

## Crop investment support should have been priority of Telangana Govt, opine farmers

Hyderabad: In the given situation, the crop investment assistance is more important for every farmer at this particular juncture. Given a chance to choose between the loan waiver and the assistance promised under Rythu Bharosa, "I will prefer the latter", said Peddinti Satyanarayana, a farmer from Aswaraopet. He said the government is not aware of the hardships the small and marginal farmers were facing in borrowing money required to support the initial activity for the 'Vanakalam' crop season. Even farmers with land holdings ranging up to five acres need to have at least Rs 50,000 in cash on hand to ensure that the farm activity takes off without any delay.

The banks were not venturing to meet the credit needs of such farmers as their crop loans were long overdue. Stretching hands before the private money lenders to meet the crop investment was indeed prohibitive but inevitable. The interest they charge was exorbitant as the interest rate varies from three per cent per month and in case of emergencies it goes up to four to five per cent in the villages, he added. This being the condition of the farmers, they were ready to receive the crop investment

support even at the previous rate of Rs 5000 per acre as it would save them from being left at the mercy of the money lender. The loan waiver was equally welcome, but it should have been advanced by at least a month. The banks would have come forward to extend fresh loans to the farmers once the existing loans were waived. The waiver is not properly timed by the government, he felt.

Another farmer Madikanti Narsaiah, from Mannegudem in Mahabubabad district said the farmers despite all the help extended by the previous government were yet to be out of the debt trap. Both crop investment support and loan waiver are equally important to extend a helping hand to the farmers. Many of the tribal farmers in the village are making a beeline before the seed distributors and fertiliser retailers. The seeds and fertilisers are available on credit and repayment would be scheduled at the harvest time. Government support for crop investment support by the end of July would be more productive for them besides saving the farmers from the lenders. A farmer from Nizamabad, Mara Ganga Reddy expressed the hope that the state government would give more priority to the agriculture



investment support over all other initiatives intended to reach out to the farmers. In anticipation of the loan waiver, the farmers did not repay the existing loans and the banks did not come forward to extend fresh loans to the farmers so far in this season. It is a peculiar situation in the state. Since the

systems were being streamlined by the government for extending the loans waiver and the crop investment assistance, it is worth waiting, he said.

At least from the next season onwards the farmers would get timely support from the government, he hoped.

## Medigadda disproves Congress accusations during floods, says KTR



Hyderabad: Though Godavari river was in spate, it could wash out only the sinister designs of the Congress party that were intended to discredit the enormous effort put in by the previous BRS regime to address the scarcity conditions in the State, BRS working president KT Rama Rao said on Saturday.

He stated that the Medigadda bar-

rage, which was written off by the Congress government, had disproved all the allegations against it by standing resolute and rock-solid surviving the flood once again. The colossal barrage structure built on the Godavari remained intact, exposing the accusations that Rs.1 lakh crore had gone down the drain with the construction of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP).

The project became a reality because of the steely resolve of former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao with which it was implemented with an urge to address the drought and deprivation in the State, he

said on X. Acknowledging Kaleshwaram as a manmade wonder, he hailed Chandrashekhar Rao on behalf of the people of Telangana for his monumental contributions to the State.

## 1,490 students graduate from GITAM Hyderabad

Sangareddy: GITAM deemed to be a University Hyderabad celebrated its 15th graduating ceremony as 1,490 graduated from their varsity amid the presence of the parents and faculty on the Varsity campus at Rudraram in Patancheru mandal of Sangareddy district on Saturday. The management of the Varsity presented gold medals to 23 meritorious students honouring their exceptional performances.

Meanwhile, 24 students scholars were also awarded doctorates during the graduation programme this year. The varsity premises were enveloped in a festive atmosphere as the students were seen walking along the campus corridors in

graduation ceremony attire. Addressing the passing out students chief guest former global banking strategist and former CEO of Barclays Bank of India Ram Gopal underlined the importance of students focusing on making an impact on society rather than just earning. He called upon them to find joy in their professional journey by giving back something to society. Acting Vice-Chancellor Prof Gouthama Rao Yejjuru said that GITAM created a student-centric holistic environment where the students can experience 360-degree learning. Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Varsity Prof DS Rao and others were present. Later, the students took photographs with faculty, classmates, and parents.



# Trying juveniles as adults is not the answer

In May, a speeding car, allegedly driven by a teenager, killed two young techies in Pune. As prescribed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, or the JJ Act, 2015, the adolescent was initially brought before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), which granted him bail under seemingly lenient conditions. This decision, coupled with the tragic outcome of the incident and emerging accusations of privilege being used to tamper with the investigation, sparked public outrage. Following the backlash, the JJB modified its order, directing the adolescent's detention in an Observation Home. This was challenged before the Bombay High Court, which directed his release on the ground that he was granted bail in accordance with due procedure. The High Court noted that the JJ Act is "not only a beneficial legislation, but is also a remedial one." The push by some to prosecute the adolescent as an adult raises broader questions about the power of the juvenile justice system to address severe offences like drunken driving and the demand for accountability in cases involving young offenders.

The JJ Act allows for the possibility of trying adolescents above 16 as adults if they are accused of committing a "heinous" offence. A "heinous" offence is one with a minimum punishment of seven years or more. Offences such as culpable homicide and causing death by negligence, which are common in drunken driving cases, are not "heinous" offences because they do not have a prescribed minimum punishment. The JJ Act, amended in 2021, now categorises an offence that has no minimum sentence but has a maximum sentence of more than seven years as a "serious offence" which, nonetheless, does not merit the transfer of a case to the adult criminal justice system. In any case, when an adolescent above 16 years of age is accused of a "heinous" offence, the JJB, a quasi-judicial body, conducts a preliminary assessment to determine if they should be tried as an adult. If it concludes that there is such a need, the adolescent is transferred to a sessions court, which independently assesses the suitability of trying the adolescent as an adult.

These protections are based on the understanding that adolescence is a temporary developmental stage characterised by immature judgement and underdeveloped impulse control. This is recognised by the Supreme Court in *Dr. Subramanian Swamy v. Raju* (2014) and by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Consequently, the juvenile justice system emphasises rehabilitation and social reintegration over punishment, acknowledging that adolescents, due to their high neuroplasticity, are more receptive to change.

