% in several States. Lessons must be imbibed on how women at the grassroots level have broken all sorts of barriers, from patriarchal mindsets at home to not being taken seriously in their official duties, and made a difference. Women struggle on so many other counts: they have uneven access to health, nutrition and education, there is a lack of safe places, women are also falling out of the workforce — among the G-20 countries, India's female labour force participation is the lowest at 24%. India, which gave women voting rights at the very outset, should not falter when it comes to ensuring better political representation for women. For growth, and instituting change in key areas, women need to have their say.

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UNION HOME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF COOPERATION, SHRI AMIT SHAH PARTICIPATES IN THE DISCUSSION ON NARI SHAKTI VANDAN ADHINIYAM IN THE LOK SABHA TODAY

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Shri Amit Shah participated in the discussion on Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam in the Lok Sabha today. Participating in the discussion, Shri Amit Shah said that 19 September, 2023 will be written in golden letters in the history of the Indian Parliament because on this day the new Parliament started functioning on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi and the long-pending bill providing the right to reservation for women was introduced in the House. He said that he would like to thank Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi from core of his heart that he has truly honoured the women power, which constitutes 50 percent of 140 crores population. Shri Shah said that with the passing of this constitutional amendment bill, one-third seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies will be reserved for women of the country. With the passing of this bill, the long continuing fight of women for their rights will end. He said that Prime Minister Shri Modi presented the concept of "Women-led Development" in front of the world in the recently held G-20 conference and with the passing of this bill, a new era will begin, because now the women of this country will not only become participants in policies but will also contribute in determining the policies.

Shri Amit Shah said that women empowerment may be a political agenda for some parties, but for the Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, women empowerment is an issue of recognition. He said that in 2014, after 30 years the people of the country decided to form a government with full majority under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Under the leadership of Prime Modi, women's safety, respect and participation have been the breath and soul of the government. Shri Shah said that when Shri Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of the country in 2014, there were 70 crore people in the country who did not have bank accounts in their homes. Shri Narendra Modi started Jan-Dhan Yojana and launched a campaign to open bank accounts, as a result of which 52 crore bank accounts were opened, out of which 70 percent bank accounts were opened in the name of women. He said that those people whose roots are connected to India will not make the mistake of calling women weak

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation said that today women empowerment has taken place in the country and the money from all the schemes is going directly into the bank accounts of women. He said that the opposition party ruled this country for more than 5 decades, there were 11 crore families in the country who did not have toilets. Slogans were raised to eliminate poverty, but

no arrangements were made for the poor. He said that when there is no toilet in the house, the young daughter, sister and mother suffer the most. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi provided 11.72 Crores toilets within the first 5 years, due to which mothers, sisters and daughters were empowered. He said that 10 crore families of the country were forced to live in smoke, but Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has empowered women by providing free LPG connections to 10 crore houses. The government led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi provided houses to more than 3 crore women in their names. Shri Shah said that there were 12 crore houses in the country where there was no drinking water, Shri Narendra Modi provided tap water to them. He added that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi provided 5 kg free food grains per person per month to 80 crore people of the country. Prime Minister Modi opened 3 crore 18 lakh SukanyaSamriddhi accounts, provided benefits to 3 crore women under MatruVandanYojana and provided approximately 26 weeks of maternity leave. Shri Shah said that today the number of women pilots worldwide is 5 percent whereas in India it is 15 percent, this is called empowerment.

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Minister said that women are more empowered than men and this bill will now ensure women's participation in decision and policy making. He said that the government led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has brought this bill to correct the errors in the social system, to increase the participation of women and to respect them. He said that today, we have an opportunity when this House can give a message to the world that the entire House is unanimous and united in fulfilling Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of "Women-led Development".

Shri Amit Shah said that four attempts have been made by previous governments to bring Women's Reservation Bill. He said that the Women's Reservation Bill was first brought by the government led by Shri H.D. Deve Gowda in 1996, after which it was given to a committee headed by Seema Mukherjee. The committee also gave its report but that bill never reached this House. He said that after this, the Government led by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee brought this bill in 1998, but the opposition did not allow it to be introduced in the House. Shri Shah said that the government led by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee once again brought the bill but again discussion could not take place. He said the government led by Dr. Manmohan Singh again brought the amendment bill in the Rajya Sabha, where after being passed, this bill could not come in the Lok Sabha.

Union Home Minister requested all the members to come together to unanimously work to amend the Constitution and provide reservation to the women power through this new beginning. He said as per the current provision, the Modi government has given 33 percent reservation to women in all three categories of members going to be elected to Parliament – General (which includes OBC), Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. He said that provision for women's reservation has been made through Article 330 (A) and Article 332 (A) under this constitutional amendment. Along with this, one-third seats have been reserved for

women by giving vertical reservation in all three categories. Shri Shah said that the Delimitation Commission is a legal provision of an important body that determines the election process of our country and it is done by appointment but there are quasi judicial proceedings. He said that it is headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court and it also has a representative of the Election Commission. Shri Shah said that the one-third seats to be reserved will be selected by the Delimitation Commission. The commission goes to every state and gives open hearings and decides the policy in a transparent manner. He said that the only objective behind bringing Delimitation Commission is to bring transparency. He added that there will be no delay in the formation of this commission, after the elections both census and delimitation will be done and soon the day will come when one-third of the women MPs will sit in this House and decide the future of the country.

Shri Amit Shah said that the Prime Minister of the country, Shri Narendra Modi has done the work of welfare of the backward class wholeheartedly. He said that in his first speech in 2014, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had said that his government is the government of Dalits, Backward Classes, Tribals and women. Today, after providing houses, toilets, electricity, water, medicines, gas cylinders and food grains to 80 crore poor people of the country, Narendra Modi government has brought 33 percent reservation for women. He said that the opposition parties never made an OBC Prime Minister. Union Home Minister requested everyone to rise above party politics and support this bill.

RK/AY/ASH/AKS/AS

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MINISTER RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR LEADS CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS ON DPDP ACT COMPLIANCE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar, participated in the first Digital India Dialogue discussions on the recently enacted Digital Personal Data Protection Act in New Delhi on Wednesday. These discussions were held with key industry stakeholders on the transition time needed for specific clauses of the law and to seek specific inputs on the implementation.

During this session, the minister recounted the journey behind the creation of the historic legislation, detailing its evolution from inception to its current status as enacted law. Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar elaborated on how this law integrates into a broader mission aligned with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision. This vision aims to establish contemporary and relevant laws tailored to Indian requirements along with platform obligations.

Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said, "Over the next 30 days, there will be necessary rules prescribed for the Act. We will also work on forming the Data Protection Board in the upcoming month. Some businesses like startups and MSMEs and establishments like hospitals that handle people's data might get more time to adhere to these rules. This is because they may not have as much experience in handling data as bigger data fiduciaries do. So, they can ask for more time to learn and follow the rules. If anyone breaks these rules, the Data Protection Board will handle it and make decisions. But they will only start doing this when they are fully ready for adjudication."

The session was attended by a diverse range of stakeholders of the technology ecosystem including industry associations, startups, IT professionals, think tanks and lawyers. Around 100+ stakeholders attended the consultation.

The Minister reiterated the primary purpose of this law which is to guarantee the trust and safety of all digital nagriks, emphasizing that all data fiduciaries must adhere to the law. He further assured that the Government is open to considering valid arguments for extending the compliance period when accompanied by compelling reasons.

"Companies that already follow similar rules like that of the GDPR (EU's General Data Protection Regulation) shouldn't ask for a very long time to follow these new rules. We are now in the phase of implementing these rules, and it should happen smoothly and quickly. The goal is to create a culture of trust, a behavioural change among all who deal with personal data and create the change required to make them do it responsibly and in alignment with the trust that the data principle has agreed to. This is a deterrent act, it is supposed to create good behaviour," the Minister added while answering questions.

These consultations are in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's consultative approach to law and policy making. This is the first time that Consultations are taking place on the Implementation and rule structures of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023.

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SALIENT FEATURES AND GUIDELINES OF PM VISHWAKARMA SCHEME

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

PM Vishwakarma, a Central Sector Scheme, was launched on 17th September, 2023 by the Prime Minister to provide end-to-end support to artisans and craftspeople who work with their hands and tools. The Scheme covers artisans and craftspeople engaged in 18 trades, viz. (i) Carpenter (Suthar/Badhai); (ii) Boat Maker; (iii) Armourer; (iv) Blacksmith (Lohar); (v) Hammer and Tool Kit Maker; (vi) Locksmith; (vii) Goldsmith (Sonar); (viii) Potter (Kumhaar); (ix) Sculptor (Moortikar, stone carver), Stone breaker; (x) Cobbler (Charmkar)/ Shoemaker/Footwear artisan; (xi) Mason (Rajmistri); (xii) Basket/Mat/Broom Maker/Coir Weaver; (xiii) Doll & Toy Maker (Traditional); (xiv) Barber (Naai); (xv) Garland maker (Malakaar); (xvi) Washerman (Dhobi); (xvii) Tailor (Darzi); and (xviii) Fishing Net Maker.

The Scheme envisages provisioning of the following benefits to the artisans and crafts persons:

- (i) **Recognition:** Recognition of artisans and craftspeople through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card.
- (ii) **Skill Upgradation:** Basic Training of 5-7 days and Advanced Training of 15 days or more, with a stipend of Rs. 500 per day;
- (iii) **Toolkit Incentive:** A toolkit incentive of upto Rs. 15,000 in the form of e-vouchers at the beginning of Basic Skill Training.
- (iv) **Credit Support:** Collateral free 'Enterprise Development Loans' of upto Rs. 3 lakh in two tranches of Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 2 lakh with tenures of 18 months and 30 months, respectively, at a concessional rate of interest fixed at 5%, with Government of India subvention to the extent of 8%. Beneficiaries who have completed Basic Training will be eligible to avail the first tranche of credit support of upto Rs. 1 lakh. The second loan tranche will be available to beneficiaries who have availed the 1st tranche and maintained a standard loan account and have adopted digital transactions in their business or have undergone Advanced Training.
- (v) **Incentive for Digital Transaction:** An amount of Re. 1 per digital transaction, upto maximum 100 transactions monthly will be credited to the beneficiary's account for each digital pay-out or receipt.
- (vi) **Marketing Support:** Marketing support will be provided to the artisans and craftspeople in the form of quality certification, branding, onboarding on e-commerce platforms such as GeM, advertising, publicity and other marketing activities to improve linkage to value chain.

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits, the Scheme will onboard the beneficiaries on Udyam Assist Platform as 'entrepreneurs' in the formal MSME ecosystem.

Enrolment of beneficiaries shall be done through Common Service Centres with Aadhaar-based

biometric authentication on PM Vishwakarma portal. The enrolment of beneficiaries will be followed by a three-step verification which will include (i) Verification at Gram Panchayat/ ULB level, (ii) Vetting and Recommendation by the District Implementation Committee (iii) Approval by the Screening Committee.

For more information, the Guidelines of PM Vishwakarma can be accessed at pmvishwakarma.gov.in. For any queries, artisans and craftspeople may call at 18002677777 or email at pm-vishwakarma@dcmsme.gov.in.

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THE CHALLENGES IN TESTING AND TREATMENT OF RARE DISEASES

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The Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Bengaluru. | Photo Credit: file photo

Vinutha M. is a 23-year-old pharmacy student in the nondescript town of Nelamangala, about 30 kilometres northwest of Bengaluru. The life of this frail woman is a story of indomitable courage, resounding resilience, and unwavering determination not to be cowed down by a rare genetic disease that modern medicine has yet to find a cure for.

When she was nine, Vinutha's parents noticed that some of the worrying symptoms she always had — poor appetite and an intolerance for solid food — were worsening. "All through her childhood, we fed her just milk. She had a skinny body but a huge abdomen. In high school, she was embarrassed to attend class with a huge abdomen. The only consolation was that she had no neurological impairment," recalls her mother, Kalpana Murugesu.

Vinutha M. who is under treatment for Gaucher Disease.

They visited multiple hospitals and were even directed to the Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology for a bone marrow test to rule out leukaemia. In 2011, doctors concluded that she had Wilson's Disease, a rare disorder that causes copper to accumulate in the liver, brain, and other vital organs. She was put on treatment for over two years. However, her condition did not show improvement.

After many more hospital visits and genetic tests, Vinutha was finally diagnosed with Gaucher Disease at the State-run Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH), Bengaluru, in 2016. Noting that she had spleen and liver enlargement, doctors advised a splenectomy, and she underwent the surgery the same year. "Doctors told us that her spleen weighed 3 kg after removal," her mother says, narrating the financial and mental agony the family went through.

Karnataka is regarded as a model State for the treatment of rare disease patients in India. Last week, the State enrolled its 100th patient for treatment at one of India's 11 Centres of Excellence for Rare Diseases (Centre for Human Genetics and IGICH, genetic testing and treatment institutions): Brithi, 6, who was diagnosed with Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) at the age of two and a half. According to a senior official in the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Centre is planning to organise video conferences to facilitate sharing Karnataka's best practices with other CoERDs.

Sanjeeva G.N., professor of Pediatrics at Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health and nodal officer of Centre of Excellence for Rare Diseases.

“Genetic testing has been offered free to all patients at IGICH for the last 15 years. Karnataka was the first State to initiate treatment of rare diseases in 2016, even when there was no policy in place,” says Dr. Sanjeeva G.N., professor of Paediatrics at IGICH and CoERD nodal officer. Since then, the Karnataka government has spent 60 crore on the treatment of 50 patients, he adds. Besides, it has also been supporting those with Primary Immune Deficiency. “In the last one and half decades, nearly 40,000 families have been diagnosed and counselled at this CoERD in Bengaluru,” the doctor says.

In March 2021, the Union Health Ministry came out with the National Rare Disease Policy. Although Vinutha was put on enzyme replacement therapy at the IGICH in 2016 with the help of State funds, her hope of a sustainable treatment was rekindled.

The policy was amended in May 2022, and the one-time monetary aid of 20 lakh per patient, announced for only Group 1 patients (who need one-time treatment), was revised to one-time assistance of 50 lakh per patient for all groups of rare diseases. While Group 2 diseases can be managed through dietary supplements, Group 3 diseases — like the one Vinutha has — have approved therapy and clinical evidence of patients leading quality lives post-therapy. Treatment is lifelong for this category.

A file photo of children engaged in fun games during the International MPS (Mucopolysaccharidosis) Day at Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health Hospital in Bengaluru.

This amendment was made after the Supreme Court dismissed a Special Leave Petition filed by the Central government in September 2021, seeking to quash a Karnataka High Court order. In its April 23, 2021, order, the Karnataka High Court had directed the Central and State governments to provide IGICH 3 crore and 2 crore, respectively, to continue the treatment of 25 rare disease patients in Karnataka.

The funds under the policy were released to the country’s CoERDs in February 2023. Vinutha’s treatment continued with these funds from the Centre since March, but it was abruptly stopped in May, as the 50 lakh grant sanctioned for her treatment was exhausted.

