

Telangana's health sector stagnates with no major reforms in Congress's one-year rule

Hyderabad: As the Congress government prepares to celebrate its one-year rule, the public health sector in Telangana State has remained stagnant, marked by lack of imaginative big ticket initiatives. All through the year, the State-run government hospitals appeared to be run on autopilot mode, devoid of new ideas or fresh direction aimed at improving healthcare services for the poor. Instead of bolstering and further improving the existing public healthcare initiatives, it appeared as if the Congress government was more intent in watering them down. While support was withdrawn for almost all the major health programs that were launched by the previous BRS government, rather strangely, the State government has so far not launched a single patients-centric health scheme that could become its flagship program.

All through the year, whenever Congress government tried to launch initiatives in the health sector, it triggered chaos and did nothing to improve overall quality of healthcare. A case in point was the hasty and unplanned faculty transfers in government hospitals. All it did was create unrest and left senior faculty disillusioned and

unhappy. The Congress government was also selective in transferring faculty. It gave exceptions and did not transfer senior office bearers of Telangana Government Doctors Association (TGDA), which left others fuming. Highly specialized doctors, with the ability to treat complex cases were shunted unceremoniously to secondary healthcare facilities that had limited infrastructure. As vector-borne ailments dengue and Chikungunya gripped Hyderabad during the monsoons, the State Health department appeared clueless in framing and implementing a proper public health response. As seasonal ailments skyrocketed in the midst of transfers of senior doctors from vital positions, confusion prevailed and quality of health care services in government hospitals declines. Throughout the year, the State government appeared content in diluting public health initiatives aimed at improving Mother and Child Health services. From KCR Kits scheme with financial incentives for pregnant women, specialized nutritional kits for anaemic women to exclusive outpatient days for women for early detection of cancers under Aarogya Mahila scheme,



the health department systematically undermined these flagship initiatives by rolling back financial support. While many would see the permission to start 8 new medical colleges as a silver lining, the fact remains that the Congress government failed to act proactively and dragged its feet

in shoring-up infrastructure and faculty after taking-over forming the government. It was only after the second attempt that the government managed to get permission for the colleges but in the process only got 50 MBBS seats for each of the medical colleges, instead of the 100.

Hyderabad braces for warmer winter, morning lows above seasonal norms



Hyderabad: Early mornings in the city are embracing a mild winter warmth, as minimum temperatures in most areas edged upward on Wednesday, with the lower recordings being above 20 degrees Celsius.

Hasthinapuram, however, held onto a crisp 19.1 degrees Celsius, standing out as the coldest pocket in the area. Humidity stayed on the higher side on Wednesday, peaking at 64 per cent in the morning before dipping slightly to 53 per cent by afternoon.

The city's average minimum tempera-

ture rose slightly to 22.4 degrees Celsius, about 0.6 degrees Celsius higher than the seasonal norm—a gentle warming trend likely to continue into the weekend, with early morning temperatures expected to linger around 23 degrees Celsius.

Light rain or drizzle may visit a few neighborhoods on Thursday and Friday, though the week ahead promises mostly dry days, with daytime highs comfortably between 31-32 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, in the State, the lowest minimum temperature of 12.9 degrees Celsius was recorded at Sirpur (U) (Kumuram Bheem).

Preeti Urology and Kidney Hospital surgeons successfully conduct robotic surgery on infant with rare condition

Hyderabad: Surgeons at Hyderabad-based Preeti Urology and Kidney Hospital on Wednesday announced successful procedure on a one-year-old baby from Hyderabad, suffering from congenital bilateral kidney swelling a condition that, if left untreated, could severely impact kidney function. The surgery was performed on both sides of the kidney simultaneously using indigenously developed advanced SSI Mantra Robotic system.

Led by Dr. V. Chandra Mohan, senior urologist and MD, Preeti Urology and Kidney Hospital, the team employed just four small keyholes to access kidneys of the infant and perform the dual surgery. Traditional laparoscopic procedures require multiple incisions and manu-



ally maneuvering surgical tools for hours. However, robotic surgery reduced the potential for repeated anesthesia exposure and the need for multiple hospital admissions, minimizing risks and expenses for the patient's family, Dr. Chandra Mohan said. The baby was discharged within 24 hours.

Hyderabad GPO to function from 8 am to 8 pm

Hyderabad: The operating hours of mails booking (speed post/registered letters/parcels) at Hyderabad GPO have been extended from 8 am to 8 pm for the convenience of customers, said the Chief Post-

master, Hyderabad General Post Office (GPO), Abids on Wednesday. Additionally, separate counters have been set up specifically for bulk posting to streamline the process.

In a Bengal town, barbers help school to crop a 'menace' — quirky haircuts

Earlier this year, the biggest school in Parulia identified a "menace" that "kept spreading" among its students. Determined to bring it under control, school authorities began a campaign and convened a series of meetings. The result of that campaign? Barbers in the town in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district have agreed not to give "quirky" haircuts to students of Parulia Kul Kamini High School. Acting headmaster Subrata Samanta says, "Six-seven months ago, we realised that strange and quirky haircuts among our students have become a serious menace. From cricketers to footballers, students copy their hairstyles. But these are not suited for school students. It was like the spreading of a disease. What had been limited to senior classes started to also be seen in junior classes. Initially, we had asked such students to leave the class, and later we issued a notice to everyone. However, the menace kept spreading." The school twice issued notices on the issue, once on June 11 and then on July 6. "All students must have decent haircuts when they come to school. If the hair near the ears is very short, then double that size will be allowed in the middle of the head. However, quirky haircuts will not be tolerated," a notice read. In August, the school also held a meeting with the guardians of class 10 and 11 students regarding the matter.

Established in 1951, the government-funded school has become known as one of the best in the region, with students regularly figuring in the top 20 in state board exam rankings. Last year, students from the school got 12th and 14th ranks in the class 10 board exams. It is also one of the biggest schools in the area, with 3,100 students — split nearly evenly between boys and girls. Having identified the haircut "menace" as a major issue this year, the school decided to take more proactive steps after the notices failed to have the desired effect. "As the menace continued, we thought: 'Why not a proper campaign?' The first part of the campaign was to approach local barbers, hairdressers, and salon owners," acting headmaster Samanta said. Along with Maths teacher Subrata Acharya, Samanta went to two nearby barber shops to discuss the issue. Eventually, they called a meeting of local barbers, for which around 36 hairdressers, salon owners and barbers came to the school on October 24. Acharya says, "We explained to them that this is a prestigious school, where students get good rank in both secondary and higher secondary board exams. We need to have discipline." The Maths teacher said the barbers expressed their helplessness in the matter when students and even some of the students' guardians request such haircuts. "It is their bread and butter," Acharya said of the barbers' argument.

