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BUCH BOOKED

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

Special Court designated under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) has directed the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to register an against former chairperson of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Madhabi Puri Buch, SEBI whole-time members and two top officials of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) for alleged stock market fraud, regulatory violations and corruption.

Apart from Mudhabi Buch whole-time and three members Ashwani Bhatia, Ananth Narayan G and Kamlesh Chandra Varshney, the two top BSE officials against whom the special PMLA court has ordered the registration of an FIR are: BSE's Chairman Pramod Agarwal and its CEO Sundararaman Ramamurthy. "The allegations disclose a cognizable offence,

There is prima facie evidence of regulatory lapses and collusion, requiring a fair and impartial probe. The inaction by law enforcement and SEBI necessitates judicial intervention under Section 156(3) CrPC," Special Court Judge Shashikant Eknathrao Bangar said in the order

necessitating an investigation.

passed on Saturday. The Special ACB court passed an order directing the ACB, Mumbai, to register an FIR based on an application filed by a media person Sapan Shrivastava, who had sought an investigations under section 156(3) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) into the offences allegedly



involving large-scale financial fraud, regulatory violations and corruption.

The allegations pertain to the fraudulent listing of a company on the stock exchange with the active connivance of regulatory authorities, particularly the SEBI, without compliance under the SEBI Act, 1992 and regulations and thereunder.

The complainant claimed that the SEBI officials failed in their statutory duty, facilitated market manipulation, and enabled corporate fraud by allowing the listing of a company that did not meet the prescribed norms.

Among other things, the complainant had alleged that he and his family had invested in shares of Cals Refineries Ltd on December 13, 1994, which was listed at BSE India, and that he had suffered huge losses. He alleged that SEBI and BSE neglected the crimes of the firm, listed it against the law, and failed to protect the interests of investors

Shrivastava alleged that the SEBI officials had facilitated market manipulation and enabled corporate fraud by

committed by Buch and allowing the listing of the Mudhabi Buch and others, company. He said in his company. He said in his application that he had approached the court as the police and regulatory authorities had failed to take police

action on his complaint. Court Citing Supreme judgements in the past, the Special Court Judge noted: Considering the gravity of allegations, applicable laws and settled legal precedents, Court deems it appropriate to direct an investigation under Section 156(3) of CrPC."

The ACB has been directed to register an FIR under the relevant provisions of Indian Penal Code (IPC), Prevention of Corruption Act, SEBI Act, and other applicable laws.

As per the order, the Special Court will monitor the investigations. The court has asked the ACB to file a status report within 30 days.

Meanwhile, the SEBI in a statement released to the media on Sunday dismissed the complaint - based on which the special court had passed the order — as the one coming from a "frivolous and habitual litigant" and said that it would challenge the order passed by the special court. "Even though these officials

respective positions at the relevant point of time, the court allowed the application without issuing any notice or granting any opportunity to SEBI to place the facts on record," the SEBI stated in its statement.

'The applicant is known to be a frivolous and habitual litigant, with previous intigant, with previous applications being dismissed by the court, with imposition of costs in some cases. SEBI would be initiating appropriate legal steps to challenge this order and remains committed to ensuring due regulatory compliance in all matters," the statement added.

It may be recalled that then SEBI chief Mudhabi Buch had come under a cloud in August last year after the Hindenburg report alleged that she and her husband Dhaval Buch "had hidden stakes in the exact same obscure Bermuda and Mauritius funds, found in the same complex nested structure. used by Vinod Adani".

The Hindenburg Research which had accused the Adani group of "brazen stock market manipulation" "accounting fraud" - had tried to connect the SEBI's inaction against the Adani group for alleged "stock manipulation" v market with the investments made Mudhabi Buch and her husband in offshore funds.

alleged that as a whole-time member of SEBI, Buch was in communication managers of offshore funds, and wrote to India Infoline to redeem the units in the fund.

Hindenburg's report had



Chamoli avalanche rescue death toll rises to eight

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

Death toll rose to eight in the avalanche mishap after rescue teams found the body of the last missing person on Sunday. Earlier in the day, the teams pulled out bodies of three labourers from the camp site which was buried in snow after the avalanche on Friday last. Fifty four workers of the Border Roads

Organisation (BRO)were buried in snow after their camp in Chamoli, Uttrakhand was hit by an avalanche. Rescue teams were able to bring out 46 workers while bodies of four labourers were pulled out from the camp on Sunday. Army doctors said 46 workers, who were earlier rescued, have been brought to the military hospital in Jyotirmath, while one with a spinal cord injury was airlifted to AIIMS, Rishikesh.

Helicopters, sniffer dogs and thermal imaging technology were being used to expedite the rescue operation due to apprehensions about

possible inclement weather on Monday, officials said.

Three bodies of the missing labourers were found on Sunday, district administration officials said in Gopeshwar. With this, the number of workers who lost their lives in the Mana avalanche mounted to seven. One person is still missing for whom the search is in progress, they said. Located three kilometres from Badrinath, Mana is the last village on the India-Tibet border at a height of 3,200 metres.

The bodies have been brought to Jyotirmath by helicopter where the post-mortem was being done at the Community Health Centre. The deceased include Anil Kumar (21) from Rudrapur in Uttarakhand's Udham Singh Nagar district, Ashok (28) from Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh and Harmesh from Una in Himachal Pradesh, the officials said. The lone worker who remains missing is 43-year-old Arvind from Dehradun.

Frequent trips abroad land IPS officer in soup

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Andhra Pradesh government on Sunday suspended senior IPS officer PV Sunil Kumar for allegedly making repeated foreign visits without prior permission during the previous YSRCP regime. In a government order, Chief Secretary K Vijayanand stated that Kumar, a DGP-rank officer awaiting posting, had deviated from the travel plan approved by the government during those overseas trips.

"Now, therefore, in the exercise of the powers conferred under Rule 3 (1) of All India Service (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969, the Government of Andhra Pradesh hereby places P V Sunil Kumar, IPS, under suspension with immediate effect," said the Chief Secretary in the order.

According to the top bureaucrat, Kumar repeatedly demonstrated willful disregard for established practices. His actions exhibit negligence, indiscipline, and misconduct by undertaking foreign travel without obtaining the requisite permission, he said, adding that disciplinary proceedings were being contemplated for such repeated acts of "grave misconduct."

WEATHER



27°C(-0.4) MAX MIN 14.2°C(+0.8)

BSP rides on Behenji's Maya



state presidents at the party office, in Lucknow

asserted.

BISWAJEET BANERJEE LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), once a dominant political force in Uttar witnessing is internal turmoil. In a major decision on Sunday, BSP supremo Mayawati removed her nephew, Akash Anand, from all party positions. This comes just days after she expelled Akash's father-inlaw, Ashok Siddharth, from the party.

At the same time, Mayawati elevated her brother, Anand Kumar, and senior leader Ramji Gautam, appointing them as national Addressing coordinators. party members, she made it clear that BSP would no longer operate on familybased leadership.

"As long as I am alive, there will be no successor in the party. Personal relations have

no significance when it comes to the party and the Ambedkarite movement," she

Mayawati emphasised that the party's welfare would always come before personal ties. "For me, the party and movement come first. My brother, his children, and other family members are secondary," she stated. She assured party workers that she would continue leading the BSP with full commitment and dedication until her last breath.

Justifying Akash Anand's removal, Mayawati pointed to the negative influence of his father-in-law, Ashok Siddharth, whom she accused of weakening the party by creating internal divisions. "Ashok Siddharth worked to split the party into factions across the country, including Uttar Pradesh. His actions during his son's wedding were

also concerning," she alleged. She further indicated that Akash Anand may have been influenced by his wife and inlaws, which posed a potential risk to BSP's future. "After expelling Ashok Siddharth, we have to seriously evaluate the extent of his daughter's influence on Akash. The signs so far are not positive,"

In a related decision, Mayawati revealed that her brother Anand Kumar has resolved to marry his children into non-political families. "This step has been taken to prevent any future damage to the party, as was the case with Ashok Siddharth," she said.

During the review meeting, Mayawati issued instructions for future party programs and strategies. She reiterated her stand that the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are two sides of the same coin. Citing BSP's absence from the Milkipur bypoll, she questioned SP's tendency to blame BSP for its electoral losses. "Now that BSP did not contest the Milkipur bypoll, whom will the SP blame for its defeat?" she asked.

Mayawati reaffirmed her belief that only BSP, with its Ambedkarite ideology, can effectively challenge the BJP and other caste-based parties. "The people of this country must realise that the BSP alone can defeat the BIP and other parties that exploit caste politics," she declared.



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 Ramazan in Rafah, southern Gaza strip

On Ramazan, Israel cuts off aid to Gaza

srael stopped the entry of all **⊥**goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" if Hamas doesn't accept a new proposal to extend a fragile ceasefire. Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the existing ceasefire agreement and said its decision to cut off aid was "cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack" on the truce, which took hold in January after more than a year of negotiations. Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended. First phase of the ceasefire,

which included a surge in humanitarian assistance, expired on Saturday.

The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release

dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout

and a lasting ceasefire. An Israeli official said the decision to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration. There was no immediate

comment from the United

Hundreds of aid trucks have entered Gaza daily since the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, and it was unclear what the immediate impact of the aid cutoff would be

ISRAEL SAYS THE NEW PROPOSAL IS BACKED BY THE US: Israel said the new proposal, which it said came from US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, called for extending ceasefire through Ramazan and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends on April 20.

Zoos battling reduced funding

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

While India's zoos have made "notable" breeding progress endangered species under conservation programmes that started around a decade ago, a government panel says that persistent gaps in fun species management hinder their overall success.

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA), which is responsible for overseeing and guiding national-level ex efforts, conservation constituted a committee in 2023 to review and evaluate the state of conservation breeding programmes in zoos

across the country. In 2007, the CZA selected 74 species for breeding in 43 zoos. By 2014, 26 highpriority species shortlisted and breeding programmes began for 23. According to the report of the committee submitted to the CZA recently, while India's zoos have made "notable progress in housing and breeding several endangered species, the overall effectiveness of conservation breeding programmes is hindered hindered by persistent foundational and operational challenges".

"Addressing these issues will require not only enhanced funding allocation but also comprehensive frameworks, adoption of standardised protocols, and



Photo: The Pioneer

improvements in genetic and demographic management

practices," it said. The committee said that ₹10.81 Crore was allocated for conservation breeding between 2006 and 2011 and ₹18.13 Crore between 2011 and 2021. Over time, with the decrease in the CZA's funding, zoos now receive limited financial support, mainly for maintenance. 'This reduction in financial assistance has had cascading effects on the implementation and sustainability of these programmes," the report said. According to the report, Artiodactyla (even-toed ungulates), Carnivora (meatmammals) Galliformes (game birds) are among the most targeted groups. However, many of their breeding programmes have either not started or are poorly managed.

The report said errors in species identification, such as with the Alpine Musk Deer and Himalayan Serow, make

managing populations difficult. The committee also populations highlighted that lack of genetic diversity, improper tracking and poor recordkeeping reduce the success of conservation breeding programmes.

While some successes, such Gaur and Indian demonstrate Chevrotain, potential for growth and recovery, they also "expose broader challenges including inconsistent record-keeping, uncoordinated transfers and husbandry inadequate practices", the committee said.

Primates, Squamata (reptiles), and Perissodactyla (odd-toed struggle with low birth rates and poor genetic diversity. Animals like the King Cobra **H**oolock and Western Gibbon have environmental needs that are not being met, which reduces their chances of successful

Youths into excessive social media suffer sexual ailments

BISWAJEET BANERJEE LUCKNOW

onsumption of explicit content on Usocial media--via photos, short videos, and reels--is significantly contributing to sexual health problems among youngsters according to experts at King George's Medical University (KGMŬ) in Lucknow. The university's psychiatry department has observed a concerning trend, with nearly 90 per cent of patients aged 16 to 25 seeking treatment for sexual health issues identified as heavy social media users. Experts at KGMU attribute this rise to excessive exposure to unrealistic digital content, which is altering brain responses and diminishing sensitivity

toward real-life relationships. Professor Adarsh Tripathi, head of the Sexual and Marital Wellness Clinic at KGMU's psychiatry department, revealed that the outpatient department (OPD) receives 10 to 12 youngsters daily with sexual health concerns, a significant portion of whom exhibit compulsive social media consumption habits. 'Most of them spend a large part of

their day scrolling through reels, shorts, and explicit images. This continuous exposure conditions their brains to expect exaggerated and often unattainable forms of intimacy, making them less sensitive to real-life relationships," Prof. Tripathi explained.

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In a bizzare incident, a wedding was cancelled by the bride's family after a groom, and his family here in Gurugram allegedly demanded luxury and ₹73 Lakh as dowry on the wedding day.

The groom had asked for a Fortuner car and ₹73 Lakh. According to the bride's family,

the groom made the demand on the wedding day during a ritual, and when they refused, the groom had reportedly warned that the wedding would not take place if his demands were not met.

The wedding was scheduled for February 25 at a marriage palace in Gurugram's Bhangrola village. According to the groom's family, on February 25, the wedding procession of Chanchal, a bride procession of Chanchal, a bride At that time, he had given a wedding expenses. from Bhangrola village, came Brezza car in dowry along with After 15 hours, the wedding

This happens only in India from the groom Mohit's Judaula village.

At around 2 o'clock in the night, when the rituals were being performed at the door of the marriage palace, the groom's family demanded ₹1 Crore and a Fortuner in dowry.

At that time the groom's uncle had even warned that he would not commit marriage if his demands were not met. The bride initially thought he was joking, but later, the groom's side was adamant about his demands.

According to the bride's father Sevaram, he had sent the marriage invitation 'Lagan' for his daughter on February 23. At that time, he had given a sudden demand of the groom's side on the wedding day. The girl's family tried to convince the groom's side for a long time, but they were not listened to. The

other household items but the

village sarpanch also folded his hands in front of them but they did not pay heed and were adamant on their demands. After several hours of prayer, the

bride's side broke the marriage, and they stopped the groom's side

in the marriage palace itself. They demanded the return of the Brezza car and the money given in the dowry. The bride side had spent more than ₹70 Lakh on

procession returned without the bride's family was shocked by the bride. The very next day on February 26,

panchayat of Bhangrola and Judaula villages was held. In this meeting, it was decided that the groom's side would return ₹73

Lakh to the bride's family. Since the groom's side did not have the money, they had to agree on a plot and a house. This amount was given by Manoj Yadav, a resident of Sadharana village after an agreement.

To settle the matter, the groom's family mortgaged their four-kanal land in Fazilpur Badli and a twostorey house built in a 220-yard plot in Judaula village.

According to the police, the groom, Mohit, is studying MBBS

from a private institute. Chanchal is doing Junior Basic Training The bride's father is a constable in

Delhi Police and is retired from the Indian Army. "We had received information on

February 25 night that an altercation had occurred between the groom's and the bride's family in Bhangrola village during a wedding. The police team reached the spot to sort out the matter.

A written agreement has been reached between the two parties and the matter was resolved at their level. No official complaint was made out in this regard," Inspector Virender, station house officer (SHO) of the Kherki Daula Police Station, said.