She is not alone. In Karnataka, treatment has stopped for five other Group 3 patients at IGICH — Revathi B., Rachita G., Aishwarya S., and two others who did not want their names revealed — as their grant has been exhausted. However, “Of the six patients, we have restarted treatment for two with State funds and hope to soon resume for the rest,” says Dr. Sanjeeva.

The diseases in Group 3 are Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSDs) that are severe, chronic, debilitating, and fatal. They include Gaucher, Pompe, Fabry, and Mucopolysaccharidosis type I (MPS I, also known as Hurler syndrome) and MPS II (also known as Hunter syndrome).

As these conditions often require long-term, specialised treatment and chronic management, they leave a catastrophic impact on the entire family, physically, emotionally, and monetarily. This group of rare diseases particularly impacts children, causing 35% of deaths before one year, 10% between the ages of one and five years, and 12% between five and 15 years.

The State government is working at multiple levels, talking to stakeholders about making treatment for rare diseases more affordable, doctors said.

“My last IV infusion was on May 6, and until last week, my treatment had stopped. I needed 19

vials a month, and my parents couldn't afford the treatment. Last week, doctors at IGICH were kind enough to arrange for an infusion with seven vials. I was told it was through the Karnataka government funds," says Vinutha, who has continued her studies through all this and is now pursuing a master's degree in Pharmacy.

"At this point, all we are asking is continuity of treatment for my daughter. We do not know what will happen to her after our death," her distraught mother says.

However, sustaining the life-long treatment of rare disease patients — especially in Group 3 — remains challenging. Hidden from the spotlight of mainstream medical attention, they grapple with some extraordinary challenges, as Rachita's case illustrates.

Diagnosed with Gaucher, this 21-year-old daughter of a farmer couple — Lokanath and Tanuja — from Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, has a hearing impairment apart from a cardiac issue. Due to her health condition, she was never sent to school. Her uncle, Madhusudan, her local guardian in Bengaluru, brought her to IGICH and her treatment started under the Centre's 50 lakh grant in March.

"She has hardly got seven enzyme replacement therapy infusion cycles, with seven vials in each cycle. Her monthly infusion of two cycles was split and given in June and July, with three vials in each cycle. She had just adjusted to the therapy and had shown slight improvement when her funds were exhausted. Doctors told us she cannot be treated with funds from the Karnataka government as she is from a neighbouring State. We do not know what to do," Madhusudan says.

A file photo of participants of Race for 7, an awareness campaign regarding rare genetic diseases in Bengaluru. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Pointing out that the treatment cost is very high and variable, based on the individual disorder and body weight of the patient, Dr. Sanjeeva cites the example of Gaucher. "The annual treatment cost for a child weighing 10 kg with Gaucher would be approximately 28 lakh (as per current price). The cost escalates as the child grows. Decreasing the dosage after clinical and lab stabilisation is possible, especially in Gaucher disease. This helps in sustaining the treatment for these patients."

He says while the government is putting in immense efforts, much more needs to be done to establish a sustainable funding mechanism. "We urge philanthropists and corporate companies to come forward and donate to this cause. They can use their CSR funds and adopt a patient with a rare disease," Dr. Sanjeeva suggested.

As the primary problem is the high cost of the therapy, the Union Ministry is exploring various low-cost alternatives. The government is working at multiple levels, talking to stakeholders about making treatment for rare diseases more affordable. "This will create a robust and sustainable mechanism to ensure that treatment is continued and patients have a hope of a healthy and near-normal life," he says.

Meenakshi Bhat, Associate Director at the Centre of Human Genetics that is working along with Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health for diagnosis of rare diseases.

A top official from the Union Health Ministry, who did want to be quoted, says discussions are on to convert the National Policy on Rare Diseases into a programme. He says such a move is essential to institutionalise the treatment of rare diseases under an exclusive programme.

Meenakshi Bhat, associate director at the Centre of Human Genetics, agrees on sustainable funding that ensures continued treatment. She says Karnataka has led the way in the treatment of rare diseases. “The State government was the first in the country to fund therapy for rare diseases in 2016, making way for positive developments here since. However, it is critical that these initiatives are maintained and further expanded to support affordable genetic diagnosis, help in early identification by newborn screening and prenatal diagnosis programmes,” she points out, adding that working together is important.

Meanwhile, patient advocacy groups are unhappy over the non-utilisation of the Centre’s funds released to some of the designated CoERDs to provide diagnosis and treatment.

L. Hanumanthaiah, Congress MP from Karnataka, who has been consistently raising the issue in the Rajya Sabha, wrote to the Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on August 7 this year, expressing grave concern over the inordinate delay by several CoERDs to start treatment of rare disease patients. The letter, signed by 20 like-minded MPs, also brought to the Minister’s notice the lack of sustainable funding support for rare diseases.

“The languid pace displayed by a majority of the Centres of Excellence for Rare Diseases (CoERDs) has caused immense anxiety to several hundred patients and their families, to the extent that some have now stopped following up with their CoERDs, while many others said they are left with no option but to wait for the inevitable,” he says in the letter.

“The Ministry has disbursed close to 72 crore to 11 CoERDs since October 2022. However, only 33 patients belonging to Group 3 (a) have been put on treatment, while the total number of patients registered on the [Centre’s] crowdfunding portal [rarediseases.mohfw.gov.in] is 912. As per reports coming in from patients of several States, the situation at several CoERDs continues to be poor, with no urgency being shown and not a single Group 3 patient having benefited so far from the funding support,” the letter says.

It says that approximately 20 children are reported to have lost their lives in the last few months awaiting treatment support.

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THE SILENT KILLER: TACKLING HYPERTENSION IN INDIA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 21, 2023 10:55 pm | Updated 10:55 pm IST

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Adherence to your medication schedule is an important factor in controlling hypertension. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is often called the “silent killer” because it often goes unnoticed until it triggers severe health complications such as strokes, heart attacks, kidney damage, and heart failure. According to medical standards, the reading on a doctor’s BP monitor going above 140/90 accounts for hypertension. The World Health Organization (WHO) released its first-ever report on the global impact of hypertension this Tuesday, highlighting the devastating consequences of this widespread, yet often neglected condition.

The WHO report reveals that hypertension affects one in three adults worldwide, making it a significant global health concern. It is a condition that knows no boundaries, affecting people across age groups and geographical regions. The number of people living with hypertension has doubled from 650 million in 1990 to a staggering 1.3 billion in 2019, with nearly half of these individuals unaware of their condition.

According to the WHO report, nearly four out of five people with hypertension are inadequately treated. However, scaling up coverage could avert 76 million deaths between 2023 and 2050. The report reveals a doubling of hypertension cases from 1990 to 2019, with over three-quarters of affected adults residing in low- and middle-income countries.

“Diagnosing and treating hypertension is the simplest and most basic care even a nurse could give in the absence of a doctor at a primary health care facility, and there is no excuse for any country failing to scale this up,” said Bente Mikkelsen, Director of Noncommunicable Diseases, WHO, in an online press conference on Tuesday during the release of the report.

Recent research on hypertension in India paints a similar picture. A recent systematic review published in *The Lancet Regional Health, Southeast Asia* and a community study published in *Cureus* highlights the growing prevalence of hypertension in the country, particularly among younger adults and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The research papers emphasise that a significant portion of hypertensive individuals in India remain undiagnosed. The lack of awareness about the condition and limited access to healthcare services are critical factors in this trend.

The systematic review examined how well hypertension, or high blood pressure, is managed in India from 2001 to 2020. They found that only about 22.5% of people with high blood pressure had it under control in the most recent period from 2016 to 2020. The Cureus study showed that the number of people with high blood pressure in India increased from 20.4% to 22.8%, especially among those aged 15-49. While more cases are being found through screening, many people (around 58%) with high blood pressure do not know they have it, especially men, those with less education and money, tribal communities, and people living in rural areas. Even when people know they have high blood pressure, six out of ten do not start treatment, so there is a need for interventions to change their health-seeking behaviour.

“The WHO report accurately reflects on hypertension as a public health problem, a significant issue in India,” said Saurav Basu, Assistant Professor, Public Health Foundation of India, and author of the Cureus study. Through their extensive community surveys, such as the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) surveys, researchers such as Dr. Basu have also found what WHO has reported. “We know that many people in India with high blood pressure don’t know they have it, and even when they do, they often don’t receive proper treatment, leading to poorly managed high blood pressure,” he added.

The WHO report underscores the role of modifiable risk factors in hypertension. Unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as a high-salt diet, lack of physical activity, and excessive alcohol consumption, increase hypertension risk. This echoes the findings of the Indian research, which also highlights the impact of lifestyle factors on hypertension prevalence. Sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary choices, and high stress levels contribute to the rising incidence of hypertension in India.

The treatment gaps identified in the WHO report and the Indian studies have dire consequences, as uncontrolled hypertension can lead to life-threatening conditions. The WHO report emphasises the importance of lifestyle changes in lowering blood pressure, such as adopting a healthier diet, quitting tobacco, and increasing physical activity. It also highlights the role of affordable, widely available medications in effectively managing hypertension.

“There have been studies several years ago that showed that the average blood pressures across countries were tightly linked to the salt intake,” said Tom Frieden, CEO of Resolve To Save Lives, a US-based NGO advocating cardiovascular disease prevention. “What we now see in some countries is that as the food gets healthier, we also see a big increase in the rate of hypertension – so what we need here is not just access to care but also promotion of healthier lifestyle to curb NCDs,” he said during the press briefing.

The Indian research papers complement these perspectives by stressing the need for improved hypertension control strategies. They reveal that despite awareness of their hypertension diagnosis, a significant portion of patients in India do not initiate antihypertensive treatment. This indicates challenges in treatment-seeking behaviour and the need for educational and behavioural interventions. Despite a significant four-fold improvement in control rates over two decades, the rising prevalence of hypertension, especially among the poor and young adults, necessitates reevaluating national strategies. According to the WHO report, regional disparities are evident among different countries. However, WHO and Dr Frieden believe India does well.

“The government of India follows WHO’s guidelines in remarkably expanding the heart care programs throughout the country among the health and wellness centres under community control,” Dr Frieden said. However, the Cureus study identifies regional disparities within India. For instance, southern States such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu show better control rates than the western and north/northeastern - States in India.

Moreover, medication adherence is crucial for control. However, issues like forgetfulness in the elderly to take medication, medication availability, and affordability pose barriers. Limited research exists on lifestyle and risk factors, with social determinants such as education and caste systems playing a role. This calls for better data collection and evidence-based policies to address uncontrolled hypertension in India.

“Managing cases of high blood pressure that don’t respond well to treatment, especially when doctors hesitate to take action in primary care settings, is also a problem,” Dr Basu said.. “Additionally, ensuring that people take their medications over the long term and close monitoring of complications related to high blood pressure, especially in those with diabetes, are major challenges in India.” Consequently, the National Programme for Noncommunicable Diseases aims to provide proper care for 70 million people with high blood pressure in India, and its work amid the WHO report release is crucial, according to Dr Basu.

The economic aspect of hypertension management is a vital focus area of the WHO report. It underscores that prevention, early detection, and effective management of hypertension are among the most cost-effective interventions. “The economic benefits of improved hypertension treatment programmes far outweigh the costs,” said Dr. Mikkelsen. This is a crucial point for India, where healthcare accessibility and affordability are significant concerns for people experiencing poverty.

(Vijay Shankar Balakrishnan is a freelance journalist based in Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Germany.)

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'NADI UTSAV' THREE-DAY FESTIVAL ON RIVERINE CULTURE WILL COMMENCE AT IGNCA NEW DELHI FROM 22ND TO 24TH SEPTEMBER

Relevant for: null | Topic: Miscellaneous Facts

The fourth 'Nadi Utsav' is being organized by the National Mission on Cultural Mapping (NMCM) of IGNCA and the Janapada Sampada Division, scheduled from September 22nd to September 24th, 2023. This year's 'Nadi Utsav' will be hosted in Delhi situated on the banks of River Yamuna. The three-day event will include a variety of events, including scholarly discussions with environmentalists and scholars on various subjects, screening of films, presentations by eminent artists, puppet shows, and discussions on various books.



Rivers have a very important place in Indian culture. In our country, rivers are not only considered sacred and revered, but are also the basis of material life for millions of Indians. Civilizations have developed along the banks of rivers. Countless cities, villages and towns of India are situated on the banks of rivers, they are identified with rivers. Indian society has always held rivers in the highest regard, considering them an integral part of our culture. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), an institution dedicated to art and culture, under the Ministry of Culture has been organizing the 'Nadi Utsav' on a grand scale for the last few years.



This noble initiative was conceived by Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi to create awareness and sensitize people about their ecology and environment. The 'Nadi Utsav' commenced in 2018, with its inaugural event held in Nashik (Maharashtra) city situated on the banks of River Godavri. The second 'Nadi Utsav' took place in Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh) city situated on the banks of river Krishna, and the third in Munger (Bihar) city situated on the banks of river Ganga.

The chief guest of fourth 'Nadi Utsav' will be Hon'ble Justice Prakash Shrivastava, Chairperson of the National Green Tribunal, the guest of honour will be the famous philosopher and scholar Acharya Shrivatsa Goswami and the head and spiritual guru of Parmarth Niketan, Swami Chidanand Saraswati and the special guest will be renowned environmentalist Padma Bhushan Dr. Anil Prakash Joshi. The chief patron of the program will be IGNCA President Padmashree Ram Bahadur Rai and Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary, IGNCA.

This three-day event will begin on September 22 at 10.30 am at Umang Conference Hall, IGNCA. In the 'Nadi Utsav' event, discussion sessions will be organized on many topics including mention of rivers in ancient texts, cultural heritage along the rivers, and rivers in folk and cultural traditions. 18 films will also be screened in these three days, out of which 6 films have been produced by IGNCA. As part of the puppet show, 'The Yamuna Gatha' will be performed by Puran Bhat.

'Nadi Utsav' is an attempt to document riverine culture, its tradition, rituals and water wisdom. The national seminar will have five academic sessions in which senior scholars will participate in round table conference. He said that in the race of modernity, we have forgotten to thank our rivers and this is an opportunity to do so now. This event is an initiative to remember the connection with rivers. A book fair will also be organized during the three-day event, in which various publishing houses will bring their books related to rivers and environment. There is also a plan to award five of the 18 documentary films that will be shown at the event. Filmmakers from almost all the states of India had sent films for the Documentary Film Festival, out of which 12 were selected for screening. They were selected by a five-member jury. These include films from North-East India, South India, Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan etc. A discussion session will also be organized after every film, in which the film's director will also participate. The

screening will begin with the film 'Mahanadi'. This 60-minute film has been directed by Jubanashwa Mishra.

'Nadi Utsav' will have three types of exhibitions. The 'Sanjhi' exhibition will be based on 16 Ghats of the country. Apart from this, a photography exhibition related to river civilization and an exhibition of paintings made on rivers by school children of Delhi will also be organized. These paintings will reflect what school children think about rivers.

