

Kalinga Stadium head swimming coach axed

After students alleged misconduct, assault

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Some students of the Kalinga Stadium Swimming Centre in the city have accused coaches of physical assault and misconduct.

The matter came to light after several children, enrolled at the swimming centre, on Saturday alleged that they

were subjected to physical assault, abusive language and threats of expulsion from the sports hostel by the coaches.

The students also alleged that the coaches neglected those residing at the sports hostel, severely hampering their training regime. Additionally, they also accused them of physical assault of students in the sports hostel for no particular reason.

"One of us, who would be performing exceptionally well, will be removed from the

group and then the coaches would meet them personally and physically thrash them for no reason. They use extremely foul language while talking to sports hostel inmates. I have been subjected to torture this time," alleged a student of the swimming centre.

Another student alleged that coaches would force one of the good-performing swimmers to sit out; later, they would threaten and not provide the students with proper

support or training.

The children also mentioned that they had written a letter to the hostel authorities informing them of the situation.

In response, the State Government has taken cognisance of the allegations made by students against the coaches. An investigation into the matter has been ordered and the head coach of the swimming centre, Sandeep Sejwal has been relieved of his duty until further notice.



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi participates in the Similipal Mini Marathon at Ramtirtha in Nayurbhanj district on Sunday.

March 31 Subhadra application deadline



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Deputy Chief Minister Pravatī Parida on Sunday announced that the deadline to submit applications for the Subhadra scheme is March 31. All the eligible applicants who apply by this date are set to receive financial benefit at a time.

"On the occasion of Rakhi Purnima, beneficiaries will receive their payments in three instalments," said Parida, highlighting the cultural significance of the festival when the scheme's funds are distributed.

She said the Subhadra magic number is anticipated

to exceed 1 crore which is a remarkable milestone within eight months.

Odisha is all set to mark International Women's Day on March 8 with the disbursement of the second instalment of the Subhadra Yojana. The ambitious scheme had been launched on September 17, 2024 after the formation of the BJP government in the State.

Under the 5th-phase disbursement under the Subhadra Yojana, the government will release the 1st instalment on March 6.

"We had assured to provide benefits to 1 crore beneficiaries. The total number has crossed 1 crore," said Parida.

Odisha Research Centre to preserve State's rich legacy

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a pioneering move to safeguard and explore Odisha's rich historical and cultural legacy, the Odisha Research Centre (ORC) has launched an ambitious mission aimed at epistemological engagement and knowledge dissemination.

A collaborative initiative of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Union Ministry of Education, IIM Sambalpur, IIT Kharagpur and IIT Bhubaneswar, the ORC is dedicated to investigating critical knowledge practices that address issues of identity, community, region and development.

The ORC is currently in the process of executing a comprehensive strategy to initiate innovative pathways that bridge conventional academic boundaries, enabling deeper engagement with Odisha's historical narratives and contemporary realities. It aims to inspire new conceptual imagi-



naries that reflect on Odisha's glorious past, dynamic present and promising future.

According to Professor Chandi Prasad Nanda, the founding director of ORC, the centre envisions providing an inclusive platform that fosters knowledge exploration and dissemination. "The ORC seeks to explore a neo-hybrid language, an idiom and grammar that bridges natural and human sciences. This approach will enhance our understanding of the State, political formations, public policies, governance, market dynamics, technology, ethics and

Odisha to get lion's share from Union Budget



Says Baijayant Panda

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJP national vice-president Baijayant Panda on Sunday held a meeting to discuss the recently-presented Union Budget. Along with Odisha Minister Suryabanshi Suraj, Panda hailed the Union Budget as a progressive and inclusive financial roadmap which would strengthen India's

economy, generate employment and enhance social welfare.

He claimed that Odisha would get a lion's share from the budget.

"The Union Budget highlights PM Modi's 2047 Viksit Bharat mission and one major share belongs to Viksit Odisha as well. In this fiscal year, the World Bank stated that extreme poverty has declined in India," said Panda.

He said the budget fulfils the

'Robots replace humans to perform complex tasks'

Workshop held at Rajdhani College



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In today's world, robots are increasingly replacing humans in performing complex and hazardous tasks while ensuring safety, stated Prof Dr Gyana Ranjan Panigrahi of Sri Sri University.

A robotics workshop on reconfigurable robotics was jointly organized by Rajdhani College and Sri Sri University under the guidance of Nihar Ranjan Mohapatra, Head Coordinator of the BBA and BCA departments.

Addressing the workshop, Dr Panigrahi emphasized the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in robotics, which has helped leading nations achieve significant success in the medical field.

During the event, two robot prototypes were demonstrated, showcasing their seven distinct configurations and functional capabilities.

The demonstration and ex-

pert discussions were supported by Lokesh Patra, Tanushree Lenka, and Indigibilli Harshit.

Principal of Rajdhani College Dr Sarojkant Choudhury spoke about the evolution of robotics in cinema and real-world applications. However, he asserted that despite technological advancements, robots can never fully replace humans.

The event saw participation from prominent academicians, including Mahesh Pattanayak (Chief Trustee), Soumya Pattnaik (Head of the BCA Department), Assistant Professor Kaibalya Kar, Prajna Padmaja Panda, Manoj Kumar Mohanty, and Dr Subrata Samal, coordinator of the college's Career & Placement Cell.

Additionally, media coordinators Biswaranjan Sahoo, Yashobanta Bhoi, and Ajay Kumar Mani played key roles in ensuring the event's success.

Return ration cards: Min to ineligible beneficiaries again

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Food Supplies Minister Krishna Chandra Patra on Sunday called upon families with incomes exceeding the stipulated limits to return their ration cards voluntarily, reassuring that no punitive action would be taken against those who comply.

The minister's appeal specifically targets those in rural areas with monthly earnings above Rs 10,000 and urban dwellers exceeding Rs 15,000 per month.

With the government taking a strong stance on the return of ration cards by fake beneficiaries, this could be the

last chance to return and escape any punishment.

According to the minister, as many as 80,000 ineligible beneficiaries have already surrendered their ration cards, including 4,500 government employees having also responded to the appeal.

Following the launch of the online application portal, there have been 1,500 new submissions, indicating heightened activity. As Minister Patra said, prior to this, there were around six lakh pending applications waiting for ration card approval.

"Responding to my appeal, around 80,000 ineligible beneficiaries have returned their

ration cards. It is certainly a notable achievement. Persons who belong to higher income groups or are well-employed should return their ration cards," the minister appealed again.

It is pertinent to mention that with around 10 lakh families waiting to be brought under the food security net, Odisha once again reopened its online portal on March 1 to receive applications for issuance of ration cards to eligible beneficiaries.

The portal's reopening is significant for the beneficiaries as it had remained closed since the announcement of the 2024 General Elections.

XIM NSS volunteers clean Puri beach



PNS ■ PURI

In an inspiring display of environmental responsibility, 55 volunteers from the NSS Cell of XIM University, accompanied by Programme Officer Dr Siddharth Misra and NSS Coordinator Prof Jyoti Ranjan, embarked on a remarkable cleanliness drive at the Puri sea beach in collabo-

ration with the Sattvic Soul Foundation.

Equipped with gloves and divided into six groups, each team collected plastic wastes, including alcohol bottles, cigarette packets, plastic wrappers and bags, ensuring a cleaner coastal environment.

Adding an artistic touch to the initiative, a group of volunteers worked on a sand art

display highlighting the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins and turtles, raising awareness about marine conservation.

As the team moved towards the bustling main beach area, they conducted an advocacy campaign, rallying with posters and gathering signatures on a petition standee to promote the cause of clean beaches.

Tuskers wreak havoc in separate incidents

Temple priest trampled to death in Dhenkanal

PNS ■ DHENKANAL/KEONJHAR

In yet another human-elephant conflict, a temple priest was trampled to death by a tusker at Koreiapal village under Kamakhyanager block in Dhenkanal district on Sunday.

Bidyadhar Dehury, 62, was performing his morning rituals at a nearby stream when he came across the tusker unexpectedly emerging from the forest. The elephant attacked him, causing severe injuries by goring him in the right thigh and trampling him.



Despite Forest Department personnel rushing him to the Kamakhyanager Medical Centre, he was pronounced dead by doctors. The department committed to providing financial assistance to Dehury's family as part of the State's compensation scheme for human-wildlife conflict victims.

In another incident, panic ensued in the village of Gada Bandhoga under Anandapur subdivision of Keonjhar district following the entry of a rogue elephant. The elephant, thought to have wandered in from a cashew forest near the village, has deeply unsettled the villagers over the past few days.

Forest Department officials are reportedly trying to direct the elephant toward the nearby deep forest. The animal reportedly strayed into the region of the Tomka Reserve Forest in Jajpur district.

In yet another incident, decomposed remains of an elephant were found in an abandoned well near Kendutokoli village within the Athagarh range. Locals detected a foul odour and reported it to the Forest Department.

It was not immediately known if the pachyderm had died a natural death or was killed by some hunters. Officials reassured the public that they were investigating the circumstances of the elephant's death.

CM unveils farm mechanisation fair at K'jhar MCL hosts Half Marathon

'My govt working to enhance farmers' income'

RAJENDRA K SAHU ■ KEONJHAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday inaugurated the five-day Regional Farm Mechanised Fair at Keonjhar. During his address to the large number of farmers who had come from different parts of the district, CM Majhi said that the development of the State depends on the development of agriculture for which his government is focussing more on the agriculture sector and this is also reflected in the current budget of the State.



He wants that average income of farmers will be more than the that of the country. And this this can be possible if farmers will take the help of modern technology and use mechanisation in agriculture. The CM also reminded the farmers how his government has enhanced the MSP of paddy to Rs 3,100 per quintal along with benefits of farmers by CM Kissan Scheme and PM Kissan Sheme. And in the coming days, his government will declare various schemes for the development of agriculture, he assured.

Telkoi MLA Dr Fakira Charan Naik, Patna MLA Akhila Charan Naik, district Collector Vishal Singh, Additional Director, Agriculture, Yami Surya Rao and Chairperson, Keonjhar Municipal Niku Sahoo were present on the occasion.

