

Blackbucks to get rescue centre in Narayanpet

Narayanpet: Farmers in different mandals of the district can now heave a sigh of relief as the Forest department is gearing up to set up a rescue centre for capturing and translocating blackbucks and spotted deer to other places. Farmers in Maganuru, Krishna, Makthal, Utkoor, Narwah, Devarkadra and many other places have been complaining about blackbucks and spotted deer invading their fields frequently. With plenty of water available and input subsidy, farmers since the last few years have been cultivating two crops a year in the region. Earlier, due to lack of sufficient water availability, only one crop used to be cultivated and in the other season, the fields used to turn into grasslands for blackbucks to feed. Now, with two crops being cultivated and blackbucks invading their fields, farmers are a worried lot.

Since blackbucks are Schedule 1 species, they cannot be harmed or hunted. Worried over the crop damages, the farmers have been appealing the forest

department to capture the blackbucks and save their crops. Since majority of the lands come under the purview of the revenue department, the forest department officials could not initiate any action due to different reasons. Since 2021, the local officials have been appealing the head office for financial assistance of Rs.2.6 crore. The idea was to set up a rescue centre for capturing the blackbucks and spotted deer and translocate them to different places. After repeated pleas, the head office accorded administrative sanction of Rs.2.7 crore for setting up a rescue centre spread over 75 acres at Mudumul under Krishna mandal in the district. "After capturing the blackbucks, they will be placed at the rescue centre. The idea is to translocate them to Amrabad or Kawal Tiger Reserves or Eturnagaram forests. But to take up this exercise, permission will have to be obtained from wildlife authorities," said an official. The forest department would be adopting the 'boma' method to capture the blackbucks. Under this method, the



blackbucks are lured into an enclosure which would have a wide opening at one end and a narrow opening at the other. At the narrow end, a vehicle would be ar-

ranged and the blackbucks would be chased into the funnel-like fencing and eventually into the vehicle, which would be covered with grass and other material.

New category buses likely to be introduced by TGSRTC



Hyderabad: Two new category buses in Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) will soon be hitting the roads. While the Semi Deluxe buses will be operated between major cities, Metro Deluxe buses will be operated within the city. With some buses already having reached bus depots, the services are to start soon. As part of the 'Mahalakshmi' scheme, there has been a sharp increase in passenger numbers but the RTC's ticket

revenue declined as women are provided free travel in express and city ordinary buses. It is learnt that the government is not able to reimburse the full amount timely. So far, the pending dues to be reimbursed to the RTC for ticket sales are about Rs 610 crore. This has become a major concern for the RTC and thus the corporation is planning to launch new category bus services to increase revenue. At present, Palle Velugu, Express, Deluxe, Super

Luxury and Garuda buses being operated by the RTC are all major revenue earners. Of this, the Express services are considered more profitable. The corporation's direct income fell by half due to the implementation of free travel in Express buses. Even the Deluxe category buses are less popular. That is why their number is also nominal. Now, RTC is planning to introduce a Semi-Deluxe category buses between these two categories. The ticket price will be 5 to 6 per cent higher than Express buses and 4 per cent lower than the Deluxe bus. Seats will also be better when compared to other buses. It has been decided to divert express buses on the routes

where there is a demand for them. With the free travel accommodation, the number of women in the buses has increased and it has become difficult for men to get seats. Recently, RTC officials found that almost 20 per cent of men are switching to alternative vehicles. As there are fewer stops than the Express buses, some of the passengers traveling in alternative vehicles are likely to travel in Semi-Deluxe buses. Earlier, Metro Deluxe category buses were operated in the city, as they became old, they were phased out. They are now being restored. If the new category buses are introduced, women will also have to take tickets in Metro Deluxe buses, which will earn profits to the RTC.

130-year-old clock on Charminar damaged

Hyderabad: The white dial on the eastern side clock of the historic Charminar was damaged on Monday. The security personnel deployed at the 433 year-old monument noticed the damage to the clock, suspected to have been caused by pigeons which flock around the clock. On being alerted, the authorities took up the repair which was done by Tuesday afternoon. Ghulam Mohammed Rabbani of Wahed Watch at Mahboob Chowk along with his colleague Madhusudhan Chary,

had done temporary repairs to the more than 130 year-old clock. "On being informed about the damage to the dial of the clock, we attended to it today. A special glue paste was used to join the broken dial and restore it to its near original semblance," Rabbani told Telangana Today. The four clocks on the Charminar were installed in the year 1889 during the reign of the sixth Nizam, Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, and are displayed in four cardinal directions.

A manipulated video shared by Elon Musk mimics Vice President Kamala Harris' voice, raising concerns about AI in politics

A manipulated video that mimics the voice of Vice President Kamala Harris saying things she did not say is raising concerns about the power of artificial intelligence to mislead with Election Day about three months away. The video gained attention after tech billionaire Elon Musk shared it on his social media platform X on Friday evening without explicitly noting it was originally released as parody. The video uses many of the same visuals as a real ad that Harris, the likely Democratic president nominee, released last week launching her campaign. But the video swaps out the voice-over audio with another voice that convincingly impersonates Harris.

"I, Kamala Harris, am your Democrat candidate for president because Joe Biden finally exposed his senility at the debate," the voice says in the video. It claims Harris is a "diversity hire" because she is a woman and a person of color, and it says she doesn't know "the first thing about running the country." The video retains "Harris for President" branding. It also adds in some authentic past clips of Harris. Mia Ehrenberg, a Harris campaign spokesperson, said in an email to The Associated Press: "We believe the American people want the real freedom, opportunity and security Vice President Harris is offering; not the fake, manipulated lies of Elon Musk and Donald Trump."

