

Telangana's finances in freefall under Congress rule; revenues plummet, debts balloon, borrowing turns reckless

Hyderabad: Telangana's financial condition under the Congress government has taken a sharp downturn, with plummeting revenues, ballooning debts and reckless borrowing creating severe economic imbalance. The State's revenue receipts stand at Rs 1,23,815 crore, a mere 55.96 per cent of the Budget estimates and a sharp decline from 63.20 per cent recorded during the same period last year. This alarming shortfall indicates the Congress government's inability to generate funds, even as public expenditure continues unchecked. Official data for the 2024-25 financial year up to January this year paints a bleak picture, exposing the government's failure to manage resources effectively. The State, which was ranked second in State Own Tax Revenue (SOTR) collections in the country under the BRS regime, is now struggling to reach its targets for the current fiscal. With less than two months for the end of the current financial year, the shortfall is evident across multiple sectors. Stamps and registration revenue has collapsed to 31.94 per cent of the targeted Rs 18,228.82 crore, compared to 63.24 per cent last year, indicating a slowdown in real estate transactions. The Goods and Service Tax (GST) collections were pegged at Rs 42,657.9 crore, i.e. 72.8 per cent against a target of Rs 58,594.91 crore. Telangana's finances in freefall under Congress rule; revenues plummet, debts balloon, borrowing turns reckless. Similarly, excise revenue (liquor sales) has plunged to 60.84 per cent, a steep fall from last year's 90.34 per cent, despite a hike in liquor prices. Serious concerns are being raised about the government's poor enforcement and policy effectiveness. Even more concerning is the non-tax revenue, which has plummeted to a shocking 16.66 per cent, down from 90.20 per cent last year, exposing the administration's failure to maximise income from State resources.

To compensate for this revenue shortfall, the Congress government has resorted to reckless borrowing, pushing Telangana into dangerous fiscal territory. The State has already borrowed Rs 58,586 crore against the Rs 49,225-crore market borrowing limit, exceeding the budgeted amount by 118.94 per cent, a significant jump from last year's 106.85 per cent. Capital receipts, primarily driven by borrowings, now stand at a staggering Rs 58,622 crore, surpassing the budgeted Rs 52,815 crore, showing an overdependence on debt to fund even routine expenses. This has led to a drastic increase in interest payments, which have surged to 124.40 per cent of the budgeted amount, up from 85.25 per cent last year. The consequence of this financial mismanagement is a record-high deficit, with the revenue deficit widening to Rs 26,050 crore, a catastrophic fall from the Rs 297-crore surplus projected in the Budget. While the revenue deficit indicates the difference between the revenue receipts and revenue expenditure, experts stated that the huge gap indicates the government's utter failure to either estimate the revenue deficit or mop up adequate revenue

to meet the expenses. The fiscal deficit has ballooned to Rs 58,586 crore (118.94 per cent of the target), up from last year's 72.87 per cent, exposing the unsustainable economic policies of the Congress government. Meanwhile, the primary deficit has reached Rs 36,530 crore (115.88 per cent of target), compared to 64.62 per cent last year, signaling the worsening fiscal situation. Despite these financial challenges, the government's expenditure remains unchecked, with total spending reaching Rs 1,78,947 crore (70.33 per cent of the Budget), up from last year's 69.07 per cent, even as revenues shrink. Alarming, the capital expenditure remained marginally sluggish at Rs 28,311.89 crore against annual target of Rs 32,745.80, which is 86.46 per cent, compared to last year's 90.8 per cent. With plummeting revenues, rising debt, interest payments spiraling out of control and an unchecked fiscal deficit, Telangana's financial health is on a dangerous decline. The Congress government's inability to control borrowing, boost revenue



or manage spending responsibly is pushing the State towards a deep financial crisis, raising concerns over future development, infrastructure, and welfare programmes.

Engineering tuition fee set to skyrocket as private colleges in Telangana propose steep hikes



Hyderabad: Several top private engineering colleges in the State have proposed steep fee hikes, which could cost aspiring engineers their arm and a leg. The management submitted proposals to the Telangana Admission and Fee Regulatory Committee (TAFRC) seeking fee hikes ranging between 50 per cent and 100 per cent for the next three-year block period commencing academic year 2025-26. The CBIT has put forward to hike its fee from Rs 1.65 lakh to Rs 2.94 lakh per annum — nearly double the existing tuition fee. This is the highest fee that has been proposed by a private engineering college in the State. Another institution, VNR VJIEET, proposed a hike from Rs 1.35 lakh to Rs 2.84 lakh per annum, which is an over 100 per cent surge.

Going by the proposals of the top 15

private engineering colleges, five colleges sought more than Rs 2 lakh as tuition fee and the remaining institutions proposed a fee more than Rs 1.50 lakh per annum. Overall, around 60 colleges sought a fee between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 2 lakh. Currently, 35 colleges have a fee of Rs 1 lakh and above. The engineering colleges submitted these proposals in response to a notification issued by the TAFRC, which revises fee of professional colleges once in three years with the last such revision being done in 2022-23.

According to sources, the colleges are unlikely to get the hike they sought. "They might get an increase of 5-10 per cent. The personal hearings for fee fixation are scheduled from February 25 and schedule will be issued on Friday," sources said. This time, a total of 157 colleges applied as against 176

in the block period 2022-25. Institutions that did not apply or failed to submit required documents and statements are barred from collecting any fee. Such colleges are not allowed to admit students for the forthcoming academic year. The fee is revised based on colleges' final audited statements of income and expenditure, and balance sheets and developmental needs for the immediately preceding years, particulars of expenditure incurred on salaries and infrastructure among others.

Low pupil-teacher ratio rings the alarm bell in Telangana schools

Hyderabad: The low pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is ringing the alarm bell in schools across Telangana. As per the norms of the Right to Education 2009 Act, the PTR should be 30:1 at primary level and 35:1 at the upper primary level, the current ratio reflects a different situation. As per the recent Telangana Statistical Abstract released by the Telangana Development Planning Society, Planning Department, the PTR at the primary level is 21:1, while it is 16:1 at the upper primary level. As for high schools, the PTR is 22:1 as against the norm of 30:1. At the primary level, 22 districts have a PTR of less than or equal to the State average, while same is the situation for upper primary level in 21 districts and 23 districts at the high school level.

