Covasant Technologies launches AI Innovation Centre in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: Covasant Technologies launched its new AI Innovation Centre at Atria, International Tech Park, Hyderabad, Telangana, on Monday.

The AI Innovation Centre in Hyderabad will accommodate 500 AI engineers with plans to rapidly expand to 3000 AI engineers by 2028. The Centre is designed to enable global enterprises to adopt Agentic AI-based solutions responsibly, at scale.

The innovation center will focus specifically on building autonomous Agentic AI solutions to solve complex business challenges for global enterprises, a press release said.

The new facility is specifically engineered to enable enterprises to gain a competitive advantage by securely adopting Agentic AI at scale, helping them swiftly move from pilot to production, a press release said.

The facility focuses on reduced risk through built-in governance through proprietary products and solutions, enabling clients to integrate Agentic AI without compromising compliance or introducing operational risk.

Speaking on the occasion, C V Subramanyam, Chairman and Managing Director, Covasant, said, "By creating the AI Innovation Center, we are giving our customers a safe environment to explore AI agents, move from experiment to business impact, and build for scale, with enterprise guardrails."

Duddila Sridhar Babu, Minister for Information Technology, Electronics, Communications, Industries, and Legislative Affairs, Sanjay Kumar, Special Chief Secretary and Sai Krishna, IT Advisor, were present.

Covasant
AI-Driven. Human-Inspired.

Tiger movement sparks fear in Bejjur mandal of Asifabad

Kumram Bheem Asifabad: The movement of a tiger triggered panic among residents of Bejjur mandal centre on Monday after locals claimed to have spotted pugmarks in the riverbed of a stream on the outskirts of the mandal headquarters.

They urged Forest officials to track the animal's movement and take steps to prevent any threat to human life, saying they had been living in fear since the sightings.

Forest officials who inspected the spot confirmed that the pugmarks belonged to a tiger and appealed to residents to remain cautious. They said animal trackers had been deployed to follow the tiger's trail, while CCTV cameras were being installed to capture its movement. Locals were advised to avoid venturing out alone and to move in groups.

Harish Rao slams Congress government for tenant farmer's suicide in Khammam

Hyderabad: Senior BRS MLA and former Minister T Harish Rao held the Congress government responsible for the suicide of tenant farmer Banoth Veeranna in Nelakondapalli of Khammam district. He termed it evidence of the betrayal inflicted on farmers by the ruling dispensation, calling it a murder committed by the Congress government.

In a selfie video, the 45-year-old farmer consumed pesticide and committed suicide, citing mounting debts and lack of price for his produce.

Harish Rao said Veeranna's death exposed the grim reality of tenant farmers being pushed to such desperate measures. "The government promised Rs 15,000 annual support to tenant farmers, signed bond papers before elections, and cheated them after coming to power," he said, accusing the Revanth Reddy administration of abandoning those who toil to ensure the State's food security.

He stated that the government's failure to ensure crop procurement, support prices, and protection from middlemen was driving farmers into hopelessness. "How many more deaths will it take for this government to wake up?" he asked.

The senior BRS leader urged Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, who is scheduled to visit Khammam district on Tuesday, to meet the bereaved family and announce immediate ex-gratia and support for Veeranna's family.

Harish Rao said farmers would continue to pay the price for governmental apathy unless promises were honoured. He appealed to farmers not to lose hope, asserting that the BRS would stand with them until justice is delivered.

Man scammed of Rs 1 L in online sexual service scam

Hyderabad: A 20-year-old young man was scammed of Rs 1,02,093 after he paid the amount to online scamsters who made him believe that he was paying for sexual services. The victim is a resident of Yakutpura in Hyderabad and was extorted by the criminals to fork out the amount. Called a 'honey trap scam', the Yakutpura resident was deceived on Telegram by a fraudster posing as a female offering paid sexual services. The cyber scamsters used fake photos and feedback to appear genuine and the accused deceitfully collected money via multiple payments on the pretext of advance booking, service security, and room reservation charges. The victim was also made to believe that all the payments were mandatory and refundable. "Under this influence, the victim transferred ?1,02,093 through UPI and bank transfers to various accounts. When asked to reach a hotel in Abids, no one appeared, and the accused later demanded an additional ?10,000 with threats," said the Hyderabad police in a press release. Eventually the victim realised it was a cyber fraud and extortion racket, and then victim filed a complaint at the cyber crime police station. The Hyderabad police has cautioned citizens of receiving messages from unknown Telegram/WhatsApp profiles offering paid companionship or sexual services. The public has been asked to never share personal details and to make payments or visit unknown locations based on such promises made by people online. "In case of threats, blackmail, or financial loss, immediately report to 1930 or www.cybercrime.gov.in.

Over 25K candidates enter fray for Telangana's Panchayat elections

Hyderabad: More than 25,000 candidates filed their nominations for the first phase of Gram Panchayat elections in Telangana, scheduled to be held on December 11.

According to the State Election Commission, a total of 25,654 nominations have been filed for 4,236 of Gram Panchayats in 31 districts. On the last day of filing of nominations on Saturday, 17,940 candidates filed their papers.

For 37,440 wards, 82,276 nominations were filed. The State Election Commission said on Sunday that 70,596 nominations were filed on the last day.

