

Govt engg college enrollment plummets despite increase in seats

Hyderabad: A surprising trend has emerged in engineering education in the State. Despite a significant increase in the number of seats in the colleges under the government sector, the enrollments have plummeted over the last four academic years. This shift in student preference highlights a growing divide between the government and private engineering education in the State. As per the information shared by the Telangana Council of Higher Education (TGCH), government engineering colleges offered 3,151 seats in the 2020-21 academic year. By 2023-24, this number nearly doubled to 5,890, reflecting the expansion of engineering education in the government sector in the last four years. However, while the seats soared, the percentage of enrollment significantly dropped from 83.02 in 2020-21 to 67.33 in 2023-24. In the last four academic years, four new engineering colleges under the government sector have

been established, taking the total to 18. One constituent college each of the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU)-Hyderabad has been set up in Sircilla, Wanaparthy, Mahabubabad, and Khammam. "Students, due to the lack of required faculty members and facilities, are not preferring these newly established colleges. However, this is not the case with Osmania University and JNTU-Hyderabad campus colleges where seats are in huge demand," said a senior TGCH official. This year, another government engineering college has come up in Kosgi in erstwhile Mahabubnagar district, offering Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), CSE Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, and CSE Data Science programmes. Meanwhile, the private engineering colleges in State have witnessed an increase in student enrollments with 78.01 per cent filled out of 1,11,769 seats in 2023-24 as against 65.85 per cent out of



95,837 seats. This is despite the number of private engineering colleges having come down from 166 in 2020-21 to 160 in 2023-

24. This academic year, there are 174 with 155 private and 19 government engineering colleges.

Hyderabad faces health crisis as dengue, viral fever cases surge



Hyderabad: Hyderabad is grappling with a seasonal health crisis, as cases of dengue and viral fevers have gone up considerably in the last few weeks. Private nursing homes, clinics and outpatient wings of Fever Hospital, Gandhi Hospital and OGH are recording a consistent surge due to steady influx of patients with typical symptoms of viral fevers and dengue.

With the prospect of more rainfall on the horizon, the Director of Public Health (DPH), Dr B Ravinder Naik on Wednesday has issued a warning, urging residents to prioritize preventive measures to mitigate

the spread of disease. At Gandhi Hospital, a majority of patient walk-ins at the OP wing are related to fever cases or individuals with dengue-like symptoms. At present, the OPD at Gandhi Hospital and OGH is hovering between 1500 and 2000 patients per day each while the daily new OPD paid visits at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) are close to 650.

In the last few days, at Fever Hospital, the OPD visits of patients has increased from an average of around 600 patients to 850 patients in the last few weeks. Based on the available data on dengue related

cases, between June and till August, a total of 4395 dengue positive infections have been registered in Telangana out of which 85 percent to 90 percent are from Hyderabad alone. This August (till now), a total of 1751 dengue positive infections have been reported from Hyderabad alone while another 310 and 399 cases have been reported from Rangareddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts. Reports have also indicated that at least five people have lost their lives due to dengue. On Wednesday, former Health Minister, T Harish Rao

on social media platform X said, "Exactly a month ago, we warned the State government about this kind of situation. Timely release of funds to conduct preventive activities in all the districts was the need of the hour.

The impact of seasonal ailments can only be reduced by taking preventive activities before the onset of monsoons," Dengue positive cases in 2024: January-April (2024): 678; May(2024): 113; June (2024): 1078; July: 1461; August: 1856.

TGCSB nabs three, seizes 4000 mobile phones procured for cybercrime

Hyderabad: The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau sleuths caught three persons – Mohammad Shamim, Abdul Salam and Mohammad Iftikhar all natives of Bihar for procuring old mobile phones from the public and allegedly supplying it to cyber fraudsters. Their associate Akhtar Ali, is absconding.

According to Director, Telangana Cyber Security Bureau, Shikha Goel, the four persons were giving money or plastic items to the seller and taking the used gadgets from them. The gadgets were transported to Bihar and afterwards handed over to fraudsters in Jamtara, Deoghar and other

areas of Jharkhand which are notorious for cyber fraud activities.

"The fraudsters get the mobile phones repaired or refurbished and use it for committing cyber frauds," said the official. The police seized 4,000 mobile phones from them.

The police advised the people not to sell or give their old mobile phones to unknown persons. "There is every chance of the fraudsters using old mobile phones for cyber frauds and due to the device identity, the seller of the gadget will also become a suspect in the crime," Shikha Goel added.

Something fishy about the Musi Riverfront project

Hyderabad: The Congress government's plans for River Musi appear to go much deeper than beautification or development of the riverfront, with the manner in which Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and his Cabinet colleagues are projecting a cost estimate of Rs.1.5 lakh crore much before a detailed project report is prepared. Adding more intrigue is the entry of a firm facing probes for embezzlement of funds in Pakistan and an Anti-Corruption Bureau probe in Jharkhand. First and foremost among the triggers of doubt is how the Chief Minister and his Ministers arrived upon the cost estimate, which they themselves revised at least thrice, for a project that they say is for development of a 55-km stretch of the River Musi.

The Rs.1.5 lakh crore for 55 km is when the Centre's multiple-project Namami Gange programme, expected to cover 2500 km, has in the last 10 years cost a much lesser Rs.39,080 crore. Another project that has similarities with the Musi project, the Sabarmati Riverfront project, began in 2003 and till 2019, has had Rs.1,400 crore spent on it, with another Rs.850 crore approved for Phase II in 2020. Revanth Reddy & Co., meanwhile, are still a disjointed unit even on the DPR of the project, with Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka saying in the Assembly that the DPR was ready, while Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu later refuted that, saying that it was still in the process of being prepared. Even the cost estimate saw cacophony, with Revanth Reddy saying on April 24 it would cost Rs.50,000 crore. On June 14, Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao said the programme would cost Rs.70,000 crore. On July 20, the Chief Minister again said it would cost Rs.1.5 lakh crore. On what basis was the cost estimate revised is unknown. This is also when both the Centre and the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation are still encountering different challenges in execution of the Namami Gange Programme and Sabarmati Riverfront projects respectively.

