

IIT-Hyderabad collaborates with Amrita Hospital to develop new tech in radiation therapy

Hyderabad: The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Hyderabad is collaborating with Amrita Hospital, Faridabad to develop new technology in radiation therapy. As a part of this initiative, Dr. Bhaskar Viswanathan, Head, Department of Radiation Oncology, Amrita Hospital, has been selected for a research grant, meant to develop an indigenous robotic ultrasound for tumor motion and radiation hyperthermia for cancer treatment.

The technology would be developed in association with Dr. Avinash Eranki, Assistant Professor, Department of Biomedical Engineering at the Medical Ultrasound Research Laboratory of IIT – Hyderabad, Eranki Labs Private Limited, and Amrita Centre for Advanced Robotics.

“It is a non-invasive technique that uses focused ultrasound waves and has a

huge potential in cancer treatment like tumor ablation, mild hyperthermia for radiotherapy and chemotherapy, and motion management during radiation delivery,” Dr. Viswanathan said. Dr. Eranki said the need for spatially precise and efficacious delivery of radiation and ultrasound energy is possibly a key to improved outcomes in patients with debilitating cancer disease. “The collaboration with IIT Hyderabad and Eranki Labs Private Limited enhances the project’s scope, leveraging the expertise of both medical and engineering domains. This interdisciplinary partnership is crucial for advancing technology in cancer care, emphasizing a holistic approach to treatment innovation. We expect to complete the project in three years, the grant for which was provided to us by the ICMR,” Dr. Viswanathan added.



Fresh IT, Industry and Infra policies, says Sridhar Babu



Hyderabad: Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu said as the annual budget session commences on Thursday, new IT, Industries and Infrastructure policies were being prepared.

Speaking at the Tele performance Impressive Experience Summit here on Wednesday, the Minister said Hyderabad was a suitable destination for setting up industries. The State government was introducing a simplified policy for investments, he said. The Minister said an appeal was made to Daniel Julian, founder of Tele Performance Group and Chief Executive Officer Anish Mukar to visit India and choose Hyderabad for setting up the industry. Hyderabad had a favorable envi-

ronment, human resources and infrastructure in abundance. There was no risk of earthquakes and other natural disasters in Hyderabad and it was the best livable city, the Minister said.

“There are 165 engineering colleges in the State. We are planning to establish a skill university and it will provide skilled manpower on the lines of ISB. Tata and Mahindra companies have come forward to establish a skill university,” Sridhar Babu said. A Global Summit on Artificial Intelligence was scheduled to be held in Hyderabad in June. All AI companies from all over the world were invited to the summit. Plans were being framed to make Hyderabad the headquarters of AI technology, he added.

Devotees can offer jaggery to deities through online

Hyderabad: The State Endowment department has developed an application through IT Department to facilitate the devotees who are unable to attend to offer Bangaram (Jaggery) before the deities. The devotees who desire to offer can do so by booking through Mee Seva or T App folio. There is a tradition of offering of Bangaram (Jaggery) equal to the weight

of the devotee to the deity. The Prasadam will be delivered to the devotee through India Post courier service. The Sammakka Saralamma jatara will be celebrated at Medaram in Tadvai mandal of Mulugu district from February 21 to 24. Lakhs of devotees across the state and other states including Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Jharkhand will take part in the festival.

The tumultuous history of Northern Ireland | Explained

The story so far: On February 3, pro-Irish unity politician Michelle O'Neill made history by becoming the first Nationalist First Minister of Northern Ireland, as the Democratic Union Party (DUP), the largest pro-U.K. party, returned to the government ending a two-year political deadlock in Northern Ireland.

What led to the political deadlock?

Northern Ireland is governed by a power-sharing agreement known as consociationalism as laid down in the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement) of 1998. This system believes that power should be shared equally between the various sectarian groups in a state, in this case, between the pro-Irish unity faction, called the Nationalists or Republicans, and the pro-U.K. faction, the Loyalists or the Unionists. Sinn Fein is the largest Nationalist political party, while the DUP is of the latter. The party that wins the largest vote-share will hold the First Minister position while the party with the second largest vote share will keep the post of Deputy First Minister. Of these two posts, one must be a Unionist and the other a Nationalist. Both positions hold equal weight and one cannot exist without the other. In the 2022 elections, Sinn Fein finished first with a 29% vote share, while the DUP secured the second position with a 21.3% vote share. However, a government was not formed as the DUP exited Stormont (Northern Ireland's Parliament) because it objected to the new border controls between Britain and the Island of Ireland, which came in the aftermath of Brexit. When the U.K. exited the EU, Northern Ireland became the only province to share a land border with an EU country (Republic of Ireland). The U.K. and the EU then came up with the Northern Ireland Protocol, which stipulated that the trade border, where goods are checked for compliance, would be shifted to the Irish ports, essentially making it a sea border. However, this was rejected by the DUP, which held that this was against the Good Friday agreement which sanctioned free movement of goods and people across borders. In protest, they exited the government and the political deadlock set in.

The U.K. and the EU then drew up fresh rules, called the Windsor Framework, which stated that on arrival at the border of Northern Ireland, goods will be demarcated into two. The ones which were entering the region would go into the 'green lane' with no inspections while those entering the Republic of Ireland (EU territory) would go to the 'red lane' for compliance checks. After assurance from the U.K. of Northern Ireland's place in its internal market, the DUP has agreed to return to government.

How did Northern Ireland come into being?

Northern Ireland was the site of a 30-year civil war (1968-1998) known as 'The Troubles' between the Republicans and the Unionists, which killed over 3,500 people. It also had a religious aspect to it with the Republicans being mostly Catholic and the Unionists being largely Protestants.