The officials took up the scrutiny of nominations. The list of validly nominated candidates is likely to be announced late on Sunday. Appeals with regard to nominations can be filed on December 1, and the same will be disposed of the next day.

The last date for withdrawal of candidatures is December 6. The first phase of elections will be held on December 11. Polling will be held from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., while counting of votes will be taken the same day from 2 p.m.

As per the notification issued by the Telangana State Election Commission on Tuesday, elections will be held on December 11, 14 and 17 for 12,728 posts of sarpanchs and 1,12,242 wards.

A total 1.66 crore votes in rural areas are eligible to cast their votes in these elections. For the second phase, nominations will be accepted from November 30, while the last date for withdrawal of candidatures will be December 6.

Nominations for the final phase of elections can be filed from December 3, while December 9 will be the last date for withdrawal of nominations. The Telangana Cabinet on November 17 decided to conduct only Gram Panchayat elections in December as

the Rs 3,000 crore grant, which should come from the Centre, will lapse by March 31, 2026.

As the term of the 15th Finance Commission is coming to an end on March 31, 2026, the Rs 3,000 crore grant that Gram Panchayats have to get from the Centre will lapse if the elections are not held before the deadline.

It was announced that the decision on conducting elections for Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies (MPTCs), Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituencies (ZPTCs) and municipal corporations will be taken after the High Court's final orders on 42 per cent reservation for BCs.

As per the High Court order, the local body elections have to be held with a 50 per cent cap on total reservation for all sections. The SEC has provided 17.08 per cent reservation in Gram Panchayats for Backward Classes (BCs).

Out of total 12,735 Gram Panchayats, 2,176 have been reserved for BCs. Among 31 districts in which elections will be held, Siddipet has the highest BC reservation at 26.772. In Bhadradri Kothagudem district, no Gram Panchayat has been reserved for BCs.

Telugu NRI quits US job to contest Telangana local body polls

Telangana: Four medical students suspended for ragging juniors

Hyderabad: Four second-year medical students have been suspended for allegedly ragging their juniors here, officials said on Sunday.

The incident, which occurred around 15 days ago, involved seniors allegedly forcing juniors to do sit-ups in their hostel.

Following a complaint filed by a junior, the college authorities conducted a preliminary inquiry at the Government Meddical College in Nagarkurnool district, Telangana.

Following a meeting of the Anti-Ragging Committee, disciplinary action was taken against the four senior students, debarring them from attending classes for two months and expelling them from the hostel for one year, a senior official said.

Hyderabad: An NRI, working in the United States, decided to quit his job to contest for the post of sarpanch in the upcoming Telangana local body polls.

Kanjarla Chandrashekar, a native of Chinnashankarampet of Medak district, said he decided to leave the States as he wanted to see his village develop. In an interview with Big TV, he said that his grandfather's service for the village motivated him to contest for sarpanch.

In a similar incident, a sub-inspector in Suryapet took voluntary retirement from service to contest the local body elections.

SI Puli Venkateshwarlu, attached to the special branch, will now contest for the post of sarpanch from his native village Gudibanda of Kodad Mandal. He was promoted to a sub-inspector four months ago.

Leaving behind his four decades of police service, he now aspires to serve his people and believes donning the role of sarpanch will help him achieve it better.

DCA raids illegal medical shop in Khammam, seizes medicines Worth Rs 30K

Hyderabad: The Telangana Drugs Control Administration (DCA) officials, acting on credible information of illegal sales, raided a medical shop located at Mondi Gate and Mamillagudem in Khammam,

During the raid, DCA officers detected unauthorised stocking of a huge quantity of medicines for sale. A total of 101 varieties of medicines, including antihypertensive drugs, antidiabetic drugs, antibiotics, analgesics, etc., were found stocked for sale at the premises, and the stock, worth Rs. 30,000, was seized during the raid.

The DCA officers collected the samples for analysis. Further investigation shall be carried out, and action shall be taken as per the law against all the offenders.

Hindered by reservation, man gets SC partner to file for sarpanch in Sangareddy

Hyderabad: Chandrashekhar, a man from the Backward class, was initially disappointed when the post of Tadlapalle's sarpanch was reserved for the Scheduled caste, hindering him from filing a nomination. However, he found a solution by getting his lover, Sreeja, a woman from the SC community, to file for the post, and the two got married right after.

According to reports, Sreeja is a final-year B.Tech student, and when she did not return from college on Saturday, her mother filed a missing persons complaint with the Sangareddy rural police.

Little did she know, her daughter had gone to file her nomination for the post of sarpanch and afterwards, got married to her boyfriend Chandrashekhar.

Sangareddy rural police have informed that Chandrashekhar is backed by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS).

Hyderabad police commissioner warns of prompt injection attacks in AI

Hyderabad: Hyderabad police commissioner VC Sajjanar has warned the public against prompt injection in Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots which could leak information.

Sajjanar explained that malicious commands can be fed to AI chabots, which could leak corporate data and customer details. He further stated that companies are increasingly relying on them due to their benefits such as providing instant answers to customer queries, increasing work speed, and reducing costs. However, there is a new threat lurking behind this technology. That is 'prompt injection'.

