

বালি মাফিয়ার দাদাগিরি, উত্তেজনা

ପ୍ରତିବାଦୀ କଳମ ପ୍ରତିବିଧି,
ବିଶାଲଗ୍ର୍ଦ, ୨୯ ମାର୍ଚ୍‌ ।। ବାଲି
ମାଫିଯାର ଦାଦାଗିରି ନିଯେ ସରବ ହେଲେ
ଏଲାକାବାସୀ ସହ ନେତାରାଓ । ଗଭିର
ରାତ ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଝୁଟେ ବାଲି ମାଫିଯାର ଖେଂଜେ
ବାଡ଼ି ଛାଡ଼ି ଅନେକେଇ । ଘଟନା
ବିଶାଲଗ୍ର୍ଦ ଥାନାଧିନ ଗୋଟିଏନଗର ତିଜ
ଏଲାକାଯ । ଅଭିଯୋଗ, ସଜଳ ନାମେ
ବାଲି ମାଫିଯା ଅମଲ ଘୋଷେର
ଆସ୍ତିଯାକେ ବେଦ୍ଧକଭାବେ ମାରଧର
କରେ । ଏରପରି ପୋଟା ଏଲାକାର ମାନୁମୁକ୍ତ
କ୍ଷେତ୍ରେ ଯାଏ । ଥାନାଯ ଗିଯେଓ କୋନାଓ

বিচার পাননি আক্রান্ত। জানা গেছে, অমর ঘোষের ভাগিনা সোনামুড়া থেকে তার বাড়িতে বেড়াতে আসেন। বিকেলে বন্ধুদের সাথে গোপীনগর ব্রিজের উপর ছবি তুলছিল যুবকরা। অভিযোগ, সজল নামে ওই বালি মাফিয়া ব্রিজের উপর এসেই যুবকদের মারধর শুরু করে। সজলের বন্ধব্য, ব্রিজের উপরে নাকি কেউ আসতে পারবেনা। কিছুদিন আগে পাশের ধাম প্রধানের ছেলেকেও মারধর করেছে ওই

সজল। প্রশ্ন উঠছে, সরকারি ব্রিজের উপর কেন মানুষ আসতে পারবে না? আক্রান্ত যুবকরা এলাকায় জানাতেই সবাই একত্রিত হয়ে সজলের বাড়িতে আসেন। কিন্তু তাকে আর খুঁজে পাওয়া যায়নি। এলাকার নেতারাও নাকি তার বাড়িতে আসেন। পরে আক্রান্ত যুবকরা বিশালগড় থানার দ্বারহস্ত হয়। কিন্তু রাত পর্যন্ত কোনও হেলদেল নেই পুলিশের। অভিযোগ, সজল ব্রিজের নীচে নদী থেকে

আবেদ্ধভাবে বালি উত্তোলন করে বিক্রি করছে। তার বিরংদে কেউ কোনও ব্যবস্থা থাহণ করছে না। এখন সে হলিয়া জারি করেন ব্রিজের উপর নাকি কেউ আসবে না। কার কাছ থেকে সাহায্য পেয়েছে ওই বালি মাফিয়া- প্রেস এলাকাবাসীর। এলাকায় কা পাতলে শোনা যাচ্ছে, পুলিশ তা বিরংদে ব্যবস্থা না নিলে যেকোন সময় এলাকাবাসীর ক্ষেত্রে আচ্ছেদ পড়ে পারে সজলের বাড়িতে।

বঙ্গপাতে যুবকের স্ব

যুব মোচার রক্তদান শিবির



প্রতিবাদী কলম প্রতিনিধি, গণভাস্তু, ২৯ মার্চ। [ভারতীয় জনতা যুব মোর্চা ৪৪ রাইমাভ্যালি মণ্ডল কমিটির উদ্দোগে বুধবার রক্ষণান মহোৎসবের আয়োজন করা হয়। এদিন গভৰ্নেচড়া দুর্ব্বাবাঢ়ি নট মন্দির প্রাঙ্গণে রক্ষণান মহোৎসবের সূচনা করেন যুব মোর্চা রাইমাভ্যালি মণ্ডল সভাপতি সজল মল্লিক। এছাড়া অনুষ্ঠানে অন্যান্যদের মধ্যে উপস্থিত ছিলেন যুব মোর্চা ধলাই জেলা সভাপতি সুরত মজুমদার, এমডিসি ভূমিকান্দ বিয়াং, রাইমাভ্যালি মণ্ডল সভাপতি সমীর রঞ্জন ত্রিপুরা, মণ্ডল



ঘটনাস্থলে ছুটে এসে অমল কৃষণকে
মাটিতে পড়ে থাকতে দেখেন।
তারা অনেক ডাকাডাকি করলেও
তার কোনও সাড়শব্দ ছিল না।
সাথে সাথে এলাকাবাসী ও
পরিবারের লোকজন অমল কৃষণকে
নিয়ে আসে মতাই প্রাথমিক সাস্থ
কেন্দ্রে। সেখানে কর্তব্যরত
চিকিৎসক তাকে মৃত বলে ঘোষণা
করেন। চিকিৎসক বলেন
ঘটনাস্থলেই অমলকৃষ্ণ ত্রিপুরার
মৃত্যু হয়েছে। ময়নাতদন্তের পর
মৃতদেহ পরিবারের হাতে তুলে
দেওয়া হয়। অমলকৃষ্ণ ত্রিপুরার
মৃত্যুর ঘটনায় তার পরিবার ও
এলাকায় শোকের ছায়া বিরাজ
করছে। উল্লেখ্য, মঙ্গলবার বিকেলে
ফটকরায় থানা এলাকায় একইভাবে
বজ্জ্বলাতে একজনের মৃত্যু
হয়েছিল। আহত হয়েছিলেন
আরও ১০ জন। পরপর দু'দিনে
বাছপাতে ২ জনের মাম হল।

ফুটো ছাউনিতে বৃষ্টির জলে কাকভেজা অঙ্গনওয়াড়ির বাচারা

প্রতিবাদী কলম প্রতিনিধি, কঁঠালিয়া, ২৯ মার্চ। বৃষ্টি হলেই অঙ্গনওয়াড়ি কেন্দ্রের কচিকঁচারা কাকভেজা হয়ে বাড়ি ফিরছে। বৃষ্টিবাদীদের দিন শুরু হতেই এই সমস্যায় ভুগছে অঙ্গনওয়াড়ি কেন্দ্রে পড়তে আসা ছেট ছেট বাচ্চাগুলি। বুধবারও দিনের বেলায় সামান্য বৃষ্টিতে অঙ্গনওয়াড়ি কেন্দ্রে আসা বাচ্চারা জলে ভিজে বাড়ি ফিরতে বাধ্য হয়েছে। বিষয়টি নিয়ে স্থানীয় অভিভাবকরা ভীষণ ক্ষুর। অঙ্গনওয়াড়ি কেন্দ্রটি টিনের ছাউনিতে মরিচা ধরে খারাপ হয়ে যাওয়াতে গত কয়েক মাস ধরে এই ভোগাস্তির শিকার অঙ্গনওয়াড়ি কেন্দ্রে পড়তে আসা বাচ্চাগুলি। বুধবারও দিনের বেলায় সামান্য বৃষ্টিতে অঙ্গনওয়াড়ি কেন্দ্রে আসা বাচ্চারা জলে ভিজে বাড়ি ফিরতে বাধ্য হয়েছে। বিষয়টি নিয়ে স্থানীয় অভিভাবকরা ভীষণ ক্ষুর।

ବନ୍ଦମାଜିତକଣ୍ଠର ଉଥାଓ ଜନଶୀ

প্রতিবাদী কলম প্রতিনিধি, তেলিয়ামুড়া, ২৯ মার্চ।।
রহস্যজনকভাবে ঘর থেকে উধাও
এক সন্তানের জননী। ৯ বছরের
কন্যা সন্তানকে রেখে তিনি
কোথায় গেলেন স্টেই সবার প্রশ্ন।

অভিযোগ জমা করেছেন।
তেলিয়ামুড়া থানাধীন গোলাবাড়ি
এলাকায় এই ঘটনা নিয়ে সবাই
অবাক। জানা গেছে, মঙ্গলবার
বিকেল তিনটা নাগাদ স্বামীর
অনুপস্থিতিতে বাড়ি থেকে বেরিয়ে

প্রাতিমন বাল্লদের এইভাবে
বৃষ্টিতে ভিজতে দেওয়া যায় না
যদিও স্থানীয়দের এই সমস্যা
নিয়ে একেবাবেই উদাসী
পঞ্চায়েত থেকে শুরু করে
সমাজশিক্ষা ও সমাজকল্যাণ দণ্ডের

জাপাচার

কেজি গাঁজা উদ্বার হয়েছে বলে
জানিয়েছেন, মহুকু মা পুলিশ
আধিকারিক। তিনি আরও
জানিয়েছেন, লরির চালককেও
আটক করা হয়েছে। ধর্মের নাম
বাদে আপনের বাদী পুরুষ মুরার
তেলিয়ামুড়া থানায় অভিযোগ
দায়ের করেন। কিন্তু ২৪ ঘণ্টা
পেরিয়ে গেলেও এখনও পর্যন্ত
পারভিন আজ্জারকে খুঁজে বের
করতে পারেনি তেলিয়ামুড়া থানার
পুলিশ। মহিলার স্বামী পেশায়
দিনমজুর। সংসার প্রতিপালনের
জন্য তাকে সকাল থেকে সন্ধ্যা পর্যন্ত
কাজের সন্ধানে বাড়ির বাইরে
থাকতে হয়। তার অনুপস্থিতিতে ৯
বঙ্গবের মোহু কিভাবে বাড়িতে

e-PT-36/EE/RDUP/G/2
On behalf of the eGovernance
Engineer, R.D Udaipur Di-
invites percentage rate e-
up to 15.00 Hrs on 06/04.
1. Providing Internal elec-
Health Center at Rajarbari
For details visit website
and contact by e-mail to
Any subsequent correge
website only.

ICA-C-4552-23

অজয় রিয়াং (২৯), তার বাড়ি-
বিশালগড়ে। অন্যদিকে, ফের
রংটিন তল্লাশিতে ত্রিপুরা থেকে
বিহারে পাচারের মুখে আসাম
চুরাইবাড়িতে ধরা পড়ে
কন্টেইনার বোরাই প্রায় সোয়া
কোটি টাকার গাঁজা। এতে আটক
করা হয়েছে নরি চালককে।
গাড়িটি ত্রিপুরা সীমান্ত টপকে
আসামে প্রবেশের মুখে তল্লাশি
করে পুলিশ। এতে গাড়ির গোপন
চেম্বার থেকে বিভিন্ন প্যাকেটে
১২৭৫ কেজি গাঁজা উদ্ধার হয়।
যার বাজার মূল্য অনুমানিক ১
কোটি ২৭ লক্ষ ৫০ হাজার টাকার
মতো হবে। এতে আটক করা হয়
কন্টেইনার চালককে। তার নাম
আমেরেশ রাই(২৮)। তার বাড়ি
বিহারে। পুলিশ জেরায় আটককৃত
চালক জানায়, সে বিশেষ
সিঙ্কেলেটর হাত ধরে গাঁজাগুলো
আগরতলা থেকে সংগ্রহ করে
বিহারের মুজাফরনগরে নিয়ে
যাওয়ার কথা ছিল।

একা থাকবে সেটাও বড় সমস্যা।

No.F.I(62)/HM/DSCMEMHSS/2023
GOVERNMENT OF TRIPURA
OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL
DHANA SINGH CHOUDHURY MEMORIAL
MEDIUM H/S SCHOOL
CBSE affiliated (Vidyajyoti School Union)
Dated, Kanchanbari, 29/03/2023

A WALK-IN-INTERVIEW will be held for filling
Contractual Post (Music/Theatre) in DHANA
MEMORIAL ENGLISH MEDIUM H/S SCHOOL under
Mission 100. Minimum eligibility criteria for applying
Diploma/Bachelor Degree from recognized Board
be given to the candidates bearing experience in respective
candidates who fulfills the criteria may appear before
03rd April of 2023 along with filled up application
addressing to the Principal along with all originals.
NB:- Honorarium Rs.200/- per class (Maximum 3 hours).

Sd/- Tarun
R
Dhana Singh
English Medium
Kanchanbari

গাড়ি চালকের জেল ও জরিমানা

প্রতিবাদী কলম প্রতিনিধি
খোঝাই, ২৯ মার্চ। যান দুর্ঘটনা
মামলার মূল অভিযুক্তকে এক বছর
তিন মাসের জেল হাজত সহ
২৫০০ টাকা জরিমানার নির্দেশ দিল
খোঝাই আদালত। ২০২২ সালের
২৬ মার্চ তেলিয়ামুড়া থেকে আস
যাত্রীবাহী গাড়ি কল্যাণপুর অমর
কলোনি এলাকায় নিয়ন্ত্রণ হারিয়ে
বাউন্ডারি ভেঙে বাড়ির ভেতরে
চুকে পড়ে। ওই সময় বাড়িতে এবং
মহিলা স্নান করছিলেন। সেই
গাড়ির ধাক্কায় বৃদ্ধা অনামিক
বধিকের বাকর পাঁজর ভেঙে যাও

বিএসএফ'র সিভিক অ্যাকশন



ପ୍ରତିବାଦୀ କଲମ ପ୍ରାଚୀ
ଗଭ୍ରାହ୍ରା, ୨୯ ମାର୍ଚ୍ଚ ।। ବିଷ
୧୯୨୯ ନଂ ସ୍ଥାଟେଲିଯାନେର
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ପ୍ରୋଜନୀଯ ସାମଣୀ ସହ
ଛାତ୍ରାତ୍ମିଦେର ଜନ୍ୟ ଶିକ୍ଷ
ବିତରଣ କରା ହୈ । ଏଦିନ
ମହକୁ ମାର ଭାରତ - ବା

পাশাপাশি গ্রামের ছাত্রছাত্রীদের জন্য স্কুল ব্যাগ ও ক্যারামবোর্ড সহ বিভিন্ন খেলার সামগ্রী বিতরণ করা হয়। পাশাপাশি একটি স্বাস্থ্য শিবিরের আয়োজন করে বিএসএফ। এদিন এই উপজাতি অধ্যুষিত থামে বিএসএফ'র তরফে প্রামাণ্যসীদের মধ্যে দেনদিন প্রয়োজনের জন্য জলের ট্যাঙ্ক, পানীয় জলের ফিল্টার, এলইডি বাল্ব, সোলার লাইট, চেয়ার, প্রেসারকুকার সহ মেয়েদের টি-শার্ট বিলি করা হয়।