Nonetheless, the juvenile justice system is rooted in holding offenders accountable for their actions. When an adolescent is found to have committed a crime, the JJ Act empowers the multidisciplinary JJB to tailor a response befitting the circumstances and the adolescent concerned. A conviction can result in institutionalisation of the offender, but with the express goal of rehabilitation. The JJBs can prescribe interventions such as therapy, psychiatric support, and de-addiction during and after institutionalisation. An individual care plan



is prepared for the adolescent's rehabilitation keeping in mind their socioeconomic conditions and the circumstances of the crime. This approach has the potential to foster accountability and healing, creating opportunities for justice that are often unattainable within the rigid confines of the punitive adult justice system.

Specifically in cases of deaths caused by motor accidents, innovative approaches have been attempted in Indonesia and the U.S. that enable offenders to face their victims and focus on personal accountability. In some jurisdictions, convicted drunk drivers are required to face a victim impact panel (VIP) of relatives of victims who express how the incident affected their lives. A report released in 2022 by Kevin Thompson and Sarah Joyce found a reduction in

recidivism amongst offenders exposed to VIPs in North Dakota. While this can never change the life-altering incident itself, it personalises the loss and grief experienced by the victim and gives an opportunity to the offender to express regret. Practices like this recognise the victim and their family as central to the process of justice dispensation in contrast to the traditional penal system where the victim is reduced to a witness or is not involved at all as the state takes over prosecution. They create space for the needs of the victims that may range from compensation to an apology or explanation or acknowledgement of responsibility by the offender. They also expose adolescents to an education regarding accountability and sensitivity to fellow human beings to foster

their transformation into responsible adults. Facing the victims or their families can be a powerful and transformative experience for offenders. Responses of the juvenile justice system can include the family members and communities of both the offender and the victim and can involve counselling the offender's family. This approach recognises that crime is often the outcome of a complex interplay of societal and psychological factors. However, the potential of the juvenile justice system remains unfulfilled. Trying adolescents as adults sidesteps the problem of weak implementation of the juvenile justice system. The issue lies not in the perceived leniency or "misuse" of the system, but rather in the failure to fully implement its foundational principles.

## Google-backed software developer GitLab explores sale

GitLab, a U.S. provider of cloud-based software development tools whose investors include Google parent Alphabet, is exploring a sale after attracting acquisition interest, according to people familiar with the matter. GitLab, which has a market value of about \$8 billion, is working with investment bankers on a sale process that has attracted interest from peers, including cloud monitoring firm Datadog, the sources said. Any deal is still weeks away and no agreement is certain, the sources said, requesting anonymity because the matter is confidential.

GitLab and Datadog did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Alphabet, which has a 22.2% voting stake in GitLab through its venture capital arm, also did not respond to a request for comment.

Dealmaking in the technology sector is picking up, as advances in artificial intelligence and cloud computing push com-

panies to expand their offerings. Alphabet is in advanced talks to acquire cybersecurity startup Wiz for roughly \$23 billion after previously exploring an acquisition offer for marketing software company HubSpot, Reuters has reported. The technology sector accounted for the largest share of mergers and acquisitions during the first half of 2024, jumping more than 42% year-on-year to \$327.2 billion globally, according to data from Dealogic.

GitLab's platform allows development, operations and security teams to design and manage software using a single tool. It has more than 30 million registered users and is deployed by more than half of the Fortune 100 companies, according to its website. Its nominal headquarters are in San Francisco but all its employees work remotely.

GitLab's shares, which have been trading in New York since their initial pub-

lic offering in 2021, are down 16% so far this year, underperforming a 3% rise in the S&P 500 Application Software index, on concerns about its customers cutting spending.

While the company reported robust year-on-year revenue growth of 33% to \$169.2 million and posted its first ever positive cash flow in its latest quarter, it acknowledged it faces headwinds in pricing its offerings as it competes with Microsoft following its \$7.5 billion acquisition in 2018 of rival GitHub.

GitLab CEO and co-founder Sid Sijbrandij, who controls 45.51% of the voting stock through dual-class shares, said on the company's quarterly earnings call last month that he would undergo treatment for osteosarcoma, a form of cancer, for a second time after he was also treated for it last year. He added that he is working on making a full recovery and would continue with his duties.



# Indian Badminton Star Saina Nehwal Launches We Little Pediatric Dental Clinic in Hyderabad



In a move to expand their preventive pediatric dentistry services, the renowned We Little Dental Clinic launched their latest branch in Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad. The grand opening ceremony was graced by the presence of Indian badminton star Saina Nehwal, who praised the clinic's commitment to providing a child-friendly dental experience.

Over the last 10 years, We Little has been synonymous with preventive pediatric dentistry, seeding smiles in the lives of children and their parents. Founded by Dr. Shifa, an advocate of India's first Preven-

tive Pediatric Dentistry, the brand has been operating in Coimbatore, Chennai, and Bangalore since 2012 and is now expanding its footprint to Hyderabad. Recognizing the daunting experience that a visit to the dentist can be for children and their parents, the new We Little Pediatric Dental Clinic in Hyderabad has been designed to create a fun and adventurous environment. Spanning an impressive 6000 square feet, the clinic's interiors resemble a snow world, making it a delightful experience for young patients. With a team of 15 skilled dentists, the We Little Clinic is equipped with ad-

vanced equipment to provide painless dental care. They offer sleep dentistry to address issues such as cavities, broken or loose teeth, and other oral health problems, ensuring a comfortable experience for the children. Additionally, the clinic has developed specialized protocols, like Myofunctional Therapy, which involves breath retraining to fix crooked teeth, a condition previously thought to be genetic. During the launch event, Saina Nehwal, the chief guest, commended the clinic's beautiful ambiance and child-friendly facilities, including ample space for

play, as well as yoga and meditation areas. Nehwal also emphasized the importance of maintaining good oral hygiene, stating that brushing twice a day not only contributes to better sleep but also helps prevent dental issues.