However, all local salon owners and barbers eventually agreed to give only "decent" haircuts to students and to refuse if they are asked for more quirky styles. Madan Sil, the owner of a local salon and the Parulia Samabay Salon Owners Association, says, "We were surprised when the headmaster approached us. We told him that if one of us does not do it (give



a quirky haircut to students), then someone else will in order to get customers. Students, and even their guardians, show pictures of sportsmen like Virat Kohli, Hardik Pandya, and many others who we do not know. But we have to cut their hair like that." He said, however, that the barbers understood the issue raised by the school. "We have respect for the school. We understood and agreed that we all must unite and stop such haircuts. Now, when students from that school come, we refuse such haircuts," he said. At the same time, he made clear that the Parulia salon owners association would not be held responsible if the students got haircuts in other areas. "Many students live in different areas of Bardhaman and can get haircuts there," Sil said. The school plans to continue its campaign. Its next move is a mega awareness conference where parents, guardians, teachers, local intellectuals, as well as barbers and salon owners will be invited to take part. "In December, we are planning an awareness drive where guardians, barbers and others will be called. We do not have a hall that can accommodate everyone, so we are planning to do it in a local field," the acting headmaster said. A parent who has two children in the school said she supported the campaign. "This is a good initiative, and should have been done long ago. It is true that such bizarre haircuts have become the norm. We, guardians, are also responsible. There needs to be some decency in a student's look. As for me, I have two sons studying in that school, and they have never been pulled up for their haircut. I have made sure they have decent haircuts," said the parent, who asked not to be named, saying she did not want any problems from the many other guardians who are against the campaign. In 2019, two other schools in Bengal had taken similar initiatives. One was the Nayaput Sudhir Kumar High School in Purba Medinipur, which ap-

pealed to local barbers to give only normal haircuts to students. The other was the New Farakka High School in Murshidabad,

which organised a "sensitisation workshop" on haircuts, where local barbers and even police officers were invited.

Eye on colleges, hospitals, Centre looks to get own house in order ahead of data protection rules

Data protection, business news, indian express The data protection Act has an exemption clause for the government and its agencies, however, it is unlikely that it could be used for institutions like colleges and hospitals. Behind the seeming delay in publishing the draft rules for data protection is the government's attempts at getting its own house in order. The Indian Express has learnt that a number of its internal discussions have centred on whether some of the institutions it controls—schools, colleges, and hospitals—would be ready to comply with the law or need a longer timeframe.

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, was enacted last August but is yet to be made operational as subordinate legislation—at least 25 rules—necessary to add contours to the law are awaited. Thus, the law has not come into force more than a year since it received the President's assent. "There are so many public colleges and hospitals that are in far flung areas, and many of them are operating on rudimentary technology. But, they do handle a lot of personal data on a daily basis. We have to carefully accommodate these institutions. We discussed a lot on these accounts while framing the rules," a senior government official said, requesting anonymity. The data protection Act has an exemption clause for the government and its agencies, however, it is unlikely that it could be used for institutions like colleges

and hospitals. There are other things that have held up the rules as well. For instance, the law said that entities that deal with the personal data of children — individuals below the age of 18 — would have to seek consent for processing their data from their parents or guardians. However, the government soon realised that it could be difficult to prescribe a particular mechanism or technological intervention to gather such consent, and is understood to have given up on the idea. Now, the IT Ministry is expected to leave it to the discretion of the companies on how they want to seek such consent under the upcoming data protection rules. The law has received pushback from the civil society, and Opposition. The Niti Aayog, the government's main think tank, has also criticised some provisions in the law that could potentially dilute the Right to Information (RT) Act, The Indian Express had earlier reported. Another major point of contention has been the wide ranging exemptions that the law offers to the government's agencies. According to Section 17 (2) (a) of the data protection law, "The provisions of this Act shall not apply in respect of the processing of personal data — by such instrumentality of the State as the Central Government may notify, in the interests of sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, maintenance of public order or preventing incitement to any cognizable offence relating to any of these..."

JSW MG Motor India Expands Hector Lineup with Two New 7-Seater Variants

Launches Hector Plus 7-Seater in Select Pro 1.5L CVT Petrol at INR 19,71,800, and Smart Pro 2.0L DSL 6MT is available at INR 20,64,800*

JSW MG Motor India has announced the expansion of the MG Hector lineup, India's first Internet SUV, by including two new 7-seater variants, the Hector Plus 7-Seater Select Pro and Smart Pro, offer a spacious and versatile option for customers seeking a premium SUV experience. The Select Pro is powered by a 1.5T petrol engine paired with a CVT transmission, delivering a smooth and efficient driving experience. Available in a 2.0L diesel engine, The Smart Pro variant is equipped with a 6-speed manual transmission, offering fuel efficiency and torque. "The addition of our new 7-seater Hector variants underscores JSW MG Motor India's commitment to meeting the evolving needs of our valued customers. Building upon the success of the MG Hector, these new additions offer a spacious and versatile experience without compromising on the quality, comfort, and technological excellence that have made the Hector a beloved choice. We are confident that the Hector Plus 7-Seater Select Pro and Smart Pro will continue to meet and exceed expectations of SUV enthusiasts," shared, Satinder Singh Bajwa, Chief Commercial Officer, JSW MG Motor India.

Priced competitively, the new variants of the Hector making all the key features more accessible that have made the Hector a popular SUV, including its commanding road presence, advanced technology,

and superior driving comfort. Building upon its success, the new Select Pro and Smart Pro variants offer an enhanced in-car infotainment experience with India's largest 14-inch HD portrait infotainment system, i-SMART technology with over 75 connected car features, Wireless Apple CarPlay & Android Auto and a Wireless Phone Charger. With R18 Dual Tone Machined Alloy Wheels, the new trims boast a bold exterior design, highlighted by LED Projector Headlamps, Floating Light Turn Indicators and LED Blade Connected Tail Lamps. Inside, the premium upholstery, leather-wrapped steering, and wooden finish create a sophisticated ambience. The Full Digital Cluster with a 17.78 cm Embedded LCD Screen provides a modern and intuitive driver interface. For added convenience, both the Select Pro and Smart Pro variants feature Push Button Engine Start/Stop with a Smart Key. The innovative Digital Bluetooth® Key and Key Sharing capability*, a first in the segment, offers enhanced convenience and security. Additionally, the cabin of the Smart Pro sports Dual Tone Argil Brown & Black Interior Theme with Leatherette Seat Upholstery and equipped with Power Driver seats.

The new Hector variants offer a range of convenience and safety features, including Cruise Control, Electric Parking Brake*,



All four-wheel disc brakes, Electronic Stability Program (ESP), Traction Control System (TCS), Hill Hold Control (HAC), ABS + EBD, Brake Assist, All Seats Seatbelt Reminder, Follow Me Home Headlamps, Cornering Front Fog Lamps, Front & Rear De-fogger, Speed Sensing Auto Door Lock, ISOFIX Child Seat Anchors, and High-Speed Warning Alert.

Both Select Pro and Smart Pro variants come with the unique car ownership program "MG SHIELD," offering after-sales

service options. Customers will also benefit from the standard 3+3+3 package, including a three-year warranty with unlimited kilometres, three years of roadside assistance, and three labour-free periodic services. Additionally, owners can customize their coverage by extending their warranty or roadside assistance or opting for the Protect plans, the company's pre-paid maintenance packages for added peace of mind and a stress-free ownership experience.

