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'Jawans didn't buy PM's lies': Rahul repeats debate dare over Modi's 'Dimagi Naxal' jibe



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his "Dimagi Naxals" jibe while addressing CRPF personnel, saying the jawans had not bought his "lies" and reiterating his challenge to the PM to debate him on who was anti-national and controlled by foreign forces.The Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha said that the prime minister "called us Naxals" and asserted that after the debate, Modi "won't have the guts to stand in front of a single jawan again".In his post on X, addressed to the CRPF personnel, Gandhi said, "Dear @crpfindia, Your faces said it all: you didn't buy the PM's lies.""He called us Naxals. My challenge stands. Let him debate me on who is anti-national and who is controlled by foreign forces. Any time, any place. My guarantee: after the debate, the PM won't have the guts to stand in front of a single jawan again," Gandhi said.The former Congress chief's remarks came a day after Modi targeted political opponents, saying armed Maoists have been eliminated but "Dimagi Naxals" have infiltrated several political parties and organisations and are instigating people against the Constitution and democracy."We must identify and defeat such elements and secure the country," Modi said on Sunday, while celebrating Diwali with security personnel at a CRPF camp in Chhattisgarh's Bastar, continuing his tradition of spending the festival with India's brave men and women in uniform.The Congress alleged that PM Modi is clearly distraught, disturbed and desperate, and his "jhola-picking-up time" is fast approaching.In his Independence Day address in August, Modi had also referred to 'Dimagi Naxals' (people with a Naxal mindset), saying the country succeeded in removing armed Naxalism, but its ideological supporters were seeking opportunities to promote violence.The opposition parties had accused Modi of using terms like "Dimagi Naxal" to intentionally brand and delegitimise democratic dissent.Gandhi has been repeatedly daring PM Modi to debate with him openly. The former Congress president has "guaranteed" that it would be proven in five minutes that the PM was a "traitor".The BJP leaders have scoffed at Gandhi's challenge, alleging that he has been running away from debates in Parliament.Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that while Gandhi is asking the PM to choose the venue for a debate, there already exists one in Parliament and called on him to show "some seriousness and responsibility" as the LoP in the Lok Sabha.

SC restores Ghaziabad judicial officer's reputation, says rudeness is no proof of dishonesty



A woman judicial officer from Ghaziabad has won a major victory in the Supreme Court, which held that complaints about her rudeness and behaviour cannot be used to brand her integrity as doubtful.A bench comprising CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana dismissed the Allahabad High Court administration's plea, noting that mere insubordination could not render the integrity of the officer suspect.The officer served as Additional Civil Judge in Ghaziabad during 2019-2020. Her District Judge gave adverse remarks on her integrity in her ACR, terming it doubtful on account of oral complaints by advocates regarding her behaviour and rudeness.She had good service records from 2013-19 and from 2020-21 onwards.Justice Bagchi remarked: "There may be rudeness in her, there may be a tendency to shirk work, but will that make the officer of doubtful integrity? There is an understanding in common parlance as to what integrity is... the word integrity relates to dishonesty. Insubordination relates to judicial temperament."The High Court said many complaints had been made by advocates. The judge at the apex court, however, noted that none were about dishonesty. There were complaints and cross-complaints over exchanges with Bar members, for which the officer had given her explanation.Justice Bagchi further added that the officer perhaps lacked proper temperament or the ability to manage court affairs.CJI Kant said: "A person can't become dishonest for one year and honest for all other years."When told that her ACR had improved after 2019-20, Justice Bagchi said: "Then be magnanimous to her."He disagreed that integrity related to sincerity and probity in judicial work. "When it's a case of integrity, it's a question of extraneous considerations," he said.On her complaint against her superior, Justice Bagchi added: "It's insubordination. Insubordination is not an integrity issue. It's a temperament issue."He said ACRs should use proper expressions, such as saying that behaviour with the Bar was not good.The High Court wanted liberty for further action. The bench declined. "We will not give you any compliment like that. As you rightly said, your warning has had its impact in improvement. I think a model employer should leave it at that," said Justice Bagchi.

Manipur CM Khemchand says Bruce Lee film inspired him to take up taekwondo

GUWAHATI: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, a martial arts enthusiast, is among Bruce Lee's millions of admirers, having taken up taekwondo after watching a film starring the icon.Singh himself revealed this on Monday while attending a demonstration of Naga Indigenous Wrestling (Pyacha) in Senapati, organised by the Senapati District Wrestling Association. Talking about his personal interest in martial arts, Singh said he had practised the traditional Meitei martial art of Thang-Ta during his childhood. He recalled that while studying in Class IX in the 1970s, he was deeply impressed by Bruce Lee after watching the film Enter the Dragon, which inspired him to take up taekwondo. Enter the Dragon is a 1973 martial arts film.Last month, Singh was conferred the Grand Master ninth DAN by the Global Traditional Taekwondo Federation (GTTF). It was presented by GTTF president Grand Master Jun Lee at the inaugural function of the maiden Manipur State Poomsae Taekwondo Championship 2026 held in Imphal.Singh began training in taekwondo at the age of 16. He is the founder president of the All Assam Taekwondo Association. In the early 1980s, he emerged as a key figure in popularising taekwondo in India and played an important role in the formation of the Taekwondo Federation of India, where he served as vice president.Singh said that as years went by, he realised the importance of promoting and preserving indigenous martial arts and traditional practices.Referring to the famous 36 Chambers of Shaolin in China, which attracts people from different parts of the world to learn and conduct research on its traditional martial arts, he emphasised that Manipur's indigenous sports and cultural heritage also have immense potential and deserve greater recognition.The chief minister said that he had visited Senapati, a Naga-majority district, with the objective of encouraging greater promotion of Naga Indigenous Wrestling. He expressed happiness that 25 of Manipur's 36 communities were coming together to participate in the wrestling event.He called for concerted efforts to promote and preserve the indigenous sports, traditional arts and cultural practices of different communities.Drawing a comparison between Naga Indigenous Wrestling and the Meitei traditional wrestling form of Mukna, he noted that different communities have their own distinctive traditional sporting practices which deserve recognition, encouragement and promotion.

