



BASAI News Updates

August 19, 2022

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Preventing pollution

Challenge is to tap into yearning for making a difference

POLLUTION is typically viewed as a local issue to be addressed through provincial regulation, though its drivers and its effects on health transcend boundaries. Synergising environmental policies becomes essential considering that by 2050, as much as 68 per cent of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas. A US-based research organisation's report on air pollution exposure and health impacts in 7,239 cities across the globe (with a minimum population of 50,000) from 2010 to 2019 presents the grim reality for India, which it says is home to 18 of the 20 cities with the most severe increase in fine particle pollutants (PM2.5). Delhi and Kolkata had the highest average levels among the most-populated cities, recording 106 and 99 deaths per one lakh population in 2019, respectively, attributed to air pollution. Worldwide, air pollution alone is said to account for one in nine deaths.

According to another report, about 93 per cent of India's population was living in areas where PM2.5 pollution levels were worse than even the lowest recorded by the World Health Organisation for its new air quality standards. Amid the scary numbers, a tiny window of hope is the mounting public concern and awareness. How to tap into this yearning for making a difference at an individual level and through community participation is a challenge, of course, but also an opportunity. The Centre and states have come up with policies that incentivise renewable sources of energy, but the rapid combined thrust for a large-scale transition still awaits an effective strategy.

Pollution prevention has to be integrated into the development agenda. No amount is enough as an investment in monitoring and supporting pollution reduction efforts. As extreme weather conditions and unsafe settlements test human survival, the close link between pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss could not be clearer.

{ DATA PROTECTION AUTHORITY }

New law may do away with key privacy body

Deeksha Bhardwaj

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The new privacy bill being drafted by the government may drop the concept of a centralised data protection authority (DPA) proposed in versions of the now-junked personal data protection bill, people aware of discussions said, adding that a grievance redressal mechanism for aggrieved individuals might be put in place instead.

DPA was pitched as an overarching regulator in past versions of the data protection law, with powers to lay down rules, monitor compliance and take action in cases where the privacy of Indian citizens is violated by private enterprise or state entities. "A lot

of the functions that were allotted to DPA were out of its remit; the collection, storage and sharing of personal data will either be worked into the law itself or be included in the rules that will be made under the law," an official familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity. "The idea is to not overwhelm one authority and increase compliance costs for small companies."

The official added that there is likely to be no DPA, although nothing has been finalised yet. "Instead, if the aggrieved person feels that their data has been misused, they can approach a grievance redressal mechanism that may be set up. Consent and privacy will always remain supreme." →PB

{ CLIMATE CRISIS }

Heatwave, floods strike China, Algeria & Sudan

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

BEIJING: China's water ministry warned that severe drought conditions in the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze river could last well into September. A severe heatwave across the basin of China's longest river, caused by a larger than usual Western Pacific subtropical high, has now lasted more than two months, slashing hydropower supplies and drying out large expanses of arable land.

Normal water flows could still be months away, with rainfall expected to remain low until the end of this month and beyond, said Liu Zhiyu, an official at the ministry of water resources.

Meanwhile, 16 people were killed and many left missing in flash flooding in a mountainous region of Datong county in Qinghai province, northwest China, affecting more than 6,200 people from six villages.

More than 70 people have been killed and 14,500 homes destroyed by Sudan's seasonal downpours and floods, a senior official said on Thursday.

Algerian firefighters on Thursday battled two dozen blazes fanned by heatwave that have killed at least 38 people and left destruction across the North African country. Most were in the El Tarf region near Algeria's eastern border with Tunisia, an area which has been sweltering in 48°C heat.

Also, brutal storms with winds gusting up to 224 kmph left five people dead on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica early on Thursday.

Five people, including two children, died on Thursday as storms wreaked havoc in Austria, according to officials.



A tree trunk lies on the dried-up riverbed (top) of the Jialing river, a tributary of the Yangtze in Chongqing, China; Algerians check a charred bus in which at least 12 people were reportedly burnt to death following raging fires in the city of el-Kala and a Sudanese walks through a flooded area in the eastern state of Kassala. AGENCIES

Govt must act on false claims by Patanjali

The Delhi high court (HC) came down sharply on Patanjali Ayurved and its founder, yoga exponent Ramdev, in a case involving the company's controversial product Coronil this week. On a petition by some doctors alleging that the company was misleading consumers on the efficacy of vaccines and allopathic treatment of Covid-19, the HC asked Ramdev to desist from making unsubstantiated claims while speaking in favour of Coronil. The HC is right. The pandemic is not behind us, and to undermine public health interventions for narrow business interests — and Ramdev's exhortations are little more than advertisements for products made by his company — can only be allowed at dire costs to the nation. Since Coronil was launched in the summer of 2020, Patanjali has attracted criticism and censure in equal measure for pushing the product aggressively.

Ayurveda and traditional medical knowledge systems are important and have their own place in the medical and wellness ecosystem. But overblown claims about them replacing proven, evidence-based allopathic medical treatments are irresponsible and damage the reputation of these knowledge systems. Rational decision-making based on sound scientific evidence is crucial at any point of policymaking, but even more so in the middle of a pandemic when millions of lives are at stake. The government must take note of the HC's observations and ensure no erroneous claims are allowed to undermine important public health programmes such as administering vaccines.