

'Make healthcare integral to India's maritime workforce'

HEMANG PALAN

Mental wellbeing of seafarers is a growing concern due to ongoing war and conflicts in the Middle East region, long periods on board and work stress, says Suhasini Deshmukh, Director, MedRabbits Healthcare and Clinic. A qualified nutritionist and a dedicated healthcare professional, Suhasini is an alumna of SNDT Women's University. Excerpts from an interview

WHY does healthcare preparedness need to become an integral part of India's maritime workforce strategy?

The advancement of maritime activities in India is correlated with the availability of a quality seafaring workforce that is adequately trained and ready for employment. Due to the fact that seafarers often operate away from hospitals, specialists and emergency services, comprehensive pre-departure health assessment, disease prevention programmes, nutrition education and prompt clinical assistance are essential for timely detection of medical problems and protection of seafarers' health.

By embedding the health-

care component into workforce management, India would ensure the application of the results of medical examinations, as well as follow-up medical management of the seafarers' condition. Healthier workforce performs more safely, suffers less operational failures and demonstrates increased adaptability of the maritime sector. Adequate pre-employment checks also drastically reduce any insurance claims thus saving cost of additional premiums for ship owners.

How can comprehensive pre sea medical assessments help identify health risks before seafarers begin deployment?

A medical assessment conducted before going at sea contributes to getting insight into the health of a seafarer prior to their work in an environment where medical help may not be widely available. Apart from the determination of medical fitness, a complete evaluation including a medical examination, necessary tests and medical history is able to pinpoint potential issues like high blood pressure, high glucose levels, cardiovascular problems, eyesight and hearing problems and make it possible to take precautions to

'HEALTHCARE PREPAREDNESS NEEDS TO GO BEYOND MEDICAL FITNESS CERTIFICATION'

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- Suhasini Deshmukh, Director, MedRabbits Healthcare and Clinic

prevent them from emerging in the future.

The value of screening lies in subsequent actions taken after the assessment. When a potential health issue is identified, it is essential to refer the patient to a qualified medical facility for further investigations and treatment. Qualified medical centers can assist in this taking into consideration that the medical assessment is done according to set up rules and regulations and in a thorough manner in order to accurately reflect the person's state of health precisely.

What is the importance of preventive healthcare and nutrition in maintaining the long term health and performance of seafarers?

Preventive healthcare and nutrition are important in managing the health of maritime workload as seafarers spend a long time without seeing their regular health providers. The long working hours, lack of a proper sleeping pattern, limited food options and restricted leisure time for physical activities may have their toll on their health.

Nutrition is especially impor-

tant since eating habits contribute to controlling such diseases as obesity, diabetes and hypertension. The seafarers need to have access to proper food and water and some recommendations regarding their nutrition based on their personal health needs and conditions.

The industry needs to adopt a proactive approach where seafarers are provided with health education opportunities before and during their work on the ship. Medical centers, shipping companies and management of the ships can cooperate in the implementation of the healthy practices. Mental wellbeing of seafarers is an equally growing concern due to ongoing war

and conflicts in the Middle East region, long periods on board and work stress.

How can early identification and management of health conditions help reduce avoidable medical emergencies at sea?

Medical emergencies on the sea get complicated even more when a seafarer's underlying health problem is not detected or treated properly. Even if not all emergencies can be avoided, early detection makes it possible to decrease the risks connected to some specific diseases. For example, uncontrolled hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular risk can be diagnosed before the beginning of voyage,

which gives an opportunity to start treatment, suggest lifestyle changes and establish whether further medical evaluation is necessary. It is especially important for seafarers who can be away from health care services for a few weeks or months.

It means that the approach should be broader than just issuing a medical certificate. A seafarer who has health issues should be trained on how to deal with it, including taking medications on time, knowing warning signs and planning follow-up visits.

What is the role of certified medical centers in supporting a safer, healthier and more sus-

tainable maritime workforce?

Certified medical centers bridge the gap between regulatory medical standards and the health of seafarers and shipping personnel. These centres help ensure that medical assessments are carried out according to required standards with sufficient medical expertise, the use of adequate diagnostic equipment and proper documentation. The quality of medical assessment is influenced not just by conducting tests. It also depends on the systematic evaluation of the health status of the seafarer, accurate understanding of test results and proper suggestions for further medical assistance when required.