In addition to her praise for the clinic, Nehwal shared a recent memorable experience of playing badminton with the President of India, Draupadi Murmu. Nehwal expressed her surprise and pride in discovering that the President is a skilled badminton player, describing it as a great and unforgettable experience for her.

## Police bust kidney racket in Delhi; MBA graduate lured poor and unemployed donors

An inter-State kidney transplant racket, led by an MBA graduate, which bought the kidneys of poor and unemployed people for ₹5-6 lakh and sold them for ₹35-40 lakh, has been busted by the Crime Branch, the police said on Friday. A total of eight persons were arrested in a week-long operation from various parts of the country, including Delhi-NCR, said a senior officer. The racket was active in Delhi-NCR, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat for the past three years, and 34 transplants carried out by the gang have been identified so far, the officer also said. Tip-off The Crime Branch received a tip-off about the case from a woman who accused two persons, identified as Sandeep Arya and Vijay Kumar Kashyap, of cheating her of ₹35 lakh by promising to arrange a kidney for her husband but failing to do so after accepting the money. Mr. Arya is the alleged kingpin of the racket. He made ₹7-8 lakh from each transplant and has an MBA in public health. Mr. Kashyap is accused of selling his kidney to Mr. Arya and later joining his gang. An FIR was registered on June 26 under IPC sections pertaining to forgery, cheating and the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994. Following this, a man named Sumit was arrested from Noida.

Forged papers, stamp seals, and patient-donor files were recovered from his possession. Two days later, the police arrested Mr. Arya and another accused, Devender, from a five-star hotel in Goa. Subsequently, five other members of the racket — Punit Kumar, Md. Hanif Shaikh, Cheeka Prashanth, Tej Prakash, and Rohit Khanna — were also arrested from various parts of the country. The police have also "bound down" seven patients and two kidney sellers in the case instead of arresting them as they were found to be unwell. When a person is bound down by the police, they are legally required to appear before an investigating officer or a court on being summoned and not allowed to leave the city or country without informing the authorities concerned. Explaining the modus operandi of the gang, the officer said, "Members of the gang used to monitor social media to identify poor and unemployed people. Such people were then added to various groups on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram, where advertisements to donate kidneys for ₹5-6 lakh were posted." Forged documents When they found a willing donor, the officer said, the accused persons would forge documents to show that the donor and the receiver were close relatives, which is a mandatory



provision for organ donation and transplant.

"According to our investigation, the

syndicate carried out kidney transplants in 11 hospitals in five different States," DCP (Crime Branch) Amit Goel said.



# Dalmia Bharat Foundation Welcomes New Skill Training Batch at DIKSHa-Kadapa



Marking a crucial step towards empowering local youth, Dalmia Bharat Foundation (DBF), the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of Dalmia Bharat Ltd. (DBL), India's leading cement company inducted its new skill training batch in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) at DIKSHa - Kadapa centre, Jammalamadugu division. 25 new trainees from the region were inducted into the inaugural batch sponsored by Karur Vysya Bank. Post completion of the course, the trainees will be offered placements with different employers. The centre also orga-

nized a valedictory ceremony for 30 trainees who successfully completed the Bridge course in collaboration with BOSCH, leading global supplier of technology and services. The course equips trainees with essential skills and knowledge, enhancing their employability and bridging the gap between basic education and specific vocational training. The outgoing trainees were presented with course completion certificates and offers letter to those who successfully secured placements. The batch has 75% successful placement rate, with a notable 14 of the 30 trainees being women. "Investing in skill development is

crucial for building a resilient and prosperous future for India", shared Mr. Mukesh Kumar Sinha, Unit Head of DCBL Kadapa. "At Dalmia Bharat, our mission is to empower youth through comprehensive education and vocational training, ensuring they have the tools to thrive in today's dynamic job market. We are committed to building a skilled workforce that drives sustainable development and growth. We extend our heartfelt thanks to KVB and APSSDC for their unwavering support in advancing these vital initiatives in the region."

The inauguration ceremony was led by Mr. H. Sunil Kumar, Branch Head of KVB Proddatur Branch, Kadapa District, along with esteemed dignitaries, including Mr. Mukesh Kumar Sinha, Unit Head of DCBL Kadapa, Mr. K. Surendranath Reddy, Prin-

cipal of Govt Polytechnic Jammalamadugu; and Mr. Kaleem, Placement Officer at BOSCH Ltd.,

Established in June 2023, DIKSHa-Kadapa facilitates skill training and employment for youth in three vital trades: Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in IT Enabled Services, General Duty Assistant (GDA) in Health Care, and Assistant Electrician (AE) in Construction. The center operates in collaboration with the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) and has recently partnered with Karur Vysya Bank (KVB), which sponsors one batch in each trade, accommodating 25 trainees per batch. DIKSHa (Dalmia Institute of Knowledge and Skill Harnessing) operates 20 centres across India and has trained over 16000 youth till date.

## Crypto fraudster from Jodhpur arrested in Telangana

Hyderabad: The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau on Saturday arrested a man from Jodhpur who was cheating people on the pretext of cryptocurrency trade. The cyber fraudster Arun Choudhary (34), works at Military Engineering Services, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, according to the police. Arun got in touch with the victim Sai Krishna Goud through Telegram App and managed to lure him to invest in crypto trading.





# Union Health Ministry contests international study that points to 11.9 lakh excess deaths in India in 2020, calls it 'gross and misleading' overestimate

Even as data from an international study emerged, estimating that 11.19 lakh excess deaths occurred in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic in India, and that life expectancy among Indian men and women fell, the Union Health Ministry on Saturday, July 20, 2024, issued a statement contesting these findings and, stating that they were based on "untenable and unacceptable" estimates. While the paper's authors claim to have followed a standard methodology of analysing National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) data, the Ministry said there were "critical flaws" in the methodology.