OPPO Find X8 Series with ColorOS 15 to Launch Globally, Setting a New Standard for Flagship Smartphones

OPPO Find X8 Series & ColorOS 15



Global Launch

21st November, 2024 | 10:30 IST | Bali

tery life, and AI tools have been weighed down by thick, heavy designs, but Find X8 Series changes the game," said Pete Lau, SVP and Chief Product Officer at OPPO. "The Find X8 is a thin and light powerhouse with a sterling battery life and a periscope zoom. The Find X8 Pro takes zoom further, delivering ultra-grade experiences without the bulk. And with ColorOS 15's smart and smooth experience, the Find X8 Series is set to mark an exciting shift for the smartphone industry." The OPPO Find X8 fits an incredibly slim periscope zoom camera into a sleek, light design that is 7.85mm slim and weighs a mere 193g. The immersive yet compact handset sports a 6.59-inch display with an ultra-narrow 1.45mm symmetrical bezel and a fingerprint-resistant diffuse finish in Star Grey, and Space Black.

Fans of bigger screens would be impressed by the Find X8 Pro with its ultra-immersive 6.78-inch display that showcases quad-curved glass on both sides. The handset debuts OPPO's dual-periscope telephoto camera for global markets. The Find X8 Pro is available in Space Black and Pearl White, with each Pearl White device featuring a unique pearlescent pattern so no two devices look the same. Both Find X8 and Find X8 Pro—featuring OPPO's latest Hasselblad Master Camera System—carry forward the Find X line's tradition of introducing breakthrough camera

innovation. Now, with AI Telescope Zoom, the Find X8 Series can reach further than ever, activating at 10x and beyond. Each device can also freeze time in an instant with Lightning Snap, which captures up to seven photos every second without compromising on flagship-grade photo processing. The OPPO's Find X8 is powered by a huge 5630mAh silicon-carbon battery while the Find X8 Pro packs a 5910mAh whopper; both devices boast a MediaTek

Dimensity 9400 SoC for smooth performance that extends over a day.

It takes world-class software to elevate ultra-grade hardware, and ColorOS 15 perfectly complements the Find X8 Series. Its seamless visuals, intuitive elements, and powerful, time-saving AI tools put everything you need at your fingertips. Stay tuned to learn more about OPPO Find X8 Series and ColorOS 15 at the upcoming global launch.

Telangana Pollution Control Board conducts session on pollution for school students

Hyderabad: An interaction session with young school students on the harmful effects of pollution was conducted by the Telangana Pollution Control Board. Students of Class 3 from DRS School participated in the educational session on causes and consequences of different types of pollution. The event, aimed to raise awareness among young minds, highlighted the need for environmental responsibility and sustainable living. They were shown different levels of air pollution in sensitive, residential, commercial and industrial areas through display of level of pollution observed on filter papers. Noise levels

were shown through the noise measuring. The students were explained about various types of pollution that impact the environment, such as air pollution, water pollution and noise pollution through activity and demonstration. The session concluded with an emphasis on how students can play a role by making changes in their lifestyle by reducing waste, recycling, conserving water and energy, planting trees and raising awareness in the communities they live in. The interactive format of the session allowed the young learners to ask questions, share their thoughts,

OPPO India will launch the Find X8 Series and ColorOS 15 at a global event on November 21, 2024, in Bali, Indonesia. Both devices—the all-new Find X8 and Find X8 Pro—redefine excellence in flagship smartphones. "Until now, flagship camera phones with ultra-zoom, power, bat-

Top Dark Edition SUVs That Redefine Elegance and Power

Dark Edition SUVs embody elegance, captivating aesthetics, and unmatched power. With a presence as powerful as their performance, these black-themed SUVs are crafted to complement every journey—from navigating the bustling city streets to conquering the rugged terrains in India. The timeless allure of black adds a layer of opulence to their designs, features, and commanding stance. Here's our lineup of standout Dark Edition SUVs, where style truly meets substance. MG Astor Blackstorm – India's first SUV with AI inside, the MG Astor Blackstorm is now available at an attractive starting price of 9.99 Lakh. The Black-themed exterior of Astor BLACKSTORM with premium interiors of-

fers a compelling choice to customers that are looking for a bold, sophisticated, and stylish SUV. It is also equipped with i-SMART 2.0 and 80+ connected features it also offers premium features like a Panoramic sunroof, Ventilated Seats in the front row, Wireless Charger, Wireless Android Auto & Apple Car Play, and Auto-dimming IRVM for additional security giving a holistic driving experience.

Tata Safari Dark

Tata Safari in the new Dark avatar is further elevated with an array of premium features. It comes with top-of-the-line advanced features, including pioneering 1st in segment features such as Welcome and

Goodbye Signature Animation on Front & Rear LED DRLs, LED DRLs with Center Position Lamp in the Front, and a Driver Knee Air Bag for enhanced safety. The audio experience is taken to new heights with 10 JBL Speakers featuring Advanced Harman AudioworX, while the aesthetics are enhanced with R19 Alloy wheels featuring Aero inserts and a bold Piano Black Grille. Tata Safari Dark Edition starts at a price of 20.69 Lakhs.

Hyundai Creta

The Hyundai Creta Black Edition features an all-black front grille, blacked-out faux skid plate on the front bumper, black colour alloy wheels, black ORVMs, black

door handles, and blacked-out C-pillar. Its new horizon LED positioning lamp & DRLs and quad beam LED headlamps in the front give the SUV an unmistakable presence on the road. The rear profile is also sculpted with new elements like the connecting LED tail lamps that announce its departure.

It also sports a remote engine start/stop, a Bose premium sound system (8 speakers), 6 Airbags, seatbelt reminder, 3-point seatbelt standard and ADAS with up to 21 features. Apart from other colours, the Hyundai Creta is available in two black options - Abyss black and Atlas white with Abyss black roof at a starting range of INR 10.99 Lakh.

The quest for freedom: is the 'will' truly free?

Since the dawn of history, the most central question of human existence has been whether or not we have free will. The question might seem pointless to many and airy philosophising to others. However, attempting to answer it is foundational to our moral codes, legal framework, interpersonal relationships, religious belief, and even to the very meaning of life itself. But before we get ahead of ourselves, let us ponder over a most simple question. What do we mean by free will? Simply defined, it is the power to make choices unconstrained by external agencies. However, this simple definition might be a bit misleading. For we are constantly constrained by external agencies; whether they be physical, psychological, or social. A body starved of a steady influx of nutrition and hydration can sustain its mental faculties optimally only for so long; a mind saddled with trauma will be too stunned to cogitate efficiently; a society which is despotic will be too asphyxiated to breathe new ideas. And yet, the definition is not incorrect. After all, if consciousness is determined by existence, then existence in turn is reshaped by consciousness. This kinesia between the world and the self is the concentric and eccentric contractions of free will.

But this leads only to further questions. The essence of the cosmos lies in its law-governed nature; this is what allows us to make predictions regarding probable outcomes based on any set of given variables. However, the law-governed nature of the universe implies a cause-effect relationship at its core. If the law of nature is bounded in cause and effect, this raises a doubt about the nature of free will. After all, free will is the ability to make choices unconstrained by external agencies. How then can one be truly free? Is not the human race bound to this principle of cause and effect? And if it is, as all things are, why does it have the ability to make choices at all?