"Cybercriminals are giving 'malicious prompts' (harmful commands) to mislead and trick the AI ??model. In short.. "deceiving AI with words"," the commissioner explained.

Sajjanar further said that a 'prompt injection attack' is a way to confuse AI and extract internal documents, customer records, and system details that should not normally be disclosed.

The commissioner reiterated that injection attacks on AI are a threat to data security.

Telangana: Sarpanch candidate's husband kidnapped in Nalgonda

Hyderabad: A sarpanch candidate in Nalgonda district, backed by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) on Saturday, November 29, alleged that her husband was kidnapped by a Congress-backed candidate.

Yadagiri, husband of Mamidi Nagalakshmi from Ellammagudem village in Tipparthi mandal, was abducted by a group of men allegedly acting on the instructions of Congress sarpanch candidate Utkuru Sandeep Reddy.

Following intense protests and pressure from senior BRS leaders, the kidnappers released Yadagiri late on Saturday night. The BRS condemned the abduction, calling it a brazen attack on democracy.

Former BRS MLAs Nallamothu Bhaskar Rao, Saidi Reddy Bhupal Reddy, and Ravindra Kumar accompanied the victim to Tipparthi police station to file a formal complaint.

In his statement, Yadagiri said that he was forcibly taken in a vehicle, threatened with knives, and taken around different villages throughout the day to prevent him from returning home. He alleged he was tortured and threatened with dire consequences as well.

He further said that he was pressured to ask his wife to withdraw from the local body elections. Congress candidate Sandeep Reddy allegedly threatened to kill him.

Yadagiri also said that even after reaching the police station, he was threatened and coerced by some individuals in front of the police to sign a statement downplaying the incident.

The local body elections will be held in three phases on December 11, 14 and 17.

CPI demands tough action in Tirumala Parakamani scam

TIRUPATI: CPI National Control Commission Chairman K Narayana has demanded strict punishment for everyone involved in the alleged corruption in Tirumala's Parakamani. Speaking at a press meet here on Sunday, he said corruption in such a sacred place was deeply worrying. He criticised the misuse of funds offered by millions of devotees, calling the incident 'extremely painful.'

Narayana expressed concern that an employee who served for nearly 30 years, CV Ravi Kumar, was able to steal Rs 14 crore. He questioned the logic behind returning the stolen money and also raised doubts over the suspicious death of Inspector YV Satish Kumar, who had registered the case, and demanded that those behind the crime be exposed and punished.

On Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, Narayana said it had created international tension. He criticised US pressure through tariff threats and urged the Indian government to strengthen cooperation with Russia in the nation's interest.

He alleged that the Modi government had become captive to corporate powers like Adani and Ambani, pushing the country into danger. On Amaravati land issues, he demanded full transparency, protection of farmers' rights and a clear roadmap for compensation and rehabilitation. CPI district secretary P Murali, Chinnam Penchalaiah, Nadia and others were present.

Govt creating wedge between farmers and regions: Kakani

Nellore: YSRCP has warned Chandrababu Naidu not to create a wedge between farmers and regions in the name of reorganization of districts, said former minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy.

Speaking to media here on Sunday, he said Chandrababu has gone back on his election promise on Gudur and has been reorganizing districts in an irrational manner creating a wedge between farmers and regions.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, on the other hand, had reorganized districts making Parliament constituency as a unit and added YSR district due to local considerations, he added.

Chandrababu had promised during elections that Gudur would be part of Nellore but has gone back on his word. Three mandals of Venkatagiri, Rapur, Kaluvayi, and Saidapuram were included in Nellore district but Chandrababu is shifting them to Tirupati, which people are against.

"We will talk with our leader and take up the issue," he said. With three mandals kept away from the

district, farmers would be facing hardships and administrative issues would arise in water sharing and irrigation needs.

He flayed Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy for showing lack of interest in his own Sarvepalli constituency.

Scores of runners take part in marathon

Visakhapatnam: About 10,000 runners took part in the Sandhya Marines Vizag Marathon here on Sunday.

Organised by the Vizag Runners Society as part of its fourth edition, the event saw participants belonging to diverse age groups, including children to senior citizens aged 90 years as well.

The marathon began with a vibrant dance session.

City Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi, founder chairman of the CMR Group Mavuri Venkata Ramana, Sandhya Marines director K Anand, founder and chairman of Varun Group V. Prabhu Kishore, Dr Krishna Prasad from Apollo hospitals, GM from Divi's Laboratories Pradyumna, among others, flagged off the run held in various categories -- 32K, 22K, 10K and 5K.

The event was organised under the leadership of president of Vizag Runners Society Balakrishna Rai, secretary Srinivas, treasurer Radhika, Race director Rana, and other committee members. Speaking on the occasion, Balakrishna Rai said that the event aims to promote fitness and wellbeing among people in the city. Cash prizes worth Rs.10 lakh were awarded to timed run (32K, 22K & 10K) winners.

Vizag gets India Vs Sri Lanka Women's T-20 tie

Visakhapatnam: Vizag cricket enthusiasts have more to look forward to as India Vs Sri Lanka Women's T-20 matches will be played in Andhra Cricket Association-Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association

(ACA-VDCA) Andhra Cricket Association-Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association International Cricket Stadium on December 21 and 23.