ଦୁଇ ଗାଡ଼ିର ମଧ୍ୟରେ ଆହ୍ତ ୭

প্রতিবাদী কলম প্রতিনিধি, দুর্ঘটনা ঘটেছে। তবে এদিনের
বিশালগড়, ২৯ মার্চ। সাতসকালে
ঘটনার জেরে অন্যান্য লোকজন
রাস্তায় দাঁড়িয়ে থেকে যন্ত্রণার
শিকার হয়েছেন।



The Executive Engineer, Agartala Division No.III, PWD(R&B), Agartala invites sealed tenders vide PNIT No.31/EE/Divn.III/PWD(RaB)/2022 - 2023 Dated 27th March, 2023 for the works detailed below:

Sl. No.	NAME OF THE WORK	Estimated cost	Earnest money	Time Stipulated for Completion.
1	Hiring of Vehicle 01 (one) No. Maruti Swift DiZire / Maruti Swift/Maruti Baleno (Petrol/diesel running) of 01/01/2020 (Manufacturing date) onwards along with driver for use of the Executive Engineer, Agartala Division No. III, PWD (R&B) , Netaji Chowmuhani, Agartala during the year 2023-2024. DNIT No. 50/EE/Divn.III/PWD(R&B)/2022-23, dated 27/03/2023	Rs . 4,05,200/-	Rs . 8,104/-	365 (Three hundred sixty five) days.
2	Hiring of Vehicle 01 (one) No. Maruti (ECCO- Petrol/CNG run) of 01/09/2021 (Manufacturing date) onwards along with driver for use of the Assistant Engineer, Construction Sub-Division No. I, PWD (R&B) , Melarmath. Agartala during the year 2023-2024 DNIT No. 51/EE/Divn.III/PWD(R&B)/2022-23, dated 27/03/2023.	Rs . 3,42,240/-	Rs . 6,845/-	365 (Three hundred sixty five) days.
3	Hiring of Vehicle 01 (one) No. Maruti (OMNI/ECCO- Petrol/CNG run) of 01/01/2014 (Manufacturing date) onwards along with driver for use of the Assistant Engineer, Construction Sub-Division. 11, PWD (R&B) , Gurkhabasti. Agartala during the year 2023-2024. DNIT No.52/EE/Divn.III/PWD(R&B)/2022-23, dated 27/03/2023.	Rs . 3,64,320 /-	Rs . 7,286/-	365 (Three hundred sixty five) days.
4	Hiring of Vehicle 01 (one) No. Maruti (ECCO - Petrol/CNG run) of 01/09/2021 (Manufacturing date) onwards along with driver for use of the Assistant Engineer, Construction Sub-Division. III, PWD (R&B) . Kunjaban. Agartala during the year 2023-2024. DNIT No.53/EE/Divn.III/PWD(R&B)/2022-23, dated 27/03/2023.	Rs . 3,31,200/-	Rs . 6,624/-	365 (Three hundred sixty five) days.
5	Hiring of Vehicle 01 (one) No. Maruti (OMNI/ECCO- Petrol/CNG run) of 01/01/2015 (Manufacturing date) onwards along with driver for use of the Sr. Manager, Pragna Bhaban PWD Cell, PWD (R&B) , Gurkhabasti, Agartala during the year 2023-2024. DNIT No.54/EE/Divn.III/PWD(R&B)/2022-23, dated 27/03/2023.	Rs . 2,87,040/-	Rs . 5,741/-	365 (Three hundred sixty five) days.

Tender forms may be collected from the office of the undersigned during the office hour w.e.f. 28.03.2023 to 06.04.2023 and last date of dropping of tenders is 13th April 2023 up

to 3:00pm.
Last Date of receipt of application : 05th April 2023.
Opening date of tender : 13th April 2023 at 3.30 (if possible)

15th April 2023 at 3.30 (if possible)

For details please see tender notice

for and on the behalf of the government of Tripura

Sd/- Illegible
Executive Engineer
Agartala Division No.III (PWD)
Agartala, Tripura(W)

Ruling party MLA Jadabla Nath caught watching porn in Assembly !



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48/-

Planet East,
Agartala, March 29 :

A video taken during just concluded Assembly session caught BJP MLA Jadabla Nath watching purported porn clips on mobile phone. He has entered the house as a people's elected representative for the very first time this month. BJP has had repeated caught-on-camera history of its MLAs allegedly relishing porn videos in Assembly sessions, in Gujarat and Karnataka, and denying doing so.

Jadabla Nath was expelled from CPI(M) for serious allegations of party fund siphoning a few years back. CPI (M) leader from North Tripura Amitabha Datta reacting to the video said, "A ruling MLA has created a notorious instance of socio-cultural erosion during the last Tripura Legislative session. The people of the state are watching what the action of the Speaker of the house will take in this context."

There were instances where CPI (M) expelled its sitting MLAs or MDC for alleged immoral acts, even if there were no complaints under

legal provisions registered. It did those on its own, by acting on its internal reports and disciplinary actions. MLAs Ananta Paul and Kartikanya Debbarma, or MDC Joykishore Jamatia have been such examples. The ruling party did not show up such act in its previous cases of watching objectionable videos during Assembly sessions.

In February, 2012 in Karnataka three of BJP lawmakers were caught on camera allegedly watching purported porn clips, they were banned initially, three resigned from cabinet berths. The incident involved even the then Minister for Women and Child Development C C Patil. After a few days, the House Committee of the state Assembly — which inquired into allegations of three former BJP ministers watching porn clippings on a mobile phone — has given a clean chit to them. The committee said, former ministers Lakshman Savadi, C C Patil and Krishna Palmar were just operating their mobile phones and not watching anything on the phone sets. In 2019 L Savadi became deputy chief minister there.

On March 20, 2012, a journalist with a local newspaper, Gujarat Samachar, had captured pictures of two BJP MLAs looking at obscene photos

- CONT. TO P2

Crisis in south district, Panchayat Pradhan takes pink slip

Planet East,
Belonia, March 29 :

In a sensational event, the Panchayat Pradhan of South Bharat Chandra Nagar has submitted her resignation to the BDO (Bharatchandra Nagar).

The said event has turned into talk of the town as it is presumed that more traitors would come to the fore now.

In 2018 assembly poll, Arun Chandra Bhoumik had contested & won from Belonia as BJP nominee. However, this time BJP candidate Goutam Sarkar had to bite dust and he was Mandal President too. Sources close to



placed before state BJP Head Quarter.

Vice Chairman of BC Nagar Panchayat Samiti, Upa Pradhan of Netaji Subhas Chandra Nagar Gram Panchayat and some other office bearers are in the radar of Pradesh BJP and a team from Agartala had gone to the ground zero and has attended multiple meets to fix the issue. A district level Secretary too is accused of the misdeeds.

The resigned Laxmi Choudhury has drawn many flak related to nepotism and conspiracies. And the same had been continuing for last two years. Her husband was attacked

many times, due to the same irregularities on her part. Her husband too was held for many objectionable works relating to civil construction and other developmental activities. Belonia PS possesses many cases against Laxmi Choudhury's husband. Finally, once the assembly poll got over, Laxmi Choudhury put her papers down to shield herself from any adversity. People privy to South district's BJP, now are expecting stern actions against the traitors inside. The dedicated party activists are now looking forward to clean the organization off in the cited district.

Couple of Panchayat Chiefs (Pradhan) and senior office bearers are alleged to be involved in 'insider trading'. Such a list has already been prepared and

THE JAIL SCAM

Planet East,
Agartala, March 29 :

The very basic of any scam is what the minority of higher officials in a particular department with the assistance of a few numbered subordinates and at the maximum one or two political resourceful persons execute. The real game happens when the illegal acts are brought to notice by other government agencies. These minimum numbers of offenders seek protection of large number of influential people of every sector and the Political leaders in the thought of defamation to their own party or regime

start to put colours on the misdeeds of the offenders.

By such acts the offenders get the impetus to continue such unlawful acts. One of the newly appointed minister of the state may term the highlighting of irregularities to be of 'jaundice eye', but as the fourth pillar of democracy the press and the media is duty bound to bring to light the facts, the truth and such scams. The Government and its machinery surely can't sit idle with folded hands when ample amount of evidences of scam and malpractice are apparently lying unaddressed for years. The department of Jail is presently under the

YEAR	PARTULARS	SCAM AMOUNT
2018-2019	The sanctioned funds were not utilised for Computerization and digitization including ICT setup in prisons of the State	Rs 166 lac i.e 1 Cr. 66 lac
2019	Sceptical Cash payment sanctioned by IG Prison and handed over to Bani Kanta Debbarma (Nodal Officer)	Rs 6.50 lac
2019	Procurement of materials without maintaining formalities like Tender etc or documentations of procurement	Rs 64.30 lac
2018	Procurement of Impermissible items	Rs 2.34 lac
2018	Loss of Government Money for over procurement of products	Rs 5,18,057/-

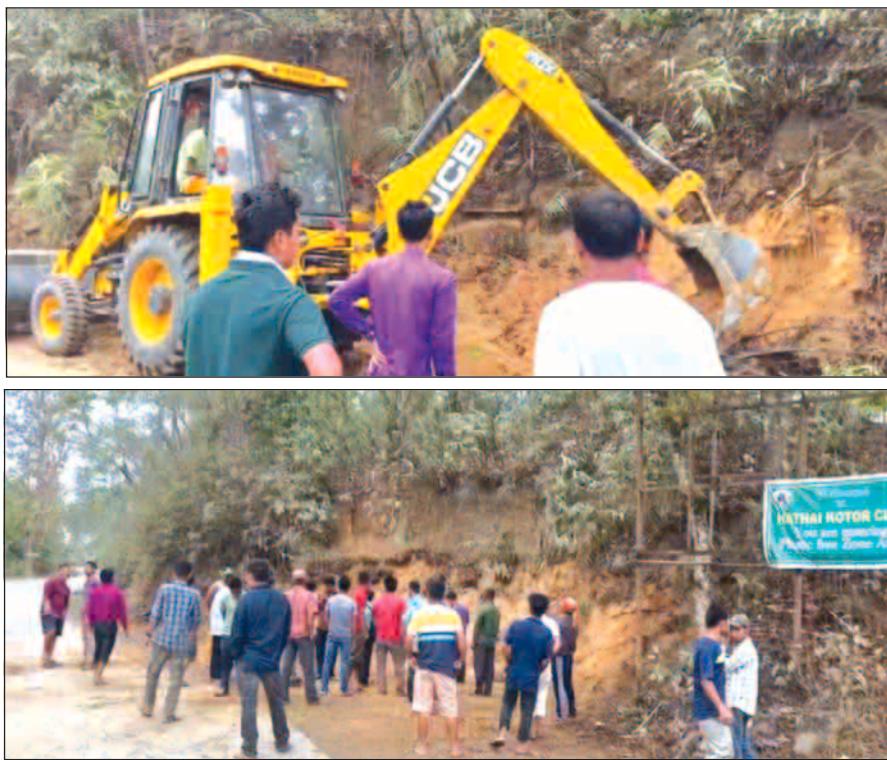
Chief Minister of the State and it is expected that in order to safeguard a bare minimum number of beneficiaries, he would not hesitate to take stringent steps against the offenders. It is also a fact that due to red-tapeism, inspite of noble desires of the Government, on-time action can't be taken and the coterie reaps the benefit out.

With major funds routed out from the "e-prison scheme" of the Central Government, not only the State will suffer in terms of upgradation

of the Prisons as desired by the Union, but cut a sorry figure before the BJP Central Leadership who are earnestly trying to fund the North Eastern States for their overall development.

With the declaration by the Chief Minister of the State in the floor of the Assembly that in his tenure he will not appreciate any corrupt practice and he desires to lay an ever remembered Governance in terms of clarity, events and statistics like these are to be addressed in no time contrary to which the common will presume that vocal and materialism are not on the identical coin.

Pradyot Kishore runs same rhetoric, no specific strategy yet



Planet East,
Agartala, March 29 :

Running the same rhetoric TIPRA Motah chief said, "I did not demand a single thing from myself, I have demanded something for

Tiprasa (Tripuri people). If the Centre gives something, we will welcome" at the airport premises on returning to Agartala and flew back to Guwahati with his few lieutenants hurriedly in a couple of hours. Pradyot Debbarman replying to

his announced stand of going into fast-unto-death after no interlocutor was appointed within March 27, did not specify any specific date for the hunger strike but sarcastically invited the journalist to join him in the hunger strike. TIPRA

away from the deceased's home.

The accused murderer Rajib Adhikari did not state any other information related to the killing. Rajib is younger sibling of Rajesh and the localities here are seeking rigorous life sentence for Rajib aka Raju.

Planet East,
Agartala, March 29 :

The motor bike and the weapon, which were used to murder Rajesh Adhikari, a resident of Laxmi Lunga tea garden (under Airport PS), have been recovered here today. These were found at a pond near Damdama area, which is eight km



away from the deceased's home.

The accused murderer Rajib Adhikari did not state any other information related to the killing. Rajib is younger sibling of Rajesh and the localities here are seeking rigorous life sentence for Rajib aka Raju.

State NHM's incompetence in implementing PM-ABHIM

Planet East,
Agartala, March 29 :

The state health department is most likely to be deprived of a whooping fund worth INR 75 lakh due to inefficiency of Dr Abhijit Das, Nodal Officer (PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission)-Tripura NHM.

The cited mission has its objective to strengthen the district level health care facilities through creation of critical care hospital blocks at the medical college(s) and



respective district hospitals. The same facility also ensures swift responsiveness of the healthcare providers in case of any exigency in future related to sudden breakout of any severe diseases or calamity.

The aforesaid mission also supports setting up of a dedicated 100 bed

Critical Care Hospital Blocks at the district(s) having population exceeding 5 Lakh. Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare had allotted INR 1.57 crore in 2022-23. Only INR 83 Lakh out of the said corpus has been provided, till date.

Sources from state health & family welfare department opine that in the current fiscal Tripura did not live upto the expectation of central government in implementing and complying with the mandates of PM-

ABHIM. Central National Health Mission's (NHM) Empowered Committee had expressed its sheer displeasure over the fund utilisation report. The meeting took place in Delhi in the first week of the running month.

The insincerity and incompetence of concerned official of state NHM has caused not only financial loss to state Tripura but the same would also hinder the development of growth of healthcare infrastructure and allied facilities to people of Tripura.

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Editorial

How to save the coasts?

The Indian coastal plains are a treasure trove of biodiversity, culture, and economic activity. However, the effects of climate change, human activities, and urbanization are putting the coastal cities and communities in peril. The recent cyclones, floods, and storms have been devastating for the people living in these areas, and the damage caused to the infrastructure, ecosystems, and livelihoods will take years to recover.