Of human bondage There are those who argue against free will altogether. Many scientists, philosophers, and theologians argue that architecture of the brain, the nature of causality, or the power of God precludes free will. Fatalism, in the sense

that all things, including human action, are fated, is as ancient as the notion that human beings can make choices to alter the course of events. The niyativada of the Ajivikas of ancient India, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, the mechanistic weltanschauung of the deists' clockwork universe, all conclude in characterising human beings either as automata or in a state of providential thraldom. "We are dogs tied to a cart. Somebody else is leading," as Chrysippus had pronounced, reducing the human to the canine; man had finally been cast in the role of "man's best friend".

Yet, far from the truth, the fatalists must find themselves within a trap of their own making. If free will is nothing but mere illusion, then they are acting in that illusion even as they argue against it. If one chooses without choice, as the argument holds, then in fact one never chooses at all. The neuroscientist who contends that free will is but an aggregated bunch of neurons in the structure of the brain does disservice to himself. As does the theologian who contends that man's free will cannot be for it is a privilege of God. If such arguments are to be furthered it must be conceded at the outset that the freedom of these individuals is itself bondage, and that they speak as mere vessels for greater forces. If that is true then someone seeking the truth must go to the root, and push past these interlocutors. Instead of the fatalism that follows in these arguments, one must seek to understand. It is evident that absolute free will is a fiction of human invention, and pursuing a fiction must be child's play. Unfortunately, the rational faculties that ennoble a society have not yet embraced the notion of necessity. If not for it, we might as well be bombinans in vacuo. Verily, it must be obvious that we have a structure of the physical universe, in which a biochemical reality of the human body exists. We are, as it were, bounded by our physiology. But in that lies the riddle, and the solution of the riddle. Man does not come to earth armed with much except his mind. In order to feed themselves, early human beings had to hunt, or plant food. Both require a cognitive process - whether it be to understand the quality of the soil, to discern the climatic patterns, to understand the properties of

seeds, to examine the behaviour of animals, et al. Our ancient ancestors' ability to develop agriculture and hunt or domesticate animals relied exclusively on their capacity to continually increase their understanding of the workings of nature. This is what allowed them to infer what plants or animals were inedible or dangerous for consumption as well. It was trial and error, and yet it was a rationally determined process. The greater the quantum of knowledge the more efficient they became at surviving, and in the process increased their measure of freedom. It is precisely a recognition that we have degrees of freedom rather than some perfected absolute freedom that liberates the human mind.

But what of those born without the faculties for rational thought. Even here, an increasing measure of knowledge shares new light, and disinfects us of long held prejudices. For much of human history, those who were thought of as physically or psychologically incapable were abandoned or outright murdered. Execution, particularly of illegitimate or malformed babies, as well as severely ailing or ageing adults, was all too common in the ancient world. This happened as much out of social requirement as from prejudice. In a society where resources were limited and the means to keep life going on were scarce, ending lives was seen not as choice but as necessity. However, the advent of modern science, and the relative increase of resources that go along with it, changed the circumstances. Today, governments in advanced societies are expected to account for high infant mortality rates, and mass deaths by illness. Stephen Hawking might not have survived the test of a Spartan social order. But he was able to live a long, and productive life due to the advancements of modern civilisation, which would have been poorer if intelligent minds like his were not allowed to survive. His life and work are a testament to the human capacity for freedom from necessity. The philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt once wrote: "Man cannot be free if he does not know that he is subject to necessity, because his freedom is always won in his never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from

necessity." A profound belief in human creativeness is the cornerstone of a view of life that encourages freedom. The idea that we have within us the ability to reshape the world, and in the process our own life and times, is essentially a romantic notion. It is simultaneously a rationalist perspective because a continual expansion of freedom is of necessity to human life. After all, it is this necessity that drove us to decipher the various phenomena in and around us, and in the process become free from the tyranny of an indifferent nature. As such freedom is a rational conception. This romantic-rationalist dynamic is the essence of free will, and in it lies the secret to the apotheosis of human existence. As the Upanishads sound out: "sa mukti?, satimukti?" or "This is freedom. This is complete freedom." Long walk to freedom

The truth is that it is a cussed human tendency to conceive nature as something different, out there and away from the experience of our own self. "Science and human power coincide in the same thing, because ignorance of the cause stops the effect. For nature to be commanded must be obeyed: and what in contemplation is like a cause, that in operation is like a rule," Francis Bacon had aphorised. He visualised human will in concert with human knowledge; for only by discovering the relationship between cause and effect does one find the freedom that is inherent in nature. This dynamic between obedience to and overcoming of nature's law is continual. In order to break free from earth's orbit, a vast swathe of knowledge must be acquired and applied - from orbital mechanics to rocket science. Yet all that knowledge also comes from a study of nature. The human will to snap off the shackle of earth's gravity requires humanity to submit to a rigorous examination of those very phenomena. This is true of every human endeavour whether it be producing fire, developing agriculture, building bridges, constructing telescopes, and beyond. But we seem to have walked out of one chasm only to be faced with another. If free will is delimited by causality, what happens to purpose. Throughout human history, we have been saddled with purposive objectives.

Governor Bandaru Dattatraya Calls upon MLAs to prioritise Public Welfare in Pursuit of 'Viksit Haryana – Viksit Bharat'

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), November 13- Haryana Governor, Bandaru Dattatraya while addressing the first session of the State Vidhan Sabha on Wednesday said that the difference between Haryana a decade ago and Haryana today is crystal clear. He called upon the members to affirm that no obstacle should stand in the way of fulfilling the resolution for 'Viksit Haryana – Viksit Bharat.' He showed confidence that each MLA will make the most of every moment in this House to prioritise public welfare. He said that he is confident that this Assembly will usher in a new chapter of decisions focused on public welfare. Let us all unite with full dedication to achieve the resolution of 'Viksit Haryana – Viksit Bharat.' Addressing the House, the Governor highlighted that this is the first time in the history of Haryana that people have shown trust in a government for the third consecutive time. He said that at present the environment is highly conducive for the development of non-stop Haryana in every way. The entire state is keeping an eye on the decisions and policies formulated by this Assembly in the coming time. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every member to ensure that the state and its people get the maximum benefit of this favourable time.

The Governor advised the members to always remember the 'Moolmantra' of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who emphasised that every decision we make should be evaluated by its impact on the poorest and weakest person in society. The Governor said that the people of the state have enthusiastically participated in the recently concluded election process and have sent you as advocates of their rights to this Assembly, the state's Supreme Panchayat and as legislators, you will fulfil your responsibilities with full dedication and commitment. The Governor said that among the 90 members of this 15th Assembly, there are 40 members who have been elected for the first time. He extended a special welcome to all these members. The Governor said that in the 14th Assembly, only 9 women members ('Navratnas'), were elected, while this time the number has increased by nearly one and half times, reaching 13. The Governor said that this House is the flag bearer of the aspirations of 2.75 crore people of the state. Now, it is the utmost responsibility of every MLA to meet the expectations of the people, said Sh. Bandaru Dattatraya. The Governor said that for the fair and peaceful elections held in the state, the vigilant voters of the state, the Election Commission of India, and all officers and employees associated with the election process deserve appreciation.

