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DELHI I LUCKNOW I BHOPAL I BHUBANESWAR I RANCHI I RAIPUR I CHANDIGARH I DEHRADUN I HYDERABAD I VIJAYWADA

# BUCH BOOKE

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

Special Court designated under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) has directed the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to register an FIR against former chairperson of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Madhabi Puri Buch, three 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

three whole-time 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, necessitating an investigation. 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

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 investigations under section 156(3) of the Code of



allowing the listing of the company. He said in his

application that he had approached the court as the

police and regulatory authorities had failed to take

Citing Supreme Court

judgements in the past, the

Special Court Judge noted:

"Considering the gravity of allegations, applicable laws and settled legal precedents, this Court deems it

appropriate to direct an

investigation under Section

The ACB has been directed to

register an FIR under the

relevant provisions of Indian

Penal Code (IPC), Prevention of Corruption Act, SEBI Act,

As per the order, the Special

Court will monitor the investigations. The court has

asked the ACB to file a status

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

and other applicable laws.

report within 30 days.

156(3) of CrPC."

action on his complaint.

committed by Buch and Mudhabi Buch and others, 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 rules and regulations 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 Criminal Procedure (CrPC) market manipulation and into the offences allegedly enabled corporate fraud by 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

were not holding their

a frivolous and habitual litigant, with previous applications being dismissed by the court, with imposition of costs in some cases. SEBI initiating would be 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 offshore 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 market manipulation" with the investments made by Mudhabi Buch and her husband in offshore funds. Hindenburg's report had alleged that as a whole-time member of SEBI, Buch was in

and wrote to India Infoline to redeem the units in the fund. Continued on page 8

managers of offshore funds,

communication



Rescue operation underway after an avalanche hit the Border Roads Organisation camp between Mana and Badrinath on Friday, in Chamoli district

# Chamoli avalanche rescue death toll rises to eight

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

 $D_{\mbox{mishap}}^{\mbox{\scriptsize eath toll rose to eight in the avalanche}}$ 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.

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#### Frequent trips abroad land IPS officer in soup

PNS HYDERABAD

 $T_{\rm government\ on\ Sunday}^{\rm he\ Andhra\ Pradesh}$  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 the 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 gross negligence, indiscipline, and grave 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."

Continued on page 8

#### **EATHER**



# **BSP rides on Behenji's Maya**



state presidents at the party office, in Lucknow

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), once a dominant political force in Uttar Pradesh, is witnessing 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 national as coordinators. Addressing 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 asserted.

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 full BSP with 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," she said.

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 key 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 BJP 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

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

I 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 States.

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 the ceasefire through Ramazan and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends on April 20.

Continued on page 8

# **Zoos battling reduced funding**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

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

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA), which is responsible for overseeing and guiding national-level ex situ conservation efforts, 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 were 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 the overall species. effectiveness of conservation breeding programmes is hindered by persistent foundational and operational challenges".

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



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 (meateating mammals) and 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

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

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

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

breeding.

Continued on page 8

# **Youths into excessive social** media suffer sexual ailments

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** LUCKNOW

Consumption of explicit content on social 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 (KGMU) 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 KGMÚ 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.

Continued on page 8

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Tn a bizzare incident, a wedding Lwas 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 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.

other household items but the bride's family was shocked by the 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 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. The very next day on February 26,

a 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 two-

storey 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 (IBT).

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 was made out in this regard,"

reached between the two parties and the matter was resolved at their level. No official complaint Inspector Virender, station house officer (SHO) of the Kherki Daula Police Station, said.



# Minor girl sets self ablaze Mayor lays foundation for roads after rape bid by youth

PNS LUCKNOW

A minor girl set herself ablaze following an alleged rape attempt by a neighbour in Malihabad. She suffered 60 per cent burns and is undergoing treatment, police said.

As per reports, the accused youth allegedly tried to rape the minor girl on finding her alone in her house. When she raised an alarm, the accused fled the scene. The girl, disturbed by the act, set herself afire. Neighbours rushed to her house after hearing her screams and rushed her to the hospital, where her con-



#### **NOTICE**

I, BHAWANA RAI, W/o Service No-9425182L, Rank: NK, Name: Mahesh Kumar Rai of Unit 6/11 GR, declare that in my husband's Service Record, my date of birth was Inadvertently mentioned as 19.02.1985 while my correct date of birth is 18.02.1985 which is declared vide affidavit dated 01.03.2025 sworn before the Executive Magistrate at Lucknow.

#### **NOTICE**

It is hereby informed that my son, Shri Sanchit Patel's date of birth was mistakenly recorded as 10/07/2012 in all documents instead of the correct date 10/07/2011. From now on, his date of birth should be considered as 10/07/2011 only.Ram Kumar Village: Kaima Khadar Post: Tikar District: Lakhimpur Kheri UP.

#### REQUIRED

Adharshila College of Professional Courses (ACPC) Raj Nagar, NH-232, Raibareli Post:-Asst. Professor for Home Science 01, Geography 01, Psychology 01. Eligibility: -55% Marks in Related Subject in M. A. with NET/Ph.D Pay Scale: - As per Lucknow University UGC norms. Contacts:-9454855857, 8299214485, 9453848622 Manager (Chandra Prabha Singh)

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि त्रुटिवश कुछ दस्तावेजों में मेरा नाम शिव नंदन (SHIVE NANDAN) व जन्मतिथि 12-10-2000 दर्ज हो गई है जो कि गलत है मेरा सही नाम शिव नंदन पाल(SHIVE NANDAN PAL) है व सही जन्मतिथि 01-07-1949 है जो कि मेरे आधार में भी दर्ज है । शिव नंदन पाल निवासी 1444 संजय गांधी नगर नौबस्ता कानपुर नगर उ०प्र०

#### सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि त्रुटिवश कुछ दस्तावेजों में मेरा नाम ममता देवी (MAMTA DEVI) व जन्मतिथि 04-10-1984 दर्ज हो गई है जो कि गलत है मेरा सही नाम ममता(MAMTA) है व सही जन्मतिथि 01-01-1983 है जो कि मेरे आधार में भी दर्ज है । ममता निवासनी 1444 संजय गांधी नगर नौबस्ता कानपूर नगर

#### **NOTICE**

It is informed to the general public that the original registry/original documents of land number 271/0.2340 hectares, recorded at number 1, section 732, page 39/50, serial number 1146, belonging to Mahipal Sharma, son of Late Guljarilal, resident of village Baraura, Pargana Pali, Tehsil and Thana Savajpur, district Hardoi, were lost on the way while going from home to Tehsil Sawaijpur on 15-1-2025. Despite extensive searching, they have not been found. Anyone who finds the above original documents is requested to kindly inform. Mahipal Sharma Address: Same as aboveContact: 8756474973

#### **NOTICE**

It is informed to the general public that the original allotment letter number Sale -1234 dated 15.07.1991 of House no. E.W.S.553 Barra 3 Kanpur Nagar and the original Possession letter have been lost somewhere i.e. cannot be found, Union Bank of India Kanpur Nagar intends to create equitable mortgaged in respect of the above property details of which are given. In this notice, if any person claims any interest or ownership in the property or has any other objection, he may make a representation to the bank with in fifteen (15) days of the notice.

Viiav Kr. Yadav Union Bank of India empaneled Adv. Chamber behind DM office Court Compound Mob. 9415424888

dition is stated to be critical. The victim's father, who is a driver, told the police that on Thursday, when his wife's health deteriorated, he took her to the hospital. During this time, his daughter was alone at home. Rahul, a youth from the village, entered the house and tried to force himself on her. DCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava said that the accused

probe is ongoing. Meanwhile, a young man was allegedly assaulted with belts and sticks for opposing objectionable comments about Maha Kumbh in Suggamau on Thursday. The incident came to light after a video sur-

faced on Saturday.

has been arrested and further

According to the victim's family, Abhay had gone to a tea shop in the locality when he got into an argument with Aftab and Kaif, who worked at a nearby meat shop owned by Arman. Aftab reportedly asked Abhay if he had attended Maha Kumbh, and when he said yes, the accused allegedly made derogatory remarks. When Abhay objected, they allegedly abused and assaulted him. Fearing for his safety, Abhay ran home, but the accused followed him. They allegedly forced their way into his house, dragged him outside, and thrashed him on the road.

Abhay's elder brother Naveen said the family is terrified after the attack. Indiranagar Inspector Sunil Tiwari confirmed that a case has been registered against Arman, Aftab, and Kaif based on the family's complaint. The accused have been arrested, and an investi-

gation is underway.

PNS/PTI LUCKNOW

Ekana stadium.

Additional

Commissioner

he Lucknow Municipal

Corporation has issued a Rs

28.42 crore property tax notice to the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal

Bihari Vajpayee International

Cricket Stadium, also known as

The notice comes ahead of the

Women's Premier League

matches scheduled this month

and the Indian Premier League

cerns over their smooth con-

duct. The stadium administra-

tion has termed the notice

"unjust" and plans to meet

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath

According to a statement from

Srivastava, Zone 4 of the

municipal corporation issued

The amount includes Rs 5.45

Municipal

Pankaj

matches in April, raising con-

# 2 cops held hostage in fight over land dispute

 $A^{
m land}$  dispute in Lucknow's Banthra area escalated on Saturday night when the accused clashed with police officers responding to a call about the altercation. The incident occurred in Paharpur, Banthra.