At MedRabbits Healthcare and Clinic, our certification from the Directorate General of Shipping allows us to carry out mandatory pre-sea medical assessments of marine officers and workers. By using our knowledge and skills, we help make a significant impact on maritime healthcare.

How can India strengthen its maritime healthcare ecosystem as its seafaring workforce continues to grow?

The maritime healthcare system in India requires a shift from being focused purely on pre-departure fitness certification to allowing seafarers to receive medical care at different points of their careers. As the seafaring workforce expands, the industry must develop healthcare systems that satisfy both urgent medical needs and those of safety and long-term health.

One crucial area where improvements are needed is the need for establishing certification medical stations in prominent places within the maritime sector, as well as ensuring that appropriate diagnostic equipment and professional teams of doctors in charge are available. India should also ensure the smooth flow of care through the use of digital medical records whenever needed, as well as health checkups at certain periods and good coordination of medical institutions, employers and seafarers. Preventive health programs targeting such aspects as healthy nutrition, chronic diseases prevention and psychological health should be developed. Mental wellness programs also should be an integral and voluntary part of pre joining assessment.

vivo to felicitate 10 educators from 6 states

BIZZ BUZZ BUREAU
HYDERABAD

VIVO India has announced 10 Teacher Innovation Fellows under the 4th edition of vivo Ignite 2026, recognising educators who are going beyond conventional classroom learning to nurture curiosity, experimentation, problem-solving and innovation among students.

Introduced as a new component of vivo Ignite 4.0, the National Teacher Innovation Fellowship (NTIF) aims to strengthen the STEM education ecosystem by recognising teachers' contributions in experiential learning, innovative pedagogy, problem-solving and inclusive classroom practices.

The fellowship received more than 200 applications from across India, with 30 educators progressing to the interview stage.

60% talent gap in GenAI, Cloud spurs huge market opportunities

Talent shortage is reshaping delivery models, hiring in tech firms

NEW DELHI

INDIA's tech industry is growing fast but holds a 53-60 per cent talent gap in GenAI and Cloud with only about 16 per cent of IT professionals holding AI skills, a report said on Tuesday.

The report from talent solutions firm TeamLease Digital said that Cloud has the widest supply gap of the four skill families at 55-60 per cent, followed by GenAI at about 53 per cent.

It also noted that demand for GenAI talent will cross 10 lakh roles by 2026, while the gap in Cybersecurity is narrowing but stands at 25-30 per cent.

It analysed 37,000 technology and digital roles, and found that the talent gap is shaping delivery models,



hiring and salaries in Indian technology firms across AI-Core, AI-Adjacent and AI-Support roles.

Only about 16 per cent of IT professionals hold AI skills while 20 lakh professionals have been upskilled, only about 3 lakh have advanced AI skills.

The report divided AI roles into three tiers — AI Core, AI Adjacent and AI Support — and showed that of 16 premium roles identified across AI, data, cloud and cybersecurity, four are

AI Core and 12 are AI Adjacent, while none are AI Support. The mix indicated that the entry layer in tech firms is compressing rather than being repriced.

With skills in short supply, salary premiums are moving toward AI-Core and product-critical engineering roles from the early stages of a career. A GenAI Developer (AI Core) earns Rs11.2 LPA at 0-2 years, rising to Rs34.5 LPA at 6-8 years; a Data Engineer (AI Adjacent) moves from Rs9.1 LPA to Rs29.6 LPA; and a Technical Support Engineer (AI Support) moves from Rs5.2 LPA to Rs14.6 LPA.

The same pattern holds at senior levels, where the highest pay sits with roles that scale, secure and operationalise AI platforms.

Crompton unveils new brand identity Cephyr

BIZZ BUZZ BUREAU
HYDERABAD

CROMPTON Greaves Consumer Electricals Ltd., recently unveiled its new master brand identity, marking the next chapter of Crompton 2.0; the company's strategic transformation into an innovation-led consumer-centric business. Over the last decade, Crompton has strategically expanded beyond its core categories through sustained investments in technology and product innovation. The new brand identity reflects this business evolution, creating a unified platform while supporting the company's next phase of innovation, premiumisation and long-term growth. At the heart of the company's refreshed identity is "Cephyr" (pronounced SAF-FYR), company's new emblem and primary visual expression.