Apart from this, cultural programs include singing by famous folk singer Chandan Tiwari of Bihar and other performances by Ms. Shweta Devendra and her team from Bhopal along with Narmada Stuti and Dashavataram.

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KERALA NIPAH VIRUS OUTBREAK: WHAT ARE MONOCLONAL ANTIBODIES?

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A health worker coming out from the Isolation ward where patients under observation for Nipah are accommodated at the Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode on Tuesday. | Photo Credit: The Hindu/K Ragesh

The story so far: Last week, India reached out to Australia to procure monoclonal antibody doses to combat the Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala. India is expecting 20 more doses soon, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) head Dr. Rajiv Bahl said on Friday.

The virus has killed two people so far and has infected at least five others in the Kozhikode district. The current [Nipah outbreak](#) is Kerala's fourth since 2018.

India currently has the antibody doses available for ten persons only. Addressing the press, Dr. Bahl said that no one in the country has been administered the dosage so far since it needs to be given at an early stage of infection.

Monoclonal antibodies are laboratory-made proteins that mimic the behaviour of antibodies produced by the immune system to protect against diseases and foreign substances.

An antibody attaches itself to an antigen – a foreign substance, usually a disease-causing molecule – and helps the immune system eliminate it from the body.

Monoclonal antibodies are specifically designed to target certain antigens.

Niels K. Jerne, Georges J.F. Köhler and César Milstein were awarded the medicine Nobel Prize in 1984 for their work on the “the principle for production of monoclonal antibodies”.

According to research published in The Lancet journal of Infectious Diseases, m102.4 is a “potent, fully human” monoclonal antibody that neutralises Hendra and Nipah viruses, both outside and inside of living organisms. The antibody has passed phase-one clinical trials — which means that researchers tested it with a relatively small number of people to estimate the right dose of treatment that also doesn't cause side effects.

As of now, the drug is used on a ‘compassionate use’ basis — a treatment option that allows the use of an unauthorised medicine under strict conditions among people where no other

alternative and/or satisfactory authorised treatment is known to be possible and where patients cannot enter clinical trials for various reasons.

The m102.4 monoclonal antibody was first developed by Dr. Christopher Broder and his team at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) in Bethesda, Maryland, with help from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Monoclonal antibodies are specifically engineered and generated to target a disease. They are meant to attach themselves to the specific disease-causing antigen. An antigen is most likely to be a protein.

For instance, most successful monoclonal antibodies during the pandemic were engineered to bind to the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The binding prevented the protein from exercising its regular functions, including its ability to infect other cells.

Dr. Köhler and Dr. Milstein, who established a generation of monoclonal antibodies for use in humans in 1975, used this principle to describe the hybridoma – a fusion cell made up of B cells (white blood cells that produce antibodies) and myeloma cells (abnormal plasma cells). These hybrid cells allowed the researchers to produce a single antibody clone, which came to be known as a monoclonal antibody.

The initial technology of producing hybridoma in mice was unsustainable. Today, these antibodies are made using recombinant DNA technology. Here, the gene that codes for the monoclonal antibody's binding region — also known as the variable region — is isolated from a B cell or synthesised in the laboratory. This antibody is then introduced into a host cell, often a bacterium or a mammalian cell, using recombinant DNA technology (which involves manipulating DNA material outside an organism to obtain specific traits or characteristics). The host cells, called bioreactors, produce large quantities of the monoclonal antibodies which are extracted, purified, and readied for use as desired.

Glycoproteins are one of the major components of viruses that cause diseases in humans. According to a [research paper](#) published in October 2020, the m102.4 monoclonal antibody binds itself to the immunodominant receptor-binding glycoprotein of the Nipah virus, potentially neutralising it.

The results of a successful clinical safety trial conducted with 40 volunteers between March 2015 and June 2016, for monoclonal antibody m102.4, were published in 2020. Led by Geoffery Playford of Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane, Australia, it was the first in-human, randomised, controlled phase-one study of the safety, tolerability, and immunogenicity of m102.4.

The study was double blind, which means neither the participants nor the researchers knew who received the antibody and who received the placebo. The researchers created eight cohorts of five participants each. In each cohort, six people were randomly administered m102.4 of varying doses, while the remaining two received the placebo.

The most common treatment-related side-effect was headache, reported by 12 of 30 participants in the combined m102.4 group, and three from the pooled placebo group. No deaths or severe effects, which could have caused the study to be discontinued, were noted.

The results of the trial showed that single and repeated doses of m102.4 were well-tolerated and safe, and invoked no adverse responses from the immune systems of participants.

The monoclonal antibody m102.4 for Dr. Playford's clinical trial was manufactured by the Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (AIBN) at the University of Queensland.

In his press conference, ICMR chief Dr. Bahl mentioned that "no opportunity presented itself to take the research forward" after the first phase of trial.

According to the Queensland Health Department, the antibody has been available in Queensland State since 2010 to treat Hendra virus infections, and has been shared by USU and the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine.

As of 2020, it had been administered to 13 people on compassionate grounds in Queensland. Hendra virus is on the World Health Organisation's list of priority diseases requiring urgent attention for research and development of therapeutics — as is the Nipah virus.

Both Hendra and Nipah viruses are bat-borne Paramyxoviridae – a family of viruses that contain a single-strand RNA of negative-sense genome, similar to the ones that cause diseases like measles, influenza etc., and replicate within infected cells.

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PEOPLE COUNT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE CENSUS AND THE SHADOW OF POLITICS

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Census collects population data that is crucial to planning and development, and the exercise is rarely devoid of political intent or consequence. India has conducted the Census every 10 years since 1881, but in 2020, the [decennial exercise for the 2021 Census had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Restrictions related to the pandemic have ceased and the state machinery is ready to start the exercise anytime, but the BJP government at the Centre continues to withhold political clearance. On September 20, Home Minister Amit Shah told the Lok Sabha that the [Census will take place after the 2024 general election](#). That still avoids any clear mention of the date or year, allowing speculation about the government's intent. A possible reason why the Centre is eager to delay it until 2024 is the [clamour for enumeration of caste](#), a question that the BJP is trying to evade. A Census after 2026 will become the basis of the next delimitation of Lok Sabha seats, which will involve inter-State redistribution of representation. The BJP may have incentives to wait until then. In the last few years, [changes in the Citizenship Act](#), and conflict between some States and the Centre regarding the National Population Register (NPR), have further muddied the discussions on Census.

The proposed [33% reservation for women in Parliament and Assemblies](#) is linked to the next Census and [delimitation](#), which adds an additional import. The next one will also be [the first digital census](#) giving citizens an opportunity to "self-enumerate". During self-enumeration, Aadhaar or mobile number will be mandatorily collected. Around 30 lakh government officials including schoolteachers will be assigned as enumerators and each will be assigned the responsibility to collect details of about 650-800 people through both online and offline modes covering an estimated population of more than 140 crore. In normal course, completion of both the phases of the Census takes at least 11 months. Meanwhile, the quality and mechanism of population level data collection are evolving fast, thanks to technology. The [Registration of Births and Deaths \(Amendment\) Act, 2023](#) that will come into effect on October 1 will help a centralised population register, electoral register, Aadhaar, ration card, passport and driving licence databases. The centrally stored data will be updated real time without human interface leading to addition and deletion from electoral roll when an individual turns 18 and after death, respectively. Rather than trying to weaponise categorisation and counting of people, the government must take States and parties into confidence on all the issues around the Census.

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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCATES DEMAND WARNING LABELS, BAN ON JUNK FOOD ADS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 22, 2023 08:31 pm | Updated 08:32 pm IST - NEW DELHI

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Public health experts, consumer groups, lawyers, and patient groups on September 22 called on the Union government to check the rise in consumption of high fat, sugar, salt, and ultra-processed foods (UPF), warning that if the trend goes unchecked, India will not be able to halt the rise of obesity and diabetes.

New data obtained through the [Poshan tracker revealed that 43 lakh children under the age of five years](#) — or 6% of all children tracked — are obese or overweight, notes Arun Gupta, convenor of the think tank Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPI). He says one of the major underlying factors behind the increasing consumption of junk foods is triggered by the food industry's pervasive advertising and promotional techniques to increase sales. NAPI recently released a report on the issue, titled, "The Junk Push: Rising Consumption of Ultra-processed foods in India-Policy, Politics and Reality".

"Existing regulatory policies remain ineffective to minimise any advertisements of junk foods, which are mostly misleading and especially directed at children and adolescents. None of the legal frameworks or guidelines in India have the potential to stop most of the misleading advertisements of pre-packaged junk or foods high in fats, salt and sugar or to ban misleading claims or warn people about the risks to health. The intent that there shall be no 'misleading advertisement' needs a clearly worded law," added Dr. Gupta.

In an effort to tackle the burden of non-communicable diseases, the Union government put in place a National Multisectoral Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Common NCDs (2017-22).

"However, gaps remain. Its recommendations such as preventive legal frameworks to control advertising and labelling are yet to be acted upon to cut down the consumption of junk foods," said the NAPI report.

The report says that, of the advertisements it examined, none provided the "most important information" as demanded by the Consumer Protection Act 2019, for a food product: the amount of sugar, salt, or saturated fat it contains.

Environmental activist Vandana Shiva said that the burden of non-communicable chronic diseases is related primarily to junk and ultra-processed foods, and is fast becoming a health emergency. Protecting and promoting healthy, diverse food and regulating ultra-processed food is the duty of government, she added.

“As per an unpublished WHO India study, more than 200,000 such advertisements [for pre-packaged foods] are flashed each month just on 10 select channels,” said social scientist Nupur Bidla, a member of NAPI. “These advertisements target children, seek parental approval, use celebrities, project junk foods as healthy. It is because of such pervasive and aggressive marketing techniques, we call it as ‘The Junk Push’,” she said.

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NASHA MUKT BHARAT ABHIYAAN (NMBA) - MOU SIGNED BETWEEN DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT AND THE ALL WORLD GAYATRI PARIWAR

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Social Movements

Substance use disorder is an issue which has the potential to adversely affect the social fabric of the country. Dependence to any substance not only affects the individual's health, but also disrupts their families and the whole society. Regular consumption of various psychoactive substances leads to dependence of the individual.



As per report of first comprehensive National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India conducted by Department of Social Justice & Empowerment through National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), AIIMS, New Delhi, Alcohol is the most common psychoactive substance used by Indians followed by Cannabis and Opioids.



To curb the menace of drug demand, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ&E), Government of India has been implementing National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR), an umbrella scheme under which financial assistance is provided to State Governments/ Union Territories (UT) Administrations for Preventive Education and Awareness Generation, Capacity Building, Skill development, vocational training and livelihood support of ex-drug addicts etc.

Since 2020, the Ministry is implementing the ambitious Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA) in all districts of the country with an aim to create awareness about ill effects of substance abuse among the youth, with special focus on higher education institutes, university campuses, schools and reaching out into the community and garnering community involvement and ownership of the Abhiyaan.

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NMBA is playing a crucial role to overcome from this addiction. Till now Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA) through the various activities undertaken on-ground 11+ crore people reached out so far. 8,000 Master Volunteers have been selected and trained to lead the Abhiyaan activities in the identified districts. More than 3.36+ crore youth have actively participated in the activities of the Abhiyaan and spreading on-ground the message against substance abuse. The contribution of 2.24+ Crore women have also been vital in reaching out to a larger community through the Anganwadi & ASHA Workers, ANMs, Mahila Mandals & Women SHGs.

Technology and Social media have been effectively utilized to spread the message of the Abhiyaan online by creating handles on Facebook, Twitter & Instagram and sharing daily updates on them. An Android based mobile Application has been developed to capture the data of activities happening on ground on a real-time basis by the districts and master volunteers. This App has been placed on the Google Play Store. All the de-addiction facilities have been geo-tagged for ease of access by the public.

A special initiative under the NMBA is association of religious/ spiritual organizations for carrying out various activities under NMBA and to spread the message of NMBA under their banner. Taking a step in this direction, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment has signed an MoU with the All World Gayatri Pariwar for spreading the message of NMBA among the youth, women, students and the community. The MoU signing ceremony was held in Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, 15 Janpath, New Delhi on 22nd September, 2023 at 09:00 am in the presence of Dr. Virendra Kumar, HMSJE, Dr. Chinmay Pandya, All World Gayatri Pariwar, Senior officers of the Department and more than 500 members of All World Gayatri Pariwar.

Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment (HMSJE) talked about the efforts undertaken through the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan in the country that have helped make this Abhiyaan a mass movement. The Minister informed the gathering about the special events like National Pledge Against Drug Abuse, NCC Interaction with the presence of Raksha Mantri that are regularly conducted to involve stakeholders in the campaign against drug use. Stressing the

importance of participation of spiritual organizations in this Abhiyaan, the Minister expressed his faith that this collaboration with the Gayatri Pariwar will go a long way to illuminate the lives of individuals and restrict them from moving towards the path of addiction and help in making a mentally, emotionally and physically strong society.



Dr. Chinmay Pandya, All World Gayatri Pariwar congratulated the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for launching such a mass campaign against drugs. Through his experiences of working in this area, he stressed on the importance of a conducive familial and social environment that would help prevent as well as overcome substance use. Through the 5000 centers and 16+ Crore people connected with the All World Gayatri Pariwar, Dr. Pandya affirmed the participation in the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan and contributing towards a Nasha Mukta Bharat.

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With the signing of this MoU, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment feels that implementation of NMBA will get a boost towards achieving the objective of drug sensitized India. Shri Saurabh Garg, Secretary for the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment attended and addressed the event.

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SIGNS OF LIFE? WHY ASTRONOMERS ARE EXCITED ABOUT CARBON DIOXIDE AND METHANE IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF AN ALIEN WORLD

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September 22, 2023 06:14 pm | Updated 06:14 pm IST

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This artist's rendering provided by University College London Centre for Space Exochemistry Data researchers shows Exoplanet K2-18b, foreground, its host star and an accompanying planet in this system. On Wednesday, the scientists announced they discovered water on the planet outside our solar system that has temperatures suitable for life. | Photo Credit: AP

Are we alone? This question is nearly as old as humanity itself. Today, this question in astronomy focuses on [finding life](#) beyond our planet. Are we, as a species, and as a planet, alone? Or is there life somewhere else?

Usually the question inspires visions of weird, green versions of humans. However, life is more than just us: animals, fish, plants and even bacteria are all the kinds of things we seek signs of in space.

One thing about life on Earth is that it leaves traces in the chemical makeup of the atmosphere. So traces like that, which are visible from a long way away, are something we look for when we're hunting aliens.

Scientists in the United Kingdom and the United States [have just reported](#) some very interesting chemical traces in the atmosphere of a planet called K2-18b, which is about 124 light-years from Earth. In particular, they may have detected a substance which on Earth is only produced by living things.

[Also Read | ISRO hoping to wake up Chandrayaan-3's Vikram and Pragyan on September 22](#)

K2-18b is an interesting exoplanet – a planet that orbits another star. Discovered in 2015 by the Kepler Space Telescope's K2 mission, it is a type of planet called a sub-Neptune. As you probably guessed, these are smaller than Neptune in our own Solar System.