According to the paper, 'Large and unequal life expectancy declines during the COVID-19 pandemic in India in 2020', published in the journal Science Advances, 11.9 lakh excess deaths occurred in 2020 in the country during the pandemic, 17 per cent higher compared to the deaths in 2019. Their estimate is about eight times higher than the official COVID-19 deaths in India, and 1.5 times the World Health Organisation's estimates, researchers, including those from the University of Oxford, UK, said. Using data of over 7.65 lakh individuals, the study also estimated changes in life expectancy at birth, by gender and social group between 2019 and 2020 in India. The data was taken from the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5). According to the study, the life expectancy in women fell by 3.1 years, while it fell by 2.1 years in men, the authors said. Gender inequalities in healthcare and resource distribution within households could be possible reasons, they said. These patterns contrast with those seen in high-income countries, where excess deaths were higher among men than women during the pandemic, the authors pointed out.

Ministry says there are 'critical flaws' in methodology. However, the Health Ministry, in its statement said: "The most important flaw is that the authors have taken a subset of households included in the NFHS survey between January and April 2021, compared mortality in these households in 2020 with 2019, and extrapolated the results to the entire country." The NFHS sample is representative of the country only when it is considered as a whole. The 23 per cent of households included in this analysis from part of 14 states cannot be considered representative of the country, the statement said. "The other critical flaw is related to possible selection and reporting biases in the included sample due to the time in which these data were collected, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic," it said. Life expectancy among different social groups

In another finding, the researchers, while looking at social groups, found that high caste Hindu groups experienced a life expectancy decline of 1.3 years, whereas Muslims and Scheduled Tribes experienced a 5.4-year and 4.1-year drop in their life expectancies. The pandemic therefore, exacerbated the disparities already faced by these marginalised caste and religious groups in terms of life expectancy, the authors said. "Marginalised groups already had lower life expectancy, and the pandemic further increased the gap between the most privileged Indian social groups,

and the most marginalised social groups in India," said first author Aashish Gupta, a research fellow at the University of Oxford. Further, the researchers found that deaths in India increased across age groups, most prominently among the youngest and the oldest, whereas drops in life expectancy in high-income countries were largely driven by increased deaths in those aged 60 years and above. Excess deaths among the youngest could be explained by children in certain areas being more vulnerable to the COVID-19 infection, they said. The indirect effects of the pandemic and lockdowns, including deteriorating economic conditions and disruptions to public health services, also contributed to excess mortality in the youngest age groups, according to the authors. CRS is a robust system: Health Ministry

Contesting all of the findings, the Union Health Ministry said the paper erroneously argues for the need for such analyses claiming that vital registration systems in low and middle income countries, including India, is weak. "This is far from being correct. The Civil Registration System (CRS) in India is highly robust and captures over 99 per cent of deaths. This reporting has constantly increased from 75 per cent in 2015 to over 99 per cent in 2020," the statement said. Data from this system shows death registration has increased by 4.74 lakh in 2020 compared to 2019, it said. There was a similar increase of 4.86 lakh and 6.90 lakh in death registrations in 2018 and 2019 over the respective previous years, the statement said. "Notably, all excess deaths in a year in the CRS are not attributable to the pandemic. Excess number is also due to an increasing trend of death registration in CRS (it was 92 per cent in 2019) and a larger population base in the succeeding year," it said. "It is strongly asserted that an excess mortality of about 11.9 lakh deaths reported in the Science Advances paper in 2020 over the previous year is a gross and misleading overestimate," the statement said. It is noteworthy that excess mortality during the pandemic means increase in deaths due to all causes, and cannot be equated with deaths that were directly caused by Covid, it said. Estimates are erroneous: Health Ministry. The erroneous nature of the estimates published by the researchers is further corroborated by data from India's Sample Registration System (SRS), the statement said.

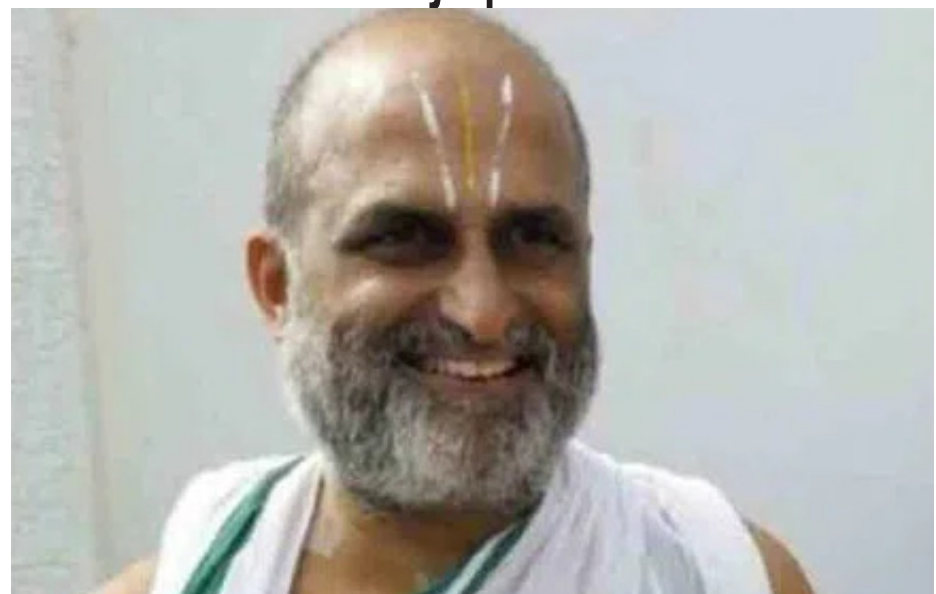
The SRS covers a population of 84 lakh in 24 lakh households in 8,842 sample units spread across 36 states and UTs, it said. While the authors take great pains to show that results from the NFHS analyses and SRS analyses for 2018 and 2019 are comparable, they completely fail to report that the SRS data in 2020 shows very little, if any, excess mortality compared to the 2019 data (crude death rate 6.0/1000 in 2020, crude death rate 6.0/1000 in 2019) and no reduction in life expectancy, the statement said. The paper reports results on age and sex, which are contrary to research and programme data on COVID-19 in India. The paper claims that excess mortality was greater in females and in younger age groups (particularly 0-19 year old children), it said. Data on about 5.3 lakh



recorded deaths due to Covid-19, as well as research data from cohorts and registries consistently shows higher mortality due to Covid-19 in males than females (2:1) and in older age groups. These inconsistent and unexplainable results in the published paper further reduce any confidence in its claims, the statement said. In conclu-

sion, the all-cause excess mortality in 2020 compared with the previous year in India is markedly less than the 11.9 lakh deaths reported in the Science Advances paper. "The paper published today is methodologically flawed and shows results that are untenable and unacceptable," the statement added.