For instance, the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited (SRDCL) wanted to auction a portion of the 204 hectares of land reclaimed then from the riverbed for commercial and residential development. However, the idea did not find many takers. Eventually, SRDCL came up with Sabarmati Riverfront Land Disposal Policy 2023 to do away with residential and cut down commercial development and focus on public places and recreational facilities. In this case too, there were not many takers. The Seaplane service launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the 2017 Assembly elections was closed in 2021. A sports park, which was opened in 2020, was handed over to a Adani Group firm after it was idle for three years. Moreover, it is not necessary that ideas that worked at a particular location could work out at River Musi, according to public policy expert Donthi Narasimha Reddy. "It all depends on the State government's objectives, which will be disclosed in the DPRs. Without DPRs, mere



announcements in the media will not reflect the true intentions," he said, asking how many farmers, citizens or a city would benefit out of such mammoth investments. To top it all, ensuring flow of water, particularly treated water is another challenge. The primary objective of any riverfront project would be ensuring flow of clean water. In the context of River Musi, the previous BRS government, to ensure flow of treated water in the river, had launched a project to construct 31 Sewerage Treatment Plants (STPs) with 1259.50 MLD capacity at a cost of Rs.3,866.41 crore. This also made Hyderabad the only city to achieve 100 percent sewage treatment infrastructure. Majority of the work towards this initiative has already been done. Already works for 20 STPs were grounded and 11 have been operational, including two STPs that were inaugurated at Nallacheruvu and Peddacheruvu on March 10. In addition these, on August 3, the State government issued administrative sanction of Rs.3,849.10 crore for construction of another 39 STPs till ORR limits under AMRUT 2.0. After such a crucial component of the Musi project is already done, what is the Rs.1.5 lakh crore going to be used for remains the big question. And topping the doubts, the entry of the Meinhardt Group. The group is involved in a scam, known as the Meinhardt scam, in Jharkhand, where the Anti-Corruption Bureau is probing alleged irregularities by former Jharkhand Chief Minister and BJP national vice-president Raghubar Das and others in the appointment of Meinhardt Singapore Private Limited as a consultant for the Ranchi sewerage-drainage project in 2005. Even the CAG had pointed out anomalies in the functioning of Meinhardt with regard to surveys it conducted, while

courts had questioned the eligibility of the firm. The Singapore-based firm is also reportedly facing a major probe in Pakistan in what is being labelled by the media as the Creek Marina scam. Though the com-

pany refuted the allegations, why did Revanth Reddy welcome the group when it evinced interest in the Musi project and ask it to design a Musi riverfront development model all add to the doubts.

Indo-Canadian groups slam anti-Hindu rhetoric at Toronto parade

Toronto: Indo-Canadian community groups have expressed anger over pro-Khalistan elements openly targeting the country's Hindus, as evidenced by a protest at the India Day Parade in Toronto on Sunday. A pro-Khalistan group gathered at the venue for the event, a celebration of India's Independence Day and were heard shouting, "Canadian Hindus go back to India," among other slogans.

That demonstration was part of the so-called Khalistan Rally, and flyers circulated in the days preceding it called for a "Face-off" between "Khalistan Sikhs" and "Canadian Hindus".

That display was condemned by community groups. In a statement, the Coalition of Hindus of North America or CoHNA's Canadian unit, said such "blatant Hinduphobia persists unchallenged" in Canada as politicians look the other way.

"Whether it's a memorial service for Canada's deadliest terror attack or Hindu festivals like Diwali and Holi, Khalistani protesters are there to harass and disrupt these gatherings with #Hinduphobic chants. Over and over we see the pretext of "political speech against India" used to target ordinary Canadians of the Hindu faith. If such rhetoric was directed against



any other group, politicians would swiftly condemn it," it added.

Security at the India Day Parade, organised by the umbrella organisation Panorama India to mark Independence Day, was maintained by Toronto Police personnel. Another group, Canadian Hindu Volunteers also expressed outrage over the incident, as it said, "Such rhetoric, if directed at any other community, would undoubtedly prompt swift and decisive action from elected officials and law enforcement." Describing the episode as "despicable", it added, "We implore Canadian authorities and elected representatives to recognise the severity of this issue, take immediate action to curb these hateful acts by extremist groups, and ensure that Hindu Canadians can live safely and with dignity."

Foolproof arrangements are made for Ganesh festival. Devotees should utilise the special amenities and co-operate with the Police: CP Sudheer Babu

Rachakonda CP Sri Sudheerbabu., today held a coordination meeting with Rachakonda DCsP, Additional DCsP, ACsP and other officials at the Commissioner's office, Neredmet regarding the security arrangements for the forthcoming Ganesh festival. Addressing the meeting, the commissioner said that Ganesh festival is one of the biggest festivals and widely celebrated across the state. He said that there should not be any problem of law and order during the Ganesh celebrations and officers and staff should work together in this regard. CP directed the authorities to take safety measures to ensure that the celebrations are held in a peaceful atmosphere without any untoward incident. "Regarding the installation of Ganesha idols, the inspectors should meet the organizers in advance and review the arrangements" CP added.

CP instructed the officials to coordinate with the other concerned government departments in the respective areas and directed to organize coordination meetings with the officials of GHMC, Fire Department, Water Drainage Department, Medical Department, Electricity, Transport and other departments related to the management and security of the upcoming Ganesh Navratri celebrations. CP advised the staff to be polite to devotees who come for immersion and to be vigilant in matters of peace and security. CP iterated that Dial 100 Calls should be given special attention and focus on CCTVs besides giving utmost priority to Visible policing. CP mentioned that as per the orders of the Supreme Court, loud speakers should be used only till 10 pm. CP suggested the officials to explain to the mandapam managers and committees that setting up of DJs is not allowed in the mandapams.

CP mentioned that the management should ensure that at least two volunteers must be present in the Ganesh mandapam throughout the day and only good quality wires are used to avoid short circuit in the mandaps. CP instructed the officials to ensure arrangement of flexi with the details and phone numbers of Ganesh mandap organizers, committee details and phone numbers of in charge of the mandaps. He ordered the staff to collect the details of the management committee of Ganesh Mandapam under the respective police stations and coordinate with the relevant departments to avoid electricity accidents and supply interruption. He said that a point book must be arranged at every Ganesh mandapam, and the police officials will write and sign it when they come for inspection. CP suggested that preventive measures need be taken to avoid clashes near Vinayaka Mandapalas and if there are problematic areas, security should be increased and special picket should be arranged at necessary places. He requested people to celebrate Ganesh festival peacefully and not to believe false rumours on social media and warned that there will be a vigil on false posts on social media and legal action will be taken against those who spread false rumours.

