Srisailam dam, NSP let off 858 TMC and 550 TMC as flood discharges

Hyderabad: After enduring a year of drought and water scarcity, Krishna river is now experiencing the problem of plenty.For the last 50 days, the river has been witnessing extensive floods, quickly filling the Nagarjuna Sagar Project (NSP) to its maximum capacity (312 TMC) within a week after the Srisailam Dam reached its Full Reservoir Level (FRL) with a gross capacity of 215 TMC.

The Srisailam Dam has received a total of 1,139 TMC of water, with 858 TMC being discharged in four spells by lifting its gates.Since July 30, the dam's gates have been open, and over the last 42 days, the average discharge from the Srisailam project has been 1.5 lakh cusecs, with peak flows nearing five lakh cusecs.This has allowed the project to release approximately 37 lakh cusecs to the hydel stations of Telangana, facilitating the generation of up to 18 million units of electricity daily.Over 155 TMC of water has been channelled to the powerhouse channels. Since July 16, around 37,000 cusecs of water have been directed to the powerhouse, enabling power generation from five of its six hydel units, which have a combined installed capacity of 900 MW.Regarding discharges from the Nagarjuna Sagar Project, approximately 550 TMC of water has been released from the project and its two main canals, each with a carrying capacity of 11,000 cusecs.After a hiatus of more than one and a half years, the Nagarjuna Sagar Project began receiving flood inflows from

August 1.This sudden influx of water has brought relief and opportunities for power generation, but it has posed challenges for managing the excess water downstream and ensuring the safety of the surrounding areas.

The NSP left canal is yet to get water released to its full capacity in view of operational issues that make the canal system vulnerable after a dry year resulting in crop holiday. The canal system is being strengthened by plugging the breaches reported at three places due to flash floods in the command area.

LVPEI bags record of highest number of corneal transplants in the world

pact all the key causes and forms of corneal impairment and blindness in the world.LVPEI's eye bank network spread across southern and eastern India, has four eye banks (Ramayamma International Eye Bank – Hyderabad, Mohsin Eye Bank – Visakhapatnam, Drushti Daan Eye Bank – Bhubaneswar, TKEB – Vijayawada) and currently receive a donation of over 12,000 corneas every year. Since its inception in 1989, the Ramayamma International Eye Bank has produced over 510,000 vials of corneal preservation medium and har-

vested 129,500 corneas.Founding Chairman Dr Gullapalli N Rao said, "we need at least one lakh corneal transplants in our country, but we are able to do only 30,000 in a year."He pointed out that when they started the Institute in 1987, only 3000 corneal transplants were done in the country, with a very high rate of transplant failures. "In the last 35 years we could collect 1.2 lakh corneas, the highest in the entire Asia Pacific Region. We could perform 50000 corneal transplants in the 37 years of the Institute's existence," he added.

Hyderabad: The Shantilal Shanghvi Cornea Institute at the LVPEI has achieved the distinction of performing the highest number of corneal transplants ever by any Institution in the world. LVPEI has performed over 50,000 corneal transplants

since its inception in 1987.

The Shantilal Shanghvi Cornea Institute ((SSCI) was the first of the Institutes of Excellence conceived at LVPEI. Envisaged as a global resource centre, it works to im-

Wine shops, bars to remain closed across Hyderabad and Secunderabad on Sept 17-18

Hyderabad: All wine, toddy, and bar shops in Hyderabad and Secunderabad will be closed on September 17 and 18.In view of the final immersion of Ganesh idols, the City Police Commissioner, CV Anand,

on Thursday issued orders to close all wine, toddy, and bar shops within the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The closure will be in effect from 6 am on September 17 to 6 pm on September 18.

Meet India's wildlife super-sniffer dogs

She raced through the forests of the Kaziranga national park at night, leading her team to a cache of firearms stashed here by a poacher.That was the German shepherd's first big bust. Seven years on, she is a veteran, part of a pack of highly trained super-sniffer canines deployed within wildlife enforcement agencies across India.Shera, also a German shepherd, led his biggest bust in 2020, when he uncovered a tiger carcass that had been hidden under 6 ft of sand in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh. He has helped crack over 25 cases involving 40 poachers, over the past decade, and is set to retire this year"With their incredible olfactory sense, these four-legged detectives accurately and efficiently pick up even the tiniest traces of illicit wildlife products and derivatives in transit," says Ravi Singh, secretary-general and CEO at the non-governmental organisation World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-India. "Every additional boot on the ground, or in this case paw, can play a strategic role in protecting our wildlife."

Around the world, canines are used in this way, sometimes to patrol forest areas, and at other times as part of wildlife-protection squads.Fox terriers, for instance, are trained to inspect cargo containers for mice and rats on certain nautical routes, so that rodents do not end up being introduced to Antarctica via supply shipments. Labrador retrievers in Estonia are being used to tell flying squirrel turd and mouse droppings apart in real time. Terriers are helping wildlife officials find and protect sea-turtle eggs in the US.While police dogs have been operational in India since 1957, helping sniff out explosives, narcotics and assisting with search and rescue missions, the wildlife super-sniffer programme was launched in 2008. It has since grown from two to 94 dogs (each one paired with two handlers). All these super-sniffers are trained by the international wildlife-traffic monitoring NGO Traffic and by WWF-India, at the border police forces' dog-training academies in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. A new batch of 12 such dogs will graduate from this academy in June.German shepherds, Belgian Malinois and Weimaraners are preferred in this field, for their inquisitive, intelligent and trainable nature.Training begins when puppies are six to nine months old, and takes nine months to a year.

The academy runs a structured three-phase programme that begins with trust-building exercises. Here, basic commands are taught, and treats awarded at the end of each exercise.In the second phase, the puppies are trained in scent detection and tracking, with a special focus on illegal wildlife products such as ivory, rhinoceros horns, tiger skins, leopard skins, pangolin scales and deer antlers.In the final phase, the trainees are tested outside the institute, in drills conducted at a forest, railway station or staged environment.Some NGOs have begun to train dogs in this field too. Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), which works with forest departments on data collection, has had three such canines since 2018. While the training modules are similar, with the NGO the aim isn't tracking wildlife crime but rather tracking elusive species such as the pangolin.Whatever the task, it is a life of danger, once the canines enter the field, though most of the threats admittedly comes from the wild. The dogs

may encounter scorpions and snakes, and get scratched or cut as they run across rough terrain. They are typically accompanied, therefore, by emergency vehicles loaded with anti-venom shots and first-aid.The handlers in turn are alert to even small changes in the dog's body language, particularly while on a mission, says Aditya Joshi, head of conservation research at WCT. Each super-sniffer typically has the same two handlers through their career, which stretches from eight to nine years. (After they retire, they often live with one of the handlers; the deployment agency is responsible for the canine's welfare through their lifespan.)