## No Vivaha Prapti on July 21, Chilkur Balaji priest clarifies



Hyderabad: The Head Priest of Chilkur Balaji temple, C S Rangarajan on Saturday urged devotees not to believe a doctored video, which appears to be urging devotees to visit the Chilkur temple at 10 pm on Sunday, July 21 to take part in Vivaha Prapti program.

Addressing devotees, the Chief Priest on Saturday said "We have already conducted and concluded Vivaha Prapti program during our annual Brahmotsavams on April 21, 2024. However, some mischievous elements have cleverly edited my old video clip by editing out April and distributing it in multiple social media outlets. As a result, people are now under the impression that we are going to conduct Vivaha Prapti program once again on Sunday, July 21, which is not the case".

In the altered video, which is making the rounds in multiple social media plat-

forms, Rangarajan is urging devotees, especially those who are struggling to get married to reach Chilkur Balaji temple at 10 pm on 21 st to participate in the Vivaha Prapti program. "In April, we made a video urging people to take part in a special Vivaha Prapti program by visiting the temple at 10 pm on April 21. Some miscreants took that video and cleverly edited out April. We conducted Vivaha Prapti program once on April 21 and we are not conducting a similar program in the near future. I urge Chilkur Balaji devotees not to forward or share the doctored video clip. It is simply adding to the confusion," Rangarajan urged. The Vivaha Prapti program that was conducted on April 21, 2024 proved to be a hit with large number of people, who want to get married or facing difficulties for marriage, thronged the Chilkur Balaji temple causing massive gridlocks in the entire area.



# A wedding that was the talk of Madras

A wedding has taken hold of social and other kinds of media and made news the world over. Who would think that there was a wedding in conservative Madras, too, that at one time made it to national news? And no, I do not mean the wedding of the foster son which happened in the 1990s. It was the wedding of Lakshminarayani, daughter of movie mogul S.S. Vasan of Gemini Studios. And it took place in May 1950. And it was the mega event of its time. If the present wedding-in-the-news has lasted for more than a year, the earlier one spanned five days, with related events lasting for almost a month. A long list

Those were days when weddings of the affluent took place at their homes, and Gemini House (since demolished) was the venue for much of the festivity. With Vasan being the owner of a film studio and a hugely popular magazine (Ananda Vikatan), the list of celebrities in attendance was long. His having produced India's first pan-Indian success from the south (Chandralekha) a couple of years earlier meant a huge chunk of Bollywood was in attendance as well. Vasan, of course, knew all of them and they made it to the festivities voluntarily, more out of love and affection for what he had done for them.

Everything about the wedding made it to the news. To have received an invitation for it meant you had arrived. It was said that the prices of everything, from gold to curry leaves, went up all around the city as preparations progressed. Excitement reached fever pitch on May 19, when despite the presence of mounted police and guards from Gemini, the public gatecrashed. They were allowed in and filed past the glittering array of gifts, all displayed by Gemini staffers. Apart from the



glamour and glitter, the good taste in all arrangements was remembered. Everyone who came in was fed — at Gemini Studios, at a temple nearby, and at local schools taken over for the purpose.

The wedding pandal, done up by Gemini carpenters, was a sight by itself. There were music and dance performances by classical artistes, all of them of top calibre. The arrival of the groom in procession saw Mylapore cordoned off, as the crowds exceeded that of the Kapaliswarar Temple's Arupathu Moovar festival. The

sheer crush of people meant some VIPs stayed away. To make amends for this, Vasan held a series of intimate dinners, each one for a hundred people, that spread for almost a month. The entire proceedings were captured on cinema and later edited as a two-reel version played to Gemini visitors. In 1956, Vasan conducted his son's wedding. That was on the plot where the Music Academy stands. While this too received media attention, the earlier one lived on in memory. But the wedding of Vasan's son stood out for another reason. Ashokamitran, in his My Years With

The Boss, writes of how each of the Gemini and Vikatan staffers got a rosewood box with a dhoti, and a saree for the spouse. Many of the women were not happy with the saree they got, and Mrs. Vasan, in all her kindness, said they could come to Gemini House to exchange them. Nobody had anticipated that all the spouses would descend on Gemini House the very next day. With over a thousand women thronging the place, the road had to be cordoned off. The next day, a memo went out from the Boss — No Saree Exchange. Even Vasan had his limits.

# The curse of speculation in Karnataka

After a month of intense speculation that there could be a change of leadership in Karnataka, the Congress high command seems to have put a stop to it, at least for the time being. The conjecture was fuelled by party legislators from the camps of both Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister and party chief D.K. Shivakumar. It reached a tipping point when a seer asked Mr. Siddaramaiah to vacate the seat in favour of his deputy, at a State government event.

An examination of the last three and a half decades of Karnataka politics shows that speculation over leadership change and even changes within short spans are not new. The ninth Assembly elected in 1989 saw three Chief Ministers during one tenure for the first time in the State. Since then, there have been 18 Chief Ministers in Karnataka. These include short tenures for the Bharatiya Janata Party's B.S. Yediyurappa (four times) and the Janata Dal (Secular)'s H.D. Kumaraswamy (twice). Over this period of 35 years, President's Rule was imposed thrice in the State. The average tenure of a Chief Minister during this period was less than two years. Three coalition governments with the JD(S) were pulled down. The BJP came to power twice (in 2008 and 2019)

lacking a simple majority and eventually cobbling together a majority through engineered defections, in an exercise called Operation Kamala. During 2008-2013, there were three Chief Ministers and during 2019-2023, there were two. The exceptions to this rule were the S.M. Krishna (1999-2004) and Siddaramaiah (2013-2018)-led Congress governments.