CP also advised to prepare advance plan for the immersion with the coordination of the concerned departments on the



provision of police personnel, swimmers, cranes used for the immersion, lightings and CCTV cameras to ensure that there is no disturbance in the Ganesh Shobhayatra. Similarly CP advised to monitor the situation to avoid traffic problem. CP mentioned that, on the occasion of immersion, street lights, flood lights and necessary cranes should be arranged in advance at ponds

and other immersion water bodies in coordination with GHMC officials. "For the convenience of the devotees, tents, electric lights, barricades should be constructed at the embankments of the pond where Ganesh immersion takes place, good water facilities, mobile toilets and medical facilities should be set up" CP added. CP instructed to ensure 24 hours uninterrupted power supply and road repair and saniti-

zation works done. CP requested the devotees to celebrate Ganesh festival in an undisturbed and dignified manner. DCP Malkajiri Padmaja, DCP LB Nagar Praveen Kumar, DCP Yadadri Rajesh Chandra, DCP SB Karunakar, DCP Crime Arvind Babu, DCP Maheshwaram Sunitha Reddy, ACP IT Cell Narender Goud, ACP SB Sreedhar Reddy and other officers participated in the meeting.

Can Mpox spread through air like Covid-19?

New Delhi: Respiratory droplets might play a role in the spread of Mpox but not as efficiently as Covid-19 or even flu, said infectious disease experts on Wednesday.

Mpox is a viral zoonotic disease that occurs primarily in tropical rainforest areas of central and west Africa and is occasionally exported to other regions. The disease is currently seeing an outbreak in Africa with over 14,000 cases and 524 deaths have been reported, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it a global health emergency. It majorly causes fevers, headaches, and muscle aches, as well as painful boils on the skin. It spreads from person to person through close, skin-to-skin contact.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), prolonged face-to-face interactions (such as talking or breathing) may increase the risk of transmission. The WHO also maintains that respiratory droplets (and possibly short-range aerosols) can result in Mpox transmission. "This suggests that respiratory droplets might play a role in transmission. That being said, it's considered to play a lesser role in transmission dynamics as compared to direct intimate contact and sexual contact which are the primary modes of transmission," Dr. Dipu T S, Professor and Unit Chief, Infectious Diseases Department, Amrita Hospital, Kochim told

IANSA. A recent study published by the University of New South Wales in Australia showed that the current outbreak caused by the Clade 1 strain has reported 70 per cent of cases and 88 per cent of deaths in children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). "The predominance of children in the DRC epidemic suggests transmission may be respiratory. In fact, smallpox and Mpox are respiratory viruses, and Mpox has been identified in ambient air," the researchers noted.

The study showed that the variola virus (smallpox) was highly airborne, "with the potential to transmit over long distances". Another study by a team of Spanish researchers in a 2023 study published in the journal *The Lancet Microbe* also showed that Mpox raised the risk of transmission indoors in poorly ventilated rooms.

Referring to the US CDC, Dr. Lancelot Mark Pinto, Consultant Pulmonologist and Epidemiologist, P. D. Hinduja Hospital & Medical Research Centre, said that the keywords are "prolonged" and "face-to-face". "Unlike highly transmissible airborne viruses such as influenza and SARS-CoV-2, Mpox isn't likely to spread during casual short encounters," Pinto told IANSA.

"Family transmission, sexual partner transmission, and caregiver transmission is much more likely, and therefore such encounters would need added protection," he

added. The 2022-2023 global outbreak of Mpox was caused by a strain known as clade IIb. Since 2022, the WHO has reported 99,176 cases and 208 deaths due to monkeypox from 116 countries. A total of 30 cases were detected in India, with the last case in March 2024. Global scientists claim that if the more pathogenic Clade I Mpox becomes highly transmissible between humans, it may pose a greater pandemic threat than Clade IIb. However, Hans Kluge, WHO regional director for Europe, in a recent media briefing stated that Mpox, regardless of Clade IIb or Clade Ib, is not the new Covid, as speculated. He said health authorities know how to control its spread. Currently, there is no proven treatment against Mpox. Bavarian Nordic's MVA-BN vaccine (Jynneos/Imvanex) — approved in the US, Europe, and Canada — is the leading Mpox vaccine worldwide. In addition, KM Biologics' LC16 vaccine is available in Japan and Emergent BioSolutions' ACAM2000 is also under regulatory review for Mpox in the US.

The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker, has also announced plans to develop a vaccine for Mpox. "Serum Institute of India is currently working on developing a vaccine for Mpox," said CEO Adar Poonawalla, in a statement, adding that the company will share "positive news within a year's time".

World's First AI & Deep Learning Powered Health Monitoring App "Quick Vitals" Launched in Hyd



The world of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deep Learning is now making strides in healthcare. Bisam Pharmaceuticals has launched the world's first AI-powered health monitoring app, "Quick Vitals," offering a groundbreaking way to monitor, check, and map vital health data through your smartphone or tablet.

The launch event, held at Hotel Avasa in Madhapur, Hyderabad on 21st August, 2024, headed by Mr. Harish Bisam founder and MD of Bisam Pharmaceuticals, drew the attention of tech enthusiasts, healthcare professionals, and prominent

figures from various fields along with G Chinna Reddy (Planning Board Commission Vice-president), Dr. Sudha - Professor of forensic Medicine, Osmania General Hospital, Dr. P. Venkateswarlu-Ex Director Drug Control Authority, Dr. Poornima, Mr. Daniel Goldman- Innovator and Product Specialist, Andrew Shostak and Dr. Usha - founder of Katalyst. Quick Vitals is an advanced AI-powered and Machine Learning-enhanced health monitoring application available on both the App Store and Play Store. Developed by Bisam Pharma under the leadership of Mr. Harish



Bisam, this app utilizes the Photoplethysmography (PPG) technique to analyze light absorption changes due to blood volume variations. This innovative approach allows mobile devices to accurately assess vital health indicators in just seconds. The app offers two modes of health assessment: contactless spot checks using camera-based devices and continuous monitoring with PPG sensors. Quick Vitals prioritizes the security and privacy of user data, with robust cloud registration and adherence to strict Indian data

protection standards. One of the highlights of the event was the endorsement of "Quick Vitals" by internationally renowned cricketer David Warner. Known for his athletic prowess and commitment to fitness, Warner shared his positive experience using the app, emphasizing its ease of use and accuracy. "As an athlete, staying on top of my health is crucial," Warner remarked. "With 'Quick Vitals,' I can monitor my vital signs anytime, anywhere, which is a game-changer for me. I encourage everyone to try it out and take charge of their health."

Incorporate climate change effects to enhance mental health services: WHO

Climate change is increasingly impacting mental health and psychosocial well-being, the World Health Organization (WHO) said, calling on member countries in Southeast Asia Region to strengthen mental health systems and services to address this growing challenge. "Climate change exacerbates many social, environmental, and economic risk factors for mental health and psychosocial well-being. Among WHO regions, South-East Asia is most vulnerable to this," said Saima Wazed, Regional Director WHO South-East Asia, in her opening remarks at a regional workshop for 'Strengthening the capacity of countries to address the impact of climate change on mental health', held here from 12 - 14 August.

The Regional Director said that in many countries significant gaps exist between mental health needs and the availability and accessibility of mental health systems and services. The increase in mental health and psychosocial problems from climate change is putting an extra burden on the health system. "There is a large gap in both knowledge of and response to, climate change's impact on mental health... There is an evident need to bring together climate and mental health officials from member states to ensure accelerated action to adapt and mitigate climate change impacts and prevent further widening of this gap," Ms. Wazed said. "Even without climate change, the

mental health situation is challenging. In our region, an estimated 260 million people live with a mental health condition and more than 200,000 people die by suicide every year," she said.

The Regional Director emphasized five key WHO approaches for strengthening mental health. First, to integrate climate change considerations into policies and programs for mental health, including mental health and psychosocial support system (MHPSS), to better prepare for and respond to the climate crisis. Second, integrating MHPSS within policies and programs dealing with climate change and health. Third, countries in the region must build upon the global commitments. Fourth, multi-sectoral and community-based approaches to reduce vulnerabilities and address the mental health and psychosocial impacts of climate change and lastly, addressing the large gaps in funding both for mental health and for responding to the health impacts of climate change. The Action Plan for Mental Health in the WHO South-East Asia Region provides an array of options to expand and strengthen user-oriented community mental health services. It also advocates for updating policies and laws in line with international human rights instruments, to strengthen leadership and governance for mental health., the WHO reported.

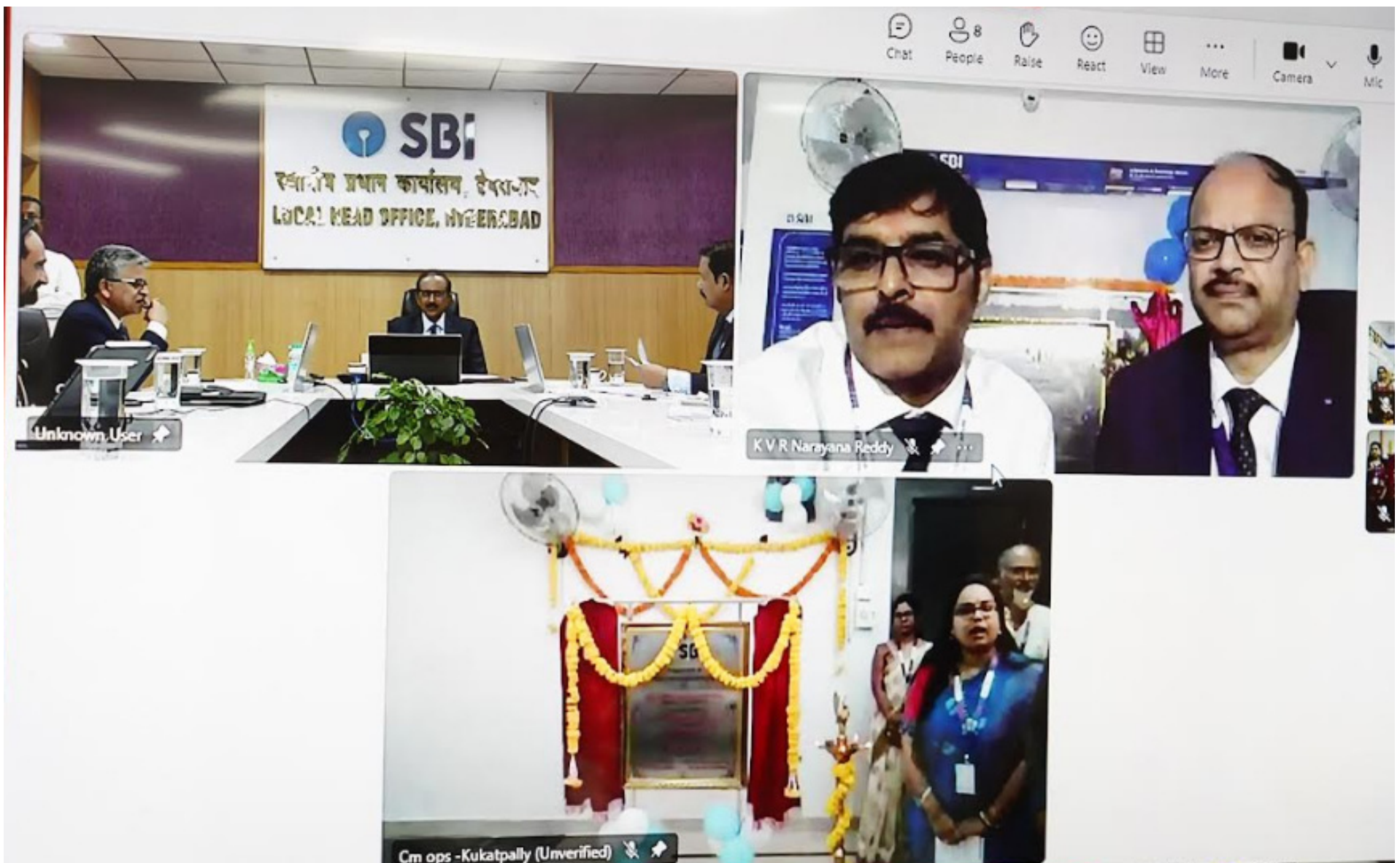
Earlier, in 2017 the WHO South-East Asia Region adopted the Male Declaration



Climate change is increasingly impacting mental health and psychosocial well-being, said the World Health Organization, calling on member countries in Southeast Asia Region to strengthen mental health systems and services

and the Framework for action for building health systems resilience to climate change, acknowledging the importance of human, technical and financial resources to address this issue. In 2022, countries in the Region endorsed the Paro Declaration on universal access to people-centred mental health care and services, committing to ensuring an effective and compre-

hensive response to mental health needs. This included establishing evidence-based and rights-oriented community mental health networks, and deinstitutionalization of care for people with severe mental disorders. It also included combating stigma and discrimination against people with mental disorders, as well as their experiences.



Shri Challa Sreenivasulu Setty, Managing Director (International Banking, Global Markets & Technology) and Chairman (Designate), State Bank of India visited Hyderabad in connection with official engagements. During his visit Managing Director virtually inaugurated 5 New Offices / Branches viz. **Regional Business Office - Ramachandra Puram, Specialized Currency Administration Branch - Gachibowli, Genome Valley Branch, Mallampet Branch, Malaysian township Branch.** He also inaugurated the renovated Entrance Lobby of the Local Head Office, Hyderabad, addressed the staff and attended to other official meetings.

Sri Setty said this renovation reflects our dedication to creating a more inviting and efficient environment to our customers and staff. "We are committed to providing world-class banking services and facilities." The renovation aims to enhance the aesthetic appeal providing a welcoming atmosphere for customers and employees alike. The renovated portico with its modern design elements & enhanced security measures provides seamless accessibility for a pleasant experience to the visitors/ customers/ dignitaries.

Sri Setty while addressing the employees at SBI Local Head Office, said that to be a member of the Board for State Bank of India itself is a great honor and to head the State Bank Group is the greatest honor for him. He said he derives great pride in having worked in this office for 3 - 4 years and it is always a homecoming for him. He also said, if his story inspires the people of this circle, it would be the most cherished contribution from him for the circle, where he worked. We have a long way to go from

here. I am inheriting the strongest Bank in the country and probably top 20 Banks in the world and we should be proud of it. The realization of the potential of the organisation should be our collective dream and "let us dream big".

Sri Challa Sreenivasulu Setty further during the day inaugurated five new branches/offices virtually viz., Ramachandrapuram Regional Business Office, SCAB Gachibowli, Genome Valley Branch, Mallampet Branch and Malaysian Township Branch. This strategic expansion aims to enhance SBI's presence and service delivery in key regions. This initiative is part of SBI's broader strategy to modernize its infrastructure and adopting cutting-edge technology to meet the evolving needs of its customers. Mr. Setty highlighted SBI's commitment to reach more customers and providing top-notch banking services. These new branches are a testament to SBI's dedication to expanding its footprint and ensuring that its services are accessible to a broader audience. We are committed to leveraging technology for improving customer engagement and operational efficiency. The new branches are equipped with modern facilities, comfortable seating areas, improved accessibility features for a seamless banking experience. The upgraded facilities are expected to handle a higher volume of visitors more efficiently enhancing overall service quality. Sri Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager, SBI, Hyderabad Circle, speaking on the occasion said that the circle is fortunate to have Sri Setty, Chairman (designate) for the inauguration, who is a native of this State. It is indeed a proud moment for each and every one from this state.

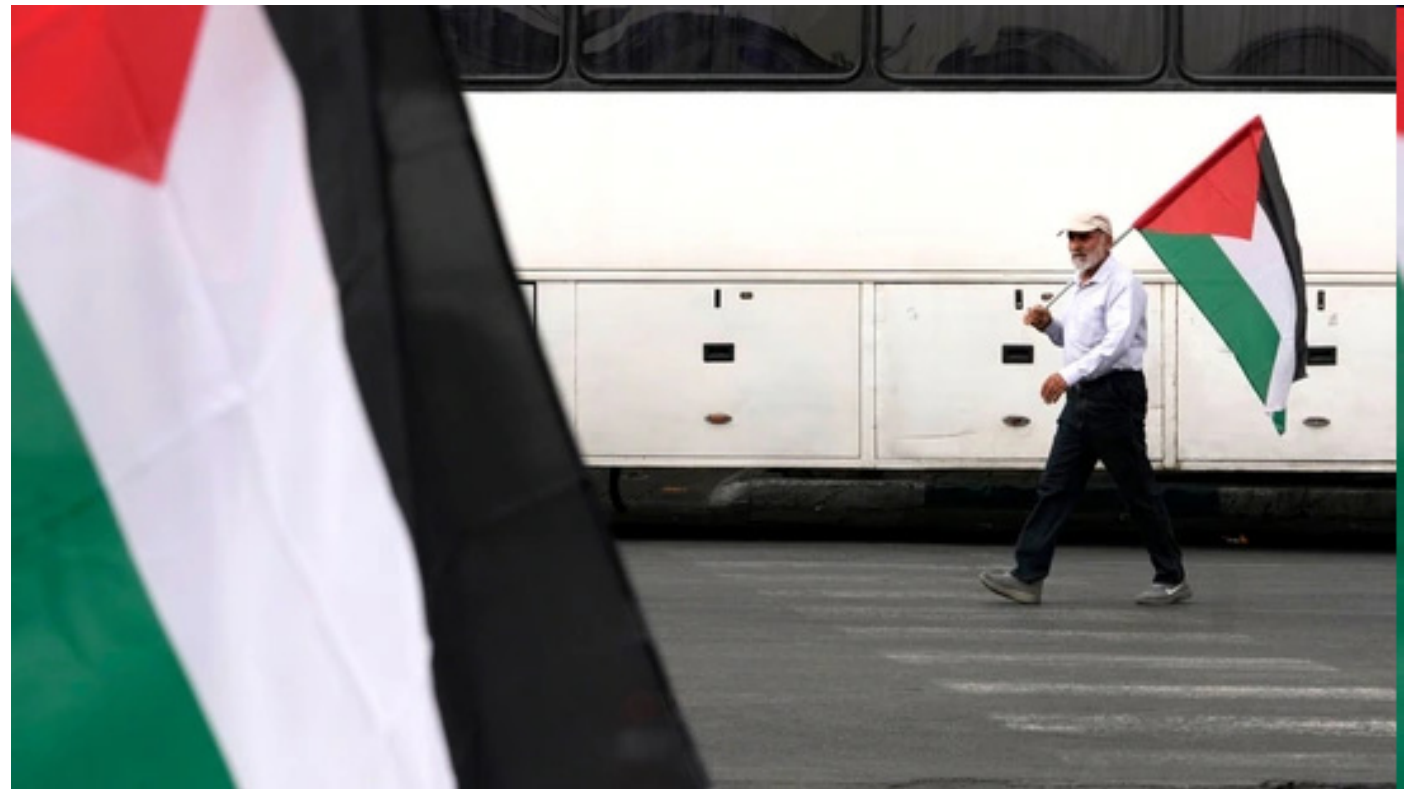


Iran's revival of strategic patience amid slow-burn ceasefire negotiations

Across August 15 and 16, key mediators including Egypt, Qatar, and the United States met in Doha for "intensive" discussions in a renewed effort to negotiate a ceasefire in Gaza. Even as this meeting adjourned with parties set to reconvene in Cairo next week, a joint statement from the three states asserted that the talks were "serious and constructive", with parties focused on a 'bridging proposal' that can lay the foundations for a ceasefire which they expect to finally conclude in Cairo. The positive undertone in both this statement as well as one by the White House, has been seen as part of an attempt to further check Iran's hand and ward off its promised retaliation against Israel.

Indeed, it is now close to 20 days since Ismail Haniyeh's assassination in Tehran on July 31 and Iran's subsequent declaration of its intention to 'harshly punish' Israel. In the weeks since then, numerous news reports and analyses have speculated on whether Iran will 'respond'. However, Iran's acts thus far prove that it is a far more cautious actor than anticipated. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a pragmatic actor; its self-declared war against Israel is timeless and historic, meaning that Iran's fight is not defined by the need to act decisively or comprehensively at any particular point in time. This has long allowed Iran to weather multiple losses to Israel (such as the assassinations of its nuclear scientists) and adopt what Khamenei has roughly termed "strategic patience" — the term freshly did the rounds in January, following the Kerman bombings. To understand whether this concept is presently at work, it is necessary to re-look at what retaliation might mean for Tehran as well as its current strategic priorities.

First, the semantic of 'retaliation' in the current context needs to be re-evaluated, since Iran has evidently let the early window of attack pass. While a replication of Iran's drone missile barrage in April (with any variation of scale) remains on the table, Iran is not bound by this precedent. In any case, Hezbollah itself is arguably already having its revenge — it has fired salvos of 50-100 rockets in numerous exchanges with Israel in the weeks since Fuad Shukur's killing. Beyond the April template, Iran itself is left with few substantial options that go beyond symbolism — short of a full-scale war. This column showed in April that Iran's priorities then were to establish deterrence, with Tehran letting 13 days pass before retaliating against Israel for its strike against Iran's consulate in Damascus. Presently, Iran has kept up a dual approach — repeating its commitment to responding against Israel, while also indicating that it does not wish to adversely affect ceasefire efforts. The latter is evidenced both by the Iranian Ambassador's statement at the UN as well as the time elapsed since Haniyeh's killing. This approach allows Iran to inject a fresh variable into the ceasefire talks, adding pressure on states to push Israel towards a deal and making them more wary of regional escalation. Both the post-Doha joint statement, as well as direct appeals from the UK, France, and Germany to Tehran, have ensured that Iran is factored in even more as a direct actor with leverage. For Iran, play-



ing up its rhetoric of retaliation and punishment is yielding enough value as a pressure point, allowing Tehran to assert its strategic patience. Notably, in an August 14 commemorative gathering, Khamenei ventured into Quranic concepts of war strategy. He asserted that retreating from the enemy for "non-tactical" reasons would incur divine wrath; easily read as a commitment to military engagement with Iran's enemies. Interestingly, however, Khamenei stressed on clarifying that retreats made for tactical reasons are justified. Regardless of whether these reflect Iran's calculus in the current context vis-à-vis Israel, they reaffirm the fundamentals of Iran's outlook towards its opponents.

Second, Iran's hostile relationship with the United States has not changed, but its immediate priorities have shifted to requiring sanctions relief, even as it keeps up appearances. Since January of this year, Iran's behaviour has been privately conciliatory beneath public hostility, with the United States keeping Iran engaged through indirect backchannels. Even as Iran has decisively moved away from the question of reviving the old nuclear deal, it now appears even more open to Western engagement for sanctions relief. A cabinet shuffle in Masoud Pezeshkian's new government has brought in Abbas Araghchi as foreign minister — a seasoned veteran of the 2015 nuclear deal, one that he has publicly defended as having benefited Iran. Pezeshkian's appointment of Araghchi, a well-travelled (western-educated) diplomat with significant experience engaging the West, is a far-cry from former President Raisi's earlier appointment of Hossain Abdollahian, an IRGC thoroughbred with relatively limited global experience. While Araghchi himself carries battlefield experience with the IRGC and is firmly loyal to Iran's revolutionary values and to Khamenei, his appointment has only furthered Pezeshkian's image as the poten-

tial harbinger of small openings.

Hence, while Iran has seemingly made its response contingent on the success/failure of ceasefire talks, any significant Iranian retaliation after a ceasefire is even harder to envision. It will allow Israel to focus more assets on Iran and Hezbollah, risk Iran's détente with Arab partners, jeopardize the ceasefire itself (along with a prisoner-hostage exchange), and unarguably derail Iran's potential engagement with Washington on sanctions relief. With a revival of strategic patience, Iran can choose to either symbolically retaliate with sufficient elements of escalation control or let the pressure from its rhetoric itself act as an instrument of coercion. While its long, grand, fight with Israel continues, Iran's focus on economic betterment while simultaneously also furthering its nuclear programme, is arguably garnering more benefits for Tehran than any full-scale

war with Israel presently can. Within Iran at least, as a Tehran Times column put it, its April template with Israel was viewed as being a "sub-threshold" response; on the line between deterrence and escalation. Presently, as it considers its own long- and short-term interests, such sub-threshold options continue to work best for the Islamic Republic. Moreover, like in April, any Iranian attack at this point can expectedly meet stiff resistance from Israel and its allies, given increased preparations in anticipation of an Iranian attack. Bashir Ali Abbas is a research associate at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi, and a South Asia Visiting Fellow at the Stimson Center, Washington DC. The views expressed are personal. Catch every big hit, every wicket with Crickit, a one stop destination for Live Scores, Match Stats, Infographics & much more. Explore now!

DPS Nacharam student bags Gem of Telangana quiz competition

Hyderabad: A student from Delhi Public School, Nacharam, Arjun S.Nair has won the prestigious Gem of Telangana quiz competition for school students, held on Sunday at Sree Narayana Vidya Bhavan School, Kanajiguda.

Organised by Hyderabad Naattukavala, in memory of popular Malayali social worker Gireesh Vijayadharan who passed away two years ago, the popular quiz competition attracted participation from hundreds of students from different schools in Hyderabad.

Other students who bagged award in the quiz competition include J. Navneeth



from S.N.Vidyabhavan, Kanajiguda, M.S.Kailas Nath of NSKK, Ferozguda, R.Manikanta of St. Mary's, Nagaaram, P.Samarth of St.Teresas High School.

How the Banni grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat can be restored

Grasslands are one of the largest ecosystems in the world. They are distributed mainly in semiarid and arid areas, and include savannahs, grassy shrublands, and open grasslands. They harbour a large number of unique and iconic species and offer a variety of material and intangible advantages to people, including several ecosystem services such as carbon storage, climate mitigation, and pollination. Like other types of biodiversity, they face the problem of degradation due to deforestation, overgrazing, agriculture, urbanisation, and other natural and human-made reasons. As much as 49% of grassland areas worldwide are estimated to be experiencing degradation. In India, grasslands account for approximately eight lakh sq. km, or about 24% of the country's total land area (32.8 lakh sq. km). They are increasingly threatened by agricultural conversion, tree-based plantation projects, invasive species, and mega-development projects. The issue is exacerbated by the strong bias of government and non-profit organisations for the conservation and protection of forests.

The Kachchh district in Gujarat, in the western part of the country, houses one of the largest tracts of grasslands in the country. Popularly known as 'Banni', it once covered an area of approximately 3,800 sq. km but it has now decreased to about 2,600 sq. km. In a new study, researchers at the Department of Earth and Environmental Science in Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma (KSKV) Kachchh University, in Bhuj, have assessed the suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grassland restoration, considering ecological value to be the primary criterion. They grouped the prospective restoration zones of the Banni grassland into five categories depending on how suitable each zone was for restoration. They have found that as much as 937 sq. km (or 36%) of the existing grassland area was "highly suitable", 728 sq. km (28%) was "suitable", 714 sq. km (27%) was "moderately suitable", 182 sq. km. (7%) was "marginally suitable", and 61 sq. km (2%) was "not suitable" for restoration.

Speaking to this correspondent, assistant professor and leader of the study team Seema Bhargav Sharma said the first two categories of "highly suitable" and "suitable" zones — which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the complete Banni grasslands — can be restored easily by simply providing them with adequate water sources, either through irrigation or rainwater harvesting. Grassland expansion should also not be much difficult in the third "moderately suitable" zone. Further, the "marginally suitable" and "not suitable" zones can also be managed through interventions such as terracing; with supplementary inputs like fertilizers; and by protecting from high water run-off and erosion, and salt intrusion, the researchers said. The study could provide the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and policymakers a robust foundation for crafting policies aimed at protecting and rehabilitating degraded grasslands. "The detailed assessment of land suitability can inform legal and regu-

latory frameworks to ensure sustainable land use and conservation practices," Dr. Sharma added. A key feature of the new study, she said, is that it provides a holistic assessment. The majority of research on grassland degradation has so far been performed only at the scale of sample plots. Some studies have been conducted at the regional scale but they also mainly used single vegetation indicators, such as net primary productivity (NPP) and the normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), without accounting for the characteristics of the soil. This compromised the accuracy of suitability analysis and grassland degradation assessment, she said. "Our study fills the gap and also covers more aspects to get as comprehensive a picture as possible. We have analysed multiple characteristics of soil also, such as the availability of the three important nutrients, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and four essential micronutrients, iron, manganese, zinc, and copper, ... soil acidity, soil texture, soil organic carbon, salinity, the water holding capacity, cation exchange capacity, bulk density, and infiltration rate," Dr. Sharma added. She also noted that the team used satellite data to check aspects such as land use and land cover, geomorphology, and land slope. "In all, 20 parameters were analysed," she said. "The study aimed at not only assisting identification of lands suitable for grassland development but also to help manage them in a sustainable manner."

Methodology and impact The study was conducted across the area of the Banni grassland. The researchers col-



lected soil samples from 45 locations, and data for geomorphological analyses. The satellites in question that provided data on slope, land use, and land cover were the U.S. Sentinel 2 satellite and the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (or ASTER). Research scientist Rupak Dey, whose doctoral work resulted in the study, said, "Our research can help generate evidence-based recommendations for sustainable grassland management, including biodiversity conservation and the enhancement of livelihoods for local communities dependent on grasses for their livestock." The researchers' findings were published in the journal *Scientific Reports* in June. Apart from Dr. Sharma and Dr. Dey, the study team consisted of Mahesh G. Thakkar, the director of the Lucknow-based Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences.

Himender Bharti, a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Ecosystem Management South Asia Regional Network, said the study was appropriate as it could help provide action plans to conserve grasslands, which have a vital role to play particularly in the context of climate change as they are a great source for sequestration of carbon dioxide. Dr. Bharti wasn't involved in the research. He also said that many bird species — such as the great Indian bustard and the Bengal florican — prefer to breed in grasslands, but grassland areas are shrinking constantly due to anthropogenic activities, threatening biodiversity as well as the ecosystem services they provide. "There is an urgent need for government agencies and other stakeholders to make efforts to conserve them for the future generations," he said.

Andhra Pradesh invites Foxconn to develop 'manufacturing city'

Nara Lokesh met the Foxconn representatives at his residence in Undavalli, said the government would provide all facilities so that Foxconn can develop a 'manufacturing city' to create more jobs. Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh's Education, Information Technology and Electronics Minister, Nara Lokesh, on Monday invited Foxconn to develop a "manufacturing city", promising to provide all facilities to the company. The Minister, who met the Foxconn representatives at his residence in Undavalli, said the government would provide all facilities so that Foxconn can develop a 'manufacturing city' to create more jobs. "Since you are planning to expand your activities across India, I want you to establish, not a mere one more unit, but a mega manufacturing city in the State. We will extend all cooperation for this," Lokesh told the delegation and said that the target of the state government is to provide 20 lakh jobs to the youth. He expressed confidence that Foxconn will play a major role in this.

"Whatever assistance you need for the establishment of a mega manufacturing city, I will personally look after that and we will formulate a special plan for this," Lokesh told the team. He explained to them

in detail about the available resources in the state for setting up their units and also the steps taken during the period from 2014 to 2019, when his TDP was in power, to attract investments to the state besides listing the IT companies that have set up their units in the state. Lokesh informed them how the Kia company was invited to the state during the period which he termed as a case study. Assuring the Foxconn delegation that a policy would be formulated to provide subsidies with the sole aim of providing employment, Lokesh informed them that a novel electronic policy would soon be formulated too. Maintaining that with the initiative taken by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, several companies, including Foxconn, had set up their units in the state during the 2014 to 2019 period, he reminded them that 14,000 jobs were provided for women during that time. Foxconn's Indian representative, Vi Li, praised the initiative being taken by Chandrababu Naidu in attracting investments to the state. Regretting that the company had faced certain difficulties in the state in the past five years, he said that the company had a very warm relationship with Andhra Pradesh. Stating that Foxconn has several units across the globe and has plans to expand its activities in the country,



the company representative said that a decision will soon be taken after holding discussions with the officials of the state government. According to an official statement, the Foxconn Indian representative said that the company is ready to set up electric vehicle manufacturing, semiconductors, digital health, and manufacturing components units in Andhra Pradesh. He informed Lokesh that the company will certainly extend its cooperation in fulfilling the promise of providing 20 lakh jobs. The Foxconn representatives, in principle, agreed to invest heavily in the state and provide large-scale employment to the youth. Lokesh asked them to begin their exercise at the earliest possible. Besides Vi Li, the Director of Foxconn Chairman's office, Senthil Kumar, Deputy Director, Bharat Dandi, the Manager,

Grappling with violence and reform, Bangladesh's interim government faces an uphill battle

On August 15, a video of people dancing in front of former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Mujib's memorial, Dhanmondi 32 in Dhaka went viral across social media. The video also showed a crowd thrashing and driving away people who came to pay respect to the father of Bangladesh's liberation movement on his death anniversary. The incident clearly shows the prevailing mood and the challenges that confront the new interim regime headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who took oath on August 8.

Though Yunus was initially reluctant, the student protestors had persuaded him to provide leadership at this critical juncture. A 17-member interim government led by Yunus was sworn in on August 8. It took almost a week for the violence against minorities and looting to be controlled as police personnel — who had abandoned their duty fearing reprisal attacks — rejoined duty at police stations after appeals by the newly appointed police chief, Mainul Islam. Still, the blame game continues. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secretary general Mirza Fakhrul accused the Awami League of being behind the attacks on minorities and claimed the chaos near the India-Bangladesh border to cross over to India was staged by the party. The interim regime embodies the aspirations of many who want to see real change in Bangladesh. But the last two weeks reflect the interim government's inability to stop the vandalism and harassment of political workers of Awami League as they are made to bear the brunt of Hasina's decision. Yunus is working hard to bring back a semblance of order. He visited Dhakeshwari temple and met leaders of the minority Hindu community to assure them of his government's commitment to protect them. In a heartening gesture, students also attempted to protect places of worship belonging to minorities after the initial attacks.

On Friday, president Shahabuddin Ahmed administered the oaths of office and secrecy to the four new members as advisors to the interim government: economist Wahiduddin Mahmud, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumdar, retired power secretary Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan and Lt Gen (retired) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury. Several political appointees have vacated their positions which will help the interim regime to clean up politicised institutions. There is an expectation that the interim regime will investigate corruption, and excesses of Hasina's regime and look into several cases of disappearances and politically motivated arrests. Syed Refaat Ahmed, the senior most high court judge, has already taken over as the new chief justice along with new judges. Some ambassadors and other foreign service officials posted abroad are also recalled back to Bangladesh, including Mohammad Imran, ambassador to the US; Kamrul Hasan, ambassador to Russia; and Javed Patwary, ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Despite the overhaul in government, financial woes loom. Ahsan H Mansur, the newly appointed Bangladesh bank governor stated that the economy is not doing well, particularly acknowledging the



country's foreign exchange reserves crunch. Private banks have almost collapsed due to unpaid loans. The life of this interim regime is not yet fixed. Electoral reforms would be an essential first step. But whether such reforms would endure to establish a healthy democratic culture is doubtful. After all, the previous military-backed caretaker regime in power between 2007 and 2008 undertook reforms with little consequence. The roadmap to restore democracy through election has not yet been announced. The interim regime however embodies the hope of the new generation that they can engender a transformative democratic change.

Second Liberation?

While Yunus has termed the ouster of Hasina as the second liberation, the law-and-order situation in the country had deteriorated, with killings and plundering soon after the army chief announced the former PM's resignation. On the day of Hasina's ouster, widespread arson attacks and looting were prevalent in Dhaka and elsewhere, and calls for help flooded social media. Not only Sheikh Mujib's statue was dismantled, but his Dhanmondi 32 memorial was burnt and statues of seven other bir protiks (Idols of courage) who had valiantly fought the 1971 liberation war were defaced, raising several questions on the identity of the people who were behind these attacks. The situation has reversed in a matter of a week. The BNP is organising rallies as the AL supporters are hiding. Murder and genocide cases have been filed against Hasina and her cabinet colleagues with the United Nations set to send a fact-finding team next week to probe atrocities committed during the student-led protests in July and early this month. The interim government cancelled August 15 which is observed as national mourning day as a holiday. It needs to be noted after Hasina's fall, 326 people were killed in just two days between August 4-6, in attacks

by miscreants belonging to political parties as part of revenge killing. It appears nothing has changed in Bangladesh's political culture after the second "liberation". Despite positive signs due to the overhaul in Bangladesh's government, the worrying

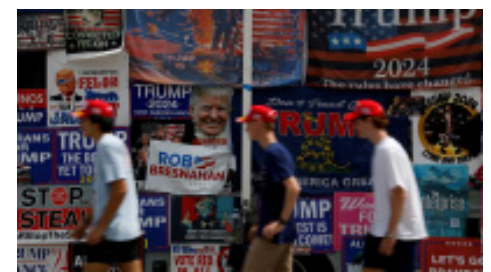
trend of reprisal attacks and the killing of previous regime supporters continues. Smruti S Pattanaik, is research fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (MP-IDSA). The views expressed are personal

Iran is to blame for hacks targeting Trump, Biden-Harris campaigns: U.S. intelligence

U.S. intelligence officials said on Monday they were confident that Iran was responsible for the hack of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, casting the cyber intrusion as part of a brazen and broader effort by Tehran to interfere in American politics and undermine faith in democratic institutions.

Although the Trump campaign and private-sector cybersecurity investigators had previously said Iran was behind the hacking attempts, it was the first time the U.S. government had assigned blame for the attack. The joint statement from the FBI and other federal agencies also indicated that Iran was responsible for attempts to hack Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign, saying hackers had "sought access to individuals with direct access to the Presidential campaign of both political parties."

The goal of the hacking and other activities, federal officials said, was not only to sow discord but also to shape the outcome of elections that Iran perceives to be "particularly consequential in terms of the impact they could have on its national security interests." "We have observed increasingly aggressive Iranian activity during this election cycle, specifically involving influence operations targeting the American public and cyber operations targeting Presidential campaigns," said the



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statement, which in addition to the FBI was also released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

The statement largely confirms the findings of private companies like Microsoft, which earlier this month issued a report detailing foreign agents' attempts to interfere in this year's election, and Google, which separately said that an Iranian group linked to the country's Revolutionary Guard has tried to infiltrate the personal email accounts of roughly a dozen people linked to President Joe Biden and Trump since May.