

DISCOMs to spend over Rs. 15,000 crore on power supply, distribution system modernization

Hyderabad: With the State witnessing a significant surge in electricity demand over the past few months, the State-run power distribution companies (DISCOMs) have started preparing plans for modernization and expansion of power supply and distribution systems in the State. The DISCOMs have reportedly decided to undertake modernization and expansion works worth over Rs. 15,000 crore to meet the increasing demand of electricity in the State. There are also plans to increase the capacity of various lines to transmit high voltage power to different parts of the State without much difficulty. The DISCOMs are expecting the power demand to touch 16,877 MW in March and April and to make adequate arrangements to meet the demand it had decided to undertake works and other important initiatives to improve the distribution system so that it could ensure continuous supply, sources said. Sources say TRANSCO has given permission to build 70 substations with capacity of 400 KV, 220 KV and 182 KV at a cost of Rs. 10,640 crore to meet the addi-

tional demand that will increase by 2030 without disturbing the continuous power supply. Apart from this, the capacity of 193 transformers would be increased in another 132 substations at a cost of Rs. 2,743 crore, the sources added.

TRANSCO has reportedly decided to take up the construction of new alternative transmission power lines at 55 places and to set up about 321 new substations across the State to ensure quality supply to consumers. Apart from this efforts were being made to modernise the electricity distribution and supply systems of the State to meet the future power demand, sources said. Already the Northern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited (TGNPDCL) had undertaken works of low tension (LT) power lines at 836 places to improve them according to the expected power demand during the upcoming summer, officials said, adding that overload had recently been found in 11 lines of 33 KV capacity and 35 lines of 11 KV capacity under its jurisdiction and measures were being taken to improve their



capacity. Similarly, overload was observed in 161 areas of 33 KV lines and 787 areas in 11 KV lines under Southern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited

(TGSPDCL) jurisdiction.

The officials were taking steps to fix all these lines by increasing the capacity in the next few months, sources informed.

Yasangi at stake for second consecutive year in 4 lakh acres under SRSP stage-II



The prolonged closure of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) barrages has begun to take its toll on the SRSP Stage II ayacut.

Hyderabad: The prolonged closure of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) barrages has begun to take its toll on the SRSP Stage II ayacut. The lack of water supplementation from KLIS is expected to have a devastating effect in over four lakh

acres of Yasangi (Rabi) ayacut in the erstwhile Nalgonda, Khammam, and Warangal districts. Nearly two lakh acres of it, falling mainly in Tungathurthy, Suryapet, Kodad and Huzurnagar assembly constituencies in Nalgonda and Suryapet districts, will be

bearing the brunt. It forms the tail-end of the SRSP Stage-II canal system. The system was receiving irrigation support for rabi only since 2018. The farmers in these parts of the SRSP command are a now a worried lot.

But they find a glimmer of hope being part of the Irrigation Minister, N Uttam Kumar Reddy's district. The Minister who has been representing Huzurnagar, cannot afford to let down farmers in his own constituency. If Huzurnagar is getting water for Yasangi, rest is assured, they feel. The Irrigation Department is making rabi plans accordingly. Last year, these areas suffered as all three KLIS barrages were emptied for structural investigations following issue with two of the pillars in Medigadda barrage. Unfortunately, the situation remains unchanged this year too, raising serious concerns about the fate of the Rabi farmers in entire SRSP stage II. Nearly two lakh acres of its ayacut is falling in Tungathurthy, Suryapet, Kodad and Huzurnagar assembly constituencies. They form the tail-end of the SRSP Stage-II canal system bearing the brunt of the deprivation of irrigation support. Over 2.20 lakh acres of area can be irrigated under the project in Nalgonda district alone, depending on water availability. However, irrigation officials are highly sceptical about providing water to the Rabi ayacut in these areas. Despite uncertainties, the irrigation authorities have included Nalgonda district in the Rabi irrigation plan. Before the closer of Medigadda barrage, the Thungathurthy assembly con-

stituency alone in Nalgonda district used to receive water for 1.20 lakh acres of Yasangi ayacut. The area had never received water for Rabi crops for more than 17,000 acres before the SRSP was given supplementations from Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation scheme. Irrigation officials believe that only part of the SRSP Stage I ayacut can be given water during Yasangi this year, and there was no scope for providing water to Stage II. Some six lakh acres if the SRSP stage I ayacut above the Lower Manair dam can be given water for the rabi crop. Stage-I ayacut below the LMD can also be treated as priority, but it has less chances. They made it clear that there would be no possibility of water allocation to SRSP stage II, though it was assured in principle as desired by the government. If water is to be provided to Nalgonda, especially to meet the needs of farmers in Huzurnagar and Kodad, two key segments for the Congress government, the department must decide how to make it possible and at whose cost, quipped officials. A part of the SRSP stage I ayacut may have to forego the season for the sake of Huzurnagar and Kodad being represented by the irrigation minister, N Uttam Kumar Reddy and his wife, N Padmavathi respectively. Irrigation for SRSP Stage II may not be possible sans support from Medigadda. Four lakh acres of SRSP stage II Rabi ayacut was receiving water since 2018. Almost the entire SRSP ayacut left barren during Yasangi in 2024. Against all odds, irrigation officials are firm on giving water for Kodad and Huzurnagar

Ban on firecrackers to be permanent, Delhi govt tells Supreme Court

The Delhi government has decided to ban firecrackers throughout the year in the Capital, and will file a response in this regard in the Supreme Court before it takes up the issue next week. The top court was informed of the decision taken by the Delhi government during a hearing related to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by lawyer and activist MC Mehta about monitoring air pollution in the city. On November 11, the top court asked Delhi and national capital region (NCR) states Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan to decide on a permanent ban on firecrackers in the interest of citizens who have a right to breathe clean air. On Thursday, senior advocate Shadan Farasat, appearing for the Delhi government, said: "We will be doing it permanently. An in-principle decision has been taken. By the next date, the affidavit by the government will be there before the court." To this, the bench of justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih responded, "This is the requirement not only to curb air pollution but noise pollution as well," and asked the other NCR states to clarify their stand by the next hearing on December 19. "We will consider issuing directions to states on the issue of ban on firecrackers. We make it clear that the ban also includes ban on manufacture, storage or sale of firecrackers," it added. A firecracker ban was first imposed in Delhi in 2017 following the Supreme Court's directions in a bid to assess their possible impact on air quality. In 2018 and 2019, there was a ban on conventional crackers, but green crackers were allowed. However, both years, firecrackers were widely burst as law enforcement agencies claimed they failed to distinguish between the different kinds of crackers. From 2020 onwards, a complete ban was put in place, including a ban on green crackers. Even then, the ban has widely been flouted, resulting in the air quality sharply plummeting especially the day after Diwali.