It is a significant achievement for Visakhapatnam to host a number of international matches in a year, including the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 and IPL season.

This year, besides the IPL, India-South Africa ODI, T-20 and India-New Zealand T20 in January have been scheduled in Vizag.

Following the efforts taken by ACA president Kesineni Chinni and secretary Sana Satish, a series of matches are being hosted at ACA-VDCA International Stadium in Visakhapatnam.

Palamaner to become a key model for highway–wildlife integration

Tirupati: A major wildlife-friendly infrastructure project is underway in Palamaner forest corridor of Chittoor district, where a three-kilometre elephant underpass is being integrated into the Chennai–Bengaluru Express Highway. Palamaner reserve forest is known as a traditional movement zone for elephants, with herds travelling between Kaundinya Sanctuary and neighbouring forest pock-

ets. With the new expressway cutting through nearly 4 km of this terrain, authorities revised the highway design to ensure that animal paths remain uninterrupted.

Forest officials say elephants frequently cross the existing highway during night hours and are often caught between fast-moving vehicles. Several elephants have died over the years due to confusion on the road, prompting both the State government and NHAI to consider long-term solutions. After joint field studies, three underpasses for elephants and three smaller structures for smaller species were identified as essential.

The construction zone extends across 7.1 kilometres of forest area. Within this, the high-movement zone—spread over three kilometres—has been exclusively earmarked for underpass structure. It is being built using five major pillars arranged at distances of 300 metres, 450 metres, 1,400 metres, 650 metres and 60 metres. Engineers say the spacing, height and load strength have been tailored to suit the natural walking behaviour of elephants, ensuring sufficient clearance and uninterrupted visibility across the span.

Design provisions include controlled lighting to reduce darkness under the structure and adequate airflow to mimic natural forest conditions. To avoid damage to forest soil layers, construction soil is sourced from outside the reserve area. Forest officials said every stage of the work is being monitored to ensure there is no impact on vegetation or water channels. Minor bridges are also being built across local streams t maintain natural drainage.According to forest officials, Palamaner would become one of the very few locations in the country to host a full-scale elephant underpass integrated with an express highway. He noted that the region currently holds 100 to 110 elephants, and the new pathway is expected to reduce their entry into villages and prevent incidents similar to recent cases where a stray elephant wandered into a settlement and a forest officer was injured while attempting to drive it away.Officials believe that once completed, the project will help ease long-standing concerns of farmers who face crop damage and night-time movement restrictions.

Sports aid in building team spirit among students

Visakhapatnam: Bheemunipatnam MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao mentioned that sports are a reflection of mental and physical strength and aid in building a sense of unity among students.

Speaking at the Annual Sports Day organised by Greendale School here on

Sunday, the MLA said that providing value-based education to the students will help them reach greater heights.

School chairman SP Ravindra and correspondent Sunkari Vijaya Ravindra stated that in addition to comprehensive modern education, students studying in their school are provided training in sports of various streams that contribute to building values.

They are also given training in yoga and horse riding, among others.

CII Andhra Pradesh chairman and Fluent Grid Limited founder and CEO Murali Krishna Gannamani lauded the efforts of the management for the holistic personality development of the children.

With a special theme focusing on 'All Round the World in 90 Minutes', various art performances were presented, reflecting the world's cultural diversity, unity, understanding and harmony. Students were encouraged to focus on their goals and work on them without any distractions. The festival organiser, principal SPM Divya Das, and director Teja Muthyam, parents and staff were present.

Vice Admiral Sanjay Sadhu takes charge as controller of warship production

Visakhapatnam: Vice Admiral Sanjay Sadhu assumed charge as the Controller of Warship Production and Acquisition.

Commissioned in the Indian Navy in 1987, the Vice Admiral is a PG in mechanical engineering and M.Phil in defence and strategic studies.

During his illustrious career spanning more than 38 years, the Flag Officer has tenanted several key operational, staff, and yard appointments. He has served onboard the aircraft carrier INS Viraat in different capacities and onboard frontline frigates INS Brahmaputra and INS Dunagiri.

Prior to his elevation to Flag Rank, he held many important assignments including Additional General Manager (Production) at Naval Dockyard (Mumbai), Commodore Superintendent of Naval Ship Repair Yard (Karwar) and Principal Director Marine Engineering at Naval Headquarters, New Delhi.

Also, he was involved in the modernisation and acquisition of the aircraft carrier Vikramaditya from Russia, in various capacities in the project, including senior naval engineer overseer at Warship Overseeing Team (Severodvinsk), Russia, Director Aircraft Carrier Projects and Principal Director Aircraft Carrier Projects at Naval Headquarters, New Delhi.

On elevation to Flag Rank, he served as Additional Director General Warship Design Bureau (Submarine Design Group), Chief Staff Officer (Technical), ENC, Admiral Superintendent Dockyard

(Visakhapatnam) and Chief Staff Officer (Technical), Western Naval Command. The Flag Officer has the rare distinction of heading two major dockyards on both the West and East Coasts and being the Chief Staff Officer (Technical) of both the Western and Eastern Naval Command.