The first Intertidal Bioblitz uncovers marine wonders in India's coasts

The intertidal pools of Rushikonda in Visakhapatnam was brimming with life that morning as the East Coast Conservation Team waded through the shallow waters, scanning the rocky crevices for marine wonders. Amid the sway of nudibranchs and sea grapes, Kusum Gorentla, an ECCT volunteer, spotted a delicate, ribbon-like object floating by. Its gentle undulations resembled the feathery arms of a crinoid, a feather star species often found clinging to submerged rocks. However, as they examined it closely, they realised it was something far more intriguing — a flatworm. Further identification confirmed it as *Pseudoceros bifascia*, marking the first-ever record of this species from mainland India, expanding its known range and adding a new chapter to the marine biodiversity of the country's eastern coastline. Discovered only last year in Lakshadweep, this species' presence along the Andhra Pradesh coast highlights the rich, yet largely undocumented, marine biodiversity of the region. This unexpected discovery was among the key findings of the recently-concluded Intertidal Bioblitz, a nationwide effort to document marine life across India's coastal regions. The event, hosted jointly by the Coastal Conservation Foundation and East Coast Conservation Team, brought together researchers, citizen scientists, and conservationists from Mumbai, Andaman, Goa and Visakhapatnam, shedding light on the vibrant but often overlooked intertidal ecosystems. This first nationwide initiative on intertidal species was done over a 10-day period and clocked in more than 3,600 observations and 514 species in iNaturalist app, a global science citizen tool. "The observations from Visakhapatnam have been very encouraging. In fact, there were 1,533 observations of 227 species done from Visakhapatnam alone. This will give a big boost to the marine life documentation of the region. The discovery of *Pseudoceros bifascia* at Rushikonda not only underscores the need for further exploration but it also reaffirms how much of India's marine biodiversity is still waiting to be uncovered," says Sri Chakra Pranav of ECCT. During the bioblitz, two undescribed species and more than 10 first records in Visakhapatnam and one first record in mainland India were reported. As many as 57 people contributed in the Intertidal Bioblitz from Visakhapatnam with a majority of observations done by Chandrashekhar Durgasi, Deepu Visweswar, Pranav, Kusum and Samuel Prakash from Sea Trust.

Apart from the first record of *Pseudoceros bifascia* from mainland India, one more undescribed flatworm species was found, which resembled an electric flatworm. Deepu, a researcher in Andhra University and a member of ECCT, is focussing on these species. "Night tidepooling sessions revealed a whole lot of biodiversity with sightings of butterfly fish, surgeon fish, three types of porcupine fish and a lot more beauties. School children who attended the walks witnessed a laced moray eel. When we photographed it, a juvenile angel fish was hiding behind it as well!" says Deepu. Participants at the Intertidal Bioblitz in Mumbai.

Mumbai suburban recorded 80 species and while metropolitan led by Shaunak Modi of Coastal Conservation Foundation, recorded 120 species during the bioblitz. Some



of the species observed include old-woman octopus, orange-striped hermit crab, mangrove leaf slug, tiger moon snail and highfin moray. Meanwhile, the intertidal zones of the Andaman islands uncovered more than 70 species over the course of three intertidal walks in different locations. Some of the key findings included bubble snails, flatworms, and sea slugs. Sea cucumbers, moray eels, an octopus and even a juvenile stingray emerged from the shadows, showcasing the incredible diversity of the Andaman intertidal. Notes from the Andamans The most common species, such as yellow sponges, sea cucumbers, sand gobies, corals, and sea grasses, form the backbone of the ecosystem, providing a glimpse into the intricate relationships that govern this underwater world. The coral-dominated landscape, interspersed by sea grass patches and rocky pools, stands in stark contrast to the sponge and hydroid-dominated coastlines of Maharashtra and Goa. The team was led by Aditya Gadkari, Prajakta Kuwalekar, Sagar Nambiar, Swayanka Sahoo, Harshal Patil, from the group Marine Life of Andamans. The intertidal zone at the natural bridge, located on the Southwest of Neil Island, is unique in that it draws a lot of tourists during the low tide where tidepools thrive with life. The fourth global coral bleaching event in 2024 had a severe impact on this region of the Andaman islands. "A lot of soft coral was affected in this area but now we are mapping the recovery of the sight through bioblitz," says Prajakta, a scuba diver. Highlighting some of signs of habitat destruction, Prajakta says: "The crowds that come to the natural bridge have resulted in degradation of the habitat with accidental trampling of marine life, some intentionally offering the species food which their systems are not accustomed to. Another interesting side-effect is that marine life such as mantis shrimp, crabs, eels and other fish in pools located closest to the bridge have become considerably bolder than elsewhere on the island." "One of the interesting observations from Andaman islands includes the absence of sandy bed species like pearly sea

anemone, which are now replaced by species like carpet sea anemone along the tidepools," says Sagar Nambiar, a zoologist and scuba dive instructor in the Andaman islands. As the inaugural intertidal bioblitz of India comes to a close, it marks the begin-

ning of an exciting annual tradition, where scientists, researchers, and enthusiasts converge to unravel the secrets of India's diverse coastlines, fostering a deeper appreciation and conservation of India's marine biodiversity, one tide at a time.

Life on Earth has been painting its own canvas for billions of years

Hyderabad: In the time unknown, the Earth was just a world of muted browns and greens. Gradually, over a period of millions of years, the planet exploded with vivid colours of flowers and feathers. Of course evolution is the primary reason. But how and why did this explosion of colour happen?

According to studies, the journey towards a colourful world began with the evolution of vision, which initially developed to distinguish light from dark over 600 million years ago. This ability probably arose in early organisms, like single-celled bacteria, enabling them to detect changes in their environment, such as the direction of sunlight. Over time, more sophisticated visual systems evolved and allowed organisms to perceive a broader spectrum of light. For example, trichromatic vision — the ability to detect three distinct wavelengths such as red, green and blue — originated approximately 500-550 million years ago.

This coincided with the "Cambrian explosion" (about 541 million years ago), which marked a rapid diversification of life, including the development of advanced sensory systems like vision. The first animals with trichromatic vision were arthropods (a group of invertebrates that includes insects, spiders and crustaceans). Trichromatic vision emerged 420-500 million years ago in vertebrates. This adaptation helped ancient animals to navigate their environments and detect predators or prey in ways that mono-

chromatic vision could not. Trilobites had compound eyes. This means eyes with multiple small lenses, each capturing a fraction of the visual field, which combine to form a mosaic image. These eyes could detect multiple wavelengths, providing an evolutionary advantage in dim marine environments by enhancing the animal's visibility and motion detection. The first burst of conspicuous colour came from plants. Early plants began producing colourful fruits and flowers, such as red, yellow, orange, blue and purple, to attract animals to help plants with seed dispersal and pollination.

The colourful fruits, which appeared roughly 300-377 million years ago, co-evolved with seed-dispersing animals, such as early relatives of mammals. Flowers and their pollinators emerged later, around 140-250 million years ago. These innovations marked a turning point in Earth's palette. The rise of flowering plants (angiosperms) in the Cretaceous period, over 100 million years ago, brought an explosion of colour, as flowers evolved brighter and more vibrant hues than seeds to attract pollinators like bees, butterflies and birds. Conspicuous colouration in animals emerged less than 140 million years ago. Before, animals were mostly muted browns and greys. This timeline suggests that colour evolution was not inevitable, but was shaped by ecological and evolutionary factors, which could have led to different outcomes under different circumstances.