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), the statutory body monitoring air pollution in Delhi-NCR which implemented the court's direction to scale down curbs to Stage 2 of the Graded Response Action Plan (Grap-2) on December 5, told the court that the air quality in the city was much better now, and accepted that keeping Grap-4 emergency measures in place for a fortnight from November 18 onwards had helped. Additional solicitor general (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for CAQM, said: "We are not asking for moving down from Grap-2. In the past week, we have seen how the effect has come about essentially because of the court's order to continue Grap-4." The court, which spoke of the need to ensure that steps are not taken to add to the pollution, asked CAQM to consider recommending all that government vehicles, which constitute a major chunk of vehicular traffic in Delhi, to be switched to electric mode. Although the court has already mooted this suggestion in another PIL related to Delhi's green cover, the bench said: "If the suggestion comes from CAQM, you can get data on how many such vehicles are there in Delhi." The court said it was aware this could come to a huge number considering the presence of state and central government departments, public sector undertakings, corporations, and defence establishments. The court also approved a modified Grap regime un-

der Stage 2 proposed by CAQM, which introduces several measures from Grap-3 as part of Grap-2. These restrictions include a ban on interstate buses from NCR other than EV/CNG or BS-VI vehicles but do not apply to buses and tempo travellers with an all-India permit. The other modifications include intensifying mechanical sweeping of roads, water sprinklers to settle dust on roads and improving public transport services. The bench also asked the states to provide details of subsistence allowance paid to construction workers who were rendered jobless during the construction ban under Grap-4. Delhi government said that over 90,000 registered workers were paid ₹8000, while fresh registrations were ongoing. Uttar Pradesh claimed to have paid the money to 488,000 workers, Haryana to 100,000 workers, and Rajasthan to 2,900 workers. "We will continue to monitor till we are satisfied that every eligible worker has been paid. The emphasis



should be not only on those who are registered but to ascertain actual number of work-

ers deprived from income during this period," the bench said.

Thalassemia patients at Delhi govt hospitals reel under shortage of drugs

Patients in Delhi's government hospitals are spiralling into panic as the supply of a life-saving injection for thalassemia patients, deferoxamine — known under the brand name Desferal — becomes increasingly scarce. For thalassemia patients, whose lives depend on regular doses to counter deadly iron overload caused by transfusions, the shortage has brought desperation and a grim sense of abandonment. While the supply of Desferal has always been erratic, the past month has seen an acute crisis. Patients and families, many struggling financially, are running between hospitals and advocacy groups, begging for help. Among them are brothers Chandan and Bharat Juneja from Patel Nagar — both unemployed due to their medical condition — who have been receiving treatment at Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital for years. Chandan, 33, whose ferritin levels have soared to a dangerous 9,000 ng/ml (normal is below 1,000), says they've been turned away from the hospital week after week.

"Both of us have been prescribed three vials of Desferal daily, but it's been unavailable for a month. Oral alternatives don't work for us. Our doctor says we are in urgent need of the injections and the oral supplements are not working for us. My brother and I are barely holding on," said Chandan, whose father runs a small shop and cannot afford the escalating costs. Chandan now scours hospitals, thalassemia societies, and social media for leads. For thalassemia patients, Desferal is more than a drug — it's a lifeline. Regular blood transfusions elevate iron levels in the body to dangerous limits, risking organ failure and death. Iron chelation injections like Desferal remove excess iron, preventing such outcomes. The drug is included in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) 2022 and is supposed to be provided free of cost in government hospitals, yet shortages persist. The option of landing supply is there, but is beyond what many can afford. The patients buy it from special

Thalassemia societies at ₹175 per vial. Some societies also donate the drug to patients from weaker economic backgrounds. Depending on their prescribed dose, the monthly expenditure could vary for each patient. Another mother, a single parent whose 26-year-old son relies on Desferal, is equally distraught. "Never have we faced such a crisis. The government has left our children to die. My son needs three vials daily. We're now buying them at ₹1,750 for a box of 10. He needs 90 vials a month — how can anyone afford this? It's not just Desferal; they don't even provide consistent blood bags or testing kits anymore," she said, her voice breaking with frustration. Hospitals like RML and Safdarjung insist they have oral iron chelators — Deferasirox and Deferiprone — in stock and are providing them to patients.

Safdarjung Hospital, in an official statement, said Deferasirox is superior to Desferal in removing iron from the blood and is non-inferior in mobilising iron from the heart. "The drugs needed for treatment of thalassemia are called iron chelators. There are three effective iron chelators available in India, one is deferoxamine injection (given subcutaneously under the skin), and two oral medications — Deferasirox and Deferiprone," the hospital's statement mentioned. Safdarjung Hospital provides deferasirox free of cost to all patients that have transfusional iron overload (thalassemia, sickle cell disease, etc) and the drug is not in short supply. Meanwhile, RML in its response stated, "Tab Deferisirox and Deferiprone are available at the store of RML Hospital." Yet, experts and patients argue that alternative oral medications don't work for everyone. "For patients who cannot tolerate other chelators, or have high iron overload have no other option but to rely on Desferal injections — oral chelators are just not as effective for them," said JS Arora, general secretary of the National Thalassemia Welfare Society.

"Nobody wants to take painful injections



two to three times daily unless absolutely necessary. Doctors themselves prescribe Desferal for its efficiency, yet hospitals push oral alternatives citing convenience. It's hypocritical." "The central government has also included it in the list of essential drugs, only for the same reason and hence there is an urgent need for the government to make it available at all designated thalassemia wards," added Arora. The Delhi government has claimed that they have paid the vendors and the supply at all hospitals will be resumed soon.

The government statement further added that at some city hospitals, injections of the drug have been restored, including 500 injections at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Hospital, 150 injections at Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital and 500 at GTB Hospital. According to the National Thalassemia Welfare Society, more than 2,500 people live with thalassemia in Delhi. "Thalassemia patients require multiple Desferal injections on a daily basis. Restoring this in small quantities will not suffice 10 people, and hence it is only an eye wash," a member of the society said. But for patients like Chandan and Bharat, waiting is not an option. "Each day without Desferal is like poison accumulating in our bodies. The government doesn't seem to understand this urgency," Chandan said. Another mother's voice echoed his despair. "I try not to think about the worst, but every night I wonder if this is the last vial we'll manage to buy. If the government won't save our children, who will?"