On rest days, when there is no mission to work on, the canines are taken on at least two walks, for exercise, and are given scents to find in test environments, in order to keep their skills honed. There are also play sessions. Like most dogs, they love to fetch, the handlers say. They are groomed regularly, in a relaxing schedule of bathing and having their coats trimmed, brushed and detangled.Impi, WCT's Weimaraner, also likes to snuggle with humans, loves to play with children, and hates being alone.When it comes to work, he is a consummate professional, Joshi adds, laughing. "During a scent-detection drill last year, we were left confused when Impi identified a urine sample incorrectly. It was the first time it had happened, so we double-checked the labels, only to

find that one of us had incorrectly labelled the sample," Joshi says. "We continue to believe that the dog is always right; it's the humans who are prone to more error."There's more terrain for the canines to cover. "We haven't explored the full potential of sniffer dogs in the wild," says Dipankar Ghose, conservation manager and interim head at Traffic India. "In India, they are deployed only on specific missions. But globally, such squads help with the early detection and mapping of invasive species in fragile ecosystems, and patrol crucial wildlife corridors."If the dogs'

full potential was explored, they could revolutionise data collection too, Joshi says. Impi will have retired by then, to a life of only play, but Joshi is hoping new generations of canines will work even more closely with humans, to study and protect the natural world.Catch every big hit, every wicket with Crick-it, a one stop destination for Live Scores, Match Stats, Quizzes, Polls & much more. Explore now!.Catch your daily dose of Fashion, Taylor Swift, Health, Festivals, Travel, Relationship, Recipe and all the other Latest Lifestyle News on Hindustan Times Website and APPs.

Should you soak rice before cooking? Does it help reduce blood sugar levels? An expert answers

Struggling with the late afternoon bout of sleep after a hearty rice meal? Feeling like you're gaining weight? Consuming rice soaked in water for a few hours before cooking can help with these issues, as this affects its glycemic index (GI) and overall nutritional profile.Soaking rice in water before cooking can have beneficial effects on its glycemic index and overall nutritional profile.

But, what is GI?

"The GI is a measure of how quickly carbohydrates in food raise blood sugar levels. Foods with lower GI are digested more slowly, leading to a gradual increase in blood sugar levels and providing more sustained energy," said Dr G Sushma, clinical dietitian, CARE Hospitals, Banjara

Hills, Hyderabad."By soaking rice, especially varieties with higher starch content, the enzymatic breakdown can help lower its GI, potentially reducing the risk of blood sugar spikes after consumption," Sushma said.Now what's enzymatic breakdown?

"When rice is soaked, it undergoes enzymatic breakdown, a process where certain enzymes naturally present in the rice grains start breaking down complex carbohydrates into simpler sugars," Sushma said. This enzymatic activity helps predigest the rice, making it easier for the body to digest and absorb the nutrients it contains.rice Rinsing soaked rice thoroughly before cooking helps remove excess starch released, resulting in fluffier cooked rice. (Source: Unsplash)

What are the health benefits?

Touching upon the nutritional aspect, Dr Sushma highlights how enzymatic breakdown increases the availability of vitamins and minerals, by breaking down antinutrients like phytic acid and tannins. "These compounds can inhibit the absorption of nutrients in the body, so reducing their levels through soaking can improve the overall nutrient absorption from the rice," she said.Are there side effects?

Dr Sushma confirmed there are no significant side effects associated with this practice when done in moderation.

GSHS hosts workshop on Effective Test Design

Hyderabad: The GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences (GSHS), Hyderabad, conducted a one-day workshop titled 'Developing Effective Test Papers: Bloom's Taxonomy and Assessment Design' here on Thursday.The workshop equipped faculty members with the necessary skills to design test papers and assessments that are effective and aligned with the principles of Bloom's Taxonomy, thereby enhancing the quality of learning and evaluation.EFLU AIELTA Director Prof. Lina Mukhopadhyay spoke on the critical aspects of content assessment for the classroom, addressing the issues and challenges educators face today.

Canon Elevates Visual Possibilities with An Innovative New Lens

Think out of the box with the RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM, a lens that inspires one's imagination

Canon today announced the RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM, a new RF mount lens for the EOS R mirrorless camera system that will take imaging possibilities into a new dimension. As a bright f/2.8 constant aperture standard zoom lens, the RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM opens accessibility to more users, being Canon's first non-professional-grade lens of its kind.

Redefining Versatility

A constant aperture zoom lens is one of the most versatile types of lenses available. With its bright f/2.8 maximum aperture and compact, lightweight portability, the RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM offers even more versatility. Users can freeze their precious moments in low light and achieve dreamy shallow focus (bokeh) effects, regardless if they are shooting glittery urban scenes at the 28mm wide end or taking close-up beauty shots at 70mm. When paired with APS-C cameras, it transforms into a standard zoom ideal for daily scenes, products, and portraits, with a full-frame equivalent effective focal range of 44.8mm to 112mm.

The versatility is boosted with powerful built-in Optical Image Stabilizer, which helps users achieve sharp, steady images even when using shutter speeds up to 5.5 stops slower on cameras with no In-Body Image Stabilizer (In-Body IS) like the EOS R8, and up to 7.5 stops slower on cameras that do, like the EOS R6 Mark II. Movie Digital IS during video shooting is also supported, allowing users to record smooth, steady handheld footage even without a tripod or gimbal.

While the combination of a bright constant aperture with zoom capabilities is usually associated with larger professional-grade lenses, the RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM dispels that notion. At approximately 9.22cm long when fully retracted and weighing approximately 495g, it is smaller and 45% lighter than its closest professional-grade counterpart (RF24-70mm f/2.8L IS USM), making it travel friendly. Despite not being an L-series lens, the RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM boasts weather-sealing, the same level of durability and shock resistance, and an excellent image quality that far exceeds that of a kit lens, thanks to Canon's advanced optical design technology.