The planet is about eight and a half times heavier than Earth, and orbits a type of star called a red dwarf, which is much cooler than our Sun. However, K2-18b orbits much closer to its star than Neptune does – in what we call the habitable zone. This is the area that is not too hot and

not too cold, where liquid water can exist (instead of freezing to ice or boiling into steam).

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Earth is what is called a rocky planet (for obvious reasons), but sub-Neptunes are gas planets, with much larger atmospheres containing lots of hydrogen and helium. Their atmosphere can also contain other elements.

Which brings us to the excitement around K2-18b.

The planet was first discovered by the Kepler Space Telescope, which was monitoring distant stars and hoping for planets to pass in front of them. When a planet does pass between us and a star, the star becomes momentarily dimmer – which is what tells us a planet is there.

By measuring how big the dip in brightness is, how long it takes for the planet to pass in front of the star, and how often it happens, we can work out the size and orbit of the planet. This technique is great at finding planets, but it doesn't tell us about their atmospheres – which is a key piece of information to understand if they hold life or are habitable.

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope – the big space telescope launched at the end of 2021 – has now observed and measured the atmosphere of this exoplanet.

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The telescope did this by measuring the colour of light so finely, it can detect traces of specific atoms and molecules. This process, called spectroscopy, is like measuring the fingerprint of elements.

Each element and molecule has its own colour signature. If you can look at the colour signature, you can do a bit of detective work, and work out what elements or compounds are in the planet.

While the planet does not have its own light, astronomers waited for when K2-18b passed in front of its star, and measured the starlight as it went through the planet's atmosphere, allowing the team to detect fingerprints of substances in the atmosphere.

The new study found a lot of carbon dioxide and methane. This is interesting as this is like what is found on Earth, Mars, and Venus in our Solar System – rather than Neptune.

However, it also found a small amount of dimethyl sulfide. Dimethyl sulfide is an interesting molecule, made up of carbon, hydrogen, and sulfur.

[Also Read | Closest known black hole to Earth spotted by astronomers](#)

On Earth, it's generally a bit smelly. But it's also closely linked to life.

The only process we know that creates dimethyl sulfide on our planet is life. In particular, marine life and plankton emit it in the form of flatulence.

So yes, scientists are excited by the potential idea of alien marine farts. If it is real. And linked to life.

While on Earth, dimethyl sulfide is linked to life, on other planets it may somehow be related to geological or chemical processes.

After all, K2-18b is something like Neptune – a planet we do not really know a lot about. Just last month, researchers discovered that [clouds on Neptune are strongly linked](#) to the Sun's 11-year cycle of activity. We have a lot to learn about planets and their atmospheres.

[Also Read | Indian Astronomical Observatory: Where the stars must not twinkle](#)

Also, the measurement of dimethyl sulfide is very subtle – not nearly as strong as the carbon dioxide and methane. This means more detailed measurements, to improve the strength of the signal, are required.

Other telescopes may need to join the effort. Instruments on the Very Large Telescope in Chile are able to measure the atmospheres of planets around other stars – as is a new instrument called Veloce on the Anglo Australian Telescope at Siding Spring Observatory in Australia.

And new space telescopes, like Europe's PLATO which is under construction, will also help us get a better look at alien atmospheres.

So while the signs of dimethyl sulfide on K2-18b may not be linked to life, they are still an exciting prospect. There is plenty more to explore.

[Brad E Tucker](#), Astrophysicist/Cosmologist, [Australian National University](#)

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THE CURIOUS LINK BETWEEN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND TRAUMA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 22, 2023 05:44 pm | Updated 05:44 pm IST

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It is the early 1800s, the French Revolution has just subsided, and Philippe Pinel, a French doctor, proposes a 'radical' humane approach to treating [medical illness](#). He argues that maladies such as Alzheimer's Disease (AD) are better understood as a puzzle of multiple pieces. Why does a person develop a specific illness at a particular time in their life? Each illness, he writes, "represented the intersection of a human being at a specific moment in life with a disease at a particular stage of its development". Take Alzheimer's. Mr. Pinel theorises the condition arises not only due to abnormalities in "plaques and tangles" — proteins in the brain associated with AD — but also from other causes including education, alcohol use, genetics, way of life, even trauma to the head.

Today, science acknowledges all these as risk factors for Alzheimer's, the most [common type of dementia](#) that progressively erodes one's memory, thinking and other cognitive abilities. This 'inevitable demise of personhood' [has been likened to a 'living death'](#). [India is home to an estimated 53 lakh dementia patients aged 60 and above](#), a number expected to exceed 120 lakh by 2050, per data collected before the COVID-19 lockdown. The [prevalence of dementia among older people is higher in India as compared to the U.S. or U.K.](#), recent evidence also showed. People are living longer, in a country set to [become the world's most populous nation](#). Moving pieces such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, lifestyle, lack of awareness also contribute to this rise, experts note, as we sit decades away from finding a cure. It is no wonder the theme for this year's [World Alzheimer's Day theme is 'never too early, never too late'](#), a clarion call to prevent risk factors where possible.

One association is reiterated in the growing canon of dementia research: that of adversity and cognitive decline, in tune with what Mr. Pinel first observed. Does stress — trauma, of the brain, the mind, the body — erode brain health to a degree that it hastens neurodegeneration, and consequently, the risk of developing AD? The hypothesis has been tested over and over, yielding conflicting and contradictory results. The Alzheimer's question boils down to: We know adversity influences symptoms of AD, but can it increase the risk of *developing* Alzheimer's too?

Evidence connecting traumatic brain injury (TBI) with numerous types of late-onset dementia has strengthened over the last three decades. TBI cases among U.S. veterans were associated with a 60% increase in the risk of developing dementia. [Footballers were 50% more likely than](#)

[others to develop dementia](#) due to repeated instances of “mild brain trauma”, per a 2023 Scottish study published in the *Lancet Public Health*. The term ‘punch drunk syndrome’ was devised in 1928 to describe syndromes (such as “marked mental deterioration”) contact-sport players presented years after retiring from boxing. Interestingly, the risk of specific brain changes was tied to the number of rounds a player boxed, not the number of times they were knocked out — implying that even injuries that don’t cause physical unconsciousness may slowly build up dementia risk.

The ‘why’ of it all is still inconclusive. A meta-analysis of studies peering into the link between TBI and AD found accumulated *beta-amyloid* (A, a toxic waste protein in the brain). A in excess tends to aggregate and form plaques, which deposit between neurons and disrupt cell function in people with AD. Other causes were vascular damage, white matter degeneration in patients, and deposition of *tau* (a protein that accumulates as neurofibrillary tangles), among other reasons that could lead to neurodegenerative disease. In 2021, [researchers looked at MRIs of people with AD and those with TBI to find similarities in neurodegeneration](#): cortisol thickness — correlated with brain age, healthy memory and attention — had thinned in both. These findings could help “professionals to identify TBI victims who are at greater risk for Alzheimer’s disease”, the researchers said.

Genes could be decisive actors too: people with TBI, who had a specific variant of the gene apolipoprotein E (APOE) called APOE-e4, were more likely to develop dementia, a December 2022 study found, but more research is needed to solidify the genetic link. In some cases, TBI was not linked to AD or dementia at all but to other forms of neurodegeneration such as Parkinson’s Disease. Scientists humbly acknowledge the equivocal nature of data and flagged the need to unearth which pathological mechanisms TBI activate, and how it is linked to neurodegeneration.

Residents of the conflict-ridden Jammu and Kashmir have the highest prevalence of dementia in India, claimed a research conducted by the University of Southern California and AIIMS-Delhi earlier this year (70% of Kashmir’s population have witnessed a violent death, almost half have undergone some form of mental distress, per the Médecins Sans Frontières). This wasn’t a causal link but a correlation: 11% of people reportedly have dementia, but it is unclear if that group was exposed to trauma or not.

The relationship between PTSD and dementia is complex, but too strong to ignore. A growing body of research has associated [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\) in American war veterans with AD](#) and dementia risk. Early childhood adversity, due to violence, war or abuse, has also been connected with a later life dementia diagnosis, a 2020 meta-analysis published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found. The UCL researchers followed up with patients up to 17 years, people who had gone through both combat and non-combat-related trauma, and found the rate of dementia diagnosis among people with PTSD was almost two times of those without PTSD. “This provides the strongest evidence yet that PTSD is a risk factor for dementia”, says Stefanie Pina Escudero, who is researching the interplay of stress and neurodegeneration at UC San Francisco, and was not involved in the study.

Instead of placing AD and trauma in a ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ equilibrium, think of a two-plate scale. Dementia on one side; protective factors, such as genetics, health conditions, lifestyle sit on the other. “If these factors are negative, they may tilt the balance further towards dementia, while if they are positive, they may help to balance it out,” says Dr. Pina Escudero.

One theory spotlights the role of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, the body’s fire alarm: any stressful event activates the HPA axis, alerting us to danger, where cortisol is released to help us cope with stress and it eventually turns off. “However, if there is a constant

fire alarm or one that goes off very easily as in PTSD, it can become very annoying and even harmful,” explains Dr. Pina Escudero. The HPA axis is overworked, causing the cortisol levels to remain high and triggering symptoms, “including flashbacks, nightmares, and anxiety, as well as several health problems, including Alzheimer’s disease.” Moreover, traumatic experiences are also associated with depression, anxiety disorders, sleep disturbances, and substance abuse, and if unaddressed, each of these outcomes “increases the risk of cognitive impairment”.

A 2023 study published in *Brain* journal found something similar, where the constant fire alarm eventually had a negative impact on the body, [causing inflammation, damage to DNA and cells, and accelerating the ageing process, “which of course can affect the brain and cognition”](#). The researchers examined stress levels in female mice and found *beta-amyloid* proteins released in excess. The authors admitted the need for more evidence, but the finding “demonstrates a direct link between stress and Alzheimer’s disease in women at a cellular level.” Another paper argued that stress due to traumatic flashbacks and lack of sleep reportedly increases amyloid burden, accelerating cognitive decline prior to AD.

Stress and trauma also often accompany social isolation or depression -- known risk factors that increase the likelihood of developing dementia. A recent John Hopkins study found even a mild hearing loss doubled the risk of dementia. “You may not want to be with people as much, and when you are you may not engage in conversation as much...which could “contribute to a faster rate of atrophy in the brain”, researcher Frank Lin explained. The intensity of trauma also adds up: chronic stress (real-life threats like war) distinctly differs from moderate stress (when facing new things). It’s like driving a car: “If you press the accelerator to the floor to escape a threat and do so for an hour... then return to driving at a normal speed, the car will continue to function well,” explains Dr. Pina Escudero. “However, if you keep the accelerator pressed for days, weeks, months, the entire car will experience wear and tear.” One of the regions that may fall to this degradation is the hippocampus, charged with learning and storing new memories.

Genes may play a role too. The Kashmir study found a higher rate of specific DNA variations called the ACE polymorphisms. The ACE gene (and its two versions: the I allele and the D allele) instructs the body on making a protein that controls blood pressure. In the study, the people who inherited the I allele from one or both parents had a higher chance of developing Alzheimer’s disease. Compared to its other half, the I allele makes a shorter version of the ACE protein, which is not only less effective in disposing of -amyloid in the brain but also contributes to higher blood pressure and threatens the brain’s shield -- the blood-brain barrier. Together, they wreak neuronal dysfunction and are hallmarks of AD. However, this connection remains a “matter of debate”, says Dr. Pina Escudero. “A person being a carrier of the ACE I alleles is not a direct cause of Alzheimer’s disease as maybe other genes are; it is just one more risk factor and may universally apply to all human populations.”

The story is “nebulous” when it comes to emotional adversity, says A.B.*, a neuroscientist involved in dementia research in India who wished not to be named. While studies aim to chart pathways between adversity and AD, the precise causality is still unclear.

One way researchers rationalised the 2023 paper on dementia risk in Jammu and Kashmir was that prolonged stress impacts the brain’s hippocampus and memory centre. But this theory “makes dementia look so simple”, says A.B., because dementia is not just about memory -- there’s so much more to the gamut than forgetfulness.

This is an inherent limitation in studying AD and dementia. A.B.* notes that studies that show associations (and not causations), while instructive in guiding research, do not offer “necessary and sufficient” evidence to prove a link. Childhood adversity does impact brain health, and poor brain health may in turn trigger cognitive decline and AD-related symptoms. But it is not wholly

correct to say if $A=B$, and $B=C$, so $A=C$; there are unmapped variables at play. "It's only a mathematical correlation. It's like a man and a woman, are walking on the road at the same time. There happen to be other men and women walking who are married. So you conclude that these two are also married," which is not accurate.

Moreover, the credibility of studies is tied to the composition of datasets, how long were the participants followed, the methodology applied. The Jammu and Kashmir study, for instance, sampled a total of 1,10,000 people from India, but only 1,000 people were surveyed from the Union Territory itself. A.B.* says, "The sampling strategy was not randomised and statistically established, and they had a lot of missing data". Correlational studies are important, but 'cherry picking' symptoms can misrepresent an illness, especially in a landscape marked by limited scientific literacy and lack of data. The threshold of proof to establish scientific causation is justifiably high, but to understand how the brain's plasticity compensates for stress means exposing people to stress itself. "A rigorous study... would involve randomly assigning two groups of individuals to either experience PTSD or not, and then following them over time to see if they developed dementia," Dr. Pina Escudero says. "This is not possible for ethical reasons."

The field is also dominated by research from Western countries sampling a Caucasian population, and may not reflect the socio-economic challenges of low- and middle-income countries. India's genetic diversity due to migration, coupled with the caste system and resultant endogamy, presents an untapped, unique genetic landscape that will invariably alter the trajectory of dementia among India's ageing population, [argued a 2021 paper in Nature](#).

There are N factors that impact brain health and lead to neurodegenerative disorders. One's age, personality, coping skills, how long the trauma last, the nature of trauma, if one has social support. If their cultural norms create healthy conditions for processing trauma. A [paper in Nature acknowledged the variability at play, explaining that "past research on the effects of specific adversity shows a fragmentary and somewhat contradictory picture"](#). Their longitudinal study followed up with patients from 2006 to 2018 and found that adversity did have a bearing on dementia risk (positive and negative). It, however, depended on a) the nature of adversity (did someone's parents die? did they experience hunger) and b) the period in life when adversity hit.

For now, whether any one of them is "necessary and sufficient" to cause AD is still uncertain, says A.B. Moreover, researchers are still unearthing which brain regions are involved in AD; dementia research is then a lot like flipping pieces to see the full picture of Alzheimer's, except the box doesn't specify how many pieces make the puzzle.