The widely shared video is an example of how lifelike AI-generated images, videos or audio clips have been utilised both to poke fun and to mislead about politics as the United States draws closer to the presidential election. It exposes how, as high-quality AI tools have become far more accessible, there remains a lack of significant federal action so far to regulate their use, leaving rules guiding AI in politics largely to states and social media platforms. The video also raises questions about how to best handle content that blurs the lines of what is considered an appropriate use of AI, particularly if it falls into the category of satire. The original user who posted the video, a YouTuber known as Mr Reagan, has disclosed both on YouTube and on X that the manipulated video is a parody. But Musk's post, which has been viewed more than 123 million times, according to the platform, only includes the caption "This is amazing" with a laughing emoji.

X users who are familiar with the platform may know to click through Musk's post to the original user's post, where the disclosure is visible. Musk's caption does not direct them to do so. While some participants in X's "community note" feature to add context to posts have suggested labeling Musk's post, no such label had been added to it as of Sunday afternoon. Some users online questioned whether his post might violate X's policies, which say users "may not share synthetic, manipulated, or out-of-context media that may deceive or confuse people and lead to harm." The policy has an exception for memes and satire as long as they do not cause "significant confusion about the authenticity of the media." Musk endorsed former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee,

earlier this month. Neither Mr Reagan nor Musk immediately responded to emailed requests for comment Sunday. Two experts who specialise in AI-generated media reviewed the fake ad's audio and confirmed that much of it was generated using AI technology. One of them, University of California, Berkeley, digital forensics expert Hany Farid, said the video shows the power of generative AI and deepfakes. "The AI-generated voice is very good," he said in an email. "Even though most people won't believe it is VP Harris' voice, the video is that much more powerful when the words are in her voice." He said generative AI companies that make voice-cloning tools and other AI tools available to the public should do better to ensure their services are not used in ways that could harm people or democracy. Rob Weissman, co-president of the advocacy group Public Citizen, disagreed with Farid, saying he thought many people would be fooled by the video. "I don't think that's obviously a joke," Weissman said in an interview. "I'm certain that most people looking at it don't assume it's a joke. The quality isn't great, but it's good enough. And precisely because it feeds into preexisting themes that have circulated around her, most people will believe it to be real." Weissman, whose organisation has advocated for Congress, federal agencies and states to regulate generative AI, said the video is "the kind of



thing that we've been warning about." Other generative AI deepfakes in both the U.S. and elsewhere would have tried to influence voters with misinformation, humor or both. In Slovakia in 2023, fake audio clips impersonated a candidate discussing plans to rig an election and raise the price of beer days before the vote. In Louisiana in 2022, a political action committee's satirical ad superimposed a Louisiana mayoral candidate's face onto an actor portraying him as an underachieving high school student. Congress has yet to pass legislation on AI in politics, and federal agencies

have only taken limited steps, leaving most existing U.S. regulation to the states. More than one-third of states have created their own laws regulating the use of AI in campaigns and elections, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Beyond X, other social media companies also have created policies regarding synthetic and manipulated media shared on their platforms.

Users on the video platform YouTube, for example, must reveal whether they have used generative artificial intelligence to create videos or face suspension.

What are the various efforts being taken to mitigate caller ID spoofing?

Several friends and family members of mine received a call from a North American (+1) phone number which played a pre-recorded message informing them of a supposed court summons. I happened to receive a call from a +1 number too. I had also missed a domestic call shortly before the international one. While these automated calls are part of a well-known scam, looking at the phone numbers, I noticed that the Indian and North American phone numbers were identical to each other, save for their country codes. The Indian number was +91 98199 69857, and the American number was +1 (981) 996-9857.

What is caller ID spoofing?

Caller ID spoofing is a technique with which the phone number that a call appears to originate from can be falsified. On a technical level, caller ID spoofing is not difficult to perform. Spoofing techniques have been honed by enthusiasts, telemarketers, and fraudsters alike, over the years. Malicious individuals use caller ID spoofing primarily to shield their identity when engaging in illicit activity. At times, caller ID spoofing is used by these individuals to carry out social engineering attacks, where the spoofed caller ID is abused for the implicit trust that the receiving party associates with it. Caller ID spoofing can also be used to circumvent standard call blocking systems, and even for exploiting vulnerabilities in insecure Interactive Voice

Response (IVR) systems. Caller ID spoofing in itself is perfectly legal in many jurisdictions, and as a result of this several companies offering caller ID spoofing services to customers around the world have popped up over the years, with the first commercial caller ID spoofing service launching in 2004. Tackling scam calls. Caller ID spoofing is a costly affair for everyone involved. Telecommunication service providers lose revenue, users that are defrauded due to a scam call abusing a spoofed caller ID lose money, and law enforcement has a harder time investigating crimes where spoofed caller IDs are used. Caller ID spoofing is not a new phenomenon, and there have been several earnest technical efforts made for fixing the problem. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is a special UN agency focused on improving and standardising global information and communication technologies. The ITU was originally established as the International Telegraph Union in 1865, much before the UN existed, and of which India has been a member since 1869 onward. In 2021, the ITU published a technical report on countering caller ID spoofing. While this report does not have any mandatory provisions, it does provide a reference using Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) based authentication which could be implemented by Indian telecom operators to fix caller ID spoofing for good.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had earlier recommended to telecom operators to integrate a system known as Calling Name Presentation (CNAP), with the idea of allowing consumers to know who is calling them in a way similar to how applications such as TrueCaller do it, except CNAP would be mandatory, and caller names would appear as per KYC documents. A 2022 consultation paper on the project makes only a few mentions of caller ID spoofing, and does not provide a plan or technical measures for tackling the issue. It merely acknowledges in one sentence that caller ID spoofing is a problem that exists. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is reportedly in the process of launching a pilot of the CNAP project. Though it is not known whether CNAP will (or should) be implemented, it can be said that introducing such a system without first implementing a technical fix for caller ID spoofing will be a mistake. According to news reports from May 2024, the DoT has devised a system to "identify and block" international calls with a manipulated Calling Line Identity (CLI) and has issued directions to telecom operators to prevent such calls from reaching subscribers. However, considering that the problem has still not been fixed, it is unclear whether the system (technical details of which have not been furnished) is effective, or if it has even been implemented.