Eight dead, 46 rescued; **Mana operation ends**

PNS DEHRADUN

The search and rescue operation in Mana ended on Sunday with the authorities succeeding in safely rescuing 46 persons though eight persons died. Forty four labourers of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) were trapped in their container shelters after an avalanche following heavy snowfall in the Mana area near Badrinath in Chamoli district on February 28. The armed forces in coordination with the government started the search and rescue operation shortly after being informed about the disaster. On the third and concluding day of the operation, the authorities stated that 46 workers had been rescued and eight had lost their

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said that personnel of the India Army, Indian Air Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force, Border Roads Organisation, Uttarakhand Police, district administration and the Health department displayed courage and dedication while undertaking the search and rescue operation. They carried out the operation in inclement weather amidst other challenging circumstances and saved 46 lives though unfortunately, eight lives could not be saved. Dhami added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah were consistently taking updates on the rescue opera-



The chief minister further said that the rescued workers who are injured and hospitalised are being taken care of properly, adding that the government is ensuring the best treatment for them. The government fully supports the affected persons and will provide all possible assistance to them, he said. The CM has already directed officials to work on developing a system to monitor the situation in order to prevent similar avalanches and their fatal effect from recurring

It is pertinent to mention here that though the majority of the BRO workers trapped following an

avalance in the high altitude border region of Mana were rescued, questions are being raised by both the opposition and experts. The CM has al-ready directed the authorities to shift both the workers doing roadworks and tourists in high altitude areas prone to avalanches during the next few days. The opposition has criticised the State government for not learn-ing from past disasters while the Bharatiya Janata Party has claimed that its government has per-formed well in disastrous situations, adding that the opposition should refrain from politicising the sensitive issue.

Rs 5 lakh penalty and 6 years jail for food adulteration

PNS DEHRADUN

The Food Safety and Drug Administration (FDA) has announced strict measures against food adulteration ahead of Holi, including a fine of up to Rs five lakh and imprisonment of up to six years for those found guilty. The FDA commissioner R Rajesh Kumar stated that the FDA has issued a comprehensive standard operating procedure, instructing officials concerned to take immediate and strict action against adulteration. He informed that FDA has launched a statewide campaign to ensure the availability of pure and safe food products, with a special focus on dairy items like milk, mawa, paneer, and khoya ahead of Holi. He stated that authorities are closely monitoring sensitive districts such as Dehradun, Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar, where extensive sampling and testing are being conducted. At the Asharodi border Dehradun, strict inspections are being carried out on in-

coming dairy products. The FDA has directed district magistrates and designated officers to enforce the SOP under the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, and its 2011 regulations, Kumar said. He stated that actions the FDA will review actions taken during the campaign and habitual of-fenders will be identified for strict legal proceedings. Officials are required to submit daily reports of enforcement activities to the FDA office in Uttarakhand, he said. The additional food commissioner Tajbir Singh Jaggi stated that the State has been divided into three categories for effective monitoring. The FDA has deployed mobile food testing labs in selected districts like Udham Singh Nagar, Haridwar, Pauri and Almora, among others, for on the spot sampling and analysis, allowing surprise inspections at any time. Jaggi also stated that the FDA is employing decoy operations, enforcement teams and

surveillance to track adulter ation. These teams will also educate consumers about adulterated food items. Raids will be conducted based on intelligence inputs and local police will assist in cases where resistance is expected. He said that dairy based and other food products are being sampled and sent to laboratories for testing as their consumption increased during festivals.
Businesses operating without valid licenses will be subject to strict legal consequences. The FDA is also monitoring border areas adjacent to Uttar Pradesh and on the spot sample testing vehicles have been deployed to detect adulteration immediately. The FDA has also set a vigilance cell to respond to complaints and take immediate action. Special inspection campaigns are being conducted in Udham Singh Nagar and Haridwar districts as FDA receives maximum adulteration complaints from there, he added.

Activists and citizens protest against large scale tree cutting in Dehradun

Local activists and con-cerned citizens of Lerned citizens of Dehradun held a march on Sunday to exhibit their protest against the large-scale felling of trees in the name of development. According to the event organisers, protestors from 33 organisations gathered near Dilaram Chowk at 7:30 AM and marched towards Centrio Mall, raising slogans related to environmental conservation. They stated that public movements had successfully prevented tree cutting on Khalanga, Canal Road and Cantt Road in the past, bringing relief to residents. They claimed that now new road construction projects in Mussoorie, Rishikesh and Jhajhra now reportedly propose the felling of nearly 30,000



trees. Protesters expressed concern over sacrificing trees to reduce travel time by a few minutes. They said that thousands of trees have already been cut along Sahastradhara Road and those planted by the Forest department among rocks are reportedly deterio-

rating. Activists mentioned past instances, such as the Rispana project, where one lakh trees were planted, but none survived. They claimed that less than five per cent of the trees planted in various afforestation efforts remain alive. Environmentalists also alleged widespread corruption in the use of Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds, stating that Rs10 crore was spent on lap-tops and mobile phones instead of conservation efforts. The activist Anoop Nautiyal also pointed out the significant transfer of forest land in Uttarakhand over the past 15 years, raising concerns about the future of the region's green

Police arrest 591 and seize narcotics worth Rs 24.25 crore in two months

PNS DEHRADUN

The police have arrested 591 individuals and registered 427 cases against drug trafficking over the past two months in Uttarakhand. The police have also seized about 936.56 kilogrammes contraband worth Rs 24.25 crore. This was done under the police's special campaign that commenced in January. This information was disclosed to the di-

house officers and investigating officers being held accountable for any negligence or delay. Besides taking action against 561 individuals in drug trafficking, the police have also booked 26 individuals under the Gangster Act and seized illegally acquired properties worth Rs 1.74 crore from 15 accused. The special drive has now been extended until



rector general of police Deepam Seth in a review meeting which was attended by senior police officials of the State from all districts via video conference. He reviewed the actions taken against crime and criminals with senior officials, including range in-charges and district police chiefs. Seth said that the campaign against crime and criminals will continue, with a focus on arresting wanted and reward-listed criminals involved in drug trafficking. He said that special attention is being given to pending investigations, with station

March 31, 2025. The DGP also instructed officials to conduct a month-long campaign to arrest wanted criminals, execute non-bailable warrants and take action against those with attachment orders. He stated that strict accountability measures have been placed on police officers for any lapses in handling serious crimes. District officials have been directed to enhance police visibility, conduct night patrols, increase security checks at checkpoints and deploy foot patrols in crowded areas.

Rain forecast again in State today after two clear days

PNS DEHRADUN

A fter a couple of days of clear weather, some parts of the State are likely to witness rain on Monday. The State Meteorological Centre has issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of thunder cloud development likely in Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts. Further, light to moderate rainfall is likely to occur at many places in Utoccur at many places in Ut-tarkashi, Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts while very light to light rainfall is likely to occur at a few places in Bageshwar and Pithoragarh districts and at isolated places in Dehradun and Tehri districts today. Apart from this, dry weather is likely to prevail in the remaining districts



The provisional State capital Dehradun is likely to witness a mainly clear to partly cloudy sky. Thunder cloud development is likely with the possibility of very light rain towards night. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 27 degrees Célsius and 12 degrees Celsius respectively Dehradun today.

It will be recalled that two to three days of heavy snowfall in the higher reaches and rain in most parts of the State had led to major repercussions as seen in the avalanche at Mana near Badrinath in Chamoli

district, but had also resulted in a noticeable drop in the temperatures across the State. The weather cleared on Saturday and remained warm and sunny on Sunday too. However, the weather is forecast to take to turn now, as stated earlier by the India Meteorological Department.

Meanwhile, the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded on Sunday were 27.2 degrees Celsius and 10.1 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 28.5 degrees Celsius and 7.4 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 15.9 degrees Celsius and 3.1 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 16.8 degrees Celsius and 4.6 degrees Celsius in Tehri.



Members of various social and political organisations protest against cabinet minister PC Aggarwal and Assembly speaker Ritu Khanduri Bhushan's statments during the recently concluded Assembly session, deemed anti-pahadi by some. The protestors were prevented from reaching the CM residence here on Sunday Pioneer photo

Doonites welcome checks on public drinking and drunk driving

PURNIMA BISHT ■ DEHRADUN

Dehradun residents have my friends. It made us undent Surya Bhatt has also observed a shift in behavaction against drinking in choice but to pass through iour among his friends and public places and drunk driving, saying it has brought much-needed order to the city. Over the past six months, the police have taken action against 5,822 individuals for consuming alcohol in public places and arrested more than 1,858 people for driving under the influence. A total of Rs 17.21 lakh has been collected in fines from violators, as per the police. While the police had been contact the police the police had been contact the police had been contact the police the police the police the police the police had been contact the police ducting regular checks, the campaign gained significant momentum after a tragic accident near ONGC Chowk on November 11, 2024, in which six young people lost their lives.

The victims were allegedly intoxicated at the time of the crash, prompting authorities to take stricter measures against drinking in open spaces and reckless driving under the influence. According to many locals, the impact of the crackdown has been noticeable, with fewer people drinking in public and fewer intoxicated individuals roaming the streets. Many residents, especially women and young girls, have welcomed this change, saying it has made their daily commutes safer and more comfortable. A class XII student Ashima shared how unsettling it used to be to pass by liquor shops on her way home from tuition in the evening. "We used to walk home from East Canal Road to Sahastradhara Road.

There were always drunk men outside near Chunabhatta area, many of them much older, who would make comments at me and

quietly. Sometimes, some uncles would intervene but we feared retaliation since we had to take that route daily. Now, liquor shop owners do not allow people to linger, saying the police

relatives. He claimed that many of them now refrain from drinking excessively at clubs, fearing police checkpoints. "Unfortunately, most people do not follow civic sense unless there is a fear of consequences. The regular

"The police make videos as evidence and it was humiliating. We had no choice but to stop drinking in public spaces," he said.

The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh told The Pioneer that the campaign has received an overwhelmingly positive



this continues," she said. A housewife Deepa echoed similar sentiments. She said that her two tenants, both in their late twenties, along with her son, frequently drank in a nearby park on Raipur Road. However, they stopped after being caught and fined by the police in December. "They were ashamed after the incident. I am glad the police took this step because it forced them to reflect on their actions," she said.

Sahastradhara Road resi-

police checks and media reports about arrests and fines have created that fear. It may not be the ideal way to bring change but it is working and I think it should continue," he stated. Meanwhile, 33-year-old Premnagar resident, Subham Thapa (name changed), admitted that he and his friends previously drank in parked cars or secluded areas, as they could not afford bars or drink at home due to family restrictions. However, they have stopped since being caught by the police in January.

response from the community. "We get thank-you messages from parents and senior citizens who appreciate the action against public drinking, as it had started creating chaos in many areas. Of course, some people complain, asking where they will go to drink, but rules are rules. Most violators we find are in Raipur and Premnagar areas. This drive will continue throughout the year," he asserted.

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सोशल मीडिया पर जुडें #FlowerShowUK2025 #ColoursOfSpring2025 #वसन्तोत्सव2025 😵 LtGenGurmit | 🕜 Lt Gen Gurmit Singh | 🗿 Itgengurmitsingh | 🧿 LTGENERALGURMITSINGH

••• दर्शकों के लिए समय •••

07 मार्च, 2025 को अपरान्ह 01:00 बजे से सायं 06:00 बजे तक, 08 एवं 09 मार्च, 2025 को प्रातः 09:00 बजे से सायं 06:00 बजे तक (प्रवेश निःशुल्क)

माननीय राज्यपाल महोदय की प्रेरणा से विगत वर्ष की भांति इस वर्ष भी वसंतोत्सव-२०२५ का आयोजन राजभवन, देहरादून के प्रांगण में दिनांक 07, 08 एवं 09 मार्च, 2025 को उद्यान विभाग द्वारा किया जा रहा है, जिसमें पुष्प प्रदर्शनी के साथ-साथ विभिन्न श्रेणियों में प्रतियोगिताओं का भी आयोजन किया जायेगा, जिसका विवरण निम्न प्रकार है:-





मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड

Name of Sub Categories A. Cut flower competition (including commercial/ hobbyist) (72 Prizes) Gerbera Red Group, Gerbera Yellow Group, Gerbera White Group, Gerbera Others Group, Carnation, Rose, Gladiolus Red Group, Gladiolus White Traditional Areas (42 Prizes) Group, Gladiolus Others Group, Orchid, Marigold, Chrysanthemum, Lilium and Any other. (US Nagar, Nainital, Haridwar & Dehradun Districts) [20-30 sticks of each variety will be treated as one entry except Rose, Orchid, Lilium where 03-05 sticks per variety will be treated as one entry] Carnation, Rose, Gladiolus, Gerbera, Marigold, Orchid, Lilium, and Any other. 2. Non Traditional Areas (24 Prizes) (09 Hill Districts) (10-20 sticks of each variety will be treated as one entry except Rose, Orchid & Lilium where 03-05 sticks per variety will be treated as one entry) 3. Cut Flowers Competition for Specially abled persons (Any Cut Flower) (03 Prize) (10-20 sticks of each variety will be treated as one entry except Rose, Orchid & Lilium where 03-05 sticks per variety will be treated as one entry) 4. Cut Flowers Competition for Women Flower Growers Any Cut Flower (Any Cut Flower) (03 Prize) (10-20 sticks of each variety will be treated as one entry except Rose, Orchid & Lilium where 03-05 sticks per variety will be treated as one entry) B. Potted Plant arrangement (12 Prizes) (i) Private Nurseries a)Small upto 0.50 acre Combination of all varieties (Minimum 15 potted plants in each will be considered as one entry) b)Large above 0.50 acre Combination of all varieties (Minimum 25 potted plants in each will be considered as one entry) (ii) Hobbyists Combination of all varieties (Minimum 10 potted plants in each will be considered as one entry) (iii)Central & State Govt./Private Institution Combination of all varieties (Minimum 25 potted plants in each will be considered as one entry) C.Loose Flower arrangement (12 Prizes) (ii) Dry Flowers (Enthusiasts / Hobbyists including Gardeners / Individual / Group) (iv) Garlands. (iii) Bouquets D. Potted Plants other than flowers 1 Potted Plants (Fruits) (06 Prizes) 2 Potted Plants (Foliage) (Group of 3 pots of each variety as one entry) Vegetables (Any Commonly Grown Vegetables) 2 Leafy vegetables (Spinach, Rai, Bathua, Methi, Swiss Chard etc.) E. Vegetables (09 Prizes) 3 Exotic vegetables (Celery, Parsley, Red Cabbage, Zucchini, Brussel's Sprout etc.) (Group of 3 pots of each variety as one entry) 1 Cacti and succulents F. Cacti & Succulents (03 Prizes) (Group of 3 pots will be considered as one entry) G. Bonsai (06 Prizes) (i) Commercial Fruit Trees (ii) Forest Trees (Group of 3 tree pots will be considered as one entry) H. Terrarium (03 Prizes) (i) Terrarium (One Terrarium as one Entry) Hanging pots (03 Prizes) (i) Hanging Pots (Arrangements of three pots as single entry). J. Hydroponic Cultivation Technology Demonstration (03 Prizes) (i) Hydroponic Cultivation Technology Demonstration K. Pots for Gardening (03 Prizes) Pots of any size. (03 pots of any size will be considered as one entry) (i) Apis cerana Himalayan Honey. (ii) Wild Forest Honey. L. Honey (09 Prizes) (iii) Monofloral Honey (500 gm bottle/Jar as one entry) Any two best pictures (size- 6" x 8") of Plants/ Plant parts/ flowers/ Bunches etc. be clicked on 7th march 2025 at Raj Bhawan and displayed by M. On the spot photography (03 Prizes) 02:00 pm on 07th March, 2025. Judgment would take place on the same day. The participants for individuals above 12 years of age will bring fresh flower petals. The competition will be held on 07th March, 2025 from 09:00 am N. Fresh Petal Rangoli (03 Prizes) to 2:00 pm. Each participant will be given two hours to complete rangoli on 1 X 1 mtr Ply Board. Children of age between 5 to 12 years. (ii) Children of age between 12 to 18 years. (iii Specially abled- Visually challenged (iv) Specially abled- Mentally challenged. O. Painting competition for School children, specially abled (v) Specially abled- Hearing and speech impaired. (vi) Street children / rag pickers. children and street children/rag pickers (18 Prizes) (The participants will bring their own colors, sheets will be provided by the Department. Competition will held on 07th March, 2025 from 09:00 am to 01:00 pm.) Postal Stamp competition organized by Postal Department, Dehradun.