Northern Ireland was formerly part of the Ulster province, which lies to the north of modern-day Ireland. Conflict between the Protestants and the Irish Catholics goes all the way back to 1609, when King James I started an official policy of migration wherein people from England and Scotland were encouraged to move to Ulster to work in his various plantations there. The religious war that was being waged in much of Europe at the time, between the Protestants and the Catholics, made its presence felt in Ulster as well. However, a much stronger resistance was brewing. Ireland at the time was under the rule of England. The growing resistance against the colonial English rule, especially after the Potato Famine of 1845 where over 1 million Irish people died due to disease and starvation, cemented these sectarian and religious differences. Finally, in 1916, in the middle of the First World War, during Easter week, Ireland rose up in arms against colonial rule under the leadership of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). After a bloody war, it was able to gain independence from England with the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921. However, Ireland was split into two territories. As there was a Protestant majority in Ulster, out of the 32 counties in Ireland, six remained with the U.K., forming the region of Northern Ireland.

What led to the Good Friday agreement?

Peace did not come easy in Northern Ireland. The years that followed were rife with discrimination and instances of sectarian violence. The Irish Republicans being the minority were often victims of discrimination when it came to housing and public service jobs. Moreover, there have also been claims that elections were heavily skewed towards the Unionists due to gerrymandering practices. In the late 1960s, various protests against the Northern Ireland government descended into violence with the IRA and the Unionist paramilitary forces taking up arms.

A civil war had officially started and the British Army was deployed to maintain peace. The Army was often accused of colluding with the Unionists against the Republicans. Walls were built between communities to segregate them, curfews were implemented and dissidents were being arrested without trial. However, violence continued and in 1972, in an incident known as Bloody Sunday, the British Army shot and killed at least 13 unarmed civilians during a protest march in the Bogside area of Derry. In its aftermath, the war spread to the mainland of the U.K. and Ireland, with attacks and bombings orchestrated in London and Dublin. In the backdrop of the ever-increasing tit-for-tat violence between the IRA and the Unionists, in the 1980s, IRA's political wing Sinn Fein started taking a more active role in the political landscape of Northern Ireland. It contested elections and played a part in governance. Peace talks were also being negotiated with the U.S. acting as a mediator.

The 1990s brought about a significant



Northern Ireland is governed by a power-sharing agreement known as consociationalism according to which power should be shared equally between the various sectarian groups in a state, in this case, between the pro-Irish unity faction, called the Nationalists or Republicans, and the pro-U.K. faction, the Loyalists or the Unionists

shift in the war. The public was weary of violence and wanted peace. Both parties agreed to a ceasefire and peace talks were in full swing. While decommissioning of arms was heavily pushed by the U.K., both the IRA and the Unionists at the time refused to give up their arms entirely. Therefore, talks took the 'twin approach' wherein peace and decommissioning was to happen in parallel as a treaty was being reached. Finally, on April 10, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed in Belfast bringing to an end the 30-year-old civil war in Northern Ireland.

What is the Good Friday Agreement?

The Good Friday Agreement is a unique peace treaty in that it conceded to most of the demands from both sides of the conflict. The treaty had three main aspects — that the Northern Ireland government would be formed on the sovereign wishes of both Republicans and the Unionists and that they would share governance equally; that the people of Northern Ireland could seek reunification with Ireland any time subject to a referendum; and that the citizens of Northern Ireland can seek Irish or British nationality or both. It also abolished border checks and encouraged the free-

dom of movement of people across the U.K. and Ireland. However, tensions of the conflict still linger in the region. The power sharing system has not been smooth. Stormont has fallen multiple times before the completion of a term. The Assembly was suspended in 2000, in 2001, from 2002-2007 when Unionists withdrew from the executive and from 2017-2020. In February 2022, the government again collapsed as Unionists withdrew over border controls between the U.K. and Northern Ireland.

What next?

The significance of a Nationalist First Minister cannot be understated. Ms. O'Neill said as much when she remarked that "we are in a decade of opportunity" indicating the possibility of a referendum on the reunification of the region with Ireland in the next 10 years. However, in a paper released by the U.K. government, it said that it "sees no realistic prospect of a border poll leading to a united Ireland," citing recent polling. In a similar vein, Irish premier Leo Varadkar, whose government in principle supports a united Ireland, also said the question of reunification was "not for today."

69.3 mn pets are homeless in India: State of Pet Homelessness Project by Mars highlights the challenges facing pets today

A global coalition of animal welfare experts in partnership with Mars, released the results from the largest-ever international study on pet homelessness, today. The ambitious 'State of Pet Homelessness Project' sets out to understand the scale of pet homelessness in 20 markets, and factors that contribute to pets being on the streets or in shelters, shining a light on the needs of a sizable hidden population of pets. The report reveals that 1 in 3 pets are homeless in the world, estimating almost 362 million pets are still waiting to find a home. The global average of homeless pets across 20 markets is pegged at 35% of the total dog and cat population. The findings from India reveal a stark picture with 69% of all cats and dogs without a home. Most homeless pets (60.5 mn) in India are living on the streets, while others (8.8 mn) are in shelters waiting to find a home.

69.3 million (69%) cats and dogs are homeless in India, accounting for approximately 19% of the global homeless pet population;

60.5 million (71%) dogs live on the street or in shelters in India, accounting for approximately 39% of the global homeless

dog population;

8.8 million cats live on the street or in shelters, accounting for 4.25% of the global homeless cat population;

While adoption from shelters is still low, 53% respondents from urban and rural areas would recommend adopting from shelters in the future

47% and 28% respondents are thinking of becoming dog and cat pet owners respectively;

Friends, relatives are the most popular route for getting pets in the country with (28%) of dogs and (30%) of cats coming from these sources;

33% respondents from rural areas have adopted pets from friends, family

32% respondents from urban areas rely on pet shops for bringing home a pet

In India, 2,565 experts were interviewed from urban (1,402) areas and rural (1,163) areas for the Project. The project also included interviews with pet professionals from nine metro and non-metro cities in the country.

