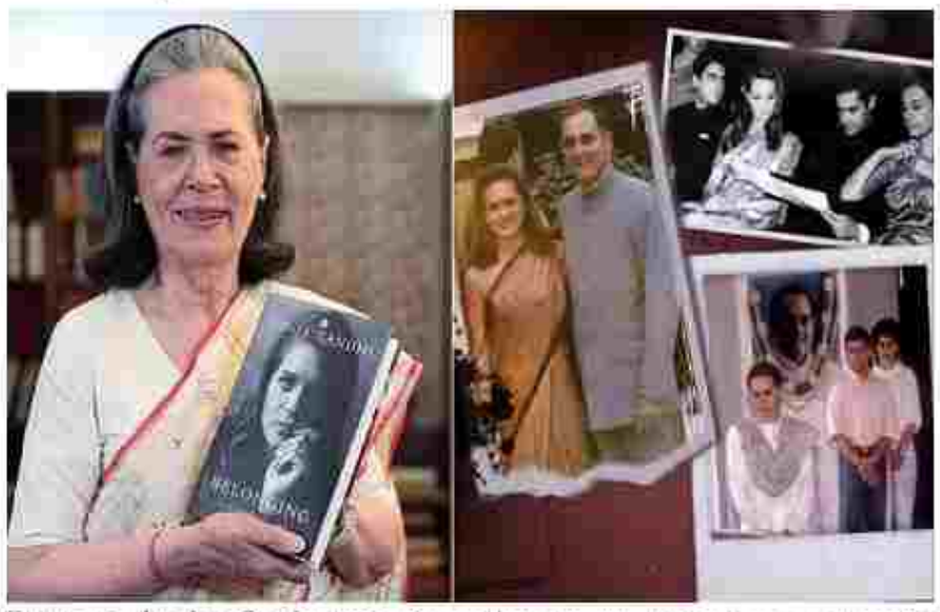
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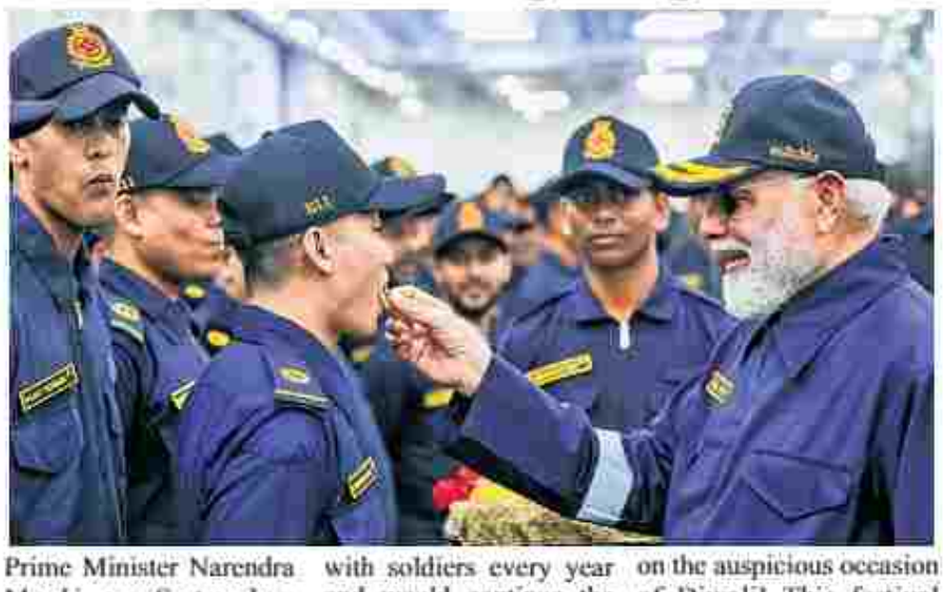
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Sonia Gandhi calls Emergency a mistake, says Indira Gandhi came to feel the same



Congress leader Sonia Gandhi has called the imposition of the Emergency a "mistake", saying she believes her mother-in-law and then prime minister Indira Gandhi eventually came to feel the same.The Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson in her upcoming book Belonging: A Journey of Love also writes that keeping Sanjay Gandhi "in check" could have prevented much of the damage that followed the imposition of the Emergency, according to The Guardian.In an interview with the British daily ahead of the launch of her memoir, Sonia Gandhi said, "I always feel that Mrs (Indira) Gandhi was a democrat at heart.""I know that many would laugh at this, but I believe she was never comfortable in the course of the emergency. I think it was sitting heavy on her," she added.Sonia Gandhi, who also holds the distinction of being the longest serving president of the Congress, was quoted by the British daily as saying that it was a mistake for Indira Gandhi to call the Emergency, and that she believes her mother-in-law came to feel the same.According to Gandhi, the family was split on the decision of Emergency.Sonia Gandhi's husband Rajiv was against the move, telling his mother to wait for the next election, but her younger son Sanjay pushed for it, arguing at one family dinner that the opposition would destroy his mother and telling her, "They must be stopped", the Guardian reported.Sonia Gandhi was quoted as saying that it inflamed tensions within the family, too, as Rajiv attempted to confront his mother, but she refused to listen."Keeping Sanjay in check could have prevented much of the damage that followed," Gandhi writes in her book, according to The Guardian.She said that hindsight allows people to put things better in perspective and pointed out that Indira Gandhi herself later publicly expressed regret and apologised for excesses during the Emergency.Asked about Sanjay Gandhi's name becoming synonymous with the Emergency, and whether the excesses of that time could have been avoided had Indira Gandhi listened to her elder son Rajiv and to others, Sonia Gandhi said, "It was not only Sanjay, though in the public mind he is often seen as synonymous with the Emergency. There was a lot of pressure from some of her senior colleagues, and I think there were very few people around her like Rajiv who had a different point of view.""I think eventually my mother-in-law began to understand the situation through her own wisdom and took actions to remedy it," she said."It was only after the Emergency that I came to know the true gravity of what had been happening. Yes, democratic rights had been curtailed and there was a suspension of habeas corpus, but it was done constitutionally," the former Congress chief said."Yet, when I take myself back to that period and try and see it from Mrs Gandhi's point of view, I see her struggling to cope with the rapidly deteriorating prevailing circumstances: violent protests, government offices and public transport set on fire, widespread organised unrest and even a call for the bureaucracy and armed forces to disobey orders," Gandhi said.Hindsight allows us to put things better in perspective, she said.

PM Modi to continue Diwali tradition with soldiers, extends festive greetings to nation



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday extended Diwali greetings to the nation and said he would continue his annual tradition of celebrating the festival with the country's soldiers.In a video message shared on his social media accounts, Modi wished people peace, prosperity and happiness and said he would celebrate Deepavali with enthusiasm.My heartiest greetings to all of you for Diwali. I wish for peace, prosperity and happiness for all of you in the coming days. I also celebrate Deepavali like you with great enthusiasm," he said.The prime minister said he had been celebrating Diwali with soldiers every year and would continue the tradition this time as well."This time also, I will continue the tradition," he said, adding, "Have a great Diwali".Modi did not disclose the military station or post where he would celebrate the festival.He also said the country was illuminated with lights on the eve of Deepavali, describing it as a reflection of the nation's resolve against darkness.In a separate message posted on the government's Jan Sampark Portal, Modi said Diwali symbolised the enduring victory of light over darkness, good over evil and hope over despair."Dear fellow citizen, warm greetings on the auspicious occasion of Diwali! This festival celebrates the eternal victory of light over darkness, goodness over evil and hope over despair," he said.He said the festival was also an occasion to cherish India's rich traditions and strengthen bonds of togetherness."May Diwali illuminate every home with happiness, harmony and prosperity. May this festive season inspire us to spread kindness, embrace positivity and work towards a brighter future," he said.Modi urged people to move forward with renewed energy and determination towards building a prosperous and 'Viksit Bharat'.