वसंतोत्सव - 2025 में स्टॉल के माध्यम से व्यावसायिक गतिविधियाँ संचालित करने हेतु इच्छुक निजी फर्मों/कम्पनियों से शुल्क के रूप में रू0 9500/- व एन0जी0ओ0/एस0एच0जी0 से रू0 4500/- की धनराशि प्राप्त की जायेगी। स्टॉल के माध्यम से पुष्प एवं औद्यानिकी से सम्बन्धित गतिविधियाँ संचालित करने वाली फर्मों/ कम्पनियों/एन0जी0ओ0/एस0एच0जी0 व महिला स्वयं सहायता समृहों को प्राथमिकता दी जायेगी।

- वसंतोत्सव 2025 में प्रादेशिक विभागों/केन्द्रीय विभागों/संस्थानों/कृषि विश्वविद्यालयों आदि द्वारा संचालित योजनाओं/कार्यक्रमों/तकनीकी का प्रदर्शन अपने-अपने स्टॉल के माध्यम से किया जायेगा।
- वसंतोत्सव 2025 में विभिन्न संस्थाओं/फर्मों, एन0जी0ओ0 तथा महिला स्वयं सहायता समूहों आदि द्वारा भी अपने उत्पाद का प्रदर्शन/विक्री हेतु स्टॉल लगाये जाएंगे। • प्रतियोगी अपने प्रदर्शनी तथा सम्बंधित विभाग अपने स्टॉल को दिनांक 07 मार्च, 2025 को प्रातः 10:00 बजे तक निर्धारित स्थान पर तैयार कर लेंगे, इसके बाद अनुमित प्रदान नहीं की जायेगी। पुष्प प्रदर्शनी का उद्घाटन दिनांक 07 मार्च, 2025 को प्रातः 11:00 बजे किया जायेगा। इसके पश्चात आम जनता के लिए प्रदर्शनी अपराह्म 01:00 बजे से 6:00 बजे सार्य तक तथा दिनोंक 08 एवं 09 मार्च, 2025 को प्रात: 09:00 बजे से सार्य 6:00 बजे तक खुली रहेगी।

 प्रदर्शनी में आगन्तक पुष्प प्रेमी/फोटोग्राफर द्वारा स्वयं लिये गये पुष्पों के फोटोग्राफ पर आधारित फोटो प्रदर्शनी, आर्ट गैलरी, सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रम तथा आम जनता हेत् आयोजन स्थल के नजदीक फुडकोर्ट की व्यवस्था भी की गयी है, जिसमें विभिन्न प्रकार के व्यंजन उपलब्ध होंगे। अतः प्रदेश के समस्त सम्मानित नागरिकों एवं पुष्प प्रेमियों से अनुरोध है कि दिनांक 07, 08 व 09 मार्च 2025 को उपरोक्तानुसार निर्धारित समय के अनुसार राजभवन, देहरादून में अधिकाधिक संख्या में पधार कर पुष्प प्रदर्शनी का लाभ उठायें। प्रतियोगिताओं में भाग लेने के इच्छुक प्रतिभागी आवेदन पत्र (Entry Form) निम्न पत्ते के साथ ही आयोजन स्थल पर भी निःशुल्क प्राप्त कर उसी पते या आयोजन स्थल पर दिनांक 07 मार्च को प्रात: 10 बजे तक जमा कर सकते हैं। आवेदन विभागीय वेबसाइट https://shm.uk.gov.in से भी डाउनलोड कर सकते हैं। पंजीकरण दिनांक 07 मार्च, 2025 के पूर्वाह्र 10:00 बजे तक ही किये जाएंगे।

Entry Form प्राप्त एवं जमा करने का पता

कार्यालय-मुख्य उद्यान अधिकारी, विकास भवन, सर्वे चौक , देहरादून, मो0-9412962728

कार्यालय-निदेशक, उद्यान/ अपर निदेशक, उद्यान, राजकीय उद्यान, सकिट हाउस, देहरादून नो0-9634299775

सूचना एवं लोक सम्पर्क विभाग, उत्तराखण्ड द्वारा जनहित में जारी | www.uttarainformation.gov.in | 🚳 DIPR_UK | 🚯 UttarakhandDIPR | 🖸 UttarakhandDIPR





GUEST COLUMN

Why I took a holy dip at the Mahakumbh



Dr Sona Kaushal Gupta

I took a Holy Dip at the Mahakumbh which recently concluded at Prayagraj and felt blessed, happy and empowered doing so. It was a lifetime experience for me and a blend of my faith, beliefs and sentiments. Many raised an eyebrow and asked me how could I do so as a doctor? As a doctor and a psychologist who has read science, biology and mastered medicine and psychology and how the body and mind function, how could I believe in religion and go to the Mahakumbh? Was the water not unhygienic? Were the crowds not intimidating? Does science give me a logical reason to do so? My answer to all these questions was that I have my own personal religious beliefs which I don't have to justify or explain to anyone. As long as I put aside these beliefs when I am working as a counsellor or while treating my patients and as long as my religious beliefs do not interfere with my work, it's fine and acceptable.

Let me try and share my views on this holy dip and how it made me feel more enriched. As a medical doctor and a psychologist I have spent years understanding the human mind, body and guiding people towards being more happy ,resilient, healing, loving and being kind to them-selves and improving their physical and mental well being. I believe health is a holistic term of mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well being. Yes, my work is rooted in science but I have always believed and advocated that healing is not just about medicine. It is about balance, faith and a deep connection among the mind, body and soul. I am a staunch advocate of the saying, "A doctor treats but god

When I took a holy dip in the Mahakumbh along with lakhs of other devotees, it was not merely a ritual for me but it was a moment of profound reflection and a blend of spirituality, traditional beliefs and science an experience which left me enriched in ways I had never imagined. The spiritual significance of the Mahakumbh was not just a religious tour and a bath for me. It was a journey within, an energy field full of devotion, surrender and faith. Millions like me took a holy dip in the sacred Ganga believing in the power of devotion and purification not just of the body but also of the soul.

Faith is an integral part of human existence. It provides us mental strength in adversity, comfort in uncertainty, and resilience when we face great challenges in life. Many people associate

a significant role in our mental and physical well being. Ironically, this is a fact which is acknowledged even by science today. Faith reminds us that no struggle lasts forever and even in our weakest times we are not

transform lives. It's about trusting in something greater than our immediate struggles. Whether it is faith in god, in the universe, in the law of attraction and manifestation, in destiny or in our own ability to overcome obstacles, this inner

an illness, a loss, a failure or an emotional distress. However those who have faith are seen to have remarkable resilience to tide through the adversities. They perceive difficulties not as permanent roadblocks but as a part of a larg-

purpose even in their suffering. Modern research supports the idea that faith has better health benefits. Studies have shown that prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices activate regions of the brain associated with peace and emotional regulation. Faith reduces stress hormones enhances immune function and lowers the risk of depression and anxiety. Faith also teaches people to surrender what they cannot control and lowers their worry and anxiety levels and reinforces our sense of trust in a greater purpose and this psychological shift reduces our stress levels and fosters our emotional well

personal-recover from

their emotional trauma and

physical ailments much

faster. They follow treat-

ment plans more vigorous-

ly, maintain hope and find a

While the holy dip holds a great religious significance, it also has a scientific side to it. The cold water immersion when we dip into the Holy waters of Mahakumbh has been studied for its health benefits also It stimulates the Vagus nerve which helps reduce stress, enhance our mood and also improves our wellbeing and immunity. The sudden plunge into the cold waters releases endorphins creating a natural sense of calm and well being in us. In the face of constant judgement about

being superstitious or having some guilt which we need to wash off and purify ourselves or the holy water being dirty and unhygienic, for me taking the holy dip was not about all these petty issues but it was about my faith and beliefs. It was about experiencing a moment of stillness amidst all the outer and inner chaos, experiencing surrender and of connection. It reminded me that while we heal others it's imperative to heal our own selves first physically, emotionally and spiritually.

In a world of outer chaos we need to bring in inner calm, to pause, to let go, to believe and to embrace experiences that remind us that beyond science and medicine there exists a force -call it faith, energy, universe or god -that plays a vital role in our well being. Standing on the banks of the Ganga, surrounded by hundreds of devotees, chants and the scent of incense and unwavering faith of millions, I felt a sense of calm surrender, peace and unity of humaniy—rich and poor beyond differences of caste, creed or colour. That is why I took a Holy Dip in the Mahakumbh and I will carry its essence with me forever.

(The author is a neuro psychologist, founder of a crisis helpline and designated CBSE counsellor. Views expressed are personal)



faith solely with religion but I believe that its influence extends far beyond the spiritual realm. At its core, faith is about our beliefs. Belief in oneself, in others and in the

Health studies have shown it to be a combination and tool along with medicines to heal the mind and body from our stress and traumas. I have seen firsthand how faith can

conviction has a profound impact on our health happiness and healing.

Life as we all know is unpredictable and no one is er journey. This mindset fosters perseverance and prevents despair from taking hold of us. In my medical practice, I have observed that patients with a strong

faith -whether religious or

DLRC children's section sees surge in membership

PNS DEHRADUN

 $T^{\text{he children's section of the}}_{\text{Doon Library and}} \text{ the library, the DLRC administration organises activities} \\ \text{Research Centre (DLRC) has} \text{ and workshops for children on}$ received a favourable response, Saturdays and Sundays. with an increase in member- Regarding the success of the membership. Initially, only ship amounting to 70 members children's section library, the eight members were registered in just 50 days. Notably, this section in charge, Megha said section was inaugurated in that it officially commenced in

pass both regular and special In light of the shortened duration of 50 days, the section categories. Regular memberhas experienced a notable sucship requires typical students to pay an annual fee of Rs 100, cess rate regarding children's while special membership is provided at no charge for chilat the section's inception. dren from NGOs, orphanages, However, this number has now government shelter homes and August 2024. The children's August 2024, and given that it risen to 70, reflecting signifiother organisations. Further, an amount of Rs 500 is collected by the administration as

> She informed that to increase engagement and improve facilities, they organise activities and workshops every Saturday and Sunday. She emphasised that the success rate of these initiatives has been commendable; initially only 32 children participated whereas the most recent events attracted a total of 537 partic-

> a security deposit, which is refundable.

It will be recalled that the library was previously designated for teenagers, young adults and senior citizens However, to enhance the library's offerings, the DLRC has decided to establish a children's reading section for children aged between seven and 15 years.

section library is exclusively accessible to children for reading on Fridays and Saturdays. Further, to enhance interest in

is open only two days a week, it has been operational for about 50 days so far.

cant growth in a brief period. She further said that the membership options available for

the children's section encom-

Patanjali to become a global resolution centre, says Pradhan

I Jnion Education minister Dharmendra Pradhan said that Patanjali will become a global centre for 'resolution' in the future, stating that it will lead in treatment and education in the world. He opined that Patanjali is not simply an institution but an ideology which represents Bharat and plays an important role in nation building. Appreciating the works done by Swami Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna in Yoga and Ayurveda respectively, he said that this is nothing less than a movement. Pradhan was speaking as the chief guest at

Pradhan opined that Patanjali is serving the nation by merging the ancient traditions of Bharat and modernity. He said that

Patanjali.



ity in the nation today where Yoga has not reached," he

Addressing the gathering,



Patanjali institution is moving forward on the base of principles established by sages and ancient traditions. We dream of making the University of Patanjali an establishment even bigger than Oxford and Cambridge.

We will work to expand this

in detail about the university and its associate institution Patanjali Research Foundation's works. He averred that Patanjali is also doing considerable work to elicit focus on native Indian heritage.

university globally

in a major way and

strive to make it

among the best

across the world,"

The university's

vice chancellor

Balkrisha informed

he said.

Addressing his views on the occasion, the State's Education minister Dhan Singh Rawat appreciated the works being done by the University of Patanjali and the Patanjali Résearch Foundation.

Temperature variance raises viral and upper respiratory infections among children

PNS DEHRADUN

cases of upper respiratory common within a two- include coughs and colds to others through droplets. and viral infections among week time-frame. To among children. He also emphasised that children in the city, the address such infections in Additionally, many chil-teachers should be vigilant doctors said. It has been children, parents should dren are experiencing observed that since the focus on enhancing their symptoms such as vomiting

beginning of February, temperature variations have escalated, with some being days sunny and others being rainy. Recently, the higher reaches witnessed snowfall while most parts in the lower altitudes and plains received rainfall, leading to a

drop in temperature. This lasted for two days, followed by two days of clear sunny weather. The State Meteorological Centre has forecast rain in parts of the State again today. This fluctuation has had a direct impact on the health of individuals, particularly children. Doctors have pointed out that these temperature fluctuations are more likely to contribute to viral and other infections in children, as their immuni-

ty is typically lower than

that of adults.

Senior pediatrician at Deen Dayal Upadhyay district hospital, Dr Neetu Tomar said that she has observed a 50 per cent rise in cases of viral infections among children compared to normal days. She said that the recent temperature fluctuations have resulted in increased cases of upper respiratory infections, lower respiratory infections, viral fevers, coughs and colds, with severe cases of pneumonia observed in children. The prevalence of health issues among children is more significant in those aged between 18 months and

hydration, providing boiled water during this period and ensuring a proper nutritional diet. It is also important to encourage children to avoid junk food and to dress appropriately for the weather, she said.

"In light of the recent and ongoing fluctuations in temperature, children have become more susceptible to health concerns. Currently, there has been an increase infection, parents

The fluctuation in tem- 10 years. Additionally, the in cases of upper and lower should refrain from send-I perature in recent days occurrence of these cases respiratory infections, fever ing them to school, as the has led to an increase in has become increasingly and viral illnesses, which infection can easily spread

and loose stools," stated pediatrician at Sri Mahant Indiresh Hospital, Dr Vishal Kaushik.

He further added that the infection and viral cases are particularly prevalent among children aged five to 10 years, with severe cases now increasingly seen in children

under one year of age. He advised that to prevent these issues, parents should ensure their children remain hydrated and receive a well-balanced diet. Rather than treating the infection at home, it is crucial to consult a doctor immediately. Further, if a child is affected by such an in observing signs of this type of infection among students during school



I MANJEET KAUR W/o of No JC-512131A Rank NB SUB Name BIKRAM SINGH presently R/o 278 Baba Budha ji Avenue Rimond City Amritsar -I Punjab-143001. I have changed my Name MANJEET KAUR TO MANJIT KAUR and DOB 17.02.1986 TO 07.04.1982 VIDE AFFIDAVIT DATED 01 MAR 2025 BEFORE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, DEHRADUN (UK).

<u>Disclaimer</u>

The Pioneer does not take responsibility for the content for the advertisement (Display/Classified) carried in this newspaper. The paper does not endorse the same. Readers are requested to verify the contents on their own.