Salil Murthy, Managing Director at Mars Petcare India, said: "The State of Pet

MARS

Homelessness Report is a clarion call to address the urgent issue of pet homelessness, armed with compelling data and insights that guide us towards actionable solutions. Despite the current low shelter adoption rates in India, 53% of respondents are receptive to the idea of adopting pets from animal shelters in the future. This is an opportunity to strengthen the human-animal bond and encourage existing and potential pet parents to adopt. Our goal is to create a better world for pets in India so every pet can get the care and nutrition they deserve. At Mars Petcare, we are raising awareness about pet adoption, forging

partnerships with NGOs in the animal welfare space, and are keen on collaborating with stakeholders in the ecosystem to force-multiply our efforts. We are pioneering the integration of digital solutions and innovative models to significantly scale adoption through NGOs.

We believe that adoption should be a part of our strategy to effectively manage and reduce the challenge of pet homelessness. Our mission is to galvanize the entire ecosystem—NGOs, communities, and pet parents—towards creating a more compassionate and inclusive world for pets."

Punjab Govt to bring bill to check mushrooming of illegal colonies



Chandigarh (Jag Mohan Thaken), February 7: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Wednesday asked the officers to prepare draft of a bill to act sternly against the illegal colonisers for checking the mushrooming up of illegal colonies in the state in future. Chairing a meeting in wake of the recent decision of the state government to do away with the clause of No Objection Certificate (NOC) for registration of land and property, the Chief Minister said that this decision is aimed at facilitating the general public. However, he said that noose around illegal colonisers needs to be tightened for which fresh law must be enacted. Bhagwant Singh Mann asked the officers to draft the new bill before the next session

of the state assembly so that it can be duly approved in the Vidhan Sabha.

The Chief Minister said that the illegal colonisers dupe the people by showing them green pastures and sell their unapproved colonies to them. He said that the hapless people have to then run pillar to post for getting the basic civic amenities in these colonies. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the colonisers mint the money illegally but people have to bear the hardships due to their misdeeds. The Chief Minister said that this will not be tolerated at any cost and strict action will be taken against the colonisers who are selling the plots before not getting it duly approved. He said that the state government will not allow the mushrooming up of illegal colo-

nies in the state and severe action will be taken against those indulging in this crime. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that strict law will be framed against the illegal colonisers so that it acts as a deterrent for them to develop any illegal colony in the state. It is pertinent to mention here that in a big relief to the residents of the state, the Punjab government had decided to do away with the clause of No Objection Certificate (NOC) for registration of any land and property. Divulging the details, the Chief Minister on Tuesday said that the decision has been taken in larger public interest to ensure that people do not face any sort of inconvenience. He said that the legal mechanism for this decision has already

been worked out and the details will be shared very soon. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this decision has been taken in due consultation with the general public and is aimed solely at ensuring their benefit. The Chief Minister said that currently the public both from urban and rural areas in the state were facing a lot of problems due to non-availability of NOC. He said that this resulted in non-execution of registration of land thereby creating a lot of problems for the common man. However, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that now this problem will be solved as the requirement of NOC for the registration of land and property has been abolished by the state government.

Bankers asked to sanction loans to the eligible without delay

Adilabad: Adilabad Collector PS Rahul Raj asked bankers to sanction loans to the eligible applicants in time. He was speaking at a district-level meeting with bankers here on Wednesday.

Raj told the bankers to achieve targets of the annual credit plan set for the district by the end of the ongoing financial year. He instructed them to disburse loans without causing inconvenience to farmers. He asked them to sanction loans to eligible

agriculture allied sectors, medium and small scale industries, education and homes without delay. He underlined issuance of loans of various government schemes. The Collector advised the bankers to raise the cap on the loans given to self-help groups. He opined farmers would be able to achieve financial progress with the help of loans to agriculture, dairy, poultry, and other allied sectors. He later unveiled a potential linked credit plan of 2024-2025.

Why are countries revising rules for foreign students? | Explained

The story so far: Migrating abroad, especially to English-speaking countries, is set to become harder for Indian students aspiring to pursue a higher education, what with countries such as Canada and the U.K. tightening rules to seek admissions to universities.

What are the new set of changes?

Following the political turmoil between India and Canada, the Canadian government in December 2023 issued revised requirements that it said are 'to better protect international students.' The foremost of these was to upwardly revise the Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) amount from 10,000 Canadian dollars, which amounts to ₹6.15 lakh, to over double at 20,635 Canadian dollars, close to ₹12.7 lakh. In another instance, the U.K. announced that come 2024, international students will be restricted from bringing in dependant family with them as they pursue their studies. Countries such as Germany and Australia too have gradually increased the GIC amount by approximately 10% annually. As on May 2023, the amount required to apply for a German visa is 11,208 euros which is ₹10 lakh, up from the earlier cap of 10,000 euros. Higher education experts say that an amount as low as ₹6.15 lakh is not enough for a student to survive in an expensive country like Canada. "Canada had earlier kept a low GIC threshold to attract students, but the government realised that this was not enough to keep up with rising housing costs, inflation. While other countries like Germany and Australia gradually increased the amount by 10% year-on-year, the Canadian jump of 100% came as a shocker because the hike occurred in one go," said Ankur Dhawan, president of ed-tech start-up UpGrad Abroad.

Which students have been hit the most?

In the latest tweak of rules, Canada has said that it is restricting the total number of study permits or student visas it plans to issue to 3.6 lakh (earlier this was nearly four lakh). India alone used to send up to 1.4 lakh students to Canada, approximately 80% percent of whom went to study diploma level courses there. Earlier, aspirants looking to migrate to Canada would take any diploma as the 'study abroad' option, essentially as a passport to migrate to the country in poorly equipped educational institutions, while a spouse visa work permit would allow their spouses to work while the aspirant studied. People would take on hefty loans to fuel this move. Now Canada has stated that while they will issue a spouse visa, the spouse will not have a work permit. Akshay Chaturvedi, CEO of LeverageEdu, opines, "In some sense it's a great step towards solving Canada's 'diploma mills' problem, it will shut down bad institutions and also de-incentivise agents who engage in shoddy practices."

How are tightened rules affecting students?

While Canada aims to rein in its burgeoning 'diploma mills' problem, it has eased norms for masters program students

to come in. Masters students can apply for a three-year work permit after their course is complete. However, the stricter guidelines have put those who want to seek a Bachelors' degree in Canada in the lurch.