It's high time that we recognize the gravity of the situation and take decisive action to save the Indian coastal plains and cities adjacent to the ocean and seas. The following are some measures that we can take to mitigate the impact of climate change and protect the fragile ecosystem of the coastal region. Promote sustainable development: The development of the coastal regions should be done in a sustainable manner, which takes into account the ecological, economic, and social aspects of the community. The construction of buildings, roads, and other infrastructure should be done in such a way that they do not harm the environment and can withstand natural disasters.

Protect and restore mangroves: Mangroves are essential for the survival of the coastal ecosystem as they act as a natural barrier against storms and provide a habitat for a variety of species. However, over the years, mangroves have been destroyed due to human activities such as land reclamation, pollution, and overfishing. We need to protect the existing mangroves and restore the degraded ones to ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem.

Implement coastal zone management: The coastal zone management should be implemented effectively to regulate the activities of industries, fishermen, and tourists. This will ensure that the natural resources are not exploited and the environment is protected.

Strengthen early warning systems: The coastal cities are vulnerable to cyclones, floods, and tsunamis. Therefore, it's crucial to strengthen the early warning systems and develop evacuation plans to minimize the loss of life and property during natural disasters.

Encourage renewable energy: The coastal regions are ideal for harnessing renewable energy such as wind and solar power. The government should encourage the development of renewable energy infrastructure in these regions to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and promote sustainable development.

In conclusion, the Indian coastal plains and cities adjacent to the ocean and seas are facing unprecedented challenges due to climate change, human activities, and urbanization. However, by taking the above-mentioned measures, we can mitigate the impact of these challenges and ensure the sustainability of the coastal ecosystem. The government, industries, and communities should work together to save the coastal regions for the present and future generations.

Ruling party MLA Jadabnal Nath caught

CONT. FROM P1

in the Gujarat Assembly. He filed a complaint with the Assembly Speaker, Ganpat Vasava, alleging that he, and a few other journalists, had seen two BJP MLAs looking at obscene photos in the state Assembly yesterday. Janakbhai Purohit, the journalist, has released a video clip - captured on a cellphone by another journalist - purportedly showing the two MLAs, Shankar Chowdhary and Jetha Bhai Dharwad, looking at obscene photos of women on an iPad while sitting in the House.

"First they started by watching the pictures of Swami Vivekananda, then cartoons and then pics of women...I saw them watching some sleazy photographs of women and felt it was wrong...I went to the Speaker's chamber and complained about it to his Personal Assistant that it was a repeat of Karnataka; he informed the Speaker and the viewing was stopped," the journalist said. "This went on for about 20 minutes...they were engrossed in watching the vulgar pictures," he added. The two were also cleared of the allegation.

Planet East did not independently verify the purported video involved BJP MLA Jadabnal Nath.

On the other hand in Odisha Congress did have such instance as in December 2015, Congress MLA from Jharsuguda Naba Kishore Das was suspended for seven days for watching obscene video content on his mobile phone inside the Assembly. Notably, a local TV channel, broadcasting the Question Hour, shot Jharsuguda MLA Das watching a porn clip. However, Das had claimed that he accidentally opened an app while browsing his phone. After a hue and cry, the Speaker had referred the allegation to the 28-member Ethics Committee, headed by Rarendra Pratap Swain and asked the panel to submit its report "at the earliest". The panel prepared a nine-page report at a meeting held December 18, 2018. As per the committee report, the concerned media channel failed to submit the visual showing the MLA watching porn videos on his mobile phone in the House. The Junior Engineer (JE), who was in charge of the CCTV installed in Assembly, had produced the CCTV footage before the Ethics Committee December 15 showing no such act by the MLA. The Then ruling BJD legislators demanded his dismissal.

Amritpal Singh gives message in new video



New Delhi, 29 March :

Amid a police crackdown on Amritpal Singh and his group, a video surfaced on Wednesday in which the Khalistan sympathizer called for a 'Sarbat Khalsa' congregation on Baisakhi to discuss issues related to the Sikh community. In the video, he claimed to be in high spirits (Chardhi Kala) and criticized the police action against him as an "attack" on the Sikh community. He also stated that if the Punjab government had only wanted to arrest him, they could have come to his home and he would have surrendered. The authenticity of the video has not been confirmed by officials, who are still trying to apprehend Amritpal Singh. However, some reports suggest that he may surrender soon, as security in the Amritsar and Talwandi Sabo area

in Bathinda has been tightened. Since the crackdown began on March 18, Amritpal Singh has been on the run, using different vehicles and changing his appearance multiple times. He evaded arrest when his cavalcade was intercepted in Jalandhar district. Several videos and images of him alone and with his aides in different areas have appeared on social media. The crackdown on his group, Waris Punjab De, began after his supporters stormed a police station in Ajnala, near Amritsar, to secure the release of one of his followers. The Punjab government has invoked the stringent National Security Act against him and some of his close aides. In the latest video, Amritpal Singh urged the Akal Takht Jathedar to call a 'Sarbat Khalsa' to

discuss the issues related to the Sikh community and invited community members to participate in large numbers. He also reiterated that he was not afraid of being arrested. In a video appeal, Khalistan sympathizer Amritpal Singh called for a 'Sarbat Khalsa' congregation to discuss issues related to the Sikh community and criticized the government's crackdown on his outfit. He urged members of the community to participate in large numbers and accused the government of attacking the Sikh community. Singh also criticized the police for invoking the National Security Act against his associates and sending them to jail in Assam. He claimed that the government did not allow his 'Khalsa Vaheer' procession earlier and alleged that Sikh youths, women, children, and even handicapped youth were sent to jails. Singh also thanked people for supporting him and asked the Akal Takht Jathedar to take a tough stand on the matter. He further criticized Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann for his comments about the Jathedar's ultimatum to the government for the release of Sikh youths from jails.

Karnataka election 2023 announced

Bangalore, 29 March :

The Karnataka assembly election schedule was announced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Wednesday. The polling will take place in a single phase on May 10, followed by vote counting three days later.

Mamata Banerjee's Laundry Day With "BJP Washing Machine"

Kolkata, 29 March : During a protest led by Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata today, an oversized washing machine became the focal point. As Trinamool Congress leaders chanted slogans, the Chief Minister of Bengal put black cloth into the machine, symbolizing the act of "washing" and turning it white. Trinamool workers shouted "Washing machine, BJP!" while Mamata Banerjee accused the BJP of being a "washing machine" that exonerates corrupt leaders who join their party. She also called for a list of all thieves and robbers in BJP, claiming that they preach about the constitution despite their criminal antecedents. The Trinamool chief launched a two-day protest sit-in against the BJP-led central government, protesting against the lack of funds disbursed to West Bengal. The protests have escalated in anticipation of the local body elections and the 2024 general election. Mamata Banerjee spoke in support of Rahul Gandhi, who was disqualified as an MP after receiving a two-year jail sentence in a defamation case over his "Modi surname" comments. She criticized the BJP for targeting opposition leaders while inducting BJP leaders with criminal records into the cabinet. Abhishek Banerjee, the Chief Minister's nephew and Trinamool MP, also spoke at the rally and questioned why Rahul Gandhi's membership was cancelled for a political statement, while the PM of India's membership should not be cancelled for insulting women by catcalling the CM with "Didi O Didi".

Not being in captaincy has taken a little bit off my

CONT. FROM P8

say it was more of a matter of time and a very special place. He is a big player for our team." You could see the quality that he has. I'm sure it'd be learning a lot from a number of leaders that he's been able to play under for a few years. And, he seems like a fantastic guy, and he has a really great understanding of the game. So, I suppose naturally, there might be leadership positions that might come this way. But we'll have to see."

Transactions over 2,000 Rupees to attract 1.1% commission

New Delhi, 29 March :

From April 1, merchants carrying out transactions exceeding 2,000 in value via Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPI Wallets) on UPI will be charged an interchange fee of 1.1%. However, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), which governs UPI, clarified that the new interchange charges will only be applicable for PPI merchant transactions, and there will be no charge to customers. The NPCI also stated that there are no charges for bank account to bank account-based UPI payments, which are normal UPI payments. Interchange fees are usually associated with card payments and are charged to cover transaction costs. As per

recent regulatory guidelines, PPI Wallets have been allowed to be part of the interoperable UPI ecosystem, the NPCI said in its statement. In a statement, Rajarsi Rengan, FIS India Head of Development, Banking and Payments, said that the new interoperability guidelines for prepaid payment instruments announced by the NPCI represent a significant step in building a more inclusive and seamless digital payments ecosystem in India. Ms. Rengan further added that interoperability between digital wallets and UPI can be a game-changer for the Indian fintech industry as it opens up new opportunities for innovation, growth, and competition. With greater interoperability between payment systems, consumers will have more choice and flexibility in how they transact with merchants, leading to increased adoption of digital payments and ultimately driving financial inclusion and economic growth. Ms. Rengan noted that this move will also encourage innovation in the digital payments space, fostering competition and improving the quality of services offered to consumers. She concluded by saying that this is a positive development for the Indian economy and the banking system, and FIS looks forward to continuing to support the growth and development of digital payments in India.

Kumari-Madhuti-Rupashree remembered



Planet East, Agartala, March 29:

CPI(M) observed Kumari-Madhuti-Rupashree Debbarma's martyrdom today. Three women for protesting against the exploitation, especially the practice of taking labour without payment for royal purpose, were killed by military of the then princely state on March 28 (Choudha Chairra), 1949. The then the state was under the rule of Kanchanprava Devi, the widow of King Birbikram Manikya. The incident took place at Padmabil in Khowai subdivision. Paying tribute to their memory CPI(M) leaders and activists remembered them at the

royal family's member, whom his followers address by the feudal title Maharaja, and who calls himself 'Bubagra'. The family never recognised the martyrs, rather under the organisation the women raised voice, GMP, has always been opposed by the royal family. The Motha head is by many means, allegedly, carrying ownself 'Bubagra', using 'I' instead of 'we' in context of his party decisions, etc. It's to mentioned here that other than Ranjit Debbarma, none of the Motha leaders spared a word on the three martyrs, so far.

Pradyot Kishore

CONT. FROM P1

what it is exactly like the 'Greater' is remained unexplained. In fag end of the electioneering he also announced quit from 'electoral politics' and he wouldn't be available anymore for any political stage, political 'bhashan', he didn't need politics for serving his people.

However, Motha activists have been gathering at Barmura foothills near Champaknagar bow-bridge from last night in a preparation to put blockade,etc. They used earth cutter machine today to dodge off hill-wall in curbing out space; however, the authority did not stop them from illegally removing chunks of earth from hill-wall.

'Don't think that Pakistan will play'

CONT. FROM P8

Cup but given tense political relations between the two countries, the hybrid Asia Cup model is being looked at as a solution at the ICC meetings held last week, according to an ESPNcricinfo report. Pakistan is the host for this year's Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in the first half of September, but India might play their matches at a neutral venue that is yet to be finalised.

The Asian Cricket Council, however, agreed to look at a hybrid model that will allow the Asia Cup to take place in Pakistan but India's matches to be played at a neutral venue, ESPNcricinfo reported.

IPL 2023: Absolutely, no problem, says Boucher

CONT. FROM P8

and I do not see workload being a major issue for us throughout the IPL." "Sometimes media and people look too much into workload in T20 cricket. Test cricket and one-day cricket are tough on the body, T20 cricket is short. We should not be talking about workload in T20 cricket with all due respect." With impact player rule and teams announcing playing elevens after the toss is held bringing the flair of innovation in IPL 2023, Rohit said the new rules were to his liking. "It's interesting to have new sort of innovation coming into the game. Only time will tell what will happen and how the team copes with this new rule. I like having an impact player coming in and changing your team after the toss." Boucher, the former South Africa wicketkeeper-batter, agreed with Rohit's views. "We are going to have to learn. It is a great innovation; I have no problem with the changing of the teams after the toss." "If (say), these sort of two rules that would have changed straight away and say this year we are going to have an impact player, and next year we are going to change the rule of the toss, it might have been a little bit different. But both rules have changed now, and it is going to have an impact." "It will be a level playing field after the toss if you lose, especially in India, where there is the dew factor. So you are just going to be able to adjust. But as Rohit said, you have 11 cricketers, and you will try to select the best 11 cricketers you have. The 12th player is just a bonus," he concluded.

BSF Civic Action Program, free medical camp in Kamalpur



Planet East,
Kamalpur, March 29:

BSF officials organised a free medical camp and distributed medicines among people of Choto Surma and adjacent areas in Kamalpur subdivision as part of their Civic Action Program on Wednesday. The event was organised at premises of Choto Surma High School under the initiative of BSF's 105 battalion posted in the area. DIG BSF Murari Prasad Singh, Commandant Himangshu Chowdhury, Chairperson of Durga Chowmuhani Panchayat committee Shampa Das and many other prominent people were

present at the event. A medical camp was organised for people of the area under supervision of three BSF doctors. Officials distributed medicines among the needful at the camp. Volleyball and football matches were also organised on the occasion in which the local youth took part. BSF officials also distributed water drums among people of remote areas of the region. A cultural program was also organised comprising of tribal artists of the area. Massive vigour and enthusiasm was witnessed among people on occasion of the event organised by BSF officials.

Anganwadi Centre in dilapidated condition

Planet East,
Kathalia, March 29:

Shobhapur Madhyapara Anganwadi Centre in Kathalia block of Sonamura sub-division has been in a dilapidated condition for the past several years. People of the area have been demanding renovations of the Anganwadi centre for a long time but for some unknown reason authorities are

indifferent towards the situation. The tin roof of the institution has been plagued with rust for several years due to the prolonged negligence of authorities. Numerous holes have emerged on the roof due to the rust and water leaks all over the Anganwadi centre even at the slightest of downpours. Children inside the centre during rains are drenched by water from the leaking

roof on regular basis. A similar incident happened on Wednesday as well which was even recorded on video. Parents of children have been demanding renovation of the Anganwadi centre for a long time but to no avail. Panchayat authorities are reportedly well aware of the situation but have not taken any initiative to renovate the

roof till date. People alleged that even officials of the block's social education department were aware of the situation at the centre. With rainy season just around the corner people are worried about sending their children to the centre as they will have to face a similar situation as present if the roof is not renovated with urgency.

First cheetah cubs born in India

New Delhi, 29 March : After more than 70 years since cheetahs were declared extinct in India, the birth of four cheetah cubs has been welcomed by the country. The environment minister announced this as a "momentous event" and shared the news on Twitter. India has been working towards reintroducing cheetahs for decades and as part of the plan, eight cheetahs were brought from Namibia last year, and 12 more were brought from South Africa last month.

