

DAILY PT POINTERS

21th May, 2024



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ICMR distances itself from BHU's study on Covaxin

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has distanced itself from a Banaras Hindu University (BHU) study for "incorrectly" associating it with an observational study on the side-effects of COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin.

The ICMR said the recently published research paper titled "Long term safety analysis of the BBV152 coronavirus vaccine in adolescents and adults: findings from a one-year prospective study in North India" was poorly designed with critical flaws, and asked why it should not take legal and administrative action for these lapses.

In its letter to the researchers, the ICMR said it had not provided any financial or technical support for the research. ICMR Director-General Rajiv Bahl called the paper "poorly designed", and said it "incorrectly and misleadingly" acknowledges financial or technical support from the ICMR. "ICMR cannot be associated with this poorly designed study," the letter says.

"We the authors would like to state that all com-



The ICMR said it has not given any financial or technical support for the research.

munications received by us from ICMR are treated with utmost respect as confidential. We have already mailed the DG-ICMR with copy to the Director, IMS. We do not wish to make any other statements as we are scientists and do not like getting involved in unnecessary public controversies," the authors of the paper informed *The Hindu*.

In a press release on Monday, BHU noted that the "university has taken note of a study in connection with Covaxin after-effects and a series of reactions in that regard".

"We are aware of the communication made by the ICMR to the concerned individuals. The Institute of Medical Sciences is looking into the matter. It is also working on further

strengthening and improving its research ecosystem," the BHU said.

The ICMR has directed BHU to immediately remove the "acknowledgement to ICMR" for the study and publish an *erratum*.

"We have also noticed that you have similarly acknowledged ICMR in similar previous papers without permission. Please explain why ICMR should not seek legal and administrative action against you," it noted.

In its letter, the ICMR listed out critical flaws with the study and said that it did not have a control group of unvaccinated individuals to prove that the side-effects were indeed associated with vaccination. Also it did not mention how frequently these adverse events were reported by the sample population to establish that they were associated with vaccination. It said the study tool was not consistent with the definition of "adverse events of special interest" that is globally accepted, and the responses of the participants were recorded one year after immunisation without verification of any clinical records or physician examination.

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the country's apex body for formulation, coordination, and promotion of biomedical research, has distanced itself from the 'poorly designed study' of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) wherein it raised concerns on the safety of the Indian-developed Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin.
- COVAXIN, India's indigenous **COVID-19 vaccine** by Bharat Biotech is developed in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - National Institute of Virology (NIV).
- The indigenous, inactivated vaccine is developed and manufactured in Bharat Biotech's **BSL-3 (Bio-Safety Level 3)** high containment facility.
- The vaccine is developed using **Whole-Virion Inactivated Vero Cell** derived platform technology

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The baobab lineage originated in Madagascar roughly 21 million years ago. REUTERS

The baobab's journey from Madagascar to Africa and Australia

Reuters

The baobab tree is a distinctive sight on the landscape. When its contorted branches are leafless during the dry seasons, they resemble jumbled roots emanating from a thick trunk, making it appear as if someone had yanked the tree from the ground, flipped it on its head, and jammed it back into the earth.

But the origins and history of the baobab, found in Madagascar and parts of Africa and Australia, have been something of a mystery. A new study has resolved this based on genomic analyses of all eight recognised species as well as ecological and geological data.

The baobab lineage originated in Madagascar roughly 21 million years ago

- The baobab lineage originated in Madagascar roughly 21 million years ago and reached Africa and Australia sometime in the past 12 million years, the researchers found. Madagascar, an island off Africa's southeastern coast, is a biodiversity hot spot and home to unusual flora and fauna.
- Baobabs, found in dry savannah habitats, provide food, shelter and nesting sites for wildlife. Their fruits also provide nutrients and medicines for people, and the leaves are edible. The trees produce large, sweet-smelling flowers whose sugary nectar attracts nocturnal pollinators as well as two types of primates, lemurs in Madagascar and bush babies in Africa.

The Hindu- IR(GSII)

North Sea energy firms look beyond U.K. after tax squeeze

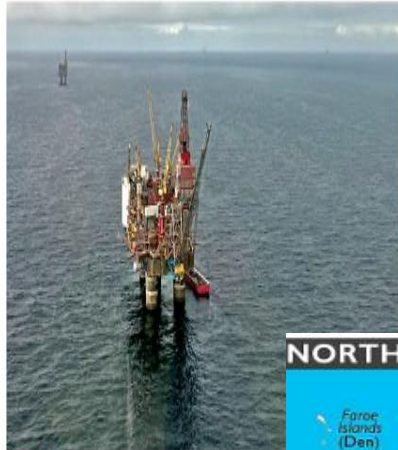
NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
LONDON

North Sea oil and gas producers are merging and shifting overseas as Britain's windfall tax slashes profits and as the opposition Labour Party threatens more tax if it wins the next general election.

