

# 'Govt. keen on implementing mechanised sewer cleaning'

Municipal Administration Minister K.N. Nehru says guidelines being drawn on safety aspects to prevent manual scavenging deaths. Sanitation workers being trained to use modern tools

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

**T**he government is keen on implementing a mechanised sewer cleaning process to prevent manual scavenging deaths. Guidelines are also being prepared on safety aspects to prevent manual scavenging deaths, Municipal Administration Minister K.N. Nehru said here on Friday.

Inaugurating a workshop to train sanitation workers in skills needed to operate sewer cleaning equipment, he said the training programme was part of the Sanitation Workers' Development Scheme launched recently. In the first phase, sanitation workers and sewerage lorry drivers and operators are being trained in Chen-



Municipal Administration Minister K.N. Nehru released a handbook for sewerage lorry operators at the workshop. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

nai, Madurai, Coimbatore and Maraimalai Nagar.

Awareness must be created in urban local bodies to prevent sanitation workers from entering sewers and septic tanks, he said.

Moreover, sewerage lorries will have to carry out trips only after obtaining licence from local bodies and tracked through GPS. Residents may book lorries for sewage disposal through the helpline 14420

from June 15 in Chennai and June 30 in other parts of the State, Mr. Nehru said.

The training programme will also cover aspects such as maintenance of sewerage lorries and proper handling of safety equipment. He also appealed to the residents to exercise their duty to ensure use of safety gear during the cleaning of sewers with prior approval from local bodies.

Residents can send complaints on manual scavenging to [grfocmwssb@gmail.com](mailto:grfocmwssb@gmail.com) and [fsmhelpline@gmail.com](mailto:fsmhelpline@gmail.com).

Mr. Nehru also released a handbook for sewerage lorry operators at the workshop in the presence of officials from various department.

# International convention centre in Karunanidhi's name will be set up: CM

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Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Friday announced that an international convention centre would be set up in Chennai, on a 25-acre land, in the name of former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi.

It will have the capacity to host international trade exhibitions, technological conferences, events by international institutions and international film festivals.

Releasing the logo for the centenary celebrations of Karunanidhi, Mr. Stalin said he hit upon the idea recently while travelling in Singapore and Japan to attract investors. "It is my wish that it should be a world-class convention centre," he said.

He said that though the Chennai Trade Centre at Nandambakkam covered 10,000 square feet and a 12,000-square foot building was being constructed, they were still not enough to meet the future requirements and the growing demand.

"The new convention centre can accommodate 5,000 persons. There will be world-class conference and exhibition halls, star-status hotels, media halls,



CM M.K. Stalin and Gopalkrishna Gandhi during the unveiling of logo for centenary celebrations of Karunanidhi in Chennai. R. RAGU

parks and international vehicle parking," he said.

Describing Karunanidhi as the "architect of modern Tamil Nadu", Mr. Stalin said the convention centre would propagate the contributions of the late leader, even after hundreds of years.

He said the Global Investors Meet would be held in Tamil Nadu in January next year and he had invited investors from Singapore and Japan.

"They [investors] are aware of the infrastructure in Tamil Nadu and promised that they would invest in the State, when they plan to invest in India," he said.

## 'Symbolised maturity'

Former West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi, who received the

logo, said Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister of the State when he joined the civil services in Tamil Nadu. "In public life, Kalaignar [Karunanidhi] symbolised maturity. In administration and governance, he symbolised balance," Mr. Gandhi said.

He said Karunanidhi was a skilful politician and a tremendous administrator. "...Within the administrator, he was a statesman. He was a statesman par excellence. Kalaignar was an artiste in administration. It means measure, rationalism and nuance," he said.

Mr. Gandhi further said a mandate to govern was a duty to discharge, not a power to flaunt.

Ministers Duraimurugan and M.P. Saminathan and Chief Secretary V. Irai Anbu participated.

## Good and bad

### India needs to harness the benefits of AI while avoiding adverse effects

**G**enerative artificial intelligence (AI) is AI that can create new data. There are many instances of generative AI in the world today, most commonly used to generate text, images, and code in response to users' requests, even if they are capable of more. Their widespread adoption really embellished their capabilities, leading to awe, then worry. OpenAI's ChatGPT chatbot mimics intelligence very well; today, it has become synonymous with the abilities of generative AI at large. In the last few years, AI models backed by neural networks trained on very large datasets and with access to sufficient computing power have been used to do good, such as finding new antibiotics and alloys, for clever entertainment and cultural activities, and for many banal tasks, but it has caught attention most notably with its ability to falsify data. The world is past being able to reliably differentiate between data that faithfully reflects reality and data made to look that way by bad-faith actors using AI. This and other developments led a prominent group of AI pioneers to draft a single-sentence, and alarmist, statement: "Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war." Dishonest actors wielding AI are one of many threats, but the statement is too simple to admit the complexity of human society.