Shri Challa Sreenivasulu Setty, Chairman, State Bank of India, today virtually inaugurated Ten new branches in the State of Telangana (Hyderabad Circle) in the presence of Chief General Manager Shri Rajesh Kumar. The branches are 1. Alampur x road 2. Chinnambavi 3. Raghavendra colony (Kondapur) 4. Neopolis 5. Kistareddypet (Patancheru) 6. Khajaguda 7. Osman nagar 8. Kangti (Narayankhed) 9. Suchitra Circle (Quthbullapur) 10. Nandipet. Five of these new branches are in Rural centres and Five are in Urban center. With the addition of these new branches the total number of branches in the state is 1206. This strategic expansion aims to enhance SBI's presence and service delivery in key regions. This initiative is part of SBI's commitment to ensure easy access to banking in unbanked areas and to cater to growing banking needs of the people in developing urban centres.

The Chairman, while addressing on this occasion said that customer is the centre of our universe and advised the staff to focus on four foundational principles - Customer-centricity, Business Growth, Sustainable Growth, Employee-centricity. Shri Setty highlighted SBI's commitment to reach more customers and providing top-notch banking services. He said that these new branches are a testament to SBI's dedication to expanding its footprint and ensuring that its

services are accessible to a wide range of customers. He said that "If this is India's decade, it is SBI's decade too" which underscores the symbiotic relationship between India's growth and SBI's evolution. As India rises on the global stage, SBI's role as a financial powerhouse, innovator, and enabler of growth will be more critical than ever. The next decade could indeed be a transformative period for both India and SBI, with the bank playing a central role in shaping the country's economic future. To achieve this, all the employees have to focus on ensuring to remain as the best bank, as well as the most valuable bank. Shri Setty said that, as we look ahead, three pillars will guide us toward becoming the Best Bank in India by embracing Consistency as the Key, Productivity through Technology adoption & with Resilience being the Anchor. Shri Setty also said that SBI continues to play an important role in boosting the economy of the country and has been ranked 4th in the list of "most trusted banks Globally", "The Best Bank of India for 2024" by Global Finance Magazine, adjudged as HR Leader of the year amongst large scale organizations, Excellence in Business Continuity for Planning and Management at the ET Human Capital Awards. These laurels bring more responsibility on us, as we strive to achieve our aspirational goal to be among the top 10 Banks globally.



Celebrate superstars Sivakarthikeyan and Nani's birthday with their best hits on Tata Play Binge



Hyderabad :As Sivakarthikeyan and Nani celebrate their birthdays, it's the perfect time to applaud their incredible journeys in cinema. Both actors have carved unique paths, winning hearts with their versatility, effortless charm, and compelling character choices. From feel-good entertainers to intense dramas, their filmography reflects an impressive growth, proving their mettle time and again. With their ever-evolving graph, they continue to be among the most beloved stars in South Indian cinema. And what better way to celebrate this landmark birthday

than with their best OTT performances? Catch Sivakarthikeyan and Nani's most loved movies on Tata Play Binge!

Jersey (Telugu)

Nani's Jersey is an emotional sports drama that follows the journey of Arjun, a talented but failed cricketer who makes an inspiring comeback in his late 30s for his son. Starring Nani in a career-defining role alongside Shraddha Srinath, the film beautifully blends sports and emotion. Nani's heartfelt performance, especially in the father-son moments, won him immense praise, earn-

ing him the Filmfare Award for Best Actor (Telugu). With soulful tracks like Adhento Gaani Vunnapaatuga becoming fan favorites, Jersey remains one of Telugu cinema's most cherished films. It is available on Zee5 and Tata Play Binge

Prince (Tamil, Telugu)

Sivakarthikeyan's Prince is a light-hearted romantic comedy that follows Anbu, a Tamil teacher who falls in love with a British woman, played by Maria Ryaboshapka, leading to cultural clashes and hilarious situations. Directed by Anudeep KV, the film

blends humor with a social message, complemented by Sivakarthikeyan's effortless charm and comic timing. Its peppy soundtrack, especially the viral hit Jessica, became a crowd favorite. Prince further showcased Sivakarthikeyan's knack for entertaining roles and his ability to carry a film with his charisma. It is available on JioHotstar and Tata Play Binge

Hero (Telugu)

Directed by P.S. Mithran, Hero is a superhero action thriller where Sivakarthikeyan plays Shakthi, a man who rises against a corrupt education system to inspire students to think beyond societal constraints. With powerful performances by Abhay Deol, Arjun, and Kalyani Priyadarshan, the film struck a chord with audiences. Sivakarthikeyan's portrayal of an underdog-turned-vigilante was widely appreciated, and songs like Malto Kithapule became popular. Watch this on Aha and Tata Play Binge

Nani's Gang Leader (Telugu)

Nani's Gang Leader is a fun-filled revenge drama directed by Vikram K Kumar, where Nani plays Pencil, a small-time crime novelist who unexpectedly becomes the leader of a group of women seeking justice. With a unique mix of comedy, emotions, and thriller elements, the film features a strong supporting cast, including Priyanka Arul Mohan, Lakshmi, Saranya Ponvannan, and Karthikeya. Nani's charm and comic timing made the film an engaging watch, while Anirudh Ravichander's music, especially the hit song Ra Ra, added to its appeal. Watch this on Amazon Prime Video and Tata Play Binge

The Two day Hackathon concludes in grandeur.

Hyderabad 22-02-2025: The much-anticipated two-day hackathon, CODEVERSE-2025, commenced today at **JB Institute of Engineering and Technology (JB IET)**, bringing together over 250 participants from various colleges for an exciting display of innovation and technical prowess.

During these Two days students have worked on the problems in the domains of Agriculture, Health Care, AI Technologies and Cyber security, the students developed innovative solutions and apps. They are evaluated by the experts from software Industry, Prizes and Participation certificates are distributed to the winners. Sri JV Krishna Rao Secretary, and Principal Dr PC Krishnamachary appreciated the students for their best efforts to develop new innovations. All the students expressed their happiness to be part of this event.



Vizag, a historic hub for cricket, nurturing future stars

Ask any cricket lover in Vizag about his favourite cricket memory, and nine out of 10 would say former Indian cricket team captain M.S. Dhoni's famous knock of 148 against Pakistan in 2005. Since then, Vizagites proudly owned Dhoni as their local boy and the scenic Dr. YSR ACA VDCA Stadium as one of his most treasured grounds. The match introduced Dhoni to the cricket world and what he can do in team India. When it is about cricket in Vizag, former Director of Centre for Policy Studies and ex-commentator A. Prasanna Kumar recalls the journey of Colonel C.K. Nayudu, who played a pivotal role in bringing cricket to Andhra.