Take for instance, 21-year-old Manvir Singh, a resident of Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh who during the years from 2022-2023 was enrolled in the University of Yorkville and completed his first two years of bachelors in Business Administration (BBA) remotely. Mr. Singh was supposed to get admitted for his third-year on-campus studies from May 2024. Mr. Singh who has deposited his third-year fees of \$15,000 and has submitted a GIC of \$20,900 has now been advised by the University to put his visa application on hold. "All visa applications of students wanting to go to study in Canada are on hold till March this year, as universities need to figure out how to send attestation letters to students which will have to be secured from the Canadian government," Mr. Singh said.

What about other foreign countries?

UpGrad Abroad analysed data of 25,000 aspirational students who showed interest in studying abroad. While 18% of this pool was interested in studying in Canada during the data collected between January to July last year, this demand dropped by half to 9.3%, in the data analysed between July and December, last year.

Paytm crisis: India's Paytm crackdown spooks retailers; Walmart, Google swoop in

Hit by a regulatory crackdown, India's Paytm is mobilising its sales team to reassure the merchants who use its app to accept digital payments just as Walmart and Google are targeting those same vendors with their rival offerings.

Cash was once king in India, but Paytm is credited with revolutionising India's digital payments market which is set to be worth \$10 trillion by 2026. Backed by SoftBank, and earlier by billionaire investor Warren Buffett and China's Alibaba, it has 100 million monthly users and clocked \$61 billion worth of merchant payments between October and December.

But many merchants are now refusing to deal with Paytm after India's central bank last week asked its banking unit - which mainly powers the popular payments app - to cease most operations from March 1 for "persistent non-compliance".

In the southern Telangana state, around 2,000 shops have put signs saying "No Paytm, Pay Cash", and some have even covered up the Paytm QR code which customers scan for payments, said Mohammed Salahuddin, a member of a local retailers association.

"I have decided to avoid using Paytm. Customers have to give cash," he said. To counter such concerns, the company is



On the contrary, a destination like Germany, which had initially been in demand with nearly 17% students, is now attracting demand from 32% students. Apart from Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, Mr. Dhawan added that newer destinations like Taiwan and Israel are also emerging in the list of potential study abroad destinations as they want to attract Indian talent to their countries. Migrating abroad, especially to English-speaking countries, is set to become harder for Indian students aspiring to pursue a higher education, what with coun-

tries such as Canada and the U.K. tightening rules to seek admissions to universities. Following the political turmoil between India and Canada, the Canadian government in December 2023 issued revised requirements that it said are 'to better protect international students.' While Canada aims to rein in its burgeoning 'diploma mills' problem, it has eased norms for masters program students to come in. Masters students can apply for a three-year work permit after their course is complete. However, the stricter guidelines have put those who want to seek a Bachelors' degree in Canada in the lurch.

sending sales staff directly to customers ranging from roadside snack sellers to big retail outlets to ask them to use Paytm's partner banks so that they can continue to receive payments, more than 40 shopkeepers and several company sales staff said.

"We are receiving a lot of calls from merchants," said a Paytm team leader in Chennai, adding that each salesperson there is tasked with visiting at least 10 shops daily. In a statement to Reuters, Paytm said customers continued to use its app, adding it is onboarding more merchants and "there will be no disruptions" for vendors who "can seamlessly be transitioned" to other partner banks.

However, with about 15% of Paytm's 40 million merchants needing to be migrated, the company last week said it would be a "large exercise". Very few shopkeepers in India are also tech savvy, which adds to the challenge. Rivals cash in Paytm has dominated digital payments in India but since the crackdown its stock has plunged 39%, wiping \$2.3 billion off its value. That has potentially created an opportunity for bigger rivals including Walmart and Google. Paytm app downloads fell 20% last week, versus the previous week, data from market intelligence firm Sensor Tower shows, while rival apps including Walmart's PhonePe and Google Pay re-

corded an average 52% growth. PhonePe in particular registered a 76% downloads growth. A Reuters reporter on Sunday received a push notification from Google Pay to migrate his Paytm-linked mobile number for bank transfers, and an industry source said many merchants were rushing to register with Google. Google said in a statement that it was supporting vendors and users. PhonePe, which offers many services similar to Paytm's, took out front-page newspaper advertisements targeting merchants, saying: "Business runs best when it runs on PhonePe".

PhonePe, in a statement, said it was seeing a surge in demand for their payment offerings, including its speakers: tiny devices that help digitally challenged retailers and eases payment tracking. The speakers - which give audio alerts to vendors when payments are received - were pioneered by Paytm with its Soundbox that is used by about 7 million Indian merchants.

Neil Shah, director at Counterpoint Research, estimates Paytm's rivals - PhonePe's SmartSpeaker and Google's Soundpod - have around 3 million such devices in India. "This is where PhonePe and Google can now hit," he said. "The Soundbox and service from Paytm has been a major stickiness factor for Paytm which contributed to its success."

The severe erosion of fiscal federalism

On February 8, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will lead a protest in New Delhi against the Centre for “placing Kerala on a financial embargo”. The Kerala government has accused the Centre of pushing the State into a severe financial crisis by imposing a limit on its borrowings. Kerala has moved the Supreme Court contending that the Centre’s imposition of a Net Borrowing Ceiling (NBC) on the State, which limits borrowings from all sources, violates Article 293 of the Constitution. The wide array of constitutional issues that are now thrown open point at the severe erosion of fiscal federalism in the country.

What is net borrowing ceiling?

The NBC limits the borrowings of States from all sources including open market borrowings. The Centre has decided to deduct liabilities arising from the public account of the States to arrive at the NBC. In addition, borrowings by state-owned enterprises, where the principal and/or interest are serviced out of the Budget, or through assignment of taxes or cess or any other State revenue, are also deducted from the NBC. Kerala is particularly agitated by the inclusion of debt taken by state-owned enterprises as the State’s own debt. Major infrastructure projects initiated by the State government are funded by the government statutory body called the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), primarily through extra-budgetary borrowings. Since the debt of KIIFB is now included in the NBC, the State government claims that it is not even able to fund pensions and meet expenses for welfare schemes. Is the Centre within its constitutional limits to impose such harsh conditions on the finances of States?