According to reports, Ramji Pandey had purchased land from Chheda Rawat 12 years ago. After Chheda's death, his sons, Pintu, Sunil, and Anil, began constructing a boundary wall on the land. When Ramji objected, a dispute ensued.
At around 8:30 pm on Saturday, tensions flared again when the brothers verbally abused the police team that had been disputed in the same of the s patched in response to a 112 emergency call. The situation worsened when the accused threatened to pelt the cops with stones. As a sub-inspector and a constable entered the house to de-escalate the situation, they were allegedly taken hostage by the accused and their family.

Additional police arrived to rescue the cops, who were allegedly assaulted during the scuffle. The buttons and nameplates of their uniforms were damaged. Both were eventually freed, and the accused were

taken into custody. However, Banthra Inspector incharge Ram Singh denied any major incident involving the police. He confirmed that the dispute was over the boundary

Ekana stadium gets ₹28-cr tax notice

December 1, 2020, and an outstanding balance of Rs 22.97

crore, the statement said,

adding, the decision has been

taken as per legal provisions

and will be strictly enforced. Srivastava clarified that only the

sports grounds and stadiums of

government-aided or recog-

nised non-aided educational

institutions are exempt from

property tax. Since Ekana sta-

dium does not fall under this

category, it is liable to pay the

"Ekana stadium hosts IPL

matches, professional sports

events and cultural pro-

Therefore, the property tax

assessment is justified.

Currently, only property tax is being levied, and there is no

action on water or sewerage

He said the stadium adminis-

charges," Srivastava added.

grammes with ticket

crore in tax due since tration had previously object-

baseless.

the rules?

told said.

wall and stated that both parties had been brought to the police station for further action.

# RETIRED JUDGE'S SON RUNS OVER TWO STRAY DOGS

An organisation responsible for the welfare of stray dogs alleged that the son of a retired judge allegedly ran over two stray canines with his car in Gomti Nagar, resulting in the death of one of them. The organisation accused the police of failing to act, despite a complaint having been filed over 12

hours ago.
A CCTV footage also surfaced, showing two dogs resting on the roadside when a car (Swift) drives over them. The complaint was registered at the Vibhuti Khand police station by the organisation.

Charu Khare, the president of that one dog died in the incident, while the other is severely injured. Khare urged Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to intervene and ensure action is taken. She stated that if the police continued to neglect the case, the NGO would submit a memorandum to the CM

demanding justice. Vibhuti Khand Inspector Sunil Singh confirmed that an investigation is ongoing based on the available evidence. He mentioned that no case has been registered as of yet but assured that action would be taken if the evidence proves to be accurate.

ed to the tax assessment, but

those objections were deemed

Ekana stadium Director Uday

Sinha called the notice "against

"We will soon meet the Chief

Minister and seek justice," he

Sinha questioned the rationale

behind imposing a Rs 28 crore

tax liability, arguing that the Lucknow Municipal

Corporation's rules provide tax exemption for all types of sta-

diums. He also pointed out that

the notice does not mention a

deadline for payment and

expressed hope that the issue

would be resolved without affecting IPL matches.

Ekana stadium is the home

ground for IPL team Lucknow

Super Giants and is scheduled

to host seven IPL matches this

# mobile phones at music concert

Lucknow (PNS): Two Mumbai residents, posing as music lovers, travelled to Lucknow to attend a Honey Singh concert on Friday as part of a plan to steal mobile phones. The duo managed to steal six expensive mobile phones worth around Rs 5 lakh during the event, police said.

"However, the accused, identified as Khateeb Sheikh (30) and Akash Tambe (30), were arrested on Sunday before they could return to Mumbai," Sushant Golf City SHO Anjani Kumar Mishra said.

Khateeb, an AC mechanic, and Akash, a tattoo artist, both hail from Santacruz East, Mumbai. The stolen phones were recovered from Akash's possession. The duo arrived in Lucknow on February 28 (Friday) by flight and checked into a luxury hotel. They attended the concert at the Cool Breeze Resort near the ISKON temple between 8 and 9 pm, where they discreetly stole mobile phones from concert-goers while they were dancing in the dark.

The theft was reported by Asim Khan from Model House Colony, Aminabad. During interrogation, the accused confessed that they frequently attend concerts of famous singers and steal phones to sell them and

a mall on Shaheed Path before flying back to Mumbai. The police acted on a tip-off provided by informers and nabbed the accused before they could leave the city.

any accomplices.

connecting 3 temples in Chowk

# 2 held for stealing

 $M^{
m ayor}$  Sushma Kharkwal on Sunday laid the foun-

dation stone for the construc-

tion of internal roads leading to Shri Badi Kali Ji Temple, Lal Temple, and Dwarkadhish

Temple in Chowk. The foundation stone ceremony was also attended by local councillor Anurag Mishra and BJP leader

The construction of these roads

is expected to not only benefit

local residents but also facilitate

easier access for devotees visiting from outside Lucknow to

Anurag Mishra said that the

first road will be built from the

Shri Badi Kali Ji Temple to the

Khunkhun Ji Inter College

gate, where road and drainage

repairs are already underway.

The second road will connect

Uttam Kapoor's residence to the Lal Temple, with repairs to the road and drainage also being carried out. The third

road will be constructed from the Dwarkadhish Temple to

Agarwal Niwas, with similar repairs planned. The entire

cost of these road constructions

will be covered by the mayor

from her fund.

these historic temples.

Amit Tandon.

fund their hobby.
They intended to sell the stolen phones near

The SHO mentioned that the investigation is ongoing to determine how many concerts the duo had attended and whether they had

# **BJP** govt conspiring to end quota by privatising institutions: AKY

Lucknow (PNS/PTI): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sundav accused the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government of conspiring to end jobs and reservation by privatising government institutions in the state. The former chief minister claimed that the state government is hell-bent on privatising two power distribution companies – Purvanchal and Dakshinanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd. "Earlier the BJP government at the Center handed over many government institutions to private hands. Now, following the same path, the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh is also promoting privatization," Yadav said. He also alleged that BJP governments "work for capitalists", according to a state-

The BJP government of Uttar Pradesh is hell-bent on handing over Purvanchal and Dakshinanchal Vidyut Nigam to private hands. The government wants to give assets worth billions of rupees to capitalists under the guise of privatisation," the SP chief charged. Yadav alleged that the BJP government is against the Constitution and reservation. He said that the BJP is hatching new conspiracies every day to keep 'PDA' (Pichhda, Dalit, Minorities) away from jobs and reservation. "The BIP's policy is anti-PDA. It hates PDA," he said.

ment issued by the SP here.

"Privatisation ends government jobs. Private sector arbitrarily increases inflation which affects the common people," he added. The SP chief said that along with this, due to government institutions going to the private sector, 'PDA' does not get the opportunity of reservation. The BJP government is working on the "policy of loot, lies and dishonesty", he said.

#### CPI (ML) FLAYS YOGI GOVT

The CPI (ML) criticised the Yogi government for the increasing violence against Dalits, alleging that government concessions and protection have emboldened criminals who are now attacking and even killing Dalits. In a statement issued on Sunday, CPI (ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav said that the condition of Dalits under the Yogi government is worsening. He cited recent incidents in Mathura, Meerut, and Kasganj. In Mathura's Karnaval village, during the marriage of two Dalit sisters, goons

attacked the family, smeared mud on their faces, and severely injured the father. In Meerut's Kalandi village, goons attacked a Dalit wedding procession, injuring the groom and his brothers. In Kasganj, miscreants kidnapped a 14-year-old Dalit girl and killed her 12-year-old sister when she resisted. The family had previously been targeted, but the administration failed to act, allowing the criminals to strike again, he alleged.

Yadav criticised the Yogi government's failure to protect Dalits, calling it a reflection of the government's neglect. He accused the BJP of exploiting Dalit votes for photo ops while allowing them to suffer oppression. He demanded immediate justice for the victims, the arrest and severe punishment of the attackers, security and compensation for the families, and strict action against negligent officers.

#### **CITYBRIEFS**

the notice on Saturday.