Some specific concerns enumerated in other communiqués are worth taking seriously, however: the inscrutability of the inner workings of AI models, their use of copyrighted data, regard for human dignity and privacy, and protections from falsifying information. The models being developed and used today are not mandated to tick these boxes, even as there is no way to understand the risks they pose. So, even at a point when the computational resources required to run AI models in full coincide with that available in consumer electronics, the world will need at least rolling policies that keep the door open for democratic institutions to slam the brakes on dangerous enterprises. At this time, the Indian government should proactively launch and maintain an open-source AI risk profile, set up sandboxed R&D environments to test potentially high-risk AI models, promote the development of explainable AI, define scenarios of intervention, and keep a watchful eye. Inaction is just not an option: apart from the possibility of adverse consequences, it could render India missing the 'harnessing AI for good' bus.



## International trade has a carbon problem

The European Union's (EU) key climate law, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), has spooked India. New Delhi fears that CBAM will cripple the export of its carbon-intensive products to the EU. While India's exports may be limited to aluminium, iron, and steel, and affect only 1.8% of its total exports to the EU, India has reportedly decried CBAM as being protectionist and discriminatory. There is also talk of challenging the CBAM at the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s dispute settlement body. This debate brings to the forefront the inter-linkages between trade and the environment. While the international trade regime allows countries to adopt unilateral measures for safeguarding the environment, environmental protection should not become a smokescreen for trade protectionism. The CBAM needs to be viewed from this standpoint.

### About CBAM

In 2005, the EU adopted an important climate change policy known as the Emissions Trading System (ETS). Now in its fourth stage, the ETS is a market-based mechanism that aims at reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by allowing bodies emitting GHG to buy and sell these emissions amongst themselves. However, the EU's concern is that while it has a mechanism for its domestic industries, emissions embedded in products imported from other countries may not be priced in a similar way due to a lack of stringent policies or due to less stringent policies in those countries. This, the EU worries, would put its industries at a disadvantage. To tackle this, the impacted industries in the EU had so far been receiving free allowances or permits under the ETS. Furthermore, the EU also apprehends the phenomenon of 'carbon leakage', that is, due to the application of ETS, European firms operating



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Environmental protection should not become a smokescreen for trade protectionism

in carbon-intensive sectors might possibly shift to those countries that have less stringent GHG emission norms.

CBAM is aimed at addressing this quagmire, and, thus, levelling the playing field for the EU industries. Under the CBAM, imports of certain carbon-intensive products, namely cement, iron and steel, electricity, fertilizers, aluminium, and hydrogen, will have to bear the same economic costs borne by EU producers under the ETS. The price to be paid will be linked to the weekly average of the emissions priced under the ETS. However, where a carbon price has been explicitly paid for the imported products in their country of origin, a reduction can be claimed.

### WTO consistency

A cornerstone principle of WTO law is non-discrimination. Thus, countries are required to accord equal treatment to 'like' products irrespective of their country of origin (most-favoured nation treatment) and to treat foreign-made 'like' products as they treat domestic ones (national treatment principle). While the CBAM's design is origin-neutral in appearance, it may, in its application, discriminate between goods from different countries on account of an inadequate carbon pricing policy, or due to onerous reporting requirements that importers would be subject to.

A key consideration in all this may be whether the carbon-intensive products to which the CBAM applies are 'like'. While steel products may appear similar, the process by which electric arc furnaces produce steel is less carbon-intensive than the steel produced in blast furnaces, for instance. Being products that are not 'like', the rules on non-discrimination would have little application in such a case. Accordingly, the debate on CBAM reignites a long-standing debate

in international trade law circles: must processes and production methods be relevant for comparing products? Traditionally, the answer to that in WTO jurisprudence has been no, and, on that account, as commentators have noted, the CBAM violates WTO law for discriminating between EU and foreign products covered by CBAM based on the embedded emissions.

However, even if the EU's CBAM is discriminatory, there could be a claim for justifying it under the General Exceptions clause given in Article XX of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Under Article XX, measures taken by countries that otherwise violate GATT obligations are permitted if, first, they fall under one of the listed policy grounds, and second, if they satisfy the requirements of the introductory clause of Article XX, known as the chapeau. One of the listed policy grounds in Article XX is 'conservation of exhaustible natural resources'. CBAM would fall under this category. However, it is doubtful if it would satisfy the chapeau, which inter alia requires that countries do not apply measures in a manner that results in arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail. As commentators argue, the CBAM only considers 'explicit' carbon prices, not 'implicit' costs (non-price-based costs) borne by products originating in certain countries. Accordingly, it arbitrarily or unjustifiably discriminates between countries where the same environmental conditions exist.

Finally, CBAM is also an important issue in the ongoing India-EU free trade agreement negotiations. India should work with the EU to secure gains on CBAM and ensure smooth onboarding for Indian exporters to maximise the benefits of a bilateral deal, even as the possibility of a WTO challenge remains open.