Determining State finances According to Article 293(3) of the Constitution, the State has to obtain the consent of the Centre to raise ‘any loan’, if ‘any part of the previous loan’ extended by the Centre is outstanding. The imposition of the NBC is done by invoking the powers of the Centre under Article 293(3).

On close scrutiny, the Centre’s decision to include extra-budgetary borrowings by state-owned enterprises in the total debt of the State is constitutionally suspect. The Union Finance Minister justified the decision by relying on the 15th Finance Commission Report, which says, “Governments at all tiers may observe strict discipline by resisting any further additions to the stock of off-budget transactions and contingent liabilities which is against the norms of fiscal transparency and detrimental to fiscal sustainability. One very important purpose of our recommendation for higher borrowing limit to the Union and State Government is to foster transparency and to avoid build-up of non-transparent liabilities.” Notably, the Finance Commission has not called for the inclusion of the debt of state-owned enterprises in the NBC.

Parliament does not have the power to legislate upon the ‘Public Debt of the State’ as this finds place in Entry 43 of the State List of the Constitution. Therefore, the power to make laws on, administer and determine aspects of the public debt of the State falls squarely on the State Legislature. The State government raises another crucial argument that the balances

in the public account of the State should not be included in the NBC. The State relies upon Article 266(2) of the Constitution which indicates that the money collected by the Central or State government, which do not pertain to the consolidated fund, can be brought under the head of ‘public accounts’. Small savings, security deposits, provident funds, reserve funds and other treasury deposits constitute ‘public accounts’. All activities related to public accounts fall within the domain of the State Legislature and the Centre has no power to include the withdrawals from public accounts in the NBC.

State territory The Kerala Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2003, which is enacted by the State Legislature, spells out the fiscal deficit targets for the State. It says that Kerala shall reduce the fiscal deficit to 3% of the GSDP by 2025-2026. When a State Act provides for budget management and fiscal discipline, it is not desirable to have external supervision on the finances of the State by the Centre. Under Article 202 of the Constitution, it is the State government that is tasked with determining the revenue and receipts and corresponding expenditure and with presenting the Budget of the State before the Legislative Assembly. Budget management of the State is the discretion of the State government. The territory occupied by the State executive and legislature cannot be ceded to the Union executive and Parliament in the name of fiscal management. Even otherwise, Kerala’s fiscal deficit is reported to have significantly reduced to 2.44% and revenue deficit to 0.88% of the GSDP. In the Centre’s case, the fiscal deficit is estimated to be 5.8% for 2023-2024. The KIIFB was a novel idea in Kerala to fund infrastructure and development projects through extra-budgetary spending. But the State’s responsibility to fund development work



cannot come in the way of it delivering justice to pensioners and beneficiaries. If the Kerala Finance Minister is to be believed, not permitting the State to borrow will affect the State’s spending on welfare schemes. This can lead to a catastrophic

situation in the revenue-scarce State. The character of India’s federalism is moving rapidly from cooperative to one that is destructive and annihilative. The borrowing restrictions are an example of ‘annihilative federalism’ at play.

Bluesky social media app available to all! Jack Dorsey’s vision unleashed

The decentralisation-focused social media platform Bluesky envisioned by Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey is open to the public and no longer requires early invite codes, announced the company on Tuesday through a blog post.

Led by CEO Jay Graber, Bluesky allows users to customise their feeds based on different topics and is also aiming to decentralise so that users can move their accounts, data, and audience between apps on the underlying protocol. The company’s post said that the process of “federation” will begin this month with an experimental early version.

“Bluesky is building an open social network where anyone can contribute, while still providing an easy-to-use experience for users. For the past year, we used invite codes to help us manage growth while we built features like moderation tooling, custom feeds, and more. Now, we’re ready for anyone to join,” said the company in its post.

“Join more than three million people discussing news, sharing art, and just posting,” added Bluesky, along with a comic showing people leaving an unnamed social media platform filled with bots and spam.

To fight spam and bad actors in its own ecosystem, Bluesky strictly limited the number of users who could make accounts on the platform and instead distributed invite codes for early users to share with others they trusted. By comparison, Meta’s text-based app Threads recorded tens of millions of sign-ups within days of its launch last summer. For content moderation, Bluesky said it will soon release labelling services so that individuals and groups can run their own moderation services.

“For example, a fact-checking organization can run a labeling service and mark posts as “partially false,” “misleading,” or other categories. Then, users who trust this organization can subscribe to their labels. As the user scrolls through posts in the app,



any labels that the fact-checking organization publishes will be visible on the post itself,” said Bluesky in its post.

However, critics have questioned how decentralised social media platforms can effectively deal with child abuse content, illegal media, and other criminal activities online that generally require quick action and accountability from a central company authority. In addition, Bluesky is yet to ship essential features such as direct messaging (DMs).

Bluesky has claimed that it is the “last social account you’ll ever have to create”.

Why is Punjab in court over BSF's powers? | Explained

The story so far: In 2021, the Government of India increased the jurisdiction of the Border Security Force (BSF) — which chiefly focus on preventing trans-border crimes — from 15 kilometres up to 50 kilometres inside the international borders in the States of Punjab, West Bengal and Assam. In Punjab, the move triggered sharp criticism from key political parties, with the State government ultimately moving the Supreme Court, which has fixed the third week of April for hearing the lawsuit.

What is the allegation?

A three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud will hear a complaint filed by Punjab accusing the Centre of stripping the State and its police of its powers. Police and law and order is a State subject under Schedule 7, List-II Entries 1 and 2 of the Constitution. Punjab challenged the constitutional validity of the notification issued by the Centre in October 2021 extending the reach of the BSF to 50 km by invoking Section 139 of the Border Security Force Act, 1968. The provision authorises the Centre to confer powers and duties on the BSF with respect to any Central Act like the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners' Act, 1939, the Central Excises and Salt Act, 1944, the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947, the Customs Act, 1962 or the Passports Act, 1967 or of any cognizable offence punishable under any other Central Act. The court agreed to look into whether the notification amounted to an "arbitrary exercise of power" by the Centre under Section 139 and an "unconstitutional interference" into Punjab's authority.