The Governor said that the 2024 election has been an election based on trust in 'Neeti, Niyat, Nishtha aur Nirnay' (Policy, Intent, Integrity, and Decisions). The present state government has carried forward a mission of service, security, good governance, cooperation, and upliftment of the Antyodaya for the last 10 years, and this mandate is an endorsement of that mission. This is a mandate that the work of developing Haryana should continue non-stop and we should continue achieving our goals. The government will continue to

move forward with the spirit of 'Raja ke vikas se desh ka Vikas' (Development of the State contributes to the development of the Nation), said Bandaru Dattatraya. The Governor said that the present state government, over the past 10 years, has worked beyond the narrow mindset of regionalism, constituency consideration and family-based politics. Also, the state government has focused on 'Shiksha, Swasthya, Suraksha, Swavalamban aur Swabhimaan' (Education, Health, Security, Self-reliance, and Self-respect), giving new energy and momentum to the state's development. The vision of Antyodaya by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya has not only guided the present state government but also embodies the core principle of "Haryana Ek-Haryanvi Ek" in all our efforts, he said.

The Governor said that the present state Government has envisaged Haryana as a vibrant, dynamic and resurgent State of India. He said that dedicated efforts are being made to ensure that farms of the state have abundance of produce; the wheels of industry grind uninterrupted, ample employment opportunities are available for the youth, and sisters and daughters feel safe, empowered, and self-reliant. A Haryana where farmers get remunerative prices for their crops, no one is left unemployed, businesses prosper, the needy receive all the benefits of development, and no one feels neglected, said Dattatraya. The Governor said that the present state government, following the guiding principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" given by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has provided equal opportunities for every section to progress in the state. The Prime Minister considers the poor, youth, women, and farmers as the four pillars of a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India). He said that the present state government has oriented its policies toward strengthening these pillars. The government's effort is to ensure that every government scheme benefits them, as this is the path to their upliftment and welfare. When the government works with the resolve that not a single eligible person should be left out from receiving the benefits of any government scheme, then every penny spent from the treasury is utilised in public interest, said the Governor. The Governor Dattatraya said that the difference between Haryana a decade ago and Haryana today is crystal clear. Be it per capita income, the development of industries, social security and welfare, or the initiation of innovation in agriculture, today Haryana has a strong presence on the national stage in every aspect. With the synergy of science and technology, our agriculture-dominant state is advancing rapidly on the path of progress. This vision is not just a mere imagination; it is a positive and achievable reality. My government has devised a proper strategy to achieve this vision at the ground level. For the next 5 years working for the betterment of every section and region of the state will be the government's priority, he said. Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), 13 November: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has strongly opposed the decision to build the Haryana Legislative Assembly complex in Chandigarh. The party questioned, if



Haryana is offering 12 acres of land in Panchkula to the Chandigarh administration, why is the assembly not being built there instead? In a press conference on Wednesday, AAP MLA and former minister Anmol Gagan Maan said that in 1966, when Haryana was carved out of Punjab, it was promised that Chandigarh would be handed over to Punjab after some time. Until Haryana built its own capital, Chandigarh would remain a Union Territory. However, 58 years have passed, and Chandigarh has not been handed over to Punjab. She stated that Chandigarh belongs entirely to Punjab, as it was built on the lands of 22 villages of Punjab. The decision to build a legislative assembly for Haryana in Chandigarh is completely wrong. We will not tolerate it. This decision is entirely against Punjab. Anmol Gagan Maan cited the example of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, saying that when Telangana was created in 2014, it was immediately decided that Hyderabad would be the capital of Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh would establish its new

capital in Amaravati. In this year's budget, the Modi government announced ₹15,000 crores for Andhra Pradesh's new capital and promised ₹50,000 crores over the next few years. She asked why, if a quick decision and financial assistance could be given to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, similar treatment was not being extended to Punjab. She claimed that the Haryana assembly is being built in Chandigarh to establish Haryana's permanent claim over the city.

This is a major conspiracy against Punjab, and we will fight it on all fronts. The AAP leader accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress of deliberately delaying the matter for years, despite both parties being in power in Punjab, Haryana, and at the Centre at various times. She pointed out that the BJP was in power in all three regions from 2014 to 2017, and even when it was in coalition with the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, it did nothing and instead harmed Punjab. Similarly, the Congress also delayed the matter. Both parties must explain their actions.

What Donald Trump's decisive win says about gender in America

Less than 24 hours before American voters cast their ballot, pundits and pollsters were dead sure of a close verdict. "National polling is neck and neck but even swing states are so," conservative historian Niall Ferguson said in an interview. We know now that Donald Trump won, and decisively, 301 to Harris's 226. It's a victory that comes on the back of women voters, Latino voters and even African-American male voters. Far from being a coin toss, all the swing states fell behind Trump. Kamala Harris had the better funded campaign with far more celebrity endorsements from Beyonce to Taylor Swift. Why did it go so badly wrong? Hindsight hand-wringing commentary is looking at various reasons. From Harris's lack of a clear message on the economy to the Democratic party's failure to read the room, including concerns about illegal immigration. From Harris's support for Israel that cost her the Arab-American vote to her failure to distance herself fast, and far, enough from Joe Biden.

While all of the above has undoubtedly played a role, what is undeniable is the role of misogyny. After 59 elections since 1789, America is not still ready for a woman, especially a Black woman president. Compared to 87 countries that have elected women heads of state, the US is looking positively Neanderthal. Even its neighbour Mexico earlier this year voted for its first woman president, Claudia Sheinbaum. An election says as much about its voters as it does about its leaders. What do you say about voters who chose to ignore Harris's proven advantage of a career as a public prosecutor who put away men like Trump ("I know his type," she said soon after replacing Biden)? These are voters who chose the alternative of Trump, a convicted felon who faces charges of sexual assault by over two dozen women and who has been ordered to pay defamation costs running into millions of dollars against a woman who says he raped her. Trump won despite making statements that became more deranged as voting day grew closer. He has consistently taken credit for appointing three Supreme Court judges who overturned Roe v Wade that set abortion rights back by half a century. He has called Harris a "low IQ individual" who is "dumb as a rock". Hours before voting, he imagined Republican Liz Cheney, who openly endorsed Harris, face a firing squad.