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नगर पालिका परिषद, मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला टिहरी गढ़वाल

पंत्राक 1049 / निविदा सूचना / 2024-25

निविदा सूचना

नगर पालिका परिषद, मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला, टिहरी गढवाल द्वारा वर्ष 2024-25 में निकाय निधि / राज्य वित्त आयोग के अन्तर्गत निकाय पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से निकाय क्षेत्रान्तर्गत स्पीड ब्रेकर लगाये जाने, चौम्बर ठीक किये जाने व नालियों के ऊपर जाल लगाने के कार्य की सीलबन्द निविदा निर्धारित प्रपत्र पर दिनाँक 17.03.2025 को अपराहन 1.00 बजे तक आमन्त्रित की जाती है, जो कि उसी दिन सांय 3.00 बजे निविदा समिति के समक्ष खोली जायेगी, निविदा के कार्यो का विवरण एवं शर्ते नगर पालिका की वेबसाईट www.nppmunikireti.in कार्यालय नगर पालिका परिषद मुनिकीरेती—ढालवाला के सूचना पट्ट एवं निर्माण अनुभाग में देखी जा सकती है, निविदा, निविदा खुलने की तिथि से 30 दिनों की अविधे के लिए वैध रहेगी। निविदा फार्म व शर्ते नगर पालिका परिषद मुनिकीरेती–ढालवाला कार्यालय से दिनाँक 15.03.2025 को कार्यालय दिवस में मध्यान 12.00 बजे तक निर्धारित शुल्क जमा कराकर प्राप्त किये जा सकते है, निविदा आमन्त्रण की तिथि पर अवकाश होने पर अगली तिथि पर निविदा की जायेगी, निविदा के साथ सलग्न एफ०डी०आर० / सी०डी०आर० एवं अन्य समकक्ष रूप में शुल्क जमा करने से पूर्व ही कार्यालय में जमा करानी अनिवार्य होगी, बिना एफ०डी०आर० / सी०डी०आर० के निविदा प्रपत्र जारी नही किया जायेगा। किसी भी अथवा समस्त निविदाओं को स्वीकार / अस्वीकार करने का अधिकार अध्यक्ष निविदा समिति में निहित है।

अधिशासी अधिकारी नगर पालिका, परिषद, मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला

नगर पालिका, परिषद, मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला

No place for anti-social elements in Punjab: Mann | BJP targets Mamata after ECI

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday asserted that gang-sters, smugglers, criminals and other anti-social elements have no place in the state and will soon be wiped out.

Addressing a gathering here during the passing out parade of 2,490 cops, Mann said this pious land produced saints, seers, martyrs, legendary players and generals.

The chief minister, however, said that smugglers, gangsters and other criminals have unfortunately made this state their abode under the alleged patronisation of the previous governments

Mann said the state government has now started a "crusade" to weed out these antinational elements, adding they will be behind the bars soon. The chief minister said Puniab is at a historic juncture as his government has launched a decisive war against drugs in



Mann said the state govern-

ment has adopted a zero tolerance policy against drugs and Punjab will be made completely drug free with active support and cooperation of the

The supply line of drugs is being snapped, drug peddlers are being put behind bars and the properties of the drug smugglers are being confiscat-

ed or razed, he added. The chief minister said that inimical forces have been chalking out nefarious designs to disturb the hard earned peace in the border state, adding the Punjab Police has always foiled such attempts. Mann said it is imperative the police force is updated as per requirements in the field of investigation, science and technology to further overcome major challenges faced by the

Congratulating the new cops, he said it is a momentous occasion for them as they have become an integral part of the Punjab Police family.

The chief minister exhorted them to discharge their duty with utmost dedication, hard work and commitment, thereby contributing immensely in the progress of the state and prosperity of its people.

Mann called upon the newly inducted cops to play a proactive role in wiping out the menace of drugs from the

He said Punjab is fighting the nation's war against drugs and the police have always acted as a barrier for checking its sup-

The chief minister said the time has now come when the cops should uphold the glorious tradition of the Punjab Police for weeding out the scourge of drugs from the

More than 10,000 youngsters have been appointed in the police force since 2022, he

Mann said the state govern-ment has also decided to recruit 10,000 new police personnel for which necessary clearance will be given by the Cabinet soon.

The chief minister said that a dedicated 'Sadak Surakhya Force' (road safety force) had been set up to ensure enhanced security and save precious lives on the roads. He said since its launch in

witnessed a 48.10 per cent reduction in casualties due to accidents. The force has been deployed all along 4,200 kms of the highways, prone to traffic accidents, Mann said, adding they act as a deterrent for traffic violations in addition to patential.

February last year, the state has

in addition to patrolling. The chief minister said even Union Minister Nitin Gadkari had hailed this initiative of the state government

clarifies voter ID duplication

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

he BJP mounted fresh attack I on Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, after the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Sunday came out with clarifications regarding duplica-tion of Voters' ID card numbers, saying duplication did not necessarily mean fake ID cards. The Commission said that dupli-

cation of Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers might have taken place because decentralised, manual mechanism was followed before the voters' database was shifted to a digital platform adding the Commission would take steps to rectify things. In a statement referring to social media reports the poll panel said "it is clarified that while EPIC numbers of some of the electors may be identical, the other details including demographic details, Assembly Constituency and polling booth are different for the electors with the same EPIC

number. Irrespective of the EPIC number, any elector can cast a vote only at their designated polling station in their respective Constituency in their State or UT where they are enrolled in the electoral roll and nowhere else." Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had earlier launched a scathing attack on the BJP Government for manipulating the ECI and influencing the Chief Election Commissioners in inserting fake names in the electoral rolls to influence the elections. She cites EPIC cards showing how the numbers of two cards were same whereas their holders were different.

"There are several people who are complaining that duplicate names from

Haryana or UP are appearing in their EPIC card numbers," Banerjee said adding this was a ploy to rig elections.

They did this in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi. The leaders there could not catch the trick of inserting the names of fake voters. But we have been able to catch their trick and we have directed the officials from the DMs and BDOs to the party workers and local leaders to start scrutinising the electoral rolls and catch the fake voters so that the BIP cannot bring in voters from Bihar, UP and Haryana to vote in Bengal," Banerjee said announcing a committee led by senior party leaders to start door-to-door scrutiny of the electoral rolls.

Meanwhile apparently taking a cue from the ECI clarifications BJP leader Amit Malviya attacked Mamata Banerjee for allegedly preparing excuses before an impending defeat in the next year's Assembly elections.

It is a pity that the Bengal Chief Minister is resorting to misinformation to lay the groundwork for her imminent defeat in 2026 and weaken votersconfidence in the electoral system," Malviya said.

SFI calls

academic

strike post

chaos in JU

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

An eerie calm prevailed the Jadavpur

Haryana civic polls held, BJP exudes confidence

PTI CHANDIGARH

Over 35 per cent of the more than 51 lakh eligible voters for civic elections in Haryana cast their votes till 4 pm on Sunday, officials said.

Voting is being held to elect mayors and ward members in seven municipal corporations -Gurugram, Manesar, Faridabad, Hisar, Rohtak, Karnal, and Yamunanagar

Bypolls for the Mayor's post in Ambala and Sonipat are also being held.

The voting, which began at 8 am, will conclude at 6 pm. Elections are also being held to elect presidents and ward members of four municipal councils

Ambala Sadar, Pataudi Jatoli Mandi, Thanesar, and Sirsa. A bypoll is being held for the post of president in the Sohna

Municipal Council. Voting is also taking place for the election of presidents and ward members in 21 municipal committees. Bypolls for the president's post in the municipal committees of Assandh (Karnal district) and Ismailabad (Kurukshetra district) are also being conducted.

At 4 pm, the turnout was recorded at 35 per cent. Ahead of the polls, Haryana

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini exuded confidence that

the BJP would win the elections and had said work would be done three times faster after the formation of a triple-engine

government. The Congress has appealed to voters to elect its candidates with a full majority. The grand old party, out of office in Haryana for more than 10 years, is looking to turn around its electoral fortunes in the civic polls.

Union minister Manohar Lal Khattar was among the early voters, casting his vote at a booth in Karnal.

'Voting is our democratic right and it is also our duty to exercise our franchise," he told reporters, exuding confidence that the BJP would win the

Union minister of state Krishan Pal Gurjar cast his vote at a booth in Faridabad.

Haryana Minister Anil Vij, who cast his vote in Ambala Cantt, said, "All voters should participate in the greatest festival of democracy. A tripleengine government will be formed in Harvana.

"People are aware that the BJP governs both at the Centre and in Haryana and, if the party also governs the urban local bodies, development will accelerate," he

Sunderlal Yadav, the BJP's may-



oters flaunt inked fingers after casting votes in Sonipat

oral candidate for Manesar, where municipal elections are being held for the first time, cast his vote at a booth in the Manesar area. Gurugram district's Farukh

Nagar recorded nearly 60 per cent polling till 4 pm. In Gurugram, the turnout was around 30 per cent while it was over 55 percent in Manesar. In Ambala district, the turnout was nearly 24 per cent in Ambala, 41 per cent in Ambala Sadar and 59 per cent in Barara. In Faridabad, the turnout at 4 pm was around 32 per cent. Narnaund in Hisar district

> cent while Hisar registered 43 per cent. In Taoru of Nuh district, 68 per

recorded a turnout of 74 per

cent of voters exercised their franchise. The turnout was 40 per cent in Rohtak and more than 22 per cent in Sonipat. Gurugram

Commissioner cum District Election Officer Ajay Kumar said 1,109 booths had been set up, including for Gurugram, Manesar and Pataudi.

The start of polling was delayed by an hour in a booth of the Gurugram Municipal Corporation's Ward No 5 due to a snag in the EVM, sources

Gurugram Commissioner Vikas Kumar Arora said more than 4,500 security personnel had been deployed to ensure smooth polling.

Gurugram's five areas see 40.6 per cent voter turnout

PARVESH SHARMA

Voting in Gurugram's five municipal areas - municipal corporation, Gurugram, municipal corporation, Manesar, and municipal councils of Sohna, Pataudi, and Farrukhnagar towns recorded 40.6 per cent till 5.55 pm on Sunday.

As per the Election Commission (EC) schedule, the voting will take place from 8 am to 6 pm, with results scheduled for declaration on March 12.

The BJP, which won 48 seats in recent held Harvana assembly polls, has this time set a target to get a full majority in Gurugram district MC elec-

According to the data released by the District Election Office, the highest voting percentage of 72.2 per cent was recorded in the Farrukhnagar Municipal Committee. The lowest turnout was 29.9 per cent in the Sohna

Municipal Council.
Municipal Corporation
Gurugram (MCG) recorded
37.2 per cent and Manesar Municipal Corporation recorded 62.8 per cent voting. Pataudi Jatauli Mandi recorded 63.3 per

The number of registered vot-



wards of the MMC area.

Similarly, the votes will be cast for the post of councillor and chairman in 22 wards in Municipal Council Pataudi Jatauli Mandi.

In which over 22,000 men and 20,721 women will cast their votes. In the by-election for the post of chairman in Sohna Municipal Council, 26,596 men and 23,551 women and six transgenders will cast their

votes in 21 wards. At the same time, in Municipal Committee Farrukhnagar, 7,683 men 6,961 women and one transgender will choose their government body for the post of councillor and chair-

University (JU) campus a day after Left students' unions including the Students' Federation of India held violent protests inside the campus and allegedly heckled Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu - demanding early elections to students' bodies throughout the State.

Students' union elections have not been held in the State for the past seven-eight years. As a group of Left students held protest rallies inside the camous and outside the Jadavpur Police Station local Trinamool Congress workers too organised rallies demanding immediate arrest of the students

who were involved in heckling the Minister and some univer sity professors who had assembled to take part in a meeting of West Bengal College and University Professors' University Professors' Association - backed by the

'We believe in democracy and peace but if the CPI(M)-backed students think that if they can get away after doing anything. Even manhandling professors and heckling a minister then our boys are ready, and we can take control of JU in a minute, another TMC leader and State minister Arup Biswas said.

The students had on Saturday noon gheroaed Minister Basu and were asking a statement from him regarding a deadline by which the college and university students' elections

would be held in the State. versions Contradictory emanated from both sides as the Minister said he was ready to talk to the agitating students and in fact received a deputa-tion from the Students' Federation of India (SFI) the protesters said Basu would not listen to them and his car tried to speed away without caring for the students who were

the incident as the car sped

While the rear wheel of the college and hospital adjacent to

in ambulances, it was panic all

faith overpowers fear, as she

said, "I took holy dip for five times during this Kumbh, mostly after the stampede' Maha Kumbh, the spectacle that

three 'Amrit Snans'.

The mega religious gathering drew a record over 66 crore pil-

Sahitya Academy opts for Padma style nomination KUMAR CHELLAPPAN KOCHI the last four decades, Academy journal of literary criticism. Bank with the award money awards have become a laugh. The book had bagged the and royalty amount. Another stance. Even pornographic political ideology, caste and written with ulterior motive.

The Sahitya Academy (National Academy of Letters) has amended its process of selection of best books by bringing in readers as juries. With effect from 2025. annual literary awards would follow the format of Padma Awards. Readers can recommend books of their choice to the Academy by online.

An Academy insider said that this was to liberate the selection process from the shackles of a cartel which has made the institution a milch cow since it was established in 1954. Over ing stock in the country.

When K Sreenivasa Rao, secretary, Academy secretary, on Saturday waxed eloquence on KP Ramanunni, the Malayalam writer who authored God's Own Book, the audience at Kozhikode were seen gaffaw-

"Rao was unaware of the fact that the book is full of obscene and if there was anything conspicuous by absence from Ramanunni's work, it was literature," K Anandan Pillai, founder-editor of Sahitya Vimarsam, a widely respected

Sahitya Academy Award for the best Malayalam novel despite it being termed by eminent critics like Prof Ravi Shankar Nair as the worst piece of literature run amuck," wrote Professor Nair in his literary column.

they have read in their career. 'We can use this book to throw at stray dogs which are aplenty all over Kerala. Or else we can put this book as an obstacle underneath the truck to ensure that the vehicle does not

Despite the observations by Prof Nair, author Ramanunni laughed all the way to the book of this genre was "Moustache", a novel by S Hareesh.

"Though the book has no literature other than pornographic description, Hareesh made millions as royalty despite literature getting buried thousands of fathom beneath the surface of earth. Cash through controversies seems to be the catchword of these modern a widely respected journal of literary criticism novels," said

"These books are purchased secretly by voracious readers to books have some substance in them but not the works of Ramanunni or Hareesh," said T G Mohan Das. He has reasons to get annoyed as Hareesh has claimed in the work that Hindu women go to temples to display

their physique. Despite these obscenities, these books manage to win national prizes thanks to the fact that the authors know the right people at the right places. "It is an open secret that the Sahitya Akademy awards are presented by jury consisting of writers with vested interests. The win-

community. There are persons who have been eternal members of the juries," said Pillai. Tamil Nadu is no exception. "Despite the DMK's opposition

Hindi instances of lobbying for Akademy awards are galore. Only the chosen few get these honors," said Professor Josephine Jayashanti, a novelist of repute who is blunt in her opinion.

a novel based on an alleged tradition in Tamil Nadu's

"When it was published in 2010, it turned out to be a

inclusion of general public in the selection process is likely to bring down the discrepancies. "But the jury is out and one has to wait and watch," said Pillai.

called celebrities were telling on

social media that arrangements

standing in front of his vehicle. The driver of the vehicle said that he sped away to save the minister as "the students were pounding fist blows on the bonnet and windscreen" of the Minister's SUV which was partly damaged.

Two students were injured in

vehicle rolled over the leg of a student another of his colleague Indranuj Roy whose left eye got seriously injured. He was presently undergoing treatment in a private medical

injured by the Minister's vehicle the students went on a rampage and ransacked TMC academic employees' union office Meanwhile, even as the SFI had called for an academic strike throughout the State on Monday, alleged TMC workers went on rampage mounting attacks on CPI(M) party offices at various places, sources said "A CPI(M) party office was ransacked at Dinhata in North Bengal while another was ransacked and its furniture broken

How Prayagraj learnt to live with Kumbh stampedes KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA **PTI** PRAYAGRAJ hours ago, and therefore we were alert, and being a local resthe disaster took place. The incident of the 1954 stam-My uncle had saved his sister by pulling her out of the ident knew what to $\bar{\text{do}}$ in case the pede was then described as a crowd became unmanageable, national tragedy".

river waters by her hair as she slipped below amid the commotion, says city-based advocate Niranjan Lal recalling the 1954 Kumbh Mela stampede stories he had heard from his aunt who sur-

Allahabad after Independence, and the tragic incident took place on February 3 on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. According to official estimates, several hundred had died in the stampede.

