

NCW forms panel to review laws governing IVF clinics

Panel will examine legal, ethical, medical and technological challenges

NEW DELHI

THE National Commission for Women (NCW) has constituted a committee, led by the former Delhi High Court Judge Asha Menon, to review the regulatory framework and laws governing IVF clinics and Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) centres, an official said.

The NCW said that the committee will propose Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and best practices for ART clinics and IVF Centres to promote ethical treatment practices, standardised clinical protocol and greater transparency across the sector. The multidisciplinary composition of the committee is intended to ensure a comprehensive examination of legal, ethical, medical and administrative issues associated with assisted reproductive technologies amid growing concerns over irregularities, the NCW said in a statement.

The panel brings together experts from judiciary, medicine, forensic science, law enforcement, gynaecology, public policy and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The committee will review the implementation of the As-



sisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, and the relevant Amendment Rules notified in 2026, an NCW statement said.

It will examine existing safeguards relating to consent, privacy and biological traceability, identify regulatory and procedural gaps that may enable exploitation or fraudulent practices and recommend reforms to strengthen institutional accountability, it added.

The recommendations of the committee are expected to guide future legal, policy and administrative reforms aimed at strengthening governance of the ART ecosystem while ensuring that women seeking fertility treatment are protected by the robust safeguards at every stage of the process.

The NCW reiterated that reproductive healthcare must be guided by the principles of dignity, informed choice, transparency and accountability and that every woman accessing assisted reproductive services must be assured of safety, ethical treatment and protection of her rights.

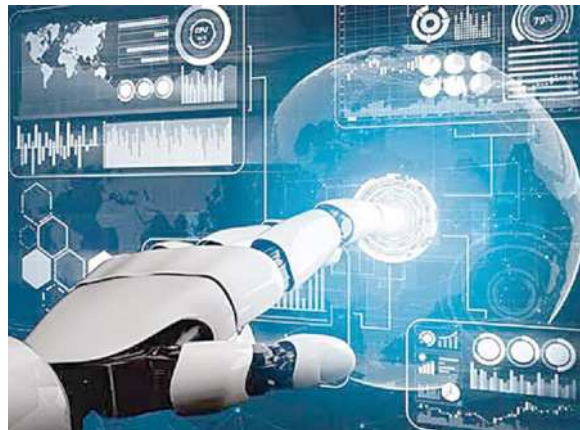
While registration under the National ART and Surrogacy Registry is mandatory for all RT Clinics and Gamete Banks, the commission has said that regulatory compliance alone has not been sufficient to prevent unethical practices. The emergence of medical tourism in the fertility sector has also raised concerns about the possible circumvention of India's legal safeguards, including those aimed at preventing sex selection, the statement said.

AI powers next phase of India's digital public services

Adobe study highlights gains in mobile access, self-service and AI readiness across ministries

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

- ▣ Mobile experience improved by 1.1 per cent
- ▣ Mobile-first approach via platforms such as UMANG, DigiLocker
- ▣ Digital Self Service is the strongest dimension
- ▣ Simplified content and improved structure



NEW DELHI

INDIA is shifting from foundational digitisation toward more integrated, accessible and AI ready citizen services, with a Digital Government Index score of 58.2, a report said on Friday.

The report from US tech giant Adobe said that India's digital government journey entered a new phase, where focus expanded beyond digitising services, to making them more intuitive, accessible and AI-ready.

"By improving discoverability, personalisation and content quality, ministries can deliver better citizen experiences while ensuring trusted government information remains visible in an AI-first world," said Venu Juvvala, Head, Customer Experience Orchestration business, Adobe India.

India's digital transformation continues to be shaped by initiatives such as Digital India, India Stack and Gati Shakti, the report said.

While progress varies across ministries, mobile experience improved by 1.1 per cent, reflecting India's mobile-first approach and the growing adoption of platforms such as UMANG and DigiLocker," it added.

Customer experience eased 3.7 per cent, highlighting opportunities to strengthen accessibility, readability and overall usability.

Digital Self Service was the strongest dimension at 62.2, up 2 per cent, driven primarily by advances in multilingual access and language



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-- Venu Juvvala, Head, Customer Experience Orchestration business, Adobe India

translation. The 2025 Digital Government Index for India evaluated government websites across customer experience, site performance and

digital self service, and introduced new assessments of AI readiness and personalisation capabilities.

The study, which combined user testing, third party technical audits and content assessments, found accessibility eased 4.1 per cent and readability dropped 23.7 per cent, underscoring the need to simplify content and improve structure.

The AI readiness among assessed ministries scored between 51.1 and 73.1.

Official government websites demonstrated strong trust and authority, and improvements in technical structure and discoverability will help ensure reliable public information remains visible in AI-powered search and digital assistants, the report said.

The report also highlighted Indian Railways' integration of Bhashini, the national AI-powered language platform, to support conversational chatbots that help citizens navigate services and enquiries across Indian languages.

Indian-origin NASA astronaut to test future space medicine

WASHINGTON

ANIL Menon, a NASA astronaut of Indian descent, is set to embark on an eight-month mission to the International Space Station on July 14 from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

Born in Minneapolis to Ukrainian and Indian immigrants, Menon is an emergency medicine physician and a US Space Force colonel.