#### LEPROSY PATIENT SEARCH CAMPAIGN As part of the National Leprosv

Eradication Programme, MLÁ Mukesh Sharma inaugurated the Leprosy Patient Search Campaign (LCDC) at the Community Health Centre on Naval Kishore Road. The campaign aims to identify leprosy cases early, preventing disability, and raise awareness about symptoms and treatment. Sharma emphasised the importance of continued efforts to eradicate leprosy and combat misconceptions surrounding the disease. State Leprosy Officer Dr Java Dehlvi announced that the 14-day campaign will run from March 1-12 and again from March 17-18, covering 47 districts, including Lucknow, Etah, Agra, and Varanasi. Leprosy is treatable through free multidrug therapy (MDT) at health centres, and timely treatment prevents irreversible disability. CMO Dr NB Singh shared that 4,569 teams and 867 supervisors have been assigned to the campaign. Currently, 227 leprosy cases exist in the district, with 200 patients now free from the disease. The campaign will include door-to-

#### door screenings.

**SEMINAR** The Faculty of Law at the University of Lucknow hosted a national seminar on 'Parental incarceration and its hidden toll on child well-being, under the UP government's 'Centre of Excellence' project. The seminar focused on the often-overlooked impact of parental incarceration on children, who are often "hidden victims" of the criminal justice system. Minister Suresh Rahi, who was the chief guest, highlight-

ed government initiatives to support children in jails, including education, nutrition, and mental health services. Keynote speaker Dr KA Pandey, a faculty member at Ram Manohar Lohia National Law University, shared his personal experience of growing up with an incarcerated parent. He emphasised the need for education, healthcare, and therapy for these children, as well as expedited trials to reduce separation time. Dr Pandey also praised Uttar Pradesh's modern prison manual and called for a multidisciplinary approach to support incarcerated parents'

**KALAM PRAGATI** The Kalam Pragati programme was launched at Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University (AKTU) in partnership with the training & placement department and ERA Foundation. This initiative offers a free 30-hour training course in 'Innovation & Design Thinking and Robotics' to engineering students. Upon completion of this programme, students will tackle industryrelated problems and showcase their solutions in an exhibition featuring their prototypes. AKTU Vice-Chancellor Prof JP Pandey emphasised the importance of skill development for India's progress, noting that innovation, robotics, and AI are key to future career opportunities. Other speakers, including finance officer Keshav Singh and IET director Prof Vineet Kansal, stressed the importance of blending theoretical knowledge with practical skills to meet industry demands. ERA Foundation CEO Murali Dhar P highlighted the foundation's focus

on aligning students' skills with industry needs. The training, meant for BTech students in second year and above, covers tools in design, CAD, 3D printing, motor control, and Python programming.

#### INTERACTION



As part of SATAT MILAP,

Kumaon Battalion at Lucknow Garrison under HQ MUPSA carried out an interaction with veterans, Veer Naris and widows of Hardoi district on February 28 to make them aware about various schemes of the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans/Central Government/State Government and keep continuous feedback mechanism where veterans can share their grievances to enable the nodal unit to timely address the grievances for redressal with r e s p e c t i v branches/Directorate.

#### **HONOURED**

President of the Mohanlalgani Vyapar Mandal, Ajay Pandey alias Satyam, was honoured with an honorary doctorate degree by Bharat Virtual University for Peace and Education in New Delhi on Sunday. He was honoured for his active social work by NITI Aayog and Bharat Virtual University for Peace and Education.

#### **Referral hospital to** come up in Gomti **Nagar Extension**

Lucknow (PNS): A referral hospital will be established in Sector-7, Gomti Nagar Extension and its layout plan has been approved by the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA), Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar said in a meeting on Sunday. Kumar said that the hospital's proposal will be a key agenda item at the upcoming board meeting later this month. Managed by the medical directorate, the land for the hospital has already been purchased to serve the residents of Gomti Nagar Extension. The multistorey hospital will be built on a 10,000 square-metre plot, with plans for future expansion into a full-fledged medical

The LDA VC emphasised that initially, the hospital would focus on providing immediate first aid and stabilising patients before transferring them to nearby hospitals, stressing the importance of timely treat-ment for patient survival.

## Traders urge MLA to address encroachment. waterlogging issues

Lucknow (PNS): Traders from Bhootnath Adarsh Vyapar Mandal met the MLA for Lucknow East, OP Srivastava, on Sunday to request the removal of encroachments from the roads in the Bhootnath Market.

Srivastava instructed the relevant officials to clear the encroachments in the market. The traders also raised concerns with the MLA about the issue of waterlogging in the area.

Although encroachments have been removed from the market on several occasions, a delegation of traders, led by Bhootnath Adarsh Vyapar Mandal president Kamal Agarwal, met Srivastava to discuss the ongoing problem of encroachments. The traders reported that miscreants, with the assistance of local police and municipal corporation employees, continue to occupy the roads. The delegation explained that although the municipal corporation had conducted several campaigns to clear the encroachments, the problem persists due to the collaboration between miscreants and the local police and municipal officials. Once a campaign is over, the encroachments quickly resurface, despite regulations stating that it is the responsibility of the local police to ensure that no further encroachments take place after the area has been cleared. The traders also informed the MLA about the waterlogging problem in Bhootnath Market.

#### FORM NO. 5 **DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL** 1 University road near Hanuman Setu Mandir Luck (Area of Jurisdiction Part of Uttar Pradesh)

SUMMONS FOR FILLING REPLY AND APPEARANCE BY PUBLICATION SUMMONS TO DEFENDANTS UNDER SECTION 19 (3) OF TH RECOVERY OF DEBTS DUE TO BANK AND FINANCIA INSTITUTION AT 1993 READ WITH RULE 12 & 13 of Th DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL PROCIDURE RULES 1993)

OA NO. 968/2024 DATED: 21.02.2025 INDIAN BANK, a body corporate constituted under the banking companies Acquisition and Transfer o Undertakings) Act of 1970 having its corporate office a 254-260, Avvai Shanmugam Salai Royapettah Chenna 600014 and among others a branch office at Alambagi Branch, Alambagh Lucknow. INDIAN BANK (Erstwhile Allahabad Bank) through its Letter of Authorization issue by Zonal office in favour of Shri Prem Ranjan Kumar Pandey Chief Manager, Indian Bank Branch Alambagh, Lucknow o

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Smt. Prem Lata Singh W/o Late S.P.B. Singh, residence o K.N 3804, Murli Vihar, Shanti Nagar, Sarojani Nagar Lucknow And 59/A, Murli Vihar, Shanti Nagar, Sarojai Nagar Lucknow (Guarantor/Mortgagor

the above noted application you are required to file reply paper book form in two sets along with documents and Affidavit (if any) personaly are through your duly athorised agent are legal practitioner in this Tribunal after serving copy of the same on the applicant are his counsel duly athorised agent after publication of the summon and thereafter to appear before the Tribunal on 22.04.2025 at 10.30 am failing which the application shall be heard and esided in your absence. REGISTRAR

> **DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL** LUCKNOW

#### Three teachers booked for **kidnapping Class 10 student**

Ballia (PTI): Three teachers of a convent school have been booked for allegedly kidnapping a Class 10 student in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia district, police said on Sunday.

According to the police, the 16-year-old girl, a resident of a vil-

lage under the Ubhaon police station limits in Ballia, left home on February 25 to appear for an exam.

A former teacher of the school, Ajay Chauhan, allegedly abducted her with the help of two other teachers, Priyanshu Yadav

and Sandeep Shukla. Additional Superintendent of Police Anil Kumar Jha said that an FIR has been registered against the three accused under Sections 137(2) (kidnapping) and 61(2)A (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, based on a complaint filed by

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# **CM** directives to reduce road mishaps in **UP**

Favours hospitals along both sides of expressways

 $T^{
m o}$  curb the growing menace of road accidents on highways and expressways, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered effective action against unauthorised vehicles and overloaded trucks. He has also directed officials to close the liquor vends on the sides of expressways and highways.
"No liquor shops should be

permitted along expressways and highways," said, noting that the signages for these shops were often extensive and should be reduced in size.

The chief minister chaired a meeting of the Uttar Pradesh State Road Safety Council on Sunday. The meeting was attended by ministers of the departments concerned, senior government officials, divisional commissioners, district magistrates, police commissioners, and superintendents of police. During the meeting, the chief minister issued essential directives to reduce road accidents

in the state effectively. Reviewing the annual data on road accidents, the chief minister highlighted that 46,052 accidents occurred in 2024, resulting in 34,600 injuries and over 24,000 fatalities – figures he described as deeply distressing. Expressing concern at the delay in treatment of accident victims, the chief minister proposed setting up hospital facilities along both sides of all expressways, similar to food plazas.