Seventy-one years later, a stampede took place on January 29, again on Mauni Amavasya day as

Lal, 67, and his wife were camping in a Swiss cottage in Sector 6 of Mahakukbh Nagar, when they got a call from their son at home late night, cautioning them not to go to the Sangam due to the stampede

'We didn't step out from the camp until the sun came out, and at around 11 am, we went to Dashashwamedh Ghat on Ganga, located near Sector 6. There were huge crowds in the mela area, in the streets and at the ghat. We were aware of the tragedy that had unfolded a few Lal said.

fearful. My wife continued to camp until the 'kalpwas' period was over, continuing the multigeneration tradition of our fam-" he said.

Allahabad (renamed Prayagraj in held here post melas Independence.

family tradition, and observed

Kumbh Mela happened. And, I and my wife have been part of all successive Kumbh also since then. But, the 1954 tragedy is something my uncle and 'bua' (aunt) used to talk about. She told me how she was saved by my father's elder brother while she dent," Lal reminisced, adding, his 'bua' who was born in 1920s and also used to observe rituals, died

> was used to draw people to the mela. The authorities were somehow complacent and some so-

Akshat Lal, 32, son of Niranjan Lal, says he used to hear stories about the old Kumbh Melas from his grandmother and aunt, whose mother was rescued dur-

that the entire country was shaken. Every other old family in Allahabad either has a personal story attached to it, or they know someone having some link with the tragedy," he told PTI. The young scholar, who even

wrote a 100-odd-page book "Kumbh: A Divine Show at Allahabad" in 2013, has researched extensively on the

Prayagraj Junction) during the 2013 Kumbh Mela in which scores of people died. After the 1954 stampede, an inquiry committee was set up

dations for better crowd manage ment and ensuring the safety of pilgrims. If one looks at the Maha Kumbh 2025, a VVIP culture was promoted during it, and aggressive

were 'great' and people should flock to Sangam, which were a factor for overcrowding and eventually a stampede," he alleged. The Uttar Pradesh government had, however, maintained that ample arrangements were made and the theme itself was 'Bhavya

PTI spoke to many other residents of the city who either witnessed January 29 stampede or its aftermath or knew someone who was present there in the mela.

Divya Surakshit Maha Kumbh'

"I saw people being taken away

over," she said. For people like Devi, however,

takes place once in 12 years, was held this year from January 13 (Paush Purnima) to February 26 (Mahashivratri) and saw grand processions of Naga Sadhus and

grims during this period.

the University. As the news of Roy getting

> at Durgapur," CPI(M) leader Mayukh said adding similar attacks had also taken place in Hooghly, Burdwan

and Howrah.

gious tourism Over a span of 45 days, from Makar Sankranti Shri Ram Lalla temple extended its darshan hours until 1 am to accommodate the ceaseless stream of pilgrims.

Anil Mishra, a member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, revealed that more than 1.25 crore devotees visited the temple during this period, with AIpowered tracking and door metal detectors recording the

vided a significant boost to the local economy, driving demand for prasad, flowers, and other religious offerings. Hotels, restaurants, and home stays, particularly those near the temple, remained fully booked, underscoring the success of government-backed employment schemes for local residents.

To manage the massive crowds, authorities arranged shelter for 25,000 people and for sanitation, drinking water, and waste management. Traffic diversions and holding zones at city entry points helped streamline the influx of

pilgrims. Divisional Commissioner

Gaurav Dayal highlighted that tight security arrangements allowed for an orderly darshan experience, setting the stage for even better preparations a massive crowd sought to enter into the Triveni Sangam waters for the 'Amrit Snan'.

"But, we didn't go back feeling

Lal belongs to an old family of 2018), many of whose members have performed 'kalpwas' and bathing rituals at all Kumbh

His wife, Saloni Niranjan kept the death in 2019.

was drowning during the inci-

ernment officer was at the family camp in the mela area when

ers in Gurugram district is over 11.7 Lakh. These voters will exercise their franchise at 1,109 booths in five municipal areas including Gurugram, Manesar, Pataudi, Sohna and Farrukhnagar in Gurugram

District Election Officer Ajay Kumar said that the votes would be cast for the post of Mayor of the MCG and councillor in 35 wards of the MCG

The elections are being held in

33 municipal bodies eight

municipal corporations, 21

municipalities and four munic-

ipal councils.

Likewise, the votes would be cast for the post of Mayor of the MMC and councillor in 20

to anything associated with

She says that Perumal Murugan's "One Part Woman",

damp squib. But when it was translated into English, there was a major controversy as desired by the author and publishers. It was written with the sole objective of tarnishing the Tiruchengode residents and portrayed them in poor light," said Jayashanti. Anandan Pillai feels that the

Over 1.25 Crore pilgrims visit Ayodhya in 45 days

s the Maha Kumbh festiv-Aities in Prayagraj captivated the nation, Ayodhya experienced an unexpected spiritual wave of its own. The sacred city witnessed an unprecedented influx of devotees, setting a new benchmark in reli-

Mahashivratri, estimated 10 to 12 Lakh devotees arrived daily, transforming Ayodhya into a hub of spiritual fervor. For the first time in history, the

Visitors lauded the Yogi government's developmental initiatives and crowd manage ment strategies, which ensured a seamless pilgrimage experi-

footfall. Devotional offerings also saw a surge, with daily donations averaging around ₹15 lakh.



ahead of the upcoming Ram Navami celebrations.

vived it. This was the first Kumbh in

the rituals at Maha Kumbh this year, after her mother-in-law's We were married in 1988, and few months later, the 1989

in 1986. Lal's father, Govind Prasad, a gov-

ing the 1954 stampede. The scale of the tragedy was such

Another stampede took place at Allahabad Junction (now

and it made a slew of recommenmarketing and '144 years' hype

Renu Devi, a domestic help, said, she saw piles of footwear and bags at the ghats and also many floating in the river the day the stampede took place.

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-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

n 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 longestablished 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.



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

he Budget presented by the BJP's doubleengine 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 selfreliance, 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 benefitted under the State Rural Livelihood Mission (UPSRLM), 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 "Lakhpati Didi," helping them become self-reliant. Uttar Pradesh is also the first state in the country to guarantee concrete houses to

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. nectivity and highway Providing further impetus to the cause, a provision of Rs 4,882 crore has been made in for the widening and conthe Budget for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural). Also, an amount of Rs 1,200 crore has been proposed under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana



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 econo-

state's economy has also been

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 conexpansion. Under this, Rs 200 crore has been provided struction 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** CAUSE, A PROVISION OF **RS 4,882 CRORE** HAS BEEN MADE IN THE BUDGET

FOR THE

(RURAL)

PRADHAN MANTRI

AWAS YOJANA

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 Vivekananda 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 devel oped state in the country.

(The writer is Deputy Chief Minister of UP; views

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



cases that might otherwise

Dr Bedi confirmed that he

plans to patent the technique

seem hopeless.

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

t the recently concluded 71st Annual Conference of the Indian Association of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Sciences, Dr Harinder Singh Director 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 anesthetised, 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 unaf-

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 wholebody cooling (hypothermia) to preserve organ function. At the conference, the technique received an enthusiastic response from 1,700 national and international expert

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

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 wholebody hypothermia and opens

new avenues for treating oxy-

gen deprivation during

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)

FINDING FUNDS FOR FREEBIES

Madam — Apropos 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

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-

Decriminalise Indian politics

THE EDITOR



t 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

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 invest-

ment with market evangelism. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur 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

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 Śelvaraj | Tirunelveli

US-UKRAINE TALKS FAIL

or more by a court of law.

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

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: letterstopioneér@gmail.com the pioneer

FIRST COLUMN

DEALING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

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



xaminations 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 iso-

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 selfawareness, 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?



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

he law has been enacted to confer rights over the use of for-est 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

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,

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. PATCHES OF BAMB00 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

Environmental Development Society, Hyderabad, accused the state of pressurising officials for recognition of rights to ineligible individuals resulting in largescale deforestation leading to the scam of unprecedented propor-

There are reports from Rampachodavaram Forests division, Rajamundri (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

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

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 frag-

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. Bampoo 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.

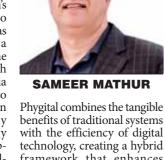
The management of Medha Lekha Gram Sabha has not been sustainable and the area has not yielded culms in 2016, 2020 and 2024. Taking a cue from Madha Lekha, other Gram Sabhas have also started clear felling and overexploitation of the resource. Further, the revenue realised from the sale proceeds has 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;

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

ith 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 deepseated 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



them with modern digital solutions. This approach is proving transformative across key sectors such as banking, commerce, agriculture, health-care, and public services. Driving Financial Inclusion

methods but rather integrating

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 touch-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 inperson 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 inclu-

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 capabili-

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

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 mid-dlemen. 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)



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

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

PTI LONDON

ritish Prime Minister Keir Starmer says Britain, Starmer says Employers France and Ukraine have agreed to work on a ceasefire plan to present to the United

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 sup-

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 lim-



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

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 itation exercise. It's going to us to unite in order to guaranhave to be an exercise in where tee the best outcome for private meeting — a day before that Europe is willing and able

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. Zelenskyv received broad sup-

port 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

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 trou-bling when Trump called Zelenskyy a dictator and falsely said Ukraine started the

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 ID 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 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

"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

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 legit imate 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 Iunar lander Blue Ghost aces moon touchdown

astronauts show up later this

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 indica-

tions suggest it landed within

the 328-foot (100-metre) target

The demos should get two

weeks of run time, before lunar

daytime ends and the lander

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

zone in Mare Crisium.

shuts down.

decade.

PTI ■ CAPE CANAVERAL (US)

Aprivate 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 kickstart 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)

'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 countries 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,

moonwalkers, who got it caked providing extra stability, according to the company. all over their spacesuits and Launched in mid-January from equipment.

Florida, the lander carried 10 On its way to the moon, Blue Ghost beamed back exquisite pictures of the home planet. experiments to the moon for NASA. The space agency paid The lander continued to stun USD 101 million for the delivery, plus USD 44 million for the once in orbit around the moon. with detailed shots of the science and tech on board. It's the third mission under moon's gray pockmarked surface. At the same time, an on-NASA's commercial lunar delivery programme, intended board receiver tracked and to ignite a lunar economy of acquired signals from the US GPS and European Galileo competing private businesses constellations, an encouraging while scouting around before

> The landing set the stage for a fresh crush of visitors angling for a piece of lunar

future explorers.

step forward in navigation for

business. Another lander — a tall and skinny 15-footer (4 metres tall) built and operated by Houstonbased 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

 $I^{
m ran's}$ 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

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 worsen-

ing 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

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 econom-

Osmani also cited recent geopolitical events as factors that undermined public vert 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

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

PTI ■ SEOUL

US aircraft carrier arrived Ain 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.

is expected to infuriate North Korea, which views tempo rary deployments of such powerful ÛS military assets as major security threats. 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.

The deployment of the carrier

Pope gets visit from Vatican secretary of state

PTI ■ ROME

stable Pope Francis had a A stable Pope Francis nad 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 ople 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

the Sunday appointment delivering the Angelus prayer in suite at the Gemelli hospital if

person. He could have done so from his 10th floor hospital 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' condi-

tion 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

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

of danger. He was eating and drinking and continued his respiratory physiotherapy, and spent 20 minutes in his private chapel down the hall on Saturday, the Vatican said. The pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has lung disease and was admitted to Gemelli on Feb. 14 after a bout of bronchitis worsened and turned into a complex pneumonia in both lungs.

Prayers continued to pour in: Francis' hospitalization has come as the Vatican is marking its Holy Year, drawing pilgrims to Rome from all over. They are walking through the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica and also making pilgrimages to the hilltop Umbrian town of Assisi, to pray at the home of Francis namesake, St. Francis.

"Every day we're praying for the pope," said the Rev. Jacinto Bento, a priest visiting Assisi on Saturday with a group of 30 Jubilee pilgrims from the Azores Islands. "We're very sad for his situation."

In an odd coincidence, Francis was supposed to have presided Saturday over a Holy Year audience in the Vatican's auditorium for the staff of the Gemelli hospital and other health care workers. They came as planned and completed the pilgrimage, while Francis continued his recovery at the hos-

Syrians begin fasting during Ramazan without Assad family

could turn into an Islamic

state, although al-Sharaa has so

far promised to respect reli-

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 eat-

ing in public fearing reprisals.

"Ramazan this year comes with

gious minorities.

ome 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 wartorn 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

ilv dynasty

Most countries around the Associated Press journalists world, including Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Kuwait began who toured Damascus on Saturday said some coffee observing Ramazan on shops were opened but had Saturday, while a few other their windows closed to that people can't see who is inside. Insurgents led by the Islamist countries such as Malyasia and Japan, as well as some Shiite Muslims, will begin the fast on Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, overthrew President Sunday. Bashar Assad's secular government in early December ending the 54-year Assad fam-

Since then, Syria's new Islamist

with a US-brokered ceasefire government under former that went into effect in late insurgent leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, has been in control and November. many fear that the country

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. a new flavour. This is the "This is something new, good and respectable, meaning that Ramazan of victory and liberation," said interim Minister of the rituals of Ramadan should be fully observed in all their Religious Affairs Hussam Haj-Hussein in a televised stateaspects.'

Ramadan 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

In many parts of the region, the holy month this year is bittersweet. Lebanese this year mark Ramadan after the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war ended

methodologies used to determine the start of the month.

US court rules head of watchdog agency must keep his job

The head of a federal watchdog agency must remain in his job, a judge in Washington ruled on Saturday, saying President Donald Trump's bid to remove the special counsel was unlawful.

US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson sided with Hampton Dellinger, who leads the Office of Special Counsel, in a legal battle over the president's authority to oust the head of the independent agency that's likely headed back to the US Supreme Court.

Dellinger sued Trump last month after he was fired, even though the law says special counsels can be removed by the president "only for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office." Jackson, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic president Barack Obama, quickly reinstated Dellinger in the job while he

Jackson rejected the Trump administration's claims that the special counsel's removal protections are unconstitutional because they prevent the president from rightfully installing

his preferred agency head. The judge said allowing the president to remove the special counsel at will would have a chilling effect on his crucial duties, which include guarding the federal workforce from illegal personnel actions, such as retaliation for whistleblow-

The Special Counsel is supposed to withstand the winds of political change and help ensure that no government servant of either party becomes the subject of prohibited employment practices or faces reprisals for calling out wrongdoing — by holdovers from a previous administration or by officials of the new one, Jackson wrote in her decision.

The Justice Department quickly filed court papers indicating it will challenge the ruling to Washington's federal appeals court. The case has already gone up once to the Supreme Court, which previously temporarily allowed Dellinger to

remain in his job. The ruling comes as Dellinger is challenging the removal of probationary workers who were fired as part of the Trump administration's massive overhaul of the government. A federal board on Tuesday halted the terminations of several probationary workers after Dellinger said their firings may have been unlawful.

"I'm glad and grateful to see the court confirm the importance and legality of the job protections Congress afforded my position," Dellinger said in a statement on Saturday. "My efforts to protect federal employees generally, and whistleblowers in particular, from unlawful treatment will continue. The judge said the special

counsel has a "unique status and mission," which requires independence from the president to ensure he can carry out his responsibilities. The office investigates whistleblower claims of reprisal, can pursue disciplinary action against employees who punish whistleblowers and provides a channel for employees to disclose government wrongdoing. "If I don't have independence, if I can be removed for no good reason, federal employees are going to have no good reason to come to me," Dellinger told reporters outside Washington's federal courthouse after a recent hear-

ing.
The Office of Special Counsel is also responsible for enforcing the Hatch Act, which restricts the partisan political activities of government work-

ers. Dellinger's firing came as Trump administration employees have touted their support on social media for his policies even though the Hatch Act is meant to restrict political advocacy while on duty. The Justice Department employed sweeping language in urging the Supreme Court last month to allow the termination of the head of an obscure federal agency with limited power. Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris wrote in court papers that the lower court had crossed "a constitutional red line" by blocking Dellinger's firing and stopping Trump "from shaping the agenda of an executivebranch agency in the new administration's critical first

Dellinger was appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden and confirmed by the Senate to a five-year term in

Yawning wealth gap widening inequalities in China: Report

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's wealthiest individuals continue to grow richer, widening economic inequalities in the country despite the ruling Communist Party's efforts to control private businesses and implement policies aimed at boosting people's incomes, a report here said. The combined wealth of the

5.12 million families in China with over six million yuan (USD 824,000) in assets was stated to be about 150 trillion yuan (over USD seven trillion) in 2024, according to a report published by the Hurun Research Institute.