An alumnus of Naval War College, Goa, the Flag Officer has been awarded the prestigious Ati Vishisht Seva Medal and the Nausena Medal. Prior to assuming charge as CWP&A, the Flag Officer served as the Programme Director, Advanced Technology Vessel Programme in New Delhi.

He has taken charge from Vice Admiral Rajaram Swaminathan, who is superannuating on November 30 after 38 years of distinguished service to the nation. During the tenure of Vice Admiral Rajaram Swaminathan, eight ships were commissioned into the Indian Navy.

US has gone after Big Tech. That makes it easier for India

The dispute between a Big Tech Goliath like Google and a host of Indian firms is neither new nor unexpected. And I can predict with a near degree of certainty that it will not be the last. The dispute began several years ago — a complaint was filed by app developers before the Competition Commission of India (CCI) over Google exploiting its dominant position in the Android and the Play Store ecosystem. The search engine was accused of coercing app developers to use Google's proprietary billing system or pay a fee if they chose a competitor. Either way you pay. It's akin to corkage at a restaurant – the difference is that the restaurant business is fairly competitive so you can carry your liquor elsewhere. With Google's monopoly over Android, that's not possible. When the developers refused to comply, Google removed the offending apps only to reinstate them after public outrage.The drama is still on with CCI having asked its Director General to conduct an investigation and file a report in 60 days. Perhaps the outcome will, as CCI expects, implicate Google's actions as infringing the Competition Act, 2002.
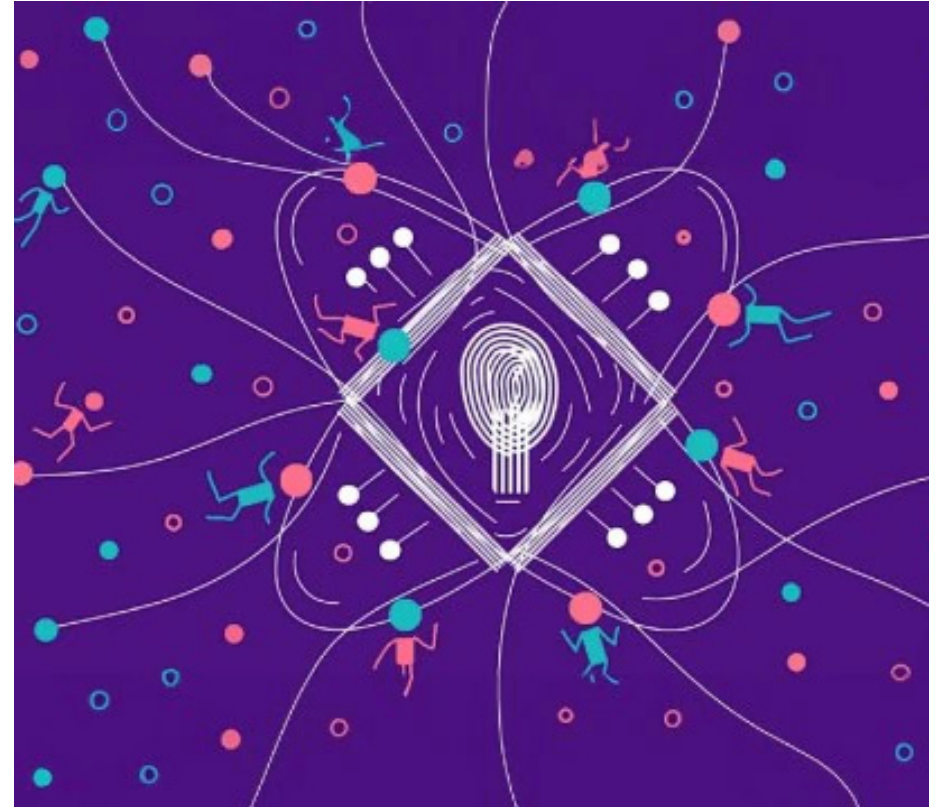
Google is not a lone wolf. We have seen this playbook before from monopolists of all hues, whether of the brick-and-mortar variety, as in the past, or digital, as in the norm nowadays. The only apparent difference is that competition crimes in the digital space are more pervasive, visible and harmful. Why is this so? And why must regulators be more prepared and ready to intervene than before? I will offer some reasons and end with a dash of optimism.

Let's start with a poser – do markets function more effectively in the digital space? Let me give an economist's favourite answer to this unresolvable question – yes, and wait for it, no. More information is available. So in theory, markets should work better, but monopolies are more easily created by successful firms, which axiomatically undermines their functioning. Of the top seven listed companies in the world with market value above $1 trillion, six are digital.So what, ask the sceptics? Markets reflect the value created and the valuation is a tribute to the innovative spirit exemplified in these trillion dollar leviathans. And we do not need to worry about setting upfront rules for such firms because free markets will unleash Schumpeterian forces of creative destruction that would render it unnecessary to do so. Innovations (that are hurt by government intervention) by smart start-ups would perform the act of disciplining incumbent monopolies much better and more efficiently than any government decree. You don't want a "nanny" state do you, say the defenders of free market enterprise, quite disingenuously one might add. By raising the spectre of government excesses, they extol the virtues of free market enterprise. The costs of government mistakes are exaggerated to the extent that make regulation an anathema to progress. Corporate excesses are forgotten, and bailouts at the taxpayers' expense are necessary to keep the wheels of commerce ticking.