AI needs \$6 trn annual mkt by 2031 to fund infra

NEW DELHI

THE global AI market must reach nearly USD 6 trillion annually by 2031 to fund AI infrastructure and justify the massive capital being deployed, according to a report by global management consultancy firm Bain & Company.

Much of that value will have to come from new innovation rather than gains in employee productivity, Bain said in its 7th annual Global Technology Report released on Tuesday.

According to the report, annual spending on AI infrastructure could reach USD 1.5 trillion by 2031. This includes new data centres, compute capacity and upgrades to installed GPUs, memory and networking equipment.

Based on the assumption that capital expenditure



amounts to about 25 per cent of industry revenue, Bain said sustaining this level of investment would require an AI market approaching USD 6 trillion a year by 2031.

Existing applications will cover only part of that. Consumer AI, through subscriptions and advertising, could generate USD 200-400 billion by 2031. Enterprise AI could add another USD 1-1.4 trillion across software development, sales, marketing, customer service and IT operations.

Together, these leave a gap of about USD 4.2 trillion that must be filled by new sources of revenue, the report said.

Salesforce's Agents for Impact showcases AI solutions for India

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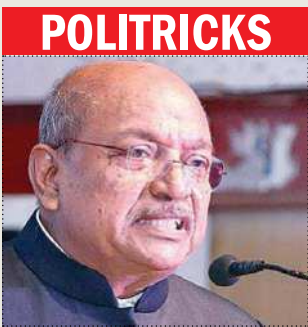
SALESFORCE, an AI CRM, announced that four Indian nonprofits have built and demonstrated custom Agentforce solutions through the inaugural India cohort of Salesforce Accelerator — Agents for Impact, an initiative that helps nonprofits harness AI to advance their missions. Showcased after its six-month build phase, the AI agents address critical needs across education, career readiness, scholarships and support for people with disabilities and their families.

Arundhati Bhattacharya, President & CEO, Salesforce, South Asia, said, "Six months ago, these organizations brought us ideas grounded in the realities of their missions. Today, they have translated deep domain expertise into practical agents built around trusted data and clear human roles.



THE POLITICA

Nothing political about it



BN Kumar

THERE was a time when governments worried about the Election Commission of India. Today, increasingly, the question is whether the Election Commission itself has reason to worry about its credibility.

That is the T N Seshan test. Seshan, who headed the Election Commission from 1990 to 1996, transformed the institution from a largely invisible constitutional authority into an assertive watchdog that political parties and governments had to reckon with. The Supreme Court itself later set the Seshan benchmark. In November 2022, a five-judge Constitution Bench said a CEC should have "character" and "does not allow himself to be bulldozed", adding: "There have been numerous CECs and T N Seshan happens once in a while."

At the Election Commission, he was restricted only by the Constitution and laws enacted by Parliament and answerable to the courts and Parliament — "but otherwise", he said, "I had a free hand".

That is the standard against which today's Election Commission is being judged.

When election commission loses vote of confidence

Seshan test demands an Election Commission that demonstrates independence, transparency and credibility, especially when its own conduct faces unprecedented questions

The controversy is no longer confined to Opposition allegations of vote chori. It now involves the Commission's own internal functioning.

The Indian Express has reported that two of the three Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, recorded at least 14 objections over 10 months to decisions and instructions under Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. The issues reportedly included voter additions and deletions, Form 6 and access to electoral-roll data.

The ECI says this interpretation is misleading. Its response is that differing views are normal during institutional deliberation and that all final decisions of the full Commission over the past year, including SIR, were unanimous.

The BJP has seized on that defence. BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi argued that all three Commissioners attended press conferences together and asked why anyone should infer a split when there was no press conference without all three.

But here is the uncomfortable question for Trivedi.

Yes, all three Commissioners may have sat together at press conferences. But who actually answered the questions?

By and large, it was Gyanesh Kumar who spoke, explained and responded to journalists. The other two Commissioners were largely silent, occasionally smiling or listening. A photograph of three Commissioners sitting together cannot by itself demonstrate the independence of three voices.

If Trivedi's argument is that the

presence of three Commissioners proves democratic functioning, he should also answer this: Is democracy merely about all three sitting on the same dais, or does it require each of them to be heard?

If the Commission is genuinely collegial, why not occasionally have all three Commissioners explain their respective views? Why should the CEC alone become the institutional voice on every important controversy?

This matters because the ECI's credibility depends not merely on unanimity at the end of a process, but on confidence that the process itself permits independent voices to be heard.