Celebrates 50 years of Coal India

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) hosted the Coal India Bhubaneswar Half Marathon on Sunday, celebrating the 50 glorious years of Coal India Limited. The event took place at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar with a total prize money of Rs 45.34 lakh, drawing over 5,600 enthusiastic participants from various walks of life, including professional marathon runners, fitness enthusiasts, young and old from all across the country.

Odisha Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Prada, Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari and Minister of Sports & Youth Services Suryabanshi Suraj were present on the occasion. Olympian shuttler Saina Nehwal was the ambassador of the event.

Participants showcased the spirit of unity and determination in the race featuring various categories, including the 21km Half Marathon, 10km Run, 5km and a Half Km Fun Run. Lili Das from West Bengal and Prince Kumar from Uttar Pradesh stood as the overall winners of the Half Marathon in female and male categories, respectively.



NDMA Commandant visits Paradip fert units



PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

In the wake of a State-level mock exercise on chemical disaster, National Disaster Management Authority [NDMA] Commandant Aditya Kumar visited Paradip and inspected fertilizer plants of IFFCO and PPL located on the outskirts of Paradip port town.

Kumar, during his on-site visit to both the plants, held a meeting with the plant authority and senior officials to review the technical aspects of the chemical exercise. The meeting focused on the emergency evacuation plan, preparation of relief camps for affected people, readiness of the medical response team, and NDRF and ODRAF teams after a chemical disaster.

Kumar also reviewed the action plans of both chemical handle fertilizer plants for conducting a mock exercise on chemical disaster to be held at Paradip.

ADM Paradip Niranjan Behera, revenue officials of Kujanga tehsil as well as fire personnel of Kujanga, representatives of OSDMA, NDRF, and ODRAF accompanied Kumar.

No rehab for slum evacuees Mahasangh threatens demo before B'swar DM

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The 'Basti Basinda Mahasangh' has threatened to demonstrate in front of the collectorate here on March 15 in order to press their demands.

Convener of the association Premanjan Patra alleged that on January 11 several shanties and dwelling houses beside the rail lines in the Arad Bazar area under Jadavpur mouza were demolished after eviction by the State government without making any arrangement of rehabilitation. Although the Odisha Human rights Commission has asked the State government for rehabilitation of the evacuees before demolition yet the same was not complied with; instead those residing in the area for more than 50 years were evicted and houses were demolished. Patra further claimed that most of the affected had patta of the Odisha government.

"On February 14, 55 families meeting the additional district magistrate had apprised their difficulties and demanded their rehabilitation. Yet nothing has been done so far. As a result, the affected are living under the open sky. Since the demands are not fulfilled there would be a demonstration before the Collectorate on February 14," said Patra. Notably, a two-day eviction and demolition drive imposing curfew was undertaken by the district administration to remove illegal encroachment from the railway land for lying of the third line.

Science Day at B'pur 'NEP should focus more on scientific thinking'

RAJEEV RATGHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

A discussion on the theme "Science and Scientific Temper" was organised on the National Science Day here under the aegis of the Humanist Rationalist Organisation on Friday.

At the outset, the organisation's secretary K Nandesh Sena paid tribute to India's renowned scientist and Nobel laureate CV Raman, recalling his discovery of the 'Raman Effect.' He highlighted that since 1987, India has been observing the National Science Day to promote scientific awareness among the masses. The primary aim of the day is to enhance scientific thinking among people, contributing to India's progress.

Keynote speaker, Bhal Chandra Sadangi elaborated on the concept of science and scientific temper. He emphasized that merely studying science for securing jobs is not enough. Without a rational mindset, superstitions, unscientific beliefs and regressive practices continue to hinder India's development.

Similarly, Somnath Behera remarked that the New Education Policy should focus more on scientific thinking rather than outdated curricula.

D Mohan Rao explained that everything operates within the laws of science, debunking supernatural beliefs. He stressed that fear-based superstitions are often used by some individuals to deceive others. The discussion also saw insights from experts like Shyam Sundar Khadanga, Bidhu Prabha Rath, Aditya Rath, Manoranjan Sahu and Maharshi Singh. The event was presided over by the organization's president, ET Rao.

Several intellectuals and dignitaries, including Pratap Kumar Pradhan, K Basava Raju, Lakshmi Nrusingha Rath, Dr Debaraj Panigrahi, Debaraj Patra, A Raja Rao, among others, actively participated in the event. The session concluded with a vote of thanks by Kishore Chandra Mishra.

J'suguda-Mumbai flight service launched



PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

Direct flight service from industrial town Jharsuguda to the financial capital of India, Mumbai was launched on Saturday with IndiGo commencing the daily flight service.

The inaugural flight landed at Veer Surendra Sai Airport in Jharsuguda in afternoon. Local MLA Tankadhar Tripathy flagged off the first flight to Mumbai from Jharsuguda.

According to the schedule, the IndiGo flight will depart from Mumbai at 10:55 am and arrive in Jharsuguda at 1:00 pm. The return flight departed from Jharsuguda at 2 pm and reached Mumbai at 4:15 pm. The flight services will be available all seven days a week.

IndiGo's Airbus A320 aircraft, with a seating capacity of approximately 230 passengers, will operate on the Jharsuguda-Mumbai route, said Sandeep Kumar Tiwari, Airport Director.

Although the final schedule has not been released yet, there is a possibility of changes to the timings in the future.

So far, Jharsuguda is having air connectivity to major metro cities like New Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru, making it easily accessible to travellers. The city's improved air connectivity is expected to boost economic growth and tourism in the region.

In Kendrapada Youth held for posting morphed pix, videos of woman

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

Patkura police with the help of a special police squad on Friday nabbed a youth for posting morphed porn videos and photos of a married woman and blackmailing her to provide Rs 2 lakh to him.

The arrested youth has been identified as Kamal Behera of Kaimati village in Sankha area under Dhenkanal sadar police station. The accused was from Puri sea beach.

According to Patkura police station IIC Md Jamshed, the victim, a resident under Patkura police limit, has lodged an FIR and also approached the Crime Branch alleging that she came in contact with Kamal through social media Instagram.

Later, Kamal started chatting with her and one-sidedly loved her. Kamal later forced her to keep physical relationship with him. When she denied, Kamal with the help of his three friends, Satyajit Behera, Suvendu Badal Nayak and Biplab Parida, prepared morphed porn videos and photos of the victim and made them viral in social media.

The accused also opened a fake ID of the victim and kept posting edited porn photos and videos.

Patkura police later registered a case against Kamal and his friends. After tracking the mobile phone of Kamal, the joint police team nabbed the accused from Puri sea beach.



Puri sea beach. According to Patkura police station IIC Md Jamshed, the victim, a resident under Patkura police limit, has lodged an FIR and also approached the Crime Branch alleging that she came in contact with Kamal through social media Instagram.

In Kendrapada Girl ends life after sexual abuse by invigilator

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

A Plus Two girl student of Pattamundai College in Kendrapada district committed suicide after being allegedly harassed by a Lecturer.

The serious allegations have been brought by the girl's mother who accused an examination invigilator of inappropriate conduct at an examination centre, forcing her daughter to end her life.

The victim's mother has lodged a complaint with the Pattamundai Rural police. As per the complaint, the girl was attending an examination at the Pattamundai College on February 19. During the examination, it is alleged that an invigilator took the student into a common room for a 'copy-checking' session where he allegedly sexually assaulted her.

The student struggled with the emotional distress caused by the incident and tragically ended her life on February 24. Seeking justice, the girl's family demanded an investigation to ascertain the full circumstances of what transpired at the college.

Meanwhile, police have initiated a probe by collecting the CCTV footage from the college.

Boudh teacher gets jail term for bungling funds

PNS ■ BOUDH

A teacher landed in jail for bungling money for construction of school building in Boudh district. He was facing a Vigilance case in this regard.

The convict was identified as Tapan Kumar Kanhar, presently working as assistant teacher at Kutibari Primary School under Harabhanga Block of Boudh district.

While he was working as in-charge headmaster of Kandra Project Primary School, Harabhanga Block, Boudh, he was charge sheeted by Odisha Vigilance for misappropriation of money without completing the construction work of the school.

Kanhar was convicted by Special Judge, Vigilance, Phulbani and sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for a period of 4 years. He was ordered to pay a fine of Rs 10,000.

Wife killer gets lifer in Jharsuguda

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

Additional District and Sessions Judge, Subhash Chandra Dhal, on Friday, sentenced Rabi Naik (40), alias Uddhab Naik, to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife, Surubali Naik (34), in Laikera.

According to Public Prosecutor Gangadhar Garnaik, the incident occurred on the evening of March 16, 2021, at around 6 pm. Following a domestic quarrel, Rabi strangled his wife to death. A complaint was subsequently lodged by the victim's family, leading to the registration of a case at Laikera police station.

The accused was arrested and charged under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

During the trial, the court examined 27 witnesses and considered 32 documentary pieces of evidence. Based on the findings, Judge Dhal convicted Naik and sentenced him to rigorous life imprisonment. Additionally, he was fined Rs 10,000. In case of non-payment, he would have to undergo an additional six months of rigorous imprisonment.

Martial Arts Training Centre launched



By Vedanta Aluminium
PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

The Vedanta Aluminium has announced the launch of a Vedanta Martial Arts Training Centre aimed at empowering the youths of Jharsuguda through structured martial arts training. The training centre will equip young individuals with essential self-defence skills, discipline and opportunity to compete at national and international levels.

It will be a dedicated hub for martial arts with a focus on disciplines such as karate and judo. It will provide professional coaching to help participants hone their skills and prepare for State, national and international tournaments.

Speaking at the event, Sunil Gupta, Chief Operating Officer, Vedanta Aluminium, stated, "We aim to strengthen the sports infrastructure in the region, providing our youth with world-class opportunities to excel."

Jeebananda Mohanty, Vice-President, District Hockey Association, said, "The Vedanta Martial Arts Training Centre is a significant step toward developing young athletes in the region."

In Ganjam State-level meet held to enhance FPOs' efficiency

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

A State-level workshop on Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) was held by the Utkarsha Kendra under the Directorate of Extension Education, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) on Friday.