Harris was simply held to a higher standard, as Michelle Obama pointed out days before the election. And that standard was still not high enough. Yet, while rejecting Harris, voters have cleared the way to undo abortion bans in seven states including Missouri, Arizona, Colorado, Maryland and Montana. Missouri is now the first state where a vote will undo one of the most restrictive bans on abortion in the country. America may have failed to vote for its first woman president, but for the first time in its history as a democracy, two Black women, Lisa Blunt Rochester and Angela Alsobrooks, will serve in the Senate. In Delaware, Sarah McBride became the first

openly transgender person elected to Congress. The president-elect's first appointment is also cause for some cheer. By naming Susie Wiles, the political strategist from Florida who has run his political operation for the past four years, as his White House Chief of Staff, the first woman to hold the powerful position, Trump has made a smart move. Not only has he appointed the best person he considers for the job, he's helped break at least one glass ceiling. He might have defeated Harris through a sexist, abusive and ugly campaign, but, he's now trying to say, he's not against women. At least not all women. Yet, to clutch at these silver linings and ignore the threats made during his campaign would be foolish. Trump has promised to crackdown on "transgender insanity". He has said he will stop transgender athlete participation in women's sport. He routinely misrepresents gender transition care for minors, including hormone therapy, as something that is decided by schools that bypass parental consent. If he pulls Medicare and Medicaid eligibility for gender transition, it will "effectively halt most of that treatment across the country," notes Washington Post. Eight years ago, pundits had predicted a clear win for Hillary Clinton. The New York Times had prepped a dummy page one with a bold font headline heralding Madam President. Then the results came in. Clinton's defeat was attributed in part to complacency among her women supporters who, sure about her victory, didn't bother to go out and



vote. Leaving nothing to chance this time around, women were exhorted to cast their ballot. Republican women were reminded that their vote is a secret and so they were free to endorse Harris without their families ever knowing. There's an awful sense of déjà vu that the same man who defeated Clinton has now trounced Harris. Trump heads one of the "most prolific harassment and intimidation machines in the country with almost zero political cost," writes Jill Filipovic in The New Statesman. His MAGA (make America great again) followers "have hounded anyone they see as his enemy" and is "among the most disturbing and under-appreciated dynamics of contemporary US political life." The ugly

triumphalism among Trump's MAGA followers has been sickening. On November 6, even before Trump had been declared the winner, white supremacist Nick Fuentes tweeted, "Your body, my choice. Forever." The Institute for Strategic Dialogue notes a 4,600% increase in similar hashtags. Elsewhere there are reports of Black students receiving texts asking them to report for work as slaves on plantations. The response was swift and angry with some posts calling for American women to revolt against men by adopting South Korea's 4B movement that follows the four rules of no sex with men, no dating men, no giving birth and no marriage.

U.S. ordered TSMC to halt shipments to China of chips used in AI applications

The U.S. ordered Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co to halt shipments of advanced chips to Chinese customers that are often used in artificial intelligence applications starting Monday, according to a person familiar with the matter. The Department of Commerce sent a letter to TSMC imposing export restrictions on certain sophisticated chips, of 7 nanometer or more advanced designs, destined for China that power AI accelerator and graphics processing units (GPU), the person said. The U.S. order, which is being reported for the first time, comes just weeks after TSMC notified the Commerce Department that one of its chips had been found in a Huawei AI processor, as Reuters reported last month. Tech research firm Tech Insights had taken apart the product, revealing the TSMC chip and apparent violation of export controls. Huawei, at the center of the U.S. action, is on a restricted trade list, which requires suppliers to obtain licenses to ship any goods or technology to the company. Any license that could aid Huawei's AI efforts would likely be denied. TSMC suspended shipments to China-based chip designer Sophgo after its chip matched the one found on the Huawei AI processor,

sources told Reuters last month. Reuters could not determine how the chip ended up on Huawei's Ascend 910B, released in 2022, viewed as the most advanced AI chip available from a Chinese company. The latest clampdown hits many more companies and will allow the U.S. to assess whether other companies are diverting chips to Huawei for its AI processor. As a result of the letter, TSMC notified affected clients that it was suspending shipments of chips starting Monday, the person said. The Commerce Department declined comment. "TSMC has had regular discussions with the government on export control issues and has made it clear that it will comply with domestic and international regulations," Taiwan's economy ministry said in a statement to Reuters, referring specific questions to TSMC. A spokesperson for TSMC also declined to comment beyond saying it was a "law-abiding company... committed to complying with all applicable rules and regulations, including applicable export controls." The Commerce Department communication - known as an "is informed" letter - allows the U.S. to bypass lengthy rule-writing processes to quickly impose new licensing require-

ments on specific companies. Ijiwei, a Chinese media site covering the semiconductor industry, reported on Friday that TSMC notified Chinese chip design companies it would suspend 7 nanometer or below chips for AI and GPU customers beginning Nov. 11. The action comes as both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have raised concerns about the inadequacy of export controls on China and the Commerce Department's enforcement of them. In 2022, the Commerce Department sent is-informed letters to Nvidia and AMD restricting their ability to export top AI-related chips to China, and to chip equipment makers like Lam Research, Applied Materials and KLA to restrict tools to make advanced chips to China. The restrictions in those letters were later turned into rules that apply to companies beyond them. The U.S. has been delayed in updating rules on tech exports to China. As Reuters reported in July, the Biden administration drafted new rules on some foreign exports of chipmaking equipment and planned to add about 120 Chinese companies to the Commerce Department's restricted entity list, including chipmaking factories, toolmakers, and related companies.

The power of bloodlines

Who: For years, Congress in Mumbai was run by businessman-turned politician Murlu Deora who headed the city unit for two decades from 1981 to 2003. He was mayor of Mumbai, Member of Parliament from south Mumbai for four terms and union petroleum minister in the UPA government. Close to the Gandhis, Deora was also a link between corporate India and the party. It was no coincidence then that Congress's relations with corporate India started getting strained as Deora withdrew from active public life towards end of the UPA 2 tenure due to illness. He passed away in November 2014. In 2004, his son Milind Deora, 47, was elected as the south Mumbai MP, and re-elected in 2009 although he lost in 2014 Lok Sabha elections. He also served as minister in telecommunications and shipping ministries during the UPA-2. He was made Mumbai Congress president in March 2019 but quit after party's debacle in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. He opposed the party conceding the south Mumbai constituency to Shiv Sena in the 2024 elections, and quit to join the Shiv Sena. In April this year he was nominated to Rajya Sabha MP. He is now contesting assembly elections opposite Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray in Worli constituency. Who: Once an auto rickshaw driver in Thane, Eknath Shinde, 60, joined Shiv Sena and moved up steadily. After the death of his mentor and Thane district Shiv Sena chief Anand Dighe, Shinde took over the party unit in the district. He entered the good books of party chief Uddhav Thackeray and simultaneously became a member of the party's top brass. During the MVA government tenure, he split the party, walked out with majority of Sena MLAs to form a government with the BJP. He is now contesting assembly election from Kopri-Pachpakhad assembly constituency in Thane for fifth term as MLA. The election will also decide whether Shinde returns as chief minister or faces an uncertain political future. His son Shrikant, 37, an orthopaedic surgeon, joined politics after his father asked him to contest Lok Sabha elections from Kalyan constituency in 2014. The three-term MLA is entrusted with the party's management behind the scene.