Emphasising the need for urgent action, the chief minister instructed all departments related to road safety to work in coordination to curb tricts accounted for 42 per cent accidents. He also directed of the total accident-related



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath presiding over the meeting of Uttar Pradesh State Road Safety Council at his official residence on Sunday

officials to identify and rectify black spots on all state routes. Additionally, he called for setting up of trauma cen-tres along with deployment of ambulances and trained medical staff at hospitals in all divi-

sional headquarters. Chief Minister Yogi said that in 2024, out of 75 districts in the state, 20 districts, namely Hardoi, Mathura, Agra, Lucknow, Bulandshahr, Kanpur Nagar, Prayagraj, Sitapur, Unnao, Barabanki, Lakhimpur Kheri, Bareilly, Aligarh, Gautam Buddha Shahjahanpur, Nagar, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Budaun, Meerut and Bijnor, recorded the highest fatalities in road accidents. These dis-

deaths in the state, he pointed out. To address this issue, he instructed officials to identify the causes of accidents and enhance public awareness about road safety. He emphasised the importance of regular meetings of the Divisional Road Safety Committee, directing that they should be held monthly at the district level and quarterly at the divisional level to prevent road accidents. The chief minister expressed concern that only one meeting was held last year in six divisions – Ayodhya, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Azamgarh, Saharanpur and Agra – and called for an increase in the frequency of these meetings. However, he expressed satisfaction with the

Basti, Lucknow, Gorakhpur Secondary Education and Mirzapur.
Additionally, the chief minis-Department and Higher Education Department to conter instructed the districts of duct activities related to road safety in schools and colleges. Balrampur, Firozabad, Gonda, Chandauli and Jaunpur, which Furthermore, he recommendhad fewer District Road Safety ed incorporating traffic rules Committee meetings in 2024, to conduct meetings within into schools' curriculum under the Basic and Secondary this week. He also directed the 38 districts that held 10 or Education departments. The chief minister also instructed more meetings to continue organising them according to the government's SOP (standard operating procedure). Highlighting the primary causes of road accidents authorities to prohibit buses without permits from operating on roads and to take strict action against unauthorised vehicles and overloaded trucks. He emphasised that vehicles from other states without permits must be stopped at the borders. Additionally, Chief Minister Yogi called for engaging with the Transport Association and overspeeding, drunk driving, wrong-side driving, jumping signals and mobile phone use the chief minister stressed

the Transport Association and

Vehicle Association to ensure

have two drivers. The chief minister highlight-

that long-distance vehicles

ed the need to increase the number of cranes, patrol vehi-cles and ambulances on expressways and highways. He pointed out that surveillance cameras are installed on only four of the 93 National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) roads in the state. He instructed that cameras be installed on the remaining roads as well. Expressing concern over frequent accidents, he emphasised the need for foot over bridges at critical points on NHAI roads and directed officials to identify such locations and proceed with their construction. Additionally, he stressed that road safety signage must be installed on all major roads across the state. The chief minister also expressed concerns about minors driving erickshaws in urban areas and directed officials to enforce strict measures to prevent this. He called for verifying all erickshaw drivers and emphasised the need to keep the regional transport offices (RTOs) free from middlemen by conducting periodic random checks.

Addressing the issue of traffic congestion, the chief minister pointed out that the state has adequate manpower to manage traffic efficiently. He suggested training personnel from the civil police, Prantiya Rakshak Dal (PRD) and Home Guard to improve traffic management. He instructed that table-top speed breakers be constructed near hospitals, schools and main markets to enhance road safety.

# Digital libraries to be set up at gram panchayat level

In a significant step toward modernising education in remote areas, the Yogi Adityanath government has decided to set up digital libraries at the gram panchayat level across Uttar Pradesh. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, in a high-level meeting, directed officials to implement the first phase of this initiative by establishing digital libraries in 22,700 gram panchayats.

The initiative aims to provide children in rural areas with access to advanced educational resources, ensuring they keep pace with the digital

In the meeting, the chief minister highlighted the need to connect rural students with digital education and provide them with high-quality learning materials.

He stated that as education continues to evolve, it is crucial to make e-books, digital content, and other study resources easily accessible to children in villages. Digital libraries at the gram panchayat level will play a key

role in this effort, he added. He said that each digital library will offer books, quizzes, videos, audio lectures, and other educational resources to make learning

more engaging.

The responsibility for managing these libraries will be given to the gram panchayats, with gram pradhan and panchavat secretaries overseeing their operations. Assistant

The chief minister highlighted the need to connect rural students with digital education and provide them with high-quality learning materials.

officials will be appointed to ensure smooth functioning and maintenance of these libraries.

The Yogi government will invest Rs 4 lakh per digital library, with Rs 2 lakh for purchasing digital equipment such as computers, printers and internet facilities, and another Rs 2 lakh for buying digital and hard-copy books. The libraries will provide not only textbooks but also ebooks and advanced study materials on various subjects. Additionally, students will have access to modern audiovisual tools and internet connectivity for online learning and research.

A well-structured management system will be in place to help students easily access their preferred study materials.

The government believes this initiative will enhance education quality in rural areas and boost digital literacy among students. This project is a crucial step toward the 'Developed India 2047' vision, which prioritises digital education.

# Over 1.25 cr pilgrims visit Ayodhya in 45 days

four meetings conducted in

PNS AYODHYA

s the Maha Kumbh festivities in Prayagraj captivat-As the Maha Kumon resultines in Frayagia, captured an unexpectan unprecedented influx of devotees, setting a new

benchmark in religious tourism.

Over a span of 45 days, from Makar Sankranti to
Mahashivratri, estimated 10 to 12 Lakh devotees
arrived daily, transforming Ayodhya into a hub of spiritual fervor.

For the first time in history, the Shri Ram Lalla temple extended its darshan hours until 1 am to accommodate the ceaseless stream of pilgrims.

Visitors lauded the Yogi government's developmental initiatives and crowd management strategies, which ensured a seamless pilgrimage experience. Anil Mishra, a member of the Shri Ram Janr

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 footfall. Devotional offerings also saw a surge, with

daily donations averaging around ₹15 lakh.

The unprecedented rush provided a significant boost to the local economy, driving demand for prasad, flow-

ers, 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 ensured adequate provisions for sanitation, drinking water, and waste manage-

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 ahead of the upcoming Ram Navami celebra-



the need to raise public aware-

ness. He urged the Basic Education Department,

Devotees take a dip in Saryu river in Ayodhya

# Cows to play pivotal role in advancing natural farming

The Yogi Adityanath government is committed to making cows the foundation of natural farming, and is taking significant steps to protect stray cattle and promote cow rear-

ing.
In the recently presented Budget, a provision of Rs 2,000 crore has been made to protect stray cows. ing this the government has also launched the Amrit Dhara Yojana, under which cattle rearers keeping two to ten cows can avail of loans of up to Rs 10 lakh from 10 banks on easy terms. Notably, for loans up to Rs 3 lakh, no guar-

antor is required. The government's focus on natural farming aligns with its vision of ensuring better health for people, land and water. Natural farming, which eliminates chemical fertilisers and pesticides, relies on cow dung and urine as organic fer-tilisers and pesticides. This dual benefit supports farmers and fosters self-sufficiency in cow shelters. Farmers gain nutritious milk for their families while enriching their

land with natural fertilisers. creating a sustainable and profitable agricultural ecosys-

Uttar Pradesh aims to emerge as a hub of natural farming in India. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath actively promotes this traditional farming method, integrating it with modern technology to enhance farmers' prosperity. A Rs 1,001 crore provision natural farming in villages along the Ganga and Bundelkhand, with plans to extend it to areas near local

The post-pandemic world has witnessed a surge in demand for organic and locally produced food, creating a lucrative opportunity for farmers. With the global shift towards sustainable eating habits, organic produce fetches premium prices in international markets. The Central government also prioritises agricultural exports, further boosting Uttar Pradesh's farmers. The state's export figures have doubled in the past seven years – from Rs 88,000 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 170,000 crore in 2023-24. Increased exports of organic produce will not

only benefit farmers financial ly but also ensure long-term environmental sustainability. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has consistently emphasised cow protection since his first term. Cow shelters have been established statewide to support stray cattle, with maintenance funds allocated per animal.

Special emphasis is given to was made in the supplementary budget before the latest Budget to strengthen these efforts further. The government aims to make cow shelters self-sufficient by transforming cow dung and urine into valuable economic resources. Various skill development programmes and MGNREGA schemes are helping farmers construct cow sheds, cattle barns and biogas plants at subsidised rates. Additionally, the Mini Nandini Yojana provides further incentives for cow rearing.

Through these comprehensive measures, the Yogi gov-ernment ensures cow protection, empowers farmers, promotes sustainable agriculture, and boosts Uttar Pradesh's position in global agricultural exports.

# Abandoned footwear at Ram temple posing problem

 $F^{\mathrm{or}}$  over a month now, the Ayodhya municipal corporation has been facing an unlikely problem — removing a huge pile of dumped footwear at the Ram temple over a change in the crowd management measures in place for devotees. Abandoned footwear "in lakhs" are being collected daily from the entry gate of the temple using JCB machines which are then loaded onto trolleys and taken away to be dumped at a spot four-five km away, officials of the municipal corporation said. According to officials, at Gate 1 of the temple, the primary entrance situated on Ram Path, devotees are asked to deposit their footwear. After completing a circular route of roughly half a kilometre inside the temple premises, people make their way to the same gate to collect the footwear. However, to manage the rush, the Ayodhya administration redirects people to exit via Gate 3 and other gates —

this is a five-six km journey to retrieve their shoes. Many just abandon the footwear and leave the temple barefoot, officials said. Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust member Anil Mishra said there has been a rise in visitors due to the Maha Kumbh. "Changes have been made in the arrangements for the past 30 days to ensure that the unexpected crowd of devotees can easily have darshan without any chaos," Mishra said. "Gate 3 of the temple complex has been opened. After visiting the temple, devotees are being guided out through this gate. So after the darshan, devotees proceed past Shri Ram Hospital. Due to the one-way track on Ram Path, devotees have to walk five-six km again to reach the shoe removal area," Mishra

Three arrested: Three men were arrested on Sunday for allegedly taking money from people, promising them VIP passes for darshan at the Ram

#### families at Maha Kumbh PNS PRAYAGRAJ midst the sea of devotees Awho came to Prayagraj for

a holy dip in the Sangam dur-ing the Maha Kumbh, many got separated from their loved ones. However, thanks to the foresight of the Yogi Adityanath government and its dedicated efforts, 54,357 individuals sep-

arated from their near and dear ones, were successfully reunited with their families. Among them, a significant number were women. The police also played a vital role in reuniting devotees from different states of India and Nepal with their families.