Compulsory retirement order is neither punitive nor stigmatic in character: SC



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has ruled that compulsory retirement of a government employee is neither punitive nor stigmatic and does not imply a finding of misconduct, provided the decision is based on relevant material and the competent authority's assessment of public interest.A bench of Justices Manmohan and Shree Chandrashekhar made the observation while upholding the Chhattisgarh government's decision to compulsorily retire five of its 14 employees under a 2017 government circular."...an order of compulsory retirement is neither punitive nor stigmatic in character. Such an order does not cast any aspersion upon the conduct of the employee nor does it imply any finding of misconduct," the bench said.The court clarified that the decision to retire an employee compulsorily must be based on the competent authority's subjective satisfaction that the employee's continued retention in service is no longer conducive to public interest.It said the executive has the authority to assess whether an officer has become "dead wood" or whether their continued service would affect administrative efficiency. However, such an assessment cannot be based on conjecture or whim and must be supported by objective and relevant material on record.The bench also rejected the employees' argument that the action was discriminatory because other similarly placed employees had not been compulsorily retired.It held that the assessment of an employee's utility, integrity, efficiency and overall service record is an individualised exercise. The fact that one employee is retired while another with a comparable service record is retained does not, by itself, make the decision unconstitutional ordiscriminatory.Invoking Article 14 of the Constitution, the bench said the principle of equality does not recognise a claim to "negative equality". An illegality or omission in favour of one person cannot be cited as grounds for extending the same treatment to another.The court further said that judicial review of compulsory retirement orders is limited to examining whether the government has followed the prescribed norms and criteria.It added that such decisions must be supported by relevant material, including Annual Confidential Reports, integrity assessments, performance evaluations and other entries in the employee's service record.The Supreme Court upheld the Chhattisgarh High Court's April 12, 2023 order, which had affirmed a single-judge bench's decision upholding the state government's 2017 circular providing for compulsory retirement.The bench said judicial review in such cases does not entail a re-appreciation or re-weighing of the material by the court as though it were sitting in appeal over the administrative decision."The court is concerned only with whether relevant material existed, whether such material was taken into consideration by the competent authority, and whether the conclusion drawn therefrom is one which a reasonable person could have arrived at. So long as these requirements are satisfied, the court will not substitute its view for that of the authority entrusted with the decision-making process," it said.It added that the principle is well settled that judicial interference with an order of compulsory retirement is warranted only where the decision is shown to be based on no evidence, suffers from non-application of mind, is manifestly arbitrary or perverse or is vitiated by malafides.With regards to the aggrieved employees, the top court said due process was followed in retiring them compulsorily and the recommendations made by the screening committee were founded upon an objective evaluation of the utility, efficiency and suitability of the employees concerned, with a view to maintaining administrative standards and ensuring efficiency in public service."Consequently, this court is satisfied that the parameters and standards applied while considering the cases of the appellants for compulsory retirement were uniformly applied to all similarly situated employees and that no element of discriminatory treatment or selective application of criteria has been established," it said.The bench said the parameters had been applied uniformly and comprehensively to all eligible employees and only after their examination that the Screening Committee identified five employees, whose overall service-record assessment fell below the prescribed benchmark and whose recent confidential reports disclosed patterns indicative of unsatisfactory performance, declining efficiency or lack of utility in public service.It said the remaining nine employees, having satisfied the prescribed standards, were found fit for continued retention in service.

Adversary avoids direct confrontation, pushes misinformation: Defence Minister at key airbase



NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday, asked the armed forces to maintain highest level of operational readiness to counter any national threats, speaking at the Bagdogra Airbase along the frontier with China in Eastern sector.Addressing the air warriors in the base, Singh said the enemy "avoids direct confrontation", "seeks to exploit vulnerabilities" and attempts to "sow doubt in the minds of the local population and our soldiers" through misinformation, not naming any country.He said the security landscape has become "increasingly complex", with warfare extending beyond conventional engagements and called for focus on asymmetric warfare, proxy wars, cyber-attacks, drone swarms, information operations and narrative management.Describing Bagdogra as a strategically important region and a crucial link in India's security framework, particularly for the North-Eastern region, Singh said the air warriors deployed in the region serve as a robust shield for the security of the eastern sector.Discipline and courage remain indispensable, irrespective of technological advancements, stating that the conduct and restraint of the defence forces personnel shape the image of the military among local communities, he said. He urged them to nurture a deep bond of trust and affection between the people and the defence forces particularly in and around Bagdogra.Reaffirming the government's resolve to achieve 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', Singh highlighted the growing contribution of Indian start-ups and industries in developing drones, anti-drone systems and advanced military equipment.He appreciated the defence forces for embracing indigenous technologies and acquiring new skills in drone operations and cyber security.Singh underlined the importance of making the military increasingly technology-driven to effectively address future security challenges.Extending his Diwali wishes to the air warriors and their families, Singh thanked the families for their sacrifices and contributions and ensured the families the nation will stand by their well being.Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station, Bagdogra Air Commodore Manish Sharma, and other senior officials of the IAF were present.

India on the path to make affordable care available to all



With Indian doctors' prowess giving foreigners a confidence to seek treatment here, India has come a long way since independence in healthcare. The country has a booming medial tourism industry, coupled with improved score in health indicators like life expectancy, infant mortality and fertility rate. India now has a strengthened network of primary health centres, community health centres and tertiary care super specialty hospitals along with an army of trained medical personnel to provide health care to its people. Simultaneously, more hospitals are being opened, drug prices being regulated, technology being made affordable for masses, network on communicable diseases being strengthened and efforts being made to invest more in the healthcare.

The Gross Domestic Product per capita, which indicates a country's standard of living, has increased 21 times from the 1960 level when it was $81.3 to $1709.4 in 2016, according to World Bank estimates. The life expectancy at birth, the average number of years a person is expected to survive if existing patterns of mortality stayed the same throughout their life has increased by 65.8 percent or 27 years between 1960 when it was 41 years and 2015 at 68 years. Crude birth rate has also reduced from 37 in 1970 to 22.2 in 2012 (per 1000 population). Population stabilisation efforts have paid off with total fertility rate for the country going down to 2.3 while some states like Delhi at 1.7, Kerala at 1.8, Tamil Nadu at 1.7, Maharashtra at 1.8, West Bengal at 1.6 and Himachal Pradesh at 1.7 attaining fertility rates even lower than the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.

The country has shown impressive progress in bringing down the infant mortality rate - the number of babies per 1000 who die before their first birthday. From 165 deaths per 1000 children in 1960, the IMR has come down to 38 deaths in 2015. A major reason for this is the country's vaccination program. After launching its first vaccine – BCG - in 1962 as part of the national tuberculosis control program, India now has come a long way. An expanded program on immunization as part of the World Health Organisation's initiative was launched in India in 1978 which included BCG, DPT and typhoid vaccine. Oral Polio vaccine was included in the program in 1979. In 1985, the program was converted into Universal Immunization Program (UIP) with a goal to cover all the children.