The change of strategy could accelerate the decline of domestic production, risking increased dependency on imports, greater vulnerability to higher consumer prices and more job losses.

Oil majors such as Shell, Chevron and Exxon Mobil have long since pulled back from the ageing basin in pursuit of more profitable



Lower supplies: Sifel projects that the UK's oil and gas output would halve

ble oilfields, divesting assets to smaller producers such as Harbour Energy, Ithaca Energy and Serica Energy.

These independent oil and gas producers are now looking further afield and merging to cut costs and boost revenue.

"Unfortunately, the U.K. government has turned the U.K. North Sea into a very harsh business environment," Gilad Myerson, executive chairman of Ithaca Energy, one of the largest North Sea producers, told Reuters last month.

In 2022, the U.K. imposed a 25% Energy Profit Levy on the sector after a jump in energy prices resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine swelled profits as consumers faced higher prices, following similar measures in other European countries.

Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt subsequently extended the levy until 2029 and raised it to 35%, bringing the total tax burden to 75%, among the highest in the world. The levy, however, exempts most profits that are re-invested in oil and gas production, in what is known as the investment allowance.

"When you have a fiscal challenge, the bigger you are, the stronger you are," Ithaca's Myerson said, adding the company was looking to expand overseas to Norway, Denmark and elsewhere.

Harbour Energy, meanwhile, agreed in December to acquire oil and gas assets with the U.K. assets of Italy's Eni.

Sifel estimate that over the remaining lifespan of the North Sea basin, a higher tax rate and removal of the investment allowance would lower investment by 30 billion pounds (\$38 billion) more than its current estimates, leading to a faster decline in output.

Under that scenario, Sifel projects that by 2030, the U.K.'s oil and gas out-



- North Sea oil and gas producers are merging and shifting overseas as Britain's windfall tax slashes profits
- **Neighboring countries:** Great Britain (Scotland and England), Netherlands, Belgium, France, Norway, Denmark and Germany.
- The North Sea connects to the **Atlantic Ocean** via the **English Channel** in the southwest and the **Baltic Sea** in the east via the **Kattegat** and **Skagerrak straits**.
- The North Sea is the mouth of the rivers such as **Rhine** and **Elbe**. The Sea hosts two of the world's largest ports i.e. **Hamburg** and **Rotterdam**.

SII ships 1st set of malaria vaccine doses to Africa

ANURADHA
MASCARENHAS
PUNE, MAY 20

SERUM INSTITUTE of India (SII), world's largest manufacturer of vaccines by number of doses, marked a significant milestone on Monday with the shipment of the first set of R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine to seven-eight countries in Africa.

Close to half-a-million children die of malaria each year in Africa, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The low-cost, high-efficacy R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine was developed by the University of Oxford and SII leveraging Novavax's adjuvant technology.

The vaccine has demonstrated high efficacy with a reassuring safety profile and the R21/Matrix-M vaccine is the second malaria vaccine to be authorised for use in children in malaria-endemic regions.

While SII has manufactured 25 million doses, Adar



US envoy to India Eric Garcetti and SII CEO Adar Poonawalla flag off the vaccine shipment in Pune on Monday. Arul Horizon

Poonawalla, CEO, SII, said they had a production capacity for 100 million doses per annum. Of the total 1,63,800 doses allocated for the Central African Republic region, 43,200 doses were dispatched from SII facility Monday. The initial shipment will be sent to CAR, followed by other African countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the coming days.

"This is a malaria vaccine for

the African continent," Poonawalla said. "It is not for India as the parasite is found in Africa... This will be widely available and accessible to all the African countries and also the other lower-middle-income countries," Poonawalla told media persons at the flag-off ceremony. "SII fully funded phase 3 clinical trial," he said.

On a vaccine for India, Poonawalla said "it will take another five years for a malaria vaccine." He also spoke about efforts towards a dengue vaccine. "...clinical trials are underway and after two-three years we can expect a dengue vaccine in India," he said.

Earlier, Eric Garcetti, US Ambassador to India said it was a history-changing day for children in Africa due to the generosity of the Poonawalla's. "...it is not a money-making, but a life-saving effort and shows the collective commitment of people here, who know that first and foremost we are human beings and need to save lives," Garcetti

said. "During our travels we visit great religious centres, temples, the Vatican and so on. This (SII) is in some ways a health pilgrimage site," he said.