This is not an invective against markets, but a caution that big monopolies left to themselves do not self-correct, that market dynamics do not unleash forces that discipline incumbents rapidly enough and government intervention isn't that bad after all. The alternatives could be a lot more damaging, killing competition and innovation.Here is some evidence. Recall Standard Oil Company that decisively monopolised the market and was forced to split by US regulators. Its owner Rockefeller later helped establish the University of Chicago, home to many Nobel laureates and unmatched free market thought. The post-war era witnessed strong decisions against ALCOA (1945) and American Tobacco (1946) for violating the Sherman Act in the US. "No monopolist monopolises unconscious of what he is doing," said the order.

There was however a decisive shift in antitrust enforcement in the US beginning in the early 1970s and especially after the publication of Robert Bork's Antitrust Paradox, questioning the role of antitrust enforcement on consumer welfare. The role of antitrust is to help protect consumers and competition, and not competitors said Bork, and rightly so. But this begs the question whether markets erode monopolies more quickly and effectively than governments.This is a weighty question that can only be judged empirically. The natural experiment in the US in the last five decades or so suggests that the dice has rolled in favour of markets and against government intervention.

But laissez faire can have its pitfalls. High consumer prices, aborted innovation and extreme inequality to name a few. During this time, IBM and Microsoft got away with mere rap on the knuckles while the EU was busy imposing huge penalties for similar violations. For example, in 2018, the EU fined Google $5 billion for abusing its market power. The case against Google was built around what competition law calls "exclusionary conduct".There is grow-ing evidence that things are changing in the US too. The change comes close on the heels of the appointment of Lina Khan as chair of the Federal Trade Commission. Last week, the US Department of Justice and 16 states sued Apple alleging it monopolised and abused the smartphone market. The case against Apple follows a growing list of lawsuits against Google, Meta and Amazon for abusing market power. The modus operandi is familiar – blocking, suppressing, excluding, diminishing functionality of rival products and limiting third-party wallets.

The surprise is not that the US has finally changed its stance towards antitrust enforcement, but the fact that it took so long.

The reason this development is significant for the rest of the world, including India, is because the protective shield of the home country for these firms has been lifted. It will, therefore, become that much easier for India and the EU to proceed in case of violations by these firms without geopolitical repercussions. It is to the credit of the Justice Department and FTC that it has not given in to the self-serving argument made by tech giants that more regulation and antitrust action will merely enable the US to lose the technology race to China.Kathuria is Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Economics at the Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence. Views are personal

Kia unveils K4 compact sedan in US ahead of launch

Seoul: Kia, South Korea's second-biggest carmaker by sales, said on Thursday that it has unveiled the K4 compact sedan at the New York auto show as it plans to launch the vehicle in North American markets this year.

Kia will assemble the K4 compact at its plant in Mexico, and sell it to customers in the United States and Canada during the second half of this year, reports Yonhap news agency, citing a company spokesperson.The new model will be available in two versions, one with a 2.0-litre gasoline engine and the other with a 1.6-litre gasoline turbocharged engine, it said.

The model won't be imported to Korea, the spokesperson added.Kia said it will exhibit dozens of models, including the K4, the EV6 and EV9 all-electric cars, and the Telluride SUV, during the motor show due March 29 through April 7.

Harnessing opportunities of AI to improve govt services

The importance of AI in governance is fast growing and many of the developed countries are successfully using it for improving governance. United States stands to benefit significantly from harnessing the opportunities of AI to improve government services. It leverages AI to provide wide range of services in various sectors like health, transportation, environment, internal security, local governance etc.India too is now fast catching up in the use of AI even in key sectors like Air Force. The observation made by AIR Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari that new technologies like AI and quantum communication are making existing weapons and inventories redundant is interesting. To be able to fight effectively in such an environment, there is a need to re-imagine, realign and reform conventional war fighting ways and means. He said, future conflicts will be characterised by a blend of simultaneous application of kinetic and non kinetic forces, high levels of battle space transparency, multi domain operations, high degree of precision, enhanced lethality, a compressed sensor to shooter cycle.

This indicates how India too can harness the opportunities of AI in many other fields including local governance. AI is rapidly becoming an integral part of local government operations, revolutionising the way cities are managed and services are

delivered in many countries though we still believe in lot of paper work people running around offices and greasing palms to get work done.

It is time Modi 3.0 government focuses more on streamlining processes to improve decision-making, AI offers numerous benefits to local governments. By leveraging AI technologies, governments can automate administrative tasks, such as data collection and analysis, thus freeing up valuable time and resources.Government employees can be trained to focus on more complex and strategic issues, leading to increased efficiency and productivity in local government operations. Furthermore, AI implementation in local government can enhance the quality and effectiveness of city services. For instance, AI-powered chat bots can provide citizens with round-the-clock assistance and information, reducing the need for human intervention and improving customer service in the process.