Over the years new vaccines like those against hepatitis B and Japanese encephalitis have been added. The thrust on vaccination has made India polio free. The country was removed from the endemic countries' list on February 25, 2012 by the WHO. Vaccination has also contributed to the decline in under-five mortality rate from around 233 to around 47.7 per 1,000 live births in 2015 in last five decades, though in numbers this is huge burden - an estimated 5.9 million children died under the age of five in 2015, 45 percent of them being newborns.

Despite the progress, health sector in India still faces some challenges. For example, a large proportion of population - two-thirds of children and more than half of the women – suffer from anemia and malnutrition. High cost of care is a cause of concern which makes accessing care difficult for the poor and the weaker sections. Statistics show that even the well-to-do families reach the brink of poverty if faced with a serious illness. This is because of low government investment in health and private sector becoming the main source of healthcare.

However, the government has initiated landmark measures in the past three years to overcome these problems. It has brought out of a new national health policy which aims to provide universal access to good quality services at affordable cost. There is an emphasis on strengthening of the public health system by increasing public expenditure on health to 2.5 per cent of the GDP in a time bound manner. The policy also proposes free drugs, free diagnostics and free emergency care services in all public hospitals to reduce financial burden of health care on people. The policy envisages giving choice of treatment to patients by co-location of AYUSH remedies in public facilities. Yoga should be introduced in schools and work places as part of promotion of good health, it says. The policy advocates strengthening of district level services so that people get secondary care there itself rather than in medical college hospitals, and recommends proactive engagement with the private sector.

In line with the intention of health policy, government has already initiated measures to reduce cost of medicines and medical equipment while bringing more people under the health insurance net. There are plans to provide about 500 medicines free of cost in government district hospitals across the country. Fifty basic medicines will be provided free in primary health centres and 300 medicines in community health centers. The government has opened 83 outlets under the Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) program. It also intends to empower citizens to access quality healthcare services using better mobile and internet connectivity. Aiming for equitable care, the government has been opening new AIIMS, including the latest approved for Assam.

Affordable medical care is the focus of this government. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority has added 30 more essential drugs in the price control list taking the total medicines under price control to about 760. A draft national medical device policy aimed at bringing most medical devices within the ambit of price regulation and boosting their local manufacturing has also been prepared. Currently, only a few critical medical devices are under indirect price control and 80 per cent of all devices are imported products.

Far from keeping the world safe

The 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change concluded on November 17 in Bonn, Germany. The two-week meeting was regarded by many as primarily intended to clarify processes for the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through the creation of a rule book, with technical guidelines and processes. This would explain what compliance with the Paris Agreement means and how it would be monitored.

The key topics of contention were related to financial support, mitigation action, differentiation, and loss and damage — the same knots of disagreements that came up at COP-21 in Paris. The questions raised in Bonn were: Are developed countries going to do their fair share to support poor and emerging countries, having occupied the bulk of the planet's available carbon space? What actions have thus far been taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by rich countries? Shouldn't there be greater emphasis to phase out coal? There was also some apprehension about the role of the U.S. in the discussions since President Donald Trump had earlier declared that it would leave the Paris Agreement.

Actions related to the Paris Agreement are intended for 2020-2030. However, the pre-2020 period is part of the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. Both the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol (2005-2012) and the second (2013-2020) principally laid out the responsibilities for reducing emissions by rich countries. However, there has been little progress and the 2012 Doha Amendment, the agreement concerning the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, has not been ratified by a sufficient number of countries to enter into force.

Under pressure from poor and emerging economies, actions on the pre-2020 Kyoto period were added to the agenda in the first week of the Bonn meeting. As a result, in 2018 and 2019 there will be additional stocktaking on progress made on the Kyoto Protocol. There will also be climate finance assessments and all of these will be part of the overall process undertaken before 2020. It is reported that several countries have since expressed interest in ratifying the Doha Amendment and all these changes indicate some advancement.

Another aspect of the obligations that need to be fulfilled by big emitters is related to economic and non-economic losses under the work programme on loss and damage. In Warsaw, Poland, COP-19 established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage to address the destruction likely from climate change, including extreme events (such as severe storms) and slow-onset events (such as sea-level rise). This track of negotiations recognised that even if the world were to drastically reduce its emissions, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere would cause warming. This would severely affect the poorest countries that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

It is important that such countries have access to economic and non-economic support, especially since their actions have not led to these increased concentrations of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement recognises loss and damage and calls for enhanced action and support from the parties. However, loss and damage was not included in the agenda for the Paris rule book, and this was rightly a big bone of contention with poor and developing economies. There are no funds currently available for this stream and the discussion on this has been postponed to 2018. This is alarming given that the world has already faced the wrath of numerous extreme events just in the last couple of years.

A third aspect of the support from rich countries is about providing finance, technology, and building capacity for poorer countries, both to protect themselves from the effects of climate change and to help them move along a low-carbon pathway. There were conflicts on financial support at various points, and on this topic, COP-23 was a failure. Without the means of implementation, the targets set by each country in Paris will not be achieved. There is also the promise of $100 billion each year by 2020 into the Green Climate Fund, which has not seen much inflow to meet the goal. There was therefore little progress on the key issue of finance and several important decisions were moved forward to be discussed at the next meeting to be held in Katowice, Poland in 2018.

There have been a number of advances in renewable energy over the last several years. These were highlighted at various side events at COP-23. There were also several state and substate actors from the U.S. at Bonn, some of whom tried to distance themselves from the actions and statements of the Trump administration, along with a series of colourful protests and interactions.

On the plus side, negotiators did move forward on developing other details for the Paris Agreement implementation, a process that is carried out under the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement and a policy should be ready in 2018. There was also a draft of a document integrating positions from parties on information needed to communicate the Nationally Determined Contributions. Steps were also taken to spell out the details of the global stock-taking that will occur every five years starting in 2023 and on transparency measures that are part of the overall process.

Nevertheless, the science on climate change has been grim this year. Greenhouse gas emissions which appeared to have stabilised for a few years, probably for economic reasons, rose by 2% in 2017, perhaps due to additional electricity drawn from coal power plants in China. When coal will be phased out globally was a major question. In fact, there were protests organised by activists at Europe's largest open pit coal mine near the Hambach Forest in Germany, not far from the COP-23. Clearly, greater ambition on clamping down on fossil fuels is needed for the Paris Agreement to be successful. The Bonn meeting saw the launch of the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which was led by Canada and the U.K. and joined by numerous countries and substate actors.

There was small but significant headway made regarding agriculture where a work plan was proposed by Parties on items related to climate change and agriculture, including improvements in soil fertility and carbon, management of land use and livestock maintenance. For India, these developments could be an excellent opportunity for learning from others and sharing local knowledge. Much more needs to be done for the international community to truly grapple with climate change — we are still far from keeping the world safe from its harmful consequences. And for India, there is unfortunately no time left for delaying action on multiple fronts on the landscape of sustainable development, which itself will be derailed by a warming world.

Carbohydrates may help to design better malaria vaccine

Good news! Carbohydrates are not our enemy, especially when it comes to stopping the spread of malaria, suggests a study. According to researchers, carbohydrates on the surface of malaria parasites play a critical role in malaria's ability to infect mosquito and human hosts. The discovery also suggests steps that may improve the only malaria vaccine approved to protect people against Plasmodium falciparum malaria - the most deadly form of the disease. Justin Boddey led the research from the Univeristy of Alberta, Canada.

Dr Justin Boddey said the team had shown that the malaria parasite 'tag' its proteins with carbohydrates in order to stabilise and transport them and that this process was crucial to completing the parasite's lifecycle. "Malaria parasites have a complex lifecycle that involves constant shape shifting to evade detection and infect humans and subsequently mosquitoes," Dr Boddey said. They found that the parasite's ability to 'tag' key proteins with carbohydrates is important for two stages of the malaria lifecycle.

