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Delimitation exercise: EC team in state

GUWAHATI, March 26 (PTI): Ahead of the delimitation of constituencies in Assam, the full team of the Election Commission of India arrived here on Sunday on a three-day visit to the state for holding consultations with various stakeholders, including political parties and civil societies.

Chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar and commissioners, Anup Chandra Pandey and Arun Goel, will hold discussions with the stakeholders on Monday. State's chief electoral officer (CEO) Nitin Khade said. The EC has been entrusted with the delimitation exercise for redrawing the territorial boundaries of the assembly and parliamentary constituencies of the northeastern state. In a statement on Saturday, Khade said the Election Commission team usually visits the states concerned after draft publication of the proposal.

"The Commission will again come after the publication of the draft proposal in newspapers. Thus stakeholders will be getting two opportunities to interact with the Commission to make the delimitation process more inclusive, participatory and transparent," he added.

The CEO said stakeholders/public will be able to send their suggestions/inputs by April 5 at the email knbhar@eci.gov.in and brajesh@eci.gov.in, for those who could not come to meet the Commission. An official said the Election Commission team will meet the CEO and other officials on Sunday evening.

They are scheduled to address a press conference on Tuesday, the official said. The process for delimitation started on January 1, 2023, using the 2001 census figures, according to a notification issued by (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Govt committed to invest over ₹ 10,000 crore in FY 2023-24 to create world-class infra in Assam: CM Himanta inaugurates, lays foundation of projects worth ₹ 545 cr in Rangia

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 26: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday announced a slew of projects in Rangia, providing a major infra boost to the region. The chief minister on the day inaugurated and laid the foundation for ₹ 545 crore-worth projects related to connectivity, healthcare and higher education at Rangia in Kamrup district. Reiterating his government's commitment to develop world-class infrastructure in the state, he directed officials to ensure timely completion of all projects.

"As we observe 'A Day dedicated to Development', I inaugurated and laid the foundation for 23 projects worth ₹ 545 cr at Rangia



today," Sarma tweeted. "I have directed officials to ensure timely execution so these ini-

tiatives bear the fruits of development and prosperity for people of Assam," he added.

Sarma said he started the day's programme by inaugurating a four-lane link road that will connect Rangia to National Highway 31.

He said the government is committed to invest over ₹ 10,000 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal to create world-class infrastructure in Assam. Inaugurating a 47-bed ICU at Rangia Model Hospital, Sarma said, "Assam is witnessing a silent revolution in healthcare. We are determined to bring quality healthcare infrastructure closer to our towns and villages." Underlining health and education as "front wheels of Assam's developmental journey", he also inaugurated a post-graduation block at Rangia College, thereby upgrading it to a PG institution.

With this, fewer students will have to leave home for studies, the CM added.

"Health & Education are the front wheels of Assam's developmental journey. I had the pleasure of inaugurating a post-graduation block at Rangia College, upgrading it to a PG institution. With this, fewer students will have to leave home for studies," CM Sarma said on micro-blogging site Twitter.

On the other hand, after laying the foundation stones, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma went to Rangia's Hardutt Biradutt Bhawan along with several party leaders to listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann ki Baat' speech. (With inputs from PTI)

HT BRIEFS

IMFL seized

BOKAJAN: The police in Karbi Anglong caught a large amount of illegal IMFL at Khakrajani on NH 36 under Borpathar police station. The police came across the truck, bearing registration number NL 01 L 6599, during checking at NH 36 which claimed to ferry only cement. The truck coming from Bandardeva in Arunachal Pradesh was going towards Dimapur in Nagaland. From the truck, 774 cartons of IMFL and beer were recovered. The market value of the contraband is ₹ 18 lakh. One Santosh Mahato has been arrested in this connection and further investigation into the matter is on.

Awareness meet

HOJAI: An awareness meet on National Water Mission was organised under the banner of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) of Karbi Anglong under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, government of India. Awareness on the topic "Catch the rain, Where it falls & When it falls" was organised at the school premises of Adarsh Rashtra Bhasha High School of Lamshakhang area in West Karbi Anglong district. Dr Shivjee Chauhan, assistant professor of Hindi department of Udali College delivered a speech on "Water conservation and rainfall harvesting". Jiten Harjan, assistant professor of History department of Kapili College spoke on aims of the National Water Mission plan and theme of "Catch the rain, Where it falls & When it falls".

Preservation of 'Assam Type' houses need of the hour: Experts

GUWAHATI, March 26 (PTI): Amid the concrete structures mushrooming all over this northeastern state, some areas are still dotted with historically and aesthetically beautiful buildings known as 'Assam Type' houses, which heritage lovers and experts assert require preservation and restoration.

Sloping roofs, louvers, gables, awnings, skylights, bay windows and a porch are some of the features that make them distinctive, along with their sustainability and resilience to withstand earthquakes, experts point out.

"Architecturally, a typical Assam Type house has features which are aesthetically soothing and at the same time sturdy enough to withstand the vagaries of nature," former chief secretary of the state, Jishnu Barua, said. This type of architecture is a style developed during the late 19th century and is primarily found in Assam and other Northeastern states along with Sylhet in Bangladesh, Barua, who has a keen interest in the heritage and preservation of these structures, said.

"These fascinating houses are disappearing fast

with the onslaught of concrete structures changing the architectural landscape of the state, and there is an urgent need to document, preserve and, where necessary, restore the buildings," heritage activist Nandinee Kalita told PTI.

Upkeep of the structures is necessary for which considerable effort, time, skill and finance are required, Kalita said. "We have attempted to document the history of these houses, its architectural significance, cultural tradition and sociological evolution in a coffee-table book titled 'Aakriti' which covers a wide spectrum of over 100 houses across the state, ranging from simple family homes to opulent bungalows, government residences and public institutions," she said.

Some of these houses are almost 150 to 200 years old and have gone through extraordinary journeys which "we attempted to highlight through literary and photographic accounts", she said.

It was the 1897 earthquake of 8.1 magnitude that struck the Shillong plateau, causing considerable damage to the houses, (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Congress on war path against bar on Rahul, slams BJP

Hiren Gohain, Akhil extend support to Congress protest

GUWAHATI, March 26 (PTI):

The Assam unit of the Congress on Sunday organised a 'Sankalp Satyagraha' here in protest against the disqualification of party leader Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha following his conviction in a defamation case. About 10 other opposition parties of the state also participated in the programme, which was attended by Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Bora and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Debabrata Saikia. Rajiour Dal chief (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Congress workers across the country on Sunday organised "Sankalp Satyagraha" to protest against disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha, with party president Mallikarjun Kharge lashing out at the ruling BJP and asking why it is pained if fugitives such as Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi are criticised. While in Delhi, the police denied permission to the Congress to hold its protest programme at Rajghat, the police in Gujarat detained several party functionaries for holding the stir.

In the national capital, the Congress put up a stage outside Mahatma Gandhi's memorial for its day-long protest programme after the permission was denied.

In her address at the protest programme, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said a

martyred prime minister's son, who walked thousands of kilometres for national unity, can never insult the country.

She was referring to her father and late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who was assassinated in 1991. Priyanka Gandhi said the time had come to raise voice against an "arrogant government" as barring Rahul Gandhi from contesting elections does not bode well for the country and its democracy.

"My family's blood has nurtured democracy in this country. We are ready to do anything for this country's democracy. Great leaders of the Congress laid the foundation of democracy in this country. If they think they can scare us, they are wrong. We will not be scared," she said. The Congress leader alleged that Rahul Gandhi was disqualified for questioning (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Tribal groups hold 'save culture' rally

GUWAHATI, March 26 (PTI): Thousands of people from various tribal communities of Assam assembled in Guwahati on Sunday demanding measures for safeguarding their traditional culture. Representatives of almost all the tribes of the state, such as Bodos, Rabhas, Mishings, Dimasas, Tiwas, Karbi, tea tribes and Sonowal-Kacharis, from 30 districts attended the day-long "Chalo Dispur" programme, organiser of the event, the Janajati Dharma Sangskriti Suraksha Manch (JDSMS), said in a press release. The organisation claimed people of the tribal communities were falling prey to "unethical conversion", which has led the converted people to forsake their traditional culture, language and rituals. It demanded that Scheduled Tribe (ST) people who convert (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Kataria for increasing agri production Governor visits two Jorhat varsities

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 26: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria on Sunday gave a call to increase production on the existing agricultural land to contribute to the country's economy. The Governor, who is also the chancellor of Assam Agricultural University (AAU) was on a maiden visit to the university here, stated this while addressing the faculty members, students and employees of AAU at the Dr MC Das Memorial Auditorium.

Kataria observed that the population was increasing but the agricultural land area had remained the same

and hence efforts had to be taken to increase the production of agricultural produce to meet the demand. Kataria, while stating that due to rise in cost of production of crops and not getting the minimum support price, youths were not coming forward to take up agriculture. To draw youths to agri and allied sectors, farming must be made profitable, he added.

The Governor urged the students not to be only job seekers but also to be job givers by taking up agriculture and allied activities. AAU VC Dr Bidyut Chandan Deka, in his address spoke (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

APSC successfully conducts CCE (Preliminary), 2022

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 26: The Assam Public Service Commission successfully conducted the Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination, 2022 in 132 venues across 31 centres/districts of Assam. The entire process of examination was carried out peacefully and (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

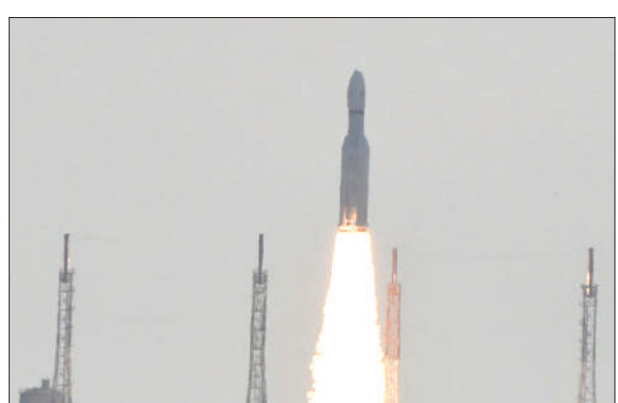
The first batch of 36 satellites were launched on October 23, 2022 by ISRO ISRO's LVM3 successfully injects 36 satellites into intended orbits

SRIHARIKOTA (AP), March 26 (PTI): The Indian Space Research Organisation's heaviest LVM3 rocket on Sunday successfully placed 36 internet satellites of UK-based OneWeb group company into intended orbits.

The 43.5 metre tall rocket blasted off at a prefixed time of 9 am on Sunday, from the second launch pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre here, about 135 kms from Chennai, at the end of a 24.30 hour countdown. This is the second dedicated mission of NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL), the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation.

ISRO had signed an agreement with Network Access Associates Ltd, United Kingdom, a OneWeb Group Company, for the launch of 72 satellites into Low-Earth orbits (LEO). The first batch of 36 satellites were launched on October 23, 2022 by ISRO, and the second batch on Sunday. OneWeb is a global communication network powered from space, enabling connectivity for governments and businesses.

Soon after takeoff, the



rocket sequentially deployed the satellites into multiple orbits. While the first set of 16 satellites were injected around 20 minutes after lift-off, the remaining satellites were placed into intended orbits later.

ISRO said, "LVM3-M3/OneWeb India-2 mission is accomplished. All 36 OneWeb Gen-1 Satellites injected into the intended orbits." "In its sixth consecutive successful flight, LVM3 carried 5,805 kgs of payload to Low Earth Orbit," the space agency said on its official social media account.

The launch vehicle took off with a total payload of 5,805

kg at 0900 hrs and gained the required altitude of 450 km in about nine minutes of flight, and achieved satellite injection conditions, ISRO said in a statement. OneWeb confirmed the acquisition of signals from all 36 satellites, it said.

ISRO chairman S Somanath congratulated NSIL, ISRO and OneWeb for the successful launch of the mission.

"As we know today the first 16 satellites of the series are already placed into the right orbit. And now it has gone into the far south of the Earth and we will be getting confirmation of the remaining spacecraft separation soon, once the

onboard storage data is acquired by our Indian ground stations," he said, addressing scientists at the Mission Control Centre. The launch was the 18th for OneWeb while for ISRO, it would be the second mission in 2023 after the successful launch of the SSLV/D2-EOS07 undertaken in February. "Till now, based on observations, the vehicle has done extremely well, it went up to the right orbit and placed the spacecraft at the right orbit and also with very minimal disturbances to it," Somanath noted.

Somanath expressed gratitude to NSIL for its support and also for the confidence that the OneWeb India team reposed in ISRO for building the rocket. Union minister Jitendra Singh lauded ISRO for Sunday's successful launch.

"Proud to be associated with the department of space #ISRO at a time when India under PM @NarendraModi has emerged as the frontline Space Tech nation of the world," he wrote on Twitter. "Team ISRO adds yet another feather to its much decorated hat. (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Office Of The Chief Electoral Officer, Assam
Assam Secretariat
Block-C, 4th Floor
Dispur-06

PRESS RELEASE

Dated 25th March, 2023

Hon'ble Election Commission of India is coming to Assam for hearing the stakeholders in connection with the ongoing Delimitation exercise like never before because Commission comes always after the draft publication of the proposal. The Commission will again come after the publication of the draft proposal in news papers. Thus stakeholders will be getting two opportunities to interact with the Commission to make the Delimitation process more inclusive, participatory and transparent.

The Commission apart from hearing the stakeholders on 27/03/2023 has decided to extend the facility, for the stakeholders/Public for sending their suggestions/inputs till 5th April, 2023 at the email ID knbhar@eci.gov.in and brajesh@eci.gov.in, for those who could not come to meet the Commission.

Nitin Khade, IAS
Chief Electoral Officer, Assam

Issued by Chief Electoral Officer, Assam

@ceoassam @ceoassam @ceo_assam

Govt caps maximum GST cess rate on pan masala, tobacco; links rate to retail sale price

The capping of the cess rate was brought in as part of the amendments to the finance bill, 2023

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): The government has capped the maximum rate of GST compensation cess that would be levied on pan masala, cigarettes and other forms of tobacco and linked the highest rate to their retail sale price.

The capping of the cess rate was brought in as part of the amendments to the Finance Bill, 2023, which was passed by the Lok Sabha last Friday.

As per the amendment, the maximum GST compensation cess rate for pan masala will be 51 per cent of the retail sale price per unit. In the current regime, the cess is charged at 135 per cent ad valorem.

The rate for tobacco has been fixed at Rs 4,170 per thousand sticks plus 290 per cent ad valorem or 100 per cent of the retail sale price per unit.

So far, the highest rate was ₹ 4,170 per thousand sticks plus 290



per cent ad valorem.

The cess is levied over and above the highest Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate of 28 per cent.

Changes in schedule-I of GST compensation cess Act, brought in via amendment in Finance Bill, has capped the maximum cess that can be charged on Pan masala and

tobacco products.

Tax experts, however, said to ascertain the exact compensation cess applicable following this change, the GST council will need to issue a notification.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said the latest amendment in the GST Compen-

sation cess law is an enabler that will permit the GST council to introduce applicable tax rates through a notification.

"This change marks a significant shift in taxation policy for pan masala and tobacco-supplying companies. Though this policy will arrest tax evasion to a great extent in this sector, it still may prove to be a regressive plan from an economic standpoint," Mohan said.

In February, the GST Council chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, had approved the report of a panel of state finance ministers on plugging tax evasion in pan masala and gutkha businesses.

The GoM had recommended that the mechanism for levy of compensation cess on pan masala and chewing tobacco be changed from ad valorem to a specific rate-based levy to boost the first stage collection of the revenue.

Bangladesh MP bats for 'border hospitals' on lines of 'border haats'

AGARTALA, March 26 (PTI): Taking a cue from the 'border haats' on 'No Man's Land' between the India-Bangladesh boundary, an MP and noted doctor of the neighbouring country has floated the idea of setting up 'border hospitals' to render quality healthcare services to people living along the stretch.

Dr Prangopal Datta, MP of Cumilla and former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University in Dhaka, who was here to attend a seminar, said the areas of cooperation in the medical sector should be further enhanced between the two countries.

"The 'border haats' between the two countries for trade of local products, has emerged as a successful model. I think the concept of border hospitals will also be a success. Both the governments can start work on it. I have proposed this idea in different forums of India and Bangladesh," he told PTI.

"People in the border areas of both countries are poverty-stricken and they would be the ones most

benefited. Besides, it would also enhance people to people relations between the two neighbouring countries," he said.

Datta said both India and Bangladesh can invest in the proposed project, and the administrative control should remain with the government officials of the two countries.

