

# THE BEACON

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## New guidelines for surrogacy hailed

Shruti Srivastava

The defective gene pool of the parents can be avoided in the child with surrogacy believes Dr Anuja Shukla (name changed), a junior resident at Moti Lal Nehru Medical College, Prayagraj. On February 22, the Union Health Ministry amended the already existing Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022 which stated that the couple opting for surrogacy have to have both the male and the female gamete of their own.

In the new Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules (2024) the couple is allowed to use a donor gamete after the declaration of the incompetency of either of the partners to use their gametes.

Talking about the medical complications in cases where the parents have defective genes she said, "This will perhaps help in eliminating the defective gene pool in the baby if the parents are carriers of specific disease which may manifest in the child if parents gametes are used."

She added that a lot of genetic disorders and other genetically transmitted diseases can be eliminated from the entire generation if the genes carrying these diseases are not used and instead the donor gametes are used.

Shukla mentioned that this amendment comes as a ray of hope for all the couples who have been finding it difficult to conceive. She said, "This is indeed a great initiative of gifting parents with this bundle of joy."

## Open-source voice AI bridging digital disparities

Aatreyi Bose

**BENGALURU:** Shedding light upon India's current Artificial Intelligence (AI) research landscape, Prasanta Kumar Ghosh, Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), elucidated three open-source voice technology projects that he is leading. His pivotal work aims to merge the socio-economic digital divide by democratising clear, gender-balanced speech recognition in multiple Indian languages.

Currently, his research team of engineers and linguistic experts has been working on Recognizing Speech in Indian Languages (RESPIN) and the Google funded Vaani Project, targeted towards building datasets and models for speech-to-text (STT) applications. The third project Synthesising Speech in Indian Languages (SYSPIN) caters to text-to-speech (TTS) applications. IISc received grants of over



Prasanta Kumar Ghosh

Aatreyi Bose

two million USD from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the German Development Cooperation initiative for RESPIN and SYSPIN, respectively.

In conversation with The Beacon, he said, "For RESPIN, we are nearly closing a collection of 10,000 hours of read-speech in nine Indian languages, including the dialectal variations. For example, we worked in four different regional variations of Telugu. We have worked with Bengali, Hindi, Marathi,

Kannada and also four low-resource languages like Chhattisgarhi, Maithili, Magahi, and Bhojpuri. We are recording from nearly 2,000 people on the ground in every language. In the case of SYSPIN, it is a high-quality studio recording from one male and one female speaker for every language."

Tracing rapid development of startups within the speech technology ecosystem, he pointed out data availability as the primary obstacle. He noted larger corporations often

overlook India's interior areas and dialects, concentrating on metropolitan areas for business alignment. Offering a solution, he emphasised, the outcome of all these projects is going to be open-source, that is anyone developing technology can download datasets under specific licensed conditions. He added, "Google sees the value in enabling this technology to a bigger set of population. Tech giants like Google coming forward in support of the Indian speech and language

technology ecosystem will indeed make a difference." Vaani, in its first phase, focuses on 80 districts, collecting 200 hours of spontaneous speech with natural expressions from each district.

To enable better accessibility for working class people who might be illiterate or technologically-challenged, Ghosh identified the need to use the smartphone in a smart way, "There is information out there on the internet; they have a phone in their hand, but they do not know how to access it. The application of STT and TTS is very well known in conversational AI, where one would like to interact with machines in a very seamless manner, like human-to-human interaction."

He also highlighted the need to responsibly use AI and said, "We make sure that the inputs to train these algorithms are good, balanced, and unbiased to make the voice models ethically correct."

## Tunnel construction proposal may hit a road block

Diva Batavia

**BENGALURU:** The road tunnel under construction on a pilot basis from Hebbal Junction to Mekhri Circle has not gone well with the environmentalists who are concerned about the potential environmental hazards the project poses.

The construction of the tunnel was mooted by Chief Minister Siddaramiah in his budget speech recently. Kiran Kumar, an environmental activist said that the construction of a tunnel would not decongest the traffic, instead, it poses a threat to the environment.



Representational Image

The Indian Express

Pointing to the dangers it posed to human life, he recalled an incident of an IT professional death caused due to water logging in one of the underpasses, recently.

Kumar was associated with a project regarding metro construction with

government and the citizens."

Prashant Kumar, a civil engineer said, "To construct tunnels, the soil must be fit enough to be constructed, if not the consequences could be dangerous." Tunnels are a more sustainable form of construction compared to that of flyovers and bridges.

An important point to keep in mind while constructing the tunnel is no living organism should be harmed. The return of Investment should be kept in mind and the benefits citizens would incur as well as the government said an environmentalist.

## Training budding journalists to tackle fake news

Prajwal S K

**CAMPUS:** Google News Initiative, in collaboration with DataLEADS, held a training workshop Tuesday at St Joseph University to combat misinformation.

The training workshop focused on providing the students with the necessary digital tools and abilities to identify fake news in the present digital era.

Giridhar Narayan, a Google News Initiative (GNI) trainer, stressed the distinction between misinformation and disinformation. "Inaccurate information spread by people without their knowledge is called misinformation. In contrast, disinformation is the false information that is deliberately spread to mislead individuals". He also emphasised the need to distinguish between the two in developing the critical thinking abilities required to navigate today's complex data ecosystem.

Further, the workshop educated on the essential tools helpful in rectifying the fake news content. The tools include reverse image search engines like Google Lens and Yandex, TinEye or InVID for verifying images and videos globally. Platforms like Tgstat.com analyzes Telegram groups, and WhatsApp's "forwarded many times" label signals a need for verification.

## Public outcry over tree felling

Sonia Sebi

**BENGALURU:** Following the chopping of 25 trees on the footpaths of Whitefield by a company, Sandeep, Founder of Citizens Agenda Bengaluru mentioned that it is high time for the government to ensure the laws are abided by and people who violate face strict actions.

Social media posts protesting the action by Whitefield Citizens Ward Committees surfaced on X. The post sought redressal for the encroachment and destruction of footpaths.

Despite the attention being drawn a month ago about the sheets being put up covering the trees on the footpath,



Representational image

Deccan Herald

neither BBMP nor traffic police took action. "Tree cutting is happening with no permission. For this, even permissions can't be given because it's on a public footpath. They should punish them because it'll set an example to everyone," said Sandeep.

BBMP forest officials responded that the permission for cutting the tree was denied when approached by the company. Authorities have responded by filing an FIR against the company. He also stated that the company acknowledged the wrongdoing.

## Cinematic view of 'Article 370'

Shruti Srivastava

**BENGALURU:** The recently released movie 'Article 370' directed by Aditya Suhas Jambhale has been the talk of the town since its release.

The film is about Article 370 from the lens of a Kashmiri. The movie has female leads played by Yami Gautam and Priyamani. The story revolves around the implementation of Article 370 in Kashmir and the effects of its implementation. The director has done a good job of explaining

the circumstances of the pre and post-era of the implementation of this Article in Kashmir. The narrative of the movie has been kept simple for a better understanding of the audience. There have been a few creative liberties that have been taken by the director that align with the narration of the movie. The screenplay of the movie has been kept simple and the actors have done a great job in portraying the characters. The IMDb rating of the movie is 8.8/10.