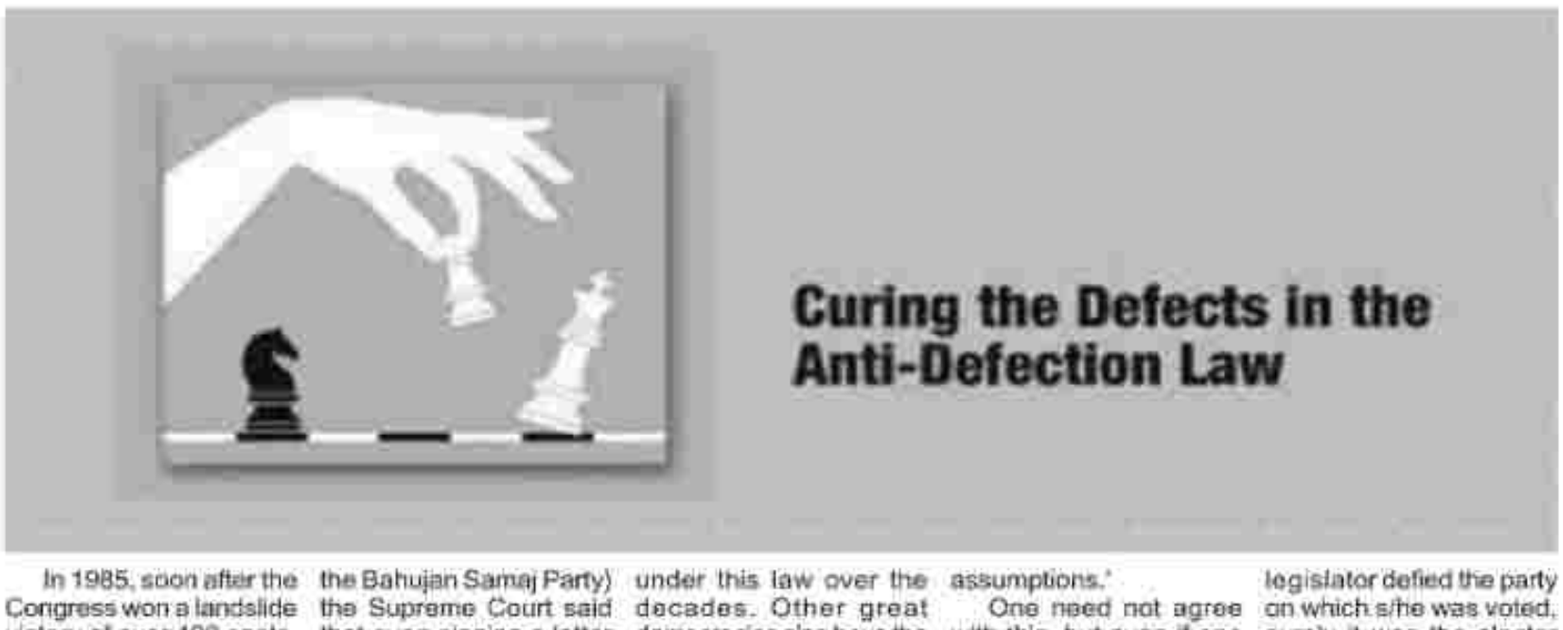
Manipur Census to remain suspended till April 2027, rules High Court

GUWAHATI: The Manipur High Court has ordered that the Census exercise in the state would continue to be put on hold till April 30, 2027.A division bench, comprising Chief Justice M Sundar and Justice A Guneshwar Sharma, issued the order on November 4 after hearing a public interest litigation filed by the Kangleipak Students' Association and the International Peace and Social Advancement, along with a connected writ petition filed by Shanta Singh Nahakpam.Referring to the notifications keeping the Census exercise in abeyance, the court said there would be no rollback or modification of the same until then."To put it differently, the census exercise for the State of Manipur will continue to be put on hold/kept in abeyance till 30.04.2027," the court said in its order.The court further ordered that even after the disposal of the representations, the Census process in the state would continue to remain suspended for four weeks to enable aggrieved parties to approach the court.The petitioners had raised concerns over the Census process, citing the bloody ethnic violence and the resultant mass displacement of people.They stressed that accurate enumeration requires meticulous preparation, particularly in updating jurisdictional boundaries and administrative units, raising questions about the accuracy of population records and the identification of those internally displaced by the ethnic violence.On August 31, the Centre had deferred the Census operations in Manipur, which were scheduled to commence on September 1, amid demands by Meitei and Naga organisations that the updation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) must precede the Census and delimitation exercises.The decision to defer the Census had come after a high-level review meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi."The meeting discussed in detail the demand raised by the people of Manipur to defer the Census exercise in the state before the implementation of the NRC. The meeting agreed to defer the proposed Census exercise in the state considering the feelings and aspirations of the people," a Manipur government statement had then stated.While Meitei and Naga organisations stuck to their guns on the NRC-first demand, the Kuki-Zo Council had dismissed the NRC demand, calling it "premature and unjustified", and welcomed the Census exercise.

Joe Biden, in White House memoir, says Trump should carry weight of Jan 6 riots 'to his grave'

ATLANTA: Former U.S. President Joe Biden writes in his White House memoir that Donald Trump, at once his predecessor and successor, has deeply damaged the country and world with an administration determined to "tear down institutions and inflame hatreds."And the 83-year-old Democrat said the 80-year-old Trump's years of lies about his 2020 defeat to Biden and the Jan. 6 attacks on the Capitol should "follow him to his grave."Biden's sweeping indictment comes in the first excerpt of "Promise Me, America," published Monday by The Atlantic. The 46th president's full memoir is set for a Nov. 17 release. Biden said that while doctors are encouraged by his response to cancer treatment, his activities promoting the book will be limited because of his health."Donald Trump led an insurrection," Biden wrote of the attack by Trump supporters as the U.S. Congress met to certify the 2020 election won by the Democrat. "His goal was to remain in power after the American people had voted him out of office."The rioters weren't 'peaceful protesters," he wrote. "They came armed to stop the official certification of a legitimate election." He chided Trump for later issuing more than 1,500 pardons of the offenders."To this day, Trump and his supporters continue to preen and posture like they're supporters of law enforcement," Biden wrote. "Here's my view: You don't get to turn a blind eye to cops being punched, speared, sprayed, and brutalized and call yourself a friend of law enforcement. What Trump did on January 6, 2021, should never be forgotten. It should follow him to his grave."Biden also laments Trump's Department of Government Efficiency and his aggressive reversal of many of his policies, especially those intended to address climate change."All presidents must confront a feeling that their legacy is vulnerable to the pendulum of politics and the whims of their successors," Biden wrote. "In my case, that feeling was magnified by the dismissive and destructive nature of Donald Trump, who seemed unable to tolerate the idea that someone else's accomplishments might be worth building on rather than tearing down."The memoir's release comes on the heels of Biden's fellow Democrats trouncing Republicans in the midterm elections, securing stunningly broad House and Senate majorities and flipping control of several statehouses in a comprehensive rebuke of Trump's second presidency. But Trump's return to power two years earlier was itself a rejection of Biden's one White House term, and many voters still harbor skeptical views of his presidency and his party.In a lengthy social media post on Sunday, Biden pitched his memoir as the best way he can explain his presidency, "the challenges we faced, the decisions I made and why I made them."During his four years in office, Biden confronted the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout, and he worked to restore global alliances that Trump frayed. But he faced widespread concerns about his age, and he abandoned his reelection bid after a disastrous June 2024 debate with Trump. Dogged by lingering inflation and other concerns, Biden's vice president, Kamala Harris, lost to Trump that November.

It's time to look at the anti-defection law



In 1985, soon after the Congress won a landslide victory of over 400 seats, Rajiv Gandhi got Parliament to pass the anti-defection law. In essence the law said the following: Any legislator who defied the party leadership on a vote would be seen as a defector and disqualified. Meaning that once the party issued a whip (a written notice to its legislators requesting attendance for a particular vote), the legislator could not vote as s/he chose but had to vote as the party wanted her/him to. Even if the legislator abstained from voting s/he could be disqualified. The vote need not necessarily be a confidence vote, linked to the survival of a government.

The anti-defection law can be invoked for any vote that a party chooses. The law originally shielded legislators voting against their party if one-third of them did so. But in 2004, this aspect was also removed. The logic was that the one-third law encouraged 'wholesale defection'. In a 2007 case (Rajendra Singh Rana vs Swami Prasad Maurya, connected to defections in the Bahujan Samaj Party) the Supreme Court said that even signing a letter to the governor supporting the opposite party was equivalent to defection. This is one reason why the Bharatiya Janata Party did not name the members from the Congress or the Janata Dal-Secular who may have been supporting it in Karnataka.