PRODUCT SPECIFICATION

Lens
RF28-70mm F2.8 IS STM
Focal Length
28-70 mm
Maximum Aperture
f/2.8
Minimum Focusing Distance (m)
0.27 / 0.89 (AF, f=28mm)
0.24 / 0.79 (MF, f=28mm)
Maximum Magnification
0.24x (f=70 mm)
Lens Construction
15 elements in 12 groups
Filter Size Diameter
Ø67mm
Aperture Blades
9
IS (CIPA Standard Correction Effect)
Yes (up to 5.5 stops)
Coordinated Control IS (With IBIS equipped Camera)
Yes (up to 7.5 stops)

Maximum Diameter and length approx. 76.5 mm × 92.2 mm
Weight (g) (Approx.)
495

Unlocking 10x income growth: Shiva's path to financial independence with PBPartners

PBPartners, a brand under Policybazaar Insurance Brokers, is revolutionizing the insurance industry by empowering individuals from local communities to become Point of Selling Persons (PoSP). With the help of these PoSPs, PBPartners is making insurance accessible beyond metro cities by providing comprehensive solutions to all customer needs with Phygital interactions. With increasing insurance penetration in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, they have financially empowered over 2 lakh+ agent partners nationwide. One such inspiring story is that of Shiva from Hyderabad, Telangana.Joining PBPartners: A Transformative Decision

With over 07 years of industry experience, Shiva joined PBPartners one and a half years ago and has seen his career and income flourish since then. Over the years, Shiva has gained vast knowledge and expertise in the Insurance sector. Before joining PBPartners, he worked with many different companies. His transition to PBPartners marked a turning point in his professional life, providing him with a single platform to manage all types of insurance. Supportive & Collaborative EnvironmentShiva highlights the supportive team at PBPartners, which goes above and beyond to assist their PoSP agent partners at every stage. Shiva added,

"PBPartners provides comprehensive training, dedicated relationship manager support, and cutting-edge technology solutions to equip its agent partners with the tools and resources necessary for success in the competitive insurance market. The organization has a collaborative environment where experienced agent partners mentor newcomers, sharing their knowledge and offering assistance. This community-centric approach not only enhances outreach efforts for agent partners but also builds trust and has a positive impact on the local community"

10x Rise in Income & Part-Time FlexibilityShiva has experienced significant growth in terms of earnings and business generated. Talking about the boost in his income, he said, "My earnings have increased almost 10x after joining PBPartners. Through my dedication and hard work at PBPartners, I have achieved professional success and become a trusted advisor within my community."

Shiva further highlighted, "One of the major advantages of being an agent partner with PBPartners is their prioritization of flexibility, allowing PoSP agents to work anytime, anywhere, and be their bosses. Working part-time with PBPartners has allowed me to pursue other interests. PBPartners played a crucial role in this new achievement by helping me secure financial investment for my business."Good PayoutsOne of the standout benefits Shiva has experienced with PBPartners is the flexibility and control over the earnings that the company provides with their On Demand Payout feature.Shiva shared his experience saying, "PBPartners'On Demand Payout feature has been a game-changer for me, allowing me to have full control over my earnings and ensuring I have the financial flexibility needed to grow in my career. This flexibility is transformative for agent partners like me, enabling them to request payment whenever they close a policy sale, with funds typically processed the same day or the next." Shiva's journey with PBPartners shows the positive impact of the company's supportive environment, excellent financial benefits, and collaborative culture for its agent partners.

MG Windsor to Disrupt the Car Industry JSW MG Motor India Launches Windsor, India's 1st Intelligent CUV

JSW MG Motor India, today launched India's first Intelligent CUV-the MG Windsor, at the price of a manual compact SUV. The Windsor, combining the comfort of a sedan and the expanse of an SUV, will be offered with innovative aerodynamic design, spacious and opulent interiors, reassuring safety, smart connectivity, driving comfort, and many hi-tech features. It is built on 'Pure EV Platform' offering a luxurious business-class experience. With BaaS – a unique ownership program, MG Windsor is offered at INR 9.99 Lakhs + 3.5 Rs. /km for battery*.BaaS (Battery-as-a-Service) - Unique ownership program

For the first time in India's passenger vehicle segment, JSW MG Motor India is introducing an innovative ownership plan through Battery-as-a-Service (BaaS) offering, which makes owning a full-size capable electric CUV at the price of a manual engine-based compact SUV possible. This flexible ownership program eliminates the upfront cost of the battery, enabling customers to pay only for its usage. Essentially, buyers pay a nominal fee per kilometre driven, which is 40% of the fuel costs of conventional vehicles. This model significantly reduces the initial acquisition cost and lowers the per-kilometre expense, ensuring an economical and hassle-free ownership experience.

In addition, the company is offering a first-of-its-kind lifetime battery warranty to the first owner of MG Windsor. With the eHUB by MG app, the company is offering one year of free public charging, making it easier than ever for Windsor owners to power up anytime, anywhere. JSW MG Motor India is also introducing its 3-60 assured buyback plan for the Windsor which ensures that it will retain 60% of its value after 3 years/45,000kms**.The Intelligent CUV features an AeroGlide design language, which is futuristic and transcends the concept of traditional segmentation. The interiors are opulent and luxurious with spacious Aero Lounge seats that can be reclined to 1350, coupled with the expansive Infinity View Glass Roof, adding to the business class experience. Immersive entertainment and smart connectivity features are powered by a massive 15.6" GRANDVIEW Touch Display in the central console.

The Windsor comes with the powerful PMS Motor which is IP67 certified. Impressive performance is derived through a 38 kWh Li-ion battery pack and 4 driving modes (Eco+, Eco, Normal and Sport) that deliver 100KW (136ps) power and 200Nm of instant torque, offering a range of 331 kms***. It can be charged in 40 minutes at any DC fast charger.