“One of the big themes in the film, in my reading of it, is religion... There’s a sacredness to Noa’s world, and it’s also kind of isolationist,” says Owen Teague on Playing Young Ape Noa in Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes, releasing on August 2nd on Disney+ Hotstar

Wes Ball breathes new life into the global epic franchise of Planet of the Apes with Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes, set several generations after Caesar’s reign. In this era, apes are the dominant species living harmoniously, while humans have been reduced to living in the shadows. As a new tyrannical ape leader builds his empire, one young ape embarks on a harrowing journey, questioning all he has known about the past and making choices that will define the future for both apes and humans alike. Premiering on Disney+ Hotstar on August 2nd, this latest instalment in the magnificent franchise will continue the epic saga, inspiring and enthralling viewers. The movie will be available in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu.

Owen Teague, who plays the young ape, Noa, delves deeper into sharing some insights about the character Noa and where he inhabits, “I guess tribal is the right word. It’s definitely not undeveloped. It’s definitely not like they are apes who have suddenly learned to speak. But it is a

deeply ritualistic culture that he’s part of. One of the big themes in the film, in my reading of it, is religion – in terms of what we worship, and what do we place importance on as different groups? There’s a sacredness to Noa’s world, and it’s also kind of isolationist. There’s not a lot of knowledge, but what is known is passed down through generations and kept very close.”

While talking about the pet golden eagle Noa has in the movie as a pet, he adds, “I didn’t work with a golden eagle, because I don’t know where you find a golden eagle! But I did work with some sort of hawk; I forget what exact species it was. But when we were doing ape school, we thought, “Hey, maybe we should work with some birds to get the feel for that,” so we had a day where this falconer brought his bird in, and we had it land our arm and take off, and worked on hooding it. It was incredible. The emotional bond between a falconer and his bird is really intense and that’s addressed in the film. It’s pretty cool.”



The History you may not know, The History you should know.



Presenting the first drop of this electrifying story, based on the award-winning book by Dominique Lapiere and Larry Collins. Streaming soon on Sony LIV the show is Produced by Emmay Entertainment (Monisha Advani and Madhu Bhojwani) in association with StudioNext and Sony LIV, Nikkhil Advani serves as the Showrunner and Director. The story is penned by Abhinandan Gupta, Adwitiya Kareng Das, Gundeep Kaur, Divya Nidhi

Sharma, Revanta Sarabhai, and Ethan Taylor.

The series features a stellar cast, including Sidhant Gupta as Jawaharlal Nehru, Chirag Vohra as Mahatma Gandhi, Rajendra Chawla as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Arif Zakaria as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Ira Dubey as Fatima Jinnah, Malishka Mendonsa as Sarojini Naidu, Rajesh Kumar as Liaquat Ali Khan, KC

Shankar as V.P. Menon, Luke McGibney as Lord Louis Mountbatten, Cordelia Bugeja as Lady Edwina Mountbatten,

Alistair Finlay as Archibald Wavell, Andrew Cullum as Clement Attlee, Richard Teverson as Cyril Radcliffe in pivotal roles.

Srisaillam Dam touches Full Reservoir Level, now turn of NSP

Hyderabad: With Srisaillam dam reaching its Full Reservoir Level (FRL), it is the turn of the downstream Nagarjuna Sagar project (NSP) to reap the bounty of Krishna River flood. The flood flow in the upstream stretches of the river and its tributaries are showing rising trend once again and they are certain to fill the huge flood cushion of over 175 tmc left in NSP

The project could add to its present storage by 30 tmc in the past three days. With the volume of flood flow rising to 2.17 lakh cusecs, the project will be receiving over 20 tmcs a day. The present storage could be built up to 164 tmcs by Wednesday evening as against its gross storage

capacity of 312 tmcs. The project authorities are gearing up for releasing water to the NSP left canal and Right canal to meet the irrigation needs in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh soon.

The water level in Srisaillam project touched 884.5 feet as against the full reservoir level of 885 by 6 pm on Wednesday. The project discharges are likely to be scaled up further as the average inflows are in the range of 3.58 lakh cusecs. The inflows into the upstream projects Jurala are in the range of 2.85 lakh cusecs, Narayanpur 3.30 lakh cusecs and Almatti 3.41 lakh cusecs are expected to rise further in view of continued rains in the catchment.

IEEE SEFET-24 Kicks Off in Hyderabad, Highlighting Sustainable Energy and Future Electric Transportation



The 2024 IEEE 4th International Conference on Sustainable Energy and Future Electric Transportation (IEEE SEFET-24) commenced today at The Plaza in Begumpet, Hyderabad. Hosted by the Gokaraju Rangaraju Institute of Engineering and Technology (GRIET), the event brings together industry leaders, researchers, and academia to explore advancements in sustainable energy and the future of electric transportation.