When contacted, Dr Ashok Sinha, the vice-chairman of the state's Planning Board said, "We are considering setting up such hospitals. I think it's a feasible project, and would be a dream-come-true if successful."

Sinha said a special medical visa could also be introduced for the purpose.

Two 'border haats' – one at Kamalasagar in Sepahijala district and another at Srinagar in South Tripura district – are operational in the northeastern state.

People residing within five km of the border are eligible to buy and sell products in the haats.

Nagaland power engineers condemn harassment to its member

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 26: The Association of Power Engineers Nagaland (APEN) on Saturday expressed strong condemnation to the alleged harassment meted out to one of its members Er. Thanyalo Kath, sub-divisional officer (electrical) Mon, in Mon town by some miscreants, who claimed to be from the NSCN (U) group on March 23.

"Such unwarranted intimidation with death threats on a government Officer delivering an essential service to the public is totally unacceptable for," APEN president Er. Kasho Chishi and general secretary Er. N. Myingthung Ngullie said in a release.

Stating that while the APEN members are giving their utmost and performing their duties round the clock to serve the people of the state, the APEN said such inhuman and outrageous act on its member is unacceptable. The association appealed to the law enforcing agencies to take all necessary steps to book the culprits and take appropriate action as per law.

High-level Indian delegation discusses energy cooperation with SL Prez Wickremesinghe

COLOMBO, March 26 (PTI): A high-level Indian delegation called on Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe here on Sunday and briefed him on the developments in the jointly-identified priority areas for bilateral collaboration in the crucial energy sector.

President Wickremesinghe provided his insights on the early implementation of these initiatives when the delegation led by Pankaj Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum Natural Gas, met him, the Indian High Commission here said.

It said India would gift Sri Lanka 500 solar-powered indoor cooking systems.

The Lanka India Oil Company (LIOOC), the local operator of Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), said the visiting Secretary to the ministry of power and natural gas Jain and Chairman IOC Shrikant Madhav Vaidya had earlier visited the Trincomalee eastern Sri Lanka's IOC terminal. Sri Lanka and India run a joint venture storing fuel in the World War II time storage tanks in Trincomalee.

In January last year, Sri Lanka formally signed an agreement with India to jointly develop the oil tank farms in Trincomalee. The joint venture was finalised amid growing concerns over China's influence in the island nation.

Jain had inaugurated three new LIOOC retail fuel sheds in their ongoing expansion whilst addressing the chamber of commerce and attended a meeting of chief executive officers of leading Indian businesses based in Sri Lanka.

Chairman IOC Vaidya said he was delighted to have met former World Cup-winning Sri Lankan cricket captain Arjuna Ranatunga.

The top-level Indian delegation on the petroleum sector is expected to have extensive talks with their Lankan counterparts for further collaboration, LIOOC said.

LIOOC provided much assistance to Sri Lankan fuel consumers at the height of the country's worst economic crisis.

Sri Lanka is completely dependent on imported fuel, which cost the cash-strapped country close to a whopping USD 4 billion last year.

Franchise Insider enters NE

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 26: Franchise Insider, a leading franchise advisory firm of India, has made its way to the North East. They were featured in Anchorage held in Aashi Apsara from March 25. Franchise Insider opened its first office in Guwahati which was inaugurated by chief managing director, Prag News,

Sanjeev Narain in presence of other dignitaries.

Franchise Insider has over a decade of experience and is a process driven company. Its portfolio consists of food, retail, education, service industry and others.

Advisory for rainfall in East Garo Hills

HT Correspondent

WILLIAMNAGAR, March 26: In view of the IMD weather forecast and warning that thunderstorm and lightning accompanied by heavy rainfall is very likely at isolated places of the district from 22 March onwards, East Garo Hills Deputy Commissioner and Chairman of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Jagdish Chelani, had issued advisory for heavy rainfall, thunderstorm and lightning in the district and set up a control room with helpline numbers for emergency response, rescue and relief, etc.

The district control room set up at Williamnagar may be contacted at the helpline number, 6009076318. The other control rooms have been set up at the block headquarters of all the three C&RD Blocks of the district. Rongjeng C&RD Block may be contacted at 8729802698 and 7005663170, Songsak C&RD Block at 8729802698, 986349368 and 8787819354 and Samanda C&RD Block at 6009588574 and 8414076118.

Contd. from Page 1...

Delimitation exercise:

the Election Commission on December 27 last year. The preliminary work to start the exercise has begun and the final job will commence after the CEC's visit, a senior official at the Office of the CEO had told PTI earlier. Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said in the state Assembly earlier this month that the re-drawing of constituencies was stalled as the then-Congress government had written to the delimitation commission that law and order situation was "not conducive" for the exercise.

"When we were asked if it can be done now, we said the situation has improved now," he added.

On December 31, 2022, the Assam Cabinet decided to merge four districts with the ones from which they were carved out and made separate districts. Biswanath was merged with Sonitpur, Hojai with Nagaon, Tamulpur with Baksa and Bajali with Barpeta. The decisions to merge the districts were taken just a day before the Election Commission's ban on creating new administrative units in Assam from January 1, 2023, as the poll panel would undertake the delimitation exercise in the state, came into force. The administrative jurisdiction of some villages and a few towns were also changed at the state Cabinet meeting, held in New Delhi. In March this year, the Gauhati High Court issued two notices to the Assam government asking it to explain within four weeks why it had dissolved Hojai and Biswanath districts.

Preservation of 'Assam Type'

that led the British government to set up an expert committee for the construction of buildings suited to the region, engineer Ochintya Sarma, involved in documenting the buildings, said. British engineers and experts studied the environment and locally available building materials and suggested a construction system more suited to withstand the vagaries of nature, he said.

The architectural intervention suggested steep roofs, walls constructed of 'ikora' (elephant grass), vertical and lateral timber frames, high ceilings, and finishing of mud and whitewash. "Strength and insulation from the impact of seasonal changes were the key consideration with local sources mostly used as building materials but zamindars, aristocrats, tea planters, professionals like doctors and lawyers sourced materials from as far as England, Poland, Belgium and Ireland," he pointed out. Teak wood for the pillars, doors, windows and ventilators were brought from Burma and Naga Hills and when the devastating earthquake of 1950 struck the state, the houses were able to stand stalling, validating the resilience of its distinctive construction style, Sarma added.

The managing director of Topcem Cements, Bajrang Lohia, pointed out that being in the construction business "we know that the technique behind the construction of these houses are environmentally sustainable, evolving over the years to adapt to the terrain, climate and availability of raw materials in the region". Times have, however, changed and with pressure on land, many of these structures have given way to concrete structures though there are some who still hold on to their heritage with pride.

For 86-year-old Hironmoyee Goswami, her Assam-type abode is an oasis of peace and "though there has been pressure from many family members that we build a three-storied concrete house as these types of houses are difficult to maintain. I refuse to give in and will spend the last few years of my life in my sprawling home". In recent years, due to renewed awareness and public goodwill, many such dilapidated buildings have been restored by experts, a government official pointed out.

Some of the iconic buildings restored are Jorhat's Assam Sahitya Sabha office, Dibrugarh's Berry White Medical College, Guwahati's Cotton University, Christ Church and the former bungalow of the Kamrup deputy commissioner (renamed as the Brahmaputra Heritage Centre), he added.

Hiren Gohain, Akhil extend

and MLA Akhil Gogoi and litterateur Dr Hiren Gohain, among others, joined the sit-in demonstration by the state's main opposition party. The state Congress president said a public rally will be organised in Guwahati soon to mobilise people against the "threat to democracy" posed by the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre. "In every district, block, we will create awareness about the threat to democracy by this current regime. We will organise public meetings everywhere and hold a mega rally in Guwahati soon over the issue," he said. Opposition parties of the state, including Rajiour Dal, Left parties, Assam Jatiya Parishad, AAP and NCP, have lent their support to the Congress, Bora said.

"Their representatives have also participated in the satyagraha here," the Congress leader said. Rahul Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday, a day after a court in Gujarat's Surat convicted him in a 2019 defamation case. The disqualification will bar Gandhi, a four-time MP, from contesting polls for eight years unless a high court stays his conviction. Terming the actions against Gandhi as an "attempt to kill democracy", Saikia said, "Our democracy is such that it allows all political parties to function together. But this BJP-led government is trying to kill this very spirit of our democracy." One alleged that the BJP is digging out 20-30 year old cases against opposition leaders and using agencies like the CBI and ED to "intimidate" them.

Congress on war path against

the Prime Minister on industrialist Gautam Adani, and said people will give a befitting reply to those behind the action. Slamming the BJP over its charge that Rahul Gandhi insulted OBCs with his remark for which he has been convicted in a criminal defamation case, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said why is the ruling party pained if fugitives such as Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi are criticised.

Kharge also thanked all opposition parties for standing with Rahul Gandhi and the Congress to save democracy. "They talk of OBC now, Lalit Modi OBC, Nirav Modi OBC, is Mehul Choksi OBC, they ran away with people's money. If they are fugitives why are you pained if they are criticised. You (BJP) punish the person who works to save the country and send those abroad who loot the country," Kharge said.

"Rahul Gandhi ji is fighting for the people of this country, for the women, for the youth, fighting against unemployment and inflation," he said.

Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday, a day after a court in Gujarat's Surat convicted him in a 2019 defamation case. The disqualification will prevent Gandhi (52), a four-time MP, from contesting elections for eight years unless a higher court upholds the conviction.

Congress workers in many states and union territories like Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat took part in the protest programme. In Gujarat, the police detained state Congress chief Jagdish Tahor, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Amit Chavda and senior leader Bharatsinh Solanki along with party workers when they arrived at Lal Darwaza in Ahmedabad to protest.

The protesters were taken to the police stadium where they continued to shout slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party. "We have the power of Truth and resolution of Satyagraha. To expose the loot of BJP, with a firm determination to protect democracy, each and every worker of Gujarat Pradesh Congress is with Rahul Gandhi," Thakor tweeted.

Tribal groups hold

to other religions and give up their "original tribal culture, customs, rituals, way of life and traditions" should be delisted from the ST list. "We will be sending separate memorandums to the president and the prime minister through the Assam governor with this demand soon," the organisers said. The participants at the rally were dressed in their traditional attire and more than 10 groups performed folk dances at the venue.

Kataria for increasing agri

about the contribution of the university towards the development of agriculture in the state by way of research and extension. Dr Deka also said that the university had played a stellar role in increasing the production of food crops to a large extent in the state. AAU registrar Tapan Gohain offered the vote of thanks in the programme which was also attended by Assam Women's University VC professor Ajanta Borgohain Rajkonwar, deputy commissioner Pulak Mahanta and district administration officials.

Later, the Governor, who is also the chancellor of Assam Women's university, visited the institute at Rowrah. The VC Ajanta Borgohain Rajkonwar also spoke about the current state of development of the institution. Kataria in his address to the university fraternity took note of the importance of the decision of the government of Assam in opening a women's university and said that a residential campus is a must for an all-girls institution like Assam Women's University.

APSC successfully conducts

in complete adherence to law and order, with active participation of personnel from respective district administrations, throughout the state, a release by the Commission stated. The Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination consists of two OMR (objective type) question papers, namely GS Paper—I and GS Paper—II (Qualifying paper) for a total of 400 marks.

It is for the first time in the history of Assam Public Service Commission that such a large-scale recruitment process for 913 posts across 27 services of the state of Assam has been advertised under the umbrella of Combined Competitive Examination, 2022.

The examination was held in order to fill 913 posts across 27 services, out of which 15 services have been newly incorporated in the Combined Competitive Examination, 2022 viz., Assam Urban Administrative Service (103 posts), Assam Financial Service (20 posts), Assistant Audit Officer (77 posts), Administrative Officer (Minorities Development Board) (1 post), Assistant Accounts Officer (415 posts) among other services. A total of 74,368 applications were received against 913 advertised posts out of which 42,320 are male candidates, 32,045 are female candidates and 3 are transgender candidates, the release further stated.

It may be mentioned that for the first time against the posts reserved for ex-servicemen, a total of 121 candidates applied for the examination. Furthermore, 20,162 candidates having post graduation degree and 258 candidates having PhD degree were also among the candidates.

A total of 31 nodal officers, 132 supervisors, 388 assistant supervisors, 3861 invigilators, 570 clerks, 777 peons, 132 sub-inspectors, 792 police personnel and 264 nurses were involved in the peaceful conduct of the aforesaid examination. In the history of APSC, the highest numbers of candidates appeared in the said examination this time. APSC chairman Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury, IAS (Retd.) expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards all officials of civil and police administrations, the health department, the postal department, the APDCL, the Guwahati Municipal Corporation, the principals and teachers of all educational institutions and all officers and staff involved in the examination process.

ISRO's LVM3 successfully

Successful launch of LVM3-M3/OneWeb India-2 Mission," the Union minister of state (independent charge) Science and Technology said. OneWeb now has 616 satellites in its fleet, which is more than enough to launch global services later this year. This mission marks OneWeb's second satellite deployment from India, highlighting the collaboration between the United Kingdom and Indian space industries, the company said.

The first set of satellite separation (comprising four of the 36 satellites) took place around 20 minutes after lift-off while the remaining were deployed into their respective orbits in phases later.

NewSpace India Ltd chairman and managing director D Radhakrishnan hailed the Indian space agency for undertaking a complex mission and being successful in it. He termed it a 'momentous' day for NewSpace India Ltd. "One special thing that we see in this particular mission is the cryogenic stage being used for such a complex manoeuvre to meet the requirements of OneWeb in deploying the 36 satellites," he said. "It is extremely challenging stuff that has been done and repeated here once again in this second mission."

India's highways infra to match US by 2024: Gadkari

The work in 'time bound mission mode' includes construction of green expressways and rail over bridges across the country

RANCHI, March 26 (PTI): India's highways infrastructure will match that of the US by 2024 for which work in time bound 'mission mode' is on including construction of green expressways and rail over bridges, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said.

He said cabinet nod to 'Bharatmala 2' is likely soon and once obtained it will meet the requirements of a robust infrastructure in the country.

"I am confident that India's highways will be on par with that of the US by 2024. Work in a time bound mission mode is on to build a robust infrastructure including a network of green expressways across the length and breadth of India," Gadkari told PTI in an interview.

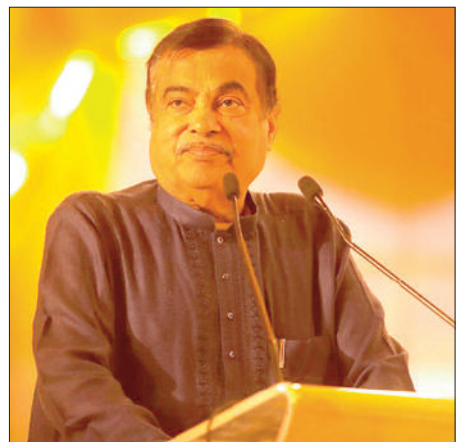
The Road Transport and Highways Minister said in this year railway over bridges are being constructed at a cost of ₹ 16,000 crore which will be increased to ₹ 50,000 crore in five years.

On the Kailash Mansarovar highway project via Pithoragarh, Gadkari said "Ninety three per cent work on Kailash Mansarovar project has been completed."

With the completion of this project, the arduous trek through treacherous high-altitude terrain can be avoided by pilgrims of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and the period of journey will be reduced by many days.

At present, travel to Kailash Mansarovar takes around two to three weeks through Sikkim or Nepal routes.

On Bharatmala Phase 2, the minister said: "Nod is likely soon to Bharatmala Phase 2 that will further accelerate the making of highways."



About 5,000 km of highway network is envisaged under phase 2 initially.

Bharatmala Pariyojana is India's largest infrastructure programme to develop about 35,000 km of National Highway corridors, connecting over 580 districts in the nation. The programme signalled a paradigm shift to corridor approach of infrastructure development.

The overall network of the nation was reimagined through scientific studies including, Origin-Destination study of freight movement across 600 districts and crow-flight alignment for optimised routes to reduce transit time.

"In Jharkhand, work of seven greenfield expressways, economic corridor and inter corridor

is being done at a cost of ₹ 70,000 crore," Gadkari told PTI.

Besides work worth ₹ 50,000 crore is being done for better connectivity with states like Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, he said.

Providing details of the projects, the minister said 4-lane inter corridor work is being done at a cost of ₹ 6,200 crore for Ranchi-Varanasi Inter Corridor which will reduce the travel time significantly between Ranchi and Varanasi.

Likewise, the 635 km Raipur-Dhanbad economic corridor is being constructed at a cost of ₹ 15,000 crore and would ensure faster movement of coal, steel, cement and minerals, he said.