C.K. Nayudu was India's first Test captain when India played against England at Lord's in 1932. Twenty-one years later, Nayudu came to Guntur and founded the Andhra Cricket Association. He also led the Andhra Cricket team to its first Ranji trophy in 1953-54. Mr. Prasanna Kumar remembers the formation of the Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association (VDCA) in 1962 by the former Superintendent of Police, late C.G. Saldanha. He was assisted by Secretary A. Radhakrishna, and got the then Governor of Andhra Pradesh, General Srinagesh. The International Cricket

It all began with Sir Vivian Richards leading West Indies XI in a three-day match against Board President's XI in the 'first international match' played in Vizag, in 1987, at the Indira Priyadarshini Municipal Corporation Stadium, which is also called Municipal Stadium at One Town, he says. "Cricket lovers of the city and the neighbouring areas had the pleasure of watching Viv Richards in action though he scored only 6 runs and took a wicket as the WI overpowered the home side in less than three years,"

he recalls. The first One Day International match was played in December 1988, when India clashed with New Zealand. It was Dilip Vengsarkar who led India to victory.

Vizag also has a history of Sachin Tendulkar making his debut as captain against an international side when he led the Rest of India against Mike Atherton's England XI in February 1993. Sachin, then only 19, and Sanjay Manjrekar delighted the home crowd with their stroke play. The coastal city hosted its second ODI between India and West Indies in 1994. The third ODI was a moment to celebrate as Vizag got an opportunity to host a World Cup match between Australia and Kenya on February 23, 1996. This was the only WC match played in the coastal city across all formats to date. It was termed as a historic occasion, as three continents came together for a cricket match. In 1998, Vizag also hosted a three-day match between the Board President's XI led by Rahul Dravid and Australia. The fifth ODI was held in April 2001 between Australia and India.

"We used to rely on newspapers, radio, and TV for the announcements of matches. There was no social media, and it was a completely different world. Getting tickets for an International cricket match was considered a 'Mission impossible' task. Still, my father used his contacts with Visakhapatnam Port Trust (VPT), now Visakhapatnam Port Authority (VPA), to get me a ticket for ODI between India and Australia," K. Jagadeeswara Naidu, a bank employee from city, recalls. He was 25 then. "All roads led to One Town. There was huge traffic, and to avoid it, we had to walk from Jagadamba Junction. The atmosphere was electric in the stadium. The security used to

allow charts and flexies on which we had expressed love for Sachin. There were a number of fans for Shane Warne and Ricky Ponting, too. Australia outplayed us, with Mathew Hayden and Ricky Ponting scoring tons. However, Sachin's knock of 62 in 38 balls has enthralled us. Watching him smash McGrath and other Aussies bowlers, spectators in the stadium felt that he would replicate 1998's Sharjah's innings," he recalls. Football dominance

While cricket was gradually gaining attention in the North Andhra districts, there was a large section of people turning out to watch football matches. A number of youth, sports enthusiasts used to express interest over football. Former national football player, Mr. Bhaskar Rao recalls that football, certainly not cricket used to be one of the most sought after sport in Vizag. "Soccer had made a mark among the youth, all thanks to the spirit in West Bengal, the Mecca of Indian football. The Railway Grounds and Gymkhana Grounds used to host the national football tournaments, which the clubs from various States, including West Bengal, used to attend. People from Vizag outskirts and even neighbouring districts used to arrive at the grounds on bullock-carts and watch the matches. The ticket price was around ₹2 and the demand for it was huge," he says. He also opined, "Lack of infrastructure, stadiums and proper support with sports quota jobs is the reason behind soccer fading out." Mr. Bhaskar Rao also observed, "People loved that hard-hitting of the ball, and that drew many sports lovers towards cricket. In some cricket playing countries, they love to bowl. They generate bowlers. But in India, people are attracted to batting, especially the power-hitting. Sachin's innings in Sharjah against Australia was nicknamed the 'desert storm'.

What Dhoni did to Pakistan in Vizag in 2005 and what most people love about Indian Premier League is power hitting." Rise of the new stadium

When the Indira Priyadarshini Stadium was giving countless memories, ACA had extended its support to the VDCA, which led to the setting up of the beautiful Dr. YSR ACA VDCA Stadium at PM Palem, which was considered as city outskirts. The first ODI at the newly built PM Palem stadium was none other than between India and Pakistan in 2005, in which Dhoni announced his arrival with a blistering knock. The year 2016 was a memorable year in the history of Vizag cricket. Vizag received the Test status and hosted its first Test match between India and England in November 2016. In February of the same year, Vizag hosted its first Twenty-20 between India and Sri Lanka. Till date, Vizag has hosted three T20s and three Tests. The IPL though there is no IPL home team for Andhra Pradesh, many IPL franchises have made Vizag their second home. Before the State bifurcation, Deccan Chargers used to play some matches in Vizag. A decade ago, Sunrisers Hyderabad also used Vizag as its home ground. In 2016, Mumbai Indians and Rising Pune Supergiants made Vizag their second home ground. The scenic stadium has also hosted Qualifiers and Eliminator of the IPL in 2019. Almost five years later, IPL made a return to Vizag in 2024, when Delhi Capitals opted to play two matches in Vizag. The team will continue to play two inaugural matches this season too.

Visakhapatnam has been a favourite for many cricketers. Dhoni, who announced his arrival with a blistering knock of 148 against Pakistan, has mentioned his love for the cricket experience he had in the coastal city.

Trump's MCC funds freeze a setback for Nepal's development aspirations

Three years ago, Kathmandu was caught in the crossfire of Washington-Beijing tensions over the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a multi-million American grant for Nepal. While the United States warned of reviewing its overall ties with Nepal should Kathmandu fail to ratify the MCC-Nepal Compact from Parliament, Beijing referred to the grant as a "Pandora's box." Within Nepal, politics was sharply divided, with some sections, particularly those holding extreme left and nationalist views, opposing the parliamentary ratification of the MCC. They argued that along with the MCC money, American boots would land in Nepal. Signed in 2017, the U.S., under the compact, committed \$500 million in grants for building electricity transmission lines and upgrading roads in Nepal. Fast forward to 2025, a month after Donald Trump returned to the White House, Nepal's Ministry of Finance (MoF) announced that it had been informed about the MCC funds freeze.

In a statement, the Ministry said the Nepal government was informed by the MCC that payment-related activities funded under the Nepal Compact had been halted in compliance with a 90-day freeze imposed by an executive order of the U.S. President Donald Trump on January 20, 2025. When Mr. Trump froze USAID funds earlier in January, it was largely expected that the MCC, which the U.S. and Nepal signed during the American President's first term in 2017, would continue. Analysts now warn that if the funding is completely withdrawn, there will be broader implications for Nepal — not just in terms of infrastructure and development efforts, but also geopolitically, with respect to India and China. The million-dollar question with the U.S. fund freeze for the largest infrastructure assistance, the immediate question is: Who will fill that void, and how will it impact Nepal's development efforts? The natural answers could be China or India, Nepal's two next-door neighbours and the second and fifth largest economies, or Nepal itself. However, analysts offer a different perspective. Sanjay Upadhyaya, a U.S.-based author and analyst, argues that neither India nor China has the capacity or readiness to fill a vacuum of this scale and scope. "We lack the resources to ensure the continuity of the projects," he said. Even if attempts are made, such projects take years of negotiations. The MCC itself was signed in 2017 after years of discussion. Electricity transmission lines are one of Nepal's major infrastructure projects, as the country aims to exploit its hydropower potential with a view to selling it to India, the biggest market in the south.