This means that the the State's political circles have generally been abuzz with rumours about leadership change. In such scenarios, Chief Ministers have always been putting out political fires and, in some cases, skewing policy to placate dissenting MLAs by earmarking more funds to certain constituencies and districts. The top agenda in such situations has always been to manage the party high command, factionalism within the party, and defectors or alliance partners in case of a coalition government. All this naturally leaves the administration with little time and energy to focus on policy and governance. H.D. Kumaraswamy and Mr. Yediyurappa came to power in 2006 in a coalition government with an arrangement that each of them will be Chief Minister for 20 months. Mr. Kumaraswamy was sworn in first. Senior bureaucrats recall that the decision of the coalition created multiple power centres and leaders within the government, and



chaos in the administration. Mr. Yediyurappa, who came to power in 2019 after toppling the JD(S)-Congress coalition government by engineering defections, resigned on July 26, 2022. He announced his decision to step down at an event to commemorate two years of his government. Mr. Yediyurappa was dogged by speculation of leadership change through his two-year tenure. During that time, a top bureaucrat had told The Hindu that constant talk of change of guard can undermine the full authority of the chief ministerial position. In

a similar vein, former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar, who had a short tenure of less than a year in 2012-13, recently advised the Congress to desist from speculating about the issue in public. "It is the party's internal matter regarding whether or not they want to change the Chief Minister. But discussing it day in and day out in public will have an adverse effect on the administration," he said. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi also rued that these discussions had "brought the administration to a standstill".

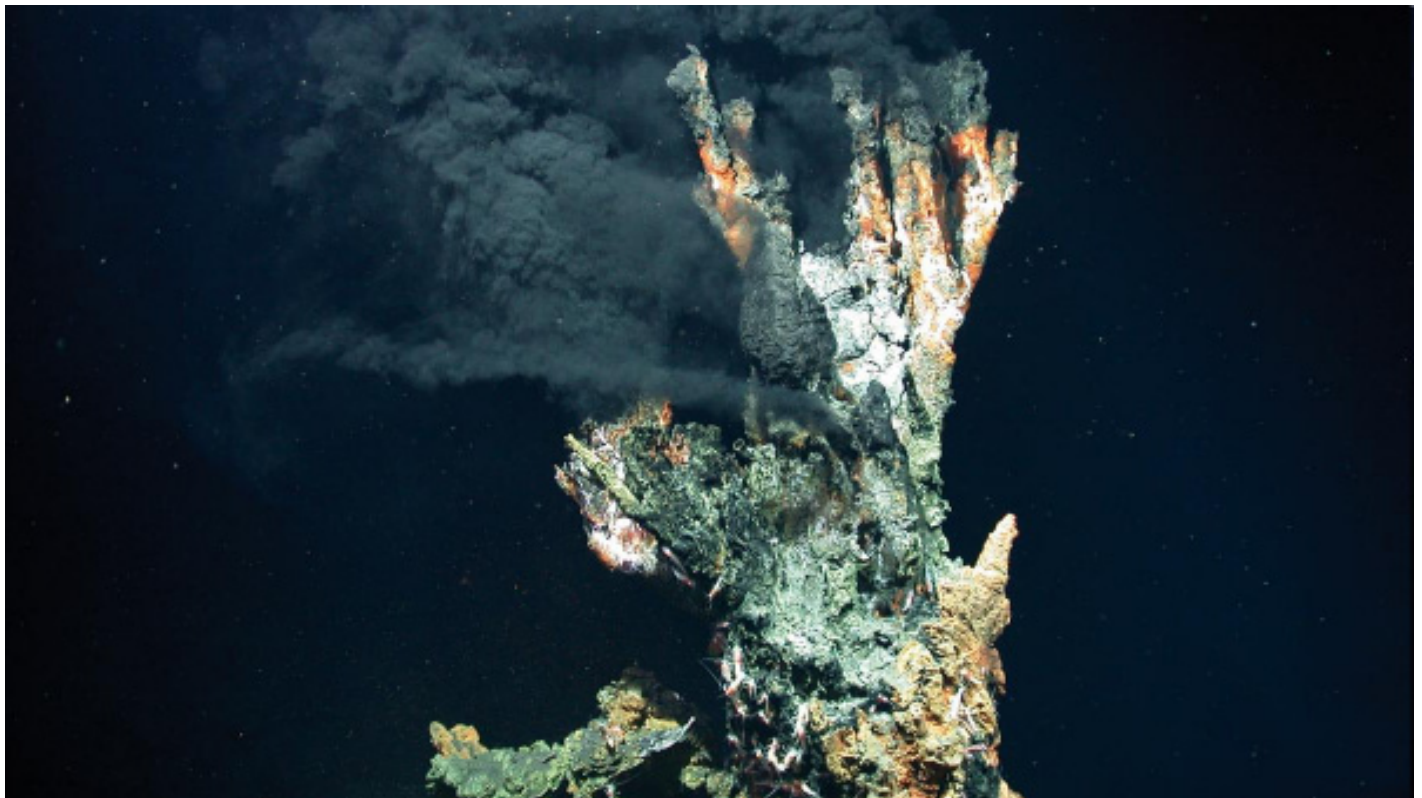


# Searching for LUCA, the first life-form from which all other life descended

The origin of life on the earth is one of the world's most enduring mysteries. There are a number of competing theories but all of them lack conclusive proof. Nonetheless, scientists widely believe a combination of geological, climatic, and chemical processes gave rise to the building blocks of life. In the 1920s, Alexander Oparin and J.B.S. Haldane independently proposed their origin theories — the first of their kind. In 1924 and 1929, Oparin and Haldane respectively suggested the first molecules making up the earliest life forms gradually self-organised from a "primordial soup" in a young earth's tempestuous, pre-biotic environment. This idea is today called the Oparin-Haldane hypothesis.