Of this, the wealthiest 130,000 families accounted for 58 per cent in 2024, which is up from 56 per cent a year earlier, the report said.

China's per capita disposable income was stated to be 41,314 yuan (over USD 41,314) last year, up 5.3 per cent from 2023, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported, citing the report. Analysts have warned that Beijing needs to work harder to narrow the wealth gap in soci-

ignite a private sector-led economic recovery, the Post reported on Sunday. The country is grappling with weak consumption and a languishing property sector, where the rich park most of their

ety more broadly as it tries to

Much of the economic strain is being felt by those in the mid-

assets.

dle and lower-middle classes, it

As a result, the overall consumption essential to halt the economic slowdown grew by just 3.5 per cent last year, a rate that was slower than the 5 per cent rise in GDP, suggesting that the income and wealth gaps were holding back spending. The growing inequality was reflected in the national Gini coefficient, which was 0.467 in 2022 when the National Bureau of Statistics last updated the number.

A Gini coefficient of 0 reflects perfect income and wealth equality, while 1 reflects maximal inequality, where a single individual has all the income while all others have none.

The yawning wealth gap was also apparent in data from Shenzhen-based China Merchants Bank (CMB), one of China the country's biggest domestic wealth management-focused lenders.

CMB said that about 2.3 per cent of its accounts held roughly 81 per cent of the total private banking assets at the institution in 2023, representing a highly unequal distribution, the Post reported.

The Hurun report is published ahead of the upcoming annual Parliament session of the National People's Congress (NPC), which begins its twoweek-long session from March 5, during which several legislations to boost the country's economy were expected to be approved

The NPC would meet along with the advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), to deliberate on the state of the economy and the country's strategic challenges arising out of US President Donald Trump starting a sec-

ond stint in power.
Trump said he planned to slap new 10 per cent tariffs on goods from China, escalating

trade fights with Beijing.
Already, Chinese goods were hit by 10 per cent tariffs by Trump earlier this month.
During his election campaign, he threatened to slap 60 per cent tariffs on Chinese goods to cent tariffs on Chinese goods to address US concerns over fentanyl, a potent opioid drug blamed for widespread drug addiction in the US.

addiction in the US.

In a bid to boost the sagging economy, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Feb 17 held a rare meeting with the country's top corporate leaders, including ecompassion giant. Alibeba commerce giant Alibaba founder Jack Ma, and urged them to unleash their talents to shore up sagging business confidence in the country to reverse the economic slowdown.

Xi's meeting with leaders of the top corporate houses came amid a severe ebb in private sector morale prompted by a volatile mix of economic issues. including heightened geopolitical tensions with the US and harsh regulatory crackdowns on some of the country's business firms

Prez Trump signs order designating **English as official** language of US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order designation utive order designating English as the offi-

cial language of the United States. The order allows government agencies and organizations that receive federal funding to choose whether to continue to offer documents and services in language other than English.

It rescinds a mandate from former President Bill Clinton that required the government and organizations that received federal funding to provide language assistance to non-English

"Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society," according to the order signed by Trump on Saturday.

"In welcoming new Americans, a policy of encouraging the learning and adoption of our national language will make the United States a shared home and empower new citizens to achieve the American dream," the order also states. "Speaking English not only opens doors economically, but it helps newcomers engage in their communities, participate in national traditions, and give back to our society."

More than 30 states have already passed laws designating English as their official language, according to US English, a group that advocates for making English the official language in the For decades, lawmakers in Congress have intro-

duced legislation to designate English as the offinot succeeded. Within hours of Trump's inauguration last

month, the new administration took down the Spanish language version of the official White House website. Hispanic advocacy groups and others expressed

confusion and frustration at the change. The White House said at the time it was committed to bringing the Spanish language version of the website back online. As of Saturday, it was still not restored.

The White House did not immediately respond to a message about whether that would happen. Trump shut down the Spanish version of the website during his first term. It was restored when President Joe Biden was inaugurated in

Anti-DOGE protests at Tesla stores target Elon Musk's bottom line

Demonstrators gathered outside Tesla stores across the US Saturday to protest the automaker's billionaire CEO, Elon Musk, and his push to slash government spending on behalf of President Donald

The demonstrations are part of a growing backlash in North America and Europe to Musk's disruptive role

up at showrooms everywhere and boycotting Tesla and telling everyone else to get out, sell your stocks, sell

Musk is taking direction from Trump to slash federal spending and sharply reduce the workforce, arguing that Trump's victory gave the president and him a mandate to restructure the US government. DOGE officials have swiftly gained access to sensitive databases, direct-



Demonstrators are arrested by NYPD officers during a protest against Elon Musk and Tesla outside of a Tesla showroom in New York

Critics of Trump and Musk hope to discourage and stigmatise purchases of Tesla, the electric car company that is the world's most valuable automaker. Liberal groups for weeks have organized anti-Tesla protests in hopes of galvanizing opposition to Musk's Department of Government Efficiency and energising Democrats still demoralized by Trump's November victory.
"We can get back at Elon," said

Nathan Phillips, a 58-year-old ecologist from Newton, Massachusetts, who was protesting in Boston on Saturday. "We can impose direct economic damage on Tesla by showing celled contracts and shut down sections of the government, including the US Agency for International Development.

Musk's critics say his actions defy Congress's power to control the US budget and present a host of ways for him to enrich himself. Musk leads several other companies, notably SpaceX, which conducts launches for NASA and the intelligence community, and the social media platform

'Protests will not deter President Trump and Elon Musk from delivering on the promise to establish DOĞE and make our federal government more efficient and more accountable to the hardworking American taxpayers across the country," said White House spokesperson Harrison Fields.

Tesla did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

More than 50 demonstrations were listed Saturday on the website Tesla Takedown, with more planned later in March from coast to coast in the United States along with England, Spain and Portugal. News reports showed demonstrations in recent days in US cities including Tucson, Arizona; St. Louis; New York City: Dayton, Ohio; Charlotte; and Palo Alto, California. Some Tesla owners have also reported their vehicles vandalized with spray painted swastikas amid what Jewish groups and observers fear is a rise in antisemitism.

Federal prosecutors charged a woman in connection with a string of vandalism against a Colorado Tesla dealership, which included Molotov cocktails being thrown at vehicles and the words "Nazi cars" spray painted on the building. Saturday's demonstration in Boston

had a festive atmosphere, with a brass band playing music as protesters carried signs and chanted. Several of the signs mocked Musk and DOGE, with one reading: "Stop Elon and his despicable Muskrats.' This government led by

Musk, it's gone completely off the rails and we are here to stop that, said Carina Campovasso, a retired federal worker. "And I hope they listen." About 300 demonstrators protested at a Tesla dealership in New York City on Saturday. Police said nine people were taken into custody but did not elaborate on the charges they faced.

Tesla's share price has fallen by nearly a third since Trump took office, though it's still higher than it was a year ago. Musk's current net worth is an estimated \$359 billion, according to Forbes, which calculated his 2024 net worth as \$195 billion.



A man rides a Penny-farthing bicycle down the Mall towards Buckingham Palace in London on Sunday.

Imran Khan seeks global help for democracy, regional stability

 $\label{eq:problem} P^{akistan's\,jailed\,former\,prime\,minister\,Imran\,Khan\,has\,appealed\,to}$ the international community, particularly the United States, to reaffirm its commitment to democracy, human rights, and regional stability. Dawn reported that in an article published in Time magazine in his name, the incarcerated politician congratulated US President Donald Trump on his "political comeback"

He also expressed the hope that the US would work with Pakistan to foster economic partnerships, promote stability, and prevent conditions that lead to conflict and extremism.

It remains unclear if the article was indeed penned by Khan, and how it was delivered to the magazine.

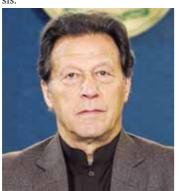
Khan reflected on the 'political turmoil' in Pakistan and his ongoing fight for democracy. He expressed deep concern over the alleged erosion of democracy in the country, describing the current period as one of the most challenging in the nation's his-

He underscored that his imprisonment and the charges brought against him were politically motivated attempts to stifle his advocacy for

democratic principles. He claimed his struggle was not personal but addressed the broader

reaching consequences, not only for the country but also for regional and global stability.

Given Pakistan's strategic importance, Khan emphasised that the international community must recognise the urgency of addressing the cri-



On the issue of terrorism, Khan criticised the government for diverting resources from crucial counterterrorism efforts to pursue a political vendetta against Pakistan Tehreek-i-

Regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, which have seen an uptick in terrorist activity, were neglected in favour of "military campaigns against political opponents".

been reduced to a tool of political persecution.

Speaking on the DawnNews TV show 'Doosra Rukh' on Saturday, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairman Irfan Siddiqui said the PTI was "impossible to predict".

The party was suggesting alliances while simultaneously calling for civil disobedience, sending letters and publishing "explosive" articles in Time magazine, the PML-N senator

While discussing the talks with the PTI, Senator Siddiqui said it was impossible to present options during the talks as they did not assess them at any forum; rather, their decisions came straight from Khan.

He said the PTI did not know what they were doing until they received instructions from Khan. "When Imran ordered 'no more

talks', the PTI committee was completely caught off guard," he said. Asked if the PTI wanted to continue negotiations despite Imran's instruc-

tions, he responded in the affirmative. 'I remember (PTI Chairman) Gohar Ali Khan went to see Imran, and when he returned, there were still three or four days left before the deadline to meet their demands. Still, they said no more talks.

Officials concerned about militant attack in Karachi

PTI ■ KARACHI

hand grenade attack on a police station in AKarachi has left senior officials concerned whether insurgent groups from Balochistan or the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have become active in Pakistan's biggest city. Despite the ongoing terror attacks carried out by the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) or the TTP in other parts of Pakistan, Karachi has largely remained peaceful in recent times.

On Friday evening, unidentified men on two motorcycles hurled at least three hand grenades at the Preedy police station in Saddar town, injuring four policemen and damaging the outer

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) South Syed Asad Raza said the people who hurled the grenades had still not been identified as they sped away on their bikes in the narrow lanes after the attack. "The injured policemen were moved to a hospital where their condition is out of danger," he said.

Bomb Disposal Squad experts said three grenades were detonated in the attack.

Reza said in the past the criminal gangs in Lyari used hand grenades to attack police stations and mobile vans. Reza said the attack alerted police and security personnel as there had been very few such cases in Karachi

The official said they had intelligence reports saying the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have recently made videos in Karachi, and some of the suspected militants were also apprehended in the city.

raising concern over surveillance

Child dies of Ebola in Uganda,

PTI KAMPALA

A⁴-year-old child became the second person to die of Ebola in Uganda, the World Health Organisation has said, in a setback for health officials who had hoped for a quick end to the outbreak that began at the end of January

The child had been hospitalised at the main referral facility in Kampala, the capital of the East African country, and died Tuesday, the WHO office in Uganda said in a brief statement on Saturday. The statement said WHO and others are working to strengthen surveil-

lance and contact tracing. There were no other details about the death and local health officials were not commenting on the case

The death undermines Ugandan officials' assertions of an outbreak under control after eight Ebola patients were discharged earlier in February. The first victim was a male nurse who died the day before the outbreak was declared on Jan 30. He had sought treatment at multiple facilities in Kampala and in eastern Uganda, where he also visited a traditional healer in trying to diagnose his illness, before later dying in Kampala.

The successful treatment of eight patients who had been contacts of that man, including some of his relatives, had left local health officials anticipating the end of the outbreak. But they are still investigating its

source. Tracing contacts is key to stemming the spread of Ebola, and there are no approved vaccines for the Sudan strain of Ebola that's infecting people in Uganda.

Over 20,000 travellers are screened daily for Ebola at Uganda's different border cross ing points, according to WHO, which supports the work.

The WHO has given Uganda at least USD 3 million to support its Ebola response, but there have been concerns about adequate funding in the wake of the US administration's decision to terminate 60% of USAID's foreign aid contracts. Dithan Kiragga, executive director of the Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation, a non-governmental group that supports Ebola surveillance in Uganda,

told The Associated Press on

Friday that his group had stopped its work supporting local health authorities in screening travelling passengers after the termination of its contract with USAID.



I, Anil Kumar S/o Shri Ram Avadh R/o A-1175, Indira Marg Mandawali Fazalpur Delhi-110092 declare that I have Changed my name from Anil Kumar Singh to Anil Kumar for all future Purposes.

PD(1606)C I, Rinku Tiwari W/o Pranav

Kumar Raju R/o G- 118 Sector Delta 2, Greater Noida, Gautam Buddh Nagar have changed my name from Rinku to Rinku Tiwari for all future purposes.

PD(1607)C

Government fails to find right candidate for BPCL top job

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

Enterprise The Public Selection Board (PESB) last month interviewed a dozen candidates including BPCL Vetsa director (finance) Ramakrishna Gupta and its director (refineries) S Khanna but found none suitable for the job of chairman and managing

(BPCL), according to a PESB order.

It advised the administrative ministry "to choose an In June last year, PESB appropriate course of interviewed further action for selection including the search cum selection committee, according to the order.

Incumbent G Krishnakumar superannuates as chairman and managing director of BPCL on April 30 this year. BPCL is the fourth company in the oil sector where PESB couldn't find a suitable candidate since 2021.

PESB in May 2023 did not make any recommendation for the top post at Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and the task was then entrusted to a search cum selection

That panel picked Arvindar Singh Sahney who was appointed chairman of IOC in November 2024.

eight candidates, including 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.

HPCL top position has been lying vacant since August 31, 2024, when Pushp Kumar Joshi superannuated Previously in June 2021, PESB reached a similar conclusion while looking for a candidate for the top job at Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC).

A year later, a search-cumselection committee picked

chairman former managing director of BPCL, for that job. board-level

Most

appointments at public sector companies are done basis recommendations of the PESB but the government headhunter struggling to find suitable candidates for top jobs that fell vacant since 2021 in the oil sector. Search-cumselection committee route has been resorted to as such a panel has flexibility of not just considering candidates who have applied for the job but anyone - from public and private sector - who it deems fit to do the job.

Sources said that the core of the problem is these

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. "I wouldn't call them one trick ponies but they are all narrow specialists. When PESB looks at candidates, it than his core competence. essentially is looking for someone who has had multidisciplinary exposure and is capable of leading an organisation whose job is not limited to one discipline of refining oil or selling

LPG," a top official said. While IOC, BPCL and HPCL refine crude oil into fuels like petrol and diesel, make petrochemicals, and retail fuels, ONGC produces

crude oil and gas. In the past, IOC and BPCL nurtured leaders by giving multidisciplinary them exposure.

IOC had a route called the department of business development where refinery, finance marketing person could get exposure to streams other

This created tall leaders like Subir Raha, Prashanto Baneriee and several others after them, another official explained.

Similar was the case with BPCL which also gave its officials multidisciplinary created Sarthak exposure and stalwarts like Behuria, B Ashok among others

'Take the instance of Arun

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.

BPCL created such leaders but unfortunately that is not happening now, he added. IOC's Sahney spent three decades in refinery operations, technical services, and health, safety,

and environment (HSE). He was an executive director in the business development division, handling

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. "While it is easy to blame PESB and the petroleum ministry, I think the oil companies have to share the blame of not creating a leadership pipeline and nurturing talent," the first

official said. In case the search cum selection committee is not presented with enough inhouse talent, the possibility an outsider being appointed at HPCL or BPCL is not ruled out, sources

FPIs withdraw ₹34,574 Crore from equities in Februrary

 $F_{\text{pulled out }}^{\text{oreign investors have}} \xrightarrow{\text{have}}$ 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.