The event, held in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Ganjam, took place at a local technical institute here. Over a hundred representatives from FPOs across Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal and Rayagada districts participated.

The primary objective of the workshop was to assess the performance of existing FPOs and explore ways to enhance their efficiency. Experts emphasized the need for capacity building, financial assistance, and strong market linkages to ensure sustainable growth. Discussions revolved around government policies supporting FPOs, including funding options, credit facilities from banks, and incentives for value addition and processing. Special focus was laid on horticulture-based entrepreneurship and the promotion of export-oriented agricultural practices.

Officials from the horticulture and agriculture departments presented various schemes aimed at boosting farmer-led enterprises. Representatives from NABARD assured continued financial and technical assistance for FPOs, stressing the importance of collective farming in improving rural livelihoods. Scientists from OUAT and KVKs shared insights on adopting modern farming techniques, diversification, and climate-resilient agriculture to enhance productivity.

The workshop, which saw participation from district agriculture officials, bank representatives, NABARD officials and experts from OUAT, KVKs, and the Phulbani Regional Research Centre, was chaired by OUAT Extension Education Joint Director Dr Sarbani Das.





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

A clash of diplomacy and dignity

A dramatic Oval Office face-off between Trump and Zelensky, marked by sharp exchanges, underscores global political instability

In a high-stakes meeting that captured global attention, President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky clashed in a dramatic showdown at the White House. What began as cordial greetings quickly spiraled into an explosive exchange, leaving Zelensky visibly humiliated on the world stage—even as his defiant stance earned him renewed backing from European leaders. The encounter marked the first in-person meeting between Trump and Zelensky since Trump's return to power in January. Early on, smiles and handshakes gave way to heated words as US Vice President JD Vance pushed for a diplomatic resolution to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Vance's remarks underscored a fundamental point: the need for serious diplomacy to end the war, while also implicitly contrasting Trump's previous approach with that of past administrations. However, as the dialogue unfolded, Zelensky's pointed references to the long history of inaction—citing the annexation of Crimea and subsequent military struggles—sparked



a vehement rebuttal. In a sequence of rapid-fire exchanges, Trump dismissed Zelensky's critiques and reminded him of the overwhelming military support provided by the United States, arguing that without this aid, Ukraine's resistance could have crumbled in days. Despite the abrasive tone and what many saw as a public humiliation, Zelensky's resistance during the meeting resonated far beyond the confines of the Oval Office. While Trump's unconventional style and bombastic rhetoric further alienated many European policymakers, Zelensky's defiant posture emerged as a symbol of unwavering national resolve. European leaders, long critical of Trump's erratic diplomacy, viewed

the exchange as evidence that Ukraine needed to assert its own dignity in the face of American grandstanding. Moreover, Trump's harsh social media post demanding Zelensky "come back when he is ready for peace"—served not only as a dramatic moment of political theatre but also as a catalyst for European unity in support of Ukraine. Zelensky's refusal to be cowed sends a powerful message to both his domestic audience and international supporters. The Zelensky US visit might strengthen Ukraine's negotiating position and ensure a more coordinated effort to counter Russian advances. Trump's return to a more unpredictable form of diplomacy has underscored deep-seated divisions within the international community. His blunt dismissals and confrontational tactics risk undermining the credibility of traditional US diplomatic channels, potentially destabilising long-established alliances. In contrast, Europe's reaction suggests a pivot towards a more measured, collective response that prioritises multilateral engagement over unilateral posturing. This divergence could reshape how global conflicts are addressed in the future, signaling a shift away from "big talk" and towards pragmatic, alliance-based strategies. The Oval Office showdown will likely be remembered as a defining moment in the ongoing Ukraine war and in the evolution of American foreign policy.

PICTALK



A farmer prepares an agricultural land for paddy cultivation, in Nadia

A new era for rural revival and inclusive growth

With a sharp focus on strengthening infrastructure and boosting holistic rural development, the UP budget underscores a visionary and inclusive agenda



KESHAV PRASAD MAURYA

The Budget presented by the BJP's double-engine government in Uttar Pradesh will go a long way in strengthening infrastructure and further boosting the holistic development of rural areas. The state government's mammoth budget of Rs 8,08,736 crore for the all-round development of the state reflects the inclusive and visionary approach of the government, taking full care of the poor, disadvantaged, youth, women empowerment and Annadatas. This budget is 9.8 per cent higher than last year's, indicating the government's pro-development agenda. Under the Prime Minister's vision of a developed India, special emphasis has been placed on rural areas.

The mainstay of the economy of the state is the rural sector and the government has been continuously working towards ensuring that the benefits of the schemes reach the deprived sections of the society. Believing in the credo of self-reliance, the government has been focusing on fortifying the development arcs of villages to make them self-reliant as they will play an important role in creating a strong Uttar Pradesh. While over 96 lakh rural families have benefited under the State Rural Livelihood Mission (UPSLM), on the other hand, financial transactions worth Rs 31,103 crore have been facilitated through 39,556 Banking Correspondent Sakhis. Until now, more than two lakh women have become "Lakshmi Didi," helping them become self-reliant. Uttar Pradesh is also the first state in the country to guarantee concrete houses to the poor. Fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," the state government has already constructed more than 3.6 million houses in resolution. Providing further impetus to the cause, a provision of Rs 4,882 crore has been made in the Budget for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural). Also, an amount of Rs 1,200 crore has been proposed under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana



(Rural). While the Prime Minister's empathetic leadership has ensured a roof over the heads of the poor, the state's economy has also been flourishing. The government's efforts have ensured the economic growth rate of the state has been recorded at 11.6 per cent, which is higher than the national GDP growth of 9.6 per cent. Once considered a "BIMARU" state, the estimated gross domestic product (GSDP) of the state has now risen to Rs 27.51 lakh crore, doubling from 2017-18. In line with this momentum, Uttar Pradesh's economy is expected to reach Rs 30 lakh crore in the next fiscal, which will significantly contribute towards making the state a \$1 trillion economy. Along with the ramping up of infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh is now witnessing a revolution in the transportation sector. The North-South Corridor Plan will be implemented keeping in view road connectivity and highway expansion. Under this, Rs 200 crore has been provided for the widening and construction of roads. A budget of Rs 2,900 crore has been proposed for the widening of roads. Also, a provision of Rs 1,450 crore has been made



THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY CONSTRUCTED MORE THAN 3.6 MILLION HOUSES IN RESOLUTION. PROVIDING FURTHER IMPETUS TO THE CAUSE, A PROVISION OF RS 4,882 CRORE HAS BEEN MADE IN THE BUDGET FOR THE PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA (RURAL)

for the construction of bridges and railway overbridges to ease traffic congestion. The incredible growth has taken into account the need to further bolster youth empowerment and job creation. A budget of Rs 1,000 crore has been allocated under the Chief Minister's Youth Entrepreneur Development Scheme. Under the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Sashaktikaran Yojana, 49.86 lakh smartphones/tablets have been distributed to promote smart education. Free coaching is also being provided to the youth through the Abhyudaya Yojana. Renewable energy and artificial intelligence have been given special emphasis to ensure that youngsters do not fall behind. While the Artificial Intelligence City will be set up in Lucknow, plans are underway to set up a 500 MW solar power plant which will entail a cost of Rs 2,500 crore. Prime Minister Narendra Modi places special emphasis on ensuring the wellbeing of farmers and wants to ensure they do not fall behind in these changing times. In line with this, Annadatas have been placed at the top of the priority list in the mission of achieving the goal of "Viksit Bharat".

Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, Rs 79,500 crore have been distributed to farmers while Rs 496 crore have also been disbursed under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. The state's sugarcane production capacity has also increased from 72 tonnes to 85 tonnes per hectare, boosting the income levels of farmers. The recently presented Budget will not only take the development of the state to new heights but will also transform rural India. From roads to digital infrastructure, farmers to industry, and women empowerment to a bright future for the youth, this Budget has been able to ensure that the needs of every section of society are taken care of. With the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and schemes aimed at boosting the rural economy and infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh is rapidly moving towards fulfilling the dream of a self-reliant India. I am confident that this Budget will realise the vision of 'growth and progress' of UP and propel the state towards the exalted status of the most developed state in the country. (The writer is Deputy Chief Minister of UP; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FINDING FUNDS FOR FREEBIES

Madam — Aprosop of the article 'Finding money for freebies: BJP faces an uphill task' (March 1), the statistical analysis and approach towards the funding of freebies is very realistic and compels the new BJP government to salvage the economy of the Capital. It is really challenging to mobilise the whopping revenue expenditure of Rs 20,100 crores on the promised direct cash transfer of Rs 2500 per month to women, Rs 3150 crores on cash assistance to the pregnant women, Rs 2500 crores on LPG cylinder subsidy, and Rs 30000 crores on education. Central funding of Rs 55000 crore is imperative. These figures are staggering and more than half the revenue expenditure budget of the Delhi state government. Many of the beneficiaries may not be deserving and needy of the freebies, but it can't be debated now and one section of people is providing resources for the others. Since it is a double-engine government, the central funding is a certainty. However, the other state governments will expect the same level of funding from the Union government. However, the local municipal corporations must be asked for self-reliance and mobilise their own resources. There should be separate autonomous development authorities for Dwarka, Rohini and East Delhi. Earlier arrangements of separate MCDs for North, South and East Delhi were doing well and should be restored. The Delhi government should raise circle rates and stamp duties for properties as the market values have risen phenomenally. Liquor shops should be under government control without any licenses to private vendors and more taxes should be imposed on liquor consumption. New mandis, commercial, and industrial complexes should be constructed for raising additional resources. Vinod Johri | Delhi

Decriminalise Indian politics



It is with reference to the editorial "Lawbreakers as Lawmakers." It is time to eradicate the influence of criminality in Indian politics. The rising number of elected representatives with criminal backgrounds in Parliament and State Assemblies is a matter of deep concern to all law-abiding and right-minded citizens. The increasing trend is dangerous and has steadily been eating into the vitals of democratic polity along with the growing corruption of a humongous

nature. Good governance gets seriously undermined when, for instance, criminals, gangsters, or mafia dons become the political bosses of bureaucrats and subvert the system to serve their interests. In 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that a sitting MP or MLA will be disqualified from contesting the election if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more by a court of law. The growing dependence of political parties on criminals for muscle power and electability must be stopped. It is high time all political parties came together and developed a consensus on keeping criminals—some with serious charges including kidnapping, rape, murder, grave corruption and crime against women—out of the system. P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