During his stint with the US Air Force, he served on the frontlines in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom and also worked for the Himalayan Rescue Association, caring for climbers on Mount Everest. Menon, 49, has also spent a year in India as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar to study and support Polio vaccination initiatives.



He is scheduled to travel to space aboard the Roscosmos Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft along with cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina. While on board the ISS, Menon will conduct a series of experiments to study the physiological toll of long-duration spaceflight and examine how microgravity affects blood flow, vein structure, and blood composition in astronauts.

He will also help test technologies for producing intravenous fluids using the station's potable water system. Such capabilities could become critical during deep-space missions where medical supplies are limited.

'Cancer to touch nearly every family'

Millions around world are facing physical, emotional and financial toll of cancer, a disease that claims more than 26,000 lives every day

NEW DELHI

NEARLY everyone, or 92 per cent of all people globally, will be affected by impacts of cancer at least once in their lifetime, with one in five developing the disease, according to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO).

However, people's lived experience of cancer is highly inequitable, with the analysis revealing persistent and widening inequities in access to prevention, diagnosis, treatment and supportive care, leaving millions without services they need.

While 87 per cent of women with breast cancer survive at five years following a diagnosis in high-income countries, only about 42 per cent survive in low-income countries, authors of the report, developed jointly with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), WHO's cancer agency, said.



They added that fewer than one in three countries currently include cancer care in their universal health coverage packages. "One in five of us will develop cancer ourselves. When we account for the impacts of a cancer diagnosis on close family members, roughly 92 per cent of all people globally will be affected by cancer at least once in their lifetime," the authors wrote. Millions around the world are facing the physical, emotional and financial toll of cancer, a disease that claims more than 26,000 lives every day, they said. The team added that with an estimated 20.6 million new cases and close to 10 million deaths annually, cancer remains the

second leading cause of death globally, after cardiovascular disease.

The report also presents a comprehensive analysis of progress across key areas such as political commitment, cancer prevention -- particularly through tobacco control and vaccination programmes -- and an investment in treatment. Even as tobacco control has declined by 27 per cent globally and political commitment has strengthened with 82 per cent of countries having a national cancer control plan, the advances are not translating into life-saving actions at a required pace, it said.

Essential cancer medicines remain far out of reach for many -- availability of the top 20 priority cancer medicines was found to range from just nine per cent to 54 per cent in low- and lower-middle-income countries, compared with 68-94 per cent in high-income countries.

IKS Health completes acquisition of TruBridge

BIZZ BUZZ BUREAU HYDERABAD

IKS Health, a care enablement solutions provider, announced the completion of its previously announced acquisition of TruBridge Inc., a provider of healthcare technology including an electronic health record (EHR) and revenue cycle management solutions for rural and community hospitals.

Sachin K Gupta, Founder, IKS Health, said: "Through this market expansion, we are uniting capabilities that move us further toward our goal of a combined system of record and system of action workflow that uses explainable AI-driven and human-in-the-loop solutions to reduce administrative friction, ease financial pressures, and close critical gaps in patient care."

Chris Fowler, CEO of TruBridge, said: "We are pleased to partner with IKS Health, as we share a deep, long-term commitment to helping healthcare organizations run efficiently."

Centre tightens scientific oversight of high-alcohol medicines

NEW DELHI

THE Centre has withdrawn the licensing exemption for medicinal formulations containing more than 12 per cent of ethyl alcohol and brought them under stricter regulatory oversight, including mandatory licensing and prescription-only sale, to curb misuse and prevent diversion for intoxication, officials said.

Certain medicinal products, including tinctures of cardamom, ginger and other aromatic preparations, have been exempted from licensing requirements under Schedule K of the Drugs Rules, 1954, the ministry said.

Some of these formulations contain high concentrations of ethyl alcohol, in



certain cases up to 80-90 per cent volume per volume (v/v), making them susceptible to misuse for intoxication, it said.

References were also received from certain state governments in this regard, the ministry said.

To address this concern, the government has mandated that all formulations containing more than 12 per cent v/v ethyl alcohol, in quantities exceeding 30 ml, shall no longer be covered under the exemption provided under Schedule K.



THE POLITICA

Nothing political about it

SAM MEDNICK

MARKING the coordinates on a handheld GPS, an Israeli diver threw an anchor into the water as another quickly chucked an orange buoy beside it. Cramped on the boat's bow, the first team assembled their gear, put on wet suits and tested oxygen tanks before jumping in.

But after hours of combing the Mediterranean seabed in search of yellow-painted mock mortar shells, the divers surfaced empty-handed.

It was the team's fifth diving trip in the yearslong experiment to help prepare Israel to clear part of the sea from unexploded grenades and other munitions in order to return beach area to residents. But on this day in June, the divers couldn't find the dummy mortar and artillery shells they'd planted months prior, foreshadowing the challenges that lie ahead.