It is critical for the earliest stages of human infection, when the parasite migrates through the body and invades in the liver and later when it is transmitted back to the mosquito from an infected human, enabling the parasite to be spread between people. Dr Goddard-Borger said the research had attracted a lot of interest because of the implications it has for improving malaria vaccine design. "It was hoped that the vaccine would generate a good antibody response that protected against the parasite, however it has unfortunately not been as effective at evoking protective immunity as hoped," Dr Goddard-Borger said.

"Now that we know how important these carbohydrates are to the parasite, we can be confident that the malaria parasite cannot 'escape' vaccination pressure by doing away with its carbohydrates," he added. This discovery reveals that carbohydrates are very important, and in two completely different lifecycle stages. This is exciting because to ultimately eradicate malaria the researchers need combined approaches that attack different stages of the parasite at once, Dr Boddey noted.

App to treat substance abuse gets FDA nod

In a first, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved marketing of a novel mobile medical application designed to help treat people with substance use disorders such as addiction to alcohol, cocaine and marijuana. The "Reset" app developed by Pear Therapeutics – a US-based Prescription Digital Therapeutics firm -- delivers cognitive behavioural therapy to teach users the skills that aid in the treatment of substance use disorders.

The app, which is also a web interface for clinicians, is also intended to increase abstinence from substance abuse and increase retention in treatment compared to other therapies, the agency said in a statement on Thursday. "This is an example of how innovative digital technologies can help provide patients access to additional tools during their treatment," said Carlos Pena, Director at FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health. "More therapy tools means a greater potential to help improve outcomes, including abstinence, for patients with substance use disorder," Pena added.

As part of the approval process, the FDA reviewed data from a multi-site, in a 12-week clinical trial of 399 patients who received either standard treatment or standard treatment with the addition of a desktop-based version of Reset which could be accessed at the clinic or home. The data showed a statistically significant increase in adherence to abstinence for the patients with alcohol, cocaine, marijuana and stimulant substance use disorders in those who used Reset, 40.3 per cent, compared to the patients who did not, 17.8 per cent. The clinical trial did not demonstrate the effectiveness of using the Reset device in patients reporting opioids as their substance of abuse. Data from the clinical studies also did not indicate any side effects associated with the device, the statement said.

E-cigs may double risk of tobacco smoking in teenagers

Teenagers who try vape may be at double the risk for developing addiction to smoking tobacco cigarettes, according to a new study. The findings showed that students in grades 7 to 12 who had tried an e-cigarette are 2.16 times more likely to be susceptible to cigarette smoking. "Since e-cigarettes came on the market, there has been a debate about whether their use may lead to cigarette smoking. The answer among adolescents is yes," said Bruce Baskerville, a researcher at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada.

E-cigarettes can contain nicotine but not many of the harmful substances produced by smoking tobacco such as tar or carbon monoxide. These products work through an inhalation-activated system that heats a solution to create an inhalable aerosol often known as vapour. "While preliminary evidence suggests that e-cigarettes contain fewer toxic chemicals than traditional cigarettes, our findings suggest that a potential increase in harmful cigarette use may follow as e-cigarette use continues to rise among adolescent populations," Baskerville added.

The study was published in the journal Preventive Medicine. "This study supports the restricting of e-cigarette access to minors, which have been shown to have heightened risk to initiate smoking," Baskerville said. However, more research is needed on additional contributing risk factors as well as longitudinal data to evaluate the complex relationship between e-cigarette use and tobacco cigarette use in adolescence.

High BP can cause organ damage in teenagers too

Is your teenage son or daughter suffering from high blood pressure? Beware, if left uncontrolled the condition can lead to organ damage as in adults, according to a research. The findings showed that organ damage -- damage to the heart and blood vessels -- from high blood pressure does not only occur in adults, but also in teenagers. Importantly, the damage in teenagers occurs at blood pressure levels that are below the clinical definition of hypertension in the age group, the researchers said.

"Some adolescents may have organ damage related to blood pressure and are not targeted for therapy," said Elaine M. Urbina, Director at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital in Ohio. "Imaging of the heart may be useful in youth in the high-normal range of blood pressure to determine how aggressive therapy should be." High blood pressure in teenagers is defined on the basis of percentiles, rather than blood pressure level as in adults.

In the study, presented at the 2017 American Heart Association (AHA) Council on Hypertension in San Francisco, the team looked at whether organ damage in teens develops below the 95th percentile -- the clinical definition of high blood pressure in teenagers. The researchers examined blood pressure and measured organ damage in 180 teenagers (14-17 years old, 64 per cent white, 57 per cent males). The results showed evidence of organ damage even among the youth categorised as "normal" with blood pressure less than in the 80th percentile.

Even teens can suffer organ damage from high blood pressure

Turns out, organ damage from high blood pressure occurs not only in adults, but also in teens. A recent study also found that the damage to the heart and blood vessels can occur in youth at blood pressure levels that are below the clinical definition of hypertension in youth. High blood pressure in youth is defined differently than it is in adults. In childhood, high blood pressure is based on percentiles, rather than blood pressure level. Researchers looked at whether organ damage in teens develops below the 95th percentile, which is the clinical definition of high blood pressure in youth.

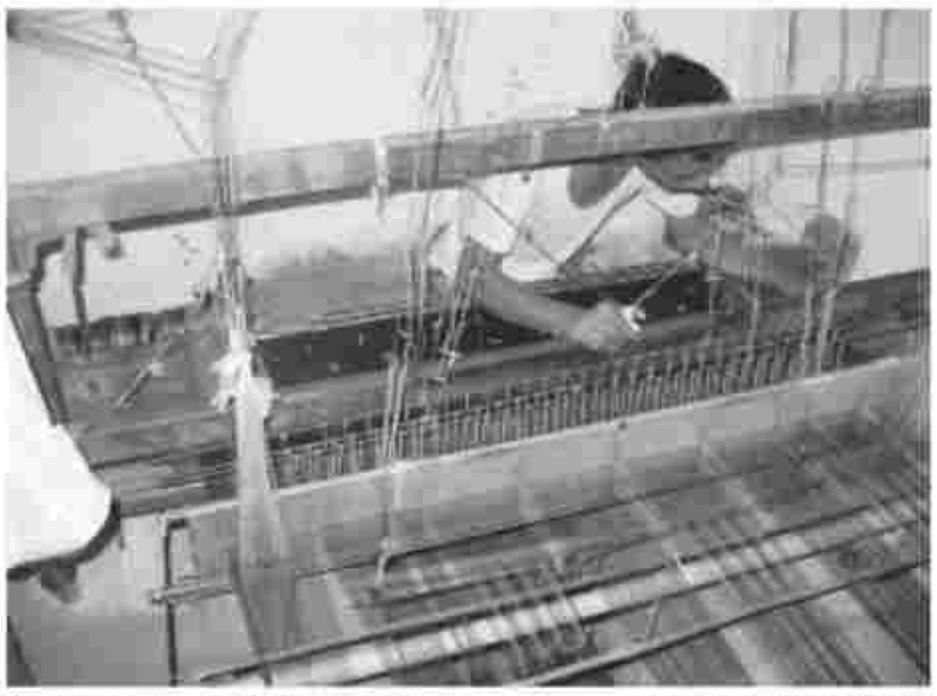
Researchers studied blood pressure and measured organ damage in 180 teenagers (14-17 years old, 64 percent white, 57 percent males). They found evidence of organ damage even among the youth categorized as "normal" with blood pressure less than in the 80th percentile. They also found heart and vessel damage in the mid-risk group, which had blood pressures in the 80th to 90th percentiles and the high-risk group, with blood pressures above the 90th percentile.