Man detained for misleading police

Planet East,
Bishalgarh, March 29:

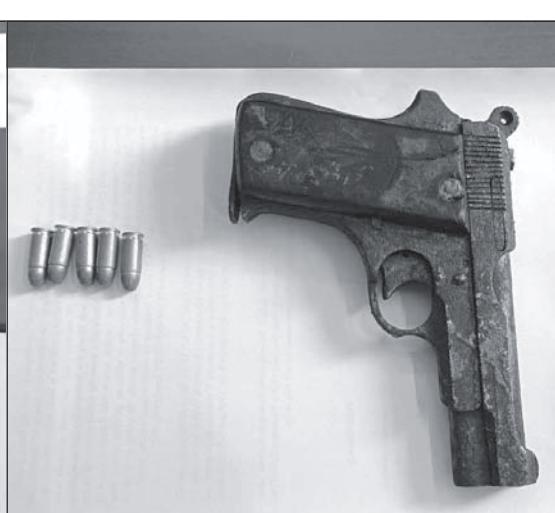
Bishalgarh police detained one Narayan Shukla Das on Wednesday for allegedly misleading police by giving wrong information in a missing diary of his son Gobinda Shukla Das. Resident of No.2 Goutam Nagar area, Narayan Shukla Das had filed a

missing diary for his son with Bishalgarh Police Station on March 23 stating that his son had gone for an interview on the previous day but had not returned since. He had stated the same to media personnel as well after which the report was published in local media outlets. Police officials sprung into action after that and

commenced investigation in the matter. Sub-Inspector Suman Ullah Kazi was given responsibility of the case. Upon investigation, officials found out that Gobinda Shukla Das had eloped with a married woman of the same locality along with her child. The two had been involved in an affair for a long time and Gobinda's family was well aware of the situation. Gobinda

Shukla Das had even informed his family, via a text message on one of his relatives phone, about his deed after eloping with the woman. Following the shocking revelation police officials summoned Narayan Shukla Das at Bishalgarh Police Station for misleading police and hiding the truth from them regarding the matter.

Cannabis, firearm confiscated



Planet East,
Sonamura, March 29:

Sonamura police with assist from BSF jawans in the area confiscated 27kg cannabis from

residence of one Abdul Sattar at ward number 2 Durgapur area on Wednesday morning. Officials also recovered a firearm along with four live rounds from his possession. Officials also apprehended Abdul Sattar and took him to Sonamura Police Station. He would be produced before court on Thursday. Based on a tip off police

officer Shubhankar Debbarma led a team of officers in an operation to raid the residence of Abdul Sattar located on the edge of the international border at

Durgapur area. He was assisted by commandant of BSF's 133 battalion along with both BSF and TSR jawans during the raid. Officials had kept the residence of Abdul Sattar under watch since last night and raided it early in the morning. They found 27kg of cannabis along with the firearm and live rounds upon searching the residence. Abdul Sattar was allegedly involved in multiple other illegal activities in the area. Police would push for custodial remand of the accused in Court and further interrogation of him in remand would reveal more details about the situation, said police official Manik Debnath.

Man struck by lightning dies

Planet East,
Belonia, March 29: One Amal Krishna Tripura, aged 23, passed away on Wednesday after being struck by lightning.



Resident of Rajbari para in Mohinagar ADC village under Belonia Police Station, Amal Krishna Tripura had gone to work at a nearby rubber plantation on Wednesday morning as usual. Fate struck him in the form of lightning while he was working at the plantation. A part of his

body was burnt instantly as he collapsed to the ground. Locals rushed to the spot after hearing the horrid noise and found

him in an unresponsive condition. They took him to Matai Primary Health Centre where doctors on duty declared him dead. He had passed away instantly after being struck by lightning. Family members broke down at the hospital premises at the untimely death of the youth. His body was brought to Belonia Hospital from where it would be handed over to family members after autopsy.

Minister fumes over condition of hostels

Planet East,
Agartala, March 29:

Tribal Welfare Minister of the state, Bikash Debbarma was furious after witnessing the condition of students' hostels around the capital city on Wednesday. Bikash Debbarma visited students' hostels at Suparibagan, Maharani Tulsibati School and Umakanta School on the day. He inspected the various amenities available for students at the hostels and the overall condition of them. The minister was left with a sour taste after the visit and fumed over the government employees



unhygienic condition and lack of cleanliness was clearly evident at all of the buildings, he said. He said that such living condition for children of the state was totally unacceptable and that strict action would be taken against officials responsible for the situation at the earliest.

Accused in road mishap sentenced to 15 month in jail

Planet East,
Khowai, March 29:

Driver of a passenger vehicle Ratan Gope was sentenced to 15 month imprisonment along with a fine of Rs.2500 by Court on Wednesday. He was accused in a road mishap that had severely injured an elderly woman. In an incident on 26 March 2022, Ratan Gope had lost control of the passenger vehicle he was driving, which subsequently rammed into boundary wall of a residence at Amar colony area in Kalyanpur. The vehicle broke through the boundary wall and hit an

elderly woman Anamika Banik who was bathing in her bathroom. The woman had reportedly suffered multiple broken ribs in the incident. Later an official complaint was lodged against driver Ratan Gope with Kalyanpur Police Station on behalf of the woman's family. Investigating Officer Sub-Inspector Biswajit Das had arrested Ratan Gope soon after the incident and subsequently filed charge-sheet against him back in May 31, 2022. After a long trial, Ratan Gope was finally convicted in the matter and was sentenced to 15 months in jail along with a fine of Rs.2500. Advocate Abhijit Bhattacharya led prosecution in the said case.

7 injured in horrific accident

Planet East,
Bishalgarh, March 29:

Seven people sustained severe injuries in a collision between a Maruti car and a bus on National Highway-8 near the front gate of Sepahijala Wildlife Sanctuary on Wednesday. Three out of the seven injured had sustained grievous injuries and were referred to GBP hospital in Agartala, the other four too had significant injuries and were sent to Dr.BRAM hospital in Hapania. The passenger bus involved in the accident was heading towards Agartala from Udaipur while four people on the car were heading in the opposite direction. The two vehicles collided head on in front of Sepahijala Noukaghat



gate. The Maruti car was flattened from the front end by the impact causing grievous injuries to the passengers inside, while three people on the bus were injured. The injured were Nandan Roy (31) s/o Nepal Roy and resident of Kailashahar; Rajib Datta (42) resident of Ramnagar Agartala; Rupak Chandra Roy (39) s/o Late Suman Chandra Roy and resident of Bagma; Sidam Das (50) s/o Late Rajani Kanta Das, resident of North Sonaichari; Bela Das (45) w/o Sidam Das; Mihir Bhowmik (60) s/o Nitai Bhowmik resident of South Santirbazar; Jhanrra Debnath (50) w/o Mihir Bhowmik. Nandan Roy, Rajib Datta and Rupak Chandra Roy were taken to GBP hospital whereas the remaining four were taken to Dr.BRAM hospital. Traffic on the National Highway was halted for a long time due to the horrendous accident.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi poses for a picture with a young child during his visit to the Chundale village, in Wayanad on Tuesday.

Wayanad bypoll soon as Rahul loses Lok Sabha seat

National Desk

Rahul Gandhi was disqualified as Lok Sabha member after he convicted in a criminal defamation case over 'Modi surname' remark and was sentenced to two years in jail. The court granted him bail and suspended the sentence for 30 days to allow him appeal against the ruling. Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha had the rumour mills claiming that the Election Commission may soon announce bypoll to Wayanad constituency from where Gandhi was a member of Lok Sabha. Kumar, however, indicated that the Election Commission would wait as Gandhi has been given a 30-day window to challenge the conviction in appellate court. "Election Commission is not into politics," Kumar said.

"We have six months' time to hold a by-election after a seat falls vacant. There is no hurry. The trial court has given 30 days time for judicial remedy. So, we will wait," he added.

On Tuesday, Rahul Gandhi said he will abide by the Lok Sabha secretariat's notice to vacate his official

bungalow, even as his party leaders accused the government of "threatening and humiliating" him. The secretariat on Monday asked the former Wayanad MP to vacate his official bungalow - 12 Tughlak Lane - by April 22.

Responding to the notice on Tuesday, Gandhi said: "As an elected Member of the Lok Sabha over the last four terms, it is the mandate of the people to which I owe the happy memories of my time spent there. Without prejudice to my rights, I will, of course, abide by the details contained in your letter."

The Jalandhar parliamentary constituency fell vacant after Congress MP Santokh Singh Chaudhary, 76, died of a heart attack while taking part in the Bharat Jodo Jodo on January 14.

The Congress has announced Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary, wife of Santokh Singh Chaudhary, as its party candidate for the bypoll in the Lok Sabha seat.

While submission of nominations for the bypoll will continue till April 20, scrutiny of the same will be held on April 21. Nominations for the by-

election can be withdrawn till April 24.

The bypoll in Jharsuguda was necessitated following the murder of Naba Das on January 29. The Odisha Police is yet to ascertain the motive behind the murder.

The sole assembly constituency of Sohiong in Meghalaya, of which polling could not be held on February 27 due to the death of a candidate, will go to polls on May 10. The polling was postponed in Sohiong following the death of United Democratic Party (UDP) candidate and former minister HDR Lyngdoh on February 20.

The election commission also announced the schedule for the Karnataka assembly election. The polling would take place in a single phase on May 10. The counting of votes will be done on May 13, the CEC said.

Detailing the date of the electors, the CEC said that there are a total of 5.21 crores in the state and the number of 100 plus voters is 16,976. He added that over 58,000 polling stations would be set up across the state.

Kharge attacks Modi, asks him to stop projecting himself as anti-graft crusader

National Desk

The attack came a day after Modi said the government's war on corruption has rattled some parties and forced them to band together to create false narratives about India and damage its democratic institutions. Modi added opposition parties have launched a campaign to save the corrupt.

In a series of tweets in Hindi, Kharge asked Modi who owns ₹20,000 crore in Adani's shell companies. "Are Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Vijay Mallya, Jatin Mehta, etc members of your 'Save Corrupt Campaign'?" he asked, referring to the fugitive economic offenders. "Are you the convenor of this

alliance?" Meghalaya when the NPP fell short of the majority. Kharge asked whether BJP leaders were not involved in the Sanjivani Cooperative scam in Rajasthan, the poshan scam in Madhya Pradesh, and Nagrik Apurti Nigam (NAN) or public distribution corporation scam in Chhattisgarh. The Congress last year sought Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's resignation saying the Comptroller and Auditor General outlined how corruption took place in the supplementary nutrition or poshan scheme. Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot has repeatedly accused Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat of involvement in the Sanjivani scam involving crores of depositors' money.

Land-for-jobs case

Supplementary chargesheet in 2-3 weeks, CBI tells court

National Desk

Delhi Rouse Avenue Court was hearing the case filed against RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal) chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, former Bihar CM Rabri Devi, their daughter Misa Bharti and 13 others accused for providing jobs as substitute in the Indian Railways in consideration for land. Rabri (68) and Misa (46) had appeared before the court while Lalu (74) had moved an application seeking exemption from appearance which was allowed. Special judge Geetanjali Goel inquired from the counsel appearing for CBI that by when is the agency filing the supplementary chargesheet in the matter. The counsel for CBI submitted that the supplementary chargesheet is under process and it will be filed within two to three weeks. The court taking note of the submission of the counsel, listed the matter for further hearing on May 8. The court had earlier taken cognizance on the chargesheet filed in the matter and granted regular bail to all the accused on February 27. The CBI had filed a chargesheet in the case, which the court had taken cognizance of, alleging that Lalu Yadav along with his family members and a few public workers had provided jobs to people as substitutes in Group D posts in railways between 2004 and 2009 in consideration for the sale of their land to the family members of Lalu. It was further alleged in the chargesheet filed by CBI that the land purchased by Lalu's family members was done at prices lower than the prevalent circle rates, even though the going market value of the land was significantly greater. The court had while taking cognizance on the chargesheet on February 27 noted that the chargesheet shows commission of offences under section 120B (criminal conspiracy) read with sections 420 (cheating), 467 (forgery of valuable documents), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating) and 471 (using as genuine a forged documents) IPC (Indian Penal Code) and sections 8 (bribing of a public servant), 9 (bribing a public servant by organization), 11 (public servant obtaining undue advantage), 12 (abetment of offence), 13 (2) (criminal misconduct) read with section 13 (1) (d) of PC (Prevention of Corruption) Act, 1988.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.

Karnataka assembly election voting on May 10, counting on May 13

National Desk

Karnataka, which has 224 seats in the Assembly currently has 119 MLAs of the ruling BJP, while Congress has 75 and its ally JD(S) has 28 seats.

The CEC said there are a total of 5.21 crores in the state and the number of 100 plus voters is 16,976. He said more than 58,000 polling stations would be set up across the state.

"There are 224 Assembly constituencies of which 36 are reserved for the SCs and 15 for the STs. The total electorates in the state are 5,21,73,579 crores of which males are 2.62 crores and females are 2.59 crores. The total number of 80 plus electors is 12.15 lakhs. It is an increase of 32 per cent from 2018. It also includes 16,976 proud electors who are 100 plus. The number of persons with disabilities (PWDs) has increased to 5.55 lakhs. This is an increase of close to 150 per cent," Kumar said.

He said that the first-time voters have increased from 2018-19 by 9.17 lakh in Karnataka. "All young voters who are turning 18 years of age by April 1, will be able to vote in the Karnataka Assembly elections," he said.

The CEC also laid down the security measures for the identified sensitive booths in the state.

Kharge takes 'aam khate hai' jibe after PM Modi's 'bhrashtachari' dig, asks 3 questions

National Desk

Asking Modi to stop calling himself the anti-corruption crusader, Kharge, in a series of tweets, raised three questions. "Who owns 20,000 crore in Adani's shell companies? Are Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Vijay Mallya, Jatin Mehta, etc members of your 'Bhrashtachari Bhagao Abhiyan'? Are you the convenor of this alliance?" Kharge tweeted in Hindi.

Inaugurating an extension of the BJP headquarters in New Delhi on Tuesday, Modi said the crackdown on the corrupt and corruption will continue without being hindered by "false allegations".

"Some parties have launched 'bhrashtachari bachao abhiyan' (save corrupt campaign)," he said in a blistering attack on opposition parties protesting against the alleged misuse of probe agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate. The foundation of the corrupt and corruption have been shaken, he said.

Congress MPs and workers had gathered at the Red Fort at 7pm to participate in the Congress' 'Loktantra Bachao Mashaal Shanti' march.