Who: Eknath Gaikwad shot into limelight when he defeated Manohar Joshi in the erstwhile Mumbai north central constituency in 2004 Lok Sabha elections. He was re-elected in 2009. Earlier, he was three-term MLA from Dharavi and considered as a prominent Dalit leader in Congress. He was also a minister first in Congress government in 1990-95 and later Congress-NCP government in 1999 to 2004. He passed away in 2021. His daughter Varsha, 49, a lecturer in Siddharth College, joined politics when her father moved to Lok Sabha. She was elected as Dharavi MLA for four consecutive terms since 2004. Varsha was appointed Mumbai Congress president in June 2023. She also won the Lok Sabha election this year from north central Mumbai constituency. She is the only Congress leader in Mumbai who gets along with Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray. She is also known as a prominent Dalit face of the party. Who: Once an auto rickshaw driver in Thane, Eknath Shinde, 60, joined Shiv Sena and moved up steadily. After the death of his mentor

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Gangadharrao's sister-in-law Shobha Fadnavis, a well-known BJP leader from Chandrapur, was in active politics, along with her brother-in-law since the '70s. She represented the Saoli assembly constituency four times from 1990 to 2004, and was cabinet minister during the Shiv Sena-BJP government in 1995. Source of strength: He spots potential which other leaders miss out on; he can turn crisis into opportunity. Who: The Naiks from Pusad, Yavatmal district, have a sway over the sizeable Banjara community in the district, who have in turn pledged their loyalty to the family through generations. Two chief minis-



ters – Vasantnao Naik and Sudhakarao Naik -- have emerged from the family. Vasantnao, who hailed from the Banjara community, has been one of the longest serving chief ministers of Maharashtra – from December 1963 to February 1975. The family's clout can be gauged from the fact that only members of the family represented the constituency right from 1952. His nephew, Sudhakarao Naik, started his political career as a sarpanch and was later the president of Yavatmal Zilla Parishad for many years. He was a five-time MLA from Pusad and chief minister during the Mumbai riots of 1992–1993. However, following political differences with Sharad Pawar, he ultimately resigned. Sudhakarao's brother Manoharrao Naik, was the MLA from Pusad, over various spans. From 2009 to 2014, he was minister of Food and Drug Administration. His son, Indranil, is the sitting MLA from NCP and is a contestant in the upcoming assembly elections. Nilay Naik, Sudhakarao's nephew is with the BJP. On July 10, 2018, he was elected unopposed with 10 others to the Maharashtra Legislative Council. Raje Vishweshwaro Maharaj dominated the political scene of the tribal district for decades. A protagonist of separate Vidarbha and scion of the royal family of Aheri state, he represented Sironcha Assembly, now Aheri constituency, for two consecutive terms. He was also elected to Lok Sabha from Chandrapur constituency in 1977. His nephew and opponent, Dharmarao Baba won the elections in 1990 after defeating Maharaj's son, Satyavan, and became a minister when Sharad Pawar was chief minister of Maharashtra. He is now a cabinet minister with the Ajit Pawar faction of NCP. Raje Satyavan, Raje Vishweshwarao's son, was elected from Aheri constituency twice in 1985 and 1995, but eventually became inactive in politics. He eventually pushed his son Raje Ambarishrao, who has a degree in business law from University of Central England. He joined the BJP, won elections from Aheri in 2014 and became a state minister. Who: Ranjit Deshmukh dominated the political scene of Nagpur in '90s and became the state Congress president and a cabinet minister. However, he left the party on the issue of separate Vidarbha state about 15 years ago and fell off the political map. His elder son Dr Ashish Deshmukh, began as a Congress activist, joined the BJP later, unsuccessfully con-

tested Saoner assembly seat in 2009 and lost to Sunil Kedar of Congress. After subsequent flip-flops between Congress and BJP, he is now contesting as a BJP candidate from Saoner against Sunil Kedar's wife Anuja of Congress. Ranjit's cousin, Anil Deshmukh joined the NCP in 1999. The five-term MLA served as the state home minister between 2019 and 2021 – he resigned that year faced with allegations of money laundering and other charges by the then commissioner of police Param Bir Singh. He was arrested by ED and was in custody for one year before being released by a court order. He has now passed on the baton to his son Saili Deshmukh, as a first-time contestant from Katol, where he is pitted against BJP candidate, Charansigh Thakur.

Amol Deshmukh, the younger son of Ranjit Deshmukh and Ashish's brother, is a Congress activist, who unsuccessfully contested from Ramtek assembly constituency in 2019 and lost to the independent candidate, Ashish Jaiswal. This time, he is contesting against his elder brother, Ashish Deshmukh of BJP and Anuja Kedar of Congress as a Congress rebel. Who: Sharad Pawar has been in elective politics for over 56 years; has been the chief minister four times, and at 84 remains the most influential leader in the country's politics. He inherited his political legacy from his mother Shardabai, who was member of the district council for three times and an active member of Peasants and Workers Party. Until recently, his nephew Ajit Pawar, 65, was regarded the undisputed political heir of the Pawar legacy. Ajit, who enjoyed key positions in state politics for over three decades, is struggling to retain his clout after splitting away from the Sharad Pawar-led party – his performance in the Lok Sabha elections was dismal. Supriya Sule, 55, Pawar's only child and four term MP from Baramati, has taken over the party's reigns after she was made the party working national president in backdrop Ajit Pawar's mutiny last year. Rohit Pawar, 39, grandnephew of Sharad Pawar, is vying for the second term as an MLA from Karjat Jamkhed and is likely to get a bigger role if party makes it to power in the state. Yugendra, another grandnephew of senior Pawar has been pitted against uncle Ajit Pawar from Baramati. Source of strength: Though the family is at a crossroads owing to the split, its dominance in the state politics remains untouched.

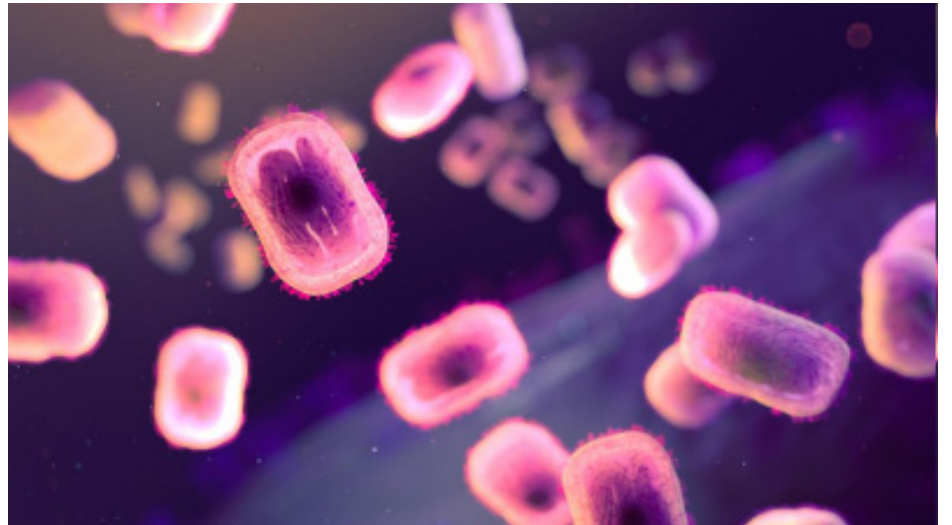
Mpox clade Ia has evolved to jump from humans to humans: new study