"It's really hard to find things in the sea," said Roy Jajiel, a researcher in the marine geology and geophysics department at Israel's National Institute of Oceanography, as he emerged from a dive.

Jajiel co-leads a project aimed at returning some 2 kilometres of shoreline to people living in Israel's central city of Rishon LeZion, an area that's been used as a firing range for decades. The initiative, the first of its kind in Israel, coin-

What to know about Israel's push to clear sea munitions to protect waters

Clearance of residue has received more attention in recent years because of AI boom, which needs undersea fibre-optic cables for global connectivity

cides with a global push to better protect the world's waters as demand increases for the use of seas and oceans for shipping, energy and recreation.

Experts say the clearance of underwater munitions has received more attention in recent years in part because of the boom in artificial intelligence, which requires millions of kilometres of underwater fibre-optic cables to allow for global connectivity.

Munitions can end up dumped into waters after wars, fall into seas during conflict or, in the case of Rishon LeZion, accumulate from firing practice. Erosion from seawater can lead toxic and explosive chemicals, along with heavy metals, to seep from the munitions, causing environmental contamination. There's also the risk of objects exploding if people step on them or children play with them, thinking they're toys.

Two years ago, Europe launched a project to better detect and clear non-military unexploded ordnance, such as from industrial or commercial sites. In a separate initiative in 2024, Germany piloted a programme to recover and dispose of military waste from the North and Baltic Seas, where some 1.6 million tonnes of unexploded munitions from two world wars lie, according to the German government.

Still, there's been less focus on clearing waters in the Middle

East, such as the Mediterranean, which historically hasn't been the site of large dumps compared with Europe.

Leaders of the Israeli project say it's one of the first to focus on clearing smaller munitions in complicated underwater terrain, which is why many countries have avoided it.

"It's like looking for a needle in a haystack," said Israel Faintuch, head of the Maritime Division at Israel's Ministry of Defence National Mine Action Authority as he checked his oxygen tank and suited up to go underwater.

Limited beach space in Israel is the driving force behind the clearing effort

The government says nearly half the country's 194-kilometre coastline is off limits to civilians, used for commercial ports, power plants, desalination facilities, military bases and firing zones.

Since the country's founding nearly 80 years ago, 7 kilometres, nearly the entire length of Rishon LeZion's shoreline, has been used as a firing range, launching grenades as well as small and large mortars, leaving hundreds of thousands of people crammed into a narrow strip of beach.

Launched last year, the joint research project funded by Rishon LeZion's municipality is being led by Israel's National Mine Action Authority and researchers from the National Institute of Oceanography. It aims to localise



Completing the project will take years and cost tens of millions of dollars. It's already been delayed due to Israel's multiple wars with Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran as divers can't work when missiles are falling and could land in the sea

the most impacted areas, mapping the pattern of munitions to determine how far offshore and how deep to go before the clearance team steps in.

In order to gather data, divers place various sizes of fake munitions -- some equipped with motion sensors -- at depths of 5, 10 and 15 metres and up to 1.2 kilometres offshore. After several months, they retrieve the munitions, analyse the data and plant

new ones. In June, Associated Press journalists accompanied the team underwater as they placed new munitions for the next round of tests and attempted to find ones they'd left in January. Divers descended using a string, or measuring tape, to navigate the seabed. Tapping each other under the water, they'd point in different directions to search, rubbing their hands over the seafloor.

"You have limited air supply

when you go with the divers and you have limited time in the water," said Dafna Eliahu, a graduate student at the University of Haifa working on the project. "So with actual live munition I expect it to be very difficult, very hard to locate and to actually be able to find them," she said.

While the information is still being processed, preliminary findings show that the munitions moved less than expected, which means there might be less area that needs clearing, she said.

Israel's Defence Ministry wants to have enough data to start clearing by the end of next year and expand the shoreline by an initial 150 metres within a few months.

Completing the project will take years and cost tens of millions of dollars. It's already been delayed due to Israel's multiple wars with Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran as divers can't work when missiles are falling and could land in the sea.

During the current war that the US and Israel launched against Iran as well as the 12-day war last June between Israel and Iran, the army said missiles aimed at larger cities like Rishon LeZion fell into the sea but wouldn't specify how many.

Israel says no one has been injured or killed by unexploded sea ordnance, but there have been about a dozen sightings of devices in the last 20 years where

the police and army were called. Most have been found on or near shore.

What's learned during the project could be useful beyond Israel

While the goal of the project is to expand parts of the shoreline, Israel also hopes its findings will yield new insights on clearing munitions from this part of the world, where there are threats but overall less is known.

According to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, more than half of global incidents related to unexploded ordnance, such as sightings or drifting mines, were recorded in the Middle East between 2014 and 2023, with most occurring in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, largely a result of Yemen's civil war.

Pedro Basto, research and innovation programme manager with the group, said it is important to keep interest high in removing underwater explosives.

"Both renewable energies based on the sea and the global connectivity that most of the world relies on every minute of every day, depend massively on underwater cable laying," he said.

Moria Malka, head spokesperson for the city's municipality, said the clearance will triple the area's coastline and much of it will become a nature reserve as well as a residential area near the sea.