The conference opened with engaging tutorials led by distinguished speak-

ers, including Prof. Lalit Goel from NTU Singapore and Prof. Atif Iqbal from Qatar University. Their presentations covered topics such as "Generating Capacity Reliability Evaluation in Electric Power Systems" and "Techniques of Optimal Placement and Capacity of Electric Vehicle Charging Stations for Community Use". Keynote addresses featured influential women in engineering, with Prof. Harivardhagini S. discussing the objectives and benefits of the Women in Engineering (WIE) initiative, and Prof. Tripta Thakur addressing global recruitment and retention



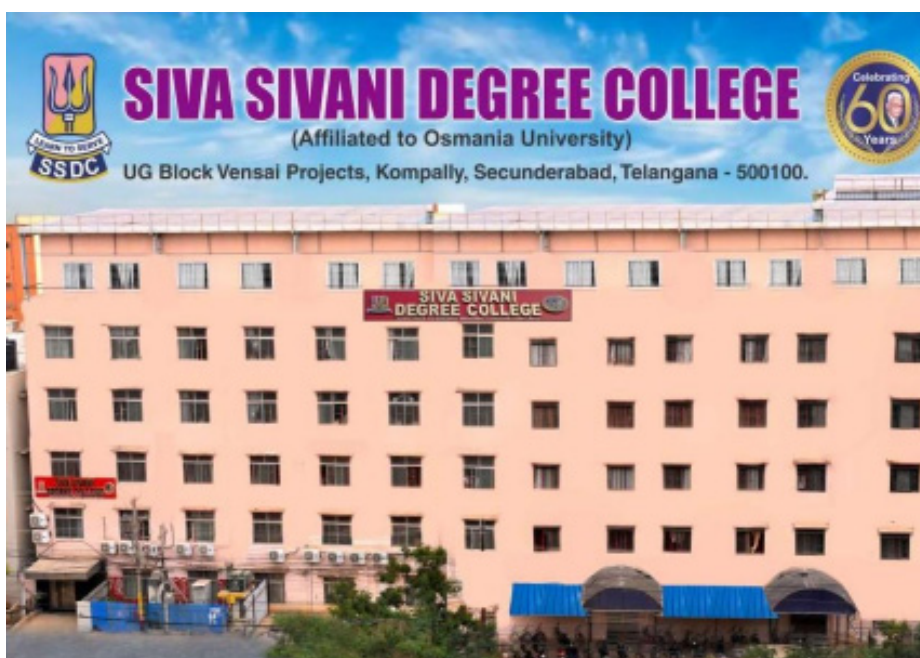
challenges for women in the field. Prof. Prerna Gaur, Director of NSUT West Campus and IEEE India Council, spoke on "Leadership Development for Women in Engineering", while Prof. G. Bhuvaneshwari highlighted women's roles in academia.

An industry panel session organized by the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) brought together experts from the automotive and energy sectors, including Shri M Nirmal Reddy, Founder & CEO of OHM Automotive Pvt Ltd. Hyderabad, Shri Rajesh Gudivada, Founder & CEO of Airgap Technologies Pvt Ltd. Hyderabad,

Shri Devender Reddy, Founder & CEO of ERIDE, Hyderabad, and Shri Abhishek Kumar Gupta, Director of I -Elektrik. The panel emphasized the importance of bridging education and industry through skilling for the future.

The conference will continue over the next three days with additional keynote sessions, technical sessions, and networking opportunities. The organizing committee expressed their gratitude to the Management, the Director, and the Principal of GRIET for their support and guidance in hosting this prestigious event.

Siva Sivani Degree College Granted Autonomous Status by UGC



Siva Sivani Degree College (SSDC) has achieved a significant milestone with the grant of autonomous status by the University Grants Commission (UGC). This prestigious recognition marks a new phase in the institution's journey, allowing SSDC to offer a more dynamic and inclusive education tailored to the needs of its students.

Founded in 2002 with just 12 students,

SSDC has grown exponentially and now educates over 2,600 students across various courses. The college is renowned for its diverse curriculum, which includes multifaceted activities, sports, charity work, enrichment programs, and social awareness campaigns.

This vibrant academic environment aims to nurture well-rounded individuals and prepare them as responsible citizens.

The newly acquired autonomy empowers SSDC to design its curriculum and evaluation system, enhancing the quality of education offered. The institution is excited to

explore this new opportunity and continue its mission of transforming young minds and contributing to the country's educational landscape.

Gadkari urges Nirmala to withdraw 18% GST on life, medical insurance premiums

New Delhi: Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari has requested Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to withdraw the 18 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) on life and medical insurance premiums.

In his letter to the Finance Minister, Gadkari raised concerns of the Nagpur Division Life Insurance Corporation Employees Union, which had submitted to him a memorandum regarding the issues of the insurance industry. Referring to the memo, the Minister said, "Levying GST on life insurance premiums amounts to levying tax on the uncertainties of life. The Union feels that the person who covers the risk of life's uncertainties to give protection to the family should not be levied tax on the premium to purchase cover against this risk." Further, he added that the main issue raised by the union is related to the withdrawal of GST on life and medical insurance premiums.



Both life insurance and medical insurance premiums are subject to an 18 per cent GST rate. He further said, "Similarly, the 18 per cent GST on medical insurance premiums is proving to be a deterrent for the growth of this segment of business which is socially necessary." In view of the above, you are requested to consider the suggestion of withdrawal of GST on life and medical insurance premium on priority as it becomes cumbersome for senior citizens as per rules with due verification," he said.

Telangana Assembly passes Appropriation Bill amid protests

Hyderabad: Amid vociferous protests by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) members, the State Legislative Assembly on Wednesday adopted the Appropriation Bill without much discussion. With members of the BRS shouting slogans in the well demanding Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to apologise for his remarks against BRS women legislators, the Appropriation Bill was voted on and passed through voice vote by Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar.