First edition of the HCL Cyclothon Hyderabad Successfully Concludes with Over 1500 cyclists participating

Hyderabad: The first edition of the much-awaited HCL Cyclothon Hyderabad concluded successfully today amidst enthusiastic cheers from over 1,500 cyclists, including 1,266 men and 224 women, who pedalled their way along the scenic service road parallel to the Outer Ring Road. Organized in collaboration with the Telangana Government and under the aegis of the Cycling Federation of India, the high-energy event witnessed the presence of several prominent dignitaries, including key representatives from HCL Group, Mr. Sundar Mahalingam, President – Strategy, HCL Group; Mr. Rajat Chandolia, Associate Vice President and Head of Brand Strategy, HCL Group; Mr. Pawan Vadapalli, Corporate Vice President and Global Head of Digital Business, HCLTech; Mr. Shiva Prasad, AVP, HCLTech, Mrs. Nirmala Datla, Executive Vice President, HCLTech, and Mr. VN Singh, Director, CFI also graced the occasion. Participants cycled multiple loops of a picturesque 23-km route spanning from Kokapet Junction to Kollur Junction. The event featured an impressive total prize pool of ₹33.6 lakhs, India's largest prize purse for a Cyclothon, awarded to the top three male and female finishers in the Professional and Amateur categories.

Commenting on the event, Mr. Sundar Mahalingam, President - Strategy, HCL Group, who also participated in the Amateur MTB Road Race (23 km) category, said, "Cycling is a powerful way to unlock human potential and promote urban sustainability. The enthusiastic response to HCL Cyclothon, including the Hyderabad and previous editions in Noida and Chennai, is truly inspiring. We are grateful to the corporates



and participants who joined us in championing fitness and community spirit. HCL Cyclothon aims to provide a platform for professional cyclists to showcase their talent while encouraging the next generation to embrace cycling as a fitness sport. Congratulations to the winners and heartfelt thanks to

everyone for making this event a success. Together, we are pedalling toward a healthier, greener future." The Cyclothon featured various categories to encourage participation across age groups and skill levels, including the Professional Road Race (52 km), Ama-

teur Road Race (52 km), Amateur MTB Road Race (23 km), Amateur Road Race (23 km), and the Green Ride (10 km). Prominent participation was received from cycling groups such as Hyderabad Cycling Revolution and Hyderabad Cyclists Group.

11 districts at very high risk of flood, drought: Study

Around 51 districts in India are at a "very high" risk of floods, whereas 91 districts are at a "very high" risk of drought and 188 are at "high" risk. Around 51 districts in India are at a "very high" risk of floods and another 118 are at "high" risk, whereas 91 districts are at a "very high" risk of drought and 188 are at "high" risk, according to a new study by the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), and the Indian Institutes of Technology at Guwahati and Mandi. The study, supported by the Centre's department of science and technology as well as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, has found that 11 districts are at "very high" risk of both flood and drought, including Patna in Bihar; Alappuzha in Kerala; Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, South Salmara-Mankachar, and Golaghat in Assam; Kendrapara in Odisha, and Murshidabad, Nadia, and Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal.

"This study is an effort to integrate vulnerability assessment with proneness to two hazards: flood and drought, and exposure to these hazards, to gain a comprehensive understanding of risk, using the framework proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change," said the study report, titled

District-Level Climate Risk Assessment for India: Mapping Flood and Drought Risks Using IPCC Framework. Unlike the concentrated flood hazard, the drought risk is spread more evenly across the country. Sixty-five districts under the very high drought-hazard category are located in 22 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Assam, Kerala, Nagaland and Chhattisgarh. The report not only considered the probability of occurrence of extreme weather events in these districts but also laid down what indices may be making them particularly vulnerable.

The study's findings underline two clear patterns: First, that flood and drought hazards are one of the driving forces behind the overall risk and two, such risk can be amplified even when the likelihood of such a hazard impacting is low, but there are chances of high exposure and the district is vulnerable. "For example, in some districts if the population is too low then the exposure will be lower and if the district has better coping mechanisms such as say irrigation (in case of drought hazard), crop insurance for farmers, more people taking up the 100 day work programme (Mahatma Gandhi National

Rural Employment Guarantee scheme) then those districts will be less vulnerable and hence not at high risk," explained professor NH Ravindranath from the Indian Institute of Science who was advisor for the risk mapping project. The core team prepared indices for hazard, exposure and vulnerability to arrive at risk indices. The team consulted state level climate change cells to arrive at very localised information. "Unfortunately for many districts the team used census 2011 data which is old but a lot of more recent information between 2019 and 2021 was also used by the team to develop these indices," added Ravindranath. An area is considered under the risk of drought hazard if precipitation systematically falls below the long-term average. The indicators of flood exposure are population density and the proportion of area under agriculture. Drought exposure is calculated based on population density and area under rainfed agriculture. Vulnerability is a system property. Its indicators are MPI, the proportion of marginal and small landholdings, yield variability of food grains, the composite MGNREGA index, the female literacy rate, forest area per 100 rural population, health infrastructure available per 100 square kilometres, the livestock-to-human ratio, the proportion of area under crop insurance, the

proportion of net sown area under horticulture, and road density.

For example, Patna (Bihar) and Majuli's (Assam) flood risk indices are comparable. However, the profiles of these two districts are completely different in terms of hazard, exposure, and vulnerability. While the flood hazard index is very high in Majuli, it is much lower in Patna. But Patna has very high exposure owing to dense population and high vulnerability. "The advice to districts at high risk of floods and droughts is to reduce their vulnerability. For example, Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh which is at high risk of drought should focus on agro-forestry, irrigation, organic or natural farming to improve soil health," said Ravindranath. HT reported in January that more than half of India's administrative units (or tehsils) saw an increase in monsoon rainfall in the 2012-22 decade over the 30-year, 1982-2011 baseline; 11%, all key agricultural hotspots saw a decline; and almost two-thirds witnessed an increase in the frequency of heavy rainfall. The results of the large-scale study, "Decoding India's Changing Monsoon Patterns", by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), provide a granular picture of the changing and erratic monsoon patterns in India.

Childhood Memories with Cricket

Bonzo Team Emerges as Winner, Busy Bee Team as Runner-Up



Hyderabad: From the moment they wake up in the morning until bedtime, women are constantly busy with various tasks. To bring some fun and excitement into their lives, a cricket match competition was organized exclusively for women. This match brought back childhood memories for everyone involved. The event was graced by Archana Chigullapalli, a women entrepreneur and food blogger, as the chief guest. Cricket tournament organizers Udutheni

Himabandu, Subita, and Jayashree also participated in the event. Over 36 women enthusiastically participated in the women's cricket tournament. Despite being mothers and wives with busy daily routines, they stepped onto the field for this special match. Playing cricket after many years brought back fond memories of their childhood and school days.