The glut of findings interlinking trauma and Alzheimer's, however, betrays a poignant temptation, to attribute a complex, baffling disease -- which changes the brain, the person and the family -- to one root cause. But as [researcher Debomoy K. Lahiri notes in his paper, we need an 'arsenal', not a 'magic bullet' that targets one region or one cause](#), for the Alzheimer's question "requires our understanding the disease as a transformation rather than a state". Both A.B. and Dr. Pina Escudero propose a 180-degree shift in how we rationalise AD research: "it's a complex interplay of factors, and we definitely need more studies to look at the impact of adverse events," says A.B.

As science seeks to demystify the brain, another part of this arsenal is to perhaps utilise research linking trauma to dementia risk, even if observational, into targeting populations "more vulnerable to developing dementia", improving screening efforts and raising awareness. It could pre-emptively address mental distress, anxiety and trauma in a population who are living through pandemics, conflicts, soaring unemployment and hunger, by investing in a mental health landscape marked by stigma and lack of availability. The route to addressing India's Alzheimer's

burden goes beyond immediate medical cure and instead by caring for those who may eventually develop a disease, activists have opined. Dr. Pina Escudero adds that a prerequisite for screening should be to “ensure equal access to screening, follow-up, treatment, and ongoing evaluation for the entire population”. There is no straightforward relationship between trauma, PTSD and dementia; prioritising one trauma over the other for screening creates conditions of inequity.

“It is essential to raise awareness about PTSD and its various health-related consequences, including dementia. People should be encouraged to discuss these concerns with their healthcare professionals,” she says. This, in tandem with healthcare professionals receiving training to identify PTSD and its potential negative outcomes can help them “effectively modify the identified risk factors”. Research linking adversity with AD is then, only discovering newer clues to the puzzle.

“The disease is just too complex in its pathogenesis, which (still) needs to be fully acknowledged. In addition, the exact causes of the disease are still elusive, which still needs to be fully admitted.”Christian Behl, author of “Alzheimer’s Disease Research” (2023)

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ISLRTC – DEPARTMENT OF EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WILL BE CELEBRATING SIGN LANGUAGE DAY ON 23RD SEPTEMBER 2023

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Persons with Disability including Mentally Ill People - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC), New Delhi under the aegis of DEPwD (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India will be celebrating Sign Language Day-2023 on 23rd September 2023 at Bhim Hall, Dr.Ambedkar International Centre Janpath, New Delhi.

Ever since the United Nations declared 23rd September as the International Day of Sign Languages, the ISLRTC celebrates it every year on 23rd September. DEPwD and ISLRTC are making all the possible efforts to bring more citizens, stakeholders, service-providing agencies, Deaf schools, NGOs, activists, Deaf leaders, educators, researchers etc. together into the fold of Sign Language Day in order to create positive awareness about Indian Sign Language among all sections of our society. The Day also reminds us of the need and importance of preserving sign languages as a part of linguistic and cultural diversity. All the professionals, parents of Deaf, Deaf students and institutions working in the field of Indian Sign Language from all walks of life are important target groups to rope into the Sign Language Day celebration.

The theme of this year Sign Language Day-2023 is "A World Where Deaf People Everywhere Can Sign Anywhere!" A world where deaf people are seen as a part of the natural range of human diversity, and national sign languages are celebrated and used everywhere as part of national societies. On this day, collective efforts of deaf communities, governments, and civil society representatives are made to ensure their children and youth know their national sign languages, as a step towards building societies in which deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere.

Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment, Km. Pratima Bhoumik will be the Chief Guest and Sh. Rajesh Aggrawal, Secretary; DEPwD will be the Guest of Honour. Rajesh Yadav, Joint Secretary, DEPwD and Sh. Mrityunjay Jha, Director, DEPwD & ISLRTC, and Representatives from National Association of Deaf, All India Federation of Deaf, and All India Federation of Deaf for Women will also grace the occasion.

During the programme, the following programs and materials will be launched:

Launch of Basic Communication Skills in Indian Sign Language an online self learning course. The primary aim of this course is to foster basic communication skills in Indian Sign Language. It is tailor-made for parents of deaf children, siblings, educators, and individuals interested in acquiring basic knowledge of Indian Sign Language (ISL). The course comprises 10 modules, covering 30 essential topics, ensuring a comprehensive grasp of basic ISL communication.

Launch of 267 signs of financial terms in Indian Sign Language which are jointly developed by ISLRTC, Society General and V-Shesh. The sign for financial terms are developed to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people working in the financial and banking sector. The project will help improve the employment prospects of deaf job-seeking youth.

Launch of about 10,000 ISL dictionary terms on website, launch of ISL course in Special Schools for hearing impaired launch of Video Relay Service for the deaf community through

whatsapp video call. Video Relay Service is a video telecommunication service which enables deaf people to communicate with hearing people via a remote sign language interpreter linked through video communication. The service can be broadly used in hospitals, government offices, educational institutions, bank, work place, interviews, police station and court etc. The service is provided at free of cost through whatsapp no. 8929667579.

The Centre conducted 6th Indian Sign Language Competition, 2023 – a national-level competition held for students with hearing disabilities. The students have showcased their creativity and knowledge by participating in the competition. All the winners of the 6th ISL competition will be distributed trophy and certificate during the Sign Language Day 2023 programme.

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NEW IMMUNOLOGY STUDY HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF COVID VACCINATION OF THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 24, 2023 08:00 am | Updated 08:00 am IST - Bengaluru

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A study has found that both COVISHIELD and COVAXIN significantly enhance immune responses in subjects with varying levels of basal immunity to SARS CoV-2 developed through natural exposure. File | Photo Credit: PTI

A study of COVID-19 vaccine immunity highlights the importance of vaccination in those who have already been exposed to the virus.

The study has found that both COVISHIELD and COVAXIN significantly enhance immune responses in subjects with varying levels of basal immunity to SARS CoV-2 developed through natural exposure. The multi-centric study led by researchers from St John's Research Institute was published in *npj Vaccines*, a Nature journal on September 14.

COVISHIELD, manufactured by Serum Institute of India and COVAXIN, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech Ltd were the first two vaccines authorized for COVID-19 vaccination in India. Even though India had a highly successful vaccination campaign, a majority of the population remained unvaccinated till end of 2021. A major question raised and unknown at that time was whether COVID vaccines available in India in 2021 were even capable of inducing immune responses over and above immunity that may have been acquired through natural exposure to the virus during the ancestral and Delta waves.

"We addressed this issue in 700 adults (aged 18-44 years) who received their primary series of vaccination between November 2021 and January 2022. The samples were collected till May 2023 following which the analysis was done," said Annapurna Vyakarnam, whose Human Immunology Laboratory is based at St John's Research Institute (SJRI).

The study participants, who were recruited from four clinical sites and five research institutes in Bengaluru, Pune and Vellore, received either two doses of COVAXIN at 28 days apart or two doses of COVISHIELD at three months apart as per Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines. The peak responses to both these vaccines were measured at two weeks (14 days) post the second dose (day 42 for COVAXIN and day 98 for COVISHIELD).

Professor Vyakarnam, who is the lead immunologist of the study, said circulating neutralising

antibodies and cellular T-cell responses are cornerstone immune parameters governing protection from severe disease. “This study probed magnitude, breadth and quality of these immune parameters using advanced immunological techniques and demonstrated all three parameters to be enhanced at two weeks after subjects received their first two doses of either of the COVID-19 vaccines,” said the researcher, who is also affiliated to King’s College London.

In addition, first round data from this group showed evidence of persistent anti-COVID-19 immunity, up to one year post COVISHIELD vaccination, but less so with COVAXIN, she said.

Srabanti Rakshit, Project Scientist at the Division of Infectious Diseases in SJRI, who is the lead author of the study, said, “this is not surprising as COVISHIELD vaccine was specifically engineered to enhance immunogenicity, whereas COVAXIN is an inactivated rapidly generated and highly deployable first response efficacious virus vaccine”.

“We hope that the unequivocal nature of scientific evidence showing COVID-19 vaccines to broaden and enhance anti-COVID immunity in subjects with pre-existing SARS-CoV-2 immunity, will spur future in-depth analysis of what constitutes persistent immunity to circulating SARS CoV-2 strains,” said the researchers.

“Importantly, we hope this will mitigate vaccine hesitancy arguments to current and future national COVID-19 booster vaccination recommendations; unfortunately vaccine hesitancy remains a global health challenge in significant pockets of the world,” they said.

Funded by CSR support from Hindustan Unilever, the study was done involving four clinical sites - (Bangalore Baptist Hospital (BBH), King Edward Memorial Hospital Research Center (KEM), Symbiosis University Hospital and Research Center (SUHRC) and St. John’s Medical College Hospital (SJMC)) and five research institutes (National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Institute for Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine (InStem), St. John’s Research Institute (SJRI), National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) and Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Pune (IISER-Pune).

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QUALITY OF ACTIVE TB CASE FINDING SUBOPTIMAL NATIONALLY: STUDY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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September 23, 2023 08:29 pm | Updated 08:29 pm IST - CHENNAI

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Since 2017, India's Tuberculosis (TB) programme has been undertaking active case finding (ACF) outside the healthcare settings among high-risk populations. | Photo Credit: AP

Since 2017, India's Tuberculosis (TB) programme has been undertaking active case finding (ACF) outside the healthcare settings among high-risk populations. Recently, a team led by the Chennai-based National Institute of Epidemiology (ICMR-NIE) undertook the first-ever national-level analysis to measure the quality of ACF. This study was commissioned by the Central TB Division. The results of the study were published on September 21 in the journal *Global Health Action*.

ACF data were available only for 657 districts. Of the three ACF cycles recommended among the high-risk populations each year, 642 districts (98%) undertook just one cycle. Most districts were not clear what constituted one ACF cycle.

An ACF cycle is mapping of the high-risk population and screening and testing them in a given period. "Based on a study in South Africa, two ACF cycles in a year appear to have additional benefits over one cycle. There is no evidence to suggest three cycles are needed," Dr. Hemant Deepak Shewade, a senior scientist at ICMR-NIE and the first author of the paper, told *The Hindu*.

Based on the available data, the quality of ACF was measured using three indicators — screening at least 10% of the district population for TB, testing at least 4.75% of the screened, and diagnosing at least 5% TB among those tested. Alternative indicator (that is a composite measure of the latter two indicators) is the number of persons who must be screened to diagnose one active TB case or number needed to screen (NNS); NNS should be less than 1,538.

The study found that the quality of ACF was suboptimal across the country in 2021. Not one State met all the three ACF quality indicator cut-offs or the NNS. At the national level, 9.3% of the population were screened, just 1% of the screened were tested and 3.7% of the tested were diagnosed. The NNS was 2,824 which is much higher than 1,538.

Within a district, all high-risk populations are to be first identified (which is called mapping) and ACF should be conducted among them. But mapping was undertaken only in areas where ACF

was conducted and not for the entire district. “We did not have comprehensive data on the number of high-risk populations in the district to report the extent of ACF among high-risk populations. Hence, we reported the extent of ACF among the district population and compared it against a derived cut-off of 10%,” he said.

They found that States that reported high percentage of screening had very low percentage of testing among the screened. Meanwhile, States that had low screening had high levels of testing and diagnosis. Quality ACF indicators for each State should be based on TB epidemiology in the State.

The percentage of people tested among the screened was the worst of the three indicators; it was even worse in the case of population-based screening. “This could be because sputum collection and transport was suboptimal or the presumptive TB cases were required to visit the nearest testing facilities on their own leading to attrition,” he said.

The recommendations of this study have the potential to guide India’s ACF guidance for TB.

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POLITICISING EXCHANGES: ON CHINA USING SPORTING EVENTS TO SCORE GEOPOLITICAL POINTS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Human resources, Youth, Sports and related issues

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September 25, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 08:37 am IST

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The Asian Games, which were opened on September 23 by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Hangzhou following a spectacular opening ceremony on a scale that has now come to be expected from China, are meant to showcase a broader message of Asian solidarity. The days leading up to the opening ceremony of the 19th edition were, however, marked by anything but. The day before the opening, Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur cancelled his visit to China as a mark of protest to the last-minute denial of entry to three Indian Wushu players from Arunachal Pradesh. The three athletes — Nyeman Wangsu, Onilu Tega and Mepung Lamgu — were given the accreditation needed to travel along with the rest of the Indian team for the Games. However, in what appears to be a directive issued to the airline by China, the athletes were told they could not board their flight. China has in the past issued stapled visas to Indians from Arunachal Pradesh. Only in July, three wushu players from Arunachal Pradesh, due to take part in the World University Games in Chengdu, were issued stapled visas. In this instance, the decision to bar the athletes appears particularly vindictive as visas were not needed to travel for athletes issued digital accreditations. Indian officials believe Beijing thus went out of its way to bar their travel by instructing the airline to not allow them to board. The Ministry of External Affairs in a statement described the action as “targeted and pre-meditated”.

This is, unfortunately, not the first instance of Beijing using sporting events that should have no place for politics to score geopolitical points. In February last year, Beijing ill-advisedly selected the People’s Liberation Army’s commander involved in the Galwan Valley clash as one of the torchbearers for the Winter Olympics. Both then and now, the organisers have appeared more than happy to look the other way given China’s status as both a willing host and strong financial backer of such events. The acting President of the Olympic Council of Asia, Randhir Singh, who met with President Xi in Hangzhou, in remarks to journalists chose not to call out the denial of entry to athletes, instead only saying the matter was being discussed. Beyond the Asian Games, the latest Chinese action serves as a reminder of the current distrust in bilateral relations, as well as of the absence of adequate channels of communication to deal with long-persisting thorny issues, including visas. New Delhi has correctly made clear that restoring normalcy in relations will not be possible without completing the disengagement process along the Line of Actual Control and restoring peace in border areas. Until Beijing reviews its stance on the border, the current state of affairs, which suits neither India nor China, is likely to endure.

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PLAYING TO THE GALLERY: ON INCIDENTS THAT HAVE LOWERED THE MAJESTY OF THE INSTITUTION OF PARLIAMENT

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

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September 25, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 09:25 am IST

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi had [called for a new chapter in parliamentary history](#), and exhorted members to “forget all past bitterness”, as they moved into a shiny new building last week. “Whatever we are going to do in this new Parliament building, it should be an inspiration to every citizen in the country,” he had said. Fittingly for a new beginning, Mr. Modi’s government brought a Bill for reserving 33% seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The [proposal found near unanimous acceptance across the political spectrum](#), though some parties were concerned about the timeline for its implementation, and some wanted a carve out for Other Backward Classes. But this show of unity and purpose was soon overshadowed by incidents that lowered the majesty of the institution of parliament. A Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Member of Parliament [hurled toxic communal slurs at a fellow MP from the Muslim community](#) even as some other senior leaders of the ruling party smiled on in the Lok Sabha during a discussion, of all things on the success of India’s Chandrayaan mission, hardly a partisan issue. In the Rajya Sabha, [visitors in the gallery reportedly raised political slogans](#) in support of the government during the discussion on the women’s reservation Bill, a singularly inappropriate method of credit appropriation.