US-UKRAINE TALKS FAIL

Madam — The abrupt failure of US-Ukraine talks underscores a troubling low in American diplomacy. Trump's insistence on securing indefinite rights to Ukraine's rare minerals in exchange for past aid—while rejecting Zelensky's request for security guarantees—was a blatant betrayal of trust. The talks' undiplomatic nature, with raised voices, Trump walking out and Zelensky skipping lunch, further damaged relations. This shift signals that US commitments are now transactional, undermining credibility and emboldening adversaries like Russia. Such treatment of a war-torn ally weakens global trust in the US, proving that administration changes do not necessarily maintain the nation's moral or strategic responsibilities or commitments. The fallout from this episode will have lasting consequences on international alliances and geopolitical stability. Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Breakthrough 'Bedi cooling turban' a glimmer of hope for brain stroke

This innovative device selectively cools the brain—bypassing the complications of whole-body hypothermia—and comes in handy in the treatment of brain stroke



GYAN BHADRA

At the recently concluded 71st Annual Conference of the Indian Association of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Sciences, Dr Harinder Singh Bedi, Director of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Sciences at Park Grecian Hospital in Mohali, presented a groundbreaking technique designed to protect the brain from oxygen deprivation during surgery. Nicknamed the "Bedi Cooling Turban," this innovative method is a trailblazer in more ways than one. It is well known that lowering the temperature of an injured organ can help reduce damage. However, the brain presents a unique challenge because whole-body cooling introduces its own set of complications, and in brain surgery, only the brain needs to be cooled. Even a brief period of oxygen deprivation can result in devastating consequences, such as a massive stroke. Dr Bedi conceived the idea during intensive brainstorming sessions and set out to cool only the brain. Drawing on his vast experience, he designed a unique cooling



turban made of plastic tubes arranged in a coil. Once the patient is anaesthetised, the device is placed around the head and cold, sterile water is pumped through the coils using a specialised machine, cooling the brain while leaving the rest of the body unaffected. To date, this device has been successfully used in 48 cases to repair blockages in brain arteries, preserving brain function throughout. Dr Bedi refined his surgical skills in advanced cardiovascular techniques at Escorts Heart Institute and St Vincent

Hospital in Sydney, where he managed cases using whole-body cooling (hypothermia) to preserve organ function. At the conference, the technique received an enthusiastic response from 1,700 national and international expert delegates. Dr Rajneesh Malhotra, Cardiac Director at Max Hospitals, expressed particular enthusiasm, suggesting that the technique be applied to more clinical cases to further safeguard patients' brain function. He noted that innovations like this empower Indian surgeons to tackle

cases that might otherwise seem hopeless. Dr Bedi confirmed that he plans to patent the technique and publish his findings so that it can be adopted worldwide to benefit similar cases. In conclusion, Dr Harinder Singh Bedi's innovative "Cooling Turban" technique represents a significant advancement in brain-protective strategies during cardiovascular and thoracic surgeries. By focusing cooling efforts solely on the brain, this breakthrough minimises the risks associated with whole-body hypothermia and opens new avenues for treating oxygen deprivation during surgery. With successful application in 48 cases and enthusiastic endorsement from leading experts, this pioneering approach underscores the ingenuity of Indian medical innovation. Dr Bedi's commitment to patenting and sharing his findings promises to influence global surgical practices, ultimately saving countless lives and setting a new standard in patient care with excellence. (The author is a columnist; views are personal)

SEBI GETS NEW CHAIRMAN

Madam — Tuhin Kanta Pandey, the former Finance and Revenue Secretary, was appointed as the new chairman of the SEBI. The new appointment is crucial as the for-

mer head was entangled in so many controversies due to her own financial favours along with her husband's investment-related vested interest. The Buch couple controversy was highlighted by Hindenburg Research, which accused the couple of misusing their governance power for self-interest. Her harsh and unprofessional approach to handling the SEBI key staff, mishandling of her regulatory position, and controversial connections with the Adani grouping make SEBI a body not so trustworthy. Despite all her flaws, it was shocking that she held her position for the entire duration of three years. The new appointment of Tuhin Kanta, an Odisha cadre IAS officer, brings a ray of hope for the security market regulation body. We hope that Tuhin will secure public confidence once again and he will improve the SEBI free from all materialistic controversies. SEBI deserves fairness and transparency so that security market investors gain confidence in the working of the market and grow their investment with market evangelism. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

FIRST COLUMN

DEALING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

Embracing positive thinking, smart study habits and relaxation can make exams a breeze



SAKSHI SETHI

Examinations are integral to the educational system and are designed to assess students' knowledge, understanding and skills. However, for many students, exams are a source of significant anxiety, leading to stress, reduced performance, and even physical or emotional distress. Overcoming exam anxiety requires a combination of psychological strategies, effective study techniques, and a supportive environment. By adopting a proactive approach, students can transform their exam experiences from overwhelming to manageable.

There is no denying that exam anxiety is real, but so is one's resilience. The anxiety can stem from various factors, including fear of failure, high expectations from parents or teachers, past negative experiences, or inadequate preparation. Symptoms of exam anxiety range from nervousness, restlessness and even difficulty concentrating to physical manifestations such as headaches, nausea and rapid heartbeat. Recognising these symptoms is the first step in overcoming exam-related stress. Dealing with exam stress can be a heavy load and can often make an individual feel lonely. A crucial aspect of managing exam anxiety is cultivating a positive attitude toward examinations. Students need to view exams as opportunities to demonstrate their learning rather than threats to their self-worth. A growth mindset can improve only through effort and practice and can significantly reduce anxiety. Use of positive affirmations such as "I am prepared" or "I can handle this challenge" can boost confidence. Additionally, normalising mistakes and failures as part of the learning process can help students overcome the fear of underperformance. One of the primary reasons for exam anxiety is inadequate preparation. Implementing effective study strategies can enhance confidence and performance. Creating a well-structured study schedule can help prevent last-minute cramming and ensure thorough coverage of subjects. Active



learning techniques, such as summarisation, mind mapping and teaching concepts to peers can also help retain information better. Practicing with past exam papers and taking mock tests can familiarise students with the exam pattern, reducing uncertainty and nervousness. Relaxation techniques can significantly reduce exam-related stress and improve focus. Deep breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation can help calm the mind before and during exams. Engaging selves in physical activities such as yoga, stretching, or even a short walk can release tension and improve concentration. Ensuring adequate sleep, maintaining a balanced diet, and staying hydrated contribute to overall wellbeing, making students more resilient to stress. A supportive environment at home and school plays a vital role in alleviating exam anxiety. In today's competitive environment, it becomes important for parents to encourage their children rather than pressurise them with unrealistic expectations. Study groups and discussions with peers can provide moral support and motivation, making exam preparation a less isolating experience.

What plays the most vital role is on the day of the exam, where students, by following simple yet effective strategies, can stay calm and focused. Following strategies such as arriving early, taking deep breaths, and engaging in light stretching before entering the examination hall can help reduce nervousness. Managing time effectively by allocating specific minutes to each question can help prevent panic. If anxiety arises during the exam, taking a few moments to pause, taking deep breaths, and refocusing can help prevent stress from escalating. Exam anxiety is a common challenge faced by students, but it can be effectively managed through self-awareness, positive thinking, strategic preparation, relaxation techniques, and a supportive environment. Ultimately, overcoming exam anxiety is not just about securing good grades but also about developing resilience and lifelong learning skills.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Is Forest Rights Act driving deforestation?



B K SINGH

Despite its noble intent to secure the livelihoods of tribals, the Forest Rights Act has inadvertently opened the door to rampant deforestation and widespread encroachment

The law has been enacted to confer rights over the use of forest lands by individual tribal or forest dwellers under their occupation on the prescribed cutoff date. Besides the individual rights, there is also provision for community rights over certain forests for benefits of collection of usufructs like beedi leaves, minor forest produces, grazing, fishing etc. and rights can also be conferred to the communities for sustainable management of forest resources.

But the rights can be granted only when they are in actual possession of the forest land or have been enjoying the usufructs or sustainably managing the forest resources on or before 13-12-2005 for tribal and three generations (75 years) before this date for other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs). Despite opposition from foresters, conservationists and environmentalists the law was enacted by the UPA government supported by left parties in 2005. This was followed by notifying the rules and the implementation from January 1, 2008.

Dipak Sarmah who succeeded me as the head of Karnataka Forest Department on my superannuation has observed on page 154 of his book titled, 'Forests Of Karnataka - Why And How Of Where They Are', "Most of the benefits that had accrued in the forests since the 1980s by way of forest consolidation due to implementation of Forest (Conservation) Act appear to have been nullified as a result of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act. The ominous signs of fragmentation and loss of forests are already discernible in a number of states as evident from the biennial India State of Forest Reports published by the Forest Survey of India, Dehradun.

A clearer picture will emerge in about a decade or so, by which time we would come to realise the true impact of the Forest Rights Act on our forests. But it may be then too late to retrieve the losses. Foresters alone cannot prevent the unauthorised removal of trees and the destruction of forests. Villagers set fire to burn the wood and grab the land. Forests are perpetually subjected to encroachments with the support of local leaders. Even if police presence is ensured and the community's resistance is bulldozed while removing encroachments, the problem resurfaces and lands are again grabbed. Political leaders question the removal of cultivation when land is devoid of tree growth. Fresh plantations are damaged and the forest area is re-encroached. Practically all encroachments till 25th October 1980, when the Forest (Conservation) Act came into operation were already regularised by the Union Government.