Mr. Upadhyaya suggests that Mr. Trump's decision significantly impacts Nepal's infrastructure initiatives and overall development efforts. "With the construction of the transmission lines and the enhancement of Nepal's road network under the Compact now on hold, uncertainty looms over their future," Mr. Upadhyaya told. The Hindu? over the phone said. "This situation may postpone Nepal's infrastructure development plans and result in costly contractual issues for the country."

In June 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India would import 10,000 MW of electricity from Nepal. Accordingly, in January of the previous year, Nepal and India signed a power trade agreement

for Nepal to export 10,000 MW of hydroelectricity to India over the next 10 years. Given the hullabaloo over the parliamentary ratification of the MCC three years ago, analysts say the fund freeze represents a setback for both the donor and the recipient. Binoj Basnyat, a strategic analyst and retired Major General of the Nepal Army, explains that the decision may erode trust in the U.S., which has been the biggest bilateral aid provider to Nepal since 1951. "Nepalis may wonder what policy the U.S. is going to pursue with regard to Nepal," said Mr. Basnyat. "But simultaneously, a review by the U.S. also gives Nepal, as a recipient, a chance to rethink its aid policy." The MCC is the largest American infrastructure grant for Nepal in history. Through USAID, the American assistance to Nepal since 1951 amounts to over \$1 billion. In 2022, USAID and Nepal signed a five-year Development Objective Agreement worth \$659 million. While the USAID fund pause will affect sectors like health, education, agriculture, climate, and women's and children's empowerment, the MCC halt directly affects the infrastructure area.

"The funding freeze places both countries in a difficult position. Nepal feels vulnerable about its control over its future," said Mr. Upadhyaya. "The U.S. has experienced a blow to its reliability and standing. Nepal took the political risk of accepting it, the U.S. has now stepped back. This sends a contradictory message to other countries considering American aid." According to him, the freeze in funds could further polarise Nepal. "Opponents feel vindicated," he said. "It may become increasingly challenging for Nepal to negotiate other international agreements." China-India interplay Beijing was suspicious of the MCC from the outset, believing it was Washington's ploy to counterbalance the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to which Nepal signed up the same year the MCC compact with the U.S. was signed. Only recently, in December last year, Nepal and China signed a BRI framework deal, paving the way for investment and cooperation in Nepal under the Chinese scheme after both sides agreed on "aid assistance financing." According to Mr. Upadhyaya, China now has an opportunity to reaffirm its narrative that U.S. commitments are unreliable and that it is the most reliable partner. "While Beijing capitalises on a propaganda victory, Nepal could potentially risk further assistance from China. At a time when the U.S. is competing with China for influence in South Asia, pausing MCC funds undermines Washington's objective in the region," he said. "Additionally, there is a risk of reverting to military- or security-led approaches to foreign aid." India, Nepal's traditional development partner in the region, remained conspicuously silent when Nepal signed up to the MCC and BRI. Some say the U.S. reversal on its aid to Nepal could open the door for Beijing to make more aggressive inroads into Nepal, which could become a headache for India. Ties between Nepal and India appear to be at a standstill, with many viewing New Delhi's reluctance to invite Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli even after six months in office as a sign of displeasure. Ajaya Bhadra Khanal, a research director at the Centre for Social Innovation and Foreign Policy, suggests that neither India nor China



can fill the void left by the MCC, as one lacks the necessary resources and the other lacks the willingness. He, however, adds that in areas like health, agriculture, and education, Beijing has more capacity and willingness than India. "Additionally, the north may continue its efforts to establish Left parties in power," he said. There are also concerns that the U.S. distancing itself from Nepal could

pose a bigger challenge for Kathmandu in balancing its neighbours—India and China. According to Mr. Basnyat, Nepal needs to focus on formulating its own credible foreign policy. "Nepal has to acknowledge it is a buffer state and find ways to re-engage with not just the U.S. but also China and India," he said. "It has to assert that it is a player, not a playing field."

Asia's first hyperloop contest to showcase innovation in high-speed travel

Asia's first international hyperloop competition got under way at Discovery, the satellite campus of the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) at Thaiyur on Friday. The competition on the future of high-speed travel, being held till February 25, comprises 10 teams. It will involve participation of around 150 industry delegates from across the world, representing sectors such as mobility, research and hyperloop.

Thaiyur is around 36 km from the main campus. The global hyperloop competition (GHC) 2025 is aimed at uniting global talent, industry leaders and researchers; fostering collaboration and innovation; and bringing forth a real-world implementation of the hyperloop technology. Hyperloop is a high-speed train that travels in a near-vacuum tube. The reduced air resistance allows the capsule in the tube to reach speeds of over 1,000 km/h. Elon Musk, who heads SpaceX and Tesla, had proposed the idea of hyperloop in 2013 through a White Paper — 'Hyperloop Alpha.'

Pankaj Sharma, principal executive director of Railway Board, who inaugurated the event, said the contest celebrated innovation and was a testament to how India was emerging as a leader in transportation technology. IIT-M director V. Kamakoti said a fast hyperloop connectivity between important destinations across the country would soon become a reality. IITM Pravartak Technologies Foundation and SAE India, with the support of Railways Ministry, are jointly conducting the competition. The competition is

being held at the institute's unique hyperloop test infrastructure — a state-of-the-art facility built with the support of Indian Railways, Arcelor Mittal, Larson and Toubro and HindalCo. Satya Chakravarthy, faculty advisor, said: "By bringing together young innovators, industry leaders and researchers, we are fostering a collaborative ecosystem that will accelerate the future of ultra-fast, sustainable mobility..." The institute has been conducting research for seven years, and boasts of the longest operational student-run hyperloop test tube and track, spanning 422 metres. The competition will feature pod demonstration, showcasing functional hyperloop pod prototypes; hyperloop InnoQuest — a case study challenge exploring hyperloop technology and implementation; and DesignX — a platform for teams to present innovative hyperloop designs. While Railways supports next generation transportation, Arcelor Mittal has helped develop hyperloop tubes. Ansys has provided advanced simulation tools for hyperloop design; SAE India facilitated technological advancements in the hyperloop sphere; and IITM Pravartak has supported hyperloop innovation and entrepreneurship. There will also be an exclusive workshop during the competition, providing participants a hands-on experience in cutting-edge design and simulation tools. As part of the event, a social campaign to foster interest towards Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in young minds called 'GHC JI ???? SA' had been launched.