The other projects included ₹ 22,000 crore Varanasi-Ranchi-Howrah 620 km access-controlled green expressway and ₹ 6,300 crore Ranchi-Sambalpur greenfield economic corridor for 230 km.

Apart from these Varanasi-Chordaha (Jharkhand-Bihar border) 6-lane 262 km economic corridor being built on completion will provide excellent hassle free connectivity to Kolkata, Assam, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh from Jharkhand, he added.

Other projects, the minister said include the ₹ 5,000 crore Ranchi Ring Road and added that the detailed project report for this 194 km highway will be completed in May 2023.

This ring road will pass through Hazaribag, Latehar, Lohardaga, Gumla, Khunti, Jamshedpur and Hazaribag.

Water resource minister launches Mora Bharali River beautification scheme

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 26: Water resources minister Pijush Hazarika formally launched the scheme of beautification and development of ecotourism of the Mora Bharali River in Tezpur on Saturday.

It is to be mentioned here that as part of a slew of projects for the development of historic Tezpur city announced by the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in the Assam government's cabinet meeting held in the recent past in Tezpur, under the water resource department a big budget project of ₹ 15 crore was proposed in the first phase for the dredging and beautification of river Morabharali from Paruwa Chariali to Bishnu Rabha samadhisthal.

However, turning the long cherished dream of converting the unexplored beauty of the dead course of the Bharali River (which is now called as Mora Bharali) into an attraction was ceremonially started on Saturday by the state cabinet minister in presence of local MLA, Prithvi Raj Rabha and other district administration's officials.

Starting the project minister Pijush Hazarika said that the extreme beauty of historic Tezpur always attracts him. "However, the dumping of garbage in Mora Bharali River at Paruwa Chariali area being a gateway to the historic city



was a major problem." Hazarika said adding, "It will restore the existence and root of the beauty of one of the beautiful tributaries of the mighty Brahmaputra River playing a major role in the tourism sector thereby reflecting the beauty of the area."

He also mentioned that cabinet meetings held outside Dispur with an exemplary idea is being able to pave a unique way for development of various districts.

In his speech he also stated that

organising various government programmes including cabinet meetings in different districts, the government celebrated the Lachit Barphukan's 400 years birth anniversary in New Delhi with a minimum budget.

He also mentioned that during the last two years, ₹ 100 crore have been sanctioned to Sonitpur and Biswanath district's water resource department, the government is taking all sorts of measures to make

the state a flood-free region. "Due to the departmental effort in the last couple of years, flood issues are decreasing in Dhemaji and Morigaon district," he further said.

Among others the programme was attended by MP, Tezpur HPC Pallab Lochan Das, Rangapara MLA, Krishna Kamal Tanti, MLA Diganta Kalita, DC Sonitpur Deba Kumar Mishra and officials of district administration and water resource department.

Family members seek justice following BSF woman constable's death

HT Correspondent

BOKO, March 26: Family members demanded justice after news of their daughter's death surfaced. A BSF woman constable allegedly committed suicide. However the family members refuted the claims and expressed doubts of conspiracy behind the death.

Dhritashree Rabha(28) was a resident of Kamrup district's Dakuapara village under Boko Police Station. She was found hanging under the mysterious circumstances at Coochbehar in West Bengal on March 20.

She was currently attached with the BSF Coochbehar for the Karate competition.

She joined the BSF in 2017 and she was in Tura BSF camp in Meghalaya, but later she was sent to Coochbehar for a Karate tournament.

On March 21 Dhritashree's body was brought to her own house and she was cremated at Boko.

However, Dhritashree's mother Leela Rabha and Dipshikha Rabha couldn't believe that her daughter had committed suicide.

When they went to the BSF camp in Coochbehar where she was staying, Dipshikha Rabha was

shocked, "like they were waiting for us by making everything up. They even didn't let us look at the body in her room and other things."

Dipshikha alleged, "Dhritashree didn't commit suicide, she was murdered due to some conspiracy. BSF wants to hide the truth."

While asking Dipshikha about the reason and other suspects, she replied, "I suspect her boyfriend and one unknown guy 'Lawrence' who was also BSF personnel was disturbing my sister when she came home last time."

Meanwhile, she requested chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to intervene in the matter.

Dhritashree's family including mother, younger sister and other family members went to Coochbehar and lodge a FIR with Pundibari Police Station in Coochbehar.

According to the FIR, Dhritashree's mother Leela Rabha alleged, "The sudden and mysterious death of my daughter clearly indicates foul play and an act of pre-planned murder and an attempt to give it the name of suicide. After my daughter's death, a photo of her hanging went viral

among our family members and village. The photo was taken from close quarters. In that photo, we could clearly see the signs of injuries on her body. In the photo, we could see that her feet were touching the floor and the window in which she was seen trapped was almost at the same height as her. In addition, no one from the department of BSF could tell me as to who took my daughter's body down from the hanging position and who was using my daughter's phone after her death. All these things clearly indicate that my daughter's death is not a case of suicide but she was murdered. I came to know from my daughter Dhritashree Rabha that one BSF employee, namely Akshay Supekar who wanted to maintain a relationship with my daughter, was harassing her for several days. My daughter also told me that another BSF employee namely Lawrence (Full name unknown), who is also working in Cooch Behar (West Bengal), was giving various threats to her from time to time. All these incidents make me believe without doubt that this sudden death is a premeditated murder of my daughter."

Jaya Mohila Samity observes golden jubilee



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, March 26: A pioneering women's organisation in Sivasagar, Jaya Mohila Samity observed its golden jubilee celebrations with a two-day long programme and the open session on Sunday was presided over by noted women activist and educationist Monica Saikia.

Dipali Chaliha, former principal, Sibsagar Commerce College, released the souvenir and spoke on garnering the courage to shoulder social responsibility in addition to that of their families.

Dr Sabyasachi Mahanta, as a guest speaker spoke on 'Problems of the deserted thrown away women in society'. He said that the problem lies in the patriarchal

social system which needs to be redressed sincerely. Legally divorced women can claim compensation, but the thrown-away women are really helpless.

Dr Assia Sultana, principal, Amguri College, released the souvenir 'Madhukori', edited by Runu Handique Gogoi and Ajanata Gogoi Das.

Prasanta Sarmah, noted director of amateur theatre, released the book 'Oi Ram' composed by 92-year old Bulumoni Goswami, and another book 'Smritir lecheri' written by 83-year-old Sabitri Sarmah, was released by former librarian of the Sibsagar College, Deva Kumar Hazarika. Advocate Bikash Dey, spoke on the legal provisions that can help women to fight discrimination and domestic violence in society.

Demow school golden jubilee celebration concludes

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, March 26: The closing ceremony of golden jubilee of Panidehing High School 2022-23 was organised in Panidehing High School premises on Saturday and Sunday for two days. As per the schedule, the programme started with cleanliness drive which was followed by flag hoisting, the flag was hoisted by Susen Chandra Konwar, president of organizing committee and Prayagn Phukan, headmaster of Panidehing High School. On the occasion of golden jubilee 50 flags of organising committee of Golden Jayanti Samaroh were hoisted. The Smriti Tarpan was offered by Samiran Phukan, Assistant General Secretary of All Assam Students Union.

Bodoland sports & cultural meet concludes

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 26: The Bodoland Sports & Cultural Meet 2023 concluded on Sunday with a closing ceremony after a three day colourful programme held at Bhergaon in Udalguri district.

Huge participants from various districts of Bodoland Territorial Region eagerly participated in the event and participants have showcased their sporting talents in various disciplines of sports which was organised by department of sports & youth welfare and department of cultural affairs of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Bodoland Territorial Region executive members, Dr Nilut Swar-

giary, Daobaisa Boro graced the occasion as guests in the closing ceremony.

The sports & cultural meet was organised to promote sports and cultural among the citizens of the region as government of BTR is working dedicatedly towards the welfare and development of the region.

"The BTR government under the leadership of CEM (BTR) Pramod Boro is making consistent efforts to promote sports among youths of the region. Such programmes will definitely boost the efforts of BTR government and encourage our youth in sports & culture in the region", Daobaisa Boro said.

Nagaon Congress stages protest against Rahul Gandhi's disqualification

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 26: In protest against disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Parliament, along with the rest of the country, the party activists from Nagaon district Congress committee also staged 'Satyagrah' near the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the small town here on Sunday. Over hundred of Congress workers led by district Congress president Suresh Bora, participated in the stir and displayed placards and also shouted various slogans against the ruling BJP. During the protest, the agitators strongly criticized PM Modi as well as the saffron party and demanded to put full stop in killing the merits of democracy across the country. The protesters claimed that the fight for restoration of democracy would be continuing more across the country in the days to come. The workers as well as supporters from Nagaon District Congress Committee, District Mohila Congress Committee, District Youth Congress Committee and District NSUI as well as Sewa Dal participated in the stir on Sunday.

Protest against Gandhi's Loksabha disqualification

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 26: Along with the rest of the state Congress and the Rajior Dal demonstrated a protest programme on Sunday against Congress leader-parliamentarian Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a 2019 defamation case and his subsequent disqualification from the Loksabha in Tezpur. Organised by Sonitpur District Congress in association with Rajior Dal the protest programme was participated by Congress and Rajior Dal workers. The protestors termed Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Loksabha an attack on democracy saying Congress and other oppositions would never remain silent against the BJP's misuse in the country.

NH37 deplorable condition angers commuters



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, March 26: The horrible condition of the NH37 from Janjhi to Demow has angered thousands of vehicle owners and the taxpaying people in general but the highway authority appears totally unmoved despite sporadic protests.

The highway expansion works is going on in the 60 km stretch under the Shiv Harilalka firm, the contractor opened the side roads along the two sides of the flyovers in Teok, Kakojan, Demow and Gaurisagar turning a blind eye to the plight of the commuters.

As the rainy season begins, the side roads have been filled with water and the heavy trucks made

them virtual mud pits clogging the traffic movement. The road contractor firm seems to have no planning as to where rain water would be drained away from the pits. A large number of vehicles while negotiating the quagmire got stuck in mud disrupting traffic flow.

Bir Lachit Sena has seized a dumper belonging to the company for an accident in Janjhi Lefergaon on Saturday for severely injuring a youth and an elderly person and trying to speed away. The people of Janjhi Jamuguri have petitioned the deputy commissioner to take stern measures against the road makers for not following the contract terms and conditions properly.

JSF expresses concern on population explosion

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 26: JSF Assam has been tirelessly working since last 9 years throughout the length and breadth of the country for creating mass awareness about the need for a strict population control on account of population explosion and demographic imbalance that our nation has been facing.

JSF puts pressure upon the central government so as to bring forth a strict population control act to be evenly applicable upon all citizens irrespective of cast, creed and religion. With this sole purpose, JSF meets the members of parliament (MPs) across the states of the country under a nationwide programme "Sansad Samvad" wherein the JSF activists handed

over written documents to the honorable MPs based on census data about the grave situation of population explosion and increasing demographic imbalance.

On Sunday Assam JSF conducted the programme "Sansad Samvad" at the residence of Mangaldoi MP Sri Dilip Saikia and JSF Assam handed over a memorandum to him for onward transmission to the Prime Minister urging him to implement a strict population control act urgently.

The Sansad Samvad programme is conducted in the presence of JSF's National general secretary Harendra Bora, Dr Manoranjan Kalita, Coordinator JSF Assam among others.

Poster making competition thrills participants in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 26: As part of Environment Education Programme under Mission LIFE of Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC), Jakve Asong - NGO, district nodal agency for implementation of Mission Life has organised a district level poster model and on the spot drawing competition on sustainable projects ideas and exhibition at Karbi People's Hall, Taralango here on Sunday.

Students of Rongnihang ME School, Sunrise Academy and Mithiphang ME School participated in the competition. Students were given to draw on the subject saving energy.

Earlier, the former executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and vice president, Karbi Cultural Society, Humsing Bey inaugurated the competition.

In the poster making competition Riya Rajbha got first prize, Swreti Shrashta in second and Bornika Gogoi in third prize. While on the spot drawing competition the first, second and third prize were received by students of Rongnihang ME School. They are




Rengmirdan Lekthepe, Amri Rongpi and Jasmine Tissopi in first, second and third respectively.

The judges for poster making and drawing competition were artist and vice president, Karbi Anglong Fine Artists & Craftmen Association,

Longkiri Rongpi and sculptor Mo-heswar Teron (MFA - Master of Fine Arts).

Certificates to winners and participants were given by the organiser. Co-ordinator (Eco-Club), Karbi Anglong District Nodal Agency, Ronard

Bey said the posters of first, second and third will be sent to state level and if it is selected in the state it will go to national level. If it is lucky then from national level the poster will go to UNO. Those selected will get scholarships from the government, Bey said.



শিক্ষার অধিকার
সকল শিক্ষার অধিকার, সকল শিক্ষার আশ্বাস

AXOM SARBA SIKSHA ABHIJAN MISSION
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT MISSION CO-ORDINATOR,
KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL, DIPHU, ASSAM

No. SSA/KAAC/AS/Construction of NSCBV/133/2023-24/1190 Dtd.25/3/2023

CORRIGENDUM

This is for information of all the Bidders the following Corrigendum being made in Tender Document (Ref. Tender Notice No. SSA/KAAC/AS/Construction of NSCBV/133/2023-24 Dtd. 06-03-2023) for Extension date has given below:-

1. Bid Submission Closing Date: - 31-03-2023, Time 3:0 pm
2. Bid Opening Date: - 01/04/2023, Time 11:30 am
3. Tender Cost: - Rs 10,000.00

Yours faithfully

Sd/-
District Mission Co-ordinator,
SSA, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council

No. SSA/KAAC/AS/Construction of NSCBV/133/2023-24/ (A) 1190 Dtd.25/3/2023

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new. - Albert Einstein

RaGa's disqualification

Incumbent ruling dispensations disenfranchising former rulers and banning them for life from contesting elections is something that one often associated with countries with fragile democracies. Indians are used to news about politicians losing their seats in parliament and being debarred from contesting elections on account of corruption and other offences from across the border rather than in their own country, where such instances are rare if not non-existent. Rahul Gandhi losing his parliament seat and being disqualified from contesting elections for six years in view of his conviction in the defamation case has in the eyes of the world lowered India's prestige as the world's largest democracy. Within hours of Rahul Gandhi's conviction and his unseating from parliament along with a ban of six years in contesting elections, western media put out stories about how Indian democracy has been losing sheen over the years. A Bloomberg report said India is facing the risk of losing its label as the world's largest democracy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule. It made a special mention of the fact that the decision to disqualify the Congress leader from parliament has been taken by the Indian parliament controlled by Modi's party.

BBC recalled how politicians including Rahul Gandhi had moved the Supreme Court for decriminalising defamation, which is based on the British era law and pointed out that charge by free speech advocates that politicians have been using the law to silence their critics. The Economist, also, recently carried an article on India's 'democratic drift', saying parliament was becoming increasingly irrelevant under the Modi administration as laws are passed without scrutiny and debate. It pointed out that the proportion of bills referred to standing committees in the lower house, the Lok Sabha has dropped from around 60-70 percent under the previous government to 27 percent in Mr Modi's first term and just 13 percent in his second. Attendance records in committee meetings in both houses for the past three years reveal a meagre average of 46 percent. Of the 15 bills rushed into law during the monsoon session last year, not one had been deliberated in committee, and many were passed by perfunctory voice votes, it said.

It may appear to be somewhat ironic that the BJP which is celebrating Rahul Gandhi's conviction and his unseating from parliament has been opposing a ban on tainted politicians from contesting elections, which the Election Commission of India has been proposing. While the poll panel favoured a ban, the law ministry opposed the move lock, stock and barrel. In fact, on a petition filed by activist lawyer and BJP supporter Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay seeking a lifetime ban on tainted politicians in a bid to check rising criminalisation of the polity and greater number of tainted politicians in elected houses, the Modi government responded saying the existing laws have several provisions which adequately dealt with this issue. A Law Commission report had recommended disqualification of persons against whom charges have been framed at least one year before the date of scrutiny of nominations for an offence punishable with a sentence of five years or more. The Supreme Court has time and again expressed itself in favour of decriminalising politics, but at the same time pointed out its inability to push ahead with the idea due to lack of legislative mandate.

Indian economy is still in a position to insulate itself from global turmoil

By: Anjan Roy

Now that the Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England have all raised their policy interest rates to fight inflation, there might be further flutters in the financial sector and several other banks might be nervous about the future. However, the central bankers have flatly stated that their primary responsibility was to fight inflation and preserve price stability. Jerome Powell of the US Federal Reserve has stated that the economy could not function with high inflation rates. The Bank of England chief on the other hand felt more optimistic about the British economy after introducing the necessary rate hike.