The Yogi government implemented several exemplary initiatives to ensure this divine event's safety and seamless organisation. A key highlight was the establishment of the Digital Khoya Paya Kendra, which facilitated the swift reunion of more than 35,000 separated devotees and their families. During the amrit snan on Makar Sankranti (January 13-15), 598 individuals



the conclusion of Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj

were reunited, while 8,725 people were reconnected during Mauni Amavasya (January 28-30), and 864 devotees during Basant Panchami (February 2-4). Additionally, 24,896 individuals who got separated during other bathing festivals and on regular days were reunited with their families, bringing the total to 35,083 by the end of Maha Kumbh. On the initiative of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, 10 digital Khoya Paya Kendra were set up across the Maha Kumbh mela area. These centres

Over 50,000 reunited with

featured state-of-the-art artificial intelligence-based face recognition systems, machine learning and multilingual support. Nongovernmental social organisations also played a commendable role, with Bharat Seva Kendra and Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Smriti Samiti leading the efforts. According to Umesh Chandra Tiwari, director of Bharat Seva Kendra's Bhule Bhatke Camp, the camp successfully reunited 19,274 lost individuals with their families by the end of the event. All 18 children who were reported lost were also safely returned to their families.

The Khoya Paya Kendras proved particularly effective in reuniting separated individuals with their families and continuously tracking them until they were safely returned. On the final day of Maha Kumbh, Krishna Devi from

Muzaffarpur, Bihar, was reunited with her family, as was Jangi Devi from Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Similarly, Jagjannan Dharu from Banke district, Nepal, and Bindi, wife of Sitaram Shah from Saptari, Nepal, safely reconnected with their loved ones. The successful reunions at these centres prompted heartfelt gratitude from the devotees, who expressed their appreciation to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for this thoughtful initiative. Through meticulous planning and compassionate efforts, Maha Kumbh 2025, which drew over 66 crore devotees, became a symbol of spiritual devotion and set a benchmark for efficient crowd management and

humanitarian service.

# Iwo electrocuted

Lucknow (PNS): Two labourers carrying flower pots in a marriage procession were electrocuted after coming in contact with a high-tension power line in Bardah area of Azamgarh. Superintendent of Police (Rural) in Azamgarh, Chirag Jain, said the incident took place when the chariot of the wedding procession came in contact with the high-tension wire in Bhaiskur village under Bardah police station late on Saturday night. He said two labourers, identi-

fied as Golu (17) and Mangru (25), both of Jawahar Nagar, who were carrying the flower pots died on the spot and the groom fainted.

"The wedding procession from Kusmiliya village under the Mehnagar police station had come to the house of Lal Chand Saroj," the SP (Rural) said. He added that the marriage procession was on its way to the bride's residence when the iron pipe of flower pots came in contact with a live high-tension

wire passing through the area and the two labourers were critically burnt. They were immediately shifted to a hospital but the doctors pronounced them dead on

arrival. A case has been regis tered and further investigation

#### Five killed in accident

**Agra (PTI):** Five people were killed in a collision between two motorcycles here, police said on Sunday. The accident occurred late on Saturday night when a bike carrying four persons collided with another motorcycle carrying two riders, they said. According to police, the victims on the first motorcycle have been identified as Bhagwan Das (35), Vakil (35), Ram Swaroop (28), and Sonu (30)-all residents of the Saiyan

area. They were returning home from a wedding when the crash took place. "The four were returning home around 10 pm on Saturday on a Splendor motorcycle when it collided with an approaching Bullet bike," said Ram Lakhan, a relative of one of the deceased. The impact proved fatal for all four riders on the Splendor, while 17-year-old Karan, who was riding the Bullet, also succumbed to his

# Target to enable one lakh youth for self-employment each year: Sachan

A joint mega loan distribu-tion camp programme of Varanasi and Azamgarh divisions was held under the Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhivan (Chief Minister's Youth Entrepreneur Development Campaign) in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Khadi Village Industries, Silk, Handloom and Textiles Rakesh Sachan as the chief guest, at Pt Deendayal Hastkala Sankul Auditorium, Bada Lalpur on Saturday.

At the beginning of the programme, the guests were welcomed by Joint Commissioner (Industries) Umesh Kumar Singh by presenting a bouquet and angavastram. Special presentation of this campaign with various project profiles was done by Amit Agarwal, expert of Samadhan Samiti.

In his address, the MSME minister said that this is such a campaign through which every youth of the state is to be made self-reliant by connecting them with self-employment, Rakesh Sachan said, adding that under the scheme, the target is to enable one lakh youth for selfemployment every year for the next 10 years. This campaign was launched by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on the occasion of UP Day on January 24, this year. The minister said that under this campaign there is a provision to provide interestfree loan up to ₹5 lakh to each eligible beneficiary and about 9,000 applications were sent to various bank branches from both the divisions, in which loans of ₹821 lakh have been approved for about 2,100 beneficiaries and loans of ₹300 lakh have been distributed to about 700 beneficiaries. This progress in just one month is encouraging, along with this, the officials of the Industry



UP MSME Minister Rakesh Sachan presenting toolkit to a beneficiary in Varanasi

to work in mission mode to achieve the target of this financial year, he added.

Addressing the programme, UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal said that in the global scenario, Bangladesh, which is the world's second largest textile producer, is facing internal challenges. He said that that the textile sector of Varanasi and UP should take advantage of this opportunity. He said our vouth should take advantage of this scheme to promote new technology and innovation.

UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH and Food Security Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' said that the state government has made a scheme keeping in mind the Indian economy, due to which young entrepreneurs

are getting benefits.

MLA from Saiyadraja,
Chandauli Sushil Singh said the youth are getting maximum benefits of the scheme run by the central and state governdepartment and the banks have ments, due to which the estab-

lishment of micro enterprises has increased. MLA from Chakia, Chandauli, Acharva Kailash Nath Kharwar underlined the importance of the scheme for providing selfemployment opportunities to the youth for the economic upliftment of the society.

On the occasion, stalls were displayed by the nine major banks of the district — Union Bank of India, State Bank of India, Baroda UP Bank, Punjab National Bank, Bank of Baroda, Indian Bank, Bank of India, HDFC Bank Ltd and Canara Bank, machinery and equipment manufacturers and the knowledge partner Samadhan Samiti of the scheme. Cheques were distributed by the guests to a total of 20 beneficiaries, including five of Varanasi district, three each of Azamgarh, Ballia and Mau and two each of Chandauli, Ghazipur and Jaunpur. Apart from this, toolkits were distributed to a total of three beneficiaries of silk products, wooden lacquerware and Gulabi Meenakari under the

One District One Product

(ODOP). Apart from this,

toolkits were distributed to three beneficiaries under Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana, which is being run for the economic development of traditional artisans. Certificates were distributed to the beneficiaries of Scheduled Caste/Tribe Training, Other Backward Class Training Scheme. Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, Pindra MLA Dr Awadhesh Singh, city BIP chief Vidya Sagar Rai, Naveen Kapoor, Gaurav Rathi, JC Industries of Azamgarh division, Lead District Manager, deputy commissioners of industries of Azamgarh and Varanasi divisions, assistant commissioners of industries and other related departmental officers. A total of 1,000 beneficiaries of the Abhiyan and Training Schemes from all the districts of Varanasi and Azamgarh divisions were present. At the end of the programme, Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal proposed the vote of

# Importance of AI-driven research & innovation in healthcare emphasised

The two-day international conference HealthCon 2025 organised by the School of Health Sciences at Rani Lakshmi Bai Auditorium of Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU) under the leadership of Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak, concluded on Sunday with thought-provoking discussions on the future of integrated healthcare. Themed "Future of Integrated Healthcare: Synergies Across Disciplines," the event brought together leading medical professionals, researchers and academicians to explore the role of artificial intelligence (AI), interdisciplinary collaboration and research in transforming healthcare.

The conference emphasised India's paradox in medical sciences—despite having some of the world's best doctors, the country lags behind in medical research publications and AIdriven healthcare solutions. Experts at the event called for stronger integration of AI, data science and engineering with medicine to bridge this gap and position India as a global leader in healthcare innovation.

The inaugural session commenced with the ceremonial lamp lighting and Maa Saraswati Vandana, followed by a welcome address by Dr Digvijay Sharma, who set the stage for engaging discussions.