The US Ambassador also noted that work in the US was underway for a dengue fever vaccine, which had taken into account all four major strains and was in the third round of clinical trials.

Silvia Taylor, Executive Vice President, Chief Corporate Affairs and Advocacy Officer, Novavax, said the malaria vaccine was a historic moment in the fight against malaria.

She also flagged concern about the need to build public trust in vaccines.

Dr Umesh Shaligram, Executive Director, R&D, SII, also spoke on the occasion. Earlier, Dr Mehreen Dattoo, Associate Fellow, Clinical Lecturer in Infectious Diseases, Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford, and others were felicitated by Adar and Natasha Poonawalla.

- Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines by number of doses, marked a significant milestone on Monday with the shipment of the first set of R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine to seven-eight countries in Africa.
- The vaccine has been developed in collaboration with the University of Oxford and Novavax's Matrix-M adjuvant. This is the second malaria vaccine to be authorised for use in children in malaria-endemic regions

Do you know ?

- Malaria is a life-threatening disease spread to humans by some types of mosquitoes. It is mostly found in tropical countries. It is preventable and curable.
- The infection is caused by a parasite and does not spread from person to person.
- Malaria mostly spreads to people through the bites of some infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes. Blood transfusion and contaminated needles may also transmit malaria.

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Antarctic Parliament meets in Kochi: what's on the table?

ANJALI MARAR
KOCHI, MAY 20

INDIA IS hosting the 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM 46), also known as the Antarctic Parliament, from May 20-30 in Kochi. The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, Goa, through the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), has organised the meeting, which will be attended by the 56 member countries of the Antarctic Treaty.

India had last hosted the ATCM in New Delhi in 2007.

The Antarctic Treaty

Twelve countries — Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the USSR, the United Kingdom, and the United States — were the original signatories to the Antarctic Treaty, which was signed on December 1, 1959. The treaty came into force in 1961, and a total of 56 countries — including India, in 1983 — have joined it since then.

The Antarctic Treaty, which was signed during the Cold War, effectively designated Antarctica as a "no man's land", outside the bounds of international geopolitical competition. A few key features of the treaty are:

■ Antarctica shall be used only for peaceful purposes, and no militarisation or fortification shall be allowed.

■ All signatories will have the freedom to carry out scientific investigations, and should share plans for scientific programmes, extend required cooperation, and freely make available the data gathered.

■ Nuclear testing or disposal of radioactive waste materials shall be prohibited anywhere in Antarctica.

Today, the treaty forms the basis of all governance and activities in Antarctica, the fifth-largest continent on the planet.

India in Antarctica

Since 1983, India has been a consultative party to the Antarctic Treaty. In this capacity, India votes and participates in all key deci-

sion-making processes regarding Antarctica. Of the 56 nations that are part of the Antarctic Treaty, 29 have consultative party status.

India has undertaken scientific research in Antarctica since 1981. The first Indian Antarctica research station, Dakshin Gangotri, was set up in 1983, some 2,500 km from the South Pole in Queen Maud Land. The station operated till 1990.

In 1989, India set up its second Antarctica research station, named Maitri, in the Schirmacher Oasis, a 3-km wide ice-free plateau with over

100 freshwater lakes. It is still operational and located about 5 km from Russia's Novolazarevskaya Station, and 90 km from Dakshin Gangotri. According to the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, Maitri can accommodate 65 persons in summer, and 25 in the winter.

In 2012, India inaugurated Bharati, its third Antarctica research station, located around 3,000 km east of Maitri, on the Prydz



Wikimedia Commons

Bay coast. Although the station focuses on oceanographic and geologic study, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) utilises it for receiving Indian Remote sensing Satellite (IRS) data. The station can support up to 72 individuals during summer, and 47 in winter.

India plans to open a new station, Maitri II, a few kilometres from the ageing Maitri station. Operations are set to begin by 2029.

In 2022, India enacted the Antarctic Act, reaffirming its commitment to the Antarctic Treaty.

Agenda before ATCM

The ATCM is meant to facilitate a global dialogue on law, logistics, governance, science, tourism, and other aspects of the southern continent.

During the conference, India will seek to promote the idea of peaceful governance in Antarctica, and underline that geopolitical tensions elsewhere in the world should not interfere with the protection of the continent and its resources.

Dr M Ravichandran, Secretary, MoES, told *The Indian Express* that India would also introduce a new working group for regulating tourism on the continent.