What should be the prospect for the Indian economy. With rate hikes in most developed economies, it might be almost sure that there will be a period of turmoil in the financial markets. As the global financial players adjust to the higher and high rates of interest, they would redraw their plans for deployment of funds. Generally, it can be fairly expected that some funds would be withdrawn from the emerging market economies and thus these markets should come under pressure. It is not as if we have not seen such concomitant instabilities in the financial markets when the developed economies make major adjustments.

During the time of Ben Bernanke's so-called "benign neglect" when after years of quantitative expansion to meet the after effect of the global financial meltdown, these measures were being reversed, emerging markets went through a period of severe storms. Many of these economies were facing serious balance of payments crisis, steep fall in their exchange rates and tanking stocks markets. This time around, the emerging markets might face some adverse winds. Those accustomed to steady flows from overseas will certainly face problems and instability.

India must ring fence itself from these adverse global headwinds. The most likely intrusion of these would be through the financial markets. Already, the stock markets have turned extremely volatile and in step the foreign exchange rate is under pressure. The rupee

has lost ground against the US dollar. The RBI would have to tread a cautious pathway. The Indian equity market has already been under pressure mainly from some isolated events. The Hindenburg report on Adani Group has sparked off a downward cycle. The follow up demand of parliamentarians on the Adani Group has not helped sentiment. But, fortunately, the worst on this looks like being over and prices have been discounted.

The major banks' share prices had been affected in sync with the general global melt down in bank shares. But it should be clear the Indian banks are insulated from these global trends and appear well-capitalised. There is no immediate cause for fear about their prospects.

But, as many of the overseas institutional investors are doing some of their calculations, outflow of funds could be real. And that would mean a further fall in Indian rupee exchange rate. This could have a direct link with the price line as imported items, most importantly oil, could see some further rise. The silver lining is of course the price of oil itself. In the wake of the financial turmoil and bank failures, oil prices went down. International oil market experts are now almost certain that prices should see southward movement. Thus, despite exchange rate loss, domestic prices of oil need not be too volatile. But, general concern over inflation is still very strong. While like elsewhere in the world, India is also witnessing rising price line, the Reserve Bank should apply its judgement in embarking on fresh rate hikes. Consumer price inflation normally shows a spike in the summer months based on the prices of food items.

The emphasis on inflation containment should be more on supply management in our country than demand management through interest rate manipulation. That should encourage overall growth momentum of the economy than put a brake on economic activity.

Indian monetary policy has most often struck its own direction even when the world's leading central banks have pursued their own chosen track. All said, Indian economy is not as much integrated with the global one and can still remain insulated. This is what might be the lesson for now. (IPA Service)

China has to go beyond tokenism to ensure return of Rohingya to Myanmar

The lights are dim at the end of the tunnel in case of repatriation of Rohingya refugees living in squalid camps in the coastal district of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The country hosts nearly 1.2 million Muslim Rohingya people who have fled ethnic religious strife in neighbouring Myanmar during a military genocidal campaign, which killed at least 9,000 people in 2017.

The Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) backed campaign that the United Nations labelled a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" saw hundreds of thousands of Rohingya driven across the border into Bangladesh in September 2017. More than a million refugees are crammed in tens of thousands of makeshift huts made of bamboo, thin plastic sheets and corrugated tin roofs and the living conditions in the nauseating camps are dangerous. Often, fires blaze through the camps leaving thousands without shelter. Last week, a 17-member delegation from Myanmar's immigration and population ministries crossed into Bangladesh in mid-March and interviewed 480 Rohingya in Cox's Bazar as part of a plan for possible repatriation to their country. The Myanmar delegation, led by Aung Myo, the social welfare minister for Rakhine State, was selecting members for a pilot "family-based repatriation" project.

The Myanmar delegation's visit to the camps is believed to be brokered by China and facilitated by the UNHCR.

The Refugee Relief And Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) in Cox's Bazar, Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, said the Myanmar junta officials cleared 711 Rohingyas out of 1,140 recommended by Bangladesh. The newborn and newly married couples have been excluded from verification.

When journalists asked when the repatriation is expected to start, Rahman said that the "Myanmar delegation did not have the power to commit to a possible repatriation date." Before the visit of the delegation, the Myanmar junta for the first time since the 2017 crackdown, allowed diplomats from Bangladesh, India, China, and five other countries to tour the restive Rakhine State.

It was only then, the officials expressed the military junta's plan to begin Rohingya



repatriation under the pilot project.

Earlier, Bangladesh formally sought co-operation from China to repatriate Rohingya refugees to Myanmar during a visit by Foreign Minister Wang Yi and also China's State Councillor promised to resolve a political solution to the Rohingya crisis. China had used its influence in Myanmar to broker a November 2017 agreement to repatriate Rohingyas. China's ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen hoped that the first batch of displaced Rohingya would be repatriated to Myanmar soon while China

continued its role as mediator, the official news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported. On 17 March 2023, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen also urged the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states to take collective responsibility to ensure a safe and dignified return of the most persecuted Rohingyas to their homeland, Myanmar.

Indeed, OIC backed Gambia to file a genocide case with the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Only Turkey has a visible presence at the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. India also launched "Operation Insaniyat" to provide relief assistance in response to the humanitarian crisis faced by a large influx of Rohingya refugees into

Bangladesh from Myanmar. Bangladesh and Myanmar began the negotiation for repatriation, but since 2018 none has returned so far and recent verification of a few hundred potential returnees for a pilot repatriation project remains unclear when they would be going home. Despite attempts to send them back, the refugees refused, fearing insecurity in Myanmar, which was exacerbated by the military takeover last year. Amid the situation, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in a statement on March 19 said they are observing developments of the Myanmar delegation's visit to Bangladesh to verify a selected number of refugees on a bilateral pilot project on their possible returns. The UN Refugee organisation reiterated that conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine State are currently "not conducive to the sustainable return of Rohingya refugees".

Bangladesh has consistently reaffirmed its commitment to "voluntary and sustainable repatriation" since the onset of the current crisis which echoes UNCHR policy that every refugee has a right to return to their home country based, make an informed choice and no refugee should be forced to repatriate. China always wanted to impress upon their "feel good" diplomacy, but de-

spite best intentions, it seems the repatriation has entered into a fresh deadlock as both Bangladesh and UNCHR, responsible for the safe return of the displaced Rohingyas are concerned about their safety and security in the Rakhine State.

The Rohingya issue must be addressed by China, a country [Myanmar] over which it has significant influence. Only China can make conclusive negotiations on the safe return of the Rohingyas, writes security analyst Samina Akhter in Modern Diplomacy.

Bangladesh and China have close political and military relations in addition to the fact that China is Bangladesh's top trading and development partner. Last week, Bangladesh has inaugurated a naval base in Cox's Bazar with two conventional diesel-electric powered refurbished Chinese submarines bought for \$205 million in 2016 to enhance Bangladesh's naval capacity, after the demarcation of its maritime boundary with India and Myanmar. It is equally true, that Myanmar's military junta, which took power in a coup two years ago, has demonstrated no intention to take back any refugees.

Most importantly, the Rohingya refugee groups based in Bangladesh said for sustainable and dignified repatriation will only be possible when the Myanmar regime recognises the Rohingyas as an ethnic community; provide legal citizenship which was stripped in 1982; school education; healthcare services; freedom of movement and livelihood.

Rohingya's human rights groups believe the face-saving exercise to repatriate refugees happened after the Chinese exerted pressure on the Myanmar military junta to demonstrate a "feel good policy" otherwise face the compliance declared by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The genocide case is resuming at ICJ on 24 April. "Taking back a few refugees, even if it is less than one percent of the population, shall allow Myanmar to come up with a counterargument under the very false pretence they are sincere about the return of refugees," the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) said in a statement. (The writer is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh, can be reached at saleemasad@hotmail.com)

Arab plan for Syria puts Europe and America in a bind

By: James M Dorsey

A push by Arab allies of the United States to bring Syria in from the cold highlights the limits of a Chinese-mediated rapprochement between the Middle East's archrivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The effort spearheaded by the United Arab Emirates, and supported by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, demonstrates that the expected restoration of diplomatic relations between the kingdom and the Islamic republic has done nothing to reduce geopolitical jockeying and rebuild trust. At best, the Chinese-mediated agreement establishes guardrails to prevent regional rivalries from spinning out of control, a principle of Chinese policy towards the Middle East.

The Saudi-Iran agreement also is an exercise in regime survival. It potentially allows the two countries to pursue their economic goals unfettered by regional tensions. For Saudi Arabia, that means diversification and restructuring of the kingdom's economy, while Iran seeks to offset the impact of harsh US sanctions. The goal of countering Iran in Syria is upfront in the Arab proposal for returning Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the Arab and international fold.

If accepted by Syria, the United States, and Europe, it would initiate a political process that could produce a less sympathetic Syrian government to Iran. It would also establish an Arab military presence in Syria designed to prevent Iran from extending its influence under the guise of securing the return of refugees. For Al-Assad, the carrot is tens of billions of dollars needed to rebuild his war-ravaged country and alleviate the humanitarian fallout of last month's devastating earthquakes in northern Syria. Hampered by sanctions, Al-Assad's Russian and Iranian backers don't have the economic or political wherewithal to foot the bill.

Nevertheless, potential Gulf investment is likely to encounter obstacles. The US sanctions that hamper Russia and Iran, also erect barriers for Saudi Arabia and the UAE that will limit the degree to which they want to be seen as sanctions busters. Moreover, countering Iranian influence in Syria would have to go beyond trade and investment in physical reconstruction. Iran has over the years garnered substantial soft power by focusing on embedding itself in Syrian culture and education, providing social services, and religious proselytization.

Meanwhile, China has made clear that its interests are

commercial and further limited to aspects of Syrian reconstruction that serve its geopolitical and geoeconomic goals. Al-Assad was in Moscow last week to discuss trade and humanitarian aid. The Syrian president's rejection of a Russian request that he meets his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, suggests that Al-Assad will be equally opposed to key elements of the Arab proposal.

The Syrian president said he would only meet Erdogan once Turkey withdraws its troops from rebel-held areas of northern Syria. Even so, the Arab push potentially offers the United States and Europe the ability to strike a reasonable balance between their lofty moral, ethical, and human rights principles and the less savoury contingencies of realpolitik.

The terms of the Arab proposal to allow Syria back into the international fold after a decade of brutal civil war that killed some 600,000 people, displaced millions more, and significantly enhanced Iran's regional footprint appears to take that into account. While Al-Assad rejects the principle of political reform and the presence of more foreign troops on Syrian territory, legitimizing the regime of a man accused of war crimes, including using chemical weapons against civilians, is a hard pill to swallow for the United States and Europe.

However, it is easy to claim the moral high ground on the backs of thousands trying to pick up the pieces in the wake of the earthquakes. The same is true for the plight of the millions of refugees from the war whose presence in Turkey and elsewhere is increasingly precarious because of mounting anti-migrant sentiment. That is not to say that Al-Assad should go scot-free. Nonetheless, the failure to defeat the Syrian regime, after 12 years in which it brutally prosecuted a war with the backing of Russia and Iran, suggests the time has come to think out of the box. The alternative is maintaining a status quo that can claim the moral high ground but holds out no prospect of change or alleviation of the plight of millions of innocent people.

To be sure, morality is not a concern of Arab regimes seeking to bring Al-Assad in from the cold. However, countering Iran and managing regional conflicts to prevent them from spinning out of control is. Even so, the Arab proposition potentially opens a way out of a quagmire.

It would enhance the leverage of the United States and Europe to ensure that political reform is the cornerstone of Al-Assad's engagement with elements of the Syrian opposition. In other words, rather than rejecting any solution that

does not involve Mr. Al-Assad's removal from power, the United States and Europe could lift sanctions contingent on agreement and implementation of reforms. Similarly, the US and Europe could make sanctions relief contingent on a safe, uninhibited, and orderly return of refugees.

However, there would be questions about the ability and willingness of Arab forces loyal to autocratic regimes to safeguard that process impartially. US and European engagement with Arab proponents of dealing with Al-Assad would potentially also give them a seat on a train that has already left the station despite their objections.

Ali Shamkani, the Iranian national security official who negotiated the deal with Saudi Arabia in Beijing, was in the UAE last week to meet President Mohammed bin Zayed. There is little doubt that Syria was on the two men's agenda. Al-Assad met with Bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi for the second time in a year and travelled to Oman for talks with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq last month.

The Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers recently trekked separately to Damascus for the first time since the civil war in Syria erupted in 2011. Perhaps, the most fundamental obstacle to the Arab proposition is not the fact that Syria, the United States, and Europe would have to swallow bitter pills. The prime obstacle is likely to be the Arab proponents of the plan. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan are unlikely to stick to their guns in presenting the plan as a package. Having taken the lead in cozying up to Al-Assad, the UAE has since last year demonstrated that it is willing to coax the Syrian leader to back away from Iran at whatever cost to prospects for reform or alleviation of the plight of his victims.

Saudi Arabia, like Qatar and several other Arab countries, initially opposed reconciliation but the kingdom has since embraced the notion of rehabilitation of Al-Assad. In early March, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud noted "that there is a consensus building in the Arab world, that the status quo is not tenable. And that means we have to find a way to move beyond that status quo."

Much of the Arab proposition is about enticing the United States and Europe to be more accommodating and more inclined to a conditioned lifting of sanctions. A speedy in principle US and European embrace of the Arab proposition would hold Emirati and Saudi feet to the fire and put Al-Assad on the back foot. (IPA Service)

'Yatra Naryastu Pujiyante Ramante Tatra Devata'

By: Dr Vishal Saxena

In our ancient texts and writings, girls and women are placed on a high pedestal. They are worshipped as kanyas (girls), as grihalaxmi (wives), and as mothers. Our Vedic scriptures and hymns glorify the dignity of women. As quoted, where women are honoured, there the deities are pleased.

With a population of more than 1.3 billion people, India is a large and diverse nation. India's population is around 50% female, and women are very important to Indian society. Yet, depending on a variety of elements like social status, location, religion, and caste, being a woman in India might be very different from place to place. In India, awareness of the significance of women's rights and gender equality has grown in recent years. Women have achieved great advancements in fields like politics, healthcare, and education. Women in India still suffer a variety of difficulties, including prejudice, gender-based violence, and unequal access to opportunities and resources. A clear example of one such disparity is found in the field of access to organ transplantation.

The only treatment that can save the lives of patients with end-organ failure is transplantation. Access to this therapeutic option has always been restricted by the lack of available organs; hence, much research has been done on how to fairly allocate these priceless national resources; hence, much re-

search has been done on how to fairly allocate this priceless national resource. Regrettably, gender and sex-based inequities exist and have done so for many years despite the transplant community's knowledge of this injustice. Crucially, the unequal access to transplantation that women experience disproportionately has not been addressed by legislation or allocation policies. In addition, although they make up the majority of living kidney donors, women with renal disease are continuously less likely to be referred for transplant evaluation and subsequently less likely to receive a kidney transplant. According to a survey, all sexes had comparable reasons for donating organs, although women were noticeably more likely than men to do it for a relative.

Men and women may not have the same intentions when it comes to organ donation, so it is important to clarify these intentions with close family members. Among the pool of live and deceased organ donors, there are still gender differences. Women make up the majority of living organ donors (60%) but make up less than half of deceased organ donors (40%) as well. These gender disparities in organ donation have persisted for more than 25 years, and the incidence of donation refusal may have an impact. According to a 2013 study, 11.1% of family members who were considering refusing to donate a recently deceased person's organ actually did so. The majority of family mem-

bers that refused donation for cadaveric donation were women. This is problematic because sex disparities in organ donation contribute to sex mismatch in transplant recipients, which is associated with worse outcomes among transplant recipients. Women represent more than 40% of the candidates awaiting the many organs available through deceased organ donation. Thus, achieving an equitable gender distribution in the deceased donor pool is a priority. Understanding the reasons behind organ donor registration can contribute to strategies to diversify the donor pool. A 2014 study suggested that organ donors registered. Ethical Principles in the Allocation of Human Organs from the OPTN include "respect for persons," where programs must respect the decisions of potential donors and those that do not consent to donate, and transparency must be maintained throughout the process. In addition, international consensus was convened under the World Health Organization, which details "Guiding Principles on Human Organ Transplantation" that also share the necessity of consent to proceed with organ procurement. Improved public dissemination of these ethical policies may restore trust in the medical system. Implementation studies led by patient stakeholders may be an appropriate next step toward achieving equity in donor registration by sex. (Erika Yee et al). A total of 557 kidney transplants were analyzed, with women having 78.5% higher in-

cidence of donation ($P < .001$). Among them, parents (72.20% mothers), spouses (87.20% wives), siblings (47.50% sisters), and children (44.44% daughters) were the major participants. In India, the data from National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) for 2019 reveal that there was 12625 total organ transplants out of which 72.4% recipients were men. Among the living organ recipients in the previous year 70.6% were men. In a study done in Gujarat at IKDRC among couples, 90% donors were female-the ratio was 78% for grandparents' donors and 75% for parents. It has been a socio-economic issue that has continued for the past several decades.