The conduct of the BJP MP was condemnable but what compounds it is the party’s overall approach that followed. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who was present during the outrage did apologise to the House for the remarks. But soon after that, the party fielded several spokespersons to explain away the episode, and they accused the one who was at the receiving end of provoking the incident. An equivalence has also been sought between communal abuse against a fellow member and remarks allegedly made by some Opposition members about faith and the existence of god. The Lok Sabha Speaker who has in the past suspended Opposition members on charges of misconduct is expected to take a more serious view of this incident, and set out an example, making it clear that the House cannot condone communal slurs against any one, and certainly not a member. Several Opposition leaders have written to Rajya Sabha Chairman regarding sloganeering from the visitor’s gallery. That episode too calls for exemplary punitive and preventive action. The new building must foster healthy dialogue among members, and between the institution and the people.

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IT'S A LONG ROAD TO WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Role of Women

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September 26, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 09:33 am IST

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Bihar BJP Mahila Morcha supporters light lamps a day after Parliament passed the women's reservation Bill, in Patna. | Photo Credit: ANI

After almost a decade of silence, the Modi government's sudden announcement took everyone by surprise: a Bill in favour of women's reservation, now renamed Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam (roughly, Statute Revering Women's Power), was to be presented in Parliament. It has since been passed in both Houses without much ado, with just two votes against it in the Lok Sabha.

While voting in its favour, Opposition groups have rightly pointed out that the Bill has been presented late in the day, and that too with various conditionalities attached, which make actual implementation vague. There is no question of its playing a direct role in the 2024 general elections. Some even wonder whether arrangements for implementation will be in place by 2029. Thus, the future of women's reservations remains uncertain even though it is now the law. How do we take stock of this turn of events? One way is to revisit the history of the issue, which spans a century of campaigns over women's rights.

The possibility of women entering political life took shape in the early 20th century when the colonial state responded to Indian nationalism in the form of political devolution, by offering Indians a greater role in governance through various means of nomination, reservation, and election. It was in this context that the first women's organisations were born. They sought to take forward agendas of social reform by expanding women's voting rights as well as by standing for elections. Women leaders, though, took different positions. While some did not want any form of reservation, others believed that structural disadvantages such as lack of economic autonomy, dependency, and the constraints of marriage laws meant that women required reservations to ensure that the 'women's point of view' was represented in legislatures. These were also the years when the rights of the depressed classes, the Dravidian movement, and the fears of Muslims of turning into a minority were occupying public space, all of which had significant implications for women's groups. Women's organisations not only opposed the idea of separate electorates for different groups in the name of women's unity, but came to be persuaded after 1930 (and especially after the Poona Pact) to drop their demand for any special treatment in the form of nominations or reservations. 'Equality and no privileges' and 'a fair field and no favour' were common slogans. Differing views were sought to be suppressed, even at the cost of loss of membership, especially for Muslim women.

Not enough is known about a subsequent critical time in this history, namely the years of

preparation for the Constitution. No voices were raised in favour of reservations for women. No change in attitude was visible until the 1970s and the shocking findings of the 1974 'Towards Equality' report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, which declared that women were turning into a minority. However, even this committee opposed by a majority vote the idea that political reservations for women were needed to counter the appallingly low presence of women in electoral politics. The rebirth of the women's movement in the late 1970s and '80s, which for the first time saw political campaigns on issues such as custodial rape and dowry deaths, also did not express concern over the absence of women in State Assemblies or Parliament.

It is only in the 1990s that a change in orientation was visible, though opinions differed then too. While there was general agreement for the need to revive moribund village panchayats with one-third reservations for women, few groups came out openly in favour of the 1996 women's reservation Bill proposing a similar quota at the State and national levels. Equally noteworthy was the form of opposition. The Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal demanded a sub-quota for women from Other Backward Classes (OBC), stating that a blanket reservation for women would disproportionately favour upper caste women. The call for sub-quotas for OBC women and Muslim women did not find many backers. Even in 2010, when the Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha, there was little appreciation of the complex forms that patriarchal exclusion takes. While there was growing support for women's reservations as an idea, questions such as the electoral disadvantages of OBC women pitted against upper caste women did not find resonance.

Today, we are in the strange situation where everyone is in favour of women's reservations, as though patriarchy has disappeared. The ruling party seems to believe that it has successfully domesticated women's issues. It sees this Bill "revering woman power" as just another welfare scheme rather than a historic law allowing women to participate in the shaping of state policy. We must be vigilant against this mood of self-congratulation. It is imperative that the reservations policy for women recognises the multiple and unequal forms that patriarchy takes in excluding women from public life. It is equally important to guard against the idea that the mere presence of women in electoral politics will translate into women's equality and freedom. Given the current ideological climate, the new law is not an achievement but a challenge. The long waiting period before it takes effect should be a time for re-examining our ideas and beliefs about how the electoral presence of women might translate into a more egalitarian and less hate-filled ethos.

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CULTURE MINISTRY CREATES EVENTS ON SWACHHATA HI SEWA (SHS) PORTAL FOR “ EK TAARIKH – EK GHANTA, SPECIAL PROGRAM ON 1ST OCTOBER,2023 ON SHRAMDAN FOR SWACHHATA

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

Culture Ministry and all 43 Organisations are creates events on SHS Portal for “ Ek Taarikh – Ek Ghanta, Special Program at 10.00AM on 1st October,2023 on Shramdaan for Swachhata. Instructions regarding Swachhata under SHS Campaign, 2023 have been issued to all Bureaus, Divisions and all Organisations under the Culture Ministry.

The message ”Swachhata Hi Seva” and theme “Garbage Free India” is being displayed during the sound and light shows running at various Centrally Protected Monuments(CPMs) under ASI (namely Royal Palace Mandu, MP and Red Fort Delhi etc) to promote awareness.



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A meeting of the Senior Officers of the Ministry of Culture and Heads of Organisation was organized through VC at 4.00 PM on 25.09.2023. The issue of Swachhata action plan and identifying best practices was discussed. In addition, stock of preparatory work was taken for implementation of the Targets during the implementation phase from 2nd to 31st October,2023. Also Cleanliness Drive is carried out at major ASI Monuments Sites.

BY/SKT

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UNIFIED REGISTRATION PORTAL FOR GOBARDHAN INTRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION TO STREAMLINE THE REGISTRATION OF COMPRESSED BIO-GAS (CBG) AND BIOGAS PLANTS NATIONWIDE

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), Ministry of Jal Shakti has introduced a Unified Registration Portal for GOBARDhan (gobardhan.co.in) to streamline the registration of Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) and biogas plants nationwide. The DDWS, being the Nodal Department for GOBARDhan, announced that over 1163 biogas plants and 426 CBG plants have successfully registered on the portal to date. These registered CBG/Biogas plants are eligible for assistance under the Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme of the Deptt. of Fertilizers, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers.

According to the guidelines, MDA of Rs. 1500/MT will be granted for the sale of Fermented Organic Manure (FOM)/ Liquid Fermented Organic Manure (LFOM)/ Phosphate Rich Organic Manure (PROM) produced at BG/CBG plants under the GOBARDhan initiative. Registration of manufacturing plants on the Unified GOBARDhan portal of the DDWS and adhering to Fertilizer Control Order (FCO) specifications for organic fertilizers are pre-requisites for MDA eligibility.

Manufacturing units registered under the Unified registration portal for GOBARDhan can market FOM/LFOM/PROM (co-products of CBG/Biogas plants) through Fertilizer Marketing Companies in packed form or independently in packed form, bulk, or both. Manufacturing plants are allowed to market FOM/LFOM/PROM in bulk/loose form for two quarters (October 2023 to March 2024) on an experimental basis. Quality testing of the manure will be carried out at Government-notified laboratories/NABL accredited private labs.

Department of Fertilizers, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers has rolled out the MDA scheme, with focused guidelines to promote production and uptake of organic fertilizers from Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBARDhan) plants.

The MDA scheme has been launched with a robust budget of Rs. 1451.82 Crore spanning three years (FY 2023-24 to FY 2025-26) to promote production and take-up of organic fertilizers generated from GOBARDhan plants inter alia, promoting sustainable/organic agricultural practices throughout the country. Its objective is to drive the widespread adoption of organic manure, ushering in savings for rural households by cutting down reliance on chemical fertilizers/urea. Bio-slurry, has potential to rev up acreage under organic farming and consequent monetary benefits to farmers. The MDA component is also a leveler, ensuring that organic fertilizer producers and farmers play on a fair field. It champions Integrated Nutrient Management, curbing chemical fertilizer overuse.

On the CBG/Biogas plant front, the MDA scheme is a massive booster shot for the sector. As India gears up to meet INDC/climate targets and achieve net-zero commitments, the scheme guarantees the financial health of CBG plants, making them magnets for private investments. Successful FOM/LFOM marketing also in-stills confidence in banking institutions, easing the loan process. For entrepreneurs and private investors, monetizing this co-product accelerates the long-term viability of plants and beckons new players to the burgeoning CBG/Biogas sector.

GOBARdhan, a trailblazing multi-ministerial initiative, is on a mission to transform biodegradable and organic waste, including cattle dung, agricultural residues, and biomass, into high-value resources like biogas, CBG and organic manure. This visionary "Whole of Government" approach not only ushers in the era of high-value Biogas/CBG production but also harnesses the power of bio-slurry - a FOM that turbocharges soil health, carbon content and water retention capacity. When used in conjunction with chemical fertilizers, bio-slurry promotes judicious fertilizer use, slashing urea imports and championing sustainable agriculture. From an economic standpoint, GOBARdhan empowers farmers with organic manure, putting the brakes on their dependence on pricey chemical fertilizers.

Key enablers have played pivotal roles in catapulting the GOBARdhan initiative to new heights, viz. standardizing bio-slurry, RBI's inclusion of CBG plants in Agri Infrastructure Fund (AIF) as well as Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Fund (AHIDF), recalibration of CBG plant categories by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), revisions in the categorization of CBG plants based on feedstock type and wastewater discharge by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the revival of the Waste to Energy Scheme of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) etc. The most recent and critical addition to these enablers is the introduction of the MDA scheme for organic fertilizers produced under GOBARdhan plants.

In a nutshell, the MDA scheme launch aligns perfectly with the twin objectives of efficient organic waste management and bolstering soil organic carbon in agricultural soils, creating fertile ground for organic farming.

Through a combination of existing and forthcoming policy enablers in the Biogas/CBG space, the government's ultimate vision is to expand the reach, awareness, and implementation of Biogas/CBG plants, transforming the sector into a magnet for private sector investments.

For more information, please visit <https://www.fert.nic.in/>

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MINISTRY OF MINES TO OBSERVE EK TAREEKH EK GHANTA EK SAATH ON 1ST OCTOBER AS PART OF SWACHHATA HI SEVA

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

The Ministry of Mines, Units and attached offices will be observing “*Ek Tareekh Ek Ghanta Ek Saath*” on 1st October, 2023.

During Swachta hi Sewa (SHS) campaign being organized from 15th September 2023, Ministry of Mines have observed 93 SHS Campaign activities in 14 states across the country. In these events 3746 people were engaged and 40819 man hours were utilized.

Now Government of India has urged citizens to devote one hour of *Shramdaan* on 1st October on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti under the slogan “*Ek Tareekh Ek Ghanta Ek Saath*” to clean our neighborhood areas under the *Swachhata Hi Seva* campaign. Ministry of Mines along with its attached, subordinate offices and PSUs has geared up for the occasion.

The offices under the Ministry will be carrying out 38 activities throughout the country on 1st October 2023 at 10 AM involving citizens and will devote one hour slot voluntarily for this campaign.

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TWO-DAY LONG AROGYA MANTHAN BEING HELD TO MARK 5 YEARS OF AYUSHMAN BHARAT PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA (AB-PMJAY) AND TWO YEARS OF AYUSHMAN BHARAT DIGITAL MISSION (ABDM)

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

“Ayushman Bharat is the most important Government welfare scheme underway in India today, as it helps the poor access the best treatment, same as the rich, which was not possible earlier.” This was stated by Prof. SP Singh Baghel, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, at the inaugural session of Arogya Manthan, being held to celebrate five years of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) and two years of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).

The inaugural event was attended by Shri Dhan Singh Rawat, Minister for Health, Uttarakhand, Dr. V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, Shri Sudhansh Pant, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research, and Dr. Rajesh S. Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology. The two-day event (25th and 26th September 2023) at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi will be filled with insightful discussions and deliberations on challenges, trends and best practices related to the two schemes.



Awards were given out to states for effective implementation of PM-JAY and ABDM under various categories like gender equity service delivery, efficient grievance redressal, highest number of treatments etc. In terms of highest number of treatments, the awards were won by Kerala, Meghalaya, and Puducherry in the category of large state, small state, and Union

Territory respectively. In Gender Equity in Service Delivery, the awards were won by Karnataka, Meghalaya, and Jammu and Kashmir in the category of large state, small state, and Union Territory respectively. The award for the facility that generated most number of ABHA Scan and Share tokens went to AIIMS, Delhi. Congratulating the winners, Prof. Baghel said that winners are people of passion, and these victories are reflective of their effort.

Highlighting the benefits accruing to the most vulnerable and poorest communities of the country, Prof. Baghel urged Delhi, Odisha and West Bengal to join AB-PMJAY scheme.



In a video message, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar stated, “Both these schemes have been essential to build the foundation for a strong nation. PMJAY provides assurance of Rs. 5 lakh per year per family, ensuring that quality healthcare is made accessible to all, without creating any financial burden on anyone.” Dr. Pawar further said that under PM-JAY around 5.59 crore hospital admissions have been undertaken. “Today, around 27,343 hospitals have been empanelled under Ayushman Bharat, providing both cashless, and portable treatment facilities.”

On ABDM, the Minister said, “ABDM has been functioning on a mission mode, to help build a digital health ecosystem that supports universal health coverage, with all stakeholders together on a digital platform. Today more than 45 crore ABHA IDs have been created, 2,19,546 Health Facilities have been registered, and around 2,28,794 Healthcare Professionals have been on boarded under ABDM, which shows that health services are being saturated, including by use of digital tools.” She concluded her address by saying, “Our goal is to ensure that all beneficiaries have access to accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare with use of Ayushman Cards, and we must continue to work together to create a healthier nation for our citizens.”

Dr. V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog said, “Arogya Manthan celebrates the journey of these two transformative schemes. The two-day event will give us learnings to make these schemes more effective, more vibrant, and help highlight pathways for improvement.” Dr Paul further said that we should ensure that healthcare policies should be mindful of the timelines under Sustainable Development Goals, encourage private sector participation, and endeavour to make the most vulnerable sections of society healthier and stronger.

Dr. Dhan Singh Rawat, Uttarakhand Health Minister, said “The biggest success of PM-JAY has been that it ensures that the poor have access to quality healthcare, with guaranteed assurance of up to Rs. 5 lakh per family.”

Shri Sudhansh Pant, Union Health Secretary said, “Around 60% of the amount has been used for tertiary care hospitalization, which had been one of the aims of PM-JAY when it was launched.” He added that 177 Ayushman PMJAY cards are being made per minute, with 30 hospital admissions per minute. He stated that 48% of hospitalisations are women beneficiaries, whereas 8 hospitals are being empanelled per day, on an average.