Hope looms large for the handloom sector

A riot of colours, eye-riveting designs, scintillating hues and entrancing interlacing of warps and wefts give these fabrics a distinctive appeal. From the northeast and Kashmir to the southern tip, these fabrics have distinguishing features that impart a unique exotic appeal. Through centuries, handlooms have been associated with excellence in India's artistry in fabrics and providing a source of livelihood to millions of crafts persons in almost every state.

Despite sweeping changes, the art and craft traditions have been kept alive due to continuous efforts of generations of artists and craftsmen who weaved their dreams and visions into exquisite handloom products and transferred their skills to their progenies. From ancient times, Indian handloom products have been identified by their impeccable quality. These include muslin of Chanderi, silk brocades of Varanasi, the tie and dye products of Rajasthan and Orissa, the Chintas of Machhilpatnam, the Himroos of Hyderabad, the Khes of Punjab, the prints of Farrukhabad, the Phenek and Tongam and bottle designs of Assam and Manipur, the Maheshwari sarees of Madhya Pradesh and the Patola sarees of Vadodara.

Furthermore, the skill involved in producing these special handloom products, such as the Kancheepuram and Benaras silks, the Kosa and Moga silk from Chhattisgarh and Assam respectively, or the Jamdhani from Bengal, the Bhagalpur silk, the



Chanderi from Madhya Pradesh and the Tussar and Ikat of Orissa, is part of a special cultural capital. Though lighter, western clothing is preferred today, most of us still do not miss the most intricately woven traditional clothing on special occasions like weddings and festivals.

After Independence, the government introduced many safeguards to preserve the Gandhian legacy of valuing Khadi to protect handloom weavers and the cultural heritage of this industry from encroachment by the powerloom and mill sectors. The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985, set aside 22 traditional cloth items such as sarees with borders, dhoti, lungi, among others, for exclusive handloom production and put them outside the purview of the powerloom sector. But, when this Act took effect after eight years in 1993, after a protracted litigation by the powerloom sector, the reserved list had only 11 items.

In the late nineties, production suffered due to a combination of factors such as customer's changing tastes, trade practices, and duty-free imports of Chinese crepe yarn. Weavers became labourers. Slowly, trends changed and traditional crafts persons found it difficult to sustain their livelihood. However, since 2015, the saree has revived people's interest in handlooms like never before.

The second biggest source of employment in rural India; next only to agriculture, the handloom sector provides employment to 4.33 million from diverse communities engaged in 2.38 million looms across the country. It contributes nearly 15 percent of the cloth production in the country and also to export earnings. About 95 percent of the world's handwoven fabric is from India.

Recognising the glorious history of the industry and its relevance to present times, the government is committed to resurgence of hand-woven textiles and also weavers. In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared August 7 as the National Handloom Day to mark the day the Swadeshi Movement was launched in 1905 and dedicated the day to the weavers of the country, making good on his poll promise of the 5Fs: farm to fibre, fibre to fabric, fabric to fashion and fashion to foreign.

The prime minister also launched the "India Handloom" Brand (IHB) the same day, to endorse the quality of the products in terms of raw material, processing, weaving and other parameters besides social and environmental compliances for earning customers' trust. The IHB soon made its presence on social media to connect with customers, especially youth, to promote high quality handloom products and help build customer awareness and carve a distinct identity for it. Since assuming charge of the textiles ministry in July 2016, Union Minister Smriti Irani has led by example with her "I Wear Handloom" campaign on social media started last August.

The government has also initiated several steps to revive handlooms. It has laid stress on increasing weavers' earnings, which would in turn attract the younger generation to this profession. These include: Organising weavers in clusters and providing basic infrastructure by setting up Common Facility Centres. To boost handlooms, the textiles minister recently brought together leading designers in a unique public-private partnership. More than a dozen of them were assigned handloom clusters for product development and training weavers to upgrade their skills.

The other measures include—encouraging weavers to sell products through e-commerce; promoting educated youth from weavers' families as weaver entrepreneurs, who will get market information, produce and market cloth directly; linking handloom with fashion and tourism, to expand the market and increase earnings; and involving the private sector in design development and marketing. The textiles ministry is making concerted efforts to pitch India as a global sourcing centre for all fabric, making handloom India's niche contribution to the international fashion industry.

Efforts are on to upgrade hand weaving technology in terms of weavers' comfort, productivity and quality. To ensure continuity of the hand weaving heritage,

Structural differences in brain linked to epilepsy: Study

Thickness and volume differences in the grey matter of several brain regions could predict an increased risk of developing epilepsy a neurological disorder characterised by seizures, finds a research led by a professor of Indian-origin. Epilepsy affects 0.6-1.5 per cent of the global population, comprising many different syndromes and conditions, and defined by a tendency for seizures. The findings showed reduced grey matter thickness in parts of the brain's outer layer (cortex) and reduced volume in subcortical brain regions in all epilepsy groups when compared to the control group.

Reduced volume and thickness were associated with longer duration of epilepsy. Adults with epilepsy exhibited lower volume in the right thalamus a region which relays sensory and motor signals --and reduced thickness in the motor cortex, which controls the body's movement. These patterns were even present among people with idiopathic generalised epilepsies -- a type of the disorder that are typically considered to be more benign if seizures are under control. "We found differences in brain matter even in common epilepsies that are often considered to be comparatively benign," said lead author, Sanjay Sisodiya, Professor at the University College London.

"We have identified a common neuroanatomical signature of epilepsy, across multiple epilepsy types. We found that structural changes are present in multiple brain regions, which informs our understanding of epilepsy as a network disorder," added Christopher Whelan from the University of Southern California. For the study, published in the journal Brain, the team conducted MRI brain scans of 2,149 people with epilepsy, and compared with 1,727 healthy controls from across Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia. "Our findings suggest there's more to epilepsy than we realise, and now we need to do more research to understand the causes of these differences," Sisodiya said.

Depression may reduce survival rates in cancer patients

Even mild depression among patients with head and neck cancer are associated with poorer overall survival, a new study has said. The findings of the study indicated that patients should be screened and treated for depressive symptoms at the time of diagnosis. "We observed that patients with depressive symptoms suffered greater two-year overall mortality rates and this was especially true for those who did not achieve optimal response to medical treatment," said study co-author Elizabeth Cash from the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

According to the researchers, many patients diagnosed with head and neck cancer experience symptoms of depression, which can make it difficult for them to manage treatment side effects, quit smoking, or maintain adequate nutrition or sleep habits. To see if depressive symptoms might affect patients' health outcomes, researchers studied 134 patients with head and neck cancers who reported depressive symptoms during the planning of their treatment.

When they examined the patients' clinical data over the following two years, they found that patients with greater depressive symptoms had shorter survival, higher rates of chemoradiation interruption and poorer treatment response. Poorer treatment response partially explained the depression-survival relationship; however, there were no significant effects from factors commonly used to determine cancer prognosis -- such as the patient's age, the stage of tumour advancement or extent of smoking history.

"This suggests that depressive symptoms may be as powerful as the clinical features that physicians typically use to determine the prognosis of patients with head and neck cancer," Cash added. The researchers noted that most patients in the study, published in the jornal CANCER, did not meet criteria for diagnosis of major depressive disorder, suggesting that even mild symptoms of depression may interfere with head and neck cancer treatment outcomes.