Speaking at the launch, Parth Jindal, Director, JSW MG Motor India, said, "The MG Windsor is the realization of the vision and promise behind JSW MG India and marks a significant milestone in this journey. The Windsor is the first car that has come out of the JV and the team has worked very hard in developing and bringing it to the Indian market. This vehicle embodies our commitment to delivering to our Indian customers the best of innovation the world has to offer. As a crossover utility vehicle, the Windsor merges the comfort of a sedan with the expanse of an SUV, making it an ideal car for the Indian household. With its advanced features, innovative design, and disruptive pricing, the Windsor sets a new benchmark. I look forward to seeing the MG Windsor on our Indian roads, delighting our customers and helping them travel sustainably with comfort, style and power."

Sharing his views on the occasion, Rajeev Chaba, CEO Emeritus, JSW MG Motor India said, "With its delightful features and easy to drive dynamics, MG Windsor will certainly invite newer sets of customers to try EVs. Enabling this, we have created a clear channel for smart and unique ownership through the BaaS program, complemented with additional benefits. With these initiatives, we are addressing the barrier of incremental upfront cost of owning an EV and supporting easy and hassle-free ownership through the user-friendly eHUB by MG app that brings the EV ecosystem to the fingertips of customers. I am confident that the overall package of the Windsor will prove to be a catalyst in strengthening the EV segment further for prospective car buyers."

Why Manipur seems so far away

For any government, Manipur would have become an embarrassment long ago. Now that the festering wound has re-surfaced, it should be a matter of national concern, shame and outrage. Any Union government would have become shaky in its democratic pretence and moral foundation. Nothing of the sort seems to be happening. A government that was gloating over its "third term" stands exposed by what is happening in Manipur. However, this does not seem to matter for the government and the main ruling party. This insensitivity of the public, political parties and government alike, might be understood through three factors — the eclipse of governance, the distortion of state-ness and the failure of Hindu nationalism.For over a year, the situation in Manipur has been practically out of control with ethnic clashes and defiance of police and armed forces. The Union government has done almost nothing even by way of formal efforts to restore law and order and broker peace. But this majestic neglect is not surprising. The government has followed a template of non-response and non-governance in the wake of almost every challenge or crisis.

In the pre-Covid phase, there were stirrings on the CAA-NRC issue. Subsequently, the farmers' protests became a major challenge. There have also been scandals such as the one surrounding the SEBI chairperson. Many gaps in routine administration have surfaced through infrastructure tragedies, paper leaks, water leaks, train accidents. In each of these cases, the government's response has been marked by inaction, repression and a perception offensive.

In fact, the governance model sits on this tripod: Don't do anything, victimise the citizens if they complain and engage in perception warfare. Very helpfully for the government, the media has rarely followed up on these and other instances of (non) governance systematically and, instead, often colluded with it in its misinformation drive and/or perception offensive. Why should Manipur be an exception?Similarly, the idea of state and state power has been distorted in response to such crises. One would imagine that a party and government that claim to be concerned with questions of national security, sovereignty and strength of the Indian state would have been alert in their response to developments in Manipur. Instead, Manipur has come to represent the failure of the Indian state. Even otherwise, the idea of a (strong) state has only meant optical and verbal illusions. Flexing metaphorical muscles is all that state-ness seems to involve, and there is a cynical exploitation of such challenges for partisan mileage. Both these traits were evident when protestors in the anti-CAA agitation were branded as anti-national, agitating farmers labelled as Khalistanis and the Ladakh protests were simply ignored.

The current regime has strange ways of using the idea of state. It uses it as drapery in its presentation of India's international image — as Vishwaguru. This is done mainly for domestic audiences. Secondly, state is invoked as a weapon against citizens. Here, too, the state and its might are directed against and experienced by an internal audience. And third, state constitutes the outer justification of the regime's nationalist fancies as was the case in Jammu & Kashmir with regard to Article 370.Neither do citizens experience the benevolent prowess of the state nor does its might address core issues of internal order or external respect. In fact, through its lacklustre governance and flawed idea of "Hindu" nationalism, the current regime has only weakened the Indian state while simultaneously making it less democratic and more irresponsible.So a state may be burning for more than a year, yet it does not qualify to be a concern in this discourse of a weak state pretending to be a strong one. The fact that two communities are unable to co-exist does not put pressure on the perception-centred state thinking. A border state being in turmoil does not worry the regime about security. Failure to quell violence does not disfigure the idea of a strong state.But above all, the current regime's idea of the Indian nation is at the heart of its unwillingness to bring Manipur to the centre of national policy. Hindutva ideology conflates religion and nation. This intellectual position simultaneously makes the state weak and the idea of nation hollow — because, the nationalist imagination it upholds does not have a fair space for non-Hindus. Hindutva believes in the existence of a conspiracy to convert Hindus to other religions — in the case of many states of the "Northeast", to Christianity. Once this conspiracy theory is adopted, an automatic schism emerges between Hindus and non-Hindus. Ideologues of Hindu nationalism tend to expect that a truly "nationalist" government should protect Hindus and restrain non-Hindus. Such a formulation of the nation as constituting Hindus and being threatened by non-Hindus brings Hindutva and its idea of Hindu nation in conflict with the co-existence of diverse religious communities.

Vinayaka Chavithi Celebrations Held at Youth for Anti-Corruption Office

Chanchalguda Jail Superintendent Shivakumar Goud Highlights India's Culture and Traditions During Vinayaka Chavithi Celebrations

India's culture and traditions are ideal for the world, said Chanchal Guda Jail Superintendent Shivakumar Goud during the Vinayaka Chavithi celebrations at the renowned NGO Youth for Anti-Corruption(YAC) central office.

On the sixth day of Navratri, the organization held a food donation program, which Superintendent Shivakumar Goud inaugurated as the chief guest along with Rajendra Palnati - Founder, Youth for Anti-Corruption. "We want the culture, custom, and tradition of our country to showcase that Kella Annadanam is the greatest of all donations, that everyone has their own preferences, and that they have the opportunity to worship their religion and their God," he said.The program was attended by Dr. Sravanthi Gadhiraju, YAC Media Secretary Jayaram, Komati Ramesh Babu, Konne Devendar, Varikuppala Gangadhar, G. Hariprakash, Battini Rajesh, Kokkula Prashanth, Dr. Annapurna, Geeta, Swapna Reddy, Shivanagaraju, Pashiganti Vamsikrishna, Nagendra, and Naresh.Additionally, the organization held a Ganesha Laddu Auction, where the members enthusiastically participated. Chanchalguda Jail Superintendent Shivakumar goud won the laddu in the auction for Rs. 16,116.