If their names and signatures had been added by B S Yeddyurappe in his letter to the governor, this could have been fatal for the MLAs concerned. The Union government arguing in the BJP's favour in Karnataka made the claim that because the Karnataka MLAs had not yet been sworn in, the anti-defection law did not apply. The Supreme Court said that this claim was 'preposterous' and 'an open invitation to horse-trading'. Over the years, because of this law, the judiciary has been able to impose itself on what it essentially the prerogative of the legislature. This may be seen by some as being necessary but it is not healthy in a parliamentary democracy.

Over 100 MLAs across India and over 2 dozen MPs have been disqualified under this law over the decades. Other great democracies also have the problem of defying their whip, but their solution or punishment is not as drastic as ours. In the United Kingdom, an MP who defies a three-line whip (meaning a written notice which has been underlined three times to mark its urgency) could be expelled from the party but retains their seat, unlike in India where they lose both.

In Australia the punishment for defying the whip is such things as being denied some party resources. In the United States, members cannot be expelled from political parties and therefore the question of such punishment does not arise. India is the only major democracy where casting a vote against your party directive results in such extreme action.

In 1992, the Supreme Court (Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachilhu) decided that the law was not against free speech or any other freedoms and was not against parliamentary democracy. The court said 'the anti-defection law seeks to recognise the practical need to place the proprieties of political and personal conduct.... above certain theoretical assumptions.'

One need not agree with this, but even if one does, other serious questions remain unanswered. What happens in case the party joins a post-poll alliance with another party whose ideology the legislator is opposed to? Should s/he let down her/his voters merely because her/his party leadership has taken a decision in that direction? This is not an easy question to answer and the anti-defection law ignores it. The anti-defection law was justified because that period saw a lot of legislators changing their party, being bribed with offers of ministries or money. In the late 1960s, a Congress legislator from Haryana, Gaya Lal, changed his party three times in a few days. This action produced the phrase 'Aaya Ram, gaya Ram', referring to those legislators who owed no party loyalty but were in politics purely for themselves.

The anti-defection law was meant to curb such activity. And it has done so to a large extent. However it was too sweeping a solution to what was essentially a problem of morality. If a legislator defied the party on which s/he was voted, surely it was the elector who should punish her/him and not the party. The anti-defection law essentially removed the conscience of the elected representative and was thus a blow against democracy and constitutionalism. It also took away the agency and freedom of the legislator. The law fails us the citizens in two most important ways.

First the loyalty that a legislator must have towards her/his voter and her/his constituents as opposed to her/his party. And second, the assumption, which is false, that the party is always right. The history of independent India shows that no party is perfect and their leaderships are capable of mistakes. The anti-defection law blunts the resistance to such actions. Parliament is the loudest and most powerful forum in a democracy. The anti-defection law has muzzled all forms of internal dissent in it. No matter which side of the divide one is on the matter of the mess in Karnataka, all of us must look again seriously at this law and examine the harm it has done, while acknowledging its benefits.

Rebuilding our cities

Soon after World War II, Americans chose to align their cities not with European ideals but with places that reflected American conditions. That great swathes of cheap land and newer technologies for construction were available meant that the new American city could have denser civic centres, a large component of suburban homes, private cars to access long distances, and a new conception of city life.

The Indian city of the 21st century is a similarly dynamic entity, with palpable differences from its modern conception after Independence. Chandigarh, under Jawaharlal Nehru, began with a minuscule population of 20,000. This has grown to 1.2 million people today and the city's construction has no allegiance to its original conception. Similarly, Delhi began its post-Independence life with less than a million inhabitants. Today, on a GPS map, the National Capital Region's unhindered spread across three States resembles muddy water spreading from a broken drain.

Delhi's per capita GDP rate gives no indication of its true demographics. The city has the largest population of urban poor in the world. Its antiquated urban policies by-laws, civic regulations and building parameters that were drawn for a city of 750,000 middle-class residents are today out of sync for a population of 22 million, of which 80% are poor, homeless, or slum inhabitants. With similar statistics, a continual expansion northwards, and a system out of touch with ground reality, Mumbai is a close second.

The liberalised economy of the last few decades has created two pockets of city life: a small exclusive elite that occupies urban space but remains cloistered and outside of its civic forces, and a majority of dispossessed who fill the empty crevices of the city with meagre possessions and rudimentary needs. A supposedly thriving middle class remains a figment of the bureaucratic imagination, while the overwhelming population is of the poor. What does this say about the future of civic planning and urban life?

If the bureaucrat and the politician wish to deal with the real city today, they must look closely at Lagos and Kumasi rather than Copenhagen or Shanghai. Like Delhi and Mumbai, West African cities are migrant towns whose development and future prospects are tied to the economy of day-to-day minor endeavours. To give civic space to people with nothing, to allow for a spread of temporary commerce, cattle fairs, public festivals and vegetable markets as the mainstay of civic life makes West African towns strikingly similar to Indian cities. A mix of agricultural town, rural outpost and cosmopolitan centre, the city's migrant economy takes centre stage in civic life. Indian towns too rely on the surrounding farming economy or are artisan centres for small-scale often illegal industry.

Consequently, the signals are all directed towards a future urbanity made up of rural inhabitants, where the more pressing needs of civic life will be addressed by informal associations. Norms of space occupation, building design, size and density have to therefore grow out of people's own comfort and familiarity, not as an imposition of imaginary European models or even Indian middle-class values. Civic mayhem is created by persistent and erroneous calls for public space, cultural centres, stadia, etc., rather than open maidans and temporary bazaars where migrant patterns can be openly expressed in city life.

Demographic changes in Indian cities occur much too fast to be acknowledged in government policy. In fact, perceptible changes in the city's public disposition have already begun to project rural patterns. The wide open green space at Delhi's India Gate designed as ceremonial space for government monuments now functions as an unselfconscious city ground for the capital's poor. The northern fringe of hillocks outside Jaipur's old city is a cataclysm of expanding tenements. Mumbai's Marine Drive is public space without intent, as is Chennai's Marina Beach.

Unless there is a serious rethink of the value of urban life, the city will remain mired in its present muddled state of trial, error and miscalculation. Cities throughout India have to be revitalised, for which three serious approaches are available. First, given the trends of migration and the free-for-all approach to civic resources, land and facilities, the government's inclination to appease the larger numbers should take precedence. The city's overriding plan should be directed towards an accommodation of all migratory tasks home, employment, entertainment, and commerce in buildings and public facilities altered to suit their primary needs. This may radically change the overall structure of the city. But when bylaws and regulations are specifically and only written for a migrant city, it would be far more acceptable than the current city profile as desperate slum.

The second idea could adopt a draconian model of restrictions similar to Chinese and some European cities, allowing entry and civic facilities only to those with either home or employment. Physical control and access to roads, parks, housing and utilities becomes a position of fewer people sharing a limited reserve of urban space and resources. As most social scientists now admit, only controlled undemocratic space can be a functioning model for a city.