The problematics of genetics and the Aryan issue

Tony Joseph's article ("How genetics is settling the Aryan migration debate, June 16) on how recent genetic studies of Indian populations might be "settling the Aryan migration debate" attempts to summarise polemical as well as technical aspects of the contribution of genetics to the debate in question. I will focus here mostly on methodological issues to argue that the conclusions of two recent studies Mr. Joseph's article heavily leans on are much shakier than conveyed. (Those are "A genetic chronology for the Indian Subcontinent", published earlier this year in BMC Evolutionary Biology, which I will refer to as "Silva et al," after its first author, and "Reconstructing Indian population history" by David Reich and four co-authors, published in Nature in 2009, henceforth "Reich et al.")

To begin with, most studies of population genetics suffer from shortcomings and flaws, some of which are currently unavoidable, while others are the result of subjective, personal choices. The larger public interested in the field of population genetics should be all the more aware of this problematics as genetic studies come to us in a scientific garb; in actual fact, they are scientific only in part; there is still much room for human prejudice and error.

The first limitation is one of numbers. Silva et al.'s study sequenced very few new genomes of the Subcontinent's populations; rather, it revisited older samples with new techniques (about 1,500 for their mtDNA study and 850 for their genome-wide study, if I have correctly read the paper's Additional file 1). That is, of course, a valid exercise, but such a small data set remains inadequate to represent the diversity of Indian populations, which the paper itself often stresses ("a remarkable genetic diversity", "a very complex history", etc.), and may easily lead to over-interpretation of the limited data. It is the case with all genetic studies to date understandably so, DNA sequencing being a time-consuming and costly affair. Moreover, the paper (see its Fig. 2) inherits from earlier studies serious inconsistencies in categorising the samples, grouped sometimes regionally ("Sindhi", "Bengali from Bangladesh", "Gujarati from Houston", "Indian Telugu from UK", with no further details), sometimes caste-wise ("Kshatriya", "Low-caste South" and "Central", "Brahmin South" and "Central", again without further details), and sometimes religion-wise ("Muslim", with no geographical precision). A look at Table S3 in Additional file 1 makes it clear that thousands of communities from all over the Subcontinent are left out of the picture. Bias is built into the data set.

Let us turn to another example of this limitation: I refer to the construct of Ancestral North Indians (ANI) and Ancestral South Indians (ASI) promoted by Reich et al., Middle Easterners, Central Asians, and Europeans", making it "tempting to assume that the population ancestral to ANI and CEU [Europeans] spoke "Proto-Indo-European"". In reality, as I showed in a paper published last year ("Aryans and the Indus Civilization: Archaeological, Skeletal, and Molecular Evidence"), the study had no samples whatsoever from several major Indian States (Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and a few Northeastern States), while other States (Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Kerala) were represented by a single population. With such a heavily skewed distribution, the constructs of ANI and ASI clearly lacked any scientific validity and, moreover, were never defined genetically in the said paper. This prompted in 2014 the biologist B.M. Reddy to call them "ill-conceived and untenable as units of study". ANI and ASI were advanced simply because they were expected to conform to predetermined results, such as ANI entering as Indo-Aryan speakers. When Mr. Joseph asserts that Reich et al.'s study "proved that most groups in India today can be approximated as a mixture of these two populations, with the ANI ancestry higher in traditionally upper caste and Indo-European speakers", he merely resorts to the classic "argument from authority" except that there is no authority at all in this case. That particular study only "proved" how good scientists are apt to bungle when their theoretical framework remains amateurish. We might as well put forth constructs of "Ancestral Eastern Indians" and "Ancestral Western Indians" and demonstrate that most Indian populations "can be approximated as a mixture of these two" the approach would be just as valid, or invalid, as that of Reich et al.

In fact, Reich et al. were themselves careful to "warn that 'models' in population genetics... although they provide an important framework for testing historical hypotheses, are oversimplifications. For example, the true ancestral populations of India were probably not homogeneous as we assume in our model, but instead were probably formed by clusters of related groups that mixed at different times". Clearly, the same complex processes of intermixing continued through most of Indian prehistory and history, which means that there are no "true ancestral populations of India", barring the original immigration from Africa some 60 or 70,000 years ago. The concept of Adivasi has no genetic legitimacy, unless we are ready to restrict it to the Andamanese.

The second flaw, hinted at above, is that of circularity. Mr. Joseph also quotes Reich et al.'s above words of caution, and adds, "In other words, ANI is likely to have resulted from multiple migrations, possibly including the migration of Indo-European language speakers" (note the use of the definite article "the" before "migration"). Silva et al.'s paper also refers to "multiple dispersals into the Subcontinent." If, then, we have "multiple migrations" or "dispersals" at different periods, what are the criteria that allow us to associate a particular migration with "the" presumed migration of Indo-Aryan speakers? There are no criteria at all only a predetermined dogma that Indo-Aryans speakers did enter India in the early or mid-second millennium B.C.E. Silva et al.'s study suffers from this argument from circularity by constantly assuming that any populations migrating in or about central Asia during the Bronze Age must have been "speaking a proto-Indo-Iranian language"; the genetic data are not allowed to gradually build up a picture of possible population movements but immediately squeezed into the mainstream linguistic model.

In a perceptive paper of 2007 entitled "Anthropological, historical, archaeological and genetic perspectives on the origins of caste in South Asia", Nicole Boivin, an archaeologist at Oxford University's School of Archaeology with wide experience of the Subcontinent, offered this critique of genetic studies: "In reading the genetics literature on South Asia, it is very clear that many of the studies actually start out with some assumptions that are clearly problematic, if not in some cases completely untenable. Perhaps the single most serious problem concerns the assumption, which many studies actually start with as a basic premise... that the Indo-Aryan invasions are a well-established (pre)historical reality."

Test vaccine for malaria appears promising

A new, experimental vaccine for malaria has shown fast and effective results against acute infection, protection against relapse, as well as, delay in resistance formation, researchers say. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), nearly half of the world's population is at risk of malaria. In 2015, there were roughly 212 million malaria cases and an estimated 429,000 malaria deaths. Researchers from the University of Tubingen in Germany, tested the efficacy, tolerability and safety of a combination of the drugs Fosmidomycin and Piperaquine on 83 patients in the phase II clinical trials.

The two-fold medication was administered for three days to patients aged one to 30, who were infected with malaria via the Plasmodium falciparum pathogen. In the 83 cases, there was a 100 per cent cure rate, said Peter Kremsner, Professor at the varsity. Patients tolerated the treatment well, and it led to a swift reduction of clinical symptoms. "This study represents a milestone in the clinical research into Fosmidomycin," Kremsner said.

The antibiotic Fosmidomycin, is originally isolated from Streptomyces lavendulae a species of bacteria from the genus Streptomyces. Streptomyces lavendulae blocks a metabolic pathway for the production of Isoprenoid – naturally occurring organic chemicals in the malaria pathogen. This makes the malaria pathogen unable to metabolise or reproduce. As Isoprenoids are formed via a different synthesis path in the human body, humans have no target structures for Fosmidomycin.

As a result, humans tolerate the drug well and suffer barely any side effects, the researchers said, in a paper published in Clinical Infectious Diseases. In addition, this unique mechanism excludes the possibility of cross-resistance to the drugs used in earlier malaria treatments. The new combination also meets WHO guidelines for combination therapies. The two drugs mechanisms against differing target structures means that they attack the parasite in the bloodstream independently of one another. This meets WHO requirements for a fast and effective treatment of the acute phase of infection, and for protection against relapse due to reappearance of the infection. Furthermore, the effective mechanism helps to delay the formation of a possible resistance, the researchers noted.