Delivering the keynote address, Vice-Chancellor of CSJMU Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak, stressed the importance of AI-driven research and innovation in healthcare. He pointed out that while India has world-class clinicians, it lags behind in research publications, data analytics and technological advancements.

'India must move beyond clinical expertise and strengthen AI-based medical research. Institutions should focus on AIdriven diagnostics and treatment solutions to bridge this gap," he asserted. Quoting an Indian philosophy, he motivat-



ed students and researchers to persist in their pursuit of knowledge: "The one who moves forward with determination reaches new heights. The sun never stands still — it keeps moving forward. Therefore, we too must keep progressing." Principal of GSVM Medical College Dr Sanjay Kala, focused on the role of young researchers in shaping the future of healthcare. Referring to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's vision, he emphasised the power of an "ignited mind" and encouraged students to embrace research. "Dreams are not those that we see in sleep but those that do not let us sleep. Young minds must take up research as a mission to bring meaningful change in health-

care," he said. Vice-Principal of GSVM Medical College Dr Richa Giri, acknowledged the efforts of the organising team and reinforced the need for interdisciplinary education in healthcare.

Pro-Vice Chancellor of CSJMU Prof Sudhir Kumar Awasthi, stressed the importance of collaboration between engineers and medical professionals. He highlighted how advancements in electrical and mechanical sciences have led to groundbreak-

ing innovations in medical technology. "The future of medicine is not limited to doctors alone; it requires strong collaboration with engineers, data scientists and AI specialists," he remarked. A recurring theme at HealthCon 2025 was India's global standing in medical sciences. Experts noted that while Indian doctors are highly respected worldwide, the country still lags in AI-driven healthcare innovations. The discussion revolved around

how AI and data analytics are reshaping the global healthcare industry, with nations investing heavily in AI-powered diagnostics, predictive analytics, and personalised medicine. The speakers pointed out that

India's lack of research culture, weak documentation practices and low patenting rates have prevented it from leading in medical innovations. They urged Indian institutions to prioritise AI-based medical research to compete globally.
A key outcome of HealthCon

2025 was the proposal to launch a collaborative initiative where doctors, paramedics, engineers and data scientists will engage in regular brainstorming sessions. Experts emphasised that by integrating AI, big data and robot-

ics. India can achieve medical self-reliance and make highquality healthcare accessible to all. The conference concluded with the release of the HealthCon 2025 booklet and souvenir. Registrar of CSIMU Dr Anil Kumar Yadav proposed the vote of thanks, appreciating the contributions of all dignitaries, scholars and organisers. Special recognition was given to Dr Digvijay Sharma for his efforts in coordi-

nating the event. Under the leadership of Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak, CSJMU's School of Health Sciences is making significant strides in research, AI integration and technological advancements in healthcare. The conference reaffirmed CSJMU's commitment to fostering innovation and preparing future healthcare professionals to embrace AI, data science and interdisciplinary collaboration. The message was clear — the future of medicine lies in AI-driven solutions and India must act now to secure its position as a global leader in medical research and innovation.

The team behind the event comprising Dr Digvijay Sharma, Dr Hina Vaish, Dr Muneesh Rastogi and Dr

# **BLW Pavilion a major attraction at Technex-2025**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) Pavilion emerged as the major attraction at 86th edition of the Tech Fest 'Technex- 2025' at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT-BHU). The Technex-2025 was held from February 28 to March 2 at Swatantrata Bhawan in Banaras Hindu University (BHU), where students from IITs and other prestigious technical institutions across India showcased their innovations. General Manager (GM) Naresh Pal Singh visited the BLW Pavilion, where he observed the displayed locomotive models. infographics and technological innovations and appreciated the efforts. He emphasised BLW's significant contribution not only to Indian Railways but also on a global scale. The BLW Pavilion at Technex-

2025 was adorned with modern technologies and innovations, drawing the attention of students and technology enthusiasts. The running and static locomotive models on display



## बनारस रेल इं. ान कारखाना ANARAS LOCO MOTIVE WORK

General Manager NP Singh at BLW Pavilion at Technex-2025 of IIT-BHU in Varanasi on Sunday.

became a major attraction, generating curiosity among students about locomotive manufacturing technology.
Public Relations Officer (PRO) of BLW Rajesh Kumar, along with technical experts and trainers from the BLW Technical Training Centre (TTC), provided students with in-depth knowledge about various aspects of locomotive con-

struction and technological advancements. The students showed keen interest in the advanced railway technologies like Hot Plate Technology, Voice & Video Capturing Facility for Pilots, Bio-Toilet System, Speed, Brake System, and High-Speed Locomotive Operations etc.

The PRO highlighted that BLW locomotives are manufactured with over 99 per cent indigenous components, making them not only popular in India but also globally. The BLW-manufactured locomotives are successfully operating in several countries, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Angola, Senegal, Mali, Tanzania, Sudan and Vietnam. The increasing demand for these locomotives reflects BLW's excellence in the global railway industry, he added.

He said that the BLW Pavilion at BHU Technex served as a hub of inspiration for both students and researchers. "It effectively showcased various technological aspects of BLW locomotives through images, translites, models, and digital displays", he said.

The technical trainers from the BLW TTC addressed students' queries in detail, further enhancing their knowledge. Students expressed great enthusiasm about the growth of Indian Railways and BLW's role in technological advancements.

#### 26-yr-old youth found dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE KANPUR

Ayouth was found dead under mysterious circumstances near Budhpur village under Shivrajpur police station area on Sunday morning. He was identified as Govind Pal 26) of Kakupur Halbal village and the only bread earner of his family. Reports said Govind had gone to attend a marriage ceremony in Bilhaur on Saturday evening where he received a call from a friend regarding a scuffle in Jagatpur village. Govind went to Jagatpur village on scooty. On Sunday morning he was found dead along the road near Budhpur village. A scooty and a bike were also found lying near the body. Forensic team collected evidence from the spot. The friend who had called Govind was absconding with his mobile phone switched off. Araul Station House Officer Janardan Singh led the police team formed to probe the issue. Senior police officers had been apprised of the incident, he said.

# **Kanpur Metro conducts** anti-terror mock drill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE KANPUR

The Kanpur Metro conductded an anti-terror mock drill at Geeta Nagar station at night for emergency situ ations, such as a terrorist attack. The exercise aimed to assess security protocols at metro stations and train staff on effectively managing such incidents while prioritising passenger safety.

During the drill, the station controller was alerted about a suspicious individual entering the premises. Acting quickly, the controller informed the in charge of the Special Security Forces (SSF) stationed at the station and the Operations Control Centre.

To mitigate risks to life and property, passenger movement at the station was halted. A team from the SSF swiftly arrived at both station entrances and apprehended the suspect. The mock drill was



Kanpur Metro conducted anti-terror mock drill at Geeta Nagar statio

successfully completed following established security procedures. Before and after the mock drill, senior security officials briefed Kanpur Metro staff and officers on key procedures for handling emergency situations.
Notably, Uttar Metro Rail

cess. He said that about 23

ducts drills for various emergencies, including firefighting, first aid and more, with passenger safety as the top priority. During these drills, metro staff receive hands-on training and gain vital knowledge on effectively managing such incidents.

Corporation regularly con-

# **GNM** students pledge commitment to nursing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Amomentous occasion unfolded at Nazareth Hospital School of Nursing when the institution celebrated its 31st batch of graduates and 35th lamp lighting ceremony on Sunday. The event, held in the presence of dignitaries, faculty members and proud families, marked a significant milestone in the lives of the graduating nurses. The ceremony commenced with a warm welcome from the anchors, emphasising the significance of the day—not just as an academic achievement but as the beginning of a lifelong commitment to compassionate service in the field of nursing. Justice Manju Rani Chauhan of the Allahabad High Court graced the occasion as the chief guest. Most Rev Louis Mascarenhas, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Allahabad, presided over the event, alongside several distinguished guests, including Rev Fr Royal Anthony, Education Director, Diocese of Bareilly, Msgr. Reginald D'Souza, Vicar General, Diocese of Allahabad and other distinguished guests. The Prayer Dance, a soulful invoca-

tion, set the spiritual tone of the event, followed by the Lighting of the Lamp—a symbol of wisdom and enlightenment. The oath-taking ceremony, led by Rev Sr Alveena CSN, saw the 35th batch of General



Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) students pledge their commitment to the noble profession of nursing. The graduation ceremony hounored the 31st batch of GNM students, as they received their certificates and placed their lamps on the ceremonial stand, signifying their readiness to embark on their professional journey. Among the highlights of the event was the presentation of prestigious Outstanding awards:The Achievement Award 2025 was conferred on Deepika Pandey, recognising her dedication, perseverance and excellence in the Semi- ICU department. The Excellence Award 2025

was awarded to Neha Maurya,

acknowledging her academic bril-

liance and commitment to compassionate service.