Hitting back at Modi, Kharge asked, "Why is your government accused of 40% commission in Karnataka? Why are you involved in the No. 1 corrupt government in Meghalaya? Are BJP leaders not involved in the Sanjivani Cooperative scam in Rajasthan, Poshan scam in MP or Naan scam in Chhattisgarh?" Taking a dig at the prime minister, the senior Congress leader said in another tweet, "The ED is on 95% of opposition leaders, and the leader in the BJP washed clean with the washing machine. If your chest is fifty-six inches, form JPC and hold an open press conference for the first time in nine years. Yes! Answer those who do not ask these - 'Aap aam kaise khate hain' (How do you eat mangoes) or 'why don't you get tired'."

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha following his conviction in a criminal defamation case has also become a rallying point for the Opposition.

The Delhi Police on Tuesday released all protesters, including Congress leaders and workers, who were detained from outside the Red Fort as part of its campaign against the government over Rahul Gandhi's disqualification and "to save democracy".

Lok Sabha secretariat revokes disqualification of Lakshadweep MP Mohammad Faisal

National Desk

The secretariat's notification came ahead of the Supreme Court's hearing on Faizal's plea challenging its refusal to restore his membership despite the high court giving a stay on the conviction. With this, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader will be able to attend the ongoing budget session of Parliament.

"In view of order dated 25.01.2023 of the High Court of Kerala, the disqualification of Shri Mohammed Faizal P. P., notified vide Gazette Notification no. 21/4(1)/2023/TO(B) dated the 13 January, 2023 in terms of the provisions of Article 102(1)c) of the Constitution of India read with Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, has ceased to operate subject to further judicial pronouncements", a notification issued by Lok Sabha secretariat said.

The reinstatement of Faizal is expected to have a bearing on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who was disqualified under the same rules last Friday after his conviction and a two-year sentence in a criminal defamation case by a court in Gujarat's Surat. Gandhi's legal team indicated that they will approach the sessions court in Gujarat this weekend and is hopeful to secure a stay in his conviction. A stay in the conviction can prompt the Lok Sabha secretariat to restore Gandhi's membership. The Lok Sabha secretariat has asked Gandhi to vacate his official residence in a month. In his reply, Gandhi assured that he will vacate the house within the stipulated time.

On January 11, the Kavaratti district sessions court in Lakshadweep convicted Faizal, along with three others, including his brother, for attacking with an intention to kill a Congress worker during a violence in the island ahead of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.

But the Kerala high court suspended the conviction. "The ramification of suspending the conviction is enormous and this court is of the view that the conviction and sentence of imprisonment imposed on the accused must be suspended until dismissed with the appeal," justice Bechu Kurian Thomas noted in his order.

PRESS RELEASE

Vice-President appoints Prof. Renu Cheema Vig as the Vice Chancellor of Punjab University

PIB Delhi

The Vice-President, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar, who is also the Chancellor, Panjab University appointed Prof. (Dr.) Renu Cheema Vig, presently the Dean of University Instruction (DUI), as the Vice Chancellor of Panjab University, today.

Exercising the powers conferred by Section 10 of the Panjab University Act 1947, Shri Dhankhar made the appointment of Prof. Vig for a term of three years. It may be noted that subsequent to the resignation of Prof. Raj Kumar as Vice-Chancellor of Panjab University, Prof. Vig, was Acting Vice Chancellor since January 16,

2023. Consequently, the Hon'ble Vice-President constituted a three member Search-cum-Selection Committee on March 21, 2023 for recommending names for the post of Vice Chancellor, Panjab University. Prof. Renu Vig's appointment follows from the committee's report.



25 Countries Come together to Promote Traditional Medicine

PIB Delhi

The B2B Conference & Expo along with National Arogya Summit, held in Guwahati recently under the aegis of Ministry of Ayush under India's presidency of SCO, has successfully brought together 25 SCO countries to promote Traditional Medicine so that it can contribute in the economic development, environment protection and achieve the goal of Health Security among the SCO nations. The event witnessed active participation of H.E. Dr. Thet Khaing Win Minister of Health, Myanmar, H.E. Safiyya Mohamed Saeed Deputy Minister of Health, Maldives and Dr. Munjpara Mahendrabhai MoS for Ayush and Participation of China, Russia and Pakistan in technical sessions through virtual mode was also noteworthy. The Conference and Expo cum Summit was inaugurated by Union Minister of Ayush and Ports, Shipping & Waterways Shri Sarbananda Sonowal.

India attained the SCO full member status in 2017 and after assuming the Presidency of SCO Council of Heads of State for the year 2023 on 17th September 2022 at Samarkand in Uzbekistan, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had remarked that India would take the initiative for a new SCO Expert working Group on Traditional Medicine. Accordingly, Ministry of Ayush has taken various initiatives on Traditional Medicine during India's SCO Presidency viz., organized virtual conference of experts and practitioners of Traditional Medicine, conducted First Expert Working Group (EWG) on Traditional Medicine wherein Draft Regulations of the EWG on Traditional Medicine were approved at expert level and will be further subjected to other respective country administrative procedures and finally to be adopted at the Head of the States Summit. It is in this light that the Guwahati SCO B2B Conference and Expo acquire importance and could successfully take the momentum further.

On the sidelines of the SCO B2B conference, Ministry of Ayush also had a bilateral meeting with Myanmar to discuss the cooperation on Ayurveda and Traditional Medicine. The MoU for the same was signed between the Ministry of Ayush, India and Ministry of Health, Myanmar on 29th August 2016, which is automatically extended and valid up till 28th August 2026. The Indian side was led by Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister for Ayush and Ports, Shipping & waterways. Myanmar side was led by H.E. Dr. Thet Khaing Win, Minister, Ministry of Health, Myanmar.

This Conference was attended by a total of 214 participants, out of which 83 were international delegates from 16 SCO Countries and 131 were Indian delegates. A total of 30 presentations were made during the said event of which 19 were from SCO Countries. 11 presentations were delivered by the Indian side, including presentations from Ministry of Ayush and the industry. A total of 11 sessions were held during the said conference. Active participation by all representatives across various discussions/presentations, trade activities and concurrently running National Arogya Summit/Expo was a remarkable achievement.

While 56 exhibitors, including industries, educational institutes and Ayush services providers exhibited their products, institutions & infrastructure, were involved in the B2B expo in Guwahati, the encouraging response came from 60 buyers from 11 countries in the form of keen interest. During the conference and the Expo more than 125 one-to-one meetings were held between buyers & sellers. The trade interest was received from 13 SCO countries in the fields of Ayurveda Education, Traditional Medicine Products and developing Infrastructure for providing Ayurveda and Yoga for Medical Value Travel. These B2B meeting participants were from Tajikistan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Bahrain, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and India.

POSHAN Abhiyaan addresses the malaise of malnutrition by adopting a synergised and result oriented approach

PIB Delhi

Government has accorded high priority to the issue of malnutrition and is making serious efforts to address this issue. POSHAN Abhiyaan, a flagship scheme of the Government was launched in 2018 to address the malaise of malnutrition by adopting a synergised and result oriented approach. Further, to address various policy and systemic needs, the efforts under the Supplementary Nutrition Programme under Anganwadi Services, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and POSHAN Abhiyaan have been re-aligned as 'Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0' or Mission Poshan 2.0 for maximizing nutritional outcomes. It seeks to address the challenges of malnutrition in children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers through a strategic shift in nutrition content and delivery and by creation of a convergent eco-system to develop and promote practices that nurture health, wellness and immunity. The scheme has been rolled out in all 36 States/UTs of the country. There are 7074 sanctioned projects under Mission Poshan 2.0 with 13.9 lakh Anganwadi Centres across the country. 9.94 crore beneficiaries, namely, pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under the age of 6 years, are registered for Anganwadi Services on the ICT application, Poshan Tracker, as on date, out of whom 91% are Aadhar-verified. Mission Poshan 2.0 is designed to address the issue of malnutrition through transparency, accountability, balanced diets, diet diversity and quality, greater grassroots involvement and last-mile delivery of services supported by key strategies.

ABHA-based Scan & Share service helps over 10 Lakh patients save time spent in hospital queues

PIB Delhi

The National Health Authority (NHA) under its Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) scheme is enabling digital interventions for bringing efficiency in delivery of healthcare services. One such intervention is the Scan and Share service that is enabling instant registrations for patients at OPD (Out-patient Department) blocks of participating hospitals. The utilization of the service has crossed 10 Lakh patient registrations within six months of its launch. It is notable to see that the service clocked 5 Lakh patient registrations only last month (23 Feb 2023). The impact and acceptance of the Scan and Share service is evident from the steep rise in numbers. Speaking about the Scan and Share service, CEO, NHA said - "ABDM aims to build a seamless healthcare delivery ecosystem using digital solutions. With the Scan and Share feature, hospitals are offering digital registration services to their patients via direct sharing of their ABHA profile. This is helping patients get instant registration tokens without having to stand in queues and without entering many details. Currently, the per day average is about 25,000 OPD tokens. We intend to cross 1 Lakh tokens per day soon. Further, we plan to extend the feature for other interactions between the patients and healthcare service providers." The Scan and Share service works on a simple modality of QR-code based direct information sharing. The participating hospitals display their unique QR codes at their patient registration counters. The patients use their smartphones to scan the QR

Wheat Based Nutrition Programme (WBPNP) of Anganwadi Services and RMK

PIB Delhi

At the time of setting up of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), it was a prominent Government body working in the area of extending concessional micro-finance loans to poor women through Intermediary Organisation (IMOs). However, over a period of time, substantial alternative credit facility mechanisms have become available to women entrepreneurs through various Government initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojna, Stand-up India, women-SHG movement under DAY-NRLM(Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission), and therefore the RMK has lost its relevance. In line with the recommendations of the Expenditure Management Commission set up by the Ministry of Finance and the report on Rationalisation of Government Bodies authored by the Principal Economic Adviser, Department of Economic Affairs, Government has decided to close down RMK to improve efficiency and utilize the available resources optimally.

In pursuance of the Hon'ble Prime Minister's Address on 75th Independence Day, Fortified Rice have to be provided through every Government Scheme by the year 2024. Therefore, 21 States/UTs were allocated Fortified Rice in the 2nd quarter of FY 2021-22 and only Fortified Rice in lieu of normal rice has been allocated from the 3rd quarter onwards to all the State/UTs which helps in fighting malnutrition and anaemia in women and children arising due to deficiency of micro nutrients like Iron, Folic Acid and Vitamin B-12. Under Wheat Based Nutrition Programme (WBPNP) of Anganwadi Services, this Ministry has so far allocated 731962 MTs of Fortified Rice in FY 2021-22 and 1226115 MTs of Fortified rice in FY 2022-23 to all the States/UTs.

Skill India certifies 910 carpenters involved in the New Parliament Project

PIB Delhi

As an example of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', India takes pride in the fact that the New Parliament, the existing temple of democracy which soon completes its 100 years; is now being built by our own people, our very own "Karigars" (workers). And recognising the efforts of these workers, the Furniture and Fitting Skill Council (FFSC) working under the aegis of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has various programmes which they give to different government agencies to fulfil the skill development initiatives. The ministry along with NARSI Group has trained and certified 910 carpenters under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme. The project is aimed to augment the skill training of carpenters and to enable them in becoming an asset in creating a world class infrastructure for the New Parliament Building, representing India's progress and democratic values.

The event was organised at the parliament and attended by senior officials and industry stakeholders including Dr. K.K. Dwivedi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE); Shri Deepak Aggarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA); Shri Ashwini Mittal, NPB, Central Public Works Department (CPWD); Shri Sushil Aggarwal, Director, National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), and Vivek Sharma, Manager – Strategy, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a component of Skill India's flagship scheme Pradhan Mantri Kaushal

Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and is an assessment process used to evaluate a person's existing skill sets, knowledge and experience gained either by formal, non-formal or informal learning. Within the programme, pre-screening guidance, counselling, and support will be provided to ensure the overall growth of the candidates. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has various programmes which they give to different government agencies to fulfil the skill development initiatives. The ministry along with NARSI group has earlier trained more than 6,000 carpenters under the various RPL schemes. The process helps in aligning the competencies of the unregulated workforce of the country to the standardized National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) to enhance employability opportunities and reduce the skill gap. Dr. Krishna Kumar Dwivedi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) said that the parliament building is the epitome of India's rich democratic heritage, and it is the symbol of India's valour and pride. Today's ceremony marks a significant milestone in empowering our carpenters by providing them with the best hands-on training, formal certification which will further enable the recognition of skill sets and assist in establishing a top-of-the-line infrastructure in the New Parliament Building. Through this training, the prospects for the candidates will increase in domestic and in international markets as well. With this training, our carpenters will have the capacity to create world-class infrastructure and undertake renowned projects that meet the demands of the industry. This initiative underscores the Government's initiative to build a skilled workforce that can drive our nation's growth and development, he added.

Shri Narsi D Kularia, Chairman, Furniture & Fitting's Skill Council and Managing Director, Narsi Group said that it is a moment of great pride for our community of carpenters to be associated with this visionary project. In our capacity, we are taking all the necessary measures to fully educate our workers and provide them with complete safety to ensure that the New Parliament Building has the state-of-the-art infrastructure. Being a carpenter myself, I comprehend the value of skilling and certification in building capabilities. To boost the formal skill training of the candidates, we have undertaken several programmes such as Meri Skill Meri Pehchan, National Apprenticeship Promotional Scheme (NAPS) and created a Centre of Excellence to make them an active participant in the economic growth. With this, we look forward for certifying & recognizing Skills of 25,000 carpenters in the coming months, Pan India, he added.

The project aims at certifying candidates to increase their relevance in the volatile job market and encourage them in contributing towards nation-building. Going forward, the workers will be upskilled in multiple trades across construction, electrical, plumbing, pottery and more. It will not only expose them to digital literacy and entrepreneurial opportunities, but also upgrade them in technical skills.

Ministry of Tourism organises two day Chintan Shivir for promoting "Tourism in Mission Mode"

PIB Delhi

In order to deliberate, ideate and devise strategies for promoting "Tourism in Mission Mode", the Ministry of Tourism organized a two-day Chintan Shivir on March 28 and March 29 at New Delhi where all the States, Industry Associations and Industry leaders took part.

The agenda for discussions on the first day was set by Minister of Tourism, Culture and DONER, Shri G. Kishan Reddy. He outlined the vision of the Government to leverage tourism as a vehicle for socio-economic development, job creation and achieving sustainable development goals for the country. He stated that this is the most opportune moment to unveil a shared vision for future of India's tourism, guiding its course for next 25 years to make India as the most sought-after travel destination in the world when India celebrates 100 years of Independence in 2047. He pointed out the three key pillars of developing tourism in mission mode - active participation of the States, Convergence of Government Programs and Public Private Partnerships. He stated that one major step would be to develop National Strategies and Models for providing guidance to the States in developing their tourism potential. The Ministry has recently formulated National strategies for development of various tourism sectors such as Rural Tourism, Adventure Tourism, MICE Tourism, Ecotourism, Medical Tourism, Sustainable Tourism.