"Elevated valuations of Indian equities, alongside concerns about corporate earnings growth, have led to sustained outflow of FPIs, Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors, said. According to the data with

the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth ₹34,574 Crore from Indian equities in February.

This came following a net outflow of ₹78,027 Crore in the entire January.

With these, the total outflow by FPIs has reached ₹1,12,601 Crore in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. The massive selling by FPIs

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

According to him, the earnings reports for the third quarter of fiscal year 2025 have been modest, indicating an atmosphere of uncertainty. issue further compounded by falling commodity prices and reduced consumer spending, which adversely impact corporate profits diminish the appeal of Indian equities to foreign investors, he added.

"FPIs are focused on selling in India because valuations in India are high and moving money to Chinese stocks where valuations are much

"But in the process, they are selling in the best performing valuations," Chief Vijavakumar 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.

Additionally, they withdrew money from the debt market. They pulled out ₹8,932 Crore from debt general limit and ₹2,666 Crore from debt voluntary retention route.

The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just ₹427 Crore. This contrasts sharply with

the extraordinary ₹1.71 Lakh Crore net inflows in 2023 driven by optimism over India's strong economic fundamentals. In comparison, 2022 saw a net outflow of ₹ 1.21 Lakh

Crore amid aggressive rate hikes by global central banks.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

In 2019, Wave Group firm Masa Global Food Private Limited and Agristo's subsidiary firm IMSTO NV, Belgium had formed a 50:50 joint venture firm to establish a potato processing plant at Bijnor to make dehydrated potato flakes.

The name of the joint venture firm is Agristo Masa Private Limited. The plant started operations in 2022 with an annual capacity of 7,500 tonnes.

In an interview with PTI. Wave Group Chairman Manpreet Singh Chadha noted that there is an immense growth potential in Indian food processing

He also stressed on the need to boost crop yields and processing capacity for augmenting farmers income. "We are setting up a new

production line for export quality french fries at Bijnor," Chadha said. He said the total investment

Wave Group, Agristo to invest ₹750 Crore in UP

on this expansion will be around ₹750 Crore, which will be financed through equity and debt. The joint venture had

invested around ₹300 Crore on setting up the existing plant, taking the total investment commitment to more than ₹1,000 Crore. Chadha said the new production line with 80,000 tonnes per annum capacity will become operational in the next two years and cater to both domestic and global

The JV is into business to business (B2B) segment

markets.

"Our aim is to empower the farmers and diversify their cash crop beyond sugarcane. We have helped these farmers to double the potatoes output with the help of new technologies. Their income has increased by 50 per cent over the last three-four years, Chadha.

Princess Astrid of the Kingdom of Belgium, hectare.
Finance Minister of Uttar The Bijnor plant caters to

Pradesh Suresh Kumar both domestic and export Khanna and Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh Manoj attended Singh groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion of the production facility.

Wave Group already has two sugar manufacturing plants in Bijnor area and has been procuring sugarcane from farmers.

The potato processing plant set up by the joint venture helped in firm has enhancing farmers income of this region, Chadha said. We are helping farmers in accessing good quality seeds for potato production. We also procuring all potatoes from farmers at a very remunerative price,

Chadha said. Around 2,500 farmers are expected to benefit from this expansion.

This is in addition to the 500 farmers in the region who been provided sustainable livelihood opportunities through the plant's interventions.
The productivity of potato

has gone up from 17 tonnes per hectare to 32 tonnes per

with markets, America, Middle East, South East Asia and Japan being destinations the key 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. Partnering with Masa Global Food has allowed us to contribute in meaningful manner to the rapidly evolving Indian agriculture and processing sectors ensure development of all stakeholders.'

To ensure the holistic development of farmers and the overall development of the region's agricultural landscape, the JV firm Agristo Masa has hired agronomists from Belgium and The Netherlands. The joint venture firm is

also assisting farmers in this region in

mechanisation. Wave Group is into real estate, sugar and food processing businesses. It has real estate projects in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

NCL aims for 139 MT production target in FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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". 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. The company known for its highly mechanised mines and critical role in ensuring the country's energy security, said that it has launched the first aid training programme for homemakers on a large scale. By extending awareness about first aid beyond the workplace and into the homes of its

workforce, NCL is fostering a primary-care-conscious

Radico Khaitan expects ₹500 Crore sales in FY26: MD

PTI NEW DELHI

Incouraged by the ongoing 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

The company expects an eightnine per cent volume growth, and value growth of around "12-15 per cent", Khaitan said, adding "this year has been a good year for us, and hopefully next year should be much

For the next fiscal, he said, "We expect the same thing, our premium PNA category (Prestige and above) should grow more than 15 per cent and we should be close to overall double-digit growth." Radico Khaitan's luxury portfolio consists of Rampur

Indian Single Malt, Jaisalmer Indian Craft Gin, Sangam World Malt and Spirit of Victory 1999 Pure Malt. "For the first time in Q3

(December quarter) we achieved a turnover of ₹100 Crore (from premium) and for the nine months of fiscal year 2024, we have achieved ₹250 Crore (turnover). We are very confident that for fiscal year 2026, Radico Khaitan should achieve ₹500 Crore of turnover, just for the luxury segment only," said Khaitan.

Moreover, to expand its presence in the fast-growing alcobev segment, Radico Khaitan plans to add two more brands next fiscal.

"So in the first half, we are planning to come out with two more brands in the luxury space. So we have been working for the last couple of years on that, and hopefully in the first half, we will see their entry into the Indian markets,'

Radico Khaitan, which also owns other premium brands in the PNA category, including Royal Ranthambore, Dazzle Vodka, and Morpheus Blue, is experiencing high double-digit growth and expects momentum to continue. Tailwinds from growing per

capita income and young demographics, such as India adding 20 Million new people Encouraged by the ongoing adding 20 million in the to the drinking age bracket alcoholic beverage (alcobev) every year, will help the 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".

However, over the ongoing talks for the UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA), he said the current duty of 150 per cent on Scotch whisky should be reduced in a gradual manner. It will allow the Indian brands to create space for themselves in the premium

"Our single malts are now outperforming the foreign single malts also, it is priced higher," he said, adding duty cut on import of bulk whisky (non-branded) from Scotland the Indian liquor companies, including Radico Khaitan will help them reduce

Besides, Radico Khaitan (earlier known as Rampur Distillery Company) expects to continue its growth from Defense Ministry Canteen Stores Department (CSD), where it is one of the largest providers of branded IMFL to the armed forces.

We are the market leaders there (at CSD). We would be having a close to 26 to 27 per cent and we feel the demand for the Indian products is very high. People are proud to consume the Indian brand," he

In the single malt and premium end, Radico Khaitan competes with Harvana-based Piccadilly Distilleries, Amrut and Paul John, among other brands.

In fiscal year 2024, Radico Khaitan's gross revenue from operations was at ₹15,483.9 Crore and had sold 45.6 million cases, in which PNA category's volume was 11.26 Million cases (of nine bottles each). Its Prestige and Above category brands grew by 20.3 per cent year-on-year in volume terms.

Excelsoft Technologies files for IPO with SEBI | US tariff, FIIs key drivers for markets

PTI NEW DELHI

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

The proposed IPO of the Karnataka-based company is a combination of a fresh issue of shares valued ₹210 Crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of shares worth ₹490 Crore by the promoters -Pedanta Technologies and Sudhanva, Dhananjaya according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company may consider mobilising up to ₹270 Crore in pre-IPO round.

"If the pre-IPO placement is undertaken, then the amount raised from the pre-IPO placement will be reduced from the fresh offer size or the Offer for Sale portion," the company said in the draft papers filed on The company has proposed

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 purposes.

With over two decades of Excelsoft experience, provides technology-based solutions across diverse learning and assessment segments through longcontracts clients

worldwide. As on December 31, 2024, it caters to 71 clients spread across 17 countries, including the US, UK, India, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Canada. Some of its prominent

Pearson clients are Education, Inc, AQA Colleges of Education, Excellence, No. NxGen Asia D, Pearson Professional Assessments Ltd, Sedtech for Technology Education and Learning Ascend Learning Brigham Young

University-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 ₹12.75 Crore.

As per the draft papers,

there are no companies or peers in India that have business composition and segment contribution similar to it. According to an Arizton report, the global SaaS market has seen rapid growth, with vertical SaaS emerging as a dominant trend that promises trend tha specialised, promises industrytailored solutions. This shift has positioned vertical SaaS to grow at an even faster pace than general SaaS, with estimates suggesting that vertical SaaS could account for nearly 50 per cent of the SaaS market by 2030. Anand Rathi Advisors is the

book running lead manager to the issue. The equity shares of the company are proposed to be listed on BSE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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 sentiment continue to remain weak due to escalating trade tariff concerns and foreign fund outflows, experts noted. In February alone, the NSE Nifty tanked 1,383.7 points or 5.88 per cent. The BSE Sensex lost 4,302.47 points or 5.55 per cent last month.

From its record peak of 85,978.25 hit on September 27 last year, the BSE benchmark index is down 12,780.15 points or 14.86 per cent. The Nifty dropped 4,152.65 points or 15.80 per cent from its lifetime high of 26,277.35 hit on September 27, 2024.

"Investors will be closely watching key events, including the tariff policy, and jobless claims. In the near term, market conditions are expected to remain weak, with a gradual recovery anticipated earnings improve from Q1 fiscal year 2026 and global trade policy uncertainties

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.

to trade with weakness due to weak global sentiments and lack of domestic triggers," Siddhartha Khemka, Head Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

The Indian economy grew by 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, recovering sequentially from seven-quarter lows, but the expansion came in lower than last year and at a time when it faces growing headwinds from the threat of a US tariff war. The 6.2 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was higher than a revised reading of 5.6 per cent expansion in the July-September 2024 period, according to data released by the Statistics Ministry on Friday. It was, however, lower than the RBI's estimate of 6.8

per cent for the period. Last week, the BSE benchmark slumped 2,112.96 points or

2.80 per cent, and the Nifty tanked 671.2 points or 2.94 per

"Uncertainty often weighs more than the actual event, and the market is currently grappling with concerns over potential trade Additionally, persistent FII Investors) selling continues to add pressure," Ajit Mishra -SVP, research, Religare Broking

Limited, said.

Gross GST collections rose by 9.1 per cent to about Rs 1.84 Lakh Crore in February, boosted by domestic consumption and indicating potential economic revival.

As per the official data released on Saturday, on a gross basis, mop up from Central GST stood at ₹35,204 Crore, State GST at ₹43,704 Crore, Integrated GST at ₹90,870 Crore and compensation cess of ₹13,868 Crore.

Satish Chandra Aluri, analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said "We are close to the signs of market capitulation with Friday's losses and might see a relief rally this week from oversold conditions but overall market is expected to be volatile with downward bias in the near term.

Wages drag as employment rises: Virmani

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

India has an opportunity in terms of global population, and there is a need to take advantage of it. For this, improving the quality of teaching and training is important, he noted. In an interview with PTI-

Bhasha, he said, "According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, the workerpopulation ratio has been clearly increasing in the last seven years. This means that the number of jobs is increasing more than the population growth. There are fluctuations in this too but the trend shows that jobs are increasing. Therefore, it is wrong to say that jobs are not

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 in2017-18.

"If we look at the wage data in PLFS, the real salary of casual workers has increased during the seven years and their condition has improved during this period. The figures confirm this.

"But a bigger issue is in the case of regular salaried jobs. In this category, real wages have not increased in line with

inflation in seven years," the economist said. "As far as my assessment is concerned, the main reason for wages not increasing as per inflation is the lack of skills. We are not hiring skilled jobs. I have seen the data of many countries. Based on that, I

would say that we need to

work on this (skill). It is in a

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.'

This is important because skills increase, productivity increases and real wages increase. This happens in India as well as in the world. Skill development is needed not only for those who are already working but also for the new people who are coming in," the Niti Aayog member said.

"According to the analysis we have done, skill development is needed at every level of education. Many children drop out of school midway, they need to be given skills accordingly. It is not that member said. everyone needs skills only to become an AI (artificial intelligence) or electronic

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. "For a developed India, there is

a need for improvement everywhere. We should see the opportunity and use it. We need to take advantage of the opportunities that we have at the level of global demographics. For this, improving the quality of education along with teaching and training is important. Attention needs to be paid here. So that we can reach a higher income level. Similarly, there is a supply chain, which needs to be worked upon," the

Job and skill are two sides of the same coin. If you have skill then it becomes easier to get a job. This needs to be understood." engineer. We also have to think about those children

Mcap of eight valued firms plummet by ₹3 Lakh Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms eroded by ₹3,09,244.57 Crore in a holidayshortened last week, with Tata Consultancy Services taking the biggest hit, in line with bearish trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark gauge Sensex tanked 2,112.96 points or 2.80 per cent, and the NSE Nifty tumbled 671.2 points or 2.94 per cent.

In February alone, the Nifty dropped 1,383.7 points or 5.88 per cent. The Sensex lost 4,302.47 points or 5.55 per cent. The market valuation of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) plunged ₹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 ₹7,01,002.22 Crore.

Bharti Airtel's market valuation

eroded by ₹39,230.1 Crore to

₹8,94,993.67 Crore and that of Reliance Industries dropped ₹38.025.97 Crore to ₹ 16.23.343.45 Crore. State Bank of India's (SBI) valuation diminished by ₹29,718.99 Crore to

₹6,14,236.97 Crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank slumped Crore ₹8,49,803.90 Crore.

Hindustan Unilever's mcap declined by ₹11,700.97 Crore to The valuation of ITC dipped

₹7,882.86 Crore to ₹4,93,867.57

Khaitan said.

₹5,14,983.41 Crore.



Tasty Recipe Using **Pistachio**

n 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 Romb.

INGREDIENTS

• 1 cup American Pistachios; • 1/4 cup brown sugar; • 1 cup rolled oats, toasted; • 1 cup puffed amaranth (rajgira); • 1/4 cup honey; • 1/4 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
- Heat a non-stick pan. Add brown sugar and 2 thsps 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 hall



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.

• 1 tbsp butter; • 1 cup kunafa dough; • 2 cups pistachios; 1 tbsp oil; • 3 tbsp 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

 Pulse the entire mixture at regular intervals of about 1 minute until the pistachios start releasing some oil and turn

with oil and icing sugar.

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.

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 wellbeing has never been more crucial. While most people may associate exercise with

physical health, its impact on mental wellbeing 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

a legacy behind

you win the mind.

Work on yourself because this is how

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 increashappiness and relaxation. They help relieve pain, relax, and lift

mood. Exercise also promotes the production of serotonin and dopamine, neurotransmitters that play a key

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

Regular exercise increases blood flow to the

class, gym or yoga sessions introduce you

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 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

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.

Vidarbha wins third Ranji Trophy title

magnificent run in domestic Acricket this season culminated in a third Ranji Trophy title for Vidarbha, who emerged champions on the basis of their first-innings lead in the summit clash, which ended in a draw at their home ground on Sunday.

The fate of the contest was all but sealed on the third evening when Vidarbha edged ahead with a slender lead of 37 runs in the first innings, having dismissed a doughty Kerala for 342 after putting on 379 runs batting first.

Kerala, the first-time finalists, fought hard but Vidarbha were rewarded for their incredible hard work and discipline throughout a season in which they not only clinched the Ranji Trophy but also ended as the runner-up in the 50-overs Vijay

Hazare Trophy. It is for the third time that Vidarbha have won the Ranji Trophy title, having done so earlier with their two consecutive wins in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 seasons.

Vidarbha's win now also makes them one of the strongest outfits in the Indian domestic cricket, for they had also finished as the runner-up in the Ranji Trophy last season.