The third model, which is the most difficult and yet most sought-after, seeks a divergent and all-inclusive solution. It is what American urbanist Jane Jacobs described as 'a cultural cohesion' where the integration of economic disparities is so complete that it resembles a finely woven carpet. The design incorporates all the essential elements of habitation home, commerce, recreation and institution and merges them mysteriously in the carpet weave. The city and its neighbourhoods are no longer a visible intrusion of small private capitalist parts in a larger socialist city-state, or vice-versa, but an unconscious mixing of interdependence.

People live blissfully unaware of the other's presence, class or economic status. Hints of such places are visible in old European and American cities, in small medieval towns in western India, even in some long-established poorer city tenements. Such cities do not follow physical, statistical or design models, but are formed out of a deeper evolutionary social core an intent that despises easy definitions of community, residence, commercial area and public space. It takes a brave government to believe these are worth doing, and an even braver one to attempt such coalescing. The extreme variation in all three approaches still demands decisive thought and implementation. It will take civic municipalities a serious commitment to a task so far given over to a decaying formless city part slum, part farmhouse born out of neglect and complacency.

Physical activity levels may start tailing off at age 7

Dear parents, ask your kids to exercise daily from early childhood, as study warns that level of physical activity may start tailing off as early as the age of seven, rather than during adolescence, which is widely believed. The study was published online in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. "The present study found that 100 percent of boys and girls fitted into longitudinal trajectories which were inconsistent with the orthodox view that physical activity begins to decline at adolescence, declines much more rapidly at adolescence and/or declines much more rapidly in adolescent girls than boys," the researchers explained.

"The study questions the concept of the adolescent girl as a priority for research and policy efforts in physical activity," they pointed out. They tracked the physical activity levels of a representative sample of around 400 children over a period of eight years (2006-15). The physical activity levels were measured when the children were seven, nine, 12 and 15, using a small lightweight portable monitor (Actigraph), worn for seven days at a time. Overall, the total volume of physical activity fell from the age of seven onwards in both boys and girls during this time, with declines no steeper during adolescence than in earlier childhood.

The study found that in 61 percent of boys, moderate levels of physical activity gradually tailed off from the age of seven. However in girls, moderate levels of physical activity that gradually tailed off from the age of seven were 62 percent. "Future research and public health policy should focus on (A) preventing the decline in physical activity which begins in childhood, not adolescence, and (B) providing an improved understanding of the determinants of the different physical activity trajectories, including an understanding of the relative importance of biological and environmental influences," they emphasised.

24 mn Americans to lose coverage under Republican health plan

The Republican proposal to overhaul health care in the US could cause as many as 24 million people to lose their coverage over the next nine years, the Congressional Budget Office said. The study released on Monday was highly anticipated given that the CBO independently evaluates the effects of congressional bills, on both the political and economic levels, Efe news reported. Nevertheless, the proposal to replace the Affordable Care Act achieves one of the key objectives of Republican lawmakers, reducing the federal deficit by $337 billion over 10 years, according to the report.

The US deficit in 2016 amounted to $587 billion. "The reductions in insurance coverage between 2018 and 2026 would stem in large part from changes in Medicaid enrolment - because some states would discontinue their expansion of eligibility, some states that would have expanded eligibility in the future would choose not to do so, and per-enrollee spending in the program would be capped," the report said.

Night shifts may up risk of common cancers in women

If you are a woman and have been assigned night shifts at workplace for long, be a little concerned about your health. According to new research, continous shifts at irregular hours may increase the risk of common cancers among women.The researchers found that overall, long-term night shift work among women increased the risk of cancer by 19 per cent.Of all the occupations analysed, nurses had the highest risk of developing breast cancer if they worked the night shift.

"Our study indicates that night shift work serves as a risk factor for common cancers in women," said Xuelei Ma, co-author of the study from West China Medical Center of Sichuan University in Chengdu, China.For the study, published in the journal Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention, researchers performed a meta-analysis using data from 61 articles comprising 114,628 cancer cases and 3,909,152 participants from North America, Europe, Australia and Asia.

The articles consisted of 26 cohort studies, 24 case-control studies and 11 nested case-control studies. These studies were analysed for an association between long-term night shift work and risk of 11 types of cancer.When analysing specific cancers, the researchers found that this population had an increased risk of skin (41 per cent), breast (32 per cent), and gastrointestinal cancer (18 per cent) compared with women who did not perform long-term night shift work.

A further analysis was conducted which looked specifically at long-term night shift work and risk of six types of cancer among female nurses.Among female nurses alone, those who worked the night shift had an increased risk of breast (58 per cent), gastrointestinal (35 percent) and lung cancer (28 percent) compared with those that did not work night shifts."Nurses that worked the night shift were of a medical background and may have been more likely to undergo screening examinations," the researcher suggested.The results might help establish and implement effective measures to protect female night shifters.

Bariatric surgery during adolescence may help in later life

Bariatric surgery, when performed in adolescence, significant improves cardiovascular disease risk factors later in life, according to a study.Prior to bariatric surgery, 33 percent of the 'Teen Longitudinal Assessment of Bariatric Surgery' (Teen-LABS) study participants had three or more defined cardiovascular disease risk factors.

However, three years post-surgery only 5 percent of study participants had three or more risk factors; representing significant reduction in the overall likelihood of developing cardiovascular disease later in life.Marc P. Michalsky, MD, surgical director of the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's, is the lead author of the latest Teen-LABS publication.The study demonstrated bariatric surgery performed during adolescence may provide unique benefits later in life by altering the probability of the future development of adverse cardiovascular events, including the development and progression of impaired glucose metabolism, atherosclerosis, heart failure and stroke.

"This is the first large-scale analysis of predictors of change in cardiovascular disease risk factors among adolescents following bariatric surgery," said Dr. Michalsky."The study demonstrated early improvement and reduction of cardiometabolic risk factors, offering compelling support for bariatric surgery in adolescents.

"This most recent publication from the Teen-LABS research study extends previous findings describing the baseline prevalence of cardiovascular disease risk factors within the cohort of 242 adolescents. Predictors of change in prevalence of cardiovascular disease risk factors measured included blood pressure, lipids, glucose homeostasis and inflammation..

Three years post-surgery, the study showed a reduction in cardiovascular disease risk factors is associated not only with weight loss, but also with age at the time of surgery, pre-operative body mass index (BMI), sex and race.

Specifically, increased weight loss, female sex and younger age at time of surgery serve to predict a higher probability of risk factor resolution.Younger participants were more likely to resolve dyslipidemia compared to older patients, while females were more likely than males to demonstrate improvements in elevated blood pressure."Although relationships between change in cardiovascular disease risk factors and postoperative weight reduction were not unexpected, we learned younger patients at time of surgery were more likely to experience dyslipidemia remission and normalization of high sensitivity C-reactive protein (a marker of inflammation), suggesting there may be advantages to undergoing bariatric surgery earlier, even among adolescents," said Dr. Michalsky.

The crackdown on civil society

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the modern democratic state, armed with technologies of surveillance and control, possesses the kind of power that has never ever been exercised by any other state in history. In a democracy, the individual transits from subject to citizen. Yet there is no one more vulnerable and more helpless than our rights-bearing citizen if the, otherwise, democratic state decides to terrorise, kill and drill fear and trepidation in the mind of the body politic. The other dominant institution of our times, the market, is completely amoral. It is supremely indifferent to human suffering. It has neither sympathy nor room for citizens exploited by the state, and by its own need for resources, labour, and profit.