In India, I feel there is a great need to create a gender-neutral society. Although the goal is far away but our persistent efforts in increasing awareness regarding living or deceased organ donation, creating a gender-neutral status will be rewarding and will increase our donor pool. Also, we need to emphasize the concept of age matched, gender matched donation as the best for the organ recipient and transplant outcomes. A society only gets respect where all individuals are treated as equal although I might sound utopian but a small step by each of us including government & law makers along with public participation might help achieve a respectful place for all citizens. (The author is the director of Nephrology & Kidney Transplant - BLK MAX Superspecialty Hospital, New Delhi)

Low bone density, poor bone health linked to higher dementia risk

By: Annie Lennon

Over 55 million people globally have dementia. By 2050, this figure is expected to increase to 139 million people. Studies have suggested a link between bone mineral density and dementia. While it remains unknown whether the two are causally linked, bone mineral density is an important predictor of fracture, which can lead to loss of independence among those with dementia.

Knowing more about the extent to which bone loss exists before dementia onset could aid the development of preventive strategies that optimize the health and care of dementia patients. Recently, researchers examined the link between bone mineral density and dementia incidence. They found that people with low bone mineral density were more likely to develop dementia. The study appears in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

Poor bone health linked to higher dementia risk

For the study, the researchers examined healthcare data from 3, 651 dementia-free participants who underwent X-rays to assess their bone health between 2002 and 2005.

The researchers also included demographic data in their analysis, including education level, smoking status, cholesterol levels, risk of comorbidities, and genetic risk data, among others.

Patients were around 72 years old on average, and 57.9% were women. They were followed for around 11 years.

During the follow-up, 18.8% of participants developed dementia, of whom 76.7% developed Alzheimer's disease.

They noted, however, that their findings contrast earlier research as they do not support a link between dementia risk and lumbar spine bone mineral density — the five bones in the lower spine.

Also, contrasting prior studies, they found that low bone mineral density increased dementia risk in males but not females.

How bone density affects brain health

When asked what might explain the link between low bone density and dementia risk, Dr. Nahid Rianon, professor of family medicine with McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston, not involved in the study, told Medical News Today:

Dr. Robert Wiggins, a neurologist at Novant Health, also not involved in the study, agreed that it is difficult to know how bone density may be linked to dementia. Dr. Wiggins said:

"Bone and brain health are both dependent on a complex interaction between hormonal, nutritional, genetic, and other external, environmental factors. What we know though, is that things like a nutritious diet and active lifestyle will lead to both improved bone and brain health. Future research will investigate whether there is something inherent about low bone density that causes the increased dementia risk, or if a factor common to both bone and brain health is causing this association."

Dr. Andrew Evans, a neurologist with Novant Health, not involved in the study, also told MNT that low bone density and dementia may occur coincidentally from common causes. Dr. Evans noted:

"Both low bone density and dementia can be influenced by diet and exercise. With dementia, it is proven that these activities and behaviors can effect our cognitive health. Similarly, a person with poor nutrition and exercise habits may have lower bone density."

Study limitations and implications

Dr. Wiggins said that as most of the patients included in this study were in their 70s and of European descent, they may not apply to other populations, even though other studies have described similar associations. "Given this study shows only an association between bone and brain health, we have to be careful not to assume that decreased bone density itself causes dementia," he noted.

"The implications of this study are that people who have low bone density may be at higher risk for developing dementia. This study adds to the compelling body of research that suggests that maintaining bone health integrity is an important part of success aging," Dr. Sullivan noted. "Evidence-based strategies for optimizing bone health after age 50 include prioritizing high-quality animal/plant protein, polyunsaturated fatty acids, fruits and vegetables high in potassium, fiber, and foods high in calcium and vitamin D having the most research support. Weight-loading and resistance exercises on a regular basis are also needed to keep bones strong and healthy as we grow older," she concluded. (Courtesy: MNT)

Heart treatment: Alternative to stents

By: Dr Bimal Chhajra

In the recent days a lot of doubts have been created about stents — excessive cost, unnecessary use and dubious quality. More than 6 lacs stents have been implanted in the year 2021 netting a Rs. 6000 crores extra/ill gotten money to the cardiologists and heart Hospitals. The excess of anything ultimately gets caught. The Government took a decision to reduce the cost of stents by 85%. Even after this it will still make money for the heart hospitals. The basic question that remains still now is- were these stents needed? Is this a only way to treat heart patients? Why the number of heart disease patients increasing? What may the more appropriate treatment of heart disease?

Heart disease occurs because of excess fats in the food, lack of exercise, tobacco consumption, non-control of BP, Diabetes, Obesity and excessive stress. The fats called Cholesterol and Triglycerides — if excess in blood keep on depositing inside the heart tubes over the years. Heart patients remain unaware about these blocks till it reaches 70-80% stage — because heart requires only 20-30% of its blood supply. By the time the symptoms appear the blocks have reached 80% or more. Then only the heart patients reach the hospitals and cardiologists make the kill and put expensive stents. The patients, even after the stenting, carry on with the same lifestyle and reblock the stents — thus the next stents are put. Then what may be the ideal solution?

The best alternative is lifestyle training of the heart patients and education of them. Most of the heart patients are medically illiterate — they need to know about Cholesterol, Triglycerides, the correct dose of exercise, stress management skills. Yoga to prevent heart disease, ways and means to control Diabetes, high BP, overweight. If they are in advanced stage, they need optimum medical management also.

SAAOL — or Science and Art of living — is one such organisation which has a pan India presence combines a complete lifestyle education program for heart patients along with optimum medical management. For the past 27 years, SAAOL has marked its presence all across India and is now aiming to spread globally. Purnya Life Foundation (PLF), an NGO which is a social venture by SAAOL will take this initiative to treat heart attacks without stents further.

SAAOL's heart program includes complete education about heart care delivered to the patients and spouse in the form of one day camps. Dieticians, doctors, Yoga experts educate the heart patients one heart disease management by Food, exercises, knowledge and Yoga. SAAOL also controls serum lipids, BP, Sugar by allopathic medications — protecting the patients from heart attack. Drugs are prescribed to thin the blood and reduce angina. The patients return to their work immediately. They also avoid stents or Bypass surgery. SAAOL also provides other alternative treatments from Ayurveda, Homeopathy, ECP and EDTA therapy — all non-invasive ways to help heart patients.

SAAOL detox therapy is a mix of Allopathic Detox medicine called EDTA along with all possible ways to remove toxins from our body. It has Ayurveda, homeopathy, herbal drinks, Unani, and naturopathy components too. After successfully treatments many heart patients in the last twenty-six years, we have found that this Detox works much more effectively not only in removing toxins from the body but also helps in the reversal of blockages. The most important ingredient of this therapy is intravenous EDTA- which is an Indian government-approved anti-toxic medicine that helps in the removal of metal poisoning and other kinds of toxins from the body. (The author is the director of SAAOL Heart Centre, New Delhi)

Tips to sleep better

By: Dr Santosh Kumar Dora

'I love sleep. My life has the tendency to fall apart when I'm awake, you know.' This quote is popularly attributed to novelist Ernest Hemingway.

Did he actually say it? We don't know. What we do know is that we become irritable and crabby and impatient when we do not sleep enough. Or if we spend the night in disturbed sleep.

What you need to know about sleep? For centuries after human life originated on earth, our living pattern was dependent on the environment around us.

Have you heard about the Circadian rhythm? It's the 24 hour internal clock in our brain that regulates alertness and sleep as per the changes in the environment around us.

Our brain is tuned to rest when it is dark and remain alert when there is light.

Forcibly altering this sleep cycle does not agree with various internal functions of the body, which can lead to numerous health issues.

Inadequate sleep at night can leave one feeling sleepy during the day. This leads to lack of concentration at work, feeling tired easily, judgement errors, etc.

In the long term it may lead, among other health issues, to diabetes, hypertension, obesity, depression and coronary artery disease.

One should try to find out the possible reason/s for not able to sleep and correct them rather than take sleeping pills.

If you are suffering from insomnia, please talk to your health care provider and discuss your sleep-related issues. The health care provider will prescribe a sleeping pill only if she or he feels it is absolutely necessary.

How much sleep do you need?

Ideally, go to sleep at around 10 pm and say good morning to the world at around 5 am or 6 am.

If you follow this pattern, your deepest sleep will be around 2 am to 4 am.

You need eight to 10 hours of healthy sleep every night. Otherwise, your life and heart tend to fall apart.

Chronic sleep deprivation can wreak havoc on the mental and physical well-being of a person.

Why are we not able to sleep?

Well, much of this damage is self-inflicted. So much so that what we call the teenage syndrome -- including the moodiness, the constant battles and the recklessness, impulsive and careless behaviour -- may have a lot to do with not getting enough sleep at night.

Some believe that variations of such behavioural patterns caused by lack of or inadequate sleep are visible all the way upto 45 years of age, when the onset of an illness demands course correction.

Self-inflicted bad habits

Here are a few self-defeating habits across age groups that you can begin correcting right away.

1. Social jetlag: Most parents believe that going to bed and waking up late on the weekends is no big deal for adolescents, as long as they get enough sleep during that time.

This goes against the body's natural clock and is one form of damage.

Parents themselves are guilty of imagining themselves



to be superheroes, partying late at night and then sleeping it off during the daytime.

2. Blue light syndrome: Use of mobile/laptops late at night causes exposure to blue light which restrains the production of melatonin (a hormone that controls the sleep-wake cycle).

This makes it difficult to fall asleep.

3. Late night eating: Staying awake late at night, for whatever reason, disrupts your eating pattern.

Untimely dinners or eating too much during dinner can make you physically uncomfortable while lying down, which may keep you awake.

4. Late night caffeine: Drinking excessive caffeinated drinks late in the afternoon or in the evening can keep you from falling asleep at night.

5. The alcohol/smoking myth: Many people argue that alcohol helps them fall asleep. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Others believe that smoking makes them eat less.

What both actually do is prevent deeper stages of sleep. They often disturb your sleep and cause you to awaken in the middle of the night.

There's no two ways about it: Alcohol consumption and smoking are bad for you.

All of these are self-inflicted bad habits.

They are not the result of work-related activities like working in shifts or having to adjust working with colleagues in different time zones. Nor are they caused but the stress inflicted by natural calamities.

In short, they are habits that can be avoided.

Habits you can change

Once these habits are ingrained in your system, there is only one way to get rid of them. You have to decide to break them and you have to be determined that you are

going to break them.

Do remember, though, that breaking any habit is not easy. Don't give up. Keep at it and it will happen. You will be able to move to a healthier lifestyle.

This is what you need to do:

1. Avoid watching TV when it is time for bed.

2. Don't use your laptop or mobile phone at bedtime.

Avoid bringing gadgets into your bedroom.

3. Fix on a time to go to bed and a time to wake up. Be consistent about it. Till you get into a routine, write down the time you go to bed and the time you wake up. It will help you keep track.

4. Keep a check how much caffeine you have in a day. Avoid it as much as possible.

5. Avoid alcohol and nicotine completely.

6. Ensure your sleep area is quiet and comfortable. Use a good quality mattress.

7. Avoid large meals before bedtime.

8. Meditate regularly, at least for 10 minutes.

9. Limit daytime naps

10. Include a good amount of physical activity in your daily routine so that your body is physically tired and feels the need to sleep.

11. Read. Make a book your bedtime companion.

These simple steps can help you get a good night's rest and avoid catastrophic life events like heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity and depression. When you are in your growth phase, sleeping well aids the process.

A good night's sleep repairs the damage to your body and improves the functioning of your nervous system.

If you still feel that you are not getting a good night's rest even after following these steps, do consult a somnologist. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

Power of meditation: 9 reasons why it's important for your wellbeing



By: Abhinandan Kaul

Meditation is a practice that has been around for centuries and has gained popularity in recent times as people strive to find ways to reduce stress, anxiety, and improve overall well-being. Meditation can be defined as a technique that involves focusing one's attention on a particular object, thought, or activity to achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm state. The practice has numerous benefits, and in this article, we will explore the importance of meditation.

Meditation can be practiced in many different ways, including mindfulness meditation, transcendental meditation, loving-kindness meditation, and many others. Regardless of the method chosen, the benefits of meditation are vast and can be experienced by anyone who is willing to give it a try. Here are some of the reasons why meditation is so important:

1) Reduces Stress and Anxiety

Meditation has the ability to reduce stress and anxiety. Research has shown that meditation can decrease the production of cortisol, the stress hormone, and increase the production of serotonin, the hormone responsible for feelings of happiness and well-being. Regular meditation practice can help individuals feel more relaxed, focused, and better able to handle stressful situations.

2) Improves Emotional Well-being

Meditation can also help improve emotional well-being. When we meditate, we learn to be more aware of our thoughts and emotions, and we develop the ability to observe them without judgment. This increased awareness can help us better understand ourselves and our emotions, which can lead to greater self-acceptance and self-compassion. Regular meditation practice can also lead to a greater sense of empathy and compassion towards others.

3) Enhances Cognitive Function

Meditation has also been shown to enhance cognitive function. Studies have found that regular meditation practice can improve memory, attention, and concentration. Meditation can also increase the thickness of the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for executive function, decision-making, and problem-solving. This increased brain activity can lead to better decision-making and improved overall cognitive performance.

4) Improves Sleep

Many people struggle with sleep problems, and meditation can be an effective way to improve sleep quality. Meditation aids in calming the mind and re-

laxing the body, and thus, making it easier for us to fall asleep and stay asleep. Research has shown that meditation can improve the quality of sleep and reduce the amount of time it takes to fall asleep.

5) Lowers Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is a significant risk factor for many chronic health conditions, including heart disease and stroke. Meditation has been shown to lower blood pressure, which can help reduce the risk of these conditions. Regular meditation practice can also improve overall cardiovascular health.

6) Reduces Symptoms of Depression

Meditation can also be an effective tool in reducing symptoms of depression. Research has shown that regular meditation practice can increase the production of serotonin, the hormone responsible for feelings of happiness and well-being, and decrease the production of cortisol, the stress hormone. These changes can lead to an improved mood and a reduction in symptoms of depression.

7) Enhances Self-awareness

Meditation can also enhance self-awareness. As we meditate, we learn to observe our thoughts and emotions without judgment, allowing us to gain a better understanding of our inner workings. This increased self-awareness can help us identify negative thought patterns and behaviors, which can lead to personal growth and development.

8) Boosts Immune System Function

Meditation also helps in boosting the immune system function. Research has found that regular meditation practice can increase the production of antibodies, which can help the body fight off infections and illnesses. Meditation can also reduce inflammation, which is a significant factor in many chronic health conditions.

9) Improves Relationships

Meditation can also help improve relationships. As we become more self-aware and develop a greater sense of self, the benefits of meditation are vast and can positively impact various aspects of our lives. Regular meditation practice can reduce stress and anxiety, improve emotional well-being, enhance cognitive function, improve sleep, lower blood pressure, reduce symptoms of depression, enhance self-awareness, boost immune system function, and improve relationships. With so many benefits, it is no wonder that meditation has become increasingly popular in recent years. Whether practiced individually or in a group setting, meditation can be a powerful tool in promoting overall health and well-being. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Navratri fasting for Diabetes: Tips for healthy fasting & recipes to try at home

By: Shivangani Singh

Navratri has begun and today is the first day of Chaitra Navratri 2023 and we will be celebrating Ram Navami on 30 March. Navratri is an auspicious celebration for the Hindus wherein they pray the nine forms of Goddess Durga and they also observe fast while trying to please the Goddess.

Navratri fasting is a ritual followed by the Hindus who want to follow the tough path to please the Goddess. Not everyone necessarily fasts during these nine days and the ones who do can eat certain foods like fruits, ghee, dry fruits, milk, etc.

People with certain health conditions never take a step back from the rituals and take part in the Navratri Vrat the same way as others. But we must know that conditions like diabetes can be challenging to manage while fasting. Here are a few easy and quick recipes along with a few tips to keep your health in check.

Navratri Fasting Tips for Diabetics

1. Don't stay hungry for too long. Since Navratri fasting allows you to eat certain foods, make sure to eat every 2-3 hours instead of taking three big meals.