"While India has expressed concerns regarding tourism-related activities in Antarctica since 2016, this is for the first time

a dedicated working group will work to formulate regulations, track tourist activities, and lay down rules," Ravichandran said.

The Netherlands, Norway, and some other European countries that share India's views on formulating regulations for tourism in Antarctica, will be part of this working group, which hopes to come to a consensus regarding some actionable guidelines. Currently, tourism to Antarctica is driven by tour operators, and little is known about the threat tourists may pose to Antarctica's fragile ecosystem.

During the Kochi meet, India will also officially table its plan to construct Maitri II before the members. Any new construction or initiative in Antarctica requires the ATCM's approval.

The ATCM will see discussions on sustainable management of Antarctica and its resources; biodiversity prospecting; inspections and exchange of information and data; research, collaboration, capacity building and cooperation; and climate change impacts on Antarctica and beyond.

- India has been a Consultative Party to the Antarctic Treaty since 1983.
- It participates in the decision-making process along with other Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty .
- India's first Antarctic research station, Dakshin Gangotri, was established in 1983.
- At present, India operates two year-round research stations: Maitri (1989) and Bharati (2012). The permanent research stations facilitate Indian Scientific Expeditions to Antarctica, which have been ongoing annually since 1981.
- In 2022, India enacted the Antarctic Act, reaffirming its commitment to the Antarctic Treaty.

HOW VENEZUELA LOST ITS LAST GLACIER, AND WHY THIS MATTERS

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 20

VENEZUELA HAS likely become the first country in modern history to lose all its glaciers. This comes after scientists reclassified the Humboldt glacier, the country's last remaining glacier, as an ice field earlier this month.

Venezuela used to be home to six glaciers, located at about 5,000 metres above sea level in the Andes. By 2011, five of them had vanished. Scientists had expected Humboldt to last another decade, but it has shrunk to an area of less than 2 hectares, leading to its downgrade to an ice field.

Like Humboldt, other glaciers around the world are shrinking and disappearing faster than researchers thought. Two-thirds of them are projected to melt out of existence by 2100 at current climate change trends, according to a 2023 study.

Creeping rivers of ice

Glaciers are essentially large and thick masses of ice that are formed on land due to the accumulation of snow over centuries. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), they usually exist in areas where mean annual temperatures reach near the freezing point; winter precipitation leads to significant snow accumulations; and temperatures throughout the remaining year do not cause the complete loss of the previous winter's snow accumulation.

Due to their mass and gravity, glaciers and to flow like very slow rivers.



The Humboldt glacier, also known as La Corona, in 2019. AP

Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, have witnessed a temperature increase of 0.10 degree Celsius in the past seven decades. That is one of the major reasons why Venezuela has lost all of its glaciers.

In the case of the Humboldt glacier, the melting was accelerated by El Niño, which developed in July 2023. El Niño refers to an abnormal warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean and leads to warmer temperatures.

Why glacier loss matters

Glaciers are a crucial source of freshwater for local communities, plants, and animals. Without them, one would be entirely dependent on spot rainfall for freshwater.

Cold glacier runoffs keep downstream water cooler, which is key to the survival of many aquatic species that are essential

According to the **International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI)**, Venezuela's only remaining glacier — the **Humboldt, or La Corona**, in the Andes has become “too small to be classed as a glacier”.

About

The Venezuela had been home to six glaciers in the Sierra Nevada de Mérida mountain range

Five of the glaciers had disappeared by 2011, leaving just the **Humboldt glacier, also known as La Corona**. But it shrank so much that scientists reclassified it as an ice field.

Venezuela has lost all of its glaciers because The Andes has witnessed a temperature increase in the past seven decades.

Andes is the world's longest continental range of mountains running through parts of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela .

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SC to revisit 1995 order on suing doctors in consumer court: here's why

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, MAY 20

A TWO-JUDGE Bench of the Supreme Court has recommended to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) that an almost three-decade-old judgment of the top court that allowed doctors to be sued in consumer court for faulty service should be reconsidered.

Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mishra made the observation about doctors in a judgment last week, in which they held that as “professionals”, lawyers could not be subjected to legal proceedings for providing faulty ‘service’ under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, as re-enacted in 2019 (CPA).

“We are of the opinion that the decision of the three-judge bench in case of *Indian Medical Association vs V P Shantha*, deserves to be revisited and considered by a larger bench,” the court said in its judgment on May 14 (*Bar of Indian Lawyers vs D K Gandhi*).