In the match, the Busy Bee (BGB) team won the toss and chose to bowl first. The Busy Bee team scored 93 runs in 15

overs, but the Bonzo team chased the target in just 14 overs with a score of 94 runs, claiming victory. The Bonzo team was declared the winner, and the Busy Bee team stood as the runner-up. Both teams received winner and runner-up trophies, participation certificates, and ₹3,000 worth of gift vouchers from Orra Fine Jewelry. Top performers were gifted rice bags from Aishwarya Dampudu Rice. The event left an unforgettable experience for all participants. The event

was sponsored by Orra Fine Jewelry, Aishwarya Dampudu Rice, Sudha Makeover, Divi Collections, and Swecha Foods, with RS Digital as a media partner and Mundadugu News App as the media sponsor. The Mundadugu management appreciated the organizers for successfully conducting the event. They praised the platform for celebrating women's memories, strength, and love for the game, which inspired everyone involved.

STATE BANK OF INDIA - THE MARKET LEADER IN HOME LOANS

State Bank of India, the Market Leader and first choice for Home Loans is organising a Mega Property Expo at Hitex from 20th to 22nd December 2024. State Bank of India, having its presence with over 22,500 branches across the country, has crossed Rs. 7.95 trillion mark in Home Loan Business as on 30.11.2024. Shri Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager, State Bank of India, Hyderabad Circle explained the recent initiatives of the Bank at the Press Meet held at Local Head Office, SBI, Hyderabad Circle crossed Rs. 10,000 crore of Housing Loan disbursements during the year. The Bank is having 27 exclusive Home Loan Centres across the State of Telangana for processing & sanction of Home loans. Hyderabad Circle has a Builder Finance Portfolio of Rs. 1,200 Cr and has 859 projects approved under "Builder Tie-up" till date. During the current FY, 120 builder tie-ups were approved across the state, and many more projects are being considered under the ambit of "Builder Tie-Up" to accelerate the Home Loan process. SBI has wide range of Products apart from the Home Loan viz. a) Personal Loan against Property (P-LAP) b) HL Top-up c) Maxgain - Hybrid d) NRI Home

Loan which are very popular, and the interest rates offered are competitive. The Bank has put in place various Digital Enablers in YONO App whereby customers can apply Home Loans without visiting Bank branch. Also "Insta Top up Loan" is available in YONO for Housing Loan customers, who, can avail a Top up loan with a click of button in YONO app. Bank has a robust software platform and has digitised its sourcing, underwriting and documentation processes for the convenience of the customers. We are very pleased to announce that the Home Loans - Property Expo for this year will be held at Hitex Exhibition grounds, Hall 4, Madhapur on 20th, 21st & 22nd of December 2024. In this Mega Property Expo, more than 50 big builders of Hyderabad city will showcase their ongoing and upcoming projects. By this, we aim to provide a one stop solution for acquiring their dream home. Concessions in Processing fee and Interest rates will be offered to those who book their home in this Property show. We request the people interested in purchasing a property at Hyderabad to visit property expo, choose their Dream home, and make the property show a grand success.



Mahindra brings Dolby Atmos to their Electric Origin SUVs range - BE 6 and XEV 9e, for an elevated entertainment experience for customers

Hyderabad:Mahindra and Dolby Laboratories, a leader in immersive entertainment experiences, announced that Mahindra will integrate Dolby Atmos® in its Electric Origin SUVs - BE 6 and XEV 9e. This groundbreaking collaboration between the two brands has set a new milestone making Mahindra the first Indian automaker to bring Dolby Atmos to its Electric Origin SUVs. Consumers will be able to experience their favourite songs in Dolby Atmos through Gaana, integrated into the infotainment system on the BE 6 and XEV 9e. Dolby Atmos will deliver an unparalleled auditory journey within the confines of the BE 6 and XEV 9e, equating the experience into a sonic studio experience. This collaboration will set a new benchmark for contemporary in-car entertainment experiences among Indian auto makers.

Dolby Atmos is a new way to create and experience entertainment that delivers artistic expression at its fullest capacity, immersing listeners in the content they love and forging a deeper connection between creators and their fans. In the car, entertainment in Dolby Atmos goes beyond the ordinary listening experience, revealing details with unparalleled clarity and depth. For consumers, it unlocks new levels of emotion for them to enjoy their music, podcasts, movies, and more. Dolby Atmos can turn just about every vehicle into a space where drivers and passengers get even more out of their favorite entertainment. Karan Grover, Senior Director, Commercial Partnerships - IMEA, Dolby Laboratories said, "We are excited about the possibilities that our collaboration with Mahindra can bring for custom-

ers in India. Dolby Atmos in Mahindra's Electric Origin SUVs - BE 6 & XEV 9e, will take the car journey to an entirely new level by transforming the interior cabin into an entertainment space that brings consumers closer to the content they love. With Dolby Atmos, every ride will be an extraordinary experience that complements the unlimited potential of the Mahindra BE 6 and XEV 9e."

R Velusamy, President - Automotive Product Development, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. and Joint Managing Director, Mahindra Electric Automobile Limited said, "The BE 6 and XEV 9e embody Mahindra's vision of delivering extraordinary experiences across every aspect of driving. By integrating Dolby Atmos, we are setting a new benchmark for in-car entertainment, ensuring that every journey is not only seamless but also truly immersive." BE 6 and XEV 9e boast 16 Harman Kardon speakers, which comes as standard with the vehicles. The speakers next to front seats are three-way speakers designed with a tweeter, mid-range, and a woofer.

The centre is Harman's patented Unity Speaker design and rear surround speakers are high fidelity mid-range. There is also a subwoofer and two speaker drivers in the ceiling which will help deliver an exceptional in-cabin audio experience with Dolby Atmos. The Mahindra BE 6 and XEV 9e will offer a premium SUV experience that caters to those who demand the finest in every aspect of their lives. This aligns with Dolby's vision of providing the best-in-class entertainment experiences for consumers. Together, with Mahindra, Dolby is set to redefine the future of in-car entertainment by allowing cre-



ators to place and move sounds all around listeners, unlocking new levels of emotion and filling the car cabin with greater details, clarity, and sound separation. If you're look-

ing for another reason to sign-up for Mahindra's Electric Origin SUVs to kickstart the new year, Dolby Atmos support should be the one.

Political vendetta or zero tolerance to corruption? TDP actions ignite debate

On December 6, the Nara Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP government constituted a special investigation team (SIT) headed by inspector general of police Vineet Brij Lal to look into the alleged illegal transport of rice meant for public distribution system (PDS) from Kakinada port to African countries. TDP official spokesperson Anam Venkataramana Reddy said: "This is not vengeance. The government is probing the illegal acquisition of the Kakinada seaport and SEZ at a throw-away price. Can anyone transfer 4,000 acres of land for just ₹12 crore, if not under coercion?" But analysts say that Naidu may also be paying back Reddy in the same currency. Between 2019 and 2024, the Reddy regime targeted TDP leaders and Naidu, who was arrested on September 2, 2023, and spent 53 days in jail before securing bail.