As soon as the House reassembled after a break of over two hours, the BRS members started demanding the Speaker to allow BRS member P Sabitha Indra Reddy to speak, but the Speaker said he would allow her only after they maintained silence. An enraged BRS member started raising slogans "Nahi Chalegi, Nahi Chalegi. Tana shahi Nahi Chalegi". The Speaker, who was upset with this, asked BJP Legislative Party leader A Maheshwar Reddy to speak. In the meantime, a large number of marshals were deployed inside the House, giving an indication that the government was making arrangements to deal with the protests. The marshals created a wall in front of the Speaker's podium to prevent the agitating members from getting near him. Soon all the members of the BRS stormed into the well and started raising slogans. There was complete chaos in the House as the treasury benches too started raising slogans against the BRS members.

Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu tried to mediate and urged the members to take their seats, but the BRS members were in no mood to listen to him. AIMIM floor leader Akbaruddin Owaisi also re-



quested the BRS members to take their seats and urged the Speaker to allow Sabitha Indra Reddy to make her point so that other members too express their view on the Appropriation Bill. Panchayat Raj Minister Seethakka intervened and accused the BRS members of disrupting the House. She claimed that the Chief Minister had not taken the name of Sabitha Indra

Reddy and that the BRS members were unnecessarily creating problems. Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka took strong objection to BRS members storming into the well and asked them to return to their seats. However, BRS members, who were in no mood to listen to him, intensified their protest. Sabitha Indra Reddy, Sunitha Lakshma Reddy and Kova Laxmi

squatted on the floor and started raising slogans. The BRS said it was not ready to allow the House to function until the Chief Minister tender an unconditional apology. Meanwhile, the Speaker asked the Deputy Chief Minister to move the Appropriation Bill and passed it through voice vote. The House was immediately adjourned for Thursday by the Speaker.

Wayanad landslides: Mud-covered bodies hugging each other found



Wayanad: Harrowing scenes of bodies in sitting and lying positions inside destroyed houses could be seen as rescue operations resumed in the landslide-dev-

astated Mundakkai hamlet in Kerala's Wayanad district on Wednesday morning. In one house flattened by massive boulders, the lifeless bodies of four to

five people were reportedly seen hugging each other tightly in their death.

The rescuers could reach many inland areas, which were totally cut off, on Wednesday morning. According to visuals aired on TV channels, Army personnel were seen breaking the tin roof of a house that was completely submerged in mud and using ropes to reach inside to retrieve the bodies of those trapped there. A local, who entered one such house, said saw mud-covered bodies in sitting positions on chairs and lying down on cots.

The deceased persons might be sitting or lying down when the tragedy struck them in the small hours of Tuesday," he said. K Babu, a ward member of the local panchayat here, said over 860 people other than children were in Mundakkai during the time of the disaster. Besides the locals and children, migrant workers and tourists were also in the area.

The panchayat member said the intensity of the disaster is beyond imagina-

tion and what they witnessed during the rescue operations was harrowing and disturbing. In many places, people were found trapped alive and were pleading for help. Dead bodies, including those of children, were seen as hugging each other tightly. Bodies of women were found under huge tree trunks," he recounted.

However, authorities have not officially responded to these claims so far. Various rescue agencies resumed their operations early in the morning to trace people suspected to be trapped in the debris. Massive landslides triggered by torrential rains struck Mundakkai, Chooralmala, Attamala, and Noolpuzha hamlets in the early hours of Tuesday, killing several people, including women and children. Wayanad, a hill district in northern Kerala, is known for its lush green forests, rolling hills, and sparkling waterfalls. With a population of about 8,17,000 people (as of the 2011 census), it is home to various cultures, including indigenous tribal communities.

Shipping awaits its dream budget

Shipping is a high-volume, cash-heavy business dealing almost exclusively in foreign exchange where margin percentages are often low but can be surprisingly high too sometimes. India's top regulators, policymakers and tax authorities have not shown a real appreciation of its nuances. India has a glorious history of shipbuilding and owning that the British destroyed even as they took control of the country. They then squelched efforts to rebuild the native shipping industry into the 20th century. More than 100 years after the British stamped out V O Chidambaram Pillai's swadeshi shipping initiative, India still does not have a robust shipowning, shipbuilding ecosystem. Some in the past in India did see shipping as a crucial component of reinforcing national sovereignty and there were some stellar efforts. But, today, shipping in India continues to be a consequence of global shipping trends and governed largely by decisions made outside India. In the last ten years, the total tonnage of India has only gone down. Practically no merchant ship is built today in India. China has become the world's No 1 shipbuilder while we have the biggest scrapyards.

Among the positives are the emergence of many Indian ship management companies that are, however, mostly registered and operating outside India, and Indian seafarers who bring in vital foreign exchange. Budget 2024-25 did contain several measures to support Indian shipping. The Economic Survey spoke about ship leasing structures in GIFT City in Gujarat and how that is a model. That shipping is being talked about is a welcome sign and an indicator that decision-makers in the government are indeed interested in its development. Among the details in the budget was removing customs duty on imported ship spares which is highly welcome. The previous set of laws led to arbitrary demands at customs and many shipping companies suffered severely as a result. And those laws were themselves indicative of how successive governments had little interest in shipping.