When people talk about "local government," many of them complain too often about slow, ponderous, inaccessible and frustrating bureaucracies that are difficult to work with. That impression is only growing by the day. For example if there is any complaint of encroachment, the authorities will not respond unless there is pressure on them. Even then they will seek all kinds of documents which should nor-

mally be available with them in digital format and make every work time consuming and pocket filling.Providing citizens with easier access to municipal and state services may initially be cost intensive yet the improvement in "living experience" can be dramatic. Smarter city and state government services mean improved responsiveness and higher service levels, leading to a better quality of life and reduced impacts on the environment. That is not happening though the NDA government has declared

many smart cities. They are still anything but smart. Yes the officials of local government have become smarter in making more money.

By strategically leveraging AI technologies, citizen services can be redefined ensuring they are not only accessible but also seamlessly aligned with the ever-evolving needs of the community. The integration of AI into municipal services can enhance service delivery for positive change in municipal administration.

Thank non-Gandhis for putting up the fight

Largely in the dock over personal attacks on Narendra Modi due to seemingly petulant rant by the Gandhi clan and its acolytes, the Congress party does have a thinking leadership in the second and the third rungs. Alas, they never get to prominence, overshadowed as they are by the zealous and self-serving bhakts of Gandhis. The party is currently facing outrage from the public over an "objectionable post" containing foul language made against actress-turned politician Kangana Ranaut by Congress leader Supriya

Shrinate. Though, the party condemned the comments, the BJP is sure to kick up dust.

Modi critics feel saddened that good opportunities are squandered away by the impulsive netas of Congress out to grab the attention of the Gandhis. Be that as it may, for a change policy-wise, the party is, indeed, making some thought-provoking pitch to put the Modi-led BJP on the mat. Thank the non-Gandhi think-tank that is propping up a flailing party.The other day, senior leader and former MP Sandeep

Dikshit laid out the Congress strategy and tore into the BJP leadership on many a pertinent issue that warrant nation's attention. To start with, the party took up the concerns of the working class, claiming it suffered the worst under the Modi regime. Primarily, poor enforcement of labour laws adds to their woes. The CAG had also noted that several factors were diluting the adjudication process, denying justice to the labourers.

The Congress manifesto will rightly vow to revive labour laws to protect the working class interests, says Dikshit. Among the benefits promised to the workers would be right to health, urban employment guarantee, hike in wages for MGNREGA workers up to ?400. Scoffing at the existing Labour Codes, the party spokesperson says they will bring back the labour laws. In a startling claim, Dikshit highlighted the party charge that after 2014-15, about 6.5 crore people had migrated from other places and gone into agriculture – "first time in country's history".On the other side, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge points out that the growth rate of wages between the period 2014-15 and 2021-22 was less than one per cent per year during the tenure of the Modi government.

Inflationary trends remain above the RBI threshold level of 4 per cent, another

leader Jairam Ramesh recalls, adding that there have been a range of negative indicators during the Modi regime, including a 47-year low in the savings growth rate, a stagnation of domestic credit to the private sector and a flat labour-force participation rate.Economists also point to the rising joblessness and say India has been adding just about 4 million jobs a year for over a decade, as against the need for 20 million jobs for a year. It is the Centre that has to rally State governments to address and meet the target. We did not see any collective campaign so far.Other Congress leaders like Salman Khurshid, Shashi Tharoor keep raising such issues as betrayal of farmers, weakening of institutions, crony capitalism, misuse of central agencies, betrayal of farmers over MSP, and, the cultivation of hate. The Modi government also raised petrol and diesel prices significantly over the years, which also pushed up the LPG prices, burdening households. Demonetisation, GST also had a negative impact, they claim.Such issues, not personal attacks, need energetic push by Gandhis. It will be a pleasant change on the part of INDIA bloc and give it a potent edge in the fiercely contested elections, if other partners, too, raise relevant questions and challenges facing the nation, to offset increasing polarisation in favour of NDA, chiefly BJP.

At 28, techie survives four brain strokes: Here's how he battled his triggers of stress, anxiety

Looking at Akshay teaching meditation techniques to his peers, giving motivational talks and creating boundaries in his work life to spend quality time with his family, you wouldn't guess that he has battled the worst trauma anybody could imagine. The 28-year-old from Madhya Pradesh has had four brain strokes already but lives each day with a bounce and is determined to fight an uncertain future. "I am not an escapist anymore. Now I know how to take care of my mental health and don't tie myself with knots of anxiety," says the techie, whose stroke was brought on by extreme stress.Akshay could not process the emotional troughs of losing his father, breaking up with his partner and managing his loneliness during the Covid years. What began with panic attacks gradually pushed him towards hyper-anxiety, sleeplessness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), something that studies have shown can raise your risk of brain strokes by 59 per cent.

Akshay is one of many young Indians, who are experiencing brain strokes at an early age. A recent study in Scientific Reports has said that the prevalence of stroke has increased by 50 per cent over the last 17 years in India. At present, one in four people are at a risk of getting a stroke in their lifetime. A new analysis from the Global Burden of Disease, Injuries and Risk Factors Study (GBD), 2021, flagged brain stroke alongside Alzheimer's disease as responsible for increasing the number of those living with or dying by 18 per cent in 30 years.