BJP using divisive politics to divide people of the nation, alleges Raja warring

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), September 12: The President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and the Member of Parliament from Ludhiana, Amarinder Singh Raja Warring has slammed BJP for its divisive policy. In a statement via his social media platforms, addressing the recent misrepresentation of Rahul Gandhi's remarks made during his visit to the United States of America, warring said that the BJP is using divisive politics to divide people of the nation.

Clarifying the context, Warring explained that Rahul Gandhi ji had engaged in a conversation with a Sikh individual in America, inquiring about his name. During the discussion, Rahul Gandhi ji remarked on the unfortunate reality that, due to the prevailing political climate in India, Sikhs and Sardars might feel the need to seek permission before openly representing their religion by tying a turban or wearing a kada."Rahul Gandhi ji was highlighting the underlying fear that has crept into various religions due to the divisive politics perpetuated by the BJP," stated Warring. "For the past ten years, the nation has been systematically divided along religious lines by the BJP, and this reality was brought to light during Rahul Gandhi ji's interaction with the Sikh individual in the United States."The PPCC Chief went on to under-

score Rahul Gandhi's deep respect and love for the Sikh religion, pointing out how this was evident during his visit to the Golden Temple, where he performed Sewa and immersed himself in the teachings of the faith. "Rahul Gandhi ji has always stood with Punjab and the Sikh community, as was clearly seen during his Bharat Jodo Yatra, where he walked through Punjab and engaged directly with the people, understanding their concerns and understanding Sikhism deeply during his visit," Warring emphasized.Refuting the BJP's claims, Warring questioned how anyone could accuse Rahul Gandhi ji of being against the Sikh religion when he has quoted the teachings of Guru Nanak in the Parliament. "BJP and its leaders, who once praised Rahul Gandhi ji while a part of Congress, now bow down to PM Modi and shamelessly speak ill of him. Their manipulation of his statement is nothing but a reflection of their fear of Rahul Gandhi ji's truthfulness," Warring said.Addressing the people of Punjab directly, Raja Warring expressed his personal views: "As a Punjabi, I did not find anything wrong in what Rahul Gandhi ji said. The BJP is simply angered because Rahul Gandhi ji exposed their true nature to the world. Whenever Rahul Gandhi ji speaks about any religion, BJP and its leaders deliberately distort his words to create

an unnecessary controversy, diverting attention from the real issues."Warring reaffirmed the Congress Party's commitment to inclusivity and unity, stating, "Congress and Rahul Gandhi ji have always been inclusive and will never speak against any religion. We are here to open 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' in this sea of hatred created by the BJP. We have never been scared and will never be scared to speak the truth."Concluding his statement, Warring urged the BJP to cease spreading hatred and stop employing divisive tactics to create discord among the people. "The people of India are now aware of the truth and will not fall for such manipulations anymore. To those leaders who criticize Rahul Gandhi ji, I challenge you to sit down and discuss Sikh history with him; you will find that he knows more than you

do. I have full faith in Punjab, and I know our people will not succumb to this divisive politics."He ended by reiterating his trust in the wisdom of the Punjabi people: "Punjab has always stood tall against divisive forces, and this time will be no different. Our people are wise and will see through the BJP's attempts to divide us.

We will continue to stand united and strong in our resolve for truth and justice."
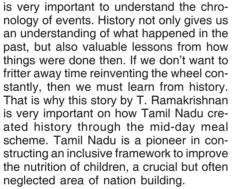
Health Matters | When nutrition calls the shots

This week, either by design or by accident, we wound up writing a lot about the importance of nutrition, the availability of adequate nutrition, the role of nutrition in health care recovery, support programmes by State governments, and a bit of history too, thrown into the mix.

Naturally, the inflationary trend pushing up the cost of food, taking healthy food above the affordability levels of a number of people in this country, will have to be fronted. In this data story, Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Sonikka Loganathan analyse the cost of a plate of food in India. Thalinomics, has for long, been a measure of rising food prices, and affordability in the country. They argue that the cost of preparing meals at home rose by 65% in five years, and wages by just 28%-37%, making it more unaffordable for families who are having to resort to meals that are neither healthy nor balanced in the way they are meant to be. Given the fixed food budget in most Indian homes, the imbalance results in smaller thalis or fewer items in the thali leading to increasingly unbalanced or unfulfilling meals. Also, did you see this data from the U.N.? The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report 2023 adds more grist to this mill. For instance, in India, 74% were not able to afford a healthy diet, the fourth highest share among the nations considered. Charts 1 and 2 show that the cost of a healthy diet in India, though increasing, is still lower than in many comparable economies. However, given the poor income levels in India, a healthy diet is still unaffordable to many. The Hindu Data Team analyses the report and reasons that due to stagnant income levels, 74% in India can't afford a healthy diet.

Sometimes it boggles the mind that if the importance of nutrition is well understood in general, we still have to be talking about its criticality in human health from time to time. Awareness building is important, but oftentimes, governments need studies to prove to them what is a commonly accepted truth. Not only is nutrition crucial for healthy living, it stands to reason that recovery from ill health is also facilitated by making sure the patient gets an appropriate and nutritious diet. And yet, scientists constantly have to conduct research to find proof for the axiom that nutrition aids in health care recoveries, I argue here. The recent extension of the breakfast scheme in Tamil Nadu, introduced just a year ago, to all primary class students in the State also made it to our nutrition-health list this week. While it does have to iron out minor tweaks, in terms of caste discrimination, there is also a demand to include more schools in the ambit. Currently at a mere ?12.71 per meal per student per day, this scheme has much going for it and is extremely popular amongst parents, teachers and students themselves. They offer suggestions to alter the menu, and attendance and enrolment have quantitatively increased in these government primary schools in the one year that this scheme has been operational. A year ago, wild horses could not bring these children to school, but they now come with a hop, skip and jump. Read more here: When schools whet the appetite of students, and feed them.