The problematic globalisation of medical education

Strange things are going on worldwide in the area of medical education. On the one hand, there appears to be a shortage of medical doctors, while at the same time governments, and in many cases also medical doctors themselves, oppose increased access to the study of medicine. As a result, there has been an increase in international mobility of medical students from high-, mid- and low-income countries. While once medical education was international, now it is nationally regulated, but at the same time becoming internationalised. Because of national and global health needs, it is worth examining this particular global medical environment. No one knows how many international students are studying in medical schools outside their home countries, but a conservative estimate might put the number to be more than 2,00,000 — many of them in institutions and countries with questionable quality of medical preparation. To give an indication, Ukraine, before the Russian invasion, had 24,000 medical students from abroad, mainly, but not exclusively, from India.

The India crisis is an interesting example. The country has a severe shortage of doctors. The demand for places in medical colleges is considerable and, as a result, competition for places is intense. Annually, approximately 2.3 million students sit for the national medical school entry examination, but only one in around 22 successful candidates is able to enter the country's 700-plus medical colleges.

The fierce competition for medical seats in India has compelled many students to explore opportunities abroad. It is estimated that more than 20,000 Indian medical students go abroad to study. With limited government medical seats and high tuition fees in private institutions, studying medicine abroad has emerged as an "affordable" and practical alternative for Indian aspirants. Countries such as Russia, pre-war Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, China, Mauritius, and Nepal have become attractive destinations. Interestingly, some of the institutions in foreign countries are controlled by Indians. One such institution is the Manipal College of Medical Sciences in neighbouring Nepal, the country's first private medical college which was established in 1994. It is operated by the Manipal Education and Medical Group (MEMG), Bengaluru. The American University of Antigua (AUA) College of Medicine, a Caribbean medical school, is also a division of Manipal. This reflects a broader strategy of Indian education groups expanding their footprint overseas to meet the growing demand from Indian students. However, studying medicine abroad comes with its own challenges, particularly for those who wish to practise in India. Indian students who complete their programmes from foreign institutions must clear the national licensing examination to qualify for medical practice in India. They are also required to complete a medical internship upon their return. Similarly, Indians wishing to practise medicine in other countries must satisfy licensing and other requirements of those countries — and one can find Indian doctors throughout the world. This il-

lustrates that governments are aware of the varying standards of medical education around the world. In a significant announcement during the Union Budget speech in February 2025, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted the government's achievements in medical education. She stated that the government had successfully added nearly 1.1 lakh undergraduate and postgraduate medical education seats over the past decade, an increase of 130%. She also revealed plans for further expansion in the medical education sector by announcing that an additional 10,000 seats would be introduced in medical colleges and hospitals in 2026. This initiative is part of a broader five-year goal to add 75,000 new seats, aimed at addressing the growing demand for qualified medical professionals.

Not just a Global South phenomenon, the case of medical education in India illustrates the problematic phenomenon of students leaving the Global South, in particular South Asia and Africa, to study medicine in other mid-income countries — and often to remain abroad. But the trend is broader. For many years, students from western countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, have been going to neighbouring countries for their medical studies, due to a lack of access at home. Romania, where medical study is provided in French, Hungary, and Poland are common host countries. Hungary and Poland also receive medical students from the United States. Thousands of U.S. students study medicine in these two countries, as well as in Ireland, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom. Medical programmes in central and eastern Europe, as well as in Central Asia, cater to diaspora students and teach in English. The Medical University of Warsaw, for instance, has medical study programmes in both Polish and English. Currently, due to a lack of national funding for places at their home universities, about 3,000 Norwegian medical students receive scholarships to study abroad, mainly in central and eastern Europe.

In other words, the phenomenon of foreign medical education is widespread, almost completely unknown, and unregulated. Where entire medical schools are devoted to international enrolments, they are almost exclusively for-profit institutions. Medical schools established in non-English speaking environments, such as Poland and Ukraine, offer English-medium medical curricula to attract high-fee-paying international students. Balancing demand and quality concerns: As the recent Budget speech shows, the government is starting to see the problem, but solutions are expensive and meet opposition from inside the medical establishment, which fears a deterioration of their privileges and elite status. Yet, with an aging population, the need for quality medical doctors will only increase. The growing number of students looking for medical education abroad illustrates a potential, but there is an overall lack of quality control. More attention is needed on this key challenge. Philip G. Altbach is Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Fellow at the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), Boston Col-



lege, U.S. Hans de Wit is Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Fellow at the Center for International Higher Education, Boston

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High protein intake boosts height in girls



Hyderabad: A study by nutritionists at the University of Bonn, showed that while an increase in protein intake had no effect on body height in the boys and young men, a clear relationship was found in the girls. According to the scientists' calculations, an average increase of about seven grams of protein daily above the intake recommendations leads on average to an increase in height of one centimeter. The researchers studied a total of 189 healthy girls and boys and recorded protein intake not only from dietary survey data, but also by measuring urinary urea nitrogen excretion. In principle, protein intake should not be higher than recommendations, such as 48 grams per day for 15- to 17-year-old female adolescents, the researchers said. Even at intakes clearly above requirements, protein still has significant growth-promoting effects in girls, they added. "If no increase in height is desired, girls may even achieve a reduction in their later adult height by a few centimeters during

growth by adjusting their protein intake to the recommendations, i.e. by not unnecessarily raising their protein intake," they say. However, this effect on height does not seem to play a relevant role in boys with protein intakes above requirements. Apparently for them, the scientists said, significantly stronger effects of sex hormones, including testosterone, on the growth hormone axis leave less room for an additional anabolic nutritional effect from protein. The possible long-term consequences of correspondingly high protein intakes have not yet been satisfactorily examined. For bone stability only, they observed positive relations with increased protein intake in past studies, provided that the fruit and vegetable intake was not too low and thus the diet-dependent acid load was not too high. The DONALD (DOrtmund Nutritional and Anthropometric Longitudinally Designed) study is a long-term investigation of the effects of nutrition on physiological and health-related outcomes during and after the completion of growth.

Innovation, as a solution to the growing crisis of antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an escalating public health crisis with the potential to undermine the effectiveness of current antibiotics, leading to longer hospital stays, more intensive care, and higher mortality rates. To address AMR, we must recognise that it is a multifaceted issue influenced by various sectors such as human health, animal husbandry, agriculture, and environmental factors. While the challenge is immense, innovation in both technology and strategy holds the key to mitigating this global health threat.