In the past, policies often supported a government-owned national company, the Shipping Corporation of India, but little else. There were several large private shipowners but almost all are extinct now – some done in by zealous tax authorities left wide-eyed by the millions of dollars in transactions that bank accounts of shipping companies were seeing every day. Today, ship stocks are not traded much in the Bombay Stock Exchange, and shipping companies have little visibility in India's corporate sector. Even as the government pushes for trade linkages with countries based on container movement such as the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor, it needs to come up with policies to support the manufacture of containers within India. India is lacking in container manufacture and it is a key trade bottleneck. The current BJP government has been making the right noises over the years but has less to show in terms of concrete results. Its major port project was the Vadnavan project in Maharashtra, announced in 2016. In 2021, some ₹51,000 crore was allocated out of the ₹1 lakh crore budget allocation for shipping. In 2024, ₹76,000 crore was announced. The government is yet to give a



status report on the project and as yet has not indicated a timeline for its completion. GIFT City is being talked about when the horses have, for the most part, bolted. Attracted by the availability of liquidity, a fair and transparent arbitration system, as well as a welcoming regulatory regime, many Indians have blossomed as shipowners in Dubai. Luring them back will require much effort and attractive policies. In 2022, a new Merchant Shipping Act was promised but did not make its appearance in Parliament. One hopes we will see it at least this year. The new leasing, ownership, flagging policy has also been promised before but has not been seen yet. Even in the case of ships managed and

managed by Indians that has seen tremendous growth, the government's disallowing of Indian private security contractors has made those ships vulnerable to drone attacks and unmanned boats. Other countries have gone ahead with this and reaped the benefits of ensuring the security of their ships. The three lakh Indian seafarers sailing in ships all over the world are among the least cared for by their parent nation among all the nationalities. They often endure gross human rights violations abroad and their government sees them largely as a tax opportunity. The government may well consider making one of India's islands function with an open registry of ships that

would allow foreign entities to register ships on that island. The island could allow free anchorage and bunkering so it becomes an attractive destination. Hong Kong's emergence as a major international finance and commerce center was due in part to its shipping-friendly policies and it could be a model. Bold and big-ticket initiatives are needed to truly leverage the potential of India's shipping to make the nation prosperous. Shipping awaits its dream budget. This author, Sanjay Prashar, is a shipping industry professional and a former member of the National Shipping Board who contributed in formulating the Maritime Vision 2030.

Long-term study finds COVID-19 increases diabetes risk

Diabetes is a chronic disease affecting hundreds of millions worldwide and has multiple risk factors. The more the risk factors present, the higher the likelihood of developing diabetes. Understanding these factors is essential for prevention. A new study published in *The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology* describes a link between COVID-19 and diabetes. From databases of tens of millions of people in England registered with their general practitioners, researchers examined the risk of developing diabetes following COVID-19. They found a four-fold increase in risk during the first month post-infection. The risk remained elevated in two-thirds of these individuals in the second year.

Early indications came in 2020 when doctors across the world noted a surprisingly high occurrence of diabetes in previously healthy individuals following a diagnosis of COVID-19. Some required high doses of insulin. A paper published in the *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* in October 2022 from Telangana reported similar findings.

However, observations based on small numbers of patients are not always definitive. For instance, steroid use for COVID-19 raises blood sugar levels on its own. Besides, in any population, diabetes exists undetected in a significant proportion of individuals. This might have been unearthed only because of the medical attention they received after contracting COVID. A reverse causality has also been implicated, with people with diabetes being at greater risk for severe COVID-19. It was also unclear whether the rise in blood sugars would settle down after the immediate stress of COVID passed. Thus, the link remained a matter of debate, necessitating larger studies over an extended period of time.

The new study also examined health records from before and after the vaccine rollout, enabling researchers to investigate the impact of vaccination on diabetes risk. With a follow-up period exceeding a year, they could assess the persistence of newly diagnosed diabetes. Since the study relied on well-maintained databases from

before the pandemic, the findings are unlikely to be due to increased testing alone. The persistence of diabetes into the second year indicates that steroid use alone was not responsible. Two key observations linked the severity of COVID-19 to an increased risk of diabetes. Firstly, the risk was significantly higher among hospitalised patients. Secondly, vaccinated individuals, who experienced less severe COVID-19, had a lower risk of developing diabetes.

When comparing vaccinated and unvaccinated populations, it is important to address demographic differences. For instance, unvaccinated people in England tended to be younger, healthier, and more likely to be of South Asian or Black ethnicity. Although South Asians have a higher baseline risk of diabetes, younger age lowers the overall risk in a population. To ensure accurate conclusions, the researchers adjusted for these factors, eliminating any inaccuracies from comparing unequal populations. The increased diabetes risk following COVID-19 is believed to involve at least two mechanisms.

How will the cess on movie tickets, OTT subscriptions help workers and artistes in distress in Karnataka?

Beyond the glitz and glamour of cinema, there are untold stories of thousands of artistes and workers of the industry who have little to fall back on as they age or face financial difficulties due to health issues or other reasons. To address the issue, the Karnataka government last week announced that it is considering a cess on movie tickets and OTT subscription fees to support cinema and cultural artistes in distress. The cess ranging from 1-2% will be revised by the State government every three years if implemented. This cess will apply to cinema tickets, subscription fees, and revenue generated from the related establishments in Karnataka. The State government also said that it plans to extend the cess to plays staged within Karnataka.