Researchers have also conducted biochemistry experiments and found evidence to support this hypothesis. A particularly famous one was the Miller-Urey experiment in 1952, in which University of Chicago researchers Stanley Miller and Harold Urey showed that in the right conditions, inorganic compounds could give rise to complex organic compounds. Miller and Urey mixed methane, ammonia, and water, and when they applied a strong electric current — like a lightning strike might have — the mixture contained amino acids, the building blocks of proteins. They reported their discovery the very next year in the journal *Science*. While we have evidence today that the earth's environment then may not have been much like what the experiment presumed to mimic, the very fact that amino acids could be created in a broth of inorganic molecules was groundbreaking. Other researchers have proposed other theories about the origin of life. A particularly prominent one is that meteorites from space could have brought the building blocks of life, sustained by discoveries on the earth as well as out there. In August 2019, French and Italian scientists reported discovering extra-terrestrial organic material 3.3 billion years old whereas Japan's Hayabusa 2 mission to the asteroid Ryugu indicated the presence of more than 20 amino acids there. LUCA and the molecular clock

As mysteries go, a close second to the origin of life is how life-forms evolved to produce the rich diversity we see around us today. Researchers believe all the three branches of life — bacteria, archaea, and eukarya — originated from a single cell, called the last universal common ancestor (LUCA). There is no fossil evidence to support the existence of LUCA, but the fact that modern genomes share so many features provides some insights. An important concept that allows scientists to reconstruct the 'tree of life' is the theory of the molecular clock. Molecular biologist Emile Zuckerkandl and biochemist Linus Pauling proposed it in the 1960s and biologist Motoo Kimura subsequently improved it. According to a simplified version of the theory, the rate at which mutations are added or removed from a population's genome is proportional to the rate of acquiring new mutations, which is constant. Later studies also found that the mutation rate varies between species. Using these two facts, researchers developed a way to estimate how much time could have passed



between two evolutionary events. To calibrate the molecular clock to a particular rate of mutations, researchers establish links between a genome with known events, such as the 'date' on which the first mammal evolved or with the age of certain fossils. These links act like temporal benchmarks. Thanks to the large number of genome sequences and fossils of various organisms as well as the computing power available today, researchers routinely use the molecular clock to understand the evolution of various life-forms on the earth through time.

Which is older: LUCA or fossils?

In a recent paper in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, researchers at the University of Bristol and Exeter in the U.K. constructed a phylogenetic tree of 350 bacterial and 350 archaeal genomes. Then, using a molecular clock, the team estimated when LUCA could have originated: around 4.2 billion years ago, just 300 million years after the earth itself formed. The team also reported LUCA may have had a small genome, of some 2.5 million bases and encoding around 2,600 proteins, all just enough to help it survive in a unique environmental niche. The team also suggested the metabolites produced by LUCA — compounds produced as a result of its metabolism — could have created a 'secondary' ecosystem in which other microbes could have emerged. Importantly, the origin of LUCA by 4.2 billion years significantly pre-dates previous suggestions about the origin of life on the earth. For context, researchers have found fossil records of the earliest life-forms in the Pilbara Craton in western Australia, one of the few places on the planet where archaean rocks are exposed aboveground and accessible. Studies of these fossils have suggested the life that lived on the rocks emerged around 3.4 billion years ago. The current study on the other hand pushes this date back by al-

most a billion years, almost on the heels of the birth of our planet itself. The researchers also found some reasons to believe LUCA may have had genes responsible for immunity, suggesting it had to fight off viruses. Taken together, the findings are tremendously significant not just for understanding how life emerged and evolved on the earth: they also speak to our ability to look for similar forms of life across the universe. The insights into evolution they provide

will also give a significant fillip to human ambitions to engineer synthetic organisms for various industrial, chemical, and biological processes on the earth as well as to create or moderate ecosystems on other planets in future. The authors are senior consultants at Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation, and adjunct professors at IIT Kanpur and Dr. D.Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, and distinguished visitors at Ashoka University.

## HYLENR demonstrates world's first cold fusion technology to generate clean energy

Hyderabad: Hyderabad-based Startup HYLENR has demonstrated world's first and a ground breaking cold fusion technology to generate clean energy. This innovation has received a patent from the Government of India for its Low Energy Nuclear Reactor Technology.

HYLENR's Low Energy Nuclear Reactor is a promising alternative for power generation, by amplifying input electricity to produce heat for space application (MMRTG), steam generation for multiple applications, room heating across cold regions globally, induction heating for domestic and Industrial requirements. Also, HYLENR devices can drastically decrease the risk profile for space missions. In a live demonstration during the launch of the product here on Wednesday, HYLENR's product successfully achieved a consistent 1.5x heat amplification (150 watts equivalent heat) from 100W electrical input.

HYLENR's reactors utilise Low Energy Nuclear Reactors (LENR known as "cold fusion") by applying milligrams of hydrogen and small volume of electricity

to stimulate and generate excess heat through fusion. These can produce significantly more heat than the input energy, making it a game-changing technology for power generation.

Dr. Prahlada Ramarao, Former Distinguished Scientist DRDO and currently the Chief Innovation Officer, HYLENR, said "LENR reactors utilize low-energy nuclear reactions to generate excess heat. By applying a small volume of electricity to stimulate these reactions, LENR can produce significantly more heat than the input energy, making it a potentially game-changing technology for power generation."

Siddhartha Durairajan, Chief Executive Officer, HYLENR said the Team has invested the last 10 years into developing the patented technology and plan to further invest and raise funds to commercialise the product in an accelerated mode. "The advanced research and development facility of HYLENR is located at T-HUB, Hyderabad. One more development centre is located in electronic city in Bengaluru." he added.



# Among party-hopping defectors, 89% fielded again, 70% re-elected, many become ministers: Data

Telangana is the latest State where such defections have taken place. As defections have become common, questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the anti-defection law. Data show that many politicians who were disqualified under the anti-defection law in the past 10 years were re-elected from the party they jumped to, in subsequent by-polls. Many also managed to secure ministerial berths. This is an analysis of 66 MLAs who defected in six States — Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Manipur. Of them, 59 (89%) were fielded again in subsequent polls by the parties they jumped to. Among the 59, the re-election rate, or the share who won again after jumping ship, was considerably high (70%). It is important to note that, except in Andhra Pradesh, where most politicians defected from the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and vice-versa, in other States, a majority of the defections were from the Congress to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In Himachal Pradesh, six Congress MLAs cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha elections and were disqualified. They were all fielded by the BJP in the subsequent polls. Four of them lost (Chart 2). Chart 2 | The chart shows the status of the defectors in Himachal Pradesh's 2024 Assembly bypolls. In 2016, nine Congress MLAs shifted to the BJP in Uttarakhand. This led to a political crisis in the State. These MLAs were disqualified in April 2016. Seven of them were fielded again in the Assembly elections in 2017 and six of them won (Chart 3). Among the defectors, three became ministers. Chart 3 | The chart shows the status of the defectors in Uttarakhand's 2017 Assembly elections.