The only sphere that stands between the individual and the omnipresent and omnipotent state is civil society. In this figurative space, individuals come together in webs of associational life. Associations have the capacity to challenge the brute power of the state through petitions, protests, dharnas and ultimately judicial activism. Given unresponsive political parties, citizens can access centres of power and privilege only through a vibrant civil society.

Civil society is, of course, a plural sphere, and all manners of associations find space for themselves here, from football clubs to reading groups to film fan societies. Each democratic association is important, but we cannot deny that civil liberty and human rights groups are an essential precondition for human well-being. Some Indian citizens were randomly and arbitrarily imprisoned during the Emergency (1975-77) and the fundamental rights of others were truncated. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the aftermath of the Emergency, the civil liberties movement made a dramatic appearance on to the scene of Indian politics. The movement which developed into, or acted in concert with, the human rights movement took on an extremely significant task, that of protecting the fundamental right to life and liberty granted by the Indian Constitution.

Every political revolution in the world has begun with the rights to life and liberty. These two rights lie at the core of other rights that have been developed and codified as critical for human beings. The two rights stretch from the right not to be tortured or killed, to the right not to be arrested and imprisoned by the lackeys of the state without due cause. The right to life is a basic right, but our lives do not mean anything if we are incarcerated for no rhyme or reason.

In the decades that followed, human rights groups have become the custodian of the Fundamental Rights chapter of the Indian Constitution.

They have investigated cases of arbitrary imprisonment, custodial deaths, deadly encounters and coercion of any citizen who dares to speak up against the state or dominant groups.

These organisations have carefully documented the causes and the triggers of communal and caste violence, and established an excellent archive on the abuse of power by governments. They have asked questions which few Indians have had the courage to ask. And above all, they have protected the rights of vulnerable sections of our own people, the Adivasis, the Dalits and Muslims.

Civil liberty and/or human rights activists are lawyers, academics, journalists and public minded citizens of India. What matters is their very human concern for the poor and the disadvantaged, the dispossessed and the vulnerable. What matters is that civil society activists protect the moral conscience of our society. Not all civil society groups do so, some are in the sole business of getting funds from the state or others. Not all sections of the media do so, they are often cowered down by their corporate bosses, and the lure of fame and lucre. Unhappily, the majority of Indians keep quiet when their own fellow citizens are tortured by the police, stripped of access to resources and livelihoods, lynched, exploited by corporate India, and neglected by the mainstream media. Human rights activists shoulder the fight for the rights of the oppressed.

Their role is crucial for democracy because today we are ruled by a government that openly defies ethics and morality, that casts itself in the mould of realism, and that is supremely indifferent to the plight of millions of its citizens.

We are ruled by leaders who dismiss the need for civil society because the cadres and the front organisations of its ideological backbone, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, seek to dominate the space between the individual, the market and the state. The consequences are serious.

Over 10 years ago, during UPA I, we were speaking of the right to food, to employment, to education, to information and to land. We theorised that India was moving towards a social democratic state vide civil society activism. Today there are few organisations that articulate the right not to be lynched, or who struggle for the right to life and liberty. Human rights activists are among these few organisations. They have courageously taken on the challenge posed by corporates, a ruthless state and its venal police, and the cadres of right-wing organisations that specialise in violence.

Activists have been penalised for their eternal vigilance, which, as Irish lawyer-politician John Curran said in 1790, is the price we pay for liberty. The government and right-wing organisations have pursued and terrorised human rights activists. On August 28, lawyers, poets, academics and activists known for their defence of the dispossessed were targeted by the Maharashtra police. The houses of Sudha Bharadwaj, Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha, Anand Teltumbde and Stan Swamy were raided, and some of them imprisoned.

The reasons for the harassment of these warriors in the cause of justice are unsubstantial and unconvincing. The police simply cannot establish that their speeches at the Elgar Parishad meeting in Pune in December 2017 incited the violence unleashed on a Dalit gathering at Bhima-Koregaon on January 1, 2018. It was earlier reported that the peaceful gathering was attacked by activists belonging to two Hindu right-wing organisations: Shiv Pratishthan led by Sambhaji Bhide, and Hindu Ekta Manch led by Milind Ekbote. Mr. Ekbote, committed to Maratha/Hindu supremacy, was arrested in March 2018. Soon he was cleared by the police and the Maharashtra government. Now a completely different set of agents has been brought in and charged with urban Maoism, a term that has neither a history nor a geography. It is simply silly.

This is the latest blow inflicted on civil society by a party that wishes to see only its own organisations dominating the space of associations. The attempt might just rebound on the party. The well-known Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, jailed by the Mussolini government in the 1920s, set out to answer a crucial question. Why had a revolution occurred in semi-feudal Tsarist Russia, and not in the Western capitalist world as predicted by Marx? He concluded that revolutions only happen when the government directly and unashamedly exercises brute power, as in Russia. They do not happen in countries which possess civil societies, for here projects of domination and resistance can be played out. Citizens just do not need to revolt. Is there a lesson our rulers need to learn from this piece of profound wisdom?

A people's campaign to rebuild Kerala

The material loss due to the Kerala floods has been estimated at Rs. 26,000 crore, but beyond this there has been an immense loss of natural, human, and social capital for which no estimates are available. There is no doubt that the short-sighted attempts in building man-made capital (buildings in hilly forests, encroachments on wetlands and rivers, and stone quarries) while ignoring the attendant degradation of natural, human and social capital have played a significant role in exacerbating the problem. The immediate task in the State is relief and rehabilitation, but it is crucial to simultaneously identify the root causes of the havoc.

These root causes prevail throughout the Western Ghats and, indeed, the rest of the country. The first is the flouting of laws that have been established to safeguard natural capital. The Shah Commission inquiring into illegal mining in Goa observes that mining beyond permissible limits has caused serious damage to water resources, agriculture and biodiversity. Second, we have been ignoring serious degradation of human capital in terms of health and employment. In the case of the Plachimada panchayat in Palakkad district, overuse and pollution of water resources by the Coca Cola factory has resulted in losses to the tune of Rs. 160 crore. Third, scientific knowledge and advice has been continually disregarded. In the case of the proposed Athirappilly hydroelectric project, an analysis by the River Research Centre showed that the project document had seriously overestimated the availability of water. The data examined showed that the likely power production in no way justified the costs of construction and running of the project. And fourth, there has been serious erosion of social capital. For instance, Anoop Vellolippil, a staunch anti-quarry activist engaging in a peaceful demonstration, was killed when he was pelted with stones by those allegedly employed by quarry owners at Kaivoli in Vadakara Taluk of Kozhikkode district on December 16, 2014.

Therefore, it is imperative that we abandon business as usual. We cannot just focus on man-made capital; we must enhance the sum total of man-made, natural, human and social capital. The new regime that we must usher in while keeping this in mind must acknowledge that it is local communities that have a genuine stake in the health of their ecosystems and an understanding of the working of the same. The current system of protecting natural resources through negative incentives in the hands of a coercive and corrupt bureaucracy must give way to positive incentives that can be monitored in a transparent fashion by all concerned citizens.

Our Western Ghats panel proposes several such incentives for example, payment of conservation service charges for protecting important elements of biodiversity such as sacred groves (called Sarpa Kavus in Kerala), and payment towards soil carbon enrichment by switching to organic farming. Turning over a new leaf then, the Kerala government must reassure its people that it will no longer continue the policies of development and conservation by exclusion, and that it will respect the right of local communities to decide what kind of development they want and what kind of conservation measures they would like to see put in place.