These are part of the provisions of the Karnataka Cine and Cultural Activists (Welfare) Bill, 2024, passed by the Legislature on June 26. The Bill envisages constituting a welfare board and establishing a fund for financing schemes to provide social security to cine and cultural activists in the State. The welfare cess would be called "The Cine and Cultural Activists Welfare Cess." Cine and cultural activists registered under the Board would be eligible to file a petition before an office, to be designated by the government, in relation to any grievances arising out of entitlements. The Bill would benefit about 60,000 to 70,000 workers engaged in cine and other cultural fields, Labour Minister Santosh Lad has said. "There are many daily wagers in the cine and arts field like dancers, extras, spotters, stunt men, make-up artistes and more who hardly get any welfare schemes and are paid very little," says Labour Minister Santosh Lad. "There are many daily wagers in the cine and arts field like dancers, extras, spotters, stunt men, make-up artistes and more who hardly get any welfare schemes and are paid very little," says Labour Minister Santosh Lad. | Photo Credit: VAIDYA

Thousands of daily wagers Speaking to The Hindu, Lad said, "There are many daily wagers in the cine and arts field like dancers, extras, spotters, stunt men, make-up artistes and more who hardly get any welfare schemes and are paid very little. We decided to bring in this Bill out of our very own experiences and stories heard from the industry. I had come across a very old woman cine artiste, she had told me how during the fag end of her life she had nobody to look after her and she was also low on finances. We could not help her then, but now the Bill has been tabled in the assembly, and I am sure it will go through." He said that this will also help the theatre community. "Theatre artistes do not have a commercial mindset as they put their passion before anything. This Bill will serve their welfare," he added. When asked if levying cess would impact cinema goers or the daily collection, Lad said it would be a very nominal amount charged. "We have got around 2.2 billion ticket per day market in our country, and we are the largest cinema goers in the world. In Karnataka we



have about 550-600 theatres, so 1-2% cess on tickets would be anywhere between 25 paise - ₹2 per ticket, which is very nominal. Along with the cess collected, funds will be provided by the State, which will go to the welfare of the artistes." Rahul (name changed), a stunt man working in the film industry for over a decade, says a lot of schemes have come and gone, but there is no guarantee that it will reach them. "As stuntmen, we can access our health facilities only when something serious happens. But for smaller injuries we end up bearing the cost. Safety is still a concern. It is only after the infamous Anil and Uday incident, where these two actors lost their lives performing a stunt and actor Duniya Vijay almost lost his life with them in 2016, that our safety was given some priority. But it is still a risky job. Through levying cess, we hope the money will reach us. It would help if the government could help us get better safety equipment and easy access to medical services," he said. Simplify process

Karthik B. (name changed), a gaffer (head lighting technician) and a cinematographer in the industry, says the government must focus on making the process of obtaining artiste cards easier. "There are many light boys who work under me, and for many of them it is hard to obtain an artiste card. An artiste card is issued by an association or an union that is certified by the government. These cards help with claiming medical insurance or receiving payments or daily wages on time. But many still do not have cards because the issuers expect a bribe. If an artiste is not able to obtain a simple card, what is the guarantee that these welfare funds will reach us? Even in times of the pandemic, we were given coupons to a retail store instead of wages to run our families. We do not have a strong light men's union in Karnataka unlike other states, which is what we need badly now." N.M. Suresh, Chairman of

Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC), feared that the levying of cess will only be a burden to producers. "The implementation of cess will help labourers, but will be a burden for producers who are already paying multiple taxes. Also, there is an existing welfare fund already for film labourers." Suresh says that a letter has been issued to the government objecting to its decision and seeking bifurcation of the welfare cess and what are the categories of artistes who will benefit from it. Implementation is key. However, there are many who feel that such an initiative is welcome if streamlined well. Actor Prakash Raj says that the move is good as long as it is sustainable. "If it is going to benefit the artistes it is a good move. If they are taking funds from the industry and empowering people from the industry it is fair enough. I believe that everything must not be the government's responsibility and all of us should be considered as partners." He however adds that the government must make sure that sustainability is built in. "Whether it is cinema, OTT or theatre, all of us in the industry must contribute," he adds.

Film, television and theatre director, producer and writer B. Suresha concurs. "The thought behind implementing cess on the grounds of welfare of artistes is a great move. But this has been in incubation for several years and nothing has taken shape. The issue is that currently the entertainment taxes are going to the Central government. The State government must figure out how the funds will come back to them, to facilitate whatever they wish to." He says that the government must streamline the process and take it through a union instead of a law being implemented. "Kerala has a nice model where there is a trade union for artists, wherever the artists perform they pay a sum to the union for every performance or earning. This helped many artists during the pandemic, the union

gave them salaries despite performance spaces being shut down. A similar model can be implemented for theatre artists," Suresha adds.

J. Lokesh, ex-chairperson of Karnataka Nataka Academy, says, "Theatre is still a struggling art form in Karnataka. Tickets for most Kannada plays in a city like Bengaluru are priced at about ₹200, and yet there are very few theatre-goers, and the teams are in debt." On the other hand, the theatre community in Karnataka argues that levying cess on theatrical performances would be unfair. J. Lokesh, ex-chairperson of Karnataka Nataka Academy, says, "Theatre is still a struggling art form in Karnataka. Tickets for most Kannada plays in a city like Bengaluru are priced at about ₹200, and yet there are very few theatre-goers, and the teams are in debt. Levying cess would mean an increase in ticket price, and losing the audience... Firstly, the government must make sure the existing funds and schemes are easily accessible for artistes." Senior theatre artist B.V. Rajaram says, "Theatre is not a platform where statistical investment is made and profit is gained unlike cinema or OTT. Theatre is a tool to promote the language, history and culture of Karnataka. We as theatre makers are already paying tax in the form of GST, levying cess will just be an addition to the existing burdens." Film and theatre artiste and founder of Ranga Shankara Arundhati Nag says theatre is a social service and the government must cover welfare without charging the community. "Taxing on cinema and OTT is fair enough because they are businesses. Theatre, especially amateur theatre and other smaller modules of performing arts where the ticket rates are so low, it is a miracle that theatre still exists. The government must cover health and other services to artists without charging the theatre community."