Second G20 Sherpas Meeting in Kumarakom, Kerala

PIB Delhi

The Second G20 Sherpas meeting under India's G20 Presidency, chaired by India's G20 Sherpa Shri Amitabh Kant is set to take place in the picturesque village of Kumarakom, Kerala, from March 30 to April 2, 2023. The four-day gathering of over 120 delegates from G20 Members, 9 invitee countries, and various international and regional organizations will hold multilateral discussions on G20's economic and developmental priorities as well as on addressing contemporary global challenges. The deliberations will focus both on policy approaches and concrete implementation.

The 2nd Sherpas Meeting will work on a range of cross-cutting issues of global concern, and will encompass the work being done under the 13 Working Groups within the Sherpa track. Further, 11 Engagement Groups and 4 Initiatives (Research and Innovations Initiative Gathering or RIIG, Empower, Space Economy Leaders' Meeting or SELM and Chief Scientific Advisers Roundtable or CSAR) are also feeding policy recommendations from the perspectives of the civil society, private sector, academia, women, youth, scientific advancement and research. The deliberations of the Sherpa Meetings will take forward the outcomes of various Sherpa Track and Finance Track Meetings, and will form the basis of the Leaders' Declaration, slated to be adopted at the New Delhi Summit in September 2023.

India has selected its G20 priorities keeping in view the diverse global challenges of the day, the concerns of developing countries as well as the need for greater momentum for collective action to take forward the shared international agenda, especially

ly the development and environment agenda. In this context, India's G20 theme "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" - "One Earth, One Family, One Future" aptly encapsulates the shared vision of the G20 for galvanising wide support and arriving at decisive, ambitious, inclusive, and action-oriented outcomes. Such outcomes require the G20 to come together and act as one family to instil hope. Ongoing deliberations during India's G20 Presidency include Green Development, Climate Finance & Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE); Accelerated, Inclusive & Resilient Growth; Accelerating progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Technological Transformation & Digital Public Infrastructure; Multilateral Institutions for the 21st century; and Women-led development. These priorities reflect the needs of the Global South, articulated by 125 participating countries, at the first ever Voice of Global South summit, hosted by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in January 2023.

The Meeting will kick start on 30 March 2023 with two high level side-events on (i) Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI); and (ii) Green Development. The Digital Public Infrastructure side-event, to be organised in partnership with NASSCOM, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL), will begin with an immersive digital experience for all G20 delegates, followed by multiple panel discussions on global challenges and opportunities for building a growth-oriented and inclusive DPI. The DPI Side event will be addressed by Nandan Nilekani (Co-Founder and Chairman of Infosys Technologies Limited), Thierry Breton (Commissioner for Internal Market).

China threatens retaliation if Tsai and McCarthy meet



In this image made from video, Taiwan's Presidential office secretary general Lin Chia-lung, left, President Tsai Ing-wen, center, and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu wave before Tsai's departure on an overseas trip at Taoyuan International Airport in Taipei, Taiwan, Wednesday, March 29, 2023. China has threatened "resolute countermeasures" over a planned meeting between Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and Speaker of the United States House Speaker Kevin McCarthy during an upcoming visit in Los Angeles by the head of the self-governing island democracy.

International Desk

China has threatened "resolute countermeasures" over a planned meeting between Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and Speaker of the United States House Speaker Kevin McCarthy during an upcoming visit in Los Angeles by the head of the self-governing island democracy, reports The Associated Press.

Diplomatic pressure against Taiwan has ramped up recently, with Beijing poaching its dwindling number of diplomatic allies while also sending military fighter jets flying toward the island on a near daily basis. Earlier this month, Honduras established diplomatic relations with China, leaving Taiwan with only 13 countries that recognize it as a sovereign state. Tsai is scheduled to transit through New York on March 30 before heading to Guatemala and Belize. On April 5, she's expected to stop in Los Angeles on her way back to Taiwan, at which time the meeting with McCarthy is tentatively scheduled. Spokesperson for the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office Zhu Fenglian at a news conference Wednesday denounced Tsai's stopover on her way to diplomatic allies in Central America and demanded that no U.S. officials meet with her.

"We firmly oppose this and will take resolute countermeasures," Zhu said. The U.S. should "refrain from arranging Tsai Ing-wen's transit visits and even contact with American officials, and take concrete actions to ful-

fill its solemn commitment not to support Taiwan independence," she said.

Transit visits through the United States during broader international travel by the Taiwanese president have been routine over the years, senior U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing have underscored to their Chinese counterparts.

In such unofficial visits in recent years, Tsai has met with members of Congress and the Taiwanese diaspora and has been welcomed by the chairperson of the American Institute in Taiwan, the U.S. government-run nonprofit that carries out unofficial relations with Taiwan.

Tsai transited through the United States six times between 2016 and 2019 before slowing international travel with the coronavirus pandemic. In reaction to those visits, China lashed out rhetorically against the U.S. and Taiwan.

However, the planned meeting with McCarthy has triggered fears of a heavy-handed Chinese reaction amid heightened frictions between Beijing and Washington over U.S. support for Taiwan, trade and human rights issues.

Following a visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022, Beijing launched missiles over the area, deployed warships across the median line of the Taiwan Strait and carried out military exercises in a simulated blockade of the island. Beijing also suspended climate talks with the U.S. and restricted military

to-military communication with the Pentagon.

McCarthy, R-Calif., has said he would meet with Tsai when she is in the U.S. and has not ruled out the possibility of traveling to Taiwan in a show of support.

Beijing sees official American contact with Taiwan as encouragement to make the island's decades-old de facto independence permanent, a step U.S. leaders say they don't support. Pelosi, D-Calif., was the highest-ranking elected American official to visit the island since then-Speaker Newt Gingrich in 1997. Under the "One China" policy, the U.S. acknowledges Beijing's view that it has sovereignty over Taiwan, but considers Taiwan's status as unsettled. Taipei is an important partner for Washington in the Indo-Pacific.

U.S. officials are increasingly worried about China attempting to make good on its long-stated goal of bringing Taiwan under its control by force if necessary. The sides split amid civil war in 1949 and Beijing sees

U.S. politicians conspiring with Tsai's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party to make the separation permanent and stymy China's rise as a global power.

The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which has governed U.S. relations with the island, does not require Washington to step in militarily if China invades but makes it American policy to ensure Taiwan has the resources to defend itself and to prevent any unilateral change of status by Beijing.

Tensions spiked earlier this year when President Joe Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon shot down after it traversed the continental United States. The Biden administration has also said U.S. intelligence findings show that China is weighing sending arms to Russia for its ongoing war in Ukraine, but has no evidence Beijing has done so yet.

China, however, has provided Russia with an economic lifeline and political support, and President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping met in Moscow earlier this month. That was the first face-to-face meeting between the allies since before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine more than a year ago.

The Biden administration postponed a planned visit to Beijing by Secretary of State Antony Blinken following the balloon controversy but has signaled it would like to get such a visit back on track. The blaze in Ciudad Juarez is one of the deadliest incidents to afflict migrants in Mexico in the past few decades.

US' Nashville school head, killed in shooting, would 'run to' danger

International Desk

"If there was any trouble in that school, she would run to it, not from it," Jackie Bailey said of her friend Katherine Koonce, head of The Covenant School. "She was trying to protect those kids ... That's just what I believe."

Koonce was one of six people killed in the shooting in Tennessee, including three 9-year-old children identified by police as Hallie Scruggs, Evelyn Dieckhaus and William Kinney. Also killed were Cynthia Peak, 61, a substitute teacher, and Mike Hill, 61, a custodian.

Hallie Scruggs was the daughter of Chad Scruggs, the lead pastor at the Covenant Presbyterian Church, according to a statement released by a Presbyterian Church in Dallas where the elder Scruggs had served as an associate pastor.

Venice hunts for 'idiot' who jumped off 3-storey building into canal

International Desk

The video of the incident that is now doing rounds on the internet shows an unidentified man wearing only boxer shorts jumping into one of Venice's canals. He also appears to be coming out of the canal uninjured and receiving a towel from a friend. "This 'subject' should be given a certificate of STUPIDITY and a lot of kicks ... we are trying to identify him, to report him, him and his buddy below who made the stupid video for social media," Brugnaro wrote in Italian.

The mayor has launched a probe to determine how the man was able to enter the private residential building and how he was able to get to the rooftop, CNN reported.

"He risked his life in that jump, but

he is also a delinquent. They don't understand the danger they create in this city. What if a boat would have been passing below?" said Brugnaro. The mayor, also, criticised publicity stunts that are carried out to attract viewers on social media, and urged everyone to help identify the person – who he referred to as a tourist – but not to "like" the video on social media.

"They do these stupid things on social for the likes," the mayor said, adding that "we will use the law to prosecute him."

Meanwhile, this incident is just the latest account of people, especially tourists, behaving badly in Italy. According to CNN, last year, over 40 tourists were arrested for swimming in Venice canals and one man was arrested for surfing down the Grand Canal.

39 killed in fire at migration centre on Mexico-US border

International Desk

The incident on Monday night, one of the deadliest in recent history at the Mexico-US border, was provoked by Venezuelan and Central American migrants in a facility in the city bordering Texas, said President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Tuesday morning. The fire was started slightly before 10 p.m. in the male-only center for adults, the National Migration Institute said in a statement. "This had to do with a protest that they started when they realized that they were going to be deported, moved, and as a protest they put cots in the door of the shelter and they set them on fire," said AMLO, as the president is known, at a press briefing. "It's very sad that this has happened." Another 29 migrants were injured by the fire and were transferred to local hospitals, some in serious condition, the statement added. The severe injuries and burns are making the process of identifying victims more complicated, said Venezuela's Ambassador in Mexico Francisco Arias Cardenas. Guatemala's migration office said in a statement that at least 28 of the victims were from that country. The dead have yet to be identified by name, Lopez Obrador said.

International Desk

At least 39 migrants from Central and South America died after a fire broke out late on Monday at a migrant holding center in the Mexican northern border city of Ciudad Juarez, the government's National Migration Institute (INM) said on Tuesday. In a statement, the INM said there were 68 adult men from Central and South America staying at the facility in the city opposite El Paso, Texas, and that 29 of them were also injured in the blaze and taken to four hospitals in the area.

A Reuters witness saw bodies lined up in body bags and confirmed that the fire, whose origins are under investigation, had been extinguished. Many of the migrants at the facility were Venezuelan, according to the Reuters witness. "I was here since one in the afternoon waiting for the father of my children, and when 10 p.m. rolled around smoke started coming out from everywhere," said 31-year-old Vianely Infante, a Venezuelan national.

Her husband, 27-year-old Eduard Caraballo, was in a holding cell inside the facility when the fire started and survived by dousing himself in water and pressing against a door, said Infante, who added she saw many dead bodies lying on the ground. A Mexican official said the dead also included migrants from Guatemala and Honduras.

The fire, one of the most lethal to hit the country in years, occurred as the U.S. and Mexico are battling to cope with record levels of border crossings at their shared frontier. Recent weeks have seen a build-up of migrants in Mexican border cities as authorities attempt to process asylum requests using a new U.S. government app known as CBP One. Many migrants feel the process is taking too long and earlier this month hundreds of mostly Venezuelan migrants got into a scuffle with U.S. officials at the border after their frustration welled up about securing asylum appointments.

In January, the Biden administration said it would expand Trump-era restrictions to rapidly expel Cuban, Nicaraguan and Haitian migrants caught illegally crossing the US-Mexico border in an effort to contain the border flows.

At the same time, the United States said it would allow up to 30,000 people from those three countries plus Venezuela to enter the country by air each month.

The blaze in Ciudad Juarez is one of the deadliest incidents to afflict migrants in Mexico in the past few decades.

2 Pakistanis arrested in Greece for plotting terrorist attack at Jewish restaurant



International Desk

The Greek police has arrested two Pakistani nationals on Tuesday who were allegedly planning the attack, Times of Israel reported.

The Israeli Prime Minister's Office (PMO), in a statement, said the two nabbed Pakistani nationals were part of an Iranian terror network.

"The affair that was uncovered in Greece is a severe case that was successfully thwarted by the Greek security forces. It was an additional attempt by Iran to perpetrate terrorism against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad", the Israeli PMO said.

"After the start of the investigation of the suspects in Greece, the Mossad rendered intelligence assistance in unravelling the infrastructure, its work methods and the link to Iran. "The investigation revealed that the infrastructure that operated in Greece is part of an extensive Iranian network run from Iran and spanning many countries", it added.

The two unnamed suspects, aged 27 and 29, are reportedly being held at police headquarters in central Athens.

A third man, who is not in Greece, is wanted for questioning and has been charged in absentia.

Local media reports indicated that the target of the attack was a Chabad House, which includes a Kosher restaurant and also hosts other religious services.

It is noteworthy that Pakistani terrorists who carried out the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai also targeted the Chabad House in the Indian metropolis.

Greek Police said the suspects had chosen a target of "high symbolism" and were making final preparations for the attack. "Their aim was not only to cause the loss of life of innocent citizens but also to undermine the sense of security in the country while hurting public institutions and threatening (Greece's) international relations," the Greek police said.

The two Pakistanis were said to be a part of a "wide Iranian network that operates from Iran and out of many other countries".

Shots fired

Body camera video shows how US cops killed Nashville school attacker

International Desk

Six people, including three children, were killed at a small, private Christian school just south of downtown Nashville on Monday after a shooter opened fire inside the building of about 200 students. Police received a call about an active shooter at The Covenant School — a Presbyterian school — around 10.15 am. Authorities said that about 15 minutes after that call to police, the shooter was dead. The remaining students were ferried to a safe location to be reunited with their parents. The suspect, Audrey Hale, 28, was a former student at the school. Hale did not target specific victims — among them three 9-year-olds and the head of the school — but did target "this school, this church building," police spokesperson Don Aaron said at a news conference on Tuesday. News agency Reuters reported that when police officer Rex Engelbert arrived at the school on Monday, he immediately retrieved a rifle from the trunk of his patrol car. Three minutes later, the shooter was dead, dropped by rounds Engelbert fired. "Let's go," Engelbert directed others, as police quickly closed in on the shooter who had killed three 9-year-old school children and three adults at the Covenant School.

Engelbert is a four-year veteran of the force and Collazo a nine-year veteran, police said. Collazo had previously worked as a paramedic with the SWAT team and had special weapons training. Police Chief John Drake told reporters.

"I was really impressed that with all that was going on, the danger, that somebody took control and said 'let's go, let's go, let's go,'" Drake said at a news conference on Tuesday.

What does the body camera video show?