The Telugu Desam returned to power in the state on June 4, 2024, and Naidu was sworn in on June 12. On June 22, municipal authorities demolished the central office of the YSRCP under construction at Tadepalli, describing it as an illegal structure. The demolition was reminiscent of a similar move undertaken by Jagan Mohan Reddy on June 1, 2019, within hours of assuming charge as the chief minister. Back then, he ordered the demolition of "Praja Vedika" a hall constructed adjacent to Naidu's residence at Undavalli,

on the grounds that it was an illegal structure. "There is no surprise in Naidu ordering demolition of YSRCP buildings, as he faced a similar situation soon after losing power in 2019. Taking revenge on political rivals has become order of the day in present-day politics," observed political analyst Telakapalli Ravi. On the day of demolition, the TDP issued a statement saying the authorities carried out the action after issuing proper notices. "Jagan 'misused' his power as the chief minister to allot the land for the construction of his party's office," the statement said. During the YSRCP regime, the TDP complained about alleged attacks and murders of the party activists by YSRCP leaders across the state, particularly in rural areas in the Rayalaseema and Palnadu regions. In recent months it has been the turn of YSRCP leaders to make similar allegations. In July, Jagan staged a demonstration in New Delhi, alleging that there had been systematic attacks on the YSRCP workers, as Naidu was "trying to take personal vengeance at every level".

He alleged that within the first 45 days of coming to power, there were 36 cases of murder, over 300 attempted murders, and destruction of more than 590 properties belonging to the YSRCP. "Obviously, Naidu must also be under tremendous pressure

from local TDP leaders to act tough against the YSRCP leaders, because they had suffered similar witch-hunt and assaults during the previous regime of Jagan," added Ravi. Following the murder of a YSRCP activist Sheik Rasheed in Palnadu district in July, TDP general secretary and state minister Nara Lokesh accused the YSRCP of "blatant lies". "Jagan is desperately trying to link every incident to TDP. We are responsible for the safety and security of people and our government will not spare any criminal," he said. The state police has also launched a massive crackdown on social media activists affiliated with the YSRCP, for allegedly posting derogatory and vulgar content on social media against Naidu, his son Nara Lokesh, and deputy chief minister Pawan Kalyan, besides their wives and daughters and even home minister Vangalapudi Anitha. According to the police, in the first week of November itself, the state police issued 680 notices, registered 147 cases, and arrested 49 individuals. YSRCP legal cell president M Manohar Reddy claimed more than 300 party workers have been arrested. At a public meeting at Amaravati on November 7, Naidu said people who used vulgar language on social media, particularly against women, would "face its consequences". "The language on social media is

reckless. They are making objectionable comments about women. Should we not take action? Should I ignore it? They have become criminals," he said. And while Naidu and Kalyan's charge about adulterated ghee being used in Tirumala is still being investigated, and may eventually amount to naught, the charges in a US court against the Adani Group for allegedly paying bribes to the YSRCP government for a solar power deal has provided fresh ammunition to the TDP. The issue came up for a discussion in the state assembly with the TDP members targeting Jagan for tarnishing the brand image of Andhra. Naidu declared that he would take a call on ordering a probe into the deal after examining the US charge sheets. The government has also said it would explore the legality of scrapping the deal. To be sure, the TDP and Naidu will have to tread cautiously given that its ally the Bharatiya Janata Party is being targeted by opposition parties for furthering the Adani Group's interests.

Irrespective of whether the case makes any progress, it has given a scope for Naidu to project Jagan in a bad light," Ravi said. When the TDP was in the opposition, Naidu was highly critical of IAS and IPS officers who were allegedly toying the line of Jagan Mohan Reddy and targeting the TDP leaders.

Youngest Indian GM to youngest chess champ

There's a now viral video of an 11-year-old Gukesh saying that he wants to become the youngest world champion. A short seven years later, Gukesh is living the dream. On Thursday, Gukesh became the youngest-ever world chess champion at 18. He sobbed and spoke of doing a bungee jump. The momentous achievement completed a stunning arc that began over a decade ago, a dream that was reared through sacrifice and an obsessive, single-minded focus. His father, Rajini Kanth, has placed his career on the backburner to prioritise Gukesh's dreams. His mother Padma, a microbiologist, has been the primary breadwinner. One of Gukesh's first calls after his win on Thursday was to her. "We didn't really say anything...we were both crying," Gukesh said. There was a time when Gukesh was chasing the goal of becoming the youngest-ever GM between 2017 and 2018, bouncing from tournament to tournament across the world, sleeping in airport lounges. But as the costs spiralled, and the journey appeared untenable, Rajini Kanth's former college-mates crowdfunded money so Gukesh wouldn't have to let up on his dream. "Even now I feel bad that right after Gukesh became the world's second youngest GM, I had to ask him to sleep at the Madrid airport on our way to a Gibraltar tournament," said Rajini Kanth. "He's never complained." "The professions we chose may be different, but the basic principle is what has been passed down from our parents," Rajini Kanth told HT. "My wife and I are from middle-class families and growing up, we were told by our parents that you have to study hard, there is no other choice. The general trend then was to either become a doctor or engineer. That's how we both ended up in our respective professions," he said. "I later learned from my wife that hers was pretty much the same story. Her parents too had dealt with it the same way. When you have a mindset that for survival I need to do this one thing, it's not very hard...Once Gukesh started getting good results in the sport, I told him - 'Either you become a Grandmaster before you go to college or we'll stop chess for now so you can finish your studies and college. Then you can do whatever you like.' I think that gave him a sense of urgency and he realised how much he loved chess and wanted to succeed in it." Gukesh's then coach Vishnu Prasanna fed him 'Free Solo' videos of American rock climber Alex Honnold's mind-bending scaling of Yosemite's 3000-foot granite-faced, vertical cliff El Capitan. It was Prasanna's way of teaching his pupil to stay grounded during every climb. Gukesh became a Grandmaster at 12 years, 7 months and 17 days, missing Sergey Karjakin's youngest-ever world record by just 17 days. "The youngest-ever GM sounded like a fancy thing," Gukesh told HT in an earlier conversation.