Since the world eradicated smallpox in 1980, scientists have known that the battle against poxviruses was far from over. Of the multiple types that exist, scientists have been wary of one in particular: mpox. In fact, one of the points in the World Health Assembly's post-eradication policies was the "continuation of monkeypox surveillance in West and Central Africa, at least until 1985". In the 2022-2023, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the then global outbreak of mpox a 'public health emergency of international concern'. In August this year, the WHO declared mpox to be a public health emergency for the second time in two years. (Note: In 2022, the WHO designated "mpox" as a preferred synonym for "monkeypox" disease. The virus is still called "monkeypox" according to the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses. For uniformity's sake, this article will use "mpox" to refer to both the disease and the virus clades.) New cause for worry The declaration ensured multiple countries would pledge vaccines to the 15 African nations affected by the outbreak, six of which had never reported a single case of mpox before. But the paucity of doses has forced countries to prioritise their campaigns. Barely two months since these countries started their targeted vaccinations, scientists have a new cause for worry. A preprint paper uploaded on Virologica, a scientists' discussion forum online, on October 24 reported evidence that yet another strain of the mpox virus appeared to have achieved human-to-human transmission. There are two clades of mpox: I and II. Clade I viruses have been shown to cause more severe disease in the mouse model, but that doesn't mean the same may be true for humans. Both clades are classified into two subclades, making a total of four known variants: Ia, Ib, IIa, and IIb. Of these, clade IIb was responsible for the 2022 outbreak, which is still continuing in certain parts of Africa.

Clade Ib, discovered towards the end of 2023, is the primary cause of infection in central Africa. Researchers believed these two clades to be the primary contributors of the present mpox problem. They know very little about clade IIa except that it causes infections in western Africa. When viruses make 'mistakes'

Clade Ia, on the other hand, is the oldest known variant of the mpox virus. It has been known to cause sporadic infections in humans, mostly children, since 1970. But these infections were always limited to a few families or communities and the transmission was always from animals to humans. There was no proof of sustained human to human transmission — until recently. The preprint posted on Virologica reported evidence that the DNA of clade Ia viruses sequenced from the present outbreak bears clear signs of human-to-human transmission. Viruses evolve by introducing changes to their genetic material. Each time a virus infects a new host, an enzyme known as a polymerase makes multiple copies of the virus's genetic material (DNA or RNA), which is then packed into new viruses. But sometimes the polymerases make a mistake. These mistakes,

called mutations, could have a positive, negative or no impact on the virus, meaning the virus can get better or worse or be the same at its job. The rate at which the polymerases make mutations is different for different viruses. Generally, viruses that have RNA as their genetic material, such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and influenza, make mistakes much more frequently than those that have DNA, like the human papillomavirus (HPV) and adenoviruses. This error rate is even lower in some DNA viruses, like the members of the pox family, which also have an error-correction mechanism built into them. This mechanism, called proof-reading, ensures few mistakes are made: around one mistake every three years in a circulating viral strain. The APOBEC family However, viral polymerases are not the only source of mistakes in a virus's genetic material. The immune system also has a mechanism to introduce random changes in foreign DNA. A family of proteins called APOBEC — short for 'apolipoprotein B mRNA editing enzyme, catalytic polypeptide-like' — can introduce changes to the viral DNA while it is being copied in the cells. By doing so, APOBEC proteins force mistakes, some of which can be lethal to the virus. Importantly, of the four bases that DNA is made of, namely adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine, viral DNA polymerases can make a mistake anywhere, but APOBEC's activity is usually limited to changing a cytosine to a thymine. In a 2023 paper that appeared in Science, researchers showed that since the mutations made by APOBEC are more



numerous than those by the viral polymerase, a sudden surge in the prevalence of mutations in circulating mpox viral DNA can be attributed to the activity of APOBEC. That is, the virus came from human cells and APOBEC must have acted on it. Otherwise those mutations couldn't have arisen so quickly

The researchers also estimated that on average, APOBEC activity would introduce around six mutations every year. Based on how many mutations the researchers observed, and the nature of those mutations, they predicted mpox clade IIb had been circulating in Africa from humans to humans since 2016. The new study described in the preprint used the

same method to show clade Ia viruses have achieved human to human transmission as well. This is because 63% of mutations they observed in the clade Ia infections were consistent with changes that could be introduced by APOBEC. Viruses' responses to antivirals The news that clade Ia viruses can spread from humans to humans is not likely to affect the vaccination strategies of the affected countries. However, it is certainly cause for worry because researchers know that the different mpox clades respond differently to certain antiviral drugs used to treat them. For now, Africa has pinned its hopes on the few doses of vaccines it has and is hoping against odds that its targeted campaign will suffice to stem the rising tide of mpox cases.

The surprising link between being unmarried and depression

Unmarried people are more likely to experience depression compared to those who are married, according to a comprehensive study published on November 4, in the journal Nature Human Behaviour. This striking finding which highlights a consistent pattern regardless of cultural differences, emerges from research that spans seven countries across different continents. Depression affects millions worldwide and is expected to become even more prevalent in the coming years. While many factors contribute to this mental health condition, the study found an unexpected influence — marital status. Researchers gathered data from over 100,000 participants in the United States, United Kingdom, Mexico, Ireland, Korea, China, and Indonesia. By including such diverse countries, the study aimed to understand whether the link between being unmarried and experiencing depression was universal or varied by culture. The results are clear. Unmarried people, which includes single, divorced, separated, or widowed, have a higher risk of showing signs of depression in comparison to those who are married. Specifically, unmarried individuals were found to be about 86% more likely to suffer from depressive symptoms. This pattern held true across all the countries giving credence to the conclu-

sion that marriage is a bulwark against depression. However, the degree of risk wasn't the same everywhere for everyone. Unmarried individuals in Western countries like the USA, the UK, and Ireland face a higher risk of depression than those in Eastern countries such as Korea, China, and Indonesia. Cultural factors might explain this difference. In many Eastern societies, strong community ties and close-knit families provide support that can help alleviate feelings of loneliness or isolation that unmarried people might experience. In contrast, Western cultures tend to emphasise individualism, which would leave unmarried individuals feeling less supported. Gender also played a significant role. The study found that unmarried men were more likely to experience depression than unmarried women. One possible explanation is that women often have stronger social networks outside of marriage, offering emotional support that men might lack.

Education level was another important factor influencing the risk of depression among unmarried individuals. Those with higher education levels were more susceptible to depressive symptoms than those with less education. This might seem surprising, but higher education often

comes with increased stress, career pressures, and possibly higher expectations for personal achievements, including marriage. Unmarried, highly educated individuals might face societal scrutiny or internal pressures that contribute to feelings of inadequacy or loneliness. Beyond identifying these direct patterns, the researchers wanted to understand why unmarried people might be at higher risk of depression. They found that in countries like China, Korea, and Mexico, unmarried people were more likely to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. Substance abuse is a known coping mechanism for stress and loneliness but also can contribute to the development of depression. To ensure their findings were reliable, the researchers followed over 20,000 participants for several years, observing how their marital status and mental health changed over time. This approach allowed them to see not just a snapshot but a progression, strengthening the evidence for a connection between being unmarried and experiencing depression. However, it's important to note some limitations of the study. The researchers relied on participants' self-reported symptoms of depression, which is not as precise as clinical diagnoses made by professionals. Various countries still have a stigma associated with acknowledging symptoms of mental health.