Understanding the complexity of AMR is not simply the result of overprescribing antibiotics in hospitals. It stems from numerous factors that include irrational antibiotic use in humans, animals and in agriculture. Inappropriate prescriptions, the use of antibiotics in animal feed for growth promotion and agricultural practices that encourage the use of antibiotics contribute significantly to the development of resistant pathogens. Once resistance develops, these microbes can spread rapidly, especially in healthcare settings where infection prevention measures may be inadequate. Sanitation and infection control in hospitals are also critical to reducing the spread of resistant bacteria. Inadequate sanitation in communities, especially in low-income areas, further fuels the problem by allowing resistant pathogens to proliferate and spread. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of clean water, and insufficient access to healthcare exacerbate the issue, making it a complex, multifactorial challenge. The role of innovation in tackling AMR Given the complexity of AMR, addressing it requires more than just conventional strategies. Innovation plays a central role in tackling this global challenge, not only through new devices but also by developing new approaches to influence behaviour and improve systems.

One of the most important areas where innovation can make a difference is in antibiotic stewardship. Ensuring rational antibiotic use in hospitals is critical to prevent the development of AMR. Technology can support healthcare providers with real-time data to guide antibiotic prescriptions and reduce unnecessary use. AI-powered decision support systems and digital health tools are increasingly being developed to assist clinicians in selecting the appropriate antibiotic, determining the correct dosage and setting the right treatment duration. These innovations enable healthcare providers to make informed decisions that minimise the risk of resistance and ensure that antibiotics are used only when absolutely necessary. In addition to technological innovations, behavioural innovations are essential in the fight against AMR. Prescribers often face significant challenges in convincing patients to limit their demand for antibiotics, particularly when it comes to conditions like the common cold or flu, where antibiotics are ineffective. Public health campaigns and education programmes that raise awareness about the dangers of unnecessary antibiotic use can help shift public perception. By empowering patients to understand that antibiotics are not always the answer, and encouraging prescribers to resist pressure to overprescribe, we can foster a culture of responsibility in both the prescribing and consum-

ing of antibiotics. Innovations in diagnostics and vaccines In addition to improving antibiotic stewardship, innovations in rapid diagnostics and vaccines are crucial in the battle against AMR. Rapid point-of-care diagnostic tools can help clinicians quickly identify the pathogen causing an infection and determine its antibiotic resistance profile. By providing immediate insights into the specific infection, these diagnostic tools allow for targeted treatments, reducing the use of broad-spectrum antibiotics and minimising the risk of resistance. These diagnostic innovations are particularly important in resource-limited settings where access to laboratories and timely test results may be restricted. Along with diagnostics, the development of new vaccines can help prevent infections that often lead to the unnecessary use of antibiotics. Vaccines reduce the incidence of infections such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, and certain types of urinary tract infections, thereby reducing the need for antibiotics. Innovative vaccines can also target antibiotic-resistant pathogens, further contributing to the reduction of AMR. Over the past two decades, my perspective on AMR has evolved significantly. Initially, I focused on policy changes, regulations, and stewardship programmes. However, through my work with the Longitude Prize, I came to realise that innovation is the true catalyst for change. While policies and regulations are important, they often face slow implementation and resistance. It is innovation that disrupts the status quo, providing practical, scalable solutions to complex challenges like AMR.

India, with its massive population, diverse healthcare infrastructure and socio-economic challenges, faces unique hurdles in combating AMR. However, the country's sheer scale presents it with an opportunity to become a leader in AMR innovation. India has more than one million doctors, hundreds of thousands of pharmacies, and a large number of hospitals. The government's commitment to addressing AMR through policy frameworks like the National Action Plan on AMR is commendable, but effective implementation requires innovation in healthcare practices, sanitation, and technology. The Chennai Declaration on AMR has already made significant strides in raising awareness



and engaging stakeholders from across sectors. However, to truly tackle AMR in India, we must integrate innovation at every level — be it in the development of new antibiotics, diagnostics, vaccines, or sanitation technologies. India has the potential to become a global leader in the fight against AMR by prioritising innovation in both policy and practice.

The path forward in combating AMR involves embracing a multi-pronged approach that integrates technological innova-

tion, behavioural change, improved infection control practices, and better sanitation. By fostering a culture of innovation — at all levels of healthcare, governance, and society — India can make significant strides in mitigating the impact of AMR. India's leadership in the global fight against AMR will depend on how well we harness the power of innovation. With the right policies, infrastructure and support for entrepreneurs, India can set an example for the world in the fight against one of the most significant public health threats of our time.

Are gluten-free foods really healthy?

Hyderabad: While consumers often pay more for gluten-free products, these items typically provide less protein and more sugar and calories compared with gluten-containing alternatives. A study findings suggested that many perceived benefits of gluten-free products — such as weight control and diabetes management — are exaggerated. Currently, many gluten-free products lack dietary fiber, protein and essential nutrients. Manufacturers often add supplements to compensate, but the incorporation of dietary fibres during processing can hinder protein digestion.

In addition, gluten-free products generally contain higher sugar levels compared with other products containing gluten. Long-term adherence to a gluten-free diet has been associated with increased body mass index,

or BMI, and nutritional deficiencies.

Gluten-free products are defined as those that contain less than or equal to 20 parts per million of gluten — largely lack wheat, rye, barley and sometimes oats, all rich sources of arabinosylin, a crucial non-starch polysaccharide. Arabinosylin provides several health benefits, including promoting beneficial gut bacteria, enhancing digestion, regulating blood sugar levels and supporting a balanced gut microbiota. The study also pointed out that it is difficult to find a gluten-free product that excels in all nutritional areas, such as high protein and fibre content with low carbohydrates and sugar. The term "gluten-free diet" has become a buzzword, much like "organic," and is now a part of everyday life for many people, often without a full understanding of its actual benefits. While a gluten-free diet is a



medical necessity for people who are sensitive to gluten, a condition called celiac disease, or for those with wheat allergies, others adopt a gluten-free diet due to perceived health benefits or because it's a trend. Public education is important to keep people informed about the pros and cons associated with a gluten-free diet.

How the two-language policy officially came into force in the State of Madras

A political controversy is raging in Tamil Nadu over the BJP-led Union government's insistence on adoption of the three language formula proposed in the National Education Policy-2020. Against this backdrop, it would be worthwhile to see how the two language policy of teaching only Tamil and English in schools came into force in 1968. In early 1968, Parliament adopted The Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967, to permit the continuation of English, in addition to Hindi, as the language of official communication, deferring an earlier policy of adopting Hindi as the sole official language in the country. It also adopted the Official Language Resolution, 1968. This resolution provided for taking steps to implement the three-language formula fully in all States: the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking areas, and of Hindi along with the regional languages and English in the non-Hindi-speaking areas. This triggered widespread protests by students in Madras that forced the first DMK government, headed by C.N. Annadurai, to announce closure of educational institutions. It was then that the Madras government adopted a resolution in the Assembly on January 26, 1968, rejecting the three-language formula. Domination by one region