"But I realised after I became GM that the record really doesn't mean much. Chasing it was pure misery. But it turned out to be a great life lesson — on how to handle expectations and critical moments. Although I regret putting myself under so much pressure, I still use the learnings." Prasanna also kept chess engines out of Gukesh's life

through the early years, until he reached reasonable strength. It was his way to get Gukesh to think, solve positions and learn to make decisions on his own. In an era when most chess players are bred on chess engines, it was a rare approach. Once the pandemic happened, tournaments came to a standstill and Viswanathan Anand transitioned from full-time player to mentor, Gukesh got the opportunity to train under him and his team of coaches. Anand's academy stepped in with assistance for Gukesh who was without a sponsor for a fairly long time. His progress since has been exponential. Over the past year he has rocketed through rankings and history books — he is ranked inside the top five, he became the youngest-ever Candidates winner in a stacked field and is now the youngest-ever world champion. Rajini Kanth joked that travelling together for tournaments and eating out has meant that he practically has to eat for two. "Gukesh is a small eater, So I end up having to eat both my portion and some of his too."

A tenacious fighter and excellent calculator, Gukesh was always the kid who would stay put till he solved the position he was assigned. "It's always been clear with us — we want him to take chances, we want him to take risks and we don't want him to



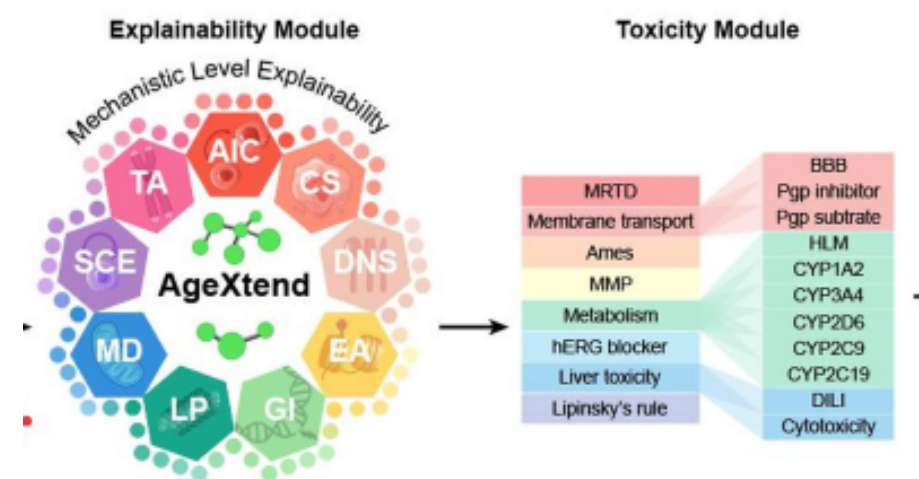
be afraid of losing." In his match against Ding, Gukesh's willingness to battle and his mental resilience shone through. It's not easy being a debutant at a World Championship, losing your first game and then striking back and going on to win the whole thing. A fan of MS Dhoni growing up, he found lessons in sheer bloody-mindedness from Novak Djokovic. "I can never forget how he (Djokovic) saved two match points to win the 2019 Wimbledon final (against Roger Federer)." Gukesh has, much like Honnold,

climbed to the summit. This is the ultimate prize there is in chess. In the absence of Magnus Carlsen from the World Championship cycle the Indian knows he can't stake claim to being the best chess player on the planet.

"It's a big motivating factor that there is someone at a very, very high level that will keep me doing the right things and working hard to try to reach the level of greatness that Magnus achieved...I want to have a very long career and stay at the very, very top."

Indian researchers develop AI-based platform to identify age-defying molecules rapidly

Longevity has always been the Holy Grail of medicine, and extending life beyond its conceivable end has driven kings, researchers and pharma companies alike through a roller-coaster ride that invariably stops at ground level, no wonder the search continues. Now, it is an Indian group from the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, Delhi that has used a platform based on Artificial Intelligence to discover molecules that promote healthy ageing. Researchers at IIT-Delhi have developed AgeXtend as a tool to efficiently cut down the time taken to identify viable molecules with geroprotectors, or age defying properties, through conventional research. The authors who have published the experiment in a recent issue of Nature Aging, have said that they screened over 1.1 billion compounds, over a period of two years, and the platform had uncovered several promising candidates validated through experiments on yeast, worms (*C. elegans*), and human cell models. A fraction of them, less than 1%, have been identified with anti-ageing properties. Gaurav Ahuja, one of the authors, from the department of Computational Biology, IIT-Delhi, says, "AgeXtend uses AI to predict and identify compounds with anti-ageing properties, assess their safety, and understand their biological effects. It looks at the structure of new molecules and can predict accurately if they have gero-protective characteristics. But where this product diverges from others that might already have been employed by researchers is that it can



explain why it considers certain compounds as anti-ageing, it reveals why it chose these components — the mechanisms. This will help to guide further research and indicate the particular direction in which validation needs to proceed." How exactly does it work? "The chemical space is like a universe, and I do not know the co-ordinates for my intended destination. What AgeXtend does is to serve as the GPS, pointing out to us where exactly we need to go," Dr. Ahuja explained. Apparently, it had successfully identified the benefits of well-known molecules like metformin and taurine, even without prior knowledge of these compounds, he

added. IIT-D PhD scholar Sakshi Arora who is also the lead author in the journal paper, described AgeXtend as "a discovery engine unlocking new possibilities for promoting health and longevity." Scanning 1.2 billion molecules makes this the largest study so far on the subject, Dr. Ahuja claimed. Candidates scanned included compounds from commercial drugs, Chinese drugs, ayurveda and molecules approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The research team has made available its code and data on open source on the website, free for researchers and students, and at a charge for companies.

Republican-led U.S. Congressional report findings on COVID's origins explained

File photo of Brad Wenstrup, House Select Coronavirus Pandemic Subcommittee Chairman during a hearing with experts from the U.S. National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill on November 14, 2024 in Washington, DC. File photo of Brad Wenstrup, House Select Coronavirus Pandemic Subcommittee Chairman during a hearing with experts from the U.S. National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill on November 14, 2024 in Washington, DC. | Photo Credit: Getty Images via AFP/Chip Somodevilla

The story so far: A U.S. Congressional committee led by Republican Brad Wenstrup has concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic was the result of the spread of a virus that likely leaked from a research facility in Wuhan, China. The final report of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, established in February 2023, was published on December 2, 2024. The report runs over 500 pages and, according to committee members, will serve as a roadmap for government action during future pandemics. "A future pandemic requires a whole-of-America response managed by those without personal benefit or bias," Mr. Wenstrup wrote. "We can always do better, and for the sake of future generations of Americans, we must." The report's highlight is that SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, possibly emerged from a laboratory leak. The report finds this conclusion on inferred or circumstantial claims made early during the pandemic.