When did the Punjab government go to the Supreme Court?

In December 2021, the Punjab government approached the Supreme Court, challenging the Centre's decision, accusing it of virtually stripping the State and its police of its powers. Earlier this week, while hearing the matter, the Supreme Court decided to examine if all border States have to be treated alike while demarcating the area of jurisdiction of the BSF. In 2021, when the Congress party was in power, it termed the decision of the Centre as a gross violation of the spirit of federalism enshrined in the Constitution. Opposing the Centre's notification on the BSF jurisdiction, which was issued on October 11, 2021, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) held a rally in Punjab's Amritsar as a mark of protest against the decision and asserted that it would not tolerate any dilution of the federal structure.

The Punjab State Assembly convened a special session in which the Centre's decision on enhancing the jurisdiction of BSF in Punjab was termed as "an expression of distrust and insult" towards the State police and the people of Punjab. A resolution was passed against the Centre's notification by the House rejecting the notification and demanding its withdrawal. The resolution read: "...The Union government should have consulted

the State government before taking such a major decision. The law and order situation in Punjab is totally under control and there is no need to extend the jurisdiction of [the] BSF. This is a gross violation of the spirit of federalism enshrined in the Constitution of India. Extending the jurisdiction of BSF is also symbolic of petty politics..."

How has Punjab challenged the notification?

Through the lawsuit filed under Article 131 of the Constitution of India, Punjab has challenged the notification issued by the Union of India, through the Ministry of Home Affairs under sub-section (1) of Section 139 of the BSF. Punjab has submitted that the effect and the consequence of the notification amount to encroachment upon the powers of the State of Punjab by the Centre in as much as more than 80% area of the border districts. All major towns and cities including all the district headquarters of these border districts of Punjab fall within the 50 km demarcation area from the India-Pakistan International Border. The government contends that considering that more than 80% area of the major border area towns of Punjab are covered in the extended belt of 50 kms, the notification is ultra vires of the Constitution and encroaches upon Punjab's plenary authority to legislate on the issue which relates to or are necessary for the maintenance of public order and internal peace. Also, it holds that the notification encroaches upon the power of the State as the police and law and order is a State subject. Punjab has also pointed out that power under Section 139 of the BSF Act, 1968 cannot be read in isolation to give unilateral power to the Central government to grant extra jurisdiction of 50 kms to the BSF.

What are Punjab's concerns?

The concerns of Punjab are distinguishable from the concerns of other States and Union Territories, as per the lawsuit. The geography of Punjab is such that the area which has been included in the extended jurisdiction of the BSF is densely populated. The State argues that this is not the case in Gujarat, where most of the area falls in the wastelands of Kutch and saline marshes; similarly, the extended jurisdiction in Rajasthan is desert land, permitting only sparse vegetation, and the density of population is low too. In the case of Punjab, the 50-km area is highly fertile, heavily populated and covers most of the physical areas forming part of the border districts of Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Ferozepur, Fazilka etc. Moreover, geographically, it points out that while Punjab is a small State, it has a very potent history and therefore, its case and concerns are different, and that no reason can justify the extension of jurisdiction to a range of 50 kms. It will inconvenience people, including farmers who have to cross barbed wire fencing to cultivate their land along the border, the State has pointed out.

What issues has the Supreme Court raised?



The Supreme Court, which has fixed the third week of April for hearing the lawsuit, has raised several issues, including whether the impugned notification constitutes an arbitrary exercise of power by the Central government and whether the increase of the jurisdiction is beyond the "local limits of areas adjoining the borders of India" under Section 139(1) of the BSF Act, 1968. Also, the court would look into whether all States have to be treated alike to determine the "local limits of areas adjoining the borders of India", and what are the factors which have to be taken into account in determining the meaning of the phrase "local limits of such area adjoining the borders of India" under Section 139(1) of the BSF Act, 1968. Besides, it would ex-

plore whether the impugned notification amounts to an unconstitutional interference in the legislative domain of the State. Punjab challenged the constitutional validity of the notification issued by the Centre in October 2021 extending the reach of the BSF to 50 km by invoking Section 139 of the Border Security Force Act, 1968. In December 2021, the Punjab government approached the Supreme Court, challenging the Centre's decision, accusing it of virtually stripping the State and its police of its powers. E Through the lawsuit filed under Article 131 of the Constitution of India, Punjab has challenged the notification issued by the Union of India, through the Ministry of Home Affairs under sub-section (1) of Section 139 of the BSF.

Apple addresses zero-day bug with vision OS 1.0.2 update for Vision Pro

San Francisco: Apple has released visionOS 1.0.2, the software that runs on the Vision Pro, which includes a fix for a vulnerability in WebKit, the browser engine that powers Safari and other web applications.

According to the company, the bug, if exploited, allowed malicious code to run on an affected device. The tech giant released its first security patch for Vision Pro headset to fix a vulnerability that "may have been exploited" by hackers in the wild after reporters published their first hands-on review of Vision Pro, reports TechCrunch.

"Processing maliciously crafted web content may lead to arbitrary code execution. Apple is aware of a report that this issue may have been exploited," Apple wrote on its support page.

Last week, Apple patched the same vulnerability when it released iOS 17.3, which fixed WebKit-based vulnerabilities on iPhones, iPads, Macs, and Apple TV, the report noted.



Meanwhile, Apple has said that using its mixed reality (MR) headset Vision Pro with certain medical conditions might increase the "risk of injury or discomfort".

The tech giant advises to consult with a medical provider before using Apple Vision Pro. Apple Vision Pro will be available starting at \$3,499 with 256GB of storage.

The headset will be available at all US Apple Store locations and the US Apple Store online, the company said.