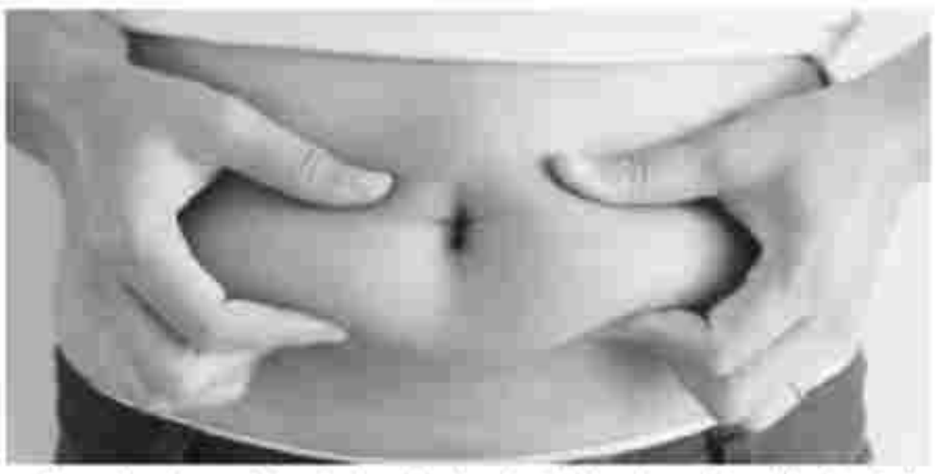
To accomplish this, the government must implement the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in letter and spirit. It must empower local bodies at the ward, gram panchayat, and town and city levels to prepare reports on the status of the environment and to decide on how a substantial portion of the budget should be spent on the basis of these reports. It must set up Biodiversity Management Committees of citizens and empower them to document the status of the local ecosystems and biodiversity resources, and regulate their use. They must be given powers to levy collection charges for access to biodiversity as well as to intellectual property relating to community knowledge.

In particular, it must accord the Biodiversity Management Committees a central place in the preparation of environmental impact assessments and ensure that these assessments begin to reflect the true state of affairs instead of being the uniformly fraudulent documents that are being submitted today. It must fully implement the Forest Rights Act and empower not only tribals, but all traditional forest dwellers to control, manage and market non-timber forest produce. It must stop distortion and suppression of all environment and development-related information and begin uploading information suo moto on websites, as the Right to Information Act demands. It must initiate building a public and transparent database on environmental parameters drawing on the environment status reports, People's Biodiversity Registers, community forest management working schemes, and environmental education projects undertaken by students.

Equipped with this information and all pertinent documents such as from the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, the Kasturirangan Committee, and the Oommen V. Oommen Committee, the State government should ask local bodies about the levels of ecological sensitivity in different parts of the landscape on the basis of topography, hydrology, land use and vegetation, regardless of ownership of the land. The local bodies should provide suggestions on appropriate management regimes for regions of different levels of sensitivity. The government should begin to proactively use modern technologies, including smartphones, in a user-friendly manner so that all the inputs from the various local bodies are transparently available to all citizens. Citizens can then assist in the task of integrating all this information and come up with appropriate conservation and development plans that are properly fine-tuned to locality- and time-specific ecological and social conditions.

This will be a broad-based inclusive approach to conservation and development, and will be in the spirit of the People's Plan Campaign of the 1990s in Kerala, which was spearheaded by the State Finance Minister, Thomas Isaac. I urge Mr. Isaac to renew the spirit of the People's Plan Campaign rather than seek to bury it. Only then can the people of Kerala rebuild nature and society and assure for themselves a sustainable and safe future. I fervently hope that the Kerala government embraces such a progressive approach, so that we will be much better equipped in the years to come to moderate, if not fully prevent, the kind of havoc that visited Kerala recently.

Three super foods that can help you lose belly fat fast



Super foods can help you to detox after overindulging during the festive period and a nutritionist has answered debate over which 'super food' is best, analysing the benefits of green tea, turmeric and cocoa just in time for New Year's resolutions to come into effect.

All three foods have different health benefits - green tea is a natural antioxidant, turmeric is an anti-inflammatory and cocoa is known for its cardiovascular benefits. But, according to nutritionist Georgios Tzenichristos, the overall winner was green tea.

It contains 7 percent of the active molecule EGCG, while turmeric only contains 2 percent of the molecule curcumin and cocoa contains 0.5 percent flavanols. Green tea's polyphenols help to speed the metabolism and boost fat-burning during exercising. Georgios said, "If I had to choose one of those famous super ingredients, that would be the humble green tea. A cup is easy to prepare, costs next to nothing and provides you with a whopping 7 percent active molecules (EGCG), the most of any other drink or food." Meanwhile, Cocoa that is high in flavanols, or plant chemicals, is good for the heart and brain.

According to research from Harvard Medical Schools, it can ward off diseases and help to cut cholesterol. It's also believed that consuming the sweet treat aids serotonin production in the brain. This feel-good chemical helps to regulate the mood and suppress your appetite. To reap the benefits, it's best to consume dark chocolate that contains a high percentage of cocoa. Turmeric has been one of the top health trends of 2017 - and Starbucks even added the ingredient into one of their menu items. The spice contains curcumin, a powerful antioxidant.

This substance helps to rejuvenate the liver and eliminate toxins. There are several ways to work turmeric into your everyday diet. You can take it in capsules, sprinkle it onto your food for flavour or add it to hot drinks. Mr Tzenichristos also pointed out that green tea is easy to prepare, while turmeric can be difficult and stains teeth, and cocoa often needs large amounts of milk and sugar, or a protein shake to mask the unpalatable taste.

Body's own built-in bathroom scales can regulate fat

According to a recent research, a group of researchers have found a previously unidentified body fat regulatory system. The mechanism senses excessive body weight much like bathroom scales, signaling the brain to reduce food intake. More knowledge about the sensing mechanism could lead to a better understanding of the causes of obesity as well as new anti-obesity drugs.

Speaking about the study, lead author John-Olov Jansson said, "Quite simply, we have found support for the existence of internal bathroom scales. The weight of the body is registered in the lower extremities. If the body weight tends to increase, a signal is sent to the brain to decrease food intake and keep the body weight constant." The research was performed on obese rodents that were made artificially heavier by loading with extra weights. The animals lost almost as much weight as the artificial load.

The extra weights caused body fat to decrease and blood glucose levels to improve.

The study also revealed a previously undiscovered mechanism that operates to regulate fat mass entirely independently of leptin. "The mechanism that we have now identified regulates body fat mass independently of leptin, and it's possible that leptin combined with activation of the internal body scales can become an effective treatment for obesity," explained Professor Claes Ohlsson.

One proposition that stems from this new research is that the discovery could potentially explain a frequently observed correlation between the time a person spends sitting and increases in metabolic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. The researchers conclude by saying, "We propose that much sitting time results in decreased loading of osteocytes in the weight-bearing long bones and, thereby, the homeostatic regulation of body weight does not activate its afferent signal to the brain, resulting in obesity."