For example, it quotes an unclassified factsheet from January 2021 published by the U.S. State Department that said: "The U.S. government has reason to believe that several researchers inside the WIV [Wuhan Institute of Virology] became sick in autumn 2019, before the first identified case of the outbreak, with symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illness." The report itself does not directly prove the lab-leak theory, however. The report also quotes previous statements by Alina Chan, a molecular biologist at the Broad Institute of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, in June 2024 in support of the lab-leak theory. In one of these statements, Dr. Chan says the virus emerged in Wuhan, which is also home to China's "foremost research lab for SARS-like viruses", and that Shi Zhengli, a senior virologist at WIV, "has been researching SARS-like viruses for over a decade and even initially wondered if the outbreak came from the WIV".

But at a conference called 'Preparing for the Next Pandemic: Evolution, Pathogenesis and Virology of Coronaviruses' in Japan on December 4, Dr. Shi reportedly refuted the claim that the viruses she was studying were ancestors of the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen. She had earlier promised to sequence the genomes of 56 betacoronaviruses she and her team had collected between 2004 and 2021 and were studying. She presented the sequencing data and its analyses at the conference. (The latter have yet to be peer-reviewed.) The Se-

lect Subcommittee report also noted an observation by Nicholas Wade, former science editor at The New York Times, in January 2024, that SARS-CoV-2 "possesses a furin cleavage site, found in none of the other 871 known members of its viral family, so it cannot have gained such a site through the ordinary evolutionary swaps of genetic material within a family." A furin cleavage is the process by which the furin enzyme breaks up specific proteins to activate them. The furin cleavage site in SARS-CoV-2 controls how it interacts with human cells to cause the disease. A letter published in The Lancet in August 2023 by researchers from Cornell University refuted Mr. Wade's idea and said the site could have evolved naturally, as opposed to being genetically engineered.

What else does the report say?

The report also said the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded gain-of-function research at WIV. Gain-of-function research refers to studies where researchers genetically alter organisms to give them additional functions, like enhanced transmissibility or infectivity. At one of the hearings of the Select Subcommittee, Lawrence Tabak, who served as the acting director of NIH from December 20, 2021, to November 8, 2023, agreed the NIH funded "gain-of-function research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology through EcoHealth". EcoHealth Alliance is a U.S.-based NGO that had received federal funding and later came under fire for its work with the WIV to study wild animal viruses. The U.S. government suspended the group's federal funding in May 2024 as the lab-leak theory gained in popularity.

Mr. Wenstrup's report also criticised EcoHealth for delaying the submission of its fifth annual progress report from September



2019 to August 2021. (Organisations that receive government funds are required to provide annual reports on the status of their research to the funding agency.) The Select Subcommittee report has claimed EcoHealth Alliance president Peter Daszak obstructed a congressional investigation into the matter. The report also blamed the World Health Organisation for pandering to the Chinese Communist Party and concealing important information related to the virus when the cases were being reported.

Economic losses The Select Subcommittee also delved into COVID-19 relief funding, alleging "significant lapses" in allocation. The Paycheck Protection Programme was created in March 2020 to help small businesses, individuals, and nonprofit organisations by providing them relief loans. According to the report, the programme received multiple fraudulent claims that resulted

in the loss of at least \$64 billion. Another area where the U.S. reportedly suffered heavy losses was the fraudulent unemployment insurance payments, which were valued at more than \$191 billion by the Select Subcommittee. The report alleged the lockdowns during the epidemic spread of COVID-19 in the country were "unscientific". However, it also praised travel restrictions imposed by Republican leader Donald Trump, who was the U.S. President until January 2021 before Joe Biden took over. It said the restrictions weren't "xenophobic", as his detractors, including Mr. Biden, had alleged. The Select Subcommittee report also said vaccine passports — the practice of allowing people to access most public areas like restaurants and sports stadiums only if they had been vaccinated — lacked "scientific basis" and blamed Biden administration and public health officials for exaggerating the "power of COVID-19 vaccines".

Deepening India's steps as a key space-faring nation

India has set ambitious goals for its space programme in the next two decades. These goals hinge on powerful, reusable rockets such as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s upcoming Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV). In addition to the NGLV, India must tap into its private sector to develop more such rockets in order to secure strategic autonomy in its access to outer space.

ISRO's road map From an infant space programme in the 1960s, India has grown into a powerful space-faring nation. Preparations for the Gaganyaan mission are underway. Gaganyaan will take an Indian crew to space for the first time, demonstrating Indian human-spaceflight capability. By the end of the next decade, India aims to have a more sustained presence in space by having its own space station in orbit around earth. It also aims to expand its human-spaceflight capabilities to the moon.

Realising these objectives effects a road map that consists of multiple uncrewed missions to the moon, mastering human-centric technologies for space travel and

developing powerful new rockets. These rockets have to carry heavier payloads to support humans in space. They should also be financially viable as it will take many test flights to reach the safety and the reliability standards for human-spaceflight to the moon. ISRO is fulfilling these requirements with its upcoming NGLV, which has been recently approved for development by the Union Cabinet. The significance of the NGLV lies in its heavy lift capability and reusability. The NGLV will triple the payload capacity of the LVM3 (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk III), which is India's most powerful rocket. This comes with numerous benefits. Heavy lift rockets ease restrictions related to weight and volume. It frees up the focus of engineers and scientists that would otherwise have to be spent on miniaturisation or weight reduction. It greatly increases the potential of space-related missions. The possibilities increase exponentially. In contrast to all of India's existing rockets which are expendable as they are built for one-time use, a major part of the NGLV will be reusable. Reusability requires that the rocket keep some of its fuel for controlled descent back

to the earth's surface. This reduces the capacity of the rocket to carry heavier loads but offers massive cost savings. Reusability has become necessary for rockets to remain competitive. The immediate need

The NGLV's development phase will last for the next eight years. In the meantime, the need for heavy lift capability is already felt. India's next uncrewed moon mission is slated to use not one, but two rockets. Two LVM3s will carry the requisite modules. They will then be assembled in space to form one composite vehicle that will go to the moon.

In another instance, GSAT-N2, a communication satellite built by ISRO, was launched on SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket. It weighed 4,700 kg while the maximum weight that an LVM3 can carry to the Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO) is 4,000 kg. A reusable Falcon 9 from SpaceX, a U.S. company, can carry up to 5,500 kg to the Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO). Foregoing reusability, an expendable Falcon 9's capacity increases to 8,300 kg. Even this figure is dwarfed in comparison to SpaceX's Falcon Heavy and Starship rockets.