Dr Praveen Gupta, principal director and unit head, neurology at Fortis, Gurugram, wasn't surprised when Akshay consulted him. "Every day, I see at least two patients with strokes, who are less than 40. Their triggers are always the same, stress, overwork and anxiety topping the list followed by obesity and sleep apnea. Recently, I had a 12-year-old patient who had suffered a stroke," he says, adding the case numbers have increased in the last two years.Stress, Dr Gupta explains, causes the heart to work harder and increases heart rate, blood pressure, sugar and fat levels in the blood. It stimulates the body to produce more stress hormones, all of which results in inflammation, damage and tear to lining of blood vessels and clot formation with platelets rushing to cluster together. A dislocated clot can travel to the brain and cause a stroke. "Akshay's anxiety levels were so high that his body was in permanent crisis mode, resulting in sudden spikes in blood pressure and heart rate," he adds. Even a slight increase in stress and anxiety levels may raise stroke risk, according to a study by the American Heart Association. Researchers followed more than 6,000 people over 22 years and found that those with the highest stress levels were 33 per cent more likely to have a stroke than those who felt less anxious or stressed.

Another reason behind brain strokes among the young population is homocysteine, an amino acid which clots the blood faster. "High levels of homocysteine have a correlation with moderate to high anxiety levels. You could be lacking certain B vita-

Every day, I see at least two patients with strokes, who are less than 40, says Dr Praveen Gupta, principal director and unit head, neurology at Fortis, Gurugram

mins too," says Dr Gupta.So devastated was Akshay by his father's death in May 2019 that he bottled up his emotions and left his hometown, taking up a job in another city. But that distancing plunged him further into loneliness. "Everyone had someone to grieve with. I was all alone and my emotions were all over the place," he says. Such was his need for companionship that he entered a relationship all too soon. That provided him some emotional relief. Which is why when he broke up with his partner, he crumbled all over again. This was the time when he showed classic symptoms of PTSD, having nightmares about his father and waking up all sweaty and breathless. "My heart pounded so hard that I consulted a cardiologist in August 2020. He put me on anxiety medication for two months. But then all hell broke loose. Apart from taking classes and interacting with my students online, the lack of human contact meant I plummeted once again," recalls Akshay.

By February 2021, he needed a psychiatrist, who recommended antidepressants and sleep medication. In April the same year, he had COVID-19. His D-dimer test, which indicates blood-clotting problems, was double than normal. This was the first red flag. "Some people with COVID-19 develop abnormal blood clots, including in the smallest blood vessels. And Akshay anyway had older triggers," says Dr Gupta.

The second red flag was September 2021 when Akshay had an episode of slurred speech, which his psychiatrist misdiagnosed as a panic attack. On October 9, 2021, Akshay had a blackout, his first stroke. But since he revived in a few seconds, he reckoned he had collapsed out of sheer exhaustion, not uncommon among those recovering from a bad bout of COVID. Just three days later, he had a major stroke. He felt dizzy, blacked out and lost sensation in his right limbs. "I was riding a bike that day and just got saved in the nick of time. My friend rushed me to a neurologist and an MRI showed two clots," says Akshay.

He had had an MCA (middle cerebral artery) stroke. "This supplies a large part of the frontal, temporal and parietal lobes of the brain, which control many functions, including movement, sensation, coordination, and language," says Dr Gupta.Akshay returned to his hometown and it took him a good two-and-a-half half months to get the sensations back in his body. But he had to give up his teaching job as he could not speak fluently.

After recovery, Akshay took up a job as a content moderator in a social media company. For two years, nothing happened, his anxiety was under control and he was gradually weaned off medication. A company in Gurugram offered him a job that he was excited about and he decided to move there permanently. But on January 31 this year, Akshay had an episode of vertigo. Tests showed minor strokes and he was given blood thinner injections for four days.

"But on February 2, I felt anxious, dizzy and thought my head would explode. The brain scans showed two clots and I resumed blood thinner injections for six days.

Exactly ten days later, on February 12, I had a blackout at a mall and slurred again. This lasted 10-15 seconds. He put me on anticoagulants and increased the dosage of other medication. Then, on March 9, I slipped while trying to get off a train at my hometown. I was again unable to move my right hand and leg. I just lay in hospital for five days and the vertigo was constant," says Akshay, who decided to consult Dr Gupta in Gurugram.Dr Gupta found the real problem — Akshay was now becoming resistant to medication. "In such cases, we have to keep rotating and changing the medication. Normally, when strokes happen in young patients, there are issues with the heart, such as a hole, blood clots and deformed arteries.

Fortunately, Akshay doesn't have all of this and he will be alright now. But a stroke patient can have secondary strokes if the triggers like blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, diet and exercise are not addressed aggressively," he adds.

Now Akshay is on double blood thinners which will prevent clotting by two mechanisms. He is also on mild hypertension medicines, statins and Clonazepam to relax his brain and help him sleep better."However, now I have a more holistic approach to my health as medication can only prevent a crisis but a lifestyle change can stop me from getting to the edge in the first place. I have a lot of green vegetables, avoid high cholesterol diets and exercise for 30 minutes daily. I do not smoke and sleep adequately," says Akshay, who is learning to prioritise himself over his problems.