2. Plan your diet with a mix of fats, carbs and protein so that you have the required energy during the entire day. Do not have high carbs diet since it can lead to spike in sugar levels and unwanted weight gain.

3. Stay hydrated during the day. Unlike the Ramadan fast, Navratri fast does not require abstaining from liquids. Thus, drink enough water, fruit juices, coconut water and stay away from caffeinated drinks like tea.

4. Use healthy methods of cooking like baking, grilling, air frying, sautéing instead of deep frying or using lots of oil in making Tikkis or Puris for Vrat.

5. Keep testing your glucose levels more often than you usually do since fasting may result in low glucose levels. Take your insulin and medications in time. Discuss the precautions and plan of action with your doctor in advance.

6. In case of feeling dizzy, disoriented or sweaty, break your fast immediately. Consume glucose tablets, sugary things followed by a meal like a sandwich or a bowl of cereals.

Navratri Fasting Recipes for Diabetic Patients

1. Roasted Makhana or foxnuts are the healthiest snacks for the people observing Navratri fast. They are low in calories and you can always roast some peanuts along with them in a tablespoon of ghee and add the vrat salt for taste.

2. Makhana kheer is another recipe that can be consumed during the Navratri fast and is healthy for you. You can boil milk and add your roasted makhana along with handful of dry fruits like cashews, almonds, raisins, etc. Avoid adding sugar. You can enjoy it warm or after it cools down as a dessert.

3. Apple smoothie is another good option for Navratri breakfast or snack options. It is rich in calcium, vitamin-A, vitamin-C, protein, antioxidants, potassium, fiber, and iron. You can blend the fruit with milk, yogurt, cinnamon, ice cubes, and dry fruits.

4. Sabudana Khichdi is a great option for the Navratri meal at night. You will have to mix the overnight soaked and drained sabudana, peanuts, salt, and chilli powder such that the tapioca pearls are coated with the masalas. Heat the ghee, add cumin seeds, red chilli, and curry leaves in the pan, add the Sabudana mixture and let the mixture stir for a bit on the low flame. You can also add lemon juice, and peanuts with coriander leaves and green chillies.

5. Fruit Chaat is as easy as cutting the fruits into smaller pieces and sprinkling some Vrat salt on the top or little cream to convert it into a healthy and Vrat friendly dessert.

6. Fruits raita is also the same instead you add curd and roasted jeera powder for better taste and it can be a great snack or a side dish with your meal like Sabudana Khichdi. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Ukraine official: Putin taking Belarus as 'nuclear hostage'



KYIV, March 26 (AP): Ukraine's top security official on Sunday denounced the Kremlin's plans to station tactical atomic weapons in Belarus, saying that Russia was taking its ally as a "nuclear hostage." But Moscow said it was making the move in response to the West's increasing military support for Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the plan in a television interview that aired on Saturday, saying it was triggered by a UK decision this past week to provide Ukraine with armour-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium. Putin argued that by deploying its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia was following the lead of the United States. He noted that Washington has nuclear weapons based in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

"We are doing what they have been doing for decades, stationing them in certain allied countries, preparing the launch platforms and training their crews," he said.

Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, tweeted Sunday that Putin's announcement was "a step towards internal destabilisation" of Belarus that maximized "the level of negative perception and public rejection" of Russia and

Putin in Belarusian society.

The Kremlin, Danilov added, "took Belarus as a nuclear hostage."

On Saturday, Putin argued that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has long asked to have nuclear weapons in his country again to counter NATO. Belarus shares borders with three NATO members — Latvia, Lithuania and Poland — and Russia used Belarusian territory as a staging ground to send troops into neighboring Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Both Lukashenko's support of the war and Putin's plans to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus has been denounced by the Belarusian opposition. Tactical nuclear weapons are intended for use on the battlefield and have a short range and a low yield compared with much more powerful nuclear warheads fitted to long-range missiles. Russia plans to maintain control over the ones it sends to Belarus, and construction of storage facilities for them will be completed by July 1, Putin said. Russia has stored its tactical nuclear weapons at dedicated depots on its territory, and moving part of the arsenal to a storage facility in Belarus would up the ante in the Ukrainian conflict by placing them closer to Russian aircraft and missiles already stationed there.

Khalistan supporters try to incite violence at Indian Embassy in Washington; Secret Service, police foil their bid

WASHINGTON, March 26 (PTI): A group of Khalistan supporters held a protest in front of the Indian Embassy here and tried to incite violence and even threatened the country's envoy, but timely intervention by law enforcement agencies prevented them from vandalising the property.

The protesters also verbally intimidated and physically assaulted the PTI journalist covering the event on Saturday.

Separatist Sikhs hurled abusive language and openly threatened Indian Ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu. Sandhu was not in the embassy at the time of the protest.

In their speeches, most of the protesters were seen trying to incite violence not only in India but here as well, including physical damage to the Indian Embassy property.

Some of the speakers were seen inciting fellow protesters to indulge in violence and break the windows and glasses of the building across the road.

Sensing that things might go out of control, the US Secret Service and the local police quickly brought in reinforcements and more forces were deployed in the area. At least three police vans were placed in front of the Embassy.

At one point, five protesters quickly crossed the road and were about to break into the temporary marker of the embassy property near the pole unfurling the tricolour before they were asked to leave.

Secret Service personnel, who were closely watching this, in no time rushed to the spot and asked the protesters to go back to the designated protest area, before any untoward incident could happen.

It appeared that the protesters came prepared to do something



similar like damaging Indian properties at the Indian Consulate in San Francisco and the Indian High Commission in London.

After the attack on the Indian consulate in San Francisco by pro-Khalistan protesters last Sunday, India registered its "strong protest" with the US Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi over the incident and asked the American government to take appropriate measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

During the protest by Khalistan supporters at the Indian Embassy in Washington, Lalit K Jha - the US correspondent of the Press Trust of India - saw separatists bringing two bundles of wooden sticks that were kept in the park that has the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in front of the embassy.

The wooden sticks were similar to those which were used to break the door and windows and smash the glasses of the Indian Consulate in San Francisco. While one bundle was used to display the separatist flag, the other bundle of about 20 sticks was kept aside.

Organisers of the protest had a very hostile approach towards the Indian reporter covering the

protest. They not only obstructed this reporter by coming in front of the camera and placing the Khalistan flag on his face, kept pushing him, but also threatened dire consequences.

The reporter, apprehending physical harm, called 911 and ran towards the other side of the road for safety, looking for a police van.

One of the protesters abused the reporter and was asking questions like you have to tell me what are you going to report?

The organiser backed off as the reporter complained to the police about the potentially harmful activities of the protesters.

Sometime later, two of the protesters came towards the reporters, who were standing near the Secret Service personnel. One of them told the Secret Service that the reporter be asked to leave "my land" which is federal property.

They warned that if there is any violence and the reporter is physically harmed, they should not be blamed for this. Immediately the other protesters hurled abuse against the reporter, used unparliamentary words, and moved the two Khalistan flags that he had in his

hand in such a way that its sticks hit the reporter's left ear with a bang.

The Secret Service personnel asked the reporter if he was ok and if he wanted to lodge a complaint. The journalist said he did not intend to lodge a complaint.

The Secret Service warned the protester that this should not be repeated, and sought additional reinforcement from police personnel.

The law enforcement official told the protesters that this was public land, and the reporter was all within his right to stand there and cover their protest.

In their speeches, the protesters repeatedly pointed fingers towards the two reporters and used abusive words against them.

While they prevented the journalists from doing their work, a group of protesters filmed the reporter covering their protest, took pictures and asked provocative questions. The separatists left the area around after 3 pm and one of them was seen keeping the bundle of wooden sticks in the trunk of the SUV.

"Thank you @SecretService 4 my protection for 2day 4 helping do my job, otherwise I would have been writing this from the hospital. The gentleman below (in the video attached) hit my left ear with these 2 sticks & earlier I had to call 911 & rushed to the police van to safety fearing physical assault," PTI Correspondent Lalit K Jha tweeted.

The Indian Embassy here condemned the attack on the PTI reporter.

"We have seen disturbing visuals of a senior Indian journalist from the Press Trust of India being abused, threatened & assaulted physically while covering the so-called 'Khalistan protest' in Washington DC earlier today," the Indian mission said in a statement.

"We understand that the journalist was first verbally intimidated, then physically assaulted, and fearing for his personal safety and well-being, had to call in law enforcement agencies, who responded promptly," the statement said.

The mission said it condemns such a grave and unwarranted attack on a senior journalist.

"Such activities only underscore the violent and antisocial tendencies of the so-called 'Khalistani protestors' and their supporters, who routinely engage in wanton violence and vandalism," it said.

It thanked the law enforcement agencies for their prompt response in the matter.

"This violence against @lalitkha is outrageous and an assault on journalism. I condemn it in the strongest terms. Lalit is one of the fairest and most thoughtful journalists. Thank you to our security for protecting Lalit and the diplomats and consulate," prominent Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna tweeted.

Ajay Bhutoria, a community leader, also condemned the attack on the journalist.

"I condemn in the strongest terms the violence against senior journalist Lalit Jha. It is an outrageous assault on journalism, and we stand in solidarity with him during this difficult time," he said.

"Lalit ji is known for his fair and thoughtful reporting and has contributed significantly to the field of journalism and connecting and deepening the US-India relationship," he said.

He thanked the security personnel for their efforts in protecting the Indian journalist as the diplomats and consulate.

Bhutoria also asked the Department of Justice to investigate this incident as a hate crime against an Indian-American US citizen.

Imran Khan unveils 10-point roadmap to revive cash-strapped Pakistan

LAHORE, March 26 (PTI): Pakistan's ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan held a massive rally here on Sunday and presented his party's 10-point roadmap for the cash-strapped country's economic recovery, including sops for the diaspora. Addressing the public rally at Minar-i-Pakistan in the early hours of Sunday, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman challenged the country's ruling party to put forward a plan to rescue Pakistan from the many crises it finds itself mired in.

"I challenge that the incumbent rulers don't have the ability or the intention [to save the country]," he said. Khan, 70, said he would happily step aside if the establishment tells him they have a plan. "I know what the programme is...there is no programme," he was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.

Announcing the 10-point programme, Khan said that overseas Pakistanis will be motivated to invest in Pakistan to attract foreign direct investments to avoid going to the IMF again and again. "We will facilitate all those who would export and bring dollars into the country," he added. Pakistan, which is in dire need of funds as it battles a wrenching economic crisis, has received economic assistance from the IMF in the past. The country is in discussions with a global lender to resume its loan programme.

Khan asserted that the country needs to take difficult decisions to improve its tax collections and exports.

"A major surgery is needed to put our house in order. Overseas Pakistanis will bring their dollars to the country provided they are given incentives," he said, adding that only 2.5 million Pakistanis out of 220 million pay taxes.

"There is a need to increase the tax base to achieve progress," he said and also proposed giving loans to young people to start businesses and reviving the mortgage scheme.

Khan said his government would promote tourism, adding that the minerals sector would be focused on generating revenue.

The ex-premier said after coming to power his government would increase agriculture produc-



tivity with the cooperation of China.

The government would take measures to stop money laundering, he said, adding that the current account deficit would be curtailed as well.

Khan, who is facing threats to his life, addressed the rally from a bullet-proof glass container. Pakistan's broadcast media blacked out the coverage of the event under the 'pressure' of the PML-N-led government backed by the powerful military establishment.

The authorities appeared so desperate to fail the Khan's power show that all major roads leading to Minar-i-Pakistan were blocked by police with containers and barricades.

The internet services were snapped in parts of Lahore, especially at the rally site.

The people reached the venue on foot after covering long distances.

Lashing out at the PML-N-led government and its handlers (a reference to the military establishment) for arresting and torturing over 2,000 of his party workers ahead of this rally, Khan said, "one thing is clear, whoever is in power, they will get a message today that people's passion cannot be curbed via hurdles and containers."

"The way the powerful circles are behaving in Pakistan today it seems that Imran Khan is the only problem of the country," he said.

Khan said a cabal of thieves was imposed on the nation after the toppling of his government in April last year.

"I have completed a century of cases. I may cross 150. Poor spend their entire lives fighting

false cases in this country. Pakistan has no future if there is no rule of law," he said and added that 'real freedom' will only come if rule of law prevails in the country.

He slammed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for begging around the world but still failing to get any reprieve.

Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Shehbaz, Khan said: "Former army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa said he used to scold Shehbaz for 40 minutes and he would not react and listen patiently. This happens when you (Shehbaz) come to power through the backdoor."

The cricketer-turned-politician said for the first time in his life he felt what the people in Palestine feel.

"Police attacked my house as they wanted to arrest me in false cases. The people supported me during the clash with the police as they knew I was right. They have booked me in 40 terrorism cases...will the nation accept that Imran Khan is a terrorist?" he asked.

He said despite Supreme Court's orders, the Election Commission of Pakistan delayed the April 30 elections of the Punjab Assembly for October 8 on the pretext of security and financial constraints.

"Who will guarantee that the elections will be held even in October? The government and its handlers have only one-point agenda - how to stop me from returning to power," he said.

Khan said all eyes were on the Supreme Court to establish rule of law by holding elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 90 days.

Earlier on Saturday, the Lahore ATC granted Khan interim bail till April 4 in three cases filed at the Lahore Race Course police station.

Khan has been in the dock for buying gifts, including an expensive Graff wristwatch, which he had received as the premier at a discounted price from the state depository called Toshakhana, and selling them for profit.

Khan was ousted from power in April last year after losing a no-confidence vote, becoming the first Pakistani Prime Minister to be voted out by the National Assembly.

Air India, Nepal Airlines aircraft almost collide mid-air 3 air traffic controllers suspended



KATHMANDU, March 26 (PTI): A major tragedy was averted on Friday when an Air India and a Nepal Airlines aircraft came close to collision mid-air but the

warning systems alerted the pilots whose timely action prevented the disaster, authorities said here on Sunday.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has suspended three employees of the air traffic controller department for "carelessness", according to CAAN spokesperson Jagannath Niroula.

On Friday morning, an Airbus A-320 aircraft of the Nepal Airlines coming to Kathmandu from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and an Air India plane coming to Kathmandu from New Delhi almost collided.

The Air India aircraft was descending from 19,000 ft while the Nepal Airlines aircraft was flying at an altitude of 15,000 ft at the same location, Niroula said.

After it was shown on the radar that the two aircraft were in proximity, the Nepal Airlines aircraft descended to 7,000 ft, the spokesperson said. The Civil Aviation Authority has formed a three-member probe committee to investigate the matter. The CAAN has suspended the three officers, who were in charge of the control room at the time of the incident. There was no immediate comment from Air India.

Travel disruption hits Germany on eve of transport strike

BERLIN, March 26 (AP): An increased number of travellers in Germany boarded trains and planes on Sunday, a day before a major one-day strike that aims to bring the country's transportation system to a standstill. But even advance travel was met with disruption in some places as Munich airport already shut down because of the impending strike on Monday, and technical problems affecting German airline Lufthansa in Frankfurt led to flight delays and cancellations at the country's biggest airport. Munich Airport, the country's second-busiest, said that the Verdi union was hitting it with two days of strikes and it has no regular passenger or cargo flights on either Sunday or Monday. A total of around 1,500 connections were affected, and takeoffs and landings were only possible for emergency humanitarian flights, German news agency dpa reported. German unions have called on thousands of workers across the country's transportation system to stage a one-day strike as employees in many sectors are seeking hefty raises to reflect persistently high inflation.

Israel's defence minister calls govt to halt 'judicial reforms' in big jolt to Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, March 26 (PTI): Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant has called upon the government to stop the controversial judicial overhaul legislation that has sparked protests across the country, sticking his neck out amid Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's insistence to go ahead with the proposed "reforms". His intervention came as Israelis opposed to the changes held mass rallies across the country for the twelfth week in a row. "The security of the State of Israel is my life's mission. Over the course of my entire adult life, I have dealt with Israel's security day in and day out," Gallant, Netanyahu's close aide, said on Saturday. He said that he still supported the need to revamp the court system, but acknowledged that "unprecedented feelings of anger, pain and disappointment have risen" within the military over the proposed changes to Israel's balance of power. The revamp includes enabling Parliament to overrule decisions made by the Supreme Court - a move that critics say will undermine the independence of the judiciary and could be used for political ends. "Clothed in the IDF's (Israel Defence Forces) uniform, I have risked my life dozens of times for the State of Israel. And at this time, for the sake of our country, I am willing to take any risk and pay any price," Gallant said in a televised speech. "I declare loudly and publicly, for the sake of Israel's security, for the sake of our sons and daughters - the legislative process should be stopped," he asserted, pointing to the visible diminishing morale of the Army he could sense that is endangering Israel's security and unity.