Not just hormones: How Indian scientist found a lipid that controls your neuro and immunity functions

The ultimate aim of Dr Kamat's work is to find ways in which various diseases caused by the dysregulation of lysophosphatidylserine can be prevented or cured. The ultimate aim of Dr Kamat's work is to find ways in which various diseases caused by the dysregulation of lysophosphatidylserine can be prevented or cured. How many times do we take the lipid profile test and think that cholesterol and triglyceride levels are all that matters? There is, however, another type of lipids. Called bioactive lipids, these can regulate various processes in the body. That's why this year's winner of Infosys Prize for Life Sciences, Dr Siddhesh Kamat, from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER)-Pune, worked with one such lipid and its role in certain neuro-degenerative disorders in children and autoimmune diseases.

How lipids control biological processes

The bioactive lipids work in a way similar to hormones to control various processes in the body. Dr Kamat chose to research lipid lysophosphatidylserine, which impacts the functioning of the nervous and immune systems. "It has to be at an optimal level all the time. If its level goes up or down, there can be weird biological effects. The levels of such lipids, in turn, are controlled by various enzymes. If there is more of the enzyme that makes it and less of the enzyme that breaks it, the levels then accumulate. If this scenario is opposite, its levels fall," he explained. Dr Kamat's lab has studied how the particular

lipid is made, how it is regulated, how it signals, and importantly, what happens when its levels are dysregulated. When he first started working with lysophosphatidylserine, there was some evidence that it works on the nervous system and the immune system, so that is where the search began. "Now, in a study that is yet to be published, we have shown that this lipid is found in all tissues," he said.

How can this research help?

The ultimate aim of Dr Kamat's work is to find ways in which various diseases caused by the dysregulation of lysophosphatidylserine can be prevented or cured. "We don't yet know what is the biological significance of this lipid in different tissues, but in the nervous and immune systems we have been able to show that if the levels are dysregulated, people end up with neuro-degenerative diseases and autoimmune diseases respectively," said Dr Kamat.

His research has shown that elevation of the levels of the lipid in the brain can exacerbate the neuro-inflammation associated with PHARC (Polyneuropathy, Hearing loss, Ataxia, Retinitis pigmentosa and Cataract), a rare and progressive genetic disorder, which affects people usually in their childhood or early teens. The levels of the lipid in immune cell is linked to autoimmune conditions such as psoriasis, Grave's disease (a condition where too much thyroid hormone is produced), and Addison's disease (where the adrenal glands do not produce enough



cortisol and aldosterone), among others. His research has also been able to show that the lipids also regulate critical processes in the immune system such as the clearance of pathogens via phagocytosis (a process where immune cells engulf foreign substances to destroy them) or release of histamine in response to allergens.

Can the findings work for humans?

Dr Kamat's laboratory has demonstrated these pathways in mice models so far. "Moving forward, we are looking to collaborate with physicians and pharmaceutical companies and see if they can take this to humans. We have already begun the process but everything is at a very nascent stage. So my hope is to take it to clinical trials over the next decade," said Dr Kamat.

Why C-suite equality is key to corporate success

The past few years have witnessed growing conversations around gender diversity and leadership. While one can see more diversity in the executive teams and corporate boards, the gender gap in the C-suite still remains glaring. Achieving gender equality at the top echelons of leadership is not just a matter of fairness—it's critical for corporate success. Numerous studies highlight the tangible benefits of gender-diverse leadership, from improved financial performance to enhanced innovation. Yet, organisations worldwide still struggle to close the gap. It's time for companies to reflect on what's missing and recalibrate their strategies to foster real, lasting change. The fact that gender diversity in leadership goes in hand with corporate success is well-documented. A study by McKinsey & Company found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the bottom quartile. Similarly, research from Credit Suisse revealed that companies with women in senior leadership roles tend to perform better in terms of stock price performance and return on equity.

Gender-diverse leadership teams offer unique perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, which can lead to better decision-making. As the Harvard Business Re-

view noted, women leaders are more likely to use collaboration and empathy as leadership tools, fostering a more inclusive work culture. This inclusivity, further helps attract and retain top talent, as younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are drawn to organisations with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. In an increasingly competitive business landscape, C-suite equality becomes a critical factor for long-term sustainability and growth.

However, despite the clear benefits, achieving gender equality at the C-suite level remains a challenge. One of the biggest barriers is the so-called "broken rung" at the first step up to management. As per LeanIn.org's Women in the Workplace study, for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 87 women receive the same opportunity. This disparity at the managerial level has a cascading effect, limiting the pool of female candidates available for higher executive roles. Another challenge lies in unconscious bias—both in recruitment and within organisational culture. Often, women are subjected to harsher scrutiny regarding their leadership styles, with assertiveness sometimes viewed negatively compared to their male counterparts. This bias often keeps highly qualified women from being considered for key roles, creating a perpetual cycle of inequality.

In addition to biases, work-life balance remains a significant concern. Many women continue to shoulder a disproportionate amount of caregiving responsibilities, making it harder for them to navigate the demanding schedules that come with senior leadership positions. Thus, closing the gender gap in the C-suite will require deliberate actions from organisations, starting with a commitment to reassess their talent pipelines and identify the gaps in advancement opportunities for women.

Companies must invest in developing female leaders at all stages of their careers. Research by Catalyst shows that women who have access to mentorship and sponsorship are more likely to advance in their careers than those who do not. This could involve providing mentorship, sponsorship programmes, and leadership training designed to address the unique challenges women face in advancing to senior roles. Furthermore, organisations should take steps to identify and eliminate biases in recruitment, performance evaluations, and promotions. Implementing blind hiring practices, where candidates are assessed without knowledge of their gender, can help reduce bias in recruitment. Additionally, training managers to recognise and mitigate unconscious bias can foster a more inclusive environment. Offering flexibility and support,

creating a fluid work environment can go a long way in helping women navigate the demands of both their personal and professional lives. Notably, organisations that promote work-life balance tend to attract more diverse candidates for senior roles. Besides, organisations should treat diversity in hiring as another key business metric. This would involve two things: Setting clear diversity goals in C-Suite and senior leadership roles and tracking its impact on the bottom-line of the business. Overall, organisations of today need to commit to fostering an inclusive work culture. Diversity alone is not enough; inclusion is equally important. Organisations need to create cultures where women feel empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. Encouraging open dialogues about gender equality, creating women's resource groups, and fostering allyship among male leaders can all contribute to a more inclusive environment. The writing on the wall is clear. Gender equality in the C-suite is not just an aspiration—it's a business necessity. The evidence is clear: companies that prioritise diversity in leadership outperform those that do not. As more organisations recognise the value of diverse leadership teams, the focus should shift from merely setting diversity targets to creating a work environment that supports the growth and advancement of women at every level.