The defection of 17 MLAs in 2019, almost all of them from Congress and Janata Dal (Secular), led to the collapse of the Kumaraswamy government in Karnataka. The BJP then came to power and B.S. Yediyurappa became Chief Minister. Fifteen of these MLAs were fielded again as BJP candidates in the by-polls, and 80% of them were re-elected (Chart 4). Chart 4 | The chart shows the status of the defectors in Karnataka's 2019 Assembly bypolls. Twelve of the defectors who joined the BJP and won the by-polls were given ministerial berths. Seven of them were ministers in the previous Kumaraswamy ministry. In 2020, 22 MLAs defected in Madhya Pradesh, reducing the Congress to a minority government after Jyotiraditya Scindia joined the BJP. With the resignations bringing down the halfway mark, the BJP had the numbers to form the government. Later, three more Congress MLAs resigned and joined the BJP. The BJP fielded all 25 of them in the subsequent by-polls. Of them, 72% were re-elected (Chart 5). Of the defectors who were re-elected, 13 were later inducted into the Shivraj Singh Chouhan ministry. Seven of them were ministers before defection. Chart 5 | The chart shows the status of the defectors in Madhya Pradesh's 2020 Assembly bypolls. This year, the Speaker of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly disqualified eight MLAs — four each from the TDP and YSRCP — for changing allegiance. Among



them, two were fielded again from each party. The defectors contesting on the YSRCP ticket lost, whereas those contesting on the TDP ticket won the election, making the win ratio 50% (Chart 6). Chart

6 | The chart shows the status of the defectors in the 2024 Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections. In Manipur, Thounaojam Shyamkumar was elected in 2017 on a Congress ticket but switched to the BJP

even before the oath-taking ceremony. He was later made a minister in the government led by N. Biren Singh and was only disqualified in 2020. He won the subsequent bye-election.

## Laxman's 281 and other cricket feats that speak for special players

Cricketers, like all athletes, have defining performances. The one that above all others reveals the essential style, the uniqueness, the essential person. These are often made in adverse conditions, against the run of play. Often they cause a captain to tell his dressing room, as Don Bradman did during an innings by Stan McCabe: "Come and watch this, you'll never see the likes of it again." You can imagine skipper Sourav Ganguly saying something similar while V.V.S. Laxman was compiling 281 in Kolkata as India beat Australia after following on.

Not all defining innings led to victories. Sunil Gavaskar's 221 at the Oval left the match drawn, while Sachin Tendulkar's 136 in Chennai against Pakistan couldn't prevent defeat. Was that Tendulkar's best innings, or should that title go to his 143 against Australia in Sharjah, the so-called Desert storm in a One-Day International? Perhaps it was the 114 he made on a bouncy Perth track as a 19-year-old? Not all such innings are centuries either. Gundappa Vishwanath's unbeaten 97 in the Chennai Test against the West Indies was more Vishy-like than even his double century against England. It is not always remembered that India won Laxman's Test thanks as much to Harbhajan Singh's 13 wickets including India's first hat-trick. That must rate as the off-spinner's defining performance — just as Anil Kumble's 10 for 74 in Delhi in the

second innings against Pakistan will remain his.

Defining performance Although Kapil Dev once took nine wickets in a Test innings, his defining performance may be the unbeaten 175 he made against Zimbabwe in the 1983 World Cup? My favourite, however, was his 129 in Port Elizabeth on India's first tour of South Africa where he seemed to be playing at a different level from everybody else. The next highest score was 17.

The Kolkata Test also saw the quintessential Rahul Dravid — calm, supportive, classical — as he made 180 in a partnership with Laxman. Dependable, as a current commercial featuring him has it. There was a brief 'Indiranagar ka goonda' in one of his early Tests, at the Wanderers where he made 148 after showing fast bowler Allan Donald who was boss! The statistician Anantha Narayanan wrote in a study recently that he calculates Ravichandran Ashwin will finish with 656 Test wickets, more than any other Indian. Ashwin reinvents himself regularly, and his defining performance will probably come closer to the end when he has mastered all his variations and worked out his tricks.

I once wrote — my only excuse being I was young and raw — that Sunil Gavaskar's batting, like history, repeats itself. It was a silly thing to say, and I was taken to task by the sports editor. No two

innings by any batter is exactly alike, and part of a reporter's job is to train himself to notice the differences. Variety and surprise are keys to mastery. If Gavaskar hit a straight drive off every ball that was pitched up to him, or Virat Kohli played that unique on-drive suggestive of a tennis player's cross-court shot, cricket would be so much poorer. Variety and surprise are keys to mastery. Every player is capable of one moment of greatness in a career, but the best players have many of them, and closer together. After he had made 192 in Auckland where he dominated the New Zealand bowlers, Mohammad Azharuddin was asked which was his favourite stroke. "The one that goes exactly where I want it to," he answered. Virender Sehwag would agree. His 195 at Melbourne where he perished attempting the six that would get him to his double, was probably that batter's defining innings. He shook the bowling by the scruff of the neck, hit 25 fours and five sixes and was out hitting a full toss to long on. He was a stranger to caution. In his first Test as captain, Virat Kohli made two centuries, the second of which nearly took India to victory. In the end they fell short by 48 runs, but Kohli's aggressive approach as batter and captain captured the cricket world's imagination. Especially since it all began with a knock on the helmet from a Mitchell Johnson express. Will someone else have the same list? Unlikely. And that's part of the joy of sport.