The Act was operational from 2008 with the new cutoff date of 13-12-2005. It was only the vote bank; the OTFDs were brought in to benefit from the legislation though their encroachments till 25th October 1980 were regularised. It can be understood that OTFDs cannot have more than a generation-old encroachment on the new cutoff date, yet a floodgate of forest destruction was opened for them. Without having any consideration for the ecological security of the country, OTFDs went on a rampage, cleared the fresh tree growth, occupied lands and claimed rights. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the nodal agency for implementation took up several reviews to monitor the progress of the



FOREST AREAS GIVEN FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF GRAM SABHAS HAVE BEEN DEVASTATED, DEGRADED AND FRAGMENTED. THERE ARE PATCHES OF BAMBOO FORESTS IN MEDHA LEKHA GRAM SABHA WHERE ALL BAMBOO CLUMPS WERE CLEARED IN ONE STROKE IN 2012

states, further diluting the provisions in 2012 to ignore the only scientific evidence of satellite imagery interpretation among the evidence to be relied on in support of the claim. The claims of the tribal community, who had only to prove the occupation as of December 2005 were easily acceptable initially, but that too is now two decades old. Left-leaning forces and NGOs fought for claim cases of individual forest rights (IFR), community forest rights (CFR) and rights to manage the forest resources sustainably. This has accelerated the deforestation. IFRs have already been granted to 2.2 million tribal and OTFDs, covering nearly 5 million ha of forest land. Several activists have written articles in newspapers and magazines showing a satisfactory performance over the grant of IFRs and suggesting the states focus their attention on CFRs and grant of forest rights for sustainable management to avail the provisions that have been neglected by the states so far. The estimates of the activists suggest that 30 million hectare forest lands comprising more than 40 per cent of the total forest area can be granted for CFRs and sustainable management. They further argue that if this is done, it has the potential to secure the rights and livelihood of 200 million people including 90 million tribal. Local press in Hyderabad has recently brought out that seven lakh acres of forests have been occupied in 2022-23 and claims over four lakh acres for tribal were approved in Telangana before the 2023 Assembly election. State machineries have accepted the claims overlooking the reports of the concerned divisional forest officer. J Ramesh, Nature Friends

Environmental Development Society, Hyderabad, accused the state of pressuring officials for recognition of rights to ineligible individuals resulting in large-scale deforestation leading to the scam of unprecedented proportion.

There are reports from Rampachodavaram Forests division, Rajamundry (AP) that tribal department officials are granting rights in Papikonda National Park for money. A retired IFS M Padamanaba Reddy has filed a PIL for the scam. In February 2019, just before the Lok Sabha polls, states moved the Supreme Court to review its order of eviction of rejected IFR claims and allow them to re-verify. The court accepted it, but so far the states have not concluded and continue to accept the fresh claims. What signal does it send down the line?

The Act has provided unlimited time for filing claims and deforestation and bringing the land under plough can continue. No one has any concern about the ecological security of the country. It is to be understood that all rejected claimants are in occupation of the forest land, where they have already been successful in deforesting and clearing the area. More rejected claims are encouraged, and more deforestation takes place.

The only place where the CFRs and rights to manage the forests sustainably have been granted is the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. Section 3-1 (i) of FRA 2006 is relevant here, where rights can be granted to villages of Gram Sabha who have the experience of managing the area sustainably. Further the requirement of Section 4 (3) of the Act is also

essential for the grant of rights i.e. they should have the resource as on 13-12-2005 for tribal and 75 years before this date for OTFDs. Management rights have been granted in many Gram Sabhas of Gadchiroli overlooking both the provisions.

Activists are taking this example all over the country and pressing for a repeat of this. This has been frequently quoted example in articles and papers. What these authors have been hiding is the destruction of forests. Forest areas given for the sustainable management of Gram Sabhas have been devastated, degraded and fragmented.

There are patches of bamboo forests in Medha Lekha Gram Sabha where all bamboo clumps were cleared in one stroke in 2012. Forest officers were physically prevented from entering the area. Bamboo has not responded well to the clear feeling. The fresh regeneration is bushy and does not yield any usable bamboo culm. It yielded certain culms every four years when it was managed by the Forest Department.

The management of Medha Lekha Gram Sabha has not been sustainable and the area has not yielded culms in 2016, 2020 and 2024. Taking a cue from Madha Lekha, other Gram Sabhas have also started clear felling and over-exploitation of the resource. Further, the revenue realised from the sale proceeds has not been ploughed back for fresh regeneration activities and the management has become completely unsustainable.

(The writer is Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Head of Forest Force, Karnataka; views are personal)

The integral role of phygital in shaping India's rural economy

The emerging phygital model—merging the tangible strengths of traditional systems with the efficiency of digital innovation—is redefining growth

With over 1.4 billion inhabitants, India's economic landscape has evolved dramatically in recent years. Yet, while urban centres boom, the nation's rural heartland—home to around 908.8 million people as of 2022—continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the country's potential. Although initiatives like Digital India have ushered the country into a digital era with 806 million active internet users by February 2025, technology alone cannot resolve deep-seated infrastructural challenges. This is where the phygital model—a fusion of physical and digital elements—steps in to bridge the divide and ensure balanced growth. A New Era: The Phygital Approach



SAMEER MATHUR

Phygital combines the tangible benefits of traditional systems with the efficiency of digital technology, creating a hybrid framework that enhances accessibility, empowers local businesses, and fosters inclusive growth. In rural regions, where infrastructural deficits and resource limitations persist, phygital strategies are not about replacing established

methods but rather integrating them with modern digital solutions. This approach is proving transformative across key sectors such as banking, commerce, agriculture, healthcare, and public services.

Driving Financial Inclusion For years, traditional banking models have struggled to serve India's vast rural expanses. High operational costs, challenging geography, and low financial literacy have hampered efforts to bring modern financial services to remote communities.

While FinTech has broadened access through digital banking, a fully digital approach can alienate those who lack familiarity with smartphones or online transactions. The phygital model addresses these gaps by merging digital conve-

nience with physical touchpoints.

Systems like Aadhaar-enabled Payment Systems (AePS), micro-ATMs, and local banking correspondents empower rural residents to conduct transactions, access credit, and secure subsidies without the need for continuous internet connectivity. In many villages, Customer Service Points (CSPs) provide essential in-person support, guiding users as they gradually transition to digital financial solutions. Furthermore, partnerships between FinTech companies and local kirana stores or post offices have effectively transformed these outlets into mini banking hubs.

This integration allows people to withdraw cash, pay bills, and transfer money within their



locality, bypassing the need to travel long distances to bank branches and operating beyond standard banking hours. The result is a significant leap forward in achieving comprehensive financial inclusion.

Reinvigorating Rural Commerce

E-commerce has revolutionised urban shopping by altering customer habits and payment methods, but rural

consumers still rely heavily on cash transactions. A completely digital model often fails to resonate with these communities. Instead, the phygital model has emerged as an effective alternative by combining the reach of online platforms with the trust of local, physical commerce. Local kirana stores are increasingly functioning as pick-up points for online orders, ensuring that digital transactions are accessible even to those without digital payment capabilities.

Assisted commerce kiosks further support rural shoppers by helping them browse products, place orders, and make payments—often in cash—thereby bridging the gap between digital platforms and traditional retail.

Transforming Agriculture Agriculture remains the backbone of India's rural economy, providing livelihoods for more than 42 per cent of the population and contributing around 18.2 per cent to the nation's GDP. However, farmers have long contended with issues such as limited market access, dependence on intermediaries, and unpredictable weather. Phygital solutions are beginning to address these challenges by integrating digital tools with conventional agricultural practices. Platforms like eNAM enable farmers to compare prices and market their produce directly, thus reducing reliance on middlemen. At the same time, traditional mandi networks continue to play an essential role in the trading process.

By ensuring that digital marketplaces and physical trading hubs operate in tandem, the phygital approach provides farmers with a more balanced and effective route to market. **Enhancing Essential Services** Beyond commerce and agriculture, phygital innovations are making significant strides in healthcare and public service delivery. Rural communities have traditionally faced barriers to accessing quality healthcare. Now, telemedicine kiosks supported by trained health workers enable remote consultations with specialists, while mobile health units equipped with diagnostic tools bring medical care directly to remote areas. (The writer is Managing Director and Founder of Roinet Solution; views are personal)

UK, France, Ukraine agree to work on ceasefire plan for war in Ukraine

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer says Britain, France and Ukraine have agreed to work on a ceasefire plan to present to the United States. Starmer says the plan emerged after talks among the four countries' leaders following Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Oval Office blowout with US President Donald Trump. The prime minister told the BBC he believes the US president wants a durable peace in Ukraine. He repeated his assertion that American security guarantees will be needed to make it stick. Starmer is hosting a summit of European leaders in London on Sunday to discuss Ukraine. It was supposed to cap a week of whirlwind diplomacy advancing the prospect of peace in Ukraine. But a summit of European leaders on Sunday has been overshadowed by the extraordinary scolding by US President Donald Trump of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Friday for being ungrateful for US support. The London meeting has now taken on greater importance in defending the war-torn ally and shoring up the continent's defenses. "There's a real problem for European leaders to pick up the pieces and try and move forward," Peter Ricketts, the former British national security adviser, told BBC radio on Saturday. "It's going to be a damage limitation exercise. It's going to have to be an exercise in where



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (right) greets French President Emmanuel Macron as he arrives for a summit on Ukraine at Lancaster House in London, on Sunday. AP/PTI

do we go from here?" The meeting at Lancaster House, a 200-year-old elegant mansion near Buckingham Palace, follows a charm offensive last week to engage with Trump at the White House to put Ukraine at the centre of negotiations and tilt his allegiances toward Europe. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who is hosting the leaders of more than a dozen countries and other officials, said he is determined to find an end to Russia's war on Ukraine. "We have an opportunity to come together to ensure a just and lasting peace in Ukraine that secures their sovereignty and security," Starmer said in advance. "Now is the time for us to unite in order to guarantee the best outcome for

Ukraine, protect European security, and secure our collective future." The summit will also include leaders from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Canada, Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Romania. The Turkish foreign minister, NATO secretary-general and the presidents of the European Commission and European Council will also attend. Zelenskyy received broad support from leaders across Europe after the White House fiasco, which was exceptional for featuring an attack on an ally — and because it was broadcast on live television. Starmer embraced Zelenskyy when he arrived Saturday for a private meeting — a day before

a get-together had been scheduled before the summit. "As you heard from the cheers on the street outside, you have full backing across the United Kingdom," Starmer said. "We stand with you, with Ukraine, for as long as it may take." Europe has been uneasy since Trump initiated direct peace talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had been isolated by most Western leaders since invading Ukraine three years ago. The scramble to remain relevant and protect European interests as their once stalwart ally appeared to be cozying up to Putin was even more troubling when Trump called Zelenskyy a dictator and falsely said Ukraine started the war. Meetings in recent days had provided some hope — until Zelenskyy's visit to the White House. Visits to the Oval Office by French President Emmanuel Macron, who had declared his visit a "turning point," and Starmer were seen as steps in the right direction. The meetings were cordial and Trump even took a gentler tone toward Ukraine though he would not commit to providing US security guarantees and maintained Europe would need to provide peacekeeping troops. Within 12 hours of Starmer's return from Washington, the talk of peace seemed to collapse as Vice President JD Vance berated Zelenskyy for challenging Trump's assertions that Russian President Vladimir Putin could be trusted. "Starmer did an impressive job of asserting Europe's agency in the war on Ukraine and conveying to President Trump that Europe is willing and able

to take a leading role in implementing any credible peace deal," said Rachel Ellehuus, director-general of Royal United Services Institute, a defence and security think tank. "Unfortunately, Friday's White House meeting was a major step backward." Ukraine can no longer count on military or political support from the US after Trump declared himself neutral in negotiations, Ellehuus said. She said Europe needs to step in and could release some 200 billion euros (USD 207 billion) in seized Russian assets to help fund that effort. "The immediate goal of the meetings in London must be to keep Ukraine in the fight so it can negotiate from a maximum position of strength," she said. Starmer pledged this week to boost military spending to 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product by 2027. Other European nations may follow suit. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said Saturday that Europe faces a historic test and has to care for itself. He said European countries have to increase their arms spending to reach at least 3 per cent of GDP. "If we don't increase our effort fast enough and let the aggressor dictate its conditions we won't end up well," he said. Macron, who said it was legitimate for the US to shift its focus to dealing with China and Asia, also called for more defense spending as he called for unity among his neighbors. "We should have woken up earlier," Macron said. "I've been saying for years that we need a more sovereign, more united, more independent Europe."

Private lunar lander Blue Ghost aces moon touchdown

PTI ■ CAPE CANAVERAL (US)



A private lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kick-start business on Earth's celestial neighbour ahead of astronaut missions. Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon's northeastern edge of the near side. Confirmation of successful touchdown came from the company's Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles (360,000 kilometers) away. "You all stuck the landing. We're on the moon," Firefly's Will Coogan, chief engineer for the lander, reported. An upright and stable landing makes Firefly — a startup founded a decade ago — the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Even companies have faltered, with only five claiming success: Russia, the US, China, India and Japan. A half hour after landing, Blue Ghost started to send back pictures from the surface, the first one a selfie somewhat obscured by the sun's glare. The second shot included the home planet, a blue dot glimmering in the blackness of space. Two other companies' landers are hot on Blue Ghost's heels, with the next one expected to join it on the moon later this week. Blue Ghost — named after a rare US species of fireflies — had its size and shape going for it. The squat four-legged lander stands 6-foot-6 (2 metres) tall and 11 feet (3.5 metres) wide,

providing extra stability, according to the company. Launched in mid-January from Florida, the lander carried 10 experiments to the moon for NASA. The space agency paid USD 101 million for the delivery, plus USD 44 million for the science and tech on board. It's the third mission under NASA's commercial lunar delivery programme, intended to ignite a lunar economy of competing private businesses while scouting around before astronauts show up later this decade. Firefly's Ray Allensworth said the lander skipped over hazards including boulders to land safely. Allensworth said the team continued to analyse the data to figure out the lander's exact position, but all indications suggest it landed within the 328-foot (100-metre) target zone in Mare Crisium. The demos should get two weeks of run time, before lunar daytime ends and the lander shuts down. It carried a vacuum to suck up moon dirt for analysis and a drill to measure temperature as deep as 10 feet (3 metres) below the surface. Also on board: a device for eliminating abrasive lunar dust — a scourge for NASA's long-ago Apollo

moonwalkers, who got it caked all over their spacesuits and equipment. On its way to the moon, Blue Ghost beamed back exquisite pictures of the home planet. The lander continued to stun once in orbit around the moon, with detailed shots of the moon's gray pockmarked surface. At the same time, an on-board receiver tracked and acquired signals from the US GPS and European Galileo constellations, an encouraging step forward in navigation for future explorers. The landing set the stage for a fresh crush of visitors angling for a piece of lunar business. Another lander — a tall and skinny 15-footer (4 metres tall) built and operated by Houston-based Intuitive Machines — is due to land on the moon Thursday. It's aiming for the bottom of the moon, just 100 miles (160 kilometers) from the south pole. That's closer to the pole than the company got last year with its first lander, which broke a leg and tipped over. Despite the tumble, Intuitive Machines' lander put the US back on the moon for the first time since NASA astronauts closed out the Apollo programme in 1972.

Iran's parliament fires minister of economy over plummeting rial, mismanagement

PTI ■ TEHRAN

Iran's parliament on Sunday impeached the country's economy minister and voted to remove him from office, amid growing concerns over the crashing rial and accusations of mismanagement. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf announced that 182 out of 273 lawmakers voted to dismiss Abdolnasser Hemmati, just six months after President Masoud Pezeshkian's government took office. Pezeshkian, who defended Hemmati, emphasised that the government is locked in a tough battle with the West. He called for greater unity and cooperation from Parliament to face these challenges. The decision comes amid rising tensions over Iran's nuclear program and worsening relations with the West. Iran's economy has been severely affected by international sanctions, especially after the US withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal. In 2015, the rial was worth 32,000 to the dollar, but by the time Pezeshkian took office in July, it had plummeted to 584,000 to the dollar. Recently, it dropped even further, with exchange shops in Tehran trad-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during an open session of parliament for impeachment of his Finance Minister Abdolnasser Hemmati, in Tehran, Iran, on Sunday. AP/PTI

ing 930,000 rials for each dollar. During the impeachment proceedings, Mohammad Qasim Osmani, a lawmaker supporting Hemmati, argued that rising inflation and exchange rates were not the fault of the current government or Parliament. He pointed to the budget deficit left by the previous administration, which he said contributed to the economic instability. Osmani also cited recent geopolitical events as factors that undermined public confidence, causing many people to convert their savings into foreign currency, which in turn further devalued the rial. Hemmati acknowledged the tough economic climate during his five months in office, including a 10% reduction in inflation. However, he acknowledged that inflation remained high, standing at 35%. He assured lawmakers that his team was working hard to address the issue, but warned that the process would take time. This latest development is another chapter in Iran's ongoing political and economic struggles as the country continues to navigate a complex relationship with the international community.



As the sun sets, Palestinians sit at a large table surrounded by the rubble of destroyed homes and buildings as they gather for iftar, the fast-breaking meal, on the first day of Ramadan in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip. PTI

US moves naval fleet to S Korea following missile tests by North

PTI ■ SEOUL

A US aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea on Sunday in a show of force, days after North Korea test-launched cruise missiles to demonstrate its counterattack capabilities. The arrival of the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group at the South Korean port of Busan was meant to display a solid US-South Korean military alliance in the face of persistent North Korean threats, and boost interoperability of the allies' combined assets, the South Korean navy said in a statement. It said it was the first US aircraft carrier to travel to South Korea since June. The deployment of the carrier is expected to infuriate North Korea, which views temporary deployments of such powerful US military assets as a major security threat. North Korea has responded to some of the past deployments of US aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and nuclear-powered submarines with missile tests. Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, President Donald Trump has said he will reach out to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un again to revive diplomacy.

Pope gets visit from Vatican secretary of state

PTI ■ ROME

A stable Pope Francis had a visit Sunday from the Vatican secretary of state as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia, the Vatican said, but again skipped his weekly noon blessing to avoid even a brief public appearance from the hospital. Instead, the Vatican distributed a message from the pope in which he thanked his doctors for their care and well-wishers for their prayers, and prayed again for peace in Ukraine and elsewhere. "From here, war appears even more absurd," Francis said in the message, which he drafted in recent days from the Gemelli hospital, the Vatican said. Francis said he was living his hospitalization as an experience of profound solidarity with people who are sick and suffering everywhere. "I feel in my heart the blessing that is hidden within frailty, because it is precisely in these moments that we learn even more to trust in the Lord," Francis said in the text. "At the same time, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to share in body and spirit the condition of so many sick and suffering people." Signs point to a recovery: It marked the third weekend in a row that Francis has cancelled



A nun prays at the Vatican at the time when Pope Francis would usually bestow his blessing in Rome. AP/PTI

the Sunday appointment delivering the Angelus prayer in person. He could have done so from his 10th floor hospital suite at the Gemelli hospital if he were well enough. But many signs indicated he was recovering and improving. "The night was quiet, the pope is still resting," the Vatican said in its Sunday update. Cardinal Pietro Parolin and his chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, called on the pope Sunday morning, their second visit since Francis' February 14 hospitalisation, according to the Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni. There were no details of what was discussed, but the mere visit suggested Francis' condition was stabilizing. "The night was quiet, the pope is still resting," the Vatican said in its Sunday early update. He had no fever or signs of elevated white blood cells, which

would signal his body was still fighting an infection. Doctors on Saturday reported that Francis was in stable condition, with no mention of him being critical. Their upbeat assessment came a day after a respiratory crisis that resulted in him being put on noninvasive mechanical ventilation. But the 88-year-old pope had a "good response" in his gas exchange levels even during the "long periods" he was off the ventilator mask Saturday and only using high-flow supplemental oxygen, the Vatican said. The fact that Francis was able to use just high-flow oxygen for long periods, without any significant effect on the levels of oxygen in his blood, was a sign his respiratory function was improving. Doctors were cautious however and kept his prognosis as guarded, meaning he wasn't out

Syrians begin fasting during Ramazan without Assad family

PTI ■ DAMASCUS

Some restaurants and coffee shops in Syria were closed during the day on Saturday while others opened as usual as observant Muslims began fasting during the holy month of Ramazan, the first since the fall of Assad family rule in the war-torn country. Syria's interim Ministry of Religious Endowments reportedly called for all restaurants, coffee shops and street food stands be closed during the day and that people must not eat or drink in public or face punishment. Those who violate the rule could get up to three months in jail. However, it did not appear that any official order had been issued by the government to that effect. Associated Press journalists who toured Damascus on Saturday said some coffee shops were opened but had their windows closed to that people can't see who is inside. Insurgents led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, overthrew President Bashar Assad's secular government in early December ending the 54-year Assad family dynasty. Since then, Syria's new Islamist

government under former insurgent leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, has been in control and many fear that the country could turn into an Islamic state, although al-Sharaa has so far promised to respect religious minorities. Under Assad's rule during the Muslim holy month of Ramazan, when observant Muslims abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, people were allowed to eat in public. This year, many people are abstaining from eating in public fearing reprisals. "Ramazan this year comes with a new flavour. This is the Ramazan of victory and liberation," said interim Minister of Religious Affairs Hussam Haj-Hussein in a televised statement. Most countries around the world, including Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Kuwait began observing Ramazan on Saturday, while a few other countries such as Malaysia and Japan, as well as some Shiite Muslims, will begin the fast on Sunday. In many parts of the region, the holy month this year is bitter-sweet. Lebanese this year mark Ramazan after the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war ended

with a US-brokered ceasefire that went into effect in late November. In the Gaza Strip, a fragile ceasefire deal, which has paused over 15 months of war between Israel and Hamas, nears the end of its first phase, and many Palestinians ate their first iftar in the middle of the rubble where their houses used to be. "This year, after the fall of the regime, there are many confirmations regarding the prohibition of publicly breaking the fast, with violators facing imprisonment," said Damascus resident Munir Abdallah. "This is something new, good and respectable, meaning that the rituals of Ramazan should be fully observed in all their aspects." Ramazan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar; the month cycles through the seasons. The start of the month traditionally depends on the sighting of the crescent moon. The actual start date may vary among Muslim communities due to declarations by multiple Islamic authorities around the globe on whether the crescent has been sighted or different methodologies used to determine the start of the month.

Government fails to find right candidate for BPCL top job

After Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), the government headhunter struggled to find a suitable candidate for the top job at Bharat Petroleum, as most applicants were narrow specialists lacking multidisciplinary experience...

Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), according to a PESB order. It advised the administrative ministry "to choose an appropriate course of further action for selection including the search cum selection committee," according to the order.

That panel picked Arvind Singh Sahney who was appointed chairman of IOC in November 2024. In June last year, PESB interviewed eight candidates, including a director on HPCL board and managing director of Indraprastha Gas Ltd, for the post of chairman and managing director at HPCL but rejected them all.

Arun Kumar Singh, the former chairman and managing director of BPCL, for that job. Most board-level appointments at public sector companies are done on the basis of recommendations of the PESB but the government headhunter has been struggling to find suitable candidates for top jobs that fell vacant since 2021 in the oil sector.

companies are not creating leaders with wide exposure. Most of the candidates who appeared for interviews for HPCL and BPCL had spent all their professional careers in just one stream such as only refineries, or LPG sales.

crude oil and gas. In the past, IOC and BPCL nurtured leaders by giving them multidisciplinary exposure. IOC had a route called the department of business development where a refinery, finance or marketing person could get exposure to streams other than his core competence.

Kumar Singh. At BPCL, he worked across refinery, retail, LPG, pipelines and supply chain before heading Bharat PetroResources Ltd, the firm's wholly owned subsidiary for upstream business. It's only after that he was appointed BPCL chairman. And after getting experience of leading a large company he was appointed chairman of ONGC," the official said.

petrochemicals business. This gave him multidisciplinary exposure. Another official said the situation at HPCL is the most grim as potential candidates have spent all of their professional careers in just one or two disciplines.

FPIs withdraw ₹34,574 Crore from equities in February

Foreign investors have pulled out ₹34,574 Crore from the Indian equity markets in February pushing total outflows to ₹1.12 Lakh Crore in the first two months of 2025 amid rising global trade tensions and concerns over corporate earnings growth.

has resulted in the BSE's benchmark Sensex falling over six per cent year-to-date. The recent market sell-off has been influenced by rising United States (US) bond yields, a strengthening US dollar, and global economic uncertainties, leading to a shift in investor focus towards US assets, Bhowar said.

sector with attractive valuations," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. An important paradox in FPIs selling is that they are selling heavily in financial services, the sector which is doing well and the valuations are attractive.

Wave Group and Belgium's Agristo NV will invest around ₹750 Crore to expand their potato processing plant in Uttar Pradesh to make premium french fries, amid rising global demand for processed food.

Pradesh Suresh Kumar Khanna and Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh Manoj Singh attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion of the production line for export quality french fries at Bijnor," Chadha said.

both domestic and export markets, with North America, Middle East, South East Asia and Japan being the key destinations overseas. Filip Wallays, Co-CEO of Agristo, said, "The Bijnor plant is a testament of how results can be achieved when vision and technical expertise are combined.

Coal India arm Northern Coalfields Ltd (NCL) expects to achieve the production target of 139 Million Tonnes (MT) for the current fiscal. In a statement, NCL said that till February the subsidiary produced 128.13 MT and "we are hopeful that we will also achieve our annual target".

production target in FY25. The company's dispatch was 125.78 MT in the April-February period of the current fiscal. NCL's dispatch target for the current fiscal is 139 MT.

Radico Khaitan expects ₹500 Crore sales in FY26: MD

Encouraged by the ongoing premiumisation in the alcoholic beverage (alcobev) segment, Radico Khaitan expects sales of ₹500 Crore from its luxury brands, including single malt 'Rampur' and Jaisalmer Indian Craft Gin, in the next fiscal, its Managing Director Abhishek Khaitan said.

capita income and young demographics, such as India adding 20 Million new people to the drinking age bracket every year, will help the company maintain its momentum. Khaitan is also unfazed about the government's decision to slash import duty on bourbon whiskey to 50 per cent and said it is very "minuscule" in size in the Indian liquor market and "that would not have so much pressure on the local companies".

Excelsoft Technologies files for IPO with SEBI

Excelsoft Technologies Limited, a vertical software-as-a-service (SaaS) company focused on the learning and assessment market, has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to raise ₹700 Crore through an initial public offering (IPO).

to utilise the proceeds of the fresh issue towards purchase of land and construction of a new building and for upgradation and external electrical systems of its existing facility in Mysore, funding upgradation of the company's IT infrastructure and for general corporate purposes.

University-IDAHO, Training Qualifications UK, Surala Net Co Ltd, Excel Public School and The Chartered Quality Institute. On the financial front, Excelsoft reported a revenue from operations at ₹198.3 Crore in fiscal year 24, with a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹12.75 Crore.

US tariff, FII's key drivers for markets

Equity markets will take cues from the United States (US) tariff related developments, global trends and trading activity of foreign investors this week, analysts said. Markets may face volatile trends going ahead as investor sentiment continue to remain weak due to escalating trade tariff concerns and foreign fund outflows, experts noted.

subside," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From macroeconomic space, announcement of HSBC manufacturing and services PMI data during the week would also be tracked by investors.

2.80 per cent, and the Nifty tanked 671.2 points or 2.94 per cent. "Uncertainty often weighs more than the actual event, and the market is currently grappling with concerns over potential trade wars. Additionally, persistent FII (Foreign Institutional Investors) selling continues to add pressure," Ajit Mishra - SVP, research, Religare Broking Limited, said.

Wages drag as employment rises: Virmani

Niti Aayog member Arvind Virmani has said that while employment is increasing in India, real wages for regular jobs have not kept pace with inflation over the past seven years.

increasing". As per the PLFS Annual Report 2023-24 (July-June), the worker-population ratio in terms of persons of all ages increased to 43.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 34.7 per cent in 2017-18.

very weak state. The central government is taking steps. States also need to work in this direction, work needs to be done at the district level because jobs will be created there.

who drop out of school midway," Virmani said. The major problem is the lack of quality education and skills. Skills need to be improved at every level - lower, middle and higher. We need skills for all kinds of jobs, he added.

Mcap of eight valued firms plummeted by ₹3 Lakh Crore. The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms eroded by ₹3,09,244.57 Crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with Tata Consultancy Services taking the biggest hit, in line with bearish trend in equities.

valued firms chart from the previous second place. HDFC Bank overtook TCS to become the second most valuable firm. The valuation of Infosys tanked ₹52,697.93 Crore to ₹7,01,002.22 Crore.

plummeted ₹1,09,211.97 Crore to ₹12,60,505.51 Crore, the most among the top-10 firms. With the sharp decline in its market valuation TCS slipped to the third rank in the top-10 most

valued firms chart from the previous second place. HDFC Bank overtook TCS to become the second most valuable firm. The valuation of Infosys tanked ₹52,697.93 Crore to ₹7,01,002.22 Crore.



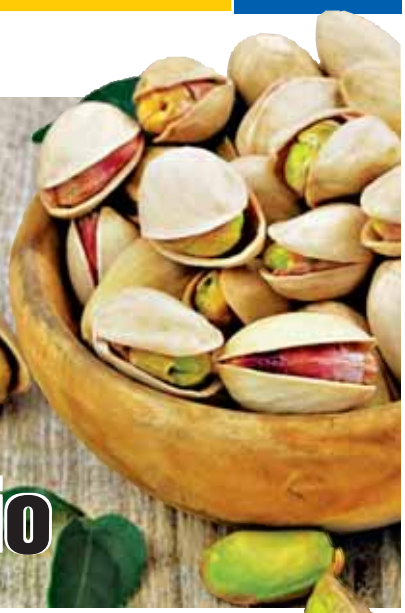
YOGASANAS FOR BELLY FAT LOSS



SURYA NAMAKSARA:

A series of 12 asanas combined to form a perfect combination we call *sun salutation*. It is also known as the mother of all asanas. It starts with namaste and stretching the abdomen and then stretching the hamstrings bending forward and so on! The sequence we all know it, if you don't and are completely new to it, just google it. It will burn the fat faster resulting in a smooth and toned belly shape that every person desires when roaming beachside. There is and never be another substitute for *Surya Namaskar*. It helps in overall blood circulation in the body and stretching abdomen muscles resulting in good appetite and reduced bowel problems.

Tasty Recipe Using Pistachio



On the occasion of *World Pistachio Day*, Chefs have shared with *The Pioneer* delicious recipe that you can make using pistachios on behalf of *American Pistachio Growers*. *Pick Me Up Pista Bomb* is a recipe by Chef Sanjeev Kapoor, *Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake* is by Chef Shivesh Bhatia. You can have a taste of all these dishes by preping the recipes:

Pick Me Up Pista Bomb By Chef Sanjeev Kapoor

On behalf of *American Pistachio Growers*, Chef Sanjeev Kapoor shares the recipe for *Pick Me Up Pista Bomb*.



INGREDIENTS
● 1 cup American Pistachios; ● ¼ cup brown sugar; ● 1 cup rolled oats, toasted; ● 1 cup puffed amaranth (rajgira); ● ¼ cup honey; ● ¼ tsp cinnamon powder

METHOD
● Dry roast American Pistachios for 3-4 minutes on medium heat. Switch the heat off and allow to cool slightly.
● Put the roasted pistachios in a food processor jar and process to a coarse mixture.
● Heat a non-stick pan. Add brown sugar and 2 tbsps water and cook till the sugar melts.
● Add rolled oats, puffed amaranth, and

coarsely processed pistachios. Add honey and cinnamon powder and mix till well combined. Transfer on to a plate and allow to cool slightly.
● Take small portions of the mixture with greased hands and roll each portion into a ball.
● Serve.



Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake By Chef Shivesh Bhatia

On behalf of *American Pistachio Growers*, Chef Shivesh Bhatia shares the recipe for *Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake*.

INGREDIENTS-
● 1 tbsp butter; ● 1 cup kunafa dough; ● 2 cups pistachios; 1 tbsp oil; ● 3 tbsps icing sugar; ● For assembly; ● 2 layers of chocolate sponge; ● Chocolate glaze

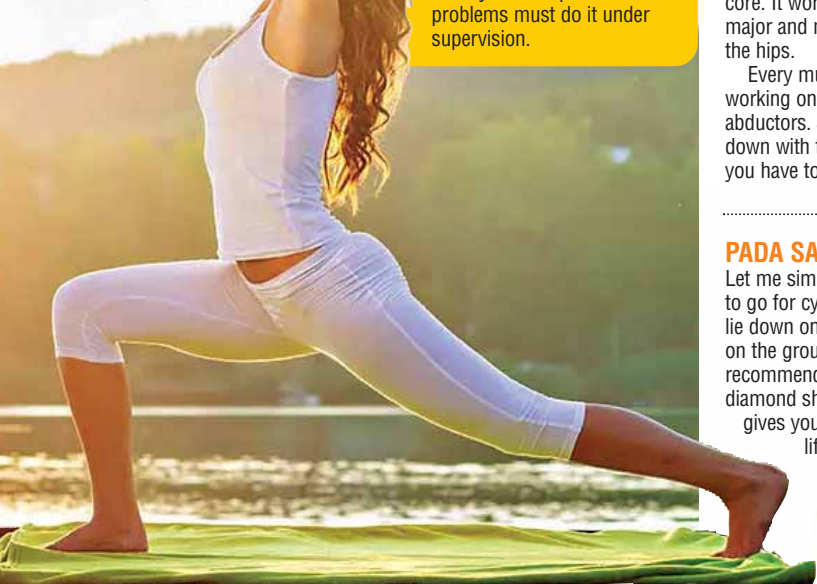
METHOD-
● Set a non-stick pan on medium heat and add butter to it.
● Once the butter has melted, add the kunafa dough and roast till it becomes golden brown. Set it aside.
● To make the pistachio paste, add California pistachios in a blender jar along

with oil and icing sugar.
● Pulse the entire mixture at regular intervals of about 1 minute until the pistachios start releasing some oil and turn into a paste.
● Combine this pistachio paste with the roasted kunafa to make the filling for the cake.
● To assemble the cake, place a layer of chocolate sponge on a stand or turn table.
● Spread the pistachio kunafa filling generously over the cake layer and sandwich it with another chocolate sponge.
● Now tightly wrap an acetate sheet around the assembled cake. Pour the chocolate glaze over the cake and pull the acetate sheet up to let the glaze drip down from all sides.

BY YASH GUPTA

Obesity is the most common problem among the elderly as well as the youth, the people and their lifestyle are forcing them to walk and have poor posture, which results in low confidence and prone to diseases. Due to sitting all day in front of a computer and workstations, it is obvious the belly from the button will say hello before you can speak. So, if you think there is a remedy that will burn the fat without you moving an inch, everyone would do it. It's better to choose your hard, either regret or discipline. Here we will look at the top 5 yoga asanas to reduce belly fat quickly. The flatter the stomach the more fabulous the life. Health is the new currency of the era. Make sure you own it and keep the wealth as long you live.

The author is an Art of Living faculty, meditation & mind coach, professional yoga trainer.



PURN-PAVANMUKTASANA

Another wonderful and effective way to burn belly fat is to perform *pavanmuktasana*, as the name suggests yes you thought that right, it not only promotes belly fat loss but helps in gastric issues in the system. Simply lie down on your back bring both your knees to your chest and place your arms around your legs like you are giving a hug, keep breathing and duck your nose in between your knees. Hold this position for 20-30 seconds and right before releasing the stretch, you may rock like a child back and forth and side to side. It will give a good massage to your spine and previously mentioned in earlier articles, a healthy spine healthy life. People with knee problems must do it under supervision.

- Work on yourself, because it is the only thing that will stay,
- Work on yourself because it is the only thing you are working on at the end of the day.
- Work on yourself because you have to leave a legacy behind
- Work on yourself because this is how you win the mind.

NAUKASANA

Also known as the boat pose/posture. Looks very tough but with practice the core muscles function well and get those 3D abs. All you have to do is lie down on your back and lift your arms, feet, and eyes in the same line. At least 6 inches off from the ground, hold the position for at least 30 seconds, and later you can progress the number of times and for a longer duration. It promotes burning belly fat and building stabilized core muscles. Advisable to do an empty stomach and women on periods must avoid the asana. Make sure to continue breathing while holding onto the posture and relax in *Shavasana* very slowly.

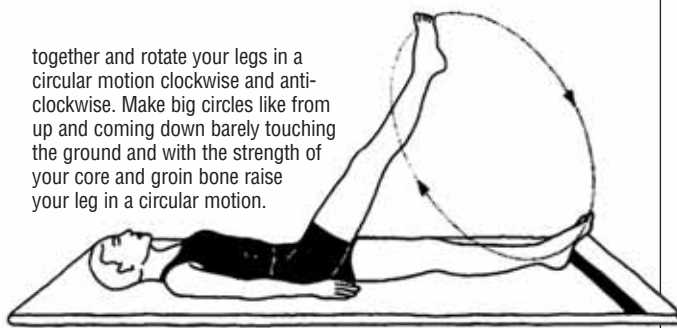


PADA CHAKRASANA

One's favourite exercise for belly fat loss is *leg rotation*. It is indeed the most effective way to build a strong core. It works on every single muscle major and minor, from the torso to the hips.

Every muscle group is involved, working on the inner thighs and hip abductors. Just as above simply lie down with the same hand placement you have to do is keep your feet

together and rotate your legs in a circular motion clockwise and anti-clockwise. Make big circles like from up and coming down barely touching the ground and with the strength of your core and groin bone raise your leg in a circular motion.



PADA SANCHALANASANA

Let me simplify, cycling. You don't have to go for cycling outside. Just relax and lie down on your back place your palms on the ground for support (personal recommendation to put both your palms in a diamond shape under your lower back, gives you comfort) and lift

your legs. Start *cycling* and you will feel a lot of muscles saying "hello" and "save me" and if you are not used to this exercise "let's stop for now". Don't worry, until to trick your mind you will never achieve the rewards if keep listening to your mind. Do it for 15-20 seconds clockwise and 15-20 seconds anti-clockwise 2-3 times each. Works magic, but there is always a price to pay.



TAKE CARE OF:
When performing Pada Sanchalanasana keep in mind to maintain proper alignment of your spine, core muscles & leg movements with your breath to avoid strain on lower back.

Move Your Body, Lift Your Mind

Move Your Body, Lift Your Mind

In an era where stress, anxiety, and depression are becoming increasingly common, the role of physical activity in promoting mental well-being has never been more crucial. While most people may associate exercise with physical health, its impact on mental well-being is also quite significant- from managing stress, boosting one's mood and enhancing the overall well-being. Studies indicate that who exercises regularly have improved mental health, healthier cognitive functions, and enhanced emotional well-being.

But how this happens?

High levels of cortisol- a

primary hormone that body release in response to stress; can lead to increased anxiety and negatively impact your overall mental well-being. Engaging in regular exercise helps lower cortisol levels, making it easier to manage stress and maintain a balanced mood.

When you engage in physical activity, your body releases endorphins, those feel-good hormones that help reduce stress while increasing happiness and relaxation. They help relieve pain, relax, and lift mood. Exercise also promotes the production of serotonin and dopamine, neurotransmitters that play a key role in



regulating mood and preventing mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Cognitive Benefits of Physical Activity

Not only emotional well-being but exercise is also beneficial for better cognitive function. Regular physical activity has been linked to improved memory, concentration, and problem-solving skills as it reduces stress and anxiety. Regular exercise increases blood flow to the

brain, which enhances cognitive abilities and reduces the risk of neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease. Studies suggest that even moderate activities like walking or yoga can significantly enhance brain function and mental clarity.

— By Dr Parul Malhotra

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

Physical activity is undoubtedly beneficial for your body and brain. But have you heard of social and emotional benefits of it? Ever wondered how exercising gives you opportunities for social connections. Let's see- joining a dance class, gym or yoga sessions introduce you

to meet like-minded people. Exercising with them builds a sense of community, offering emotional support and motivation. If you are lucky enough, you might find people who through their positive energy inspire you to become better versions of yourselves.