National Health Authority Annual report and Best Practices and Innovations 2022-23 from different states and UTs for PM-JAY and ABDM were also launched at the event.

The inaugural event was attended by Dr. M Srinivas, Director, AIIMS, senior officials of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, including Dr. Basant Garg, Additional CEO, National Health Authority (NHA), and Shri GU Ahmed, Financial Advisor, NHA, as well as representatives

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MV/JJ

HFW/Aarogya Manthan Inauguration/25thSept2023/2

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WITH CLIMATE CHANGE, TACKLING NEW DISEASE SCENARIOS

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'Heat has been proven to interfere with the genomic structure of pathogens, changing their infectivity and virulence' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

In its latest report released this March, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) delivers a stark warning: climate change heightens the global risk of infectious diseases. The close relationship between climate and disease is being demonstrated every year. For instance, the periodicity of mosquito-borne disease outbreaks no longer follows expected patterns. Dengue manifests in two to three peaks throughout the year. Variability in temperature, precipitation, and humidity disrupt disease transmission cycles. These also alter the distribution of the vectors and animal reservoirs that host the parasite. Heat has been proven to interfere with the genomic structure of pathogens, changing their infectivity and virulence.

Habitat loss forces disease-carrying animals to encroach upon human territory, increasing the risk of human-animal interaction and the transfer of pathogens from wildlife to humans. Viruses which do not harm animals can be fatal for humans. Nipah virus, which has been causing outbreaks in Kerala for many years now, is a good example. An analysis of 2022 published in Nature Climate Change warns that humans now face a broader spectrum of infectious agents than ever before. Over half of all-known infectious diseases threatening humans worsen with changing climate patterns. Diseases often find new transmission routes, including environmental sources, medical tourism, and contaminated food and water from once-reliable sources. While ecosystems shape local climates, climate change is transforming ecosystems. This dynamic introduces invasive species and extends the range of existing life forms. Both these trigger upheavals in ecosystems that are complex and confound ecologists and epidemiologists to predict outbreaks. Human-induced climate change is unleashing an unprecedented health vulnerability crisis. India, in particular, has felt the ominous impact, with early summers and erratic monsoons causing water scarcity across the Gangetic plains and Kerala. These climatic shifts are manifesting in severe health crises, including a dengue epidemic in Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Kolkata and the Nipah outbreak in Kerala. Why should we not be surprised at the recent outbreaks in Kolkata or Kerala or at its un-seasonality?

Changed disease scenarios require a revision of strategies to detect and deal with them. Over the past two decades, India has improved its reporting of outbreaks. The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) was rolled out in a few States in 2007. From reporting 553 outbreaks in 2008, it last reported 1,714 in 2017. It was phased out in favour of a new, a web-

enabled, near-real-time electronic information system called Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP). IHIP was launched in seven States in 2018. It added 20 additional disease conditions over IDSP's 13 and could present disaggregated data to its users. Tragically, the programme, which would have enabled real-time tracking of emerging disease outbreaks, has not delivered on expectations.

The current design of surveillance is not adequate for the emerging disease scenario. Mitigating the spread of climate change-induced diseases requires safeguarding ecosystems, curbing greenhouse gas emissions, and implementing active pathogen surveillance. A unified approach, termed One Health which integrates monitoring human, animal, plant, and environmental health, recognises this interconnectedness. This approach is pivotal in preventing outbreaks, especially those that originate from animals. It encompasses zoonotic diseases, neglected tropical diseases, vector-borne diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and environmental contamination.

India must launch One Health and infectious disease control programmes by building greater synergies between the Centre and States and their varied specialised agencies. Animal husbandry, forest and wildlife, municipal corporations, and public health departments need to converge and set up robust surveillance systems. More importantly, they will need to build trust and confidence, share data, and devise logical lines of responsibility and work with a coordinating agency. So far, the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister has been taking this lead but with new World Bank and other large funding in place, this will need greater coordination and management.

Globally, there is an obsession with the enigmatic "disease X," but it is the familiar annual cycles of known agents such as influenza, measles, Japanese encephalitis, dengue, diarrhoea among others that will continue to test the public health system. Climate change is not limited to infectious diseases. It also exacerbates injuries and deaths from extreme weather events, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and mental health issues. The re-emergence of Nipah in Kerala is a wake-up call, that mere biomedical response to diseases is inadequate. In the face of a changing climate and the growing threat of infectious diseases, protecting ecosystems, fostering collaboration, and embracing the One Health paradigm are our best defences. The road ahead demands concerted efforts, not just to adapt but also to proactively safeguard our planet and its inhabitants.

***Pranay Lal is a Senior Adviser to the Health Systems Transformation Platform (HSTP).
Rajeev Sadanandan is the CEO of the Health Systems Transformation Platform and a former Health Secretary of Kerala***

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INDIAN PHARMA, MED-TECH SECTORS SHOULD TRANSFORM FROM COST-BASED TO VALUE AND INNOVATION-BASED INDUSTRY: MANDAVIYA

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Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya during the launch of the National Policy on Research and Development and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech Sector on September 25, 2023. Image credit: Twitter/@mansukhmandviya

The Indian pharmaceutical and med-tech sectors need to be transformed from a cost-based to a value and innovation-based industry, Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers Mansukh Mandaviya said on September 26.

Mr. Mandaviya was speaking at the launch of the National Policy on Research and Development and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech Sector and the Scheme for Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech Sector (PRIP).

Speaking about the benefits of the scheme, the Minister said it would focus on transforming India into a high-volume, high-value player in the global market of pharmaceuticals, meeting the quality, accessibility, and affordability goals.

It will transform India's MedTech sector by making it an innovation-driven powerhouse & nurture a culture of high-quality research & innovation.

The initiative will take India's Pharma MedTech sector from a cost-based to a value-based & innovation-based path.

“The policy will help to create an ecosystem of skills and capacities including the academia and the private sectors and give impetus to new talent among the youth through start-ups,” he said.

It will also enhance India's share in the global value chain, the Minister said.

He said India needed to do mass production of pharmaceutical products and medical devices, and for this “we have made three bulk drug parks in Himachal Pradesh, Visakhapatnam and Gujarat and four medical device parks in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, which will help in strengthening this sector”.

Emphasising the importance of the scheme, the Minister said India can only achieve self-reliance in pharmaceuticals and medical devices by strengthening its research and development infrastructure that would drive the expansion of access to life-saving medicines and drugs and help India become a global pharmaceuticals and medical exports hub.

"We need to make policies, new products and new research according to the needs of our country and the world, in consultation with industries and academia. We should become so independent that we should not be dependent on anyone for our critical needs," he added.

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MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT TO OBSERVE EK TAREEKH EK GHANTA EK SAATH ON 1ST OCTOBER AS PART OF SWACHHATA HI SEVA

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

The Ministry of Labour and Employment joins in the Government of India's call for citizens to engage in "Ek Tareekh Ek Ghanta" an initiative to promote community service and cleanliness.

During the on-going Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) campaign, which began on 15th September 2023, the Ministry of Labour and Employment is encouraged by the following achievements:

The Ministry has proposed to organise "Ek Tareekh Ek Ghanta" campaign on 1st October 2023 at 10 AM at more than 442 sites in 156 Districts across nation and citizens are urged to dedicate one hour of voluntary service (Shramdaan), to enhance the cleanliness of their neighbourhoods in alignment with the Swachhata Hi Seva campaign.

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SEEDS WITH MULTIPLE TOLERANCE WILL BE A GAME-CHANGER: BORLAUG AWARD WINNER SWATI NAYAK

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September 27, 2023 09:22 pm | Updated September 28, 2023 02:37 am IST - New Delhi

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Scientist Swati Nayak, who has been named the 2023 recipient of the World Food Prize's Norman E Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application. | Photo Credit: PTI

International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC) scientist Swati Nayak, known for research works in climate-resilient and nutritious rice varieties, recently won Borlaug Field Award by the World Food Prize, named in honor of the renowned agricultural scientist and Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug. Dr. Nayak had organised more than 10,000 on-farm and comparative testing for more than 500 climate resilient, high-yielding, bio-fortified and healthier seed varieties.

Placing her research in the small holder farmers' perspective, Dr. Nayak said developing high yielding inbreds (non hybrids) from our old seed varieties and the focussing on climate resilient and climate responsive varieties rich in micro nutrients have been the innovations of this decade. The combined efforts of various national and international organisations resulted in developing such varieties, she told *The Hindu*.

She is also focused on preserving the landrace of seeds found in the country. "Life style diseases are certainly concern. We need more low glycemic index varieties of rice which are with micro nutrients. Next decade should be dedicated to such kind of researches," Dr. Nayak said.

Giving out the example of the traditional *Kala Namak* seed variety of paddy found in eastern India, she said own varieties have to be conserved for both scientific and cultural purposes. "We need to empower the farming community to help them produce better quality of seeds and maintaining their germplasm. It will help them for better yield and better taste of the seeds. The yield may not be competitive, but market positioning shall help farmers to help better price for these seeds," she said.

Swati Nayak with paddy farmers in Odisha. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Researchers around the country are trying to evaluate different accessions of seed varieties, she said. "We collect multiple accessions and assess it. We validate it for yield and market

aspects. For example, we have identified 2-3 best accessions for *Kala Namak* and we are now focusing on scaling and capacity building of these seeds. The seeds will be available for larger production purposes soon. There is demand. But we have to now work on how to consolidate on this demand,” she said.

The effort of the scientific community is to make seeds affordable for small holders without much cost, investment and infrastructure. “Average yield is a matter concern, especially for eastern States. There is still room for increasing and stabilising the productivity. Bringing high yielding seeds and fighting climatic, biotic and abiotic risks. Scientists are fighting along with farmers in this process. Resilient varieties replacing the regular varieties is like an insurance. We need to ensure that these varieties are accessible to farmers,” she said.

Maintaining that climate change is a reality and its induced damages on agriculture cannot be ignored, she said the country has a lot of climate resilient varieties now, which can face conditions of droughts and floods.

“The efforts are also to develop seeds with multiple tolerance-- floods, droughts and pests. It is a package so that farmers do not have to look for so many options. The system will also be focussed on what to produce and what to grow. These new generation varieties will be a game changer. They will be available as options for farmers in next two three years,” she said.

On fortified rice, she said her personal opinion is in favour of bio fortified foodgrains. “Looking at the perspectives of both farmers and consumers, I would suggest that bio fortified rice is the most low cost, intensive and affordable way to address the nutrition challenge. It will directly go into their consumption system. Bio fortified rice can be produced in bulk volume and it is not cost intensive. It could be the future and the way forward,” she said adding that the country needs good products to convince farmers for bulk production.

“A buy-back guarantee or incentives for farmers for cultivating these special varieties will give a boost to the production,” she said.

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THE TWO HEROES OF 'SANATANA DHARMA', THEIR INSIGHTS

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Swami Vivekananda at Chicago. | Photo Credit: THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

When Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan makes a point out of Sree Narayana Guru not using the word 'Sanatana' as a prefix to 'Dharma' in the name of his organisation, the intention is to clearly distance progressive elements within Hinduism from the 'majority' who supposedly follow the casteist 'Sanatana' version. What Mr. Vijayan and other politicians do not seem to appreciate is that no Hindu reformer including Sree Narayana Guru criticised 'Sanatana Dharma' or disowned it in favour of any other religion or philosophy.

Orthodox opponents of 19th century reform movements such as Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna mission called themselves 'Sanatanists' to emphasise permanence of ancient textual doctrines over dynamism and change, as the essential feature of Hinduism. Just like the many voices that resisted change right from the time of Adi Sankara to the Bhakti movement, these self-proclaimed 'Sanatanists' also remained on the wrong side of history. What they failed to realise — like some politicians of today — is that dynamism and propensity for reform are the most 'Sanatana' or ancient or original of Hinduism's 'Dharmic' features. Which is why the reformers had no qualms in using the phrase 'Sanatana Dharma' to describe their philosophies.

In the 'Satyarth Prakasa', Swami Dayananda Saraswati called the 'Vedic Dharma', bereft of many prevailing features of Hinduism including untouchability and idol worship, 'Sanatana Nityadharma'. Few can dispute that the proud 'Sanatani', Mahatma Gandhi, had the greatest role in bringing women into the country's social mainstream. In fact, it was Gandhians such as Renuka Ray and Hansa Mehta who first campaigned for reform in Hindu family laws despite facing stiff opposition, once again from self-proclaimed 'Sanatanists'. Their response was not to deride 'Sanatana Dharma'. In the Central Assembly, Renuka Ray quoted verse after verse from the Upanishads and scriptures to highlight Hinduism's egalitarianism. Any effort to carve Hinduism into progressive and regressive blocks and label the latter 'Sanatana Dharma' cannot overcome the influence and example of two icons of 'Sanatana Dharma', i.e., Swami Vivekananda and Subramania Bharati.

Before Sree Narayana Guru built his movement for emancipation of low-caste Hindus in Kerala, Swami Vivekananda called the region a 'lunatic asylum' for the kind of barbaric practices Hindus perpetrated against each other. He used every kind of critical epithet to describe the state of Hinduism and its youth. This anger and call for action arose only from his grounding in

'Sanatana Dharma'. Swami Abhedananda, Swami Vivekananda's chosen successor for his international mission, called the Chicago speech "an outline of Sanatana Dharma". He described the import of Swami Vivekananda's speech: "the word Sanatana Dharma, as you all know, means eternal religion. The eternal religion has no founder. By 'religion' we do not mean a particular set of doctrines and dogmas By religion it is not meant that we should accept some of the words written in a book (which may or may not be revealed) as infallible truth, whether the questions of minds are answered or not, but by religion is meant a solution of all the problems of life and death." It was this 'Sanatana Dharma' that formed the basis of Swami Vivekananda's attack on "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, (which) have long possessed this beautiful earth". It is essentially different from any religion that is static by virtue of having a single source. It is different because it is antithetical to dogma.

Bharati, an indirect disciple of Swami Vivekananda through his 'Dharma-Putri' Sister Nivedita, was equally anguished by the state of material and spiritual debility to which India had sunk during his times. In a poem titled "My Heart Seethes" he writes, "Like blind children, they follow always... in this sacred land where once flourished more than a million ennobling arts, like senseless beasts, they now simply subsist." The allusion is to the path of 'Sanatana Dharma' from which Indians have gone astray. For Bharati, without spiritual awakening, there could be no political liberation. It was Nandanar and Panchali of 'Sanatana Dharma' who were inspirations in his fight against discrimination and oppression.

Vain attempts have been made to distance these icons from their 'Dharmic' background. As Sahitya Akademi awardee Ka. Naa. Subramanyam says, "communists were never tried of quoting the poem of Subramania Bharati on the Russian Revolution often forgetting or wilfully withholding the fact, that he attributed to the Mother Goddess, of India as well as of the World, in fact the Maha Kali of the Universe, the Russian Revolution..." In his quest to make 'Vedanta' practical and meaningful to the lowest rungs of society, Vivekananda did not spare even the greatest of gurus such as Sankara and Ramanuja from criticism. This does not mean he thought outside the sphere of 'Sanatana Dharma'.