The analysis reveals that those who identified as 'Christian' reported poorer health than the overall population Hindus among healthiest, Sikhs most likely to own homes: UK census data shows

LONDON, March 26 (PTI): Hindus living in the UK are among the healthiest and well qualified religious groups and Sikhs are most likely to own their homes, according to latest census data for England and Wales.

The UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been analysing census statistics to release information across various subcategories for the country's population based on the responses of the online census conducted in March 2021.

In its latest release entitled 'Religion by housing, health, employment and education' this week, the ONS finds that life outcomes for religious groups varied considerably.

"In 2021, those who identified as 'Hindu' had the highest percentage of their population reporting either 'very good' or 'good' health

(87.8 per cent), compared with 82.0 per cent of the overall population," the ONS finds, adding that the Hindus also reported the "lowest prevalence of disability".

"People who identified as 'Hindu' had the highest percentage with a 'Level 4 or above' [certificate-level] qualification (54.8 per cent), compared with the overall population (33.8 per cent)," it noted. "People who identified as 'Sikh' were more likely to live in households that owned their home... 77.7 per cent of those who identified as 'Sikh' lived in households that owned their home," the ONS said. The religion question is voluntary in the census and in 2021, 94 per cent of the overall population in England and Wales of 56 million chose to answer the question.

The ONS said that many of the life outcomes discussed in its

analysis may be influenced by the differing age and sex profiles of religious groups.

"In 2021, people who identified as 'Muslim' were nearly four times more likely to live in overcrowded homes than the overall population of England and Wales," the statistics show.

"In 2021, people who identified as 'Muslim' had the lowest percentage of people aged 16 to 64 years in employment (51.4 per cent compared with 70.9 per cent of the overall population); this resulted from the high percentages of people who were students or looking after home or family in this group," it said.

The ONS pointed out that life outcomes for religious groups often overlap, as people in poor health or caring for others may be less able to work or gain education. Income, where people live, and

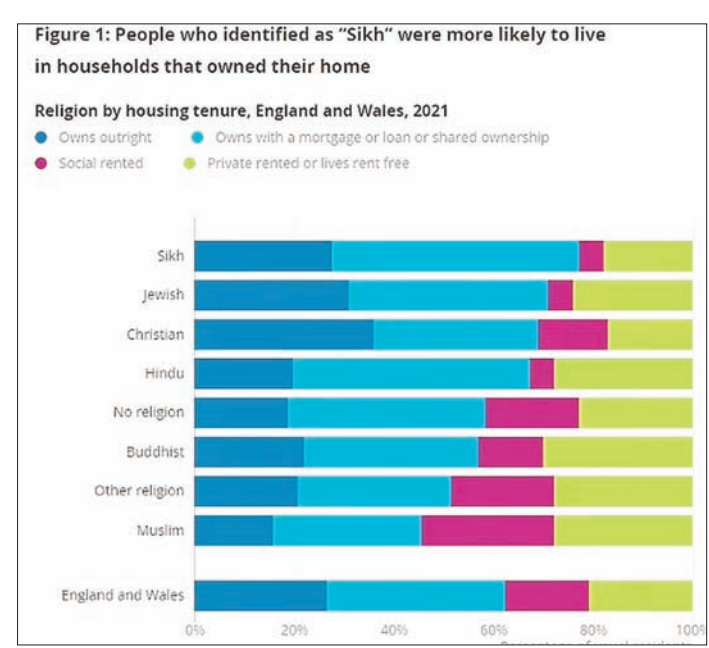
cultural background, also have an influence on outcomes.

The analysis reveals that those who identified as "Christian" had an older age profile and reported poorer health than the overall population.

"People who identified as 'Christian' were most likely to live in households that owned their home outright (36 per cent), 8.9 percentage points higher than the overall population (27.1 per cent).

This group had a median (average) age of 51 years, compared with 40 years for the overall population, suggesting that they may have had time to pay off a mortgage or loan," the ONS said.

The 2021 census survey was filled out by more than 24 million households across England and Wales and data from the survey has been published in stages by the ONS since then.



India summons Canadian envoy over Khalistan protests



NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): India has summoned Canadian high commissioner Cameron MacKay and conveyed its strong concerns about the actions by pro-Khalistani extremist elements against its diplomatic missions in Canada recently.

MacKay was summoned by the external affairs ministry on Saturday and sought an explanation on how "separatist and extremist elements" were allowed to breach the security of its diplomatic mission and consulates despite the presence of police, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

On Sunday last, India's high commissioner to Canada Sanjay Kumar Verma was forced to skip an event in British Columbia province after a violent protest by Khalistan supporters.

Indian-origin journalist Sameer Kaushal, who was at the venue to cover the protest, was also assaulted by protesters.

Canada was reminded of its obligations under the Vienna Convention and asked to arrest and prosecute the individuals who have already been identified as being involved in such acts, the ministry said.

It said it expected the Canadian government to take all steps needed to ensure security of its diplomatic premises and the safety of its diplomats so that they are able to fulfil their normal diplomatic functions.

Canada has seen a rise in anti-India activities recently by Khalistan supporters who have vandalised some Hindu temples.

Earlier this month, pro-Khalistan supporters had attacked the Indian High Commission in London and vandalised the Indian consulate in San Francisco.

The external affairs ministry had summoned the Charge d'affaires of Britain and the US to voice strong protests against the developments at its missions.

'They have been insulting our family and we remained silent but not anymore' Cong's Priyanka Gandhi Vadra takes charge of Sankalp Satyagraha

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday said a martyred Prime Minister's son who walked thousands of kilometres for national unity can never insult the country as the Congress held a nationwide protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha.

Priyanka Gandhi was addressing the 'Sankalp Satyagraha' at Rajghat -- the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi -- here to protest against Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a 2019 defamation case and his subsequent disqualification from the Lok Sabha.

She said the time had come to raise a voice against an "arrogant government" as barring Rahul Gandhi from contesting elections does not bode well for the country and its democracy.

The Congress has launched a day-long satyagraha at all states and district headquarters to protest against Gandhi's conviction in a 2019 defamation case and his subsequent disqualification from the Lok Sabha.

Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday, a day after a court in Gujarat's Surat convicted him in the defamation case. The disqualification will prevent Gandhi (52), a four-time MP, from contesting elections for eight years unless a higher court stays the conviction.

The Congress leader alleged that Rahul Gandhi was disqualified for questioning the prime minister on industrialist Gautam Adani and people will give a befitting reply to those behind the action.

"My family's blood has nurtured democracy in this country. We are ready to do any-



thing for this country's democracy. Great leaders of the Congress laid the foundation of democracy in this country. If they think they can scare us, they are wrong. We will not be scared.

"Time has come and we are not the ones who will remain silent anymore," she told the outside Rajghat.

Asking if a martyred prime minister's son can insult the country, Priyanka Gandhi said, "This is an insult to that prime minister who gave his life."

"You have called a martyr's son anti-national, Mir Jafar, insulted his mother in Parliament. The Prime Minister in Parliament asks why this family does not use the 'Nehru' surname. You insult the entire family and the

tradition of Kashmiri Pandits. But there is no case against you. You don't get a case or a two-year term and no one disqualifies you. Why?" she asked.

Priyanka Gandhi said till today, they have been insulting "our family and we remained silent but not anymore".

"How much will you insult one person?" she said and asked if Lord Ram, who was sent into exile, was a "parivaarwadi".

The Congress leader, who alleged that the country's wealth was being looted and given to one person, said this wealth belongs to the people and no one can take it away.

"When arrogant dictators are unable to answer the questions raised, they try to suppress those who ask the questions.

"This entire Cabinet, government and MPs are trying to save one person and are not holding an inquiry. Who is this Adani in whose support everyone comes the moment his name crops up?" she asked.

Questioning if this was the "mother of democracy", she asked why people are still unemployed if the economy is doing so well.

Noting that lakhs of people joined Rahul Gandhi on his Bharat Jodo Yatra when he walked from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, Priyanka Gandhi said, "When a person who walks from Kanyakumari to Kashmir to unite the country, can this person insult the country?"

Coming out in support of her brother, she asserted that Rahul Gandhi wants the poor, youth and the women to get their rights and what belongs to them should go into their hands and not to someone who is a big man and the Prime Minister's "friend".

She said Rahul Gandhi studied at Harvard and Cambridge -- the best universities in the world -- but still they call him a "Pappu".

"When they came to know that he is not Pappu and lakhs of people are walking with him, they got disturbed over the questions he raised in Parliament to which they don't have answers. They have to do all this to stop just one person.

"This country's Prime Minister is a coward. Take me to jail but the truth is this country's Prime Minister is a coward. He is hiding behind his power and (he) is arrogant. But this country's tradition is that people reply to an arrogant king. This country recognises an arrogant king. This country knows the truth," she said.

Gehlot slams BJP for 'OBC insult' charge

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot Sunday slammed the BJP over its charge that Rahul Gandhi insulted OBCs with his remark in 2019, and said his party has done a lot for backward classes which include making an OBC leader like him CM thrice.

Gandhi was on Thursday sentenced to two years in jail by a Surat court in a 2019 criminal defamation case over his "why all thieves have Modi surname" remark.

Several BJP leaders, including party chief J P Nadda, have accused Gandhi of insulting Other Backward Classes (OBCs) through his remark.

Addressing a gathering at the daylong "Sankalp Satyagraha" of the Congress at the Rajghat, Gehlot said Prime Minister Narendra Modi conducted an "experiment" in Gujarat polls in 2017 by saying that a Congress leader abused him about his caste.

And in a repeat of that, the BJP is claiming again before elections that Rahul Gandhi insulted OBCs, Gehlot said.

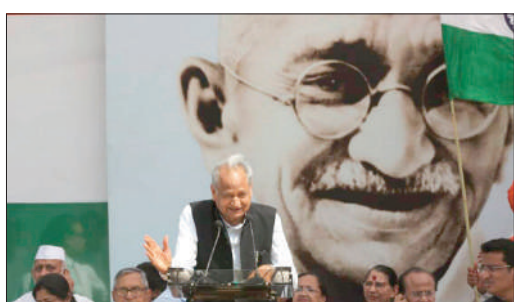
"In 2017, when the BJP was losing the Gujarat elections, Modi ji played the OBC card against the Congress there. The BJP today again wants to run a campaign to mislead the OBCs," he alleged.

Are fugitives like Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi OBCs, he asked.

"You are protecting fugitives such as Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi, and then saying Rahul Gandhi insulted OBCs," he said.

Gehlot said can anyone forget what the Congress has done for OBCs and SCs and STs.

"I have been made CM for the third time by Sonia ji, Rahul ji. I am an OBC. There is only one member



of OBC Mali community (in the assembly) and that is me," he said.

Gehlot said what "bigger message" could be for the OBCs there than him being made chief minister again and again.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel is also comes from the OBC community, he pointed out.

Elections are coming and that is why they are raising this bogey of OBC insult, he alleged. "It is baseless." He said the sacrifices of the Gandhi family are before everyone and Rahul Gandhi is constantly raising the issue of unemployment and high prices.

"They could not answer on allegations raised in Parliament by Rahul Gandhi. I have never seen before that allegations are raised but instead of answering, the prime minister has taken a vow of silence," Gehlot said.

The BJP raised allegations against Gandhi for his remarks abroad, when he said what he had been saying in the country, he said.

It is the PM who should answer and apologise, Gehlot said.

Centre notifies revised MGNREGA wage rates

The wage hikes, which range from ₹ 7 to ₹ 26, will come into effect from April 1

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): The Centre has notified a hike in wage rates under the rural job guarantee programme for the 2023-24 financial year with Haryana having the highest daily wage at ₹ 357 per day and Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the lowest at ₹ 221.

The union ministry of rural development issued a notification on the change in wage rates under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on March 24.

The notification was issued under Section 6 (1) of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, that says the Centre may, by notification, specify the wage rate for its beneficiaries.

The wage hikes, which range from ₹ 7 to ₹ 26, will come into effect from April 1.

Compared to last year's rates, Rajasthan registered the highest percentage increase in wages. The revised wage for Rajasthan is ₹ 255 per day, up from ₹ 231 in 2022-23.



Bihar and Jharkhand have registered a percentage increase of around eight from last year. Last year, the daily wage for a MGNREGA worker in these two states was ₹ 210. It has now been revised to ₹ 228.

For Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, which have the lowest daily wages at ₹ 221, the percentage increase from last year was recorded at 17.

In 2022-23, the two states had a daily wage of ₹ 204.

The increases in the wages for

states range between two and 10 per cent. Karnataka, Goa, Meghalaya and Manipur are among the states to register the lowest percentage increase.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a flagship programme aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work.

BJP will win more than 200 seats in MP polls: Nadda

BHOPAL, March 26 (PTI): Bharatiya Janata Party president JP Nadda on Sunday said his party would win more than 200 out of 230 Assembly seats in Madhya Pradesh, where elections are set to be held at the end of this year.

Nadda later performed a ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of a new BJP office in the state capital.

"The warm welcome accorded to me by the spirited BJP cadre shows we are going to more than 200 Assembly seats in MP," he said.

A 10-storey modern office complex will come up in Arera Colony area located near the Kamalapati railway station in place of an old building which was demolished by the BJP earlier. A group of priests performed 'bhoomipujan' rituals in which Nadda, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and state BJP president VD Sharma took part along with other leaders of the saffron party. Union ministers Narendra Singh Tomar, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Virendra Kumar and Prahlad Patel, members of the state cabinet, and BJP's national general secretary Kailash Vijaywargiya were also present on the occasion.

"The estimated cost of the 10-storey building will be calculated after finalizing the DPR (detailed project report)," a BJP leader said.

The old state BJP office, which was razed for the new one, was constructed in 1991 when the saffron party government under the late Sundarlal Patwa was in power, sources said.

UP man who rescued Sarus crane gets forest department notice

AMETHI, March 26 (PTI): The forest department has filed a case and issued a notice to an Uttar Pradesh man who rescued a Sarus crane and took care of it for a year, officials said. The crane, which lived with Arif Khan Gurjar in the Mandkha village of Amethi district, accompanied him to his fields and was accepted "like a family member", was taken away by forest department officials on March 21.

The bird was shifted to the Samaspur sanctuary in Rae Bareilly to allow it to live in its natural environment, an official had said.

On Saturday, the department issued a notice to Gurjar and asked him to appear at the office of the Gauriganj divisional forest officer on April 4 to record his statement.

According to the notice issued by Assistant Divisional Forest Officer (Gauriganj) Ranvir Singh, Gurjar has been booked under relevant sections of the Wildlife Protection Act.

In poll-bound Karnataka, Amit Shah reminds of Hyderabad liberation

BIDAR, March 26 (PTI): In poll-bound Karnataka, union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday hit out at the Congress alleging that it never remembered those who fought and sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Hyderabad from the 'brutal' Nizam rule.

Addressing a public gathering after inaugurating the Gorata Martyrs' Memorial and statue of the country's first Home Minister late Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at Gorata village in this district, Shah also slammed the K Chandrasekhar Rao-led Telangana government for "hesitating" to celebrate the Hyderabad Liberation Day.

Shah also hoisted a 103 ft high national

flag at Gorata, called "Jallianwala Bagh of South India"

Recalling the horror of Gorata on May 9, 1948, the union minister recalled that 200 people were massacred by the 'brutal' Nizam even though the country had become independent.

Shah said it was the most important day for an emotional person like him, because on that day the ruthless army of Nizam butchered hundreds of people for hoisting a 2.5 ft tricolour. Today, he can proudly proclaim that he hoisted the 103 ft tricolour, which no one can ever reach.

Shah recalled that eight years ago he had

visited the place as the BJP national president and laid the foundation for the Gorata Martyr's Memorial with direction to the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha workers to build a memorial that should be remembered throughout the country for hundreds of years. He said he is pleased that eight years later, he got the opportunity to inaugurate it.

"More than 200 people were massacred here in Gorata by the brutal Nizam, but due to its appeasement policy, the Congress never remembered those who fought and sacrificed their lives for Hyderabad liberation only for its greed for vote bank," he added.

Assess reason for candidates low turnout: Parl Panel to UPSC

15 months long recruitment process wastes candidates 'prime years' besides taking a heavy toll on their physical and mental health

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Assessing that the nearly 15 months long recruitment process wastes candidates' prime years besides taking a heavy toll on their physical and mental health, a Parliamentary Committee has asked the UPSC to reduce the civil services examination's selection cycle. In its latest report, the panel also asked the Union Public Service Commission to examine the reasons for the low turnout of candidates in the civil services examination.

The examination is conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages -- preliminary, main and interview -- to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) among others.