In *V P Shantha* (1995), a Bench of Justices S C Agarwal, Kuldip Singh, and B L Hansania had ruled that medical professionals provide a “service” as defined in the older CPA (the definition remains the same in the current CPA), and could thus be sued in consumer court for providing faulty service.

In its May 14 judgment, the court made a distinction between “professionals” and those who carry out a business or a trade – ruling that “neither the ‘Profession’ could be treated as ‘business’ or ‘trade’ nor the services provided by the ‘Professionals’ could be treated at par with the services provided by the Businessmen or the Traders, so as to bring them within the purview of the CP Act”.

Doctors provide a ‘service’

In the 1995 case, counsel for Indian Medical Association (IMA) argued that a medical practitioner cannot be judged on fixed norms or standards, and thus cannot be covered un-

der the definition of “service” or be sued over “deficiency in service” under the CPA.

The SC acknowledged that professional occupations differ from other occupations as success often depends on factors “beyond the professional man’s control”. However, it ruled that a doctor still has certain duties towards the patient – duties of deciding whether to treat the patient, what treatment to give, and how to administer it.

If the doctor does not exercise a “reasonable degree of care” and breaches one of these duties, they can be liable for deficiency in service, the court said.

In the present case, however, the court held that the purpose of the CPA was to protect consumers from “unfair trade practices and unethical business practices only”, and that the legislature never “intended to include the Professions or the Professionals within the purview of the Act”.

‘Complexity’ is not a bar

Legal proceedings under the CPA lie before Consumer Redressal Commissions that are constituted at district, state, and national levels. Under the 1986 version of the CPA, which was applicable in 1995, the president of each commission would be a person who was, or was qualified to be, a judge of the district court, High Court, and Supreme Court respectively.

**EXPLAINED
LAW**

The rest of the members (two at the district and state levels; four at the national level) would be individuals with the knowledge, experience, or capacity to deal with “problems relating to economics, law, commerce, accountancy, industry, public affairs or administration”.

The petitioners in *V P Shantha* argued that since commission members are not required to have knowledge in medical matters, they are unsuited to deal with complex

medical issues.

The court rejected this argument, holding that requiring members to have knowledge and experience that is specifically relevant to each individual case “would lead to impossible situations”.

The question of free service

The definition of ‘service’ in both the 1986 and 2019 CPAs explicitly excludes two types of services – those that are free of charge, and those given under a “contract of personal service”.

The court identified three types of services in the medical profession – those free for everyone, those for which everyone pays, and those which are free for certain categories of people who cannot afford them. Under the CPA, the first is not a service, while the second is.

With regard to the third type of service, the court said it was “difficult to conceive” that lawmakers had intended to make the

protections under the CPA available only to consumers who could afford to pay for medical services.

This, the court said, would result in hospitals and doctors giving better services to those who could afford it, while providing “inferior” services to those who could not. To avoid this inequity, the court held that hospitals and doctors falling under the third category will be covered by the definition of ‘service’, regardless of whether it was free.

The court also held that medical care is not provided as a “contract of personal service”, as such contracts are limited to situations where there is an employer-employee or a “master and servant” relationship between the two parties.

“Since there is no relationship of master and servant between the doctor and the patient, the contract between the medical practitioner and his patient cannot be treated as a contract of ‘personal service’, the court held.

- the Supreme Court allowed a review of a 2022 judgment where a Bench of Justices Hemant Gupta and V Ramasubramanian allowed gram panchayats to acquire *shamlat deh* land.
- *Shamlat deh* is essentially village common land, created by multiple landowners contributing an equal portion of their individual land holdings to serve the “common purposes” of village’s people.
- The apex court in 2022 had **upheld a 1992 amendment** to the Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1961 (henceforth, the Punjab Act) which allows gram panchayats to manage and control *shamlat deh* land as “lands reserved for the common purposes of a village”.

HEADLINES OF THE DAY



PIB-Economy(GSIII)

Ministry of Commerce & Industry

ULIP Workshop Brings States Together to Enhance India's Logistics

Posted On: 20 MAY 2024 6:31PM by PIB Delhi

- Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP) continues to lead the charge in transforming India's logistics sector. Today, a groundbreaking workshop was held under the chairmanship of Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)
- ULIP is a digital gateway that allows industry players to access logistics-related datasets from various Government systems through API-based integration. Currently, the platform integrates with 37 systems from 10 ministries via 118 APIs, covering over 1800 data fields. Private sector participation in ULIP has been instrumental in amplifying its impact, with over 900 companies registered on the ULIP portal