The body camera video shows officers searching room by room for the shooter as a school alarm blared. They follow the sound of gunfire, rushing up a flight of stairs. As police converge on the shooter, someone yells "reloading" and Engelbert appears to be the first officer to fire, squeezing off four rounds that down the shooter.

Another officer with a long gun, standing between Engelbert and Collazo, may have also fired a round. Then Collazo quickly moves forward, firing four more shots with his handgun.

Fresh clashes in France pension protests fuel domestic crisis

International Desk

The day of nationwide protests and strikes called by unions is the tenth since mid-January against the law, which includes raising the retirement age from 62 to 64. The movement has turned into a major challenge to Macron who won a second term in elections last year and presents the biggest crisis of his second mandate. An eleventh day of protest action has now been scheduled by unions for April 6. Some 13,000 police deployed nationwide on Tuesday after last Thursday saw the most violent clashes yet between protesters and security forces. French police have been accused of using excessive force -- both by protesters and rights bodies -- and this has further fuelled the anger of demonstrators.

In eastern Paris, police fired tear gas and launched a charge after some protesters, dressed in black with their faces covered, raided a grocery store and started a fire as the march closed in on Place de la Nation.

Police said at least 27 people were arrested in the capital by the afternoon and that they had been targeted by protesters throwing stones and bottles.

Protesters delayed trains at Gare de Lyon, one of the busiest stations in Paris, walking on the rails and lighting flares in what they called a show of solidarity for a railway staffer who lost an eye in a previous protest.

In the western city of Nantes, protesters threw projectiles at security forces who fired back tear gas, an AFP reporter said. A bank was set on fire as were rubbish bins around the city.

Police deployed water cannon in the southeastern city of Lyon and tear gas in the northern city of Lille after protesters caused damage including smashing a bus stop.

Rubbish collectors in Paris are from Wednesday suspending a three-week strike that has seen thousands of tonnes of garbage accumulate in the capital, the CGT union said.

But it said the move was to allow workers' coordination to "go on strike again even more strongly" as fewer workers were now striking.

US lawmakers introduce bill seeking reform in H-1B L-1 visa norms

International Desk

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The L-1 is the other type of work visa the US issues to professionals looking to work in the country. Unlike the H-1B, where an individual is looking to join an American company, the L-1 visa is issued to those who are already employed by the company in another country, and who are merely relocating to an American office. Two influential Senators -- Dick Durbin and Chuck Grassley -- have introduced this legislation in the US Senate.

The co-sponsors include Senators Tommy Tuberville, Bernie Sanders, Sherrod Brown, and Richard Blumenthal.

The H-1B and L-1 Visa Reform Act will reduce fraud and abuse in the immigration system, provide protections for American workers and visa holders, and require more transparency in the recruitment of foreign workers, a media release said on Tuesday. The legislation proposes to place new wage, recruitment and attestation requirements on employers looking to hire L-1 and H-1B workers, and employers seeking to hire H-1B employees to post those jobs on the Department of Labour (DOL) website, it said.

It also proposes to give DOL the authority to place a fee on labour condition applications and use it to hire an additional 200 DOL employees and make reforms to the H-1B programme by prioritising the H-1B visa issuance for workers with higher levels of education in STEM and amending the definition of a "specialty occupation" to require a bachelor's degree or higher, according to the release.

The legislation seeks reforms to the L-1 nonimmigrant programme,

Walnuts are the new brain superfood for stressed students

Research

Feature Desk

In the weeks before their next exam, stressed-out college students may wish to add walnuts to their daily diet.

In a recent clinical experiment, undergraduate students' self-reported indices of mental health and biomarkers of general health were positively impacted by walnut consumption during their university studies. According to a University of South Australia study that was published in the journal *Nutrients*, walnuts may be able to mitigate the negative effects of academic stress on the gut flora, particularly in females.

Lead researchers, PhD student Mauritz Herselman and Associate Professor Larisa Bobrovskaya, say the results add to the growing body of evidence linking walnuts with improved brain and gut health.

"Students experience academic stress throughout their studies, which has a negative effect on their mental health, and they are particularly vulnerable during exam periods," Herselman says.

Eighty undergraduate students split into treatment and control groups were clinically assessed in three intervals, at the beginning of a 13-week university semester, during the examination period and two weeks after the examination period. Those in the treatment group were given walnuts to consume daily for 16 weeks over these three intervals.

"We found that those who consumed about half a cup of walnuts every day showed improvements in self-reported mental health indicators. Walnut consumers also showed improved metabolic biomarkers and overall sleep quality in the longer term."

Students in the control group reported increased stress and depression levels in the leadup to exams but those in the treatment group did not. The walnut consumers also reported a significant drop in feelings associated with depression between the first and final visits, compared to the controls.

Previous research has shown that walnuts are full of omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, as well as melatonin (sleep-inducing hormone), polyphenols, folate and vitamin E, all of which promote a healthy brain and gut.

Anxiety to your advantage

Lifestyle Desk

When my son was born with a congenital heart condition, like any parent, I felt lost. He required open-heart surgery and I felt overwhelming uncertainty for what the future might hold. I understood that the outcome might not be good, but I also knew that a positive outcome was possible if I could provide the best care for him.

At a time like that, it was hard to focus on those positives, but I learned that I could use my anxiety to keep me energised. Knowing that the future was uncertain but that my actions could influence the outcome, my anxiety helped me to function in what otherwise might have felt like a hopeless situation. I believe that anxiety can be a tool to help us to cope with the challenges that life throws at us.

However, for many people anxiety can be suffocating, and has become synonymous with feeling bad.

When I was growing up in the 1980s, stress was the go-to shorthand for emotional discomfort. How's your wedding planning? Oh it's great, but I'm stressed. How is your chemotherapy going? Pretty stressful, but I'm managing.

Today, we seem to be living in the age of anxiety. Google Trends shows that searches for the word anxiety have increased over 300% since 2004. Anxiety is on our minds, with good reason. As much as 31% of the US population will experience an anxiety disorder at one point in their lives, which can range from generalised anxiety disorder to panic disorder and social anxiety disorder – which is one of the most common types.

Outside of medical diagnoses, the word also seems to have slipped into our vernacular. It has usurped stress as our language placeholder for feeling uncomfortable – anxious about giving a presentation, about going on a blind date, about starting a new job. The word has become ubiquitous and absorbed meaning, amoeba-like, to encompass everything from dread to pleasant anticipation. Too often, the mere use of it casts these experiences in a negative light, infusing them with threat and a touch of the not-quite-right.

Then there are anxiety disorders – they are the most common of the mental health diagnoses, more common than depression and addiction. Hundreds of millions of people across the world will be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. Rates of these disorders, especially among the young, continue to rise, as they have been for well over two decades. Yet, there are dozens of validated therapies, 30 different anti-anxiety medications, hundreds of excellent self-help books, and thousands of rigorous scientific studies. While they certainly can help individuals, why have these solutions failed to reduce the scale of the problem so spectacularly? As I put forward in my book,



Future Tense, one reason for this failure is that mental health professionals, myself included, have unintentionally misled people about the nature of anxiety in the past – a misunderstanding that has harmed us. I propose a new, more helpful and hopeful approach to understanding and living with anxiety in the 21st Century – to use it to your advantage.

Negative emotions like anxiety have long gotten a bad rap – irrational at best, destructive at worst. The ancient Roman poet Horace wrote over 2,000 years ago, anger is a short madness. But over the course of the past 150 years, starting with Darwin's *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, we have actually come to understand that emotions like anger, fear, and anxiety are more advantageous than dangerous. Like the opposable thumb and language, emotions are tools for survival, forged and refined over hundreds of thousands of years of evolution to protect and ensure that humans can thrive. They do this by providing two things: information and preparation.

Anxiety is information about the uncertain future: something bad could happen, but something good could still happen, too. Anxiety is waiting for your Covid test to come back positive or negative, or anticipating that difficult conversation with your boss that might go well or might go completely sideways. Anxiety isn't, however, information about certain and present threats – that's fear, like seeing a shark fin rise out of the water mere yards away from where you're swimming. Fear primarily prepares us to fight, take flight, or freeze, whereas anxiety is a civilisation builder. It prepares us to persist, remain vigilant, and act in ways that avert future disaster but also can make positive possibilities into reality.

When we're anxious, not only are we more creative and innovative, but our brains respond with greater focus and efficiency when we face

the unpredictable. Anxiety is thus more than the "fear circuitry" of the brain. Anxiety also activates our drives for reward and social connection, impelling us to work for what we care about, connect with others, and be more productive. That's why, from the perspective of evolutionary theory, anxiety isn't destructive. Anxiety embodies the logic of survival.

Yet, evolutionary theory and research have not trickled down into the public consciousness – or into that of most medical professionals. Far from treating anxiety as a potential ally, we treat it like an enemy howling at the gates. While anxiety disorders can be paralysing, the widespread use of the term anxiety to mean a general ill-feeling is problematic because it means we accept two key fallacies: (a) experiencing anxiety is dangerous and destructive; and (b) the solution to its pain is to prevent or eradicate it. It is a way of thinking that has led us to perceive daily anxieties as malfunctions to fix. Yet, it is only anxiety disorders – when extreme anxiety and our attempts to cope with it interfere with our daily lives – that are recognised as mental health conditions. The emotion of anxiety, in contrast, should be considered healthy and normal – and even beneficial.

The inexorable logic of this disease metaphor requires us to take it even one step further – like other illnesses, from infectious diseases to cancers, until we have suppressed anxiety, we cannot be mentally healthy, just as the mere presence of a cancerous cell means that we're sick.

This disease metaphor traps us rather than uplifts us because it causes us to mistake normal anxiety for a disorder, and to fear, avoid, and suppress any anxious feelings as soon as we experience them.

Unlike an infectious disease or cancer, avoidance and suppression of anxiety will almost certainly amplify it, while simultaneously exacting an opportunity cost by preventing us

from finding productive ways to cope and to build skills of emotional resilience. This is the vicious cycle of anxiety, spiralling it out of control: feeling anxiety as dangerous, fearing it, and ultimately fleeing from it through suppression and avoidance.

The harm caused by the disease metaphor for anxiety doesn't stop there. It also blocks us from seeing that anxiety isn't just something to soothe and manage. Anxiety is something to harness and leverage because it evolved to help us persist, innovate, socially connect, and remain hopeful in the face of uncertainty so that we can create a better future.

But if anxiety is so great, why does it feel so bad?

Anxiety must feel bad to do its job. Even the word's origins, derived from the ancient Latin and Greek words for choked, painfully constricted, and uneasy, reflect this essential unpleasantry. Only something so unpleasant can consistently compel us to sit up and pay attention, can effectively demand that we work hard to avoid future danger and chart a more positive course.

Yet, most of us have learned to avoid and ignore this useful emotion – to our detriment. Think of anxiety like a smoke alarm, warning that the house is catching fire, and priming us to take useful action. What if, instead of running out of the house and calling the fire department we just ignored the alarm, or removed the battery, or avoided places in the house where the alarm was loudest. So, instead of benefitting from the alarm, putting out the fire, and preventing future fires, we just hope and pray the house doesn't burn down. We can't ignore the role that unrelenting stress and adversity play. Sometimes, life just doesn't let up and any one of us in such situations would feel intense and overwhelming anxiety. But no matter what the cause, listening to our anxiety – believing there is wisdom inherent in what it tells us and that we can use it to our advantage – is the very first step in learning to be anxious in the right way. Making this mindset shift has a powerful positive impact. A Harvard study, for example, showed that when socially anxious people were asked to do a truly stressful task – give a public speech in front of a panel of judges with no time to prepare – but were also taught to think of their anxious responses as a signal that they were ready to rise to a challenge (instead of a signal of distress) they performed better under pressure. They were more confident, less anxious, and had steadier heart rates and lower blood pressure when focused and engaged.

Engaging with anxiety is often the key to healing. Take research on combat veterans, who reduce their risk of developing PTSD by paying more attention to anxiety-provoking information, rather than distracting from it. Or consider the heart transplant patients who required fewer days of hospitalisation while waiting for a heart transplant and therefore were more likely to qualify for a transplant when they were anxious.

The vegan leather made from India's waste flowers

Lifestyle Desk

Inside a dusty compound in the northern Indian city of Kanpur lies a sterilised lab with an incubator full of flasks. Each of these flasks contains a small mound of what looks like a sourdough starter.

The room nextdoor houses a shiny metal cylindrical vessel called a bioreactor, akin to what you might expect to find in a laboratory which manufactures antibiotics. But this is no pharmaceutical facility – what is being made in the pipe-laden bioreactor won't save you from an infection. It could help make India's rivers a bit cleaner though. It's called Fleather, and it's a new material being developed as a sustainable alternative to animal leather. It is delicate and smooth to touch, like soft lamb skin leather, and its journey begins in an unexpected place – flowers.

Fleather, made by a Kanpur-based startup called Phool, is part of an emerging trend of companies producing plant- and fungi-based leather alternatives which aim to disrupt the traditional leather industry and capitalise on growing interest in "vegan" fashion.

Producing leather from animals poses several environmental hazards. It is energy- and water-intensive and the process of tanning and treating animal skin with chemicals to make leather releases toxic heavy metals that can poison water bodies. Cattle rearing to source animal skin, meanwhile, produces greenhouse gases and contributes to deforestation. Animal rights activists also condemn leather, citing inhumane conditions in slaughter houses.

Fleather, on the other hand, is made by repurposing floral waste generated in temples across India, and it is Phool's moonshot.

The startup's journey began on a cold winter morning in 2015, when Ankit Agarwal and his friend made their way to the bustling bank of the Ganges in Agarwal's hometown Kanpur for some sightseeing.

The Ganges is believed by Hindus to be the most sacred of all rivers. But the sight that greeted the duo belied this faith. Rubbish was floating on the grey, visibly-polluted water. Among the muck were tonnes of flowers – marigolds, roses and chrysanthemums – discarded by temples and worshippers. These flowers are used in Hindu rituals and are considered sacred, meaning they can't be disposed of along with other waste.

But depositing them in a river is sometimes part of the ritual and as a result flowers are dumped in water bodies daily where they leach out harmful chemicals from pesticides, and eventually decay into mulch that contaminates the water. Undeterred by the obvious pollution, devotees take ceremonial dips in the Ganges and cup their palms to take holy sips.

The sight disturbed Agarwal, and set him on a quest to find a solution to the uniquely Indian problem of temple



flower waste, which he calls "the lowest hanging fruit" among pollutants. In 2017, he zeroed in on an idea to upcycle the flowers into incense sticks, and founded Phool ("flower" in Hindi).

The company is backed by the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur and counts Bollywood star Alia Bhatt among its investors. Every morning Phool trucks travelled around Kanpur's temples collecting the flower waste before it was dumped into the river. At the Phool factory, workers plucked the petals and set them to dry. The dried petals were then powdered and made into a dough with essential oils which female workers then rolled into incense sticks.