Cervical cancer's signs every woman should know

The symptoms of cervical cancer, a condition that develops in the cervix, don't surface during its early stages, but there are some crucial signs of the disease that women should know. According to the Daily Express, one of the pivotal signs can be bleeding from the vagina at any time, other than during monthly period. National Health Service also shared that the bleeding can usually occur after having sex.

The organisation added, "Other symptoms of cervical cancer may include pain and discomfort during sex and an unpleasant smelling vaginal discharge. If cancer spreads out of your cervix and into surrounding tissue and organs, it can trigger a range of other symptoms". Bone pain, loss of appetite and finding blood in the urine are also considered to be the signs of the condition. Though there is no single way to prevent cervical cancer, the people can lower your risk by using a condom when having sex.

Most cases of the cancer are linked to an infection from the human papillomavirus (HPV), and using a condom could lower the risk of the infection. Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women and the seventh most common cancer overall. In 2012, worldwide, there were estimated to have been around 528,000 new cases. India alone accounts for one-fourth of the global burden of cervical cancers.

In a recent study, it was estimated that cervical cancer will occur in approximately one in 53 Indian women during their lifetime compared with one in 100 women in more developed regions of the world. The data also showed that cervical cancer contributes to approximately 6-29 percent of all cancer in females at different locations within the country.

Bhai Boolchand, the unsung Indian who launched trade with Ghana



Not much is known about him, but it has now emerged that trade relations between Ghana and India were started by Bhai Boolchand, the first Indian to arrive in the Gold Coast – Ghana's colonial name – in 1890. That's some 67 years before the British colonial government granted the country independence, research by the Indian Association of Ghana has found. "As far as our records show, Bhai Boolchand (of the Bhaibband Sindhwarki trading community), landed on the shores of the Gold Coast in western Africa in 1890. Nearly twenty years later, in 1919, the first Sindhi company was established by two brothers -- Tarachand Jasoomal Daswani and Metharam Jasoomal Daswani," the Indian Association said.

The duo opened a store -- Metharam Jassomal Brothers – in the then capital city of Cape Coast in 1919. "Their business flourished and branches were opened in Accra and Kumasi. A few years later, the two brothers separated and whilst Bhai Metharam Jasoomal continued the business as Metharam Brothers, Tarachand Jasoomal operated his business as Bombay Bazaar. These were the first two Indian companies that were established in the Gold Coast," the Association said.

Boolchand's arrival, therefore, pre-dates the historical links between the two countries that were always thought to have started between Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkruman, and India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Boolchand can thus be described as the one who paved the way for the arrival of other members of the Sindhi community, initially as traders and shopkeepers.

The Indian Association said more of this group arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, with a few venturing into manufacturing industries such as garments, plastics, textiles, insecticides, electronics, pharmaceuticals and optical goods.

The Association said two more Indian firms were established under the names of Lilaram Thanwardas and Mahtani Brothers in the 1920s. This trend continued in the 1930s and 1940s with the creation of several more Indian companies like T. Chandirams, Punjabi Brothers, Wassiamal Brothers, Hariram Brothers, K. Chellaram & Sons, G. Motiram, D.P. Motwani, G. Dayaram, V. Lokumal, and Glamour Stores.

Glamour Stores, which was stared by Ramchand Khubchandani who arrived in Ghana in 1929, has grown -- after changing its name to Melcom Group – to become the largest retailing business in the country.

The Melcom Group, headed by Ramchand's son Bhagwan Khubchandani, is now in its 60th year and about 40 stores all over the country. Ramchand and his brother later went into garment manufacturing in 1955 and once employed over 1,200 Ghanaians. They later opened the first Indian restaurant, Maharaja, in Ghana. Bhagwan followed in his father's footsteps and in 1989 established the Melcom Group with his sons-in-law, Mahesh Melwani and Ramesh Sadhwani.

Another Indian-owned company that has survived through the years is the Mohanani Group, which is currently in its 51st year. At the first-ever Ghana Expatriate Business Awards, the Ministry of Trade and Industries recognised the work of one of the thriving Indian-owned B5 Plus Steel Company and awarded it the Best Expatriate Company in the metal and steel category. As these companies brought in new expatriate staff, some left their employers to venture out on their own – resulting in more companies opening up.

"After 1947, the Gold Coast attracted the attention of some Indian multinational companies, and big names like Chanrai, Bhojsons, K.A.J. Chotirmal, Dalamals and A.D. Gulab opened branches in Ghana," the Association said. "The employment of Ghanaians by these founding companies also helped to lessen the burden of unemployment in the country. This amply demonstrates the level of commitment India has in the developmental agenda of Ghana," it said.

Indians are not only investing in the manufacturing and commercial sectors of the country; they are also investing in the financial sector. Bank of Baroda, one of India's biggest and most reputable banks, recently established a branch in Ghana and hopefully it will expand its operations in other parts of the country very soon.

UN action set to revive Kenyan lake around which flowers bloom



The Naivasha wetlands, nestled amidst the volcanic mountains of Kenya's Great Rift Valley, are dying a slow death. Concerned at the impending ecological crisis, United Nations Environment stepped in to initiate a five-year Freshwater Strategy, part of its global action plan, to protect Lake Naivasha from certain extinction. Roughly half of the country's 127 flower farms are concentrated around Lake Naivasha.

UN Environment Freshwater Unit Head Joakim Harlin told IANS that tackling water pollution and quality and the health of freshwater ecosystems owing to urbanisation are two of the cornerstones of UN Environment's global Freshwater Strategy 2017-2021. He said the new initiative aims to address water-related disasters and the use of integrated science-based water resources management approaches to protect, manage and restore freshwater resources.

The Freshwater Strategy, by involving governments and local partners at national, regional and global levels, provides actionable guidance to support implementation of sustainable freshwater management practices globally. Lake Naivasha supports a mammoth population of hippos, is the wintering ground of myriad avian species and sometimes also supports a small population of flamingos. It is a major tourism destination.

Besides, the lake is the only source of water for this town, some 90 km northwest of capital Nairobi. Experts attribute the shrinkage and water deterioration of Kenya's second-largest freshwater lake to pollution from pesticides, fertiliser and sewage effluents, water abstraction for floriculture, overgrowth of weeds, siltation and the mushrooming of resorts that are pushing this Ramsar-designated site towards certain death. Imarisha Lake Naivasha Catchment Management Programme Chief Executive Officer Kamau Mbogo blamed the growing population in urban slums that are ringed around the lake for its water deterioration and shrinkage.

"The lake is now turning fast into a dump for domestic and agricultural wastes generated from business, tourism and housing within its catchment area. The deterioration started in the late 1980s. Now it's shrinking fast and its deepest point has reduced to 18 metres (off Crescent Island)," he told. He said pollution from fertilisers and pesticides in the run-off from fields is boosting the growth of algae, which is suffocating the fish. Over 700,000 people live in the lake's approximately 3,400 sq km catchment area that is semi-arid with an average annual rainfall of 1,350 mm in the mountains and 600 mm on the lake's shores.

Lake Naivasha, which almost dried up in 2010 owing to scarce rains, provides water for irrigation that supports one of the biggest floriculture hubs in Kenya that caters mainly to the European Union. Kenya is the world's third-largest exporter of cut flowers, accounting for around 35 per cent of all sales in the European Union. Experts say the receding water level and rising water toxicity are posing a serious challenge to the cut-flower industry that employs tens of thousands of people.