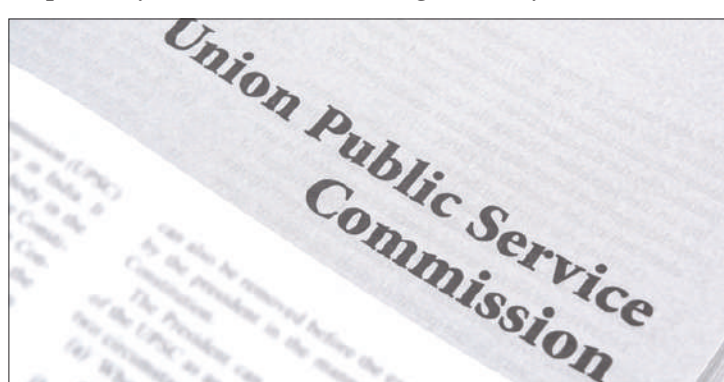
The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice said according to the data provided by the UPSC, the average time taken for civil services examination from the date of issue of notification to the date of declaration of the final result is nearly 15 months.

"The Committee is of the opinion that the duration of any recruitment examination should not ordinarily ex-

ceed six months as long and protracted recruitment cycles waste prime years of a candidates' life besides taking a heavy toll on their physical and mental health. The Committee, accordingly, recommends that UPSC should take steps to reduce the duration of the recruitment cycle significantly without compromising the quality," the report said. On the low turnout, it said out of approximately, 32.39 lakh candidates who had applied for examinations conducted by UPSC in 2022-23, only 16.82 lakh candidates, (51.95 per cent) actually appeared for examinations. For instance, 11.35 lakh candidates applied for the civil services examination in 2022 but only 5.73 lakh candidates (50.51 per cent) actually appeared for the examination.

The Committee recommended UPSC furnish the details of examination fees collected from the candidates during the last five years.

"The Commission may also provide the details of expenditure incurred by it on the conduct of the examinations for the same period. The Committee also recommends UPSC to examine the reasons for low turnout of candidates and share the findings



thereof with the Committee," the report said. The panel has recommended forming an expert committee to assess if the present scheme of recruitment through civil services examination provides an equal opportunity to both English-medium-educated urban candidates and non-English medium-educated rural candidates.

While UPSC has changed the pattern of civil services examination from time to time on the basis of recommendations made by various expert committees, no study has been commissioned to assess how such changes impacted the aspirants, nature of recruitment and administration

at large, it said.

The panel said an expert group or committee should be appointed to assess the impact of changes made in the scheme, pattern and syllabus of civil services examination in the last ten years on the quality of recruitment and administration at large.

"The expert group so constituted may assess if the present scheme of recruitment provides an equal opportunity to both English-medium educated urban candidates and non-English medium educated rural candidates," said the report tabled in Parliament recently.

This group may also assess whether

the existing pattern of preliminary and mains examination provides a level playing field for all candidates irrespective of their academic background, it said.

The Committee is of the considered opinion that the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and UPSC should consider making further changes in the scheme and syllabus of civil services examination in the light of the findings of the impact assessment study, the report said.

The panel was also apprised that the UPSC releases the answer key of the preliminary test of the civil services examination only after the completion of the entire process of the said examination.

In other words, the Commission is depriving the candidates of an opportunity to contest the answer key before progressing to the next stage of the examination, the report said.

"This practice not only demoralises the candidates but also compromises the validity and fairness of the examination process. Although recruiting agencies exercise utmost caution to ensure that the answer key is foolproof, the possibility of errors cannot be ruled out.

UP police reaches Sabarmati jail Atiq Ahmed to Prayagraj for court order

AHMEDABAD, March 26 (PTI): A team of the Uttar Pradesh police reached Sabarmati central jail in Gujarat's Ahmedabad on Sunday to take gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed to Prayagraj, where he will be produced before a court that is scheduled to pass an order on Tuesday in a kidnapping case in which he is an accused, officials said.

Ahmed, a former Samajwadi Party leader, has been lodged in Sabarmati jail since June 2019 where he was shifted from his home state as per the Supreme Court orders in April that year, they said.

"A team of police from Prayagraj is at the Sabarmati jail to take Atiq Ahmed to their state, where he will be produced in a court. Formalities for the same are underway," Superintendent of Police (Sabarmati jail) JS Chavda said.

A court in Prayagraj has set March 28 as the date to pass its order in a kidnapping case in which Ahmed is an accused, Prayagraj Police Commissioner Ramit Sharma said in the Uttar Pradesh city. Sharma said that a team of the Prayagraj police was sent to bring Ahmed and produce him to the court there on the given date.

"As part of the procedure, all the accused are to be produced before the court on the date of the judgment and then sent back to their respective jails. A team of police has been sent to Sabarmati jail for mafia Atiq Ahmed as he has to be produced in the court on the given date," the police officer said.

Atiq has been lodged in Sabarmati jail since June 2019 after the Supreme Court had in April that year directed that the former MP from Phulpur in UP be shifted to a high-security jail in Gujarat after he was accused of orchestrating the kidnapping and assault of a real estate businessman Mohit Jaiswal while in jail. He is named in more than 100 criminal cases, including the recent Umesh Pal murder case, police said.

LOVLINA UPSTAGED CAITLIN PARKER OF AUSTRALIA

Super Sunday: Nikhat, Lovlina win World Championships title

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Nikhat Zareen continued to grow in stature as she added a second World title to her swelling trophy cabinet while Lovlina Borgohain broke her 'bronze jinx' to claim her maiden gold medal at the marquee event here on Sunday.

Nikhat upstaged two-time Asian champion Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Tam by a 5-0 verdict to take the light flyweight title in front of a packed KD Jadhav Indoor Hall.

Two-time bronze medallist Lovlina, on the other hand, defeated Caitlin Parker of Australia 5-2 to win her maiden World title. With the win, Nikhat becomes only the second Indian after the legendary MC Mary Kom to win the title of the prestigious tournament twice. "I am very happy that I have become a world champion for the second time, especially in an Olympic category," Nikhat, who won the 52kg title last year, said after her bout. The first bout of the day between the two Asians was an exciting affair that went down to the wire. "Today's bout was the toughest for me, she is an



Asian champion and my next target is Asian Games and I might meet her, so I will work hard," Nikhat said.

"It was a roller coaster bout, she got warning, I got warning, she got count so did I. But I went all out."

Nikhat, who has moved down from her preferred 52kg, looked tentative at first as Tam was the first one to attack. But after a few seconds, the home favourite leapt forward to attack. She then landed two right hooks, followed by straight jabs.

Tam was handed a penalty point for clinching further, tilting the result in Nikhat's favour as she took the first three minutes by an unanimous verdict.

But Tam made a strong comeback as she launched into attack mode. The southpaw landed several punches, forcing Nikhat to play with her head down that earned her a penalty point. The Vietnamese managed to take the round 3-2.

In the final three minutes, both boxers went for broke and attacked each other relentlessly.

If Nikhat's powerful right cross forced the referee to give Tam the eight count, Tam's jab compelled the referee to do the same to the Indian.

"For me, this is the first major competition in this category after the Commonwealth Games, which did not have much competition."

"But here, countries from all over the world competed and had back-to-back matches also, my body was a bit slow in some matches. I will learn from these experience and try to become stronger," Nikhat, who has already qualified for the Asian Games, said.

On Saturday, Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and Saweety Boora (81kg) were crowned world champions in their respective weight categories.

Hosts India matched their best-ever performance in terms of gold medals.

India had won four gold in the 2006 edition at home which was also the country's best ever performance with a haul of eight medals, including a silver.

Satwik-Chirag win Swiss Open title



BASEL, March 26 (PTI): Indian men's doubles pair of Satwik Chikara and Chirag Shetty capped off their impressive campaign with a title win, beating China's Ren Xiang Yu and Tan Qiang in the final of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Sunday.

The second-seeded Indian pair, the 2022 World Championships bronze medallist, was solid in defence and dished out an attacking game to outwit the world No. 21 pair 21-19, 24-22 in 54 minutes.

It was the first title of the season for India with Satwik and Chirag putting to rest the disappointment of last week's All England Championships where they had exited in the second round. Overall, it was the fifth career world tour title for the Indian pair, who had claimed the India Open and French Open last year, besides securing the Thailand Open in 2019 and Hyderabad Open in 2018. Satwik and Chirag had also won the Commonwealth Games gold in 2022. The title run also meant India continued its love affair with the Swiss Open, with PV Sindhu (2022), Saina Nehwal (2011, 2012), Kidambi Srikanth (2015) and HS Prannoy (2016) claiming the crown in the past. The two pairs had contracting march to the final with Satwik and Chirag playing three three-game matches on their way to the summit clash, while Tan and Ren didn't drop a game.

Tan had forged a world No. 10 pairing with He Jiting in 2019, winning the 2021 World Championships silver medal, while Ren had been ranked as high as 16 with his former partner Ou Xuanyi. Playing the Chinese pair for the first time, Satwik and Chirag turned up the heat at the right moments, displayed their attacking prowess and steady nerves to come out victorious.

A service error from Chirag was a dampener but India managed to lead 3-1 early on before the Chinese drew parity at 6-6. There was another service error for height from Satwik before the Indians entered the break with a three-point cushion.

The Indians tried to keep the rallies flat and short and it worked, as they led 15-10 and then 18-13.

Hardik Pandya's Gujarat Titans enter IPL 2023 as title contenders

MUMBAI, March 26 (PTI): Having achieved the ultimate glory of winning the IPL title in their maiden appearance last year, Hardik Pandya's Gujarat Titans will aim to replicate all the right moves they made to lift the trophy with the competition expanded to 10 teams.

Gujarat Titans was the best team in IPL 2022 for not just lifting the trophy but for executing a perfectly-planned campaign among all competitors, winning 10 out of 14 league games and finishing at the top of the points table with the best outcome (20 points).

Since last year, having led Gujarat Titans to the title win, Pandya's stature has grown with his ascendancy to India's permanent captaincy job in T20Is and even a look-in in ODIs, while their young batter Shubman Gill has established himself as a natural pick at least in two of the three international formats.

Both Pandya and Gill led Gujarat Titans with the bat, finishing

with 487 and 483 runs respectively to top the charts for their side while two of the best in business, Mohammad Shami (20 wickets) and Rashid Khan (19), were their primary attacking weapons with the ball.

Even though Gujarat Titans have let go of the express pacer Lockie Ferguson, his absence should not rock the ship which also consists of Ireland pacer Josh Little, West Indies' Alzarri Joseph, Shivam Mavi, Yash Dayal and a few more.

Credit must be given to the coaching staff led by former India pacer Ashish Nehra for establishing camaraderie between the players and most importantly, clarity of their roles.

In the lead-up to IPL 2023, both non-regular members of Gujarat Titans, Mavi and R Sai Kishore, highlighted that knowing their roles and executing them was among the biggest reasons for GT's successful campaign last year.

AUSTRALIAN PACER HAZLEWOOD DOUBTFUL FOR IPL

Injured Rajat Patidar could miss first half of IPL

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Royal Challengers Bangalore's top-order batter Rajat Patidar could miss the first half of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) owing to a heel injury.

According to a report in ESPNcricinfo, the 29-year-old Patidar, who was one of the top performers for RCB last season, is currently undergoing rehab at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru.

There are also "serious doubts" over Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood's participation in the tournament as he continues to re-

cover from Achilles tendonitis, adding to the Faf du Plessis-led team's woes ahead of the league starting in less than a week's time.

The 32-year-old Hazlewood was signed for Rs 7.75 crore in the mega-auction last year.

As far as Patidar is concerned, the report stated that the player has been "advised rest for the next three weeks before an MRI scan will determine his participation in the second half of the competition".

Patidar, who picked up the injury prior to joining the camp, will need an

NCA clearance heading back to the RCB setup.

Patidar, who wasn't picked at last year's mega auction but came in as a replacement midway through the season following an injury to wicket-keeper Luvnith Sisodia, made a statement in the Eliminator by hitting the fastest hundred by an Indian in the tournament's history.

With 333 runs in seven matches at a strike rate of 152.75, Patidar ended the season as the third-highest run-scorer for RCB, behind Du Plessis and Virat Kohli.



Rishabh Pant must take his time to heal properly: Ganguly

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Former BCCI president Sourav Ganguly says India's star wicket-keeper-batter Rishabh Pant "must take his time to heal properly" from his injuries, before launching his bid for a comeback to competitive cricket.

Pant was involved in a road accident in the early hours of December 30 as he was driving from New Delhi to Roorkee. He is currently recovering after undergoing treatment for his injuries.

Former India captain Ganguly said that the Delhi Capitals franchise, of which Pant has been the skipper in last few seasons, will definitely miss the wicketkeeper-batter in the upcoming Indian Premier League. Ganguly is serving as DC's director of cricket.



"I am sure that the national team is missing him as well. He's young and he has got a lot of time left in his career. He's a special player and he must take his time to heal properly. We wish him all the best and I'll meet him as well," Ganguly said in a release issued by the IPL franchise.

Ganguly has been keenly observing all the players during the pre-season camp at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here in the lead-up to IPL 2023.

Speaking about the season, he said, "It's been great to work with the boys and I am looking forward to the season starting. Net practice is good, but we want to get into match mode. And (coach) Ricky (Ponting) has been fantastic. He brings a lot of intensity during training."

When asked about David Warner, the Delhi Capitals captain for this season, Ganguly said, "David Warner is looking forward to leading the side. He's always up for the challenge and he's a great player. He has got a lot of runs and experience under his belt."

Bordoloi Trophy Football Tournament: ASEB beat AP Blues

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 26: The opening ceremony of the 69th edition of Bharat Ratna Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Trophy Football Tournament 2023 was held at Nehru Stadium here on Sunday.

The first match of the tournament was held between ASEB SC and Assam Police Blues, where the former registered an emphatic 3-0 win over the latter in the opening Group A match. Tridev Boro (45+), Jigyasa Deka (88') and Dwijoraj Boro (90+) scored for ASEB SC.

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The opening ceremony was attended by Director of Sports and Youth Welfare, Assam, Nibedan Das Patwary as chief guest; veteran social worker and son of Bharat Ratna Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Bolin Bordoloi; vice president, AOA, Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa; sports organiser Heromba Prasad Baruah; treasurer, AOA Tapan Das, president, GSA Pulok Goswami; general secretary, GSA Dhruva Kalita; former president, GSA Munin Nobis, GSA members and other dignitaries.

I like Virat's passion and work ethic, batting with him was just fantastic: Gayle

NEW DELHI, March 26 (PTI): Swashbuckling West Indian batter Chris Gayle praised Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli for his work ethic and passion, and recalled the intense competition between the two during their heyday at Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Both Gayle and Kohli spent several seasons together at the IPL, dominating the crowd at their home base, Chinnaswamy Stadium, with as many as 10 century partnerships.

"Batting with Virat was just fantastic. I like the passion he has for the game. I like his passion and his work ethic, it's fantastic. You have to give him credit for that and he wants to show it with his performances," Gayle said.

In an episode of 'My Time with Virat', available on Jio Cinema, Gayle spoke about sharing the dressing room with Kohli, notching up numerous 100-run partnerships,



and all the dance moves they perfected together.

"Sharing a dressing room with Virat and the other guys, once I am there, I am always jovial and having a lot of fun, dancing and everything like that," said Gayle.

"I'd show them a few moves and

realise Virat's got the skills. He can move, you know. But if it's an Indian dance, Chris Gayle will win. If it's a Caribbean dance, Chris Gayle will win!"

Their relationship was strong but the pair could also be competitive with each other. Gayle narrated a

story about Kohli's reaction to the former earning the Orange Cap from him during a season. "One thing I remember, just to go back a bit, I remember Virat was the Orange Cap holder one particular season. I was getting runs but he was more of the guy at the time scoring a lot of runs. Then, bam bam, two or three games, whatever the case may be, I became the Orange Cap holder. He was like, 'man this guy just came in, bang bang bang, and became the Orange Cap holder?' It was just a funny thing that I'll always remember," Gayle said.

For years, Kohli and Gayle toyed with the opposition bowling attacks, sending the Chinnaswamy Stadium into a frenzy.

However, Gayle added that it was not only fours and sixes that did the trick for them. He insisted they paid a lot of attention to running between wickets and that yielded rich dividends.

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Jakve Asong (NGO), district nodal agency for implementation of Mission LiFE under Environment Education Programme (EEP) has organised a workshop on the theme, 'Reduce paper waste' on 27th March, 2023, at Hemphu English School, Longnit.

In this regard the Jakve Asong (NGO) has requested school students, SHG members, general public including departmental staff to participate in the workshop to learn about reducing paper waste.

Time: From 9 a.m. to 12 noon

For more details please contact:

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