That brings us to SIR.

The Special Intensive Revision has become the largest test of that confidence. The Indian Express has reported that more than 13 crore names were struck off draft electoral rolls across 30 States and Union Territories. That does not mean 13 crore eligible voters have been permanently disenfranchised: draft deletions can be challenged and names restored. But the scale of the exercise makes transparency indispensable.

The Opposition has been raising questions about electoral rolls for more than a year.

Rahul Gandhi first made his vote chori charge prominent through allegations concerning Karnataka's Mahadevapura constituency, where he claimed that more than a lakh votes had been manipulated. The ECI rejected the allegations. The argument subsequently travelled to Aaland in Karnataka, Maharashtra's Rajura and then Haryana, where Gandhi alleged 25 lakh votes were fake or otherwise compromised.



The ECI and BJP rejected those charges as well. Bihar brought SIR itself into the centre of the political confrontation.

And this is not the first time the ECI has been accused of watching from the sidelines. During the 2019 Lok Sabha campaign, questions were raised over its response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal in Latur to first-time voters to dedicate their votes to the soldiers who carried out the Balakot air strike and to the Pulwama martyrs. The ECI had earlier advised parties against using the activities of the armed forces for political propaganda, but eventually held that Modi's speech did not violate the Model Code of Conduct. The episode fuelled the "sleeping umpire" metaphor — an umpire who sees the action but does not blow the whistle.

The point is not that every Rahul Gandhi allegation has been proved. They have not. Nor can electoral outcomes be attributed to alleged manipulation merely because Opposition parties make the charge.

But allegations concerning electoral rolls cannot be disposed

of simply as political sour grapes.

The appropriate answer is evidence: deletion records, claims and objections, restoration figures, audit trails, software access and a transparent explanation of how decisions were reached.

The irony is that the BJP is increasingly doing the explaining for the Election Commission.

Why?

The BJP can defend itself against allegations that it benefited from electoral irregularities. But when the question is whether the Election Commission conducted itself properly, the constitutional authority itself should answer.

An institution entrusted with the conduct of elections should not need the ruling party to become its spokesperson.

The ECI says all decisions were unanimous. Fine. Then let the institution demonstrate that unanimity through transparency.

If the 14 objections reported by The Indian Express were merely routine administrative deliberations, publish the context and explain how they were resolved. If the final decisions were unanimous, that should be easy to es-

tablish. Silence creates suspicion. Transparency kills it.

That is why Seshan remains relevant.

He was not necessarily right about everything. He was certainly controversial. But he established something invaluable: the perception that the Election Commission belonged to the Constitution, not to the government.

His autobiography records how, as CEC, he regarded himself as answerable to the Constitution, Parliament and the courts, but otherwise to no one.

The Seshan test, therefore, is not whether today's ECI agrees with the Opposition.

It is whether the ECI can demonstrate, visibly and convincingly, that it does not belong to either the ruling party or the Opposition.

That test has become more urgent because the controversy has moved beyond political speeches. Two Commissioners have reportedly raised objections internally. The Commission says the final decisions were unanimous. The BJP says the existence of deliberations proves democracy. The Opposition says the process has compromised democracy.

Somewhere between these competing claims lies a simple institutional obligation: show the public how the decision was made.

The ECI does not need political defenders.

It needs demonstrable independence.

It needs Commissioners who are not merely present but heard.

It needs answers that come from the constitutional institu-

tion itself, not from party headquarters.

And above all, it needs to protect the one asset that cannot be restored by another press conference or another election: public trust.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi often takes pride in describing India as the "mother of democracy". Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has said that the world watches how India conducts free and fair elections.

Those are not merely phrases for speeches. They carry a constitutional responsibility.

The ruling party and the Election Commission must remember that they owe their authority to "We, the People of India" — that is, Bharat.

The voter is supreme. The vote is supreme. Governments derive their power from that vote. Political parties can campaign, governments can govern and institutions can administer — but none of them owns the voter.

The Election Commission cannot be the government's commission, the Opposition's commission or anybody's commission except the Constitution's.

Nor can it, in public perception, become a selection committee for the party in power.

The real vote of confidence is not taken in Parliament. It is cast by the voter. And that is a vote the Election Commission cannot afford to lose.

(The columnist is a Mumbai-based author and independent media veteran, running websites and a youtube channel, and known for his thought-provoking messaging)