According to the Horticultural Crop Directorate, the country's floriculture industry, which generates 1.1 percent of GDP, earned 70.8 billion Kenyan shillings ($688 million) in 2016. Fishermen too expressed concern over a possible extinction of the tilapia fish species due to pollution. "Earlier we used to catch three to four tilapias in a day. Now there is hardly any catch, even for days. I don't know where our fish have gone," a perturbed fisherman, Paul Okello, remarked. Growers in the region have adopted sustainable farming methods to check the lake's deterioration.

Longonot Farm is one such in the Lake Naivasha area that introduced its own constructed wetlands – a natural system that filters chemicals from the farm and allows water to be re-used to irrigate flowers instead of ending up in the lake. It produces around one million roses daily for export to British, European and other markets and employs 12,000 people. The farm has also created a biogas system that uses waste biomass, rejected flowers and other agricultural produce to generate enough clean energy to power the farm and light up 15,000 homes. It is able to produce so much energy from waste that it sells electricity to the national grid. The system also generates enough organic compost for the entire farm.

Negative parenting can affect childhood friendships: Study

Negative features of parenting, such as depression and psychological control, increase the risk of breaking up childhood friendships, finds a study. The results showed that for children with clinically depressed parents, the risk of best friendship dissolution increased by up to 104 per cent, Xinhua reported. There was a similar, although not quite as dramatic, increase in the risk of best friendship dissolution for children with psychologically controlling parents. Parent depression and parent psychological control uniquely predicted subsequent child friendships breaking up, above and beyond contributions of peer difficulties.

"We already know that peer status plays an important role in friendship outcomes. For example, well-liked children have more long-lasting relationships than do their classmates," said Brett Laursen, Professor at Florida Atlantic University (FAU), US. But "children with depressed and psychologically controlling parents are not learning healthy strategies for engaging with other people, which could have long-term consequences for their future relationships", Laursen added.

However, contrary to the researchers' expectations, there were no evidence that positive parenting behaviours like warmth and affection altered the stability of children's best friendships. "We were hoping that positive behaviours would help extend the life of friendships and that it would be a buffer or a protective factor," said Laursen. "This was not the case. Warmth and affection don't appear to make that much of a difference. It is the negative characteristics of parents that are key in determining if and when these childhood friendships end," he noted.

For the study, published in the Journal of Family Psychology, the team looked at 1,523 children. Among them 766 were boys, from grades one to six. They conducted a survival analysis to identify the characteristics of parents that predict the stability of their children's friendships. The researchers also examined the parenting styles to predict the occurrence and timing of the dissolution of kids' best friendships from the beginning to the end of elementary school (grades one to six).

Healthy eating? Women are all ears

The research conducted by the Brigham and Women's Hospital found that patterns of healthy eating may lower risk of hearing loss by 30 percent. Previous studies have looked at how specific nutrients affect risk, but the relation of overall diet and risk of developing hearing loss was unclear. In the new study, researchers examined the relation between three different diets and risk of developing hearing loss: The Alternate Mediterranean diet (AMED), Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH), and the Alternative Healthy Eating Index-2010 (AHEI-2010) in 70,966 women who were followed for 22 years and found that eating a healthy diet is associated with a lower risk of acquired hearing loss in women.

"Interestingly, we observed that those following an overall healthy diet had a lower risk of moderate or worse hearing loss," said first author Sharon Curhan. "Eating well contributes to overall good health, and it may also be helpful in reducing the risk of hearing loss." In this longitudinal study, researchers collected detailed information on dietary intake every four years and found that women whose diets most closely resembled the AMED or DASH dietary patterns had an approximately 30 percent lower risk of moderate or worse hearing loss, compared with women whose diets resembled these dietary patterns the least.

Moreover, findings in a sub-cohort of over 33,000 women for whom detailed hearing-related information had been collected suggest that the magnitude of the reduced risk may be even greater than 30 percent, and may also pertain to the AHEI-2010. The AMED diet includes extra virgin olive oil, grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts, fish and moderate intake of alcohol. The DASH diet is high in fruits and vegetables and low-fat dairy, and low in sodium. The AHEI-2010 diet has common components with AMED and DASH.

Bone density treatment can delay leukemia progression in kids

Targeting a bone loss mechanism that occurs during the development of leukemia may hold the key to reducing the progression of the disease in children, researchers have found. Leukemia is a cancer of blood-forming tissues, hindering the body's ability to fight infection. The study focused on the most common form of the cancer in children, a subtype of acute lymphoblastic leukemia and witnessed substantial bone loss during its development, Xinhua news agency reported.

The pre-clinical findings from identifying the mechanism were promising and suggested that targeting the microenvironment around leukemia cells could not only help fight the cancer, but "simultaneously provide relief for one of its most common and painful side-effects, bone loss", said lead author Laurence Cheung, a researcher from the Telethon Kids Cancer Centre, West Perth in Australia. In the study, published in the journal Leukemia, the team identified a signal produced by the leukemia cells which instructed cells in the microenvironment to eat away at the bone.

The researchers then used a commercially available drug to target the cells in the microenvironment around the leukemia cells.

"Importantly, we found that this not only compensated for the leukemia-dependent bone fragility, but also reduced leukemia progression," Cheung said. "To date, the main strategy for cancer therapy in children has focused on targeting malignant cells with chemotherapy, which is toxic for the leukemia cells but also toxic for the patient."Our finding that the cells surrounding the leukemia cells can contribute to treatment failure or success has led to a paradigm shift. "It means this potentially could be a powerful adjuvant therapy. It's not going to replace chemotherapy, but we propose that using chemotherapy and treating the microenvironment at the same time will have more benefit than just the chemotherapy by itself," Cheung said.

Researchers suggest new therapy for drug-resistant skin cancer

A team of researchers has managed to exploit a vulnerability in melanoma or skin cancer that develops resistance to a targeted therapy, providing a potential new therapeutic strategy to selectively kill the drug-resistant cancer cells. The study has shown that when cancer cells develop drug resistance, they also acquire a new vulnerability, the Xinhua reported.

The researchers, led by Rene Bernards of the Netherlands Cancer Institute and Oncode Institute in Denmark, exposed this new vulnerability in melanoma that has developed resistance to treatment with a BRAF inhibitor – a targeted therapy that blocks a signalling pathway in the cancer cell through which it gets the message to keep on dividing.

Since more than half of all melanoma patients have a mutation in this BRAF gene, the BRAF-inhibitor stops tumour growth in those patients. But within a few months, the tumour cell adapts the original signalling pathway and becomes active again, and even hyperactive.

The researchers, however, found that the hyperactive resistant melanoma cells produced large amounts of reactive oxygen species, but cancer cells still sensitive to the drug did not do so.

The study, published in the journal Cell, found that the abundance of free radicals caused the resistant melanoma cells to stop dividing, but they did not die. When tested on mice along with an existing drug, vorinostat, which is known to stimulate the production of free oxygen radicals, the researchers saw tumours shrink under the influence of the drug, the report said. This laid the foundation for a new therapeutic strategy: Treating patients with BRAF-mutated melanoma, as usual, with signal pathway inhibitors.

When the tumour becomes resistant, stop giving those inhibitors and immediately treat the patients with vorinostat to kill the resistant cancer cells. "It is not a combination drug. It is very important that you first stop the signalling pathway inhibitors because they suppress the free radicals and thus eliminate the effects of vorinostat," Bernards said.

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