The resolution argued that the adoption of one of the regional languages as the Official Language of India, in a land of different languages, cultures, and civilizations, would result in the domination by one region over the other regions. It proposed that until Tamil and other national languages were adopted as official languages, English should continue as the official language and the Constitution should be suitably amended. "Whereas this House is of the opinion that the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967, passed by Parliament, does not serve to achieve the above objective, but will result in creating, among those connected with the administration, two divisions with mutual hatred, friction, and inevitable confusion, this House resolves to continuously strive to realise the objective as stated above. As the Resolution on the Language Policy passed along with the Official Languages (Amendment) Act will result in injustice to the people in the non-Hindi regions by placing them at a disadvantage with new burdens, and as all the political parties are unanimously of the opinion that the said resolution should not be enforced, this House resolves that the Union Government should immediately suspend the operation of that resolution and devise ways and means to ensure that the people in the non-Hindi regions are not subject to any disadvantage or additional burden," the resolution said. "This House is of the opinion that the said resolution, by insisting on the enforcement of the three-language formula, aims to force Hindi on the people of non-Hindi regions with the ultimate object of making only Hindi the sole Official Language," it added. The House then resolved that "the three-language formula shall be scrapped, and Tamil and English alone should be taught, and Hindi should be completely eliminated from the curriculum in all schools in Tamil Nadu". The then Deputy Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, felt that the two-language formula adopted in the Madras Assembly was not in the interests of the country. "...the

Union Government was considering measures to deal with the situation. This thing could not be discussed in public," he said, according to a PTI report published in The Hindu on February 6, 1968. However, much earlier, Annadurai had rejected the charge that the government motion "indirectly revived the DMK's secession move", which it had abandoned some years ago. "On the other hand, he said, it was the Centre's language policy and scheme that paved the way for this. He pointed out that if he had aimed at separation, the best thing would have been for him to leave the language issue alone. He had not done that; he was making earnest attempts to solve the language problem and tackle the situation created after the passage of the Official Languages Act," said a report in The Hindu dated January 24, 1968. Speaking in the Assembly on January 23, Annadurai told critics, who pleaded that national unity should be placed above the language question, that he too was repeating the same request. "If national unity was the need of the hour, why did the Congress rake up the language issue now, in spite of the advice of eminent leaders like Mr. C. Rajagopalachari against it," he asked. The Chief Minister pointed out that in Canada, the French and English people lived together harmoniously for over 100 years, without forcing the issue of a link language. On



some members suggesting that people should give up their claims and make sacrifices for the sake of national unity, he countered, "But, are we the only people who should always give up our claims and make sacrifices? What is the sacrifice the Hindi-speaking people have made to preserve national unity? What is the suffering they have undergone to achieve this?"

'A bogey created by the Congress' He also felt that the plea for a link language among the people of the various States was

itself a bogey created by the Congress. He said that in a vast country like India, there could be no single language linking the people. A few days later, at a symposium on the national language organised by students of Tenali in the present day Telangana, Annadurai said the people did not ask for an official language. "The whole problem was created by the Indian Government," he felt. "I sincerely believe in and stand for the sovereignty of India. I am not for secession, but I also want every one of us to live as equals and not as masters and servants," he said.

The rise of the house of Qatar and its old pearl link with Mumbai

Smaller in size than the state of Nagaland in north-east India, Qatar stands for its outsized influence even in the Arabian peninsula. It has one of the highest GDP per capita in the world and is often the stage at which regional geopolitics plays out. For much of the region's history, the littoral between Kuwait and Qatar was known as Bahrain while Qatar was one of its dependent tribal chiefdoms. The present state of Qatar ruled by the House of Thani emerged in the 19th century with the backing of the British government, which was keen to secure its trade routes. While presently nearly all the Gulf states including Qatar have oil as their chief export and mainstay of the economy, less than 100 years ago it was the pearl trade that was the most prominent export and brought prosperity to the region.

Pearling in the Gulf region has been prevalent since ancient times, referred to in poetry as the 'tears of the beloved, and 'fish eyes' by the Babylonians, the Quran refers to them as something that belonged to paradise. Qatar and the Arabian peninsula in general has been the bridge between south Asia and the West i.e Mesopotamia. Archaeological digs near Doha have thrown up pottery that provides evidence of the Dilmun civilisation (2450-1700 BC) which thrived in this region. Habibur Rahman wrote in The Emergence of Qatar, "...sea traffic from the Gulf to Mesopotamia, carrying copper, gold, precious stones, ivory, teakwood, frankincense, and spices, also linked this country (Qatar and the Gulf) with India and the an-

cient Far East... and the expansion of Islam into the subcontinents of Iran and India gave fresh impetus to maritime trade in the Gulf. By exploiting the monsoon winds, Arab seamen and merchants in the 8th to 13th centuries became regular visitors to the ports of the East African coast and the Malabar coast of India". The Portuguese first interacted with the Arabs of the Gulf in the 16th century and established outposts along the coast as well as the mainland. "They traded for spices in India and for pearls in Bahrain and its vicinity", wrote Rahman. Some other goods were silks, silver, amber and horses. In fact, according to widely held belief it was an expert Arab sailor, Shihab al-Din who helped Vasco de Gama reach Calicut in India from Malindi (now in Kenya). In many ways the 'scramble' in the Arabian peninsula and the interplay of regional powers like the Wahabis, Omanis, Utubs and international players like the Ottomans and the British led to the birth of a sovereign Qatar.

Allen J Fromherz wrote in Qatar: "Qatar is one of the world's most unlikely political entities. Surrounded by powerful and expansionist neighbours and projecting into Gulf waters, waters rocked by centuries of conflict, Qatar has one of the more extraordinary stories of state formation in the Gulf. Unlike the long-established ruling families of other Gulf States such as Al-Sabah of Kuwait or the Zayed family of Abu Dhabi who had a coherent, if admittedly local, political presence in the region long before the British dominated it, the power of Al-Thani of

Qatar is relatively young." Through inter-tribe conflicts and powerplay around the 1780s the Maadhid tribe began gaining control of present-day Qatar region. Under the leadership of Mohammad bin Thani, the leader of Maadhids, they eventually established supremacy and won the support of the British to stake claim. Rahman wrote, "Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani's position as 'the Chief' of Qatar received legal recognition when in September 1868 he signed a treaty with Colonel Lewis Pelly (November 1862 to October 1872), the Resident in the Gulf, bringing a significant change in the political status of Qatar. The treaty referred to Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani as the 'principal Chief of Qatar'. In fact, the 1868 Treaty reconfirmed the existence of a local leadership in Qatar similar to that elsewhere in the region." Till the 1900s, Bombay was the hub from where pearls were exported to other countries. Because of this link, India traders settled in large numbers in the Gulf. Called the Banyas, they could thrive in this trade due to the advantage of long-term credit facility provided by bankers in India. They therefore became influential actors and dominated the export of pearls. Until the end of the 19th century, pearls were exported to Bombay, and from there to other world markets. A new layer was added to this commercial link with the conquest of India by the British who then started using Bombay as a naval base to influence the geopolitics of the region. In the Gulf, the under the Thani family, Qatar became a British protectorate in 1916 in return for concessions on foreign affairs and sovereignty.