Recently, on September 11, Bharati was remembered on his death anniversary and the country celebrated the 130th anniversary of the Chicago speech at the World's Parliament of Religions. These are occasions to remind ourselves that Bharati and Swami Vivekananda could espouse 'Sanatana Dharma' in a manner that appears to subvert its own established rules, only because as Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan says, "Hinduism is not bound up with a creed or a book, a prophet or a founder, but is persistent search for truth on the basis of a continuously renewed experience."

Adithya Reddy is Advocate, High Court of Madras

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INDIA AGEING, ELDERLY TO MAKE UP 20% OF POPULATION BY 2050: UNFPA REPORT

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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United Nations Population Fund, India's 2023 India Ageing Report projected that the population of people aged 80+ years will grow at a rate of around 279% between 2022 and 2050 with a "predominance of widowed and highly dependent very old women". File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

With the decadal growth rate of the elderly population of India currently estimated to be at 41%, and the percentage of elderly population in the country projected to double to over 20% of total population by 2050, the United Nations Population Fund, India (UNFPA) in its 2023 India Ageing Report has said that by 2046 it is likely that elderly population will have surpassed the population of children (aged 0 to 15 years) in the country.

More than 40% of the elderly in India are in the poorest wealth quintile, with about 18.7% of them living without an income, the report said, adding that such levels of poverty may affect their quality of life and healthcare utilisation.

The report, unveiled by the Secretary, Social Justice, Saurabh Garg and UNFPA India Representative, Andrea M. Wojnar on Wednesday in Delhi, projected that the population of people aged 80+ years will grow at a rate of around 279% between 2022 and 2050 with a "predominance of widowed and highly dependent very old women" - a finding in line with the pattern across several nations.

The data showed that women, on average, had higher life expectancy at the age of 60 and at the 80, when compared to men — with variations across States and Union Territories.

For instance, in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, women at 60 years have a life expectancy of 23 and 22 years, respectively, which is four years greater than men at 60 years in these States — as compared to the national average differential of only 1.5 years, the report said.

Life expectancy of women at 60 years is greater than 20 years in States such as Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, raising concerns about their social and economic well-being, the report said.

Further, the sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) among the elderly has been climbing steadily since 1991, with the ratio in the general population stagnating. Between 2011 and 2021, the

ratio increased in India as a whole and across all regions, barring the Union Territories and western India.

In the northeast and the east, while the sex ratio of the elderly increased, it remained below 1,000 in both years, indicating that men still outnumber the women in these regions even at 60-plus years.

This, however, is not true for the other regions (which has a bearing on the country's average). "A case in point is central India, where the sex ratio went from 973 in 2011 to 1,053 in 2021, implying that the women caught up with and outperformed the men in survival after 60 years over the decade," the report said.

"Poverty is inherently gendered in old age when older women are more likely to be widowed, living alone, with no income and with fewer assets of their own, and fully dependent on family for support," the report said, pointing out that the major challenges facing India's ageing population are the feminisation and ruralisation of this older population and that policies must be designed to suit their specific needs.

The report noted that there was a significant inter-State variation in absolute levels and growth (and hence, share) of the elderly population as well, reflecting the different stages and pace of demographic transition across States.

Most States in the southern region and select northern States such as Himachal Pradesh and Punjab reported a higher share of the elderly population than the national average in 2021, a gap that is expected to widen by 2036, the report said.

While States reporting higher fertility rates and lagging in demographic transition, including Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, expect to see an increase in the share of the elderly population between 2021 and 2036, the level will remain lower than the Indian average, the report said. Compared with southern and western India, central and northeastern regions have the younger group of States as indicated by the ageing index.

"In the southern region, the old-age dependency ratio (elderly people per 100 people between 15 and 59 years) was higher than the national average at around 20 as is true of western India at 17. Overall, Union Territories (13) and the north-eastern region (13) reflected lower old age dependency ratios," it said.

The report also reviewed the response of the government and state authorities to the needs of elderly people during the Covid-19 pandemic based on experiences of older people. It said that while most said they received state aid, this was not enough; that there were no accessible public healthcare facilities; and that nobody except NGOs or CBOs (community-based organisations) helped them. In light of this, the report called for a special focus on older persons in disaster-preparedness plans that are formulated henceforth.

The report added that there is a lack of credible data on various issues related to the elderly in India and more could be done by including questions on relevant and emerging issues related to older persons in the upcoming data collection exercises of the National Sample Survey, the National Family Health Survey, and the Census of India, respectively.

The UNFPA report suggested that the government must work on increasing awareness about schemes for older persons, bring all Old Age Homes under regulatory purview and focus on facilitating in-situ ageing to the extent possible.

Mr. Garg called the report, prepared a “valuable roadmap”, while Ms. Wojnar said it will become an important resource for scholars, policymakers, program managers, and all stakeholders involved in elder care.

The report used data from the 2011 Census, the 2017-18 Longitudinal Ageing Survey in India (LASI) conducted by the Health Ministry, population projections of the Government of India and the World Population Projection 2022 report, among other sources.

Among other suggestions, the report called for the government to encourage the creation and running of elderly self-help groups, and stressed the importance of having elderly people live in multigenerational households. The report also suggested that the government should encourage *in situ* (at home) ageing as much as possible by creating short-term care facilities like creches or day-care facilities, citing better care when elderly people live with their respective families.

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CARING FOR THE OLD: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND'S INDIA AGEING REPORT 2023

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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September 29, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 08:21 am IST

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A good part of the world's population is growing older, and India mirrors this trend as well. The reality, according to the [United Nations Population Fund's India Ageing Report 2023](#), is that the population above 60 years will [double from 10.5% or 14.9 crore \(as on July 1, 2022\) to 20.8% or 34.7 crore by 2050](#). With one in five individuals set to be a senior citizen, there will be implications for health, economy, and society. In Kerala and West Bengal for instance, there is a growing population of the elderly who live alone as children migrate for better opportunities. With life expectancy increasing, thanks to better ways to fight disease, and decreasing fertility rates in many countries, including India, there are challenges in nurturing an expanding elderly population. Within this macro phenomenon, there are myriad other data of importance. For instance, women elderly citizens outnumber their male counterparts. At 60 years, a person in India may expect to live another 18.3 years, which is higher in the case of women at 19 years compared to men at 17.5 years. If women in India, where labour force participation is low at 24%, do not have economic and social security, they will become more vulnerable in old age.

There are also significant inter-State variations. Most States in the south reported a higher share of the elderly population than the national average in 2021, a gap that is expected to widen by 2036. While States with higher fertility rates, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, expect to see an increase in the share of the elderly population too by 2036, the level will remain lower than the Indian average. Overall, more than two-fifths of the elderly are in the poorest wealth quintile — ranging from 5% in Punjab to 47% in Chhattisgarh; also, 18.7% of the elderly do not have any income. A high proportion of the rural population is among the elderly and often economically deprived. To meet the challenges, physical and mental health, basic needs of food and shelter, income security, and social care, a 'whole-of-society' approach is required. Geriatric care must be fine-tuned to their unique health-care needs. There are several schemes targeting the elderly but many are unaware of them or find it too cumbersome to sign up. The National Policy on Older Persons, 1999 and the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 lay down the care of the elderly but to ensure that senior citizens live in dignity, public and private policies must provide a more supportive environment.

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REFORM CAN ADDRESS INDIA'S KIDNEY TRANSPLANT DEFICIT

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September 29, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 08:38 am IST

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'Reforms of kidney exchange laws have been slow' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

India's organ shortage when it comes to kidneys is alarming. In 2022, over two lakh patients needed a transplant, but there were only about 7,500 transplants (about 3.4%). Due to the prevalence of diabetes, malnourishment, overcrowding and poor sanitation, there is a high prevalence of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) in India, affecting about 17% of the population. CKD often leads to end-stage renal disease (ESRD). A kidney transplant is often the best treatment for ESRD. Specifically, transplant is often better than alternatives on almost all dimensions that matter: quality of life, patient convenience, life expectancy, as well as cost-effectiveness. In contrast to India, the United States and other developed countries could carry out about 20% transplants. Notably, a significant portion of this gap is on account of more stringent regulations in India than a lack of medical facilities.

These are four main ways a patient can obtain a kidney. The first is to get a kidney from a deceased person. This is constrained due to a lack of donations, the particular conditions required on the nature of death, and the infrastructure needed to collect and store kidneys. The second is to request a relative or friend to donate. However, donor and recipient have to be compatible in terms of blood type and tissue type; such relative/friend donors are often incompatible.

Thus, regulations for kidney exchange are needed as kidney exchange must often occur across family units. But we argue that these regulations need urgent reform to unshackle two innovative kidney exchange methods: kidney 'swaps' and kidney 'chains'.

In kidney swap, let us take the example of two strangers, Sunita and Zoya, who need kidneys. Sunita's spouse is incompatible with her, and Zoya has the same problem. However, if Sunita's spouse is compatible with Zoya, and Zoya's spouse is compatible with Sunita, swap donations are possible. In kidney chain, let us look at the case of Sonu who is an altruistic donor donating his kidney with no expectation of a kidney in return. Sonu donates to Sunita (assuming compatibility), Sunita's spouse donates to Zoya, and Zoya's spouse donates to some other compatible person, and so on.

Our research shows that there are barely any swaps and almost no chains in India. This is because of legal roadblocks. And this is a significant opportunity missed with terrible

consequences. Consider swaps. Swap transplants are legally allowed in India with due permission, but only near-relatives are allowed as donor-recipient pairs. Exceptions to this restriction are Kerala, Punjab and Haryana, where High Court judgments have recently allowed non-near-relative donor-recipient pairs after verification. Thus, in most States, if Sunita's donor is not a near relative (such as spouse, parents), she and her donor cannot participate in a swap. By contrast, it is legal for Sunita's non-near-relative to donate to her. These double standards across swaps and direct donations are questionable. Easing the laws for swaps to make them on a par with direct donations is necessary.

Further, unlike national, regional, and State lists for direct transplant from cadavers, there is no national coordinating authority for swaps. This is again a huge lost opportunity, since larger and more diverse pools make it easier to find compatible swaps.

While there are occasional swaps in India, there are almost no kidney chains. First, in all States except Kerala, it is illegal to donate a kidney out of altruism. Thus, one cannot start a chain since one cannot donate without getting a kidney (for a family member) in return. And, kidneys from the deceased or brain dead are only used for direct transplants, not for chains or cycles.

The lack of kidney chains is possibly an even bigger opportunity missed than swaps. While participating in swaps, families demand nearly simultaneous operations of all donors and recipients since no one wants to lose a kidney without gaining one. But in chains, each patient first receives a kidney and only then does their relative donate. Thus, chains, compared to swaps, involve significantly lower hospital resources and uncertainty for participants.

Needlessly harsh laws regulating swaps and chains have contributed to a proliferation of black markets for kidneys. 'Selling a kidney' to relieve financial distress is a mainstream reference. These black markets endanger all their desperate participants since these operations are conducted 'off the books', without due legal and medical safeguards.

Reforms of kidney exchange laws have been slow. The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act 1994 set the ball rolling by recognising transplant possibility from brain-stem death. In the 2011 amendment, swap transplants were legalised, and a national organ transplant programme was initiated. But the national network remained underdeveloped initially. According to the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules 2014, swap transplants are allowed only for near relatives. The government's recent reforms (February 2023) allow more flexibility in age and domicile requirements while registering to obtain an organ. But these reforms leave the fundamental issue of inadequate kidney supply largely unaddressed. This is why it is beneficial to allow and encourage altruistic donation, non-near relative donation for swaps, and to improve the kidney-exchange infrastructure.

India does not need to innovate in order to reform chains and swaps. Sufficient precedents have been set globally. Australia, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands and the United States (among others) now allow altruistic donations. Spain and the United Kingdom have national-level registries for kidney chains and swaps. The U.S. has especially made progress in facilitating thousands of swaps and chains. Spain even has international collaborations for kidney exchange. India's real challenge, therefore, is to learn from and replicate such existing successful regulations to improve the lives of several thousands of citizens.

Jay Mehta is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad. Utkarsh Agrawal is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad. Jeevant Rampal is an Associate Professor of Economics at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad

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SWAMINATHAN WALKED AHEAD OF HIS TIME: SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

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File photo of M.S. Swaminathan. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Indian agriculture scientists and policymakers [remember M.S. Swaminathan](#) as someone who walked ahead of time not just as a scientist, researcher and academic but also as a visionary administrator. The community believes that developing high yielding Basmati rice varieties, innovatively using the technology of mutation for various crops, application of genetics for increasing production and food security and launching programmes such as “lab to land” were his major contributions to the country’s agriculture sector.

Former Director-General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Trilochan Mohapatra remembers Dr. Swaminathan as an encouraging teacher and a strong administrator. “He was our professor at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute. He minced no words to encourage us. When we successfully organised a congregation of scientists, he wrote a letter to then Director of IARI congratulating us as ‘students who take pride in perfection’. I had met him last for his birthday in August. In all our meetings, he would passionately talk about research and finding in the field of agriculture, which was so inspiring,” Prof. Mohapatra said.

Nutritional quality through mutation of crops, bio fortification, funding States to promote agriculture, precision farming, advocacy through National Academy of Agricultural Sciences and establishment of a Central Institute for Women in Agriculture were all his pet projects, Prof. Mohapatra said. “Political class always valued his suggestions and recommendations,” he added.

Prof. Mohapatra remembers insightful papers by Dr. Swaminathan on his doctoral research work in the science of potato in *Nature* magazine is still considered as seminal. “He joined the Central Rice Research Institute in Cuttack when he came back to India after his research. He always had a special consideration for this Institute,” Prof. Mohapatra said. “His stamp is visible in ICAR, IARI and all other national agriculture science institutions,” he added.

Chairman of the Punjab Farmers Commission and eminent agro-economist Sukhpal Singh said it was under Dr. Swaminathan’s leadership that efforts were launched at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) to cultivate rice with C4 carbon fixation capabilities, enabling improved photosynthesis and water utilisation. “Dr. Swaminathan also contributed to developing the world’s first high-yielding basmati rice,” Prof. Singh said, adding that his incomparable

contribution in improving agricultural production by developing high yielding crop varieties and modern technologies would always be remembered by the country, especially by the farmers of Punjab. "A true visionary and pioneer in agriculture and sustainable development," Prof. Singh said.

IARI Director A.K. Singh said in a statement that in passing away of Dr. Swaminathan ends an era of agricultural research, education and extension that was full of disruptive innovation. "If God appears to poor and hungry in form of bread as said by Mahatma Gandhi, that God is Dr. Swaminathan who should be worshipped by every citizen while taking daily meals," Prof. Singh said.

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