Partition of Bengal: New Demands and Old Memories

Political Line is returning after a break. The author spent some time in the United States meanwhile, which included a road trip through some key battleground States that will decide the outcome of the 2024 Presidential election, which is now between Republican Donald J. Trump and Democrat Kamala Harris. I have written a few pieces on the evolving political scene in the U.S., and hope to write more in the coming days. Do watch this space. In recent days, at least two BJP politicians have called for carving out new administrative entities from West Bengal. Nishikant Dubey, a BJP MP from Jharkhand, wants parts of West Bengal and Bihar to be constituted as a Union Territory to stop the movement of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh into tribal regions. Mr. Dubey said in the Lok Sabha that Bangladeshi immigrants — Muslims — were intermarrying with tribal communities in Jharkhand, and the character of the State was being altered. Mr. Dubey wants Murshidabad and Malda districts in West Bengal, and Kishanganj and Katihar in Bihar, to be declared a Union Territory to deal with the challenge.

Union Minister of State for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Sukanta Majumdar, who is also the West Bengal BJP president, has suggested that north Bengal could be “included” in the Northeast. He later explained that his proposal was not to carve out the region from the existing State but to include it in the developmental plans of the Northeast. But that has not calmed the frayed nerves in the State, with the ruling Trinamool Congress seeing a BJP conspiracy to divide West Bengal. Mr. Majumdar’s proposal has also renewed the demand for creation of a separate State of Gorkhaland. Bengal was partitioned twice: in 1905 and then again in 1947, when two nations — India and Pakistan — were formed by the partition of the subcontinent. In 1905, Bengali Hindus were opposed to the Partition, which gave a new impetus to the evolving national movement. But in the decades that followed, Muslim nationalism grew stronger and the electoral and representative process, and political landscape of Bengal changed. Jan Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee became a strong votary of dividing Bengal, and opposed the idea of a separate country of united Bengal. The Hindu majority regions became part of India, but no division can be clean — and partition continues as a long process till date.

As of now, there are multiple demands from within West Bengal for separate political or administrative units. While the demand for Gorkhaland is more known, there are also Statehood demands for the Cooch Behar and Jangalmahal regions. The BJP is stronger in the northern parts of the State, and it has political incentive to carve out that region, and Muslim majority regions into separate units. Mr. Dubey’s demand is tied to the BJP’s strategy for Jharkhand, which will be going to polls later this year. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), a tribal party, opposes demographic



changes in the State due to the influx of people from outside. Migrants are the key vote bank of the BJP. As the JMM and its partners, including the Congress, are trying to mobilise tribal communities, the BJP is blaming Muslims from Bangladesh, as opposed to people from Bihar — both Hindus and Muslims — for the demographic changes in the State. In fact, such demands for reconstituting the administrative map of India could get louder in the coming decade when a new census and the corresponding delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies will turn the spotlight on the massive demographic changes that are under way in the country. Federalism Tract: Notes on Indian Diversity

Talking of movement of people and managing demographic changes, the controversial move by Karnataka to carve out job quotas for natives is indicative of a larger problem — that there are fewer jobs and more job seekers. Apart from demographic reasons, changes in the nature of capitalism and advancement of technology make human labour less required at a time when there are more humans seeking it. This piece by Ruchi Gupta discusses that. Distress caused by unemployment and underemployment is a huge political challenge and the Union Budget last week takes this factor into account, but the special consideration given to two States — Andhra Pradesh and Bihar — is causing some heartburn, and raising some questions about how to equitably share the resources and wealth of the nation. The Supreme Court has said States have unlimited power to tax mineral rights, unless and until it is specifically barred by a central law. The SC held there is no such law currently in existence, and rejected the Centre’s position to the contrary. In a second intervention, the SC has agreed to examine whether Governors — by indefi-

nately delaying approval for Bills passed by State Assemblies and sending them to the President, who is bound to act as per the decision of the Union government — were subverting federalism. We discussed disputes and debates about the territorial organisation of the country earlier. The Union government may form a committee to resolve the issues that have been hold-

ing up the Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019 intended to grant more financial, executive, and administrative powers to tribal autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The assurance was made to the chiefs of the 10 tribal autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura in a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah.

AI on duty to help world's loneliest tree

One of the rarest plants in the world, this large, palm-like plant survived the destruction of the dinosaurs and weathered through five ice ages, but now there is only one.

AI may soon help the world’s loneliest tree find a mate. The Wood’s cycad (*Encephalartos woodii*), a plant species dating back around 300 million years, has only one known male specimen discovered by botanist John Medley Wood in 1895 in the Ngoye Forest Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Cycads produce male and female cones on separate plants and can also reproduce through offshoots.

Throughout the 20th century, botanists transplanted offshoots and original trunks from the solitary male, resulting in around 500 plants in botanical gardens worldwide. However, sexual reproduction is crucial for the species’ survival.

To locate a potential female cycad, scientists are using drones to survey the remote forests of the cycad’s native habitat. The data collected by these drones is analyzed using AI algorithms to identify



possible female plants. If a female is found, it will likely be transplanted to a controlled environment where natural or artificial pollination can occur.

Seeds produced from this process would be cultivated to create fertile seedlings, which can then be reintroduced into their natural habitat, ensuring the species’ future viability. One of the rarest plants in the world, this large, palm-like plant survived the destruction of the dinosaurs and weathered through five ice ages, but now there is only one. Up to 20-feet tall, its noble trunk is crowned with a canopy of long, glossy leaves that resemble those of a palm