But it turned out that there was a far more impactful and surprising use for the flowers, as the company was soon to discover.

A chance discovery

On a humid day in 2018, Nachiket Kuntla, head of research and development at Phool, and other scientists at the company noticed a whitish layer on a pile of waste flowers on the factory floor.

When they peered closer, they saw a thin fibrous network. It seemed some kind of fungal microorganism was trying to grow on the flowers, drawing nutrition from the cellulose in them, explains Kuntla. Intrigued, Phool researchers started experimenting. They sourced microorganisms from the jungle near the IIT Kanpur campus and fed the flower waste to different microbial strains, tweaking the temperature and humidity to see how it would

grow under controlled conditions in a laboratory.

Their initial experiments resulted in a thick styrofoam-type material that could be used in packaging. But the researchers soon realised that the texture of the microbial growth felt oddly familiar. "Someone in the team felt that the touch is leathery," Kuntla says. "So [we asked], can we create a fabric-like material? That was the thought process."

They continued experimenting and cultured a couple of species together, says Kuntla. To help the microbes draw nutrients more efficiently and grow better, the researchers began feeding them in liquid form, by boiling the flower petals in water to extract the cellulose and lignin from them and adding some extra carbohydrates.

"[The microorganism] feeds on that, and it grows," explains Aamen Talukdar, an associate research scientist at Phool. "It produces molecules that are similar to the molecules in leather."

This was the beginning of Fleather, which Phool began producing in 2021. To make the material today, the team begins with small volumes of the microbes in flasks in an incubator which are gradually grown larger by feeding them on the nutrient-rich flower liquid. Once the free-flowing liquid turns into a thick slurry, indicating that the microbe has attained maturity, the mixture is poured in trays to nudge the fibrous growth to take the form of a continuous sheet.

The tray is then rested for a few days during which an interconnected layer that resembles the rind on a brie

cheese takes shape. It is then tanned using a tree-bark powder solution, dried, dyed and embossed with a snake or crocodile pattern. The end result is a soft, supple sheet that feels incredibly similar to animal hide leather.

So far Phool has been able to make several Fleather prototypes – wallets, sling bags, sandals and trainers – which, at first glance at least, look quite satisfactory. However, the material currently falls short for items like belts that require tougher leather, says Kuntla. Leather's tensile strength ranges from 8 to 25 megapascals, he explains, whereas Fleather has been testing at around 6 to 10 megapascals. "Current experimentation is completely focused on how we can increase the fiber density... to get a stronger material," says Kuntla. Agarwal says he feels the company is "10% away from the final thing". "Once we get that, it can be the breakthrough that India gives to the world," he says.

But Fleather is already creating buzz. It was recently a finalist in the 2022 Earthshot Prize, which honours groundbreaking environmental solutions. Phool is now working with PVH, the parent company of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, on a Fleather pilot. PVH says it is currently at material development and testing phase of this project. A British luxury car maker and another American fashion retailer have also shown interest in Fleather, Agarwal says. Agarwal admits the idea is disruptive, more so because Fleather's birthplace Kanpur also happens to be the mecca of the Indian leather industry. But while Fleather might be the only eco-friendly leather in Kanpur, on the world stage, it is hardly alone.

The rise of vegan leather

Most faux leather is made from plastic from fossil fuels, but sustainable leather alternatives made from bio-materials have been popping up all over the world. (Read more about the fossil fuels used in our clothing)

Last year, Nike partnered with London-based firm Ananas Anam to launch a line of sneakers made from pineapple leaf leather. In Mexico, Dessoerto makes material out of prickly pear cactus, while Italian startup Frumat has come up with apple skin leather. And earlier this year, Stella McCartney launched a line of fungi handbags.

But these aren't always a perfect solution. "Compositions of most other plant-based alternatives utilise polymers as a binder in the production process that lead to them being partially non-biodegradable," say Charlotte Borst and Saatchi Doshi of Fashion For Good, an Amsterdam-based global initiative working on sustainable fashion. Not only is Fleather 100% biodegradable, they say, it is also more breathable than other alternatives. Phool, which was part of Fashion For Good's innovation programme in 2020, claims that Fleather decomposes entirely in about 90 days when buried in soil.

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SPORTS

Englishman Alex Fitzpatrick seizes the halfway lead, Kartik Sharma is highest-placed Indian in tied fourth

BENGALURU, MARCH 29 :

Englishman Alex Fitzpatrick seized the halfway lead with a second straight seven-under 65 at The Challenge 2023 presented by KGA, a US\$300,000 event being played at the Karnataka Golf Association (KGA) course, here. Fitzpatrick (65-65), who was overnight tied second and one off the lead, took his total score to 14-under 130 in round two to lead by one shot at the event co-sanctioned by the Challenge Tour and PGTI.

Spain's Ivan Cantero Gutierrez (66-65) occupied second place at 13-under 131 while

Dutchman Lars Van Meijel (66-66) was in third position at 12-under 132. Kartik Sharma (66-67) was the highest-placed Indian golfer in tied fourth at 11-under 133. The others sharing fourth place were Switzerland's Joel Girrbach (69-64), who shot the day's joint best score of 64 as well as Frenchman Frederic Lacroix (67-66). The cut was declared at two-under 142. Sixty-nine players including 66 professionals and all the three amateurs in the field made the cut. Twenty Indian players out of a total of 55 made the cut.

Twenty-four-year-old Alex Fitzpatrick, playing his rookie season on the Challenge Tour, also happens to be the

younger brother of 2022 US Open champion Matthew Fitzpatrick. The man from Sheffield has gone bogey-free in the tournament so far. Fitzpatrick, who missed the cut at last week's event at KGA, produced an eagle and five birdies on Wednesday. The highlights of Alex's second round included his outstanding drive on the par-4 first hole that landed on the green and set up a birdie, a 10-foot eagle conversion on the fifth and a chip-in from the bunker for birdie on the ninth.

Alex, on his second trip to India, said, "I was trying to push it to the back of my mind [that I'd gone bogey-free], because normally the moment you think like

that, a bogey happens straight away. We had our game plan to keep it on the fairway. You don't need to be aggressive with these flags and the greens are so good, you can hole putts. "A few lucky breaks, a couple of putts holed and I scored well. I've worked pretty hard for my long game to be good, and it's nice to see it pay off a bit." The left-handed Kartik Sharma, lying tied fifth and two shots off the lead at the start of the day, sank three long birdie putts from a range of 10 to 30 feet on the back-nine. The 22-year-old Kartik, yet to register his first win, then added two more birdies courtesy his accurate chipping on the front-nine. Kartik, currently fourth on the

TATA Steel PGTI Rankings, said, "I started well then didn't hit it great in the middle of the round but stayed patient and managed to scramble. I made some crucial par saves on the front-nine that kept me error-free. I've been working on a few things since the last event which I'm trying to put into practice. Importantly, I'm well-placed at the moment and need to capitalize on that." India's Aman Raj, like Kartik, too fired a flawless 67, to move up six spots and end the day in tied 10th place at nine-under 135.

The Indian duo of Udayan Mane (64) and M Dharma (66) were tied 15th at eight-under 136. Udayan fired the day's joint best score of 64.

Not being in captaincy has taken a little bit off my plate, says Gujarat Titansí Williamson

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 29 :

After leading Sunrisers Hyderabad for 46 matches in seasons 2018-2022 of the Indian Premier League (IPL), Kane Williamson will be turning out for defending champions Gujarat Titans in the 2023 edition of the tournament. With India all-rounder Hardik Pandya to lead Gujarat's title defence in IPL 2023, Williamson admitted that not being a captain has taken some things off his plate, citing the huge amount of energy leadership roles require.

Earlier, Williamson had stepped down as New Zealand's Test captain, with Tim Southee taking over.

"It certainly doesn't switch the cricketing brain off absolutely because when you are out there on the field, you try and assist where you can for the team, if you are called upon for your ideas, that's quite a natural thing to be engaged." "But having said that, it has taken a little bit off my plate which was a large part of the reason for making the decision back home. I have always thought that it wasn't a forever job and requires a lot of energy. I really enjoyed my role in that specific position and basically helping where I am." "Captaincy is a position I have been involved in for a number of years in different teams. But it's not something that I have to have. Any side you are on, you want to do as much as you can for the team." "Whether you have an official leadership role or not doesn't really matter. It's nice to mix it up. I'm excited to be playing under Hardik as I have been playing under Tim Southee in the Test format, who's doing a fantastic job. Still, it's a change which I am experiencing and going through it," he said in a virtual press conference

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'Don't think that Pakistan will play'

NEW DELHI, MARCH 29 :

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) may consider the possibility of

on Wednesday. Troubled by elbow issues, Williamson had a forgettable time with the bat in IPL 2022, scoring just 216 runs in 13 innings, including one fifty, at a strike rate of 93.50 and averaging 19.64. Under his captaincy, Sunrisers Hyderabad finished at eighth place in a ten-team table. With Shubman Gill and Wriddhiman Saha set to continue from last year as the opening pair for Gujarat, Williamson is likely to bat one-down. For now, he feels that shrugging off a troublesome elbow injury was a big relief.

"It was something that was improving slowly all the time. It certainly required management and it is a lot better now. It's not something that's stopping me in terms of training loads and playing. Although no injury is ideal and often injuries require time to heal and work through and so, for me, it was no different. But it's nice to be back playing and training and not be sort of burdened by it." Gill has had a phenomenal 2023 so far, smashing five centuries across all three formats of the international game. Williamson, now New Zealand's white-ball skipper, considers Gill as a big player in the Gujarat side and sees some captaincy potential in the right-handed batter.

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Bangladesh, despite India being the sole host of the tournament, according to the reports. According to Wasim Khan, the General

at a neutral location rather than in India.

"I don't know if it would take place here or in a different country but a neutral venue is highly likely," Khan said in an interview with local media.

"I don't think that Pakistan will play their World Cup matches in India. I think their matches will also be held at a neutral venue just like India's Asia Cup matches," he added. The idea came up on the sidelines of the board meetings in Dubai, where India's presence in the Asia Cup and Pakistan's at the World Cup were points on the agendas of both members. However, no formal discussions have taken place on the matter. India is the host of the ICC Men's World

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Manager of Cricket for the International Cricket Council (ICC), it is possible that Pakistan may have to play their 2023 World Cup matches

especially with the World

'I'd like to coach in Premier League'

MADRID, MARCH 29 :

Former Spain national team coach Luis Enrique said on Wednesday that one of his ambitions is to coach in the Premier League.

The man, who stepped down as Spain boss after a disappointing FIFA World Cup in Qatar, said he would be open to a new adventure, reports Xinhua.

"I'd really like to coach in England. I am a big fan of the Premier League, which is really interesting," Enrique said. He also said he wouldn't rule out coaching another national team.

"I haven't had any offer yet, but I have heard of



but I don't know if I would be the best kind of coach for a team of that level," he explained. Speaking the day after his replacement, Luis de la Fuente suffered a 2-0 defeat in Scotland, Enrique said he had felt "loved" by the majority of Spain fans. "I feel very proud of my time as national team coach. I made a lot of mistakes, but that's normal and I'm not really interested in debates over whether 'Plan A' or 'Plan B' is better between people who don't have all of the information." "When you are the coach, you have all of the information, a lot more than journalists or fans, and you have to take your decisions based on that and then accept the results," he commented.

IPL 2023: Absolutely, no problem, says Boucher on giving Rohit rest during the tournament

MUMBAI, MARCH 29 :

Mumbai Indians head coach Mark Boucher on Wednesday said he has absolutely no problem in resting captain Rohit Sharma during the league stage of 2023 season of the Indian Premier League (IPL), in order to manage his workload.

With 2023 being an ODI World Cup year, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had stated previously that the workload of players bound for the mega event will be monitored during IPL 2023 running from March 31 to May 28.

Rohit is yet to captain India in overseas Test due to suffering injuries or even Covid-19 and his workload becomes all

especially with the World Test Championship final against Australia starting from June 7 at The Oval in London.

Asked during MI's pre-season press conference on whether he will rest during games, Rohit quipped, "In terms of me resting, I think Mark will give you an answer to that," he said. To this, Boucher replied, "Do you want to rest?" Boucher then added, "In regards to resting Rohit, he is the captain. Hopefully he gets into some good sort of form and I hope he doesn't want to rest. But we all adapt to different situations. If I can get the best out of him as a captain and player, that will be great. If it means he wants to rest 1 or 2 games, then I will do that. Absolutely, no problem."

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Live learned to be calm and level-headed because of Dhoni: Steve Smith

NEW DELHI, MARCH 29 :

When the reigns of captaincy were handed over to Steve Smith ahead of the 2017 edition of the IPL, the spotlight was on how the Australian cricketer would lead a side that had MS Dhoni, one of the most successful IPL captains, as its member. However, with the constant support and guidance of Dhoni, Smith successfully led the franchise to the finals of the tournament, narrowly missing out on the title by just one run. Now, as Smith returns to the IPL 2023 as part of the expert panel on Star Sports, he fondly recollects his experiences of working with Dhoni and leading a team with the legendary Indian cricketer as his teammate. In an interview with Star

Sports, Smith spoke about his experience of captaining the Rising Pune Supergiants in the 2017 IPL and the significant role played by former Indian skipper MS Dhoni in that season. Smith, who was initially daunted by the idea of leading a team that had Dhoni in it, expressed his gratitude towards the legendary cricketer for his guidance and support on and off the field. He also spoke about the valuable lessons he learned from Dhoni's calm and composed demeanor, which he has since tried to emulate in his own leadership style. "Of course, you know he's been able to achieve so much over such a long period of time, he's going to go down as one of the best leaders to play the game for sure. So, you know, when I got the call to say that they wanted me to

captain, it was a little bit daunting. But that season, MSD was just wonderful. You know, he helped in any way that he



selected as the captain of the RPS team and how he felt leading a side which had MS Dhoni in it. "Yeah, I, I didn't really could and, he's a terrific guy. It was a great experience being able to captain him, but also very daunting as well," Smith said. He also spoke on the emotions he went through when he got

little bit shocked first, and then I didn't really know what to say. It was like, have you spoken to MS about this? This is a little bit strange from my side, but after we sorted everything out, MS was just wonderful. And the way he helped me and helped guide that team that year was incredible. And yeah, I couldn't thank him enough." Smith recalled how it was to work on the field with Dhoni, he said, "Well, it was a while ago now, but yeah, look out on the field. He was someone that I was bouncing ideas off. You know, being behind the stumps, he's got a great, great view of the game. He understands the angles really well and obviously playing in India also, you know, it's his home and he understands those conditions as well as anyone could. And yeah, that's certainly something that I learned off of MS."