A series of cultural performances, including a Fusion Dance and a Maha Kumbh Group Dance, captivated the audience, celebrating India's rich heritage and the spirit of unity. The ceremony concluded with a vote of thanks, a cake-cutting ceremony and national anthem. The event was a testament to the hard work, resilience and dedication of the students and faculty of Nazareth Hospital School of Nursing. As the new nurses step forward into their careers, they carry with them the light of knowledge, the spirit of service and the commitment to excellence in the healthcare pro-

# UDID card should be made for every Divyangjan: CDO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE VARANASI

meeting of the District Disabled Rehabilitation A meeting of the District Disabled Renadilitation Centre, District Management Team, Local Level Committee for Legal Guardianship, Monitoring Committee for UDID and District Disability Committee was held on Saturday in the Collectorate auditorium under the chairmanship of Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal. The CDO directed that the Divyangjans residing in the urban area who need physiotherapy through the District Disabled Rehabilitation Centre operated in Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay Government Hospital, Pandeypur, should be given the benefit as much as possible through the centre and in the rural area, they should be benefited from the physiotherapy centre run by community health centre (CHC).

He directed that Unique Disability ID (UDID) card of every Divyangian should be made and no application of any kind should remain pending on the portal. Appropriate action should be taken immediately on each application. He informed that repairing centres will soon be opened in the district for repairing motorised tricycles.

A total of 20 applications received on the portal by the Local Level Committee for Legal Guardianship were approved and instructions were also given to get maximum applications by widely publicising Legal Guardianship. The meeting was conducted by District Divyangjan Empowerment Officer Ram Prakash Singh.

# Youth cultural festival 'Spandan' from today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Hindu (BHU) announced its highly anticipat-Hindu ed inter-faculty youth cultural festival 'Spandan', which will be taking place after an interval of five years. This vibrant celebra-tion of talent, creativity and tion of talent, creativity and companionship is set to capti-vate the university communi-ty and will be taking place from March 3 to 6 at various venues across the campus.

Addressing a press conference on Saturday, BHU's Dean of Students Prof Anupam Kumar Nema informed that 'Spandan-2025' will kick off with a procession by students from various faculties, followed by an inaugural ceremony at the amphitheatre ground. Renowned Hindustani classical music vocalist and BHU alumna Padma Shri Dr Soma Ghosh will be the chief guest in the

inaugural session. Convener of Spandan-2025 Prof BC Kapri stated that nearly 2,500 students and teachers will actively participate to make the programme a grand suc-

teams will be competing in nearly 40 events across 11 venues. Professor-In-Charge (External Communication) and chairperson of the media committee of the event Anurag Dave said Spandan is a celebration of the students' enthusiasm and spirit at BHU. Spandan-2025 offers a diverse range of events including music, dance, painting, poetry, exhibitions, and more. Events will be held across 11 locations on campus, including the Amphitheatre ground, KN Udupa Auditorium, Malaviya Bhawan and faculty specific venues, ensuring a dynamic and engaging experience. The main organising committee of Spandan-2025 includes the Dean of Students Prof Anupam Kumar Nema, convenor Prof BC Kapri, co-convenors Prof Arti Nirmal and Prof Lalit Mohan Agrawal under the chairmanship of Vice-Chancellor Prof Sanjay Kumar. ANNUAL CONFERENCE: The Department of Economics, BHU, is going to host 59th Annual Conference of The

Indian Econometric Society (TIES) during March 3 -5. Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog Suman Bery will inaugurate the conference at Swatantrata Bhawan in BHU on Monday at 9.30 am. The inaugural function will be presided over by TIES President Prof Sudipto Mundle.

UDAAN-2005: The third and last evening of Youth Festival Udaan-2025 organised by the Cultural Committee under IQAC at DAV PG College here on Saturday was in the name of sitarist Pt Devbrat Mishra's fusion band. When the tunes of Banarasi Thumri, Dadra and Kajri came out simultaneously from sitar, guitar, tabla and tanpura, the entire auditorium was filled with enthusiasm and seen cheering.
Pt Devbrat first started with a

Thumri Yaad Piya Ki Aayi'in Raga Mishra Shadaj. After this, a fusion performance was presented in Raag Jog. When he sang Dadra 'Hamri Aatariya Par Aaja Re Saawariya' in Raag Bhairavi, the entire auditorium reverberated with a thunderous

# Government to go tough on drug traffickers: Shah India's policies needs comprehensive

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Modi government is unsparing in punishing drug traffickers who drag the youth into the dark abyss of addiction for the

greed of money. In a social media post, Shah said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government pledges to continue combating the drug menace with ruthless and meticulous investigations to build a "drug-free Bharat". He said, as a result of a foolproof investigation with a "bottom to top" and "top to bottom" strategy, 29 drug traffickers have been convicted by courts in 12 different cases across India. This success is a testament to the "bottom to top" and "top to bottom" approach adopted by the government, an official



Union Home Minister Amit Shah

Pioneer photo

release said. In pursuit of Modi government's zerotolerance policy against drugs, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has achieved this significant success, it said. The details of 12 cases include the seizure of 23.859 kg of

charas at the Sabarmati Railway Station in Gujarat's

Ahmedabad in 2019, where three people were arrested and sentenced to 14 years in jail. In July 2022, the NCB in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur intercepted two vehicles in Shahdol and seized 123.080 kg of ganja. Four people were arrested in the case and sentenced to 12 years rigorous

Rs 2 lakh each. In the Chandigarh Zone last year, a parcel containing two hockey sticks packed with 438 grams of opium was intercepted at DHL Express, Ludhiana, by the officers of

of imprisonment with a fine of

the NCB. Two arrested accused in the case were sentenced to three vears of imprisonment by a Puniab court for their role in attempting to transport the opium to Canada. In another case, the NCB

arrested one person at the Chandigarh Railway Station in 2021 for possession of 390 grams of charas.
The accused was formally arrested, and completion of

sentenced him to six months in jail. In June, 2021, the NCB

investigation, a special court

intercepted a Zimbabwean woman on her arrival at the

upon

Cochin International Airport. The examination of her luggage led to the recovery and seizure of 2.910 kg of heroin. She was subsequently arrested and a court in Ernakulam sentenced her to 11 years in jail.

In January 2018, the NCB seized 450 grams of charas, leading to the arrest of one person in Dehradun, who was later sentenced to one year in In 2021, the NCB seized 1.950

kg of charas from the possession of two accused who were later arrested. A court in January 2025 sentenced the accused to 10 vears in jail.

years in jail.

In February 2021, the NCB seized 681.8 kg of ganja in the Ranga Reddy district of Telangana. Eight accused were arrested and charged with drug trofficking. A local court drug trafficking. A local court sentenced them to 10 years in

# framework says Principal Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■

Any policy making in the Government setup must account for uncertainty, with a focus on a comprehensive framework and an outcomeoriented constructive mindset, said PK Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, in an interaction during a recent Business Standard Manthan Summit in the national Capital.

Addressing a wide array of issues, Mishra said that the Government had been successful in tackling the turmoil ranging from Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine-Russia conflict and West Asia crisis with a focus on being 'Atmanirbhar' (self-reliant). He attributed this to the visionary leadership of the Prime Minister Narendra

to address the challenges posed by being resilient and by introducing reforms to tackle the emergent issues. Mishra further elaborated

how the Indian economy faced several challenges like geopolitical tensions. disruptions in global supply chains, and energy transition. In the event of Covid-19 pandemic when the whole world, including India, appeared to be in turmoil, India could navigate the challenges effectively and

"It took several measures on economic reforms in addition to providing some stimulus The growth packages. momentum was restored," he said.

successfully.

He also highlighted the Government's initiative of Production Linked Initiative

Modi focussed on readiness (PLI) Schemes and leveraging of consumption base and demographic advantage of India among others.

In the context of the ongoing protectionism breakdown of the Washington Consensus, Mishra explained how our policy stance in our economic engagement with the world has been consistent. Citing examples of recent FTAs with Australia, UAE and EFTA, he referred to the ongoing negotiations with the UK and the EU. This approach will help us mitigating the emerging challenges, he added.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister impressed upon the need to tackle uncertainty with a new approach where not only risk assessment but also building an 'anti-fragile system' should

## NHRC to organise human rights program for global south nations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

 $N_{\text{Commission (NHRC)}}^{\text{ational Human Rights}}$ collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is organising a six-day Indian enhance collaboration and Technical and Economic networking, and improve Technical and Economic networking, and improve Cooperation (ITEC) Executive human rights protection Capacity Building Programme on human rights for senior-level functionaries of the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) of Global South here from March 3-8, NHRC said here on Sunday.

Forty seven participants from the NHRIs of 14 countries of Global South are likely to attend it.

Uganda, Samoa, Timor Leste, DR Congo, Togo, Mali, Nigeria. Egypt, Tanzania, Nigeria, Egypt, Mauritius, Burundi, Turkmenistan, Qatar.

This customised programme has been developed in accordance to the need of NHRIs of participating countries and feedback provided earlier. Eminent with domain persons knowledge and expertise in capacity building and imparting training, will be the

resource persons. The programme will be inaugurated by Chairperson of **Justice** Ramasubramanian

various dimensions of human building

perspectives, and share NHRC, India's experience over the past three decades to enhance awareness among participants of various NHRIs. It seeks to strengthen South–South cooperation, mechanisms through comprehensive capacity building and experience sharing.