Study finds nanowire device to detect cancer with a urine test

In a new research, a group of researchers have developed a nanowire device that can detect microscopic levels of cancer markers in the urine, an advance that could help non-invasively diagnose the deadly disease. Cells communicate with each other through a number of different mechanisms. A less familiar mode of cellular transport is the extracellular vesicle (EV), which can be thought of as small "chunks" of a cell that are able to pinch off and circulate throughout the body to deliver messenger cargo to other cells.

These messengers have become increasingly recognised as crucial mediators of cell-to-cell communication. The scientists have developed a novel medical device that can efficiently capture these EVs, and potentially use them to screen for cancer. Talking about the research, study's lead author Takao Yasui explained, "EVs are potentially useful as clinical markers. The composition of the molecules contained in an EV may provide a diagnostic signature for certain diseases. The ongoing challenge for physicians in any field is to find a non-invasive diagnostic tool that allows them to monitor their patients on a regular basis -- for example, a simple urine test."

Yasui further added, "The content of EVs in urine is extremely low, at less than 0.01 percent of the total fluid volume. This is a major barrier to their diagnostic utility. Our solution was to embed zinc oxide nanowires into a specialized polymer to create a material that we believed would be highly efficient at capturing these vesicles. Our findings suggest that the device is indeed quite efficient. We obtained a collection rate of over 99 percent, surpassing ultracentrifugation as well as other methods that are currently being used in the field."

To test the practicality of their device, researchers compared the microRNAs of EVs isolated from healthy patients with those isolated from patients who were already diagnosed with bladder, prostate, and other forms of cancer. The technique required only one millilitre of urine and found a substantially greater number and different types of microRNAs compared with the standard ultracentrifugation approach.

Swachh Bharat momentum: Toilets for pilgrims in Maharashtra



Like every year, lakhs of people are expected to join the Aashadhi Yatra that begins from the Sant Tukaram Temple at Dehu in Pune District today and culminates on 16th of next month in the temple town of Pandharpur. This Yatra on foot en route 34 km distance is joined by a large number of devotees from other towns and villages on the way. The 21 day yatra culminates on 'Ashadi Ekadashi' in the Pandharpur considered the Centre of Bhakti movement in Maharashtra. Lakhs of pilgrims throng the famous Vithoba Temple located in this pilgrimage town situated on the banks of the river Chanderbhaga. While almost 15 lakh people congregate at Pandharpur on 'Ashadi Ekadasi', even on other 'Ekadashis' two to three lakh people visit this town and 10 to 15 thousand people every weekend. So actually it is almost round the year that the pilgrims throng Pandharapur and that is why the need for permanent toilets structures become a necessity.

For decades lack of toilets in this small town about 120 kms from Pune led to open defecation by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims creating health hazard. " It was impossible to walk without soiling one's feet because of the open defecation by pilgrims also referred to as 'wakaris' who converged on this town says Sachin Kamble a local journalist. Many of the devotees who stayed along the river too had no choice but to defecate in the open. The locals were willing to provide accommodation to the pilgrims but would not let them use their toilets. Shikhare who belongs to this town says ironically while the yatris visited Pandhrapur during yatra, the locals preferred to move out on trips elsewhere because of the unhygienic situation and fear of spread of diseases that was created because of open defecation.

That is no longer the case. Over the last few years, the situation has improved considerably. Today Pandharpur boasts of the biggest toilet complex in the world. Maharahstra government has sanctioned over100 crore rupees for the project. Permanent structures with 50 toilet seats each are being constructed on the route at several points where pilgrims halt for the night. Till last year the a cluster of eight mega toilet complexes with over 1400 toilet units in the temple's vicinity had been constructed. These toilet complexes also have disabled friendly toilets and washrooms where the pilgrims can change their clothes.

Toilet project 'Nirmal Wari' was initiated some years back by the state government. Last year 20,000 mobile toilets were deployed during the yatra. But that was not enough so Maharashtra government roped in Sulabh International Social Service Organisation to create more toilet facilities. In all, twenty three toilet complexes are to be constructed and the number of toilets would rise to 2900. Shikhare who works at one of these toilet complexes located in the vicinity of the Vitthal Temple, said these toilet complexes have completely changed the scenario in the town. He said that Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has had its impact with many of the people living in nearby slum areas, now coming forward to construct toilets. He says that instead of defecating in the open, more and more people are using the community toilets. Amul Patil who lives in JJ colony not far from this complex said he would rather pay fifty rupees a month for his family to use the toilets than defecate in the open creating health hazards for himself and others.

Today Maharashtra is 80 percent Open Defecation Free (ODF) against the national average of 64 percent. Speaking at a function to launch 'Darwaza Bandh' to promote toilet use and freedom from open defecation across the country's villages, the state Chief Minister said that Maharashtra is committed to become ODF by March next year. It is not just about Maharashtra, being a multi religious society, pilgrimages on foot or otherwise are part and parcel of our socio-cultural life. It is therefore important that such places and the routes to these places should have toilet facilities, prefabricated, temporary or permanent structures, so that the pilgrims are not forced to defecate in open and create health hazards. It is hoped that with the Government's commitment towards sanitation and the resounding success of the Swachh Bharat campaign, pilgrims across the country will not have to defecate in open and create health issues for themselves and others.

GST: The biggest ever Tax reform



Much awaited Goods and Services Tax (GST) that would radically change the way manufacturer, service provider, trader and eventually the consumer, pay taxes to the exchequer, both at the state and Central level, through a single levy, subsuming a plethora of indirect taxes and making India unified market.

GST is a unified taxation system which would end multiple taxation across the states and create a level playing field for businesses throughout the country, much like the developed nations. It is a multi-stage destination-based tax which will be collected at every stage, starting from procuring the raw material to selling the final product. The credit of taxes paid at the previous stage(s) will be available for set-off at the next stage of supply. Being destination or a consumption based, the GST will also end multiple taxes levied by Centre and the State Governments like Central Excise, Service Tax, VAT, Central Sales Tax, Octroi, Entry Tax, Luxury Tax and Entertainment Tax etc. This will lower the overall tax burden on the consumer and will benefit the industry through better cash flows and working capital management. Currently, 17 State and Central levies are being applied on goods as they move from one State to the other.

Different estimates peg the net advantage to the Gross Domestic Product, up to two percentage points. The GST regime is also expected to result in better tax compliance, thereby increasing its revenue and narrowing the Budget deficit.

All the imported goods will be charged Integrated Goods & Services Tax (IGST) which is equivalent to the Central GST + State GST. This will bring equality with taxation on local products.

Mainly, there will be three types of taxes under the GST regime: Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST), State (or Union Territory) Goods and Services Tax (SGST) and Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST). Tax levied by the Centre on intra-State supply of goods or services would be called the CGST and that to be levied by the States and Union Territories(UTs) would be called the SGST respectively. The IGST would be levied and collected by the Centre on inter-State supply of goods and services. Four supplementary legislations approving these taxes, namely the Central GST Bill, the Integrated GST Bill, The GST (Compensation to States) Bill, and the Union Territory GST Bill were passed by the Lok Sabha in May this year, making the realisation of 1st July, 2017 deadline a reality. All the matters related to the GST are dealt upon by the GST Council headed by the Union Finance Minister while all the State Finance Ministers are its Members. The GST Council also has a provision to adjudicate disputes arising out of its recommendation or implementation thereof.