What is needed from a Governor is reticence

The Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, has recently been in the news for the wrong reason. Instead of confining himself to his role which requires that Governors steer clear of controversies, especially those unconnected with their constitutional duties, Mr. Ravi has waded into the minefield of interpretation of historical events which led to India's Independence. Even a Governor with a background of historical studies should avoid this. But Mr. Ravi was a student of physics who joined the Indian Police Service and spent long years in the Intelligence Bureau (IB). He has obviously felt that he had the expertise to publicly express his opinions on an important period of Indian history. There has been no indication from Mr. Ravi that he has made a detailed study of India's national movement which, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, aimed at the comprehensive transformation of a feudal, largely obscurantist and hierarchical society along with the achievement of freedom from British colonialism. All the great leaders of the national movement played their part in this noble enterprise. In any event, it is intrinsically wrong for any constitutional authority to play up the role of some and denigrate that of others. The Governor's view

Mr. Ravi has been reported as saying that the Quit India movement made little impact on the British decision to leave India. Instead, it was insecurity felt by the British at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose forming the Azad Hind Government and its army (INA) and in 1946 by the Naval Mutiny and the Air Force Rebellion. Apparently, Mr. Ravi formed this view from his reading of IB files of the relevant period. He has also cited a conversation between British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and an acting Governor of Bengal in which Mr. Attlee said that the impact of 'non-cooperation' was minimal but that the British left because they felt 'insecure' after the 'Naval Revolt and the Air Force Rebellion'. A clarification

Under criticism for his assertions and views, Mr. Ravi clarified that he had the 'highest respect' for Mahatma Gandhi. At the same time, he reiterated his views on the departure of the British from India. There is no doubt that the loyalty of Indian soldiers in the British Indian armed forces was a principal pillar of their rule in India. If not for the Indian soldiers who served in the armies of the East India Company, the British could not have conquered India. Most historians of the national movement also acknowledge that the INA and the naval mutiny shook British confidence in the loyalty of the Indian members of their army in India. And, obviously, after the Second World War, circumstances created by the national movement, Britain's economic weakening and the international situation simply did not permit them to even think of undertaking armed action to retain their rule in India.

Hence, Mr. Ravi was right in praising Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's great contribution in achieving Independence. This is almost universally acknowledged. Despite the great ideological differences in leaders of the freedom movement none of them ever denigrated Netaji or the INA. Had that been so, would it have been possible for so many of the lawyers among them to come together to defend the three officers — Prem Kumar Sehgal, Gurbaksh Singh

Dhillon and Shah Nawaz Khan — at their court martial at the Red Fort in 1945-46? The great lawyer, Bhulabhai Desai, led the defence which included Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Kailas Nath Katju. This writer would be forgiven for making a personal reference. As Katju's grandson and Sapru's great-grandson, he knows full well the enormous admiration that Netaji evoked in them. It would not be out of place to quote from Katju's unpublished biography of the impact of the INA trial. He writes that because of them "The excitement in the country was intense and indescribable". He goes on to note, "I am firmly of the opinion that just as the murders in Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 laid the foundation stone of our national struggle, similarly the Indian National Army trials were the definite cause of the withdrawal of the British rule in India in August 1947. The British discovered for themselves that it was impossible for them to continue..." The last word

It is obvious that Mr. Ravi feels that Netaji was not given due recognition for



his contribution to the country's Independence by the Congress party because of Jawaharlal Nehru and his successors, and that this lapse has now been corrected. It is Mr. Ravi's right to feel so. What is not open to him while holding the office of Gov-

ernor is to make his views public. Governors are also not expected to make comparisons, however indirectly, of the impact of the actions of different leaders of the national movement. What is needed from Governors is reticence. As a former civil servant, Mr. Ravi should certainly know this.

DDA demolishes mosque in Mehrauli, cites drive against encroachments



The religious structure was believed to have been constructed over 500 years ago; cleric says no prior notice served; officials say Delhi government's Religious Committee consulted before action

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Tuesday carried out an "unannounced" demolition of a mosque in Mehrauli believed to have been constructed over 500 years ago, with officials citing the action as part of the agency's drive against encroachments. Mosque cleric Md. Zakir Hussain alleged that the authorities did not serve prior notice and that they were told to vacate the mosque as early as 5.30 a.m. by a group of officials. A madrasa was also being run from the mosque premises, where 15 of the 22 students of the theo-

logical school were staying.

Seminary tutor Md. Javed alleged, "They snatched our phones and asked us to step aside without even letting us pick up any of our belongings." He also alleged that they were not even allowed to collect the children's books or the little money they had saved for them. The children were shifted to a nearby madrasa, he said. Commenting on the action, a senior DDA official said the demolition was carried out following the Ridge Management Board's decision to remove all kinds of

encroachment around Sanjay Van, a reserved forest in the southern part of the Ridge, an extension of the Aravali forest range in the national capital. The spot on the mosque's premises where the graves of Sufi saints are located.

The Akhundji Mosque, which was being maintained by the Waqf Board, was situated at a spot between Sanjay Van and the Mehrauli Eidgah. Panel looked into issue. The DDA official said a panel, including the District Magistrate (South Delhi), DCP (South), and DDA's Director of Horticulture (North West), was formed to look into the issue of illegal structures. "The panel found various illegal structures, including religious places, in the area. It suggested that all such structures be removed," said the official.

He added that the decision was taken following consultation with the Delhi government's Religious Committee on Saturday. The demolition was carried out by the DDA's Horticulture Department, he said. The mosque cleric said the officials immediately loaded the rubble on trucks and took it away. Heritage walker Asif Khan Dehlvi said the architecture and inner walls of the religious structure suggested that it was constructed during the Delhi Sultanate period, which lasted from 1206 to 1526 AD. Graves of Sufi saints

According to Mr. Dehlvi, the premises housed the graves of many Sufi saints, including that of Sheikh Jalaluddin. It has been a permanent part of the lives of those living nearby, he said. Usama, an architect who used to visit the mosque frequently, also said that the mosque was integral to the lives of the Muslim community in the area for a long time. They have been left dejected, he added.