The expected outcome includes developing a better understanding of international dimensions of human rights, a understanding of NHRC, India's work in the it. field of human rights are Madagascar, protection, and its best practices, which can be adopted by the other NHRIs, improved networking among NHRIs, fostering NĤRIs,

collaborations and partnerships at regional and international levels and enhanced capability contribute towards protection and promotion of human rights. The participants will engage in lectures and interactive sessions by eminent persons and practitioners in the field, cultural immersion and field visits.

The initiative is a part of NHRC's ongoing outreach efforts to

capacity

40 per cent people have no access to education in mother tongue: UNESCO PTI ■ NEW DELHI  $F_{\text{population does not have}}^{\text{orty per cent of the global}}$ access to education in a lan-

guage they speak or understand, according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Despite countries' growing understanding of the role of home language, policy uptake remains limited. Implementation challenges limited teacher include

materials in home languages and community opposition, In some low- and middleincome countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent. More than a quarter of a billion learners are affected, GEM officials said, recommending nations to implement multilingual education policies and practices with the goal of creating educational systems

capacity to use home

languages, unavailability of

that benefit all learners. The team, which has come up with a report titled "Languages

matter: Global guidance on multilingual education", noted that as migration increases, linguistic diversity is becoming a global reality and classrooms with learners from diverse language backgrounds

are more common. Over 31 million displaced youth are facing language barriers in education. The report was compiled on the 25th anniversary of International Mother Language Day, celebrating a quarter-century of dedicated efforts to preserve and promote the use of mother tongues. The report comes at a time

when India is in the process of implementing the new National Education Policy (NEP) that advocates multilingual education. The three-language policy in school education has drawn opposition from some states.

"Today 40 per cent of people globally lack access to education in the language they speak and understand fluently. In some low- and middleincome countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent. More than a quarter of a billion learners are affected," a senior GEM team member told PTI.

The first thing to note is that over the course of this decade, which has been marked by the pervasive influence of technology in young people's lives but also by the impact of COVID-19, learning levels have dropped sharply in Dh reading and mathematics. But the next thing to note is that the impact has been disproportionate on learners who are disadvantaged due to linguistic reasons," the official

According to the analysis by the team, the gap between the two groups increased on average between 2010 and 2022, from 12 to 18 percentage

points in reading and from 10 to 15 percentage points in mathematics. This suggests that learners who do not speak the language of instruction at home, whether for historical reasons or due to migration and displacement, are at a bigger risk of leaning loss. Countries face diverse

linguistic challenges in education, stemming from historical both contemporary factors. In the first category, often as a legacy of colonialism, languages have been imposed on local populations that prevented their use for instruction and educational created disparities. "At the same time, large linguistic diversity in some countries presents challenges for education

systems, as resources for implementing multilingual education programmes tend to be limited," the report said. In the second category, immigration brings new

languages to classrooms in richer countries, enriching linguistic diversity but also challenges posing instruction and assessment. "These countries often

grapple with issues such as language acquisition support for immigrant students, developing inclusive that curricula reflect diversity, and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their linguistic background. The context each country faces means the policy solutions required are different," it added.

The GEM team has recommended that educational language policies should prioritise contextspecific approaches and language transition must be backed by curriculum adjustments and supported by teaching and learning materials adapted for that grade. "In countries with

populations, policies should support the development and implementation of effective bridging qualified programmes, teachers, and support inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse linguistic needs of all," it said.

"In multilingual contexts, training should ensure proficiency in both home and second languages; teacher deployment could match the teacher's language fluency with the language of instruction of the target school; early childhood educators should be trained on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy," it added. Planning for strong support systems outside of schools to ensure the success of new multilingual education policies and supporting school leaders to foster inclusion in schools are also among the recommendations.

# AAP brings back Bhaben Choudhury as Assam chief Committee in its meeting on Saturday unanimously chose campaigns against opposition campaigns against opposition

he Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday said the party has appointed its national joint secretary Bhaban Choudhury as the acting state president of the among not active due to "personal senior functionaries of NHRIs. | reasons", the executive

Choudhury for the position. Choudhury was the chief of AAP Assam prior to Dhanowar taking charge as state president in September last vear.

the "increasing conden political violence, suppression of democratic protests and

leaders and their families".

"The BJP government is systematically killing democracy by silencing opposition voices. No matter in 2026" he said in a reply statement. Highlighting the "rising public discontent", he chaotic environment to instill fear among the masses,"

issues like skyrocketing prices, communal remarks, environmental destruction due to deforestation and the recurring floods in Assam.

BIP is intentionally creating a

He also alleged that the BJP government is using fear tactics ahead of the 2026 assembly elections to deter public dissent.

He also criticised the oneman Justice (retd) Biplab Kumar Sharma Commission report on the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) scam, calling it a politically motivated document.

#### how much suppression they "The frustration among the Assam unit, five months after enhance replacing him from the post. on understanding Immediately after assuming impose, the people of Assam common people is growing and As the party's permanent office, president Manoj Dhanowar is conden Monday. The programme appreciation of various aspects will give them a befitting every day and in response, the Choudhury human rights and help in aims to provide ts into

projects.

NIT Rourkela develops low-cost solar panel technology PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Researchers at the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela have patented a low-cost technology developed by them to extract maximum power from solar panels under changing weather conditions, according to officials.

The innovation also responds quickly to changes in sunlight and temperature, allowing the system to consistently operate at peak efficiency and avoid any power fluctuations, they

Supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) under the Clean Energy Research Initiative (CERI), the research team has been granted a patent "Method And System For Voltage Sensor-based Maximum Power Point Tracking For Photovoltaic

System". According to Susovon Samanta, Associate Professor, Electrical Engineering, NIT Rourkela, Solar panels produce electricity from sunlight, but require expensive current essensors, making them less

generate changes throughout the day due to shifts in temperature and the intensity of sunlight.

To ensure they always produce the most energy possible, solar systems use a technique called Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT). This is a smart system that

helps solar panels produce the most electricity possible by adjusting voltage and current based on sunlight and temperature changes. consists of a microcontroller that runs the MPPT algorithm, sensors to measure voltage and current, and a DC-DC converter that regulates power flow. "The system continuously monitors the solar panel's output and makes minor adjustments to keep it operating at peak efficiency, ensuring minimal energy waste. Traditional MPPT methods can waste energy and respond slowly when weather conditions change. They also sensors, making them less

the amount of power they affordable for low-cost solar

setups," Samanta said. "To overcome these limitations, we have developed a voltage sensor-based MPPT method that eliminates the need for current sensors, reducing system complexity and cost. Our approach uses a simple voltage sensor or a resistor divider circuit to track the Maximum Power Point (MPP) more accurately while maintaining stable and efficient steady-state operation, leading to improved tracking efficiency and better PV energy harvesting," he added.

Samanta explained that their method prevents small power fluctuations that older techniques struggle with, ensuring stable and efficient power extraction.

"It also responds quickly to changes in sunlight and temperature, allowing the system to consistently operate at peak efficiency. Additionally, by using only a voltage sensor or a simple resistor divider circuit, it reduces system complexity and cost. Its

adaptable design enables integration into various solar power setups, making it a versatile solution for a wide range of application," he said. The researchers claimed that the innovation has broad applications in the renewable energy sector, including eliminating the need for costly current sensors, reduces costs and makes it a good fit for affordable and small-scale solar

The developed innovation can

be used in solar-powered IoT

devices such as weather sensors and remote communication towers, where maintaining reliable energy output is crucial. Affordable consumer solar products like home lighting systems and portable solar chargers, where cost and efficiency are key considerations and use in microgrid and off-grid energy solutions, providing a stable and reliable power source in remote or rural areas, are among other possible benefits of the innovation," Samanta

# BJP targets Mamata after ECI clarifies voter ID duplication

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

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

number. Irrespective of the EPIC 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 BJP cannot bring in voters from Bihar, UP and Haryana to vote in Bengal," Baneriee 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 vear'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

the district magistrate, the Dehradun regional office of the Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, and the UKPCB.

response from the Uttarakhand chief secretary

principal chief conferencing on the next date of hearing to be essential for assisting this tribunal in just and proper adjudication of

directed to remain present before this tribunal with the relevant record," the green body said. The NGT posted the matter for further hearing on April 7.

# NOAA layoffs will impact forecasts, cyclone tracking in India: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists and policymakers have voiced concern over the layoffs at the US climate agency, National Oceanic and reduce, there is less data to Atmospheric Administration assimilate. (NOAA), saying any reduction in observation data could affect monsoon forecasts and cyclone tracking in India.

Hundreds of weather forecasters and other federal NOAA employees on probationary status were fired last week.

included These meteorologists who do crucial local forecasts in the national weather service offices. "We are worried.

reduces observations, there will be implications on weather forecasts.

Hence predictability will reduce," M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences,

told PTI. Climate scientist at the Indian Institute for Tropical Meteorology Roxy Mathew Koll termed the NOAA layoffs