The GST Council has fixed four broad tax slabs under the new GST system - 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent. On top of the highest slab, there is a cess on luxury and demerit goods to compensate the States for revenue loss in the first five years of GST implementation. Most of the goods and services have been listed under the four slabs, but a few like gold and rough diamonds have exclusive tax rates. Also, some items have been exempted from taxation. The essential items have been kept in the lowest tax bracket, whereas luxury goods and tobacco products will invite higher tax.

Many countries in the world switched to a unified taxation system very early. France was the first country to do so in 1954 and many others followed, some by implementing GST and others by using a different form of Value Added Tax (VAT). In India, the discussion on GST started in the year 2000, in the NDA Government led by the former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Finally, after 17 years of consensus building, 101st Constitution Amendment Bill was passed by Parliament in 2016. The States had apprehension of reduction in their revenue and their desire to keep some lucrative goods out of the GST baskets like alcohol, petroleum and real estate among others.

From agarbattis (incense sticks) to luxury cars - all these goods will be taxed under different slabs. Movie tickets costing less than Rs 100 have been kept in the 18% GST slab while those over Rs 100 will attract 28% tax under GST. Tobacco products have been kept under a higher tax bracket. Industries such as textiles and, gems and jewellery are subject to a GST rate of 5% The Government has shown its strong determination and stuck to implementing the GST with effect from 1st July, 2017. The road ahead would require a lot of resolve by the implementing agencies like the Goods and Services Network, states and the industry. To sail through initial hiccups and successfully steer the ship of the economy, the Government needs to show the same determination and courage. A bold initiative like GST taken for the welfare of the country must lead to a grand success.

Quashing the claim against antidepressants

A recent study has rebutted the claim that antidepressants do not work. The research group at the Sahlgrenska Academy analyzed data from clinical trials before quashing a theory that gained considerable attention in international media, including Newsweek and the CBS broadcast 60 minutes. The theory suggested that the antidepressant drugs, such as the SSRIs, do not exert any actual antidepressant effect.

According to the challenged hypothesis, the fact that many people medicating with antidepressants regard themselves as improved may be attributed to a placebo effect, i.e. that someone who expects to be improved by a medication often also feels improved, even if the medicine lacks actual effect. However, if SSRIs had indeed acted merely by means of a placebo effect, these drugs should not outperform actual placebo in clinical trials where patients have been treated with an SSRI or with ineffective placebo pills, and where neither the physician nor the patient knows which treatment the patient has been given until the study is over.

To explain why antidepressants in such trials nevertheless often cause greater symptom relief than placebo, it has been suggested that SSRI-induced side effects will make the patient understand that he or she has not been given placebo, hence enhancing his or her belief of having been given an effective treatment. The beneficial effect of SSRIs that has been shown in many studies should thus, according to this theory, not be due to the fact that these drugs exert a specific biochemical antidepressant action in the brain, but that the side effects of the drugs enhance a psychological placebo effect.

This theory has been widely disseminated despite the fact that there has never been any robust scientific support for it. Thus, so far, it has never been investigated whether individuals in clinical trials experiencing side effects from antidepressant medication, and for this reason may have guessed that they have not received placebo, also respond more favourably to treatment than those without side effects.

The analysis, which comprised a total of 3 344 patients, showed that the two studied drugs are clearly superior to placebo with respect to antidepressant efficacy also in patients who have not experienced any side effects. The theory that antidepressants outperform placebo merely by means of side effects making the patient realizing that he or she has not been given placebo, and herby enhancing the expectancy of improvement, may hence be rejected. The researchers concluded that this study provides strong support for the assumption that SSRIs exert a specific antidepressant effect. They suggested that the frequent questioning of these drugs in media is unjustified and may make depressed patients refrain from effective treatment.

Vitamin D deficiency ups heart failure risk in older adults

You may advise your grandparents to include dairy products, orange juice, soy milk and cereals in their diet, as a study has recently warned that vitamin D deficiency was linked with a 12.2-times increased risk of heart failure in older adults, especially men. According to researchers, an elevated risk of heart failure in more than half of older individuals and this risk was significantly associated with vitamin D deficiency. The study involved an analysis of the medical records of 137 individuals in Brazil aged 60 years and older. The findings revealed that increase in risk of heart failure is higher in men, obese individuals and those with heart arrhythmias.

Monsoon is fraught with Hepatitis Infection risks

En masse hepatitis infection is wide spread during monsoon. Thankfully, mostly they are not fatal variety of hepatitis. They caused by viruses through contaminated food and water we consume. If we consume them outside, chances of hepatitis infection is very high. News such as large number of school children or office goers suffering jaundice together is a common occurrence these days. Put the blame on food they eat outside their school or office or water they drink.

Dr J.C. Vij, Director and Head, BLK Centre for Digestive and Liver Diseases, BLK Super Speciality Hospital, says, "There are mainly 5 types of hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D and E. The most common types are A,E, B, and C. Hepatitis infections that reach epidemic proportions during monsoon are mostly caused by A and E viruses which infect via contaminated food or water.

Thankfully, hepatitis caused by these viruses are not life threatening in majority of patients. The infection is self limiting. One or two in hundred may die but all others are cured after a period of rest combined with good nutritive food. There are no medicines to treat infections by these viruses."

Hepatitis A is commonly contracted after ingesting food or liquid contaminated by feces from a person infected with hepatitis A. But it is no life threatening. It doesn't lead to long-term inflammation of liver. Majority of people, drinking polluted water and having poor sanitation around get infected with this virus. The same is with Hepatitis E virus. It is a waterborne disease. It is mainly transmitted through consumption of contaminated water or food and is mainly found in areas with poor sanitation.

Dr Vij further added, "Monsoon is notorious for A and E hepatitis infections. Of course, there is no medicine available for the treatment of infection by these viruses. Nor any is needed. But consulting doctor is a must so as to find that jaundice caused is not due to dangerous types of hepatitis viruses namely B and C." He further says, "No witch doctors or Chandni Chowk variety of herbal medicine is of any use in such infections which are self limiting. Take a plenty of rest and some precaution regarding food is enough to let it pass."

On the occasion of World Hepatitis Day, Dr Parinita Kaur, Consultant, Internal Medicine, Aakash Healthcare expressed, "The most common cause of Hepatitis worldwide is infection from 5 types of viruses A, B, C, D and E. Hepatitis A and B are vaccine preventable diseases, yet their incidence is quite high. Universal Immunization for Hepatitis A and B can decrease the burden of disease. Treatment of Acute Hepatitis is supportive and short term. Rarely, it can progress to Acute Liver failure requiring urgent Liver transplant." She further added "Hepatitis B and C viruses can persist in the body for a long time and progress to Chronic Hepatitis requiring long term treatment."

Hepatitis A generally doesn't require treatment because it's a short-term illness. Bed rest may be suggested if symptoms cause a great deal of discomfort. If you experience, vomiting or diarrhea, follow your doctor's orders for hydration and nutrition. Hepatitis E similarly does not call for any treatment because there is none. Because the infection is often acute, it typically resolves on its own.

People with this type of infection are often advised to get adequate rest, drink plenty of fluids, get enough nutrients, and avoid alcohol. However, pregnant women who develop this infection require close monitoring and care. Practicing good hygiene is one key way to avoid contracting hepatitis A and E. One must avoid few things such as local water, ice, raw or undercooked shellfish and oysters, raw fruit and vegetables. Chaat, Golgappa and cut fruits outside home should be a strict no no.

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