U.S. says it disrupted a China cyber threat, but warns hackers could still wreak havoc for Americans

U.S. officials said Wednesday they disrupted a state-backed Chinese effort to plant malware that could be used to damage civilian infrastructure, as the head of the FBI warned that Beijing is positioning itself to disrupt the daily lives of Americans if the United States and China ever go to war. The operation, announced just before FBI Director Chris Wray addressed House lawmakers, disrupted a botnet of hundreds of U.S.-based small office and home routers owned by private citizens and companies that had been hijacked by the Chinese hackers to cover their tracks as they sowed the malware. Their ultimate targets included water treatment plants, the electrical grid and transportation systems across the United States. Speaking before the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, Mr. Wray said there's been far too little public focus on a cyber threat that affects "every American." "China's hackers are positioning on American infrastructure in preparation to wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities, if or when China decides the time has come to strike," Mr. Wray said. Jen Easterly, the director of the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, voiced a similar sentiment at the hearing.

"This is a world where a major crisis halfway across the planet could well endanger the lives of Americans here at home through the disruption of our pipelines, the severing of our telecommunications, the pollution of our water facilities, the crippling of our transportation modes — all to ensure that they can incite societal panic and chaos and to deter our ability" to marshal a sufficient response, she said. The comments align with assessments from outside cybersecurity firms including Microsoft, which said in May that state-backed Chinese hackers had been targeting U.S. critical infrastructure and could be laying the technical groundwork for the potential disruption of critical communications between the U.S. and Asia during future crises.

At least a portion of that operation, attributed to a group of hackers known as Volt Typhoon, has now been disrupted after FBI and Justice Department officials obtained search-and-seizure orders in Houston federal court in December. U.S. officials did not characterize the disruption's impact, and court documents unsealed Wednesday say the disrupted botnet was just "one form of infrastructure used by Volt Typhoon to obfuscate their activity." The hackers have infiltrated targets through multiple avenues, including cloud and internet providers, disguising themselves as normal traffic. The U.S. has in the past few years become more aggressive in trying to disrupt and dismantle both criminal and state-backed cyber operations, with Mr. Wray warning Wednesday that Beijing-backed hackers aim to pilfer business secrets to advance the Chinese economy and steal personal information for foreign influence campaigns. "They are doing all those things. They all feed up ultimately into their goal to supplant the U.S. as the world's greatest superpower," he

said. Complicating the threat is that state-backed hackers, especially Chinese and Russian, are good at adapting and finding new intrusion methods and avenues.

U.S. officials have long been concerned about such hackers hiding in U.S.-based infrastructure, and the end-of-life Cisco and NetGear routers exploited by Volt Typhoon were easy prey because they were no longer supported by their manufacturers with security updates. Because of the urgency, law enforcement officials said, U.S. cyber operators deleted the malware in those routers without notifying their owners directly — and added code to prevent re-infection. A Justice Department official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the government said officials were determined to disrupt the Volt Typhoon operation as soon as possible because the hackers were using the botnet as a stepping stone to hide in U.S. internet traffic while burrowing into the networks of critical infrastructure, ready to maliciously exploit that access at a time of their choosing. "The truth is that Chinese cyber actors have taken advantage of very basic flaws in our technology," Ms. Easterly said. "We've made it easy on them." Cybersecurity veteran Amit Yoran, the CEO of Tenable, called Mr. Wray's warning "an urgent call to action. Continuing to turn a blind eye to the risk sitting inside our critical infrastructure is the definition of negligence." Cybersecurity experts say major software providers too often sacrifice security for convenience, and that's biting back. On the eve of a June visit to China by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, state-backed Chinese hackers



foiled Microsoft cloud-based security in hacking the email of officials at multiple U.S. agencies that deal with China. On Wednesday, U.S. officials said allies were also affected by Volt Typhoon's critical infrastructure hacking but, asked by reporters, would not discuss any countermeasures they might be taking.

China has repeatedly denounced the U.S. government's hacking allegations as baseless. Beijing has accused the U.S. of "almost daily" and "huge amounts of intrusions against Chinese government, with Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, saying last year that "China is the biggest victim of cyber attacks." But Gen. Paul Nakasone, the outgoing commander of U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency, said "responsible cyber actors" do not tar-

get civilian infrastructure. "There's no reason for them to be in our water," Nakasone said. "There's no reason for them to be in our power." On Tuesday, testifying before the same committee, Leon Panetta, who served as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency and the defense secretary in the Obama administration, said he believed that the Chinese agents had "planted malware within our own computer networks" and warned that the Chinese government would use artificial intelligence to spread disinformation. The committee, chaired by Republican Rep. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, was established last year with a mandate of countering China, kicking off with a prime-time hearing. The Chinese government has lashed out at the committee, demanding that its members "discard their ideological bias and zero-sum Cold War mentality."

TikTok owner ByteDance's chief warns against mediocrity as AI brings disruption



ByteDance CEO Liang Rubo warned employees at a company-wide meeting on Tuesday that the TikTok owner risks becoming complacent and slipping into mediocrity as it faces challenges from newer startups. Liang said the Beijing-based

company's rapid expansion in recent years had made it less efficient, and it had not paid enough attention to groundbreaking artificial intelligence technology, according to a ByteDance post about the meeting on social media.

"Our company is not sensitive enough (to new technologies)," Liang said. "For example, discussions about GPT did not appear in our half-year tech review until 2023, although GPT-1 was already released in 2018." GPT refers to a machine learning technique that has given OpenAI's ChatGPT chatbot human-like accuracy.

ByteDance is often seen as the world's leading company on algorithms because its flagship apps such as TikTok, Douyin and Toutiao are powered by commanding recommendation engines. But the company, nicknamed "App Factory" due to its aggressive iteration of mobile applications, has been slow to the AI race that is disrupting the technology sector. Other Chinese tech tycoons ranging from JD.com founder Richard Liu to Tencent Chairman Pony Ma are also now calling on their companies to be more efficient and refrain from becoming complacent. Highlighting ByteDance' late start on AI foundation models, Liang said the companies with better models created them between 2018 and 2021.