The team under the captaincy of Akshay Wadkar and head coach Usman Ghani produced dominant performances throughout the Ranji Trophy season which was, for the first time in its 90-year history, split into two halves.

Vidarbha emerged as the best team across all the four groups in the league stage with six wins in seven



Vidarbha players pose with the trophy after winning Ranji Trophy final cricket match against Kerala in Nagpur on Sunday

matches giving them 40 points.

Unlike Kerala who also had luck on their side in the knockouts when they Jammu and Kashmir (quarterfinal) and Gujarat (semifinal) by barest of margins and progressed on basis of first-innings leads, Vidarbha grabbed outright

Vidarbha crushed Tamil Nadu, last year's semifinalists, by 198 runs in the quarterfinal and went on to pummel defending champions Mumbai by 80 runs in the semifinal

Overall, Vidarbha won nine of the 10

matches they played in the Ranji Trophy this season, which reflects the dominance of the team in India's premier domestic competition.

On Sunday, Vidarbha did what they had planned — to bat, bat and bat and reached 375 for nine with Karun Nair making 135 (295 balls, 10x4s, 2x6s), Danish Malewar scoring 73 and Darshan Nalkande chipping in with a 51 not out.

Vidarbha resumed the final day's play with the contest completely in their control, having an overnight lead of Even though Nair could only add three more runs to his overnight tally, Vidarbha batted for long enough close to the tea break — taking their overall lead to 412 runs, far beyond the reach of Sachin Baby's side.

The triumph was achieved on the back of all-round performances, which had two of Vidarbha's youngest players taking charge of their team's showings on the field.

The 22-year-old left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey created the record for most wickets in a Ranji Trophy season with 69 dismissals, going past

the previous record of 68 wickets which belonged to Bihar's Ashutosh Aman. Dubey also implemented the batting tips given by legendary Indian player Ravichandran Ashwin to make 476 runs in 10 matches with five fifties, perhaps to show early signs of another spin-bowling all-rounder in making for India.

The 24-year-old Yash Rathod, a bespectacled left-handed batter, amassed 960 runs at 53.33 in 10 matches with five centuries and three fifties to top the charts for batters, which had plenty of his teammates as

The veteran Nair, who had joined Vidarbha for this season, not only led their charge in the Vijay Hazare Trophy with five tons but also finished as the fourth highest rungetter in the Ranji Trophy, making 263 runs in pine matches at 53.03 863 runs in nine matches at 53.93 with four tons and two fifties. In the final, Nair struck 86 and 135.

The 21-year-old Malewar, who struck 153 and 73 in the final, finished fifth with 783 runs at 52.20 with two tons and six fifties.

Nair and Malewar were the architects of Vidarbha's win in the final, for they forged partnerships of 215 and 183 runs in the two innings to steer their team out of troubled waters in both

the innings. Skipper Wadkar was not too far behind, at seventh position with 722 runs in 10 matches at 45.12 with two tons and as many fifties.

Wadkar told the broadcaster after the match, "Everyone worked hard throughout, and we're all very happy. Last year, we lost the final. So we prepared during the monsoon itself. Every individual worked on himself."

World No. 2 Jeeno Thitikul

fought hard to chase Ko down,

Jeeno fired a 70, finishing at nine under, tied for second

with Japan's Ayaka Furue, who carded a closing 68. The Thai

star made an early push with

two birdies in the first four

holes to trail Ko by a stroke at

9-under but couldn't maintain

Charley Hull, just one shot

the pressure.

but her charge fell just short.



India has 'strong case' in 2036 Olympics bid: Coe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic nternational Committee **▲** president's post contender Sebastian Coe feels India's bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games is a "strong case" but competition will be tough with several other countries throwing their hats in the

India has already submitted a 'Letter of Intent' to host the Olympics 2036 Paralympic Games to the IOC's Future Host Host Commission, taking the first concrete step in an ambitious plan after months of informal dialogue with the global sport's apex body.

"Well, you won't be surprised given my background to say that I'm obviously very happy that India is committed to global sport and particularly the Olympic movement. I'm very happy to hear that.

"And look, it will be very competitive. It won't be the only bidder, but the case that it (Índia) can make is a very strong case," Coe told PTI in

an exclusive interview.
Poland, Indonesia, South
Africa, Qatar, Hungary, Turkey, Mexico and Egypt are among other countries which have expressed a desire to

host the 2036 Olympics. The 2036 Games host nation will not be known before 2026. But it is certain that the host will be chosen during the presidency of the winner of the March 20 election of the new IOC chief.

maternal whose grandfather is an Indian from Punjab, is considered the frontrunner among the seven candidates contesting for elections to succeed Thomas Bach as IOC president.

The 68-year-old Coe, double Olympic 1500m gold medallist, also advised India to not end its ambition to organise the Olympics if it does not get the 2036 Games

hosting rights.
"Plenty of cities have bid and lost and come back. Interestingly, when London won in 2005 (for the 2012 edition), it defeated Paris. We all have just been to the Paris Olympic Games (in 2024)," said the Briton, who is currently heading World Athletics.

Rio was one of the cities that didn't make it past the initial evaluation for the 2012 bid. And they had the Games immediately after Britain in

"So it is by no means the end of the story. And even the legacy from bidding is an extremely strong legacy." More than 100 members of

the IOC will vote on March

20 in the Greek resort of

Costa Navarino, where the 144th IOC Session will be held from March 18 to 21. Besides Coe, the other six candidates are Prince Feisal Al Hussein of Jordan, David Lappartient of France, Johan Eliasch of Sweden, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr of Spain, Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe and Morinari Watanabe of Japan.

Coe said South Asia, of which India is the major country, has the potential to help grow the Olympic movement further bringing more young people

to sport. I have witnessed in the last few years the growing importance of South Asia in athletics, and athletics is the centrepiece of Olympic

movement. 'If you and I 10 years ago said to each other that the men's Olympic javelin title would be being fought between athletes from Pakistan and India, I think we both would have smiled at each other and moved on," he said referring to Arshad Nadeem and

Neeraj Chopra winning gold

and silver respectively in

Praggnanandhaa scores second victory in Prague Masters

PTI ■ PRAGUE

¬randmaster Praggnanandhaa scored his second victory on the trot, outwitting Vincent Keymer of Germany compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram at the top on three points after the end of the fourth round of the Prague Masters here.

initial hiccups before signing peace with Sam Shankland of the United States, while top seed Wei Yi of China finally found his form at the expense of local star David Navara Anish Giri of Netherlands

played out his fourth draw in as many games with Gurel Ediz of Turkey, while Czech GM Nguyen Thai Dai Van also drew with Quang Leim Le of Vietnam in the other two games of the 10-player round-robin tournament.
With Praggnanadhaa and

Aravindh in front, Shankland, Keymer, Giri and Le share the third spot a full point behind and it looks like the race for the title will be between the two Indians only with five rounds still to come. Almost a month back

Keymer had beaten Praggnanandhaa in the Tata Steel Masters and the Indian

avenged his defeat fighting from what looked like a shaky French defense with

Keymer was caught off guard in the middlegame. Praggnanandhaa went for the trade of queens and got his counter attack rolling. Keymer, meanwhile, ran low

on time and wasted some moves moving his rook back Indian obviously understood it better and used his pieces well to win a couple of pawns. The rest was easy and it was all over in 44 moves. Aravindh faced the Sicilian defense and Shankland

equalised quite easily. An exchange spree led to a very slight advantage for Shankland but the endgame was always closer to a draw. players eventually arrived at a theoretically drawn rook and pawns endgame where an extra pawn for Shankland did not

The next round will see the two leaders pitted against other Praggnanadhaa will play

matter much.

with white. In the challengers' section, Divya Deshmukh played out a draw with Ma Qun of China and took her tally to 1.5 points from four games.

Lydia Ko wins Singapore LPGA **PTI** ■ SINGAPORE Asia's major to my major collection," the New Zealander

Lydia Ko finally conquered the LPGA's HSBC Women's World Championship, clinching her first title at her 11th attempt with a dominant four-stroke win over Ayaka Furue and Jeeno Thitikul in Funday's final round Sunday's final round. The 2024 Olympic gold

medalist and Women's British Open champion overcame a middling start before finding her rhythm with a birdie on the par-5 sixth Ko added back-to-back birdies

on Nos. 7 and 8, seizing control of the leaderboard from then Despite dropping two bogeys after the turn, the world No. 3

closed with a solid 69, sealing a 13-under-par 275 total at Sentosa Golf Club.

"I dreamt last night that I won but then I woke up, and I was

West Indies legend Sir Vivian Richards on Sunday said Virat Kohli's

fighting spirit, energy, and passion put him in the

category of cricket's "great"

Richards, a long-time admirer

of Kohli's indomitable spirit

and passion for the game, also

hailed the India batter for

silencing critics through

Well, I think he answers all of

us, really. Before the World

Cup for the ODIs, where he

wasn't doing that well and

then he came back in

magnificent form, so, that is

true testament to the

character that we are speaking

about," said Richards, a

governing council member for

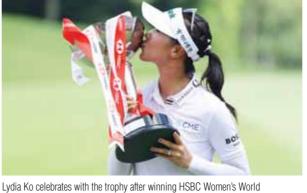
League, during a virtual

International Master

performances on the field.

and "legendary" players.

PTI MUMBAI



Championship 2025 at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore

like, dang, it's not real yet," said Ko, who secured her 23rd LPGA title and her first victory since the Kroger Queen City Championship last September. "But I just wanted to focus on

"I started off really steady, and

interaction. "This is why I put

him in the category of being

great and legendary... Not all

the time that you get players

who can come back when

they're down. His fighting

spirit, energy and passion to

do well make him stand out."

Richards said if he was still

playing, he would love to have

"His energy reflects his

passion. He goes to show you

that his involvement in the game all the time. There's a

passion for that. There's not a

moment that goes on that field that Virat Kohli doesn't miss.

He's just magnificent in that

way," he added.

Kohli reminds me of myself

Asked about batters he

admires, the former West

Indies captain said Kohli

"A lot of batsmen... Before you

had people like Sachin

reminds him of himself.

Kohli's energy on the field.

you know, didn't really put myself in trouble that much. I think that was going to be the key for today? Ko's previous best finish here

was a lone second place in "It's exciting to finally add the year.

behind Ko entering the final round, saw her title hopes fade after a frustrating 74, settling for a share of fourth at seven under alongside Im Jin Hee, who fired the day's best round of 67, and Gaby Lopez (70).

The Singapore tournament is the second of three events on the LPGA's first Asian swing of

iv Richards praises Kohli, calls him 'legendary'

Tendulkar, who has retired," he said.

"But presently, Virat Kohli. He reminds me of myself. He who dares, win. He believes in himself, 120 per cent per cent confident at all times and whenever it needs to be aggressive, and confront opponents, you need guys like

"I appreciate seeing guys who,

especially when you're a captain, you defend your team and defend the people who you are representing so Virat Kohli, the modern day guy, I love," he added.

Richards said given his fitness and hunger, Kohli can go on to play ODIs for a long time. 'I'll tell you something. Just the way he is and the way how fit he is and the way he still believes, very passionate about the game. You never know. He could still play when he's 50," he said. 'You never know. But it's just

magnificent to see. Sometimes we see guys go on and maybe they come to an age and sometimes you look and you say, 'wow, he doesn't look as good as in the past." But he just scored 100 just

recently against Pakistan in Dubai so that says that, and this has just happened. This suggests that he's still very much at the very best, in the best of form," he added. Richards, however, declined to

compare Kohli Tendulkar. "I do not believe in that. We should be quite thankful that the periods that everyone would have passed through, that the folks who saw these guys then benefited from the fact that they saw

some very good player," he said.

will never comparisons. They all did their time, their work for the time that they represented their countries. And we should appreciate that time because it's not just us alone who would be giving the answer, but all the folks, the fans who would be watching would pay tribute to that.

Backing Rohit Richards said India should be patient with the form of their skipper Rohit Sharma, who has blown hot and cold with his form.

You have got to give him all the opportunity. He would have failed in the past. I just believe that let's wait and see when we get to the semifinals and hopefully when you get to the semifinals, you're hoping to get to the finals," he said.

Real Betis defeats Real Madrid 2-1 in Spanish league

PTI BARCELONA

 $R^{\text{eal Madrid stumbled in the}}_{\text{three-way}} \ \text{race for the}$ Spanish league title as Isco Alarcón guided Real Betis to a 2-1 comeback win over the defending champion.

The former Madrid player delivered a corner kick that was headed in by fellow midfielder Johnny Cardoso in the 34th minute on Saturday, cancelling out Brahim Díaz's opener for Madrid.

Isco then put Betis ahead from the penalty spot in the 54th after he passed to Jesús Madrid Rodríguez and defender Antonio Rudiger knocked the Betis forward

down in the area. Madrid's loss left it level on points with Barcelona, which hosts Real Sociedad on Sunday. Atletico Madrid moved two points clear of them both at the top of the table after substitute Julián Álvarez scored to secure

a 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao. Kylian Mbappé was back starting for Madrid after missing one game because of a problem with a tooth. Coach Carlo Ancelotti substituted him with 15 minutes left, saying that his dental issue had impeded him from training properly and that his star striker "was not 100 per cent."
"We weren't able to keep our

initiative and the result got away from us," Ancelotti said. This is a hard blow, and we have to react. Today we didn't

play well. Madrid had led the league but is now struggling with just one victory its last five rounds, a poor run that includes a defeat

Champions League round-of-16 game against Atletico.

Isco left Madrid three years ago, having helped it win five midfielder was the most Champions League titles before decisive player on the field at

at modest Espanyol. Next for Madrid: Tuesday's he lost his starting job and then struggled to get off the bench. But Madrid might wish it had Isco torments old team

the Benito Villamarin. him back after the 32-year-old can hurt you, so if it weren't for

Isco, however, shared the credit for the win with his teammates. "Madrid has the best players and a million different ways it

the hard work of the entire team we wouldn't have been able to do this," Isco said, before adding that he was still "grateful" for his time at Madrid.

The playmaker also showed he has not been slowed down by a leg injury that likely cost him a spot on Spain's European Championship side last summer. He returned to the field in December and is playing like he'd never been

"It is a dream of any player to play for his national team," Isco said after the win.

"I haven't played for Spain in six, seven years, so of course I would like to." Madrid has good start and little

Madrid started strong and looked ready to romp when Mbappé played Ferland Mendy through and the left back squared the ball for Brahim to

But Isco delivered a swerving corner kick for Cardoso, who was unmarked at the penalty spot to thump a header through the arms of Thibaut Courtois. Shortly after, as rain poured

wonder save to palm another Cardoso header over the bar in first-half injury time. Coach Manuel Pellegrini had to be satisfied with his team's

down, Courtois had to make a

defending as the hosts frustrated any thoughts of a Madrid rally after Isco put them ahead from the spot. "We went for the win and

generated more scoring chances than they did," Pellegrini, a former Madrid coach, said. "They played better in the first

15 minutes and deserved their goal, but from there on it was our match? Madrid was without Jude

Bellingham, who was serving the second of a two-game suspension for cursing at a referee. Dani Ceballos was out with a leg injury, and Federico Valverde was recovering from an unspecified knock. Sixthplaced Betis likewise had several players on the injury list,

Carvahlo and Marc Roca. Atletico takes advantage Álvarez scored from a pass by Marcos Llorente in the 66th

including midfielders William

It as the Argentine's 21st goal in all competitions since joining from Manchester City in the summer, with 10 coming in the

after both came off the bench to

help break through Athletic's

Fourth-placed Athletic came close to an equalizer with three efforts off the woodwork, including two by Iñaki Williams.

It was Athletic's first loss in league since October 6, ending an unbeaten run of 16 games. Lukebakio rescues point for Sevilla

Dodi Lukebakio continued to provide a bright spot in Sevilla's otherwise drab season by scoring his 11th league goal in the 81st minute to secure a 1-1

draw with Rayo Vallecano.