As the Home Minister recently said, it is very important to understand the chronology of events. History not only gives us an understanding of what happened in the past, but also valuable lessons from how things were done then. If we don't want to fritter away time reinventing the wheel constantly, then we must learn from history. That is why this story by T. Ramakrishnan is very important on how Tamil Nadu created history through the mid-day meal scheme. Tamil Nadu is a pioneer in constructing an inclusive framework to improve the nutrition of children, a crucial but often neglected area of nation building.
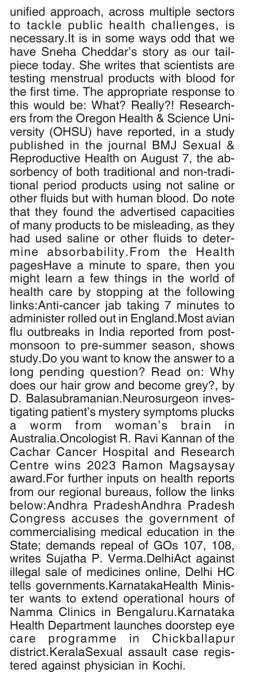
It is a sheer coincidence that the Union Government is observing Poshan Maah, in its 6th year in September this year. The nutrition week is held every year with the aim of reducing undernutrition levels among children below six years of age, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. Self Help Group members across the country have been trained and activated to raise awareness about food, nutrition, health in their communities. Rajulapudi Srinivas writes on this in Andhra Pradesh: Poshan Maah' utsavams held at all Anganwadi centres.Pharma development, checks and balances have featured in this newsletter multiple times, given the significance and the attempts being made by the Centre to promote made in India and keep tabs on quality as well. Bindu Shajan Perappadan writes here on the latest batch of mega schemes for pharma development, medical-tech innovation and reducing dependency API import. This will be announced next month. Minister of Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya says that six priority areas have been identified, which would see ?5,000-crore worth research and investment push in the next 10 years.

As Karnataka readies its own State Dementia Action Plan, a national plan to tackle this condition still remains on paper. The importance of taking care of persons with dementia cannot be overstated, Afshan Yasmeen argues, since it is an umbrella term for several diseases affecting memory, other cognitive abilities and behaviour that interfere significantly with a person's ability to maintain their activities of daily living. An action plan is likely to be launched on September 21, which is observed as World Alzheimer's Day. Do read further here: Karnataka set to come out with State Dementia Action Plan.Meanwhile, we also have to tarry at this very important story on concerns over underfunding frustrating mental health care in the country. A Parliamentary Standing Committee expressed its worry last week about the decrease in funding of tertiary care programs and noted that it feared that the reduced budgetary allocation would hamper the state of tertiary-level mental health institutions in the country. Read more, here.

If you have wondered, hypothetically or with serious concern because of the situation at home, if there is a 'too much screen time' limit for children and if so, what would be a safe viewing time, this story is for you: Aroon Deep and Sreeparna Chakraborty note that experts say that while very young children up to six years of age should mostly be kept away from screens, a more nuanced approach can be considered for older children based on when and what they engage with online. They have quoted experts who say children cannot be isolated from the Internet and a safe level of exposure is beneficial for the development of cognitive skills in the 6-14 years age group. In his continuing TB series, R. Prasad writes on a crucial aspect: detection. Chest X-ray interpretation using AI can detect more TB cases, he argues. In other stories, Abhinay Lakshman reports that Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda called on experts and doctors to dispel negative notions in tribal people over screening blood for sickle-cell disease, and Zubeda Hamid speaks to Dr. Rajib Dasgupta for The Hindu's In Focus podcast about One Health - an approach that recognises that the health of humans, animals, plants and their environment is interconnected, and a unified approach, across multiple sectors to tackle public health challenges, is necessary.It is in some ways odd that we have Sneha Cheddar's story as our tailpiece today. She writes that scientists are testing menstrual products with blood for the first time. The appropriate response to this would be: What? Really?! Researchers from the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) have reported, in a study published in the journal BMJ Sexual & Reproductive Health on August 7, the absorbency of both traditional and non-traditional period products using not saline or other fluids but with human blood. Do note that they found the advertised capacities of many products to be misleading, as they had used saline or other fluids to determine absorbability.From the Health pagesHave a minute to spare, then you might learn a few things in the world of health care by stopping at the following links:Anti-cancer jab taking 7 minutes to administer rolled out in England.Most avian flu outbreaks in India reported from post-monsoon to pre-summer season, shows study.Do you want to know the answer to a long pending question? Read on: Why does our hair grow and become grey?, by D. Balasubramanian.Neurosurgeon investigating patient's mystery symptoms plucks a worm from woman's brain in Australia.Oncologist R. Ravi Kannan of the Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre wins 2023 Ramon Magsaysay award.For further inputs on health reports from our regional bureaus, follow the links below:Andhra PradeshAndhra Pradesh Congress accuses the government of commercialising medical education in the State; demands repeal of GOs 107, 108, writes Sujatha P. Verma.DelhiAct against illegal sale of medicines online, Delhi HC tells governments.KarnatakaHealth Minister wants to extend operational hours of Namma Clinics in Bengaluru.Karnataka Health Department launches doorstep eye care programme in Chickballapur district.KeralaSexual assault case registered against physician in Kochi.

Explained | How the amended Forest (Conservation) Act imperils the Northeast

On August 22, the Mizoram Assembly unanimously passed a resolution opposing the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, "to protect the rights and interest of the people of Mizoram". The amendment allows the diversion of forest land for roads, railway lines or "strategic linear projects of national importance and concerning national security" within 100 km of India's international borders or lines of control, without a forest clearance under the Forest (Conservation) Act (FCA) 1980.Most of India's Northeast falls in this 100 km range. When it meets next week, the Nagaland Assembly will also face strident demands to pass a resolution against the Amendment. Tripura, Mizoram, and Sikkim – ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or its allies – have also opposed the 100-km exemption clause.

Grant of FCA clearancesSpecial Constitutional protections – Article 371A for Nagaland and 371G for Mizoram – prohibit the application of any law enacted by Parliament that impinges on Naga and Mizo customary law and procedure, and ownership and transfer of land and its resources. Such laws can be extended to these States only if their Legislative Assemblies decide thus in a resolution.Nagaland extended the application of the FCA "to government forests and such other forests and Wildlife Sanctuaries under the control of [the] State Government" (notification no. FOR-58/82, July 3, 1986). Government forests make up only 2.71% of the State's Recorded Forest Area.

But in December 1997, the Home Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Law and Justice, confirmed to the Union Environment Ministry that the FCA is covered under the term "land resources" and is not applicable to Nagaland, as its legislative assembly hadn't adopted any resolution to apply FCA to the State. In fact, since 1980, the Environment Ministry has not granted an FCA clearance to forests in Nagaland.Contradicting this, the Environment Ministry informed the Nagaland Government in November 1998 that the Ministry of Law and Justice had clarified that the FCA is indeed applicable to the State.This is not so with Mizoram: the Union Territory became a State with the Constitution (Fifty Third Amendment) Act 1986, adding Article 371G to the Constitution. It stipulated that all Central Acts in force before 1986 are extended to the State, including the FCA. Moreover, the powers of the Autonomous District Councils in the three Sixth Scheduled areas in Mizoram don't extend to reserved forests. So the FCA covers 84.53% of forest areas that are notified forests, and 6,630 ha have thus far received FCA clearance.The FCA is applicable in the rest of Northeast: in Meghalaya and Tripura, the Sixth Schedule Areas within these States, and in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Manipur. Arunachal Pradesh ranked first among these States in FCA clearance (21,786.45 ha), followed by Tripura (9,051 ha), Assam (5,261 ha), Manipur (3,604 ha), Sikkim (2,902 ha), and Meghalaya (807 ha).FCA 1980 vis-à-vis the Northeast

Over a million hectares of forest have been diverted nationwide under FCA since 1980. FCA exists to deforest the forest, under the Indian Forest Act 1927 or its State versions.In 1996, the Supreme Court expanded the term "forest land" in the FCA in the Godavarman case to "not only include 'forest' as understood in the dictionary sense, but also any area recorded as forest in the Government record irrespective of the ownership", thus extending the FCA to unclassed forests. These are recorded forests but not notified as forests.More than half of the Northeast is Recorded Forest Area (RFA). Of this, 53% are unclassed forests controlled by individuals, clans, village councils or communities, and governed by customary law and procedures. The remainder is notified forest controlled by the State Forest Departments.RFA ranges from 34.21% in Assam to 82.31% in Sikkim with Mizoram having 35.48%, Meghalaya 42.34%, Nagaland 53.01%, Arunachal Pradesh 61.55%, Manipur 78.01% and Tripura 60.02%. Of these, unclassed forests range from nil in Sikkim to 97.29% in Nagaland, with 15.47% in Mizoram, 33.43% in Assam, 42.96% in Tripura, 75.67% in Manipur and 88.15% in Meghalaya.The apex court's 1996 order brought unclassed forests under the FCA's purview everywhere except in Nagaland, considering the 1997 Home Ministry clarification.There are also forests outside RFA, neither recorded nor surveyed: 38.5% of the cover in Assam; 29% in Nagaland; and 1.5% in Mizoram.FRA 2009 vis-à-vis the NortheastIn the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (FRA) 2006, "forest land" includes unclassified forests, undemarcated forests, existing or deemed forests, protected forests, reserved forests, Sanctuaries and National Parks. This complied with the 1996 Supreme Court redefinition.

While benefitting the Northeast states with sizeable unclassed forests, the FRA also included a specific provision in the list of rights: "rights which are recognised under any state law or laws of any autonomous district council or autonomous regional council or which are accepted as rights of tribal under any traditional or customary law of the concerned tribes of any State."Even if there are no FRA claims like those claimed by six of the eight Northeast States, nothing prevents these States from taking suo motu cognisance of the existing rights and obtaining the concerned Gram Sabha approvals for issuing titles. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs can also issue legally enforceable directions under Section 12 of the FRA, paving the way for this. This would add another layer of legal security to traditional community tenurial rights over forests.

But none of the Northeast States have implemented FRA except for Assam and Tripura. The reasons include the FRA being 'irrelevant' as communities, clans, chiefs and individuals own most of the land, and lack of forest-dependent forest-dwellers.The Mizoram Legislative Assembly resolved on October 29, 2009, under Article 371G, to extend the FRA and its Rules with effect from December 31, 2009. But the Mizoram Assembly did a U-turn on November 19, 2019, declaring the FRA to

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not be relevant to the State since no claims for rights were forthcoming. It also referred to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs declining to sanction Rs 10 lakh to implement the FRA.

The Nagaland assembly, as required under Article 371A, is yet to decide whether it wants this law. A committee has been looking into it for years now.

FRA compliance under FCAThe Environment Ministry mandated FRA implementation and prior informed consent of the Gram Sabha in 2009 to admit a forest diversion proposal. The responsibility was delegated to the District Collector, who ironically also headed the District Committee that issues FRA titles. The Collectors' certificate of FRA compliance in the in-principle Stage I forest clearance was shifted to Stage II final clearance.

But the Ministry's 2022 Forest Conservation Rules eliminated compliance with the FRA before final approval altogether. Instead, it said that State governments "shall issue order for diversion, assignment of lease or dereservation as the case may be … after fulfillment and compliance" with the FRA "including ensuring settlement of rights".

Taking this further, States can formulate and take legal measures to ensure mandatory fulfillment of the FRA before recommending a forest diversion proposal, and ensuring Gram Sabha consent before handing over forest land. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs can also issue legally enforceable directions under the FRA, or even enact a separate law, to recognise and settle forest rights when forests are diverted for other purposes and forest-dwellers are relocated, as forest rights fall squarely within its Business Rules.

This way, the States and the Tribal Affairs Ministry have a way to provide tenurial security to forest-dwellers and protect the forests. On August 22, the Mizoram Assembly unanimously passed a resolution opposing the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, "to protect the rights and interest of the people of Mizoram".

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Despite decades of advocacy, and govt backing, care for rare diseases not optimal

In the field of rare diseases, in India, what did not happen for 20 years, was dramatically hustled through over the last couple of years. Consider this: the first National Policy on Rare Diseases was issued in March 2021, providing a comprehensive national approach to the prevention and management of rare diseases. It was nearly a dream come true for patients living with rare diseases and their families – the policy also factors in ways to lower the exorbitant cost of treatment, and boost indigenous research. The policy also envisages the creation of a national hospital-based registry of rare diseases, an intervention as crucial as funding for treatment itself, as it will provide rich epidemiological data to define the extent of the problem in India and decide optimal funding for research in rare diseases too. The Rare Diseases Policy also focuses on the creation of Nidan Kendras for early screening and prevention, as well as plans to strengthen extant secondary and tertiary health facilities at Centres of Excellence.And yet, this World Rare Diseases Day (February 29) does give us occasion for pause; despite the stupendous pace of development in the recent past, it is important to periodically evaluate the needs in the community, and tailor requirements to meet those demands. It is also important to evaluate policy against implementation, to see if the goals are being achieved and the target groups benefiting from the intended gains.

What is a rare disease?

But first, a bird's eye view of the rare diseases scenario here: In India, it is estimated that there are between 7000 - 8000 rare diseases, but less than 5% have therapies available to treat them. But, taken as a whole, rare diseases affect nearly 1/5th of India's population, educated extrapolations indicate. A rare disease is one that is loosely defined as occurring infrequently in the population, and as such, what constitutes a rare disease varies from nation to nation. The World Health Organisation defines rare disease as an often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder with a prevalence of 1 or less, per 1000 population. However, different countries have their own definitions to suit their specific requirements and in the context of their own population, health care system and resources. For instance, in the US, rare diseases are defined as a disease or condition that affects fewer than 200,000 patients in the country (6.4 in 10,000 people). The European Union has its own definition - affecting no more than 5 in 10,000 people. India currently does not have a standard definition - but the Organisation of Rare Diseases - India, has suggested that a disease is to be defined as rare if it affects 1 in 5,000 people or less. The National Policy statement itself lays out: The landscape of rare diseases is constantly changing, as there are new rare diseases and conditions being identified and reported regularly in medical literature. Apart from a few rare diseases, where significant progress has been made, the field is still at a nascent stage.Notwithstanding the rather significant developments, and a number of patients benefiting, the progress on the field still is at an infantile stage. The Union Government in May 2022 had allocated ?50 lakh per patient for the treatment of all rare diseases across the country. How well was that utilised? We did not know until recently when Sashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament raised a question in the Lok Sabha, during the budget session, about the number of Rare Diseases patients enrolled with the Centres of Excellence across the country, and the details of the allocation and utilisation of funds by the different Centres of Excellence across the country during the last three years and till date, year-wise. The answer was quite disappointing. As per the data shared in response to the question, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare disbursed to all the CEntres of Excellence a sum of approximatey ?109 crore in the last three years. However, the total funds utilised so far is only approximately ?53 crore. A whopping 51.3 % of the total funds allocated are still sitting pretty, while patients are losing lives with no access to treatment. There are now 12 Centres of Excellence, and of the 11 centres that data is available for, only three CoEs have utilised over 90 % of the funds allotted to them, and one Centre in the honourable mention, late 80 percentile mark. Underutilisation of funds

Clearly the CoEs are not compelled by the sense of urgency that patients desperately seeking avenues for funding life-saving treatment are. Manjit singh, founder and president of the Lysosomal Storage Disorder Support Society says: "The underutilisation of allocated funds and the plight of patients who have exhausted their treatment allocations underscores the critical need for action. By advocating for these key initiatives, we aim to catalyse change, driving the CoEs to prioritise rare disease treatment and securing long-term funding support from the government for those in need." Speaking on behalf of patients, he adds: "We are driven by a dual mandate - to build urgency among Centers of Excellence (CoEs) for the immediate treatment of all eligible patients and to demand sustainable funding for Group 3 conditions. We believe that every rare disease patient deserves timely access to life-saving treatments, and we are committed to ensuring that this becomes a reality. Our efforts are not just about improving access to care; they are about saving lives and empowering individuals to lead fulfilling, meaningful lives despite the challenges posed by rare diseases. Also, the state governments need to pitch in here through budgetary allocations specifically for the treatment of eligible rare disease patients."The key asks of rare diseases patient advocacy groups, among the strongest lobbies in the health care sector now, are to build urgency on the part of the CoEs to start treatment of all eligible patients and build a continuum of care with sustainable funding support for conditions that necessitate long term care and treatment, classified by the National Policy as Group 3 diseases. There are, reportedly, 10 patients, children, from across

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the country who have already exhausted their Rs. 50 lakh allotment, and are currently running from pillar to post seeking continuation of their treatment. These patients need sustainable funding and continued treatment support to survive and lead normal lives.

Screening for diseaseS. Suresh, managing director of Mediscan, is a senior radiologist who pioneered the argument for genetic testing for rare diseases, with a rare, nearly evangelical zeal. Two decades ago, he had made the point that it was important to set up pre-natal scan centres in the public health set up, to take the possibility of early detection, already available in the private sector, to the larger public. He acknowledges with relief that finally, an epidemiological transition might have happened. The change came with awareness generation and really hard work by advocacy groups. Organisations and parents put effort and energy into this, taking the battles to the courts and the streets. Gynaecologists and paediatricians are more aware about rare diseases, and people have started looking at birth defects, doing gene testing etc, besides vastly improved neonatal intensive care unit services in hospitals across the country leading to earlier and more accurate detection. What's left, is to take care of the patient, he adds.

Not just that. Dr. Suresh has also been advocating for a national registry that people can report rare diseases to. " The list of rare diseases needs to be really clarified. But, to say that is a tall order, we possibly will never be able to put all rare diseases inside. The most common ones, which are reported periodically, should be there in the list. But the registry would be a starting point at least." It will have a registered cohort of rare diseases detected across the country and will be able to provide an idea of the geographic distribution of rare diseases. In addition to this, he is pushing the envelope on setting up a single centralised laboratory for detection of rare diseases for the entire country that will be able to perform enzyme assays and molecular genetic testing. "The knowledge we will gain from this will be top class, even of inestimable value," Dr. Suresh says. While a hospital-based National Registry for Rare Diseases has been initiated by the Indian Council for Medical Research by involving centres that are involved in diagnosis and management of rare diseases, it needs to be pushed through and actualised, he adds.Through example, he is also trying to promote another model for delivery of care for children suffering from rare diseases.

At the Voluntary Health Services hospital, in Chennai, which he heads, plans are afoot to establish a comprehensive centre with multiple experts to take care of the child for a few days at a stretch, so that the primary care giver can have some downtime. "Once there is a child with a rare disease, one of the parents is completely tied to the child. In most cases, it is the mother. It is only fair that we give them some respite for a day or two, so that someone else, can take over the care of the child for those days. We are trying to establish such a centre at VHS, we already have a rehabilitation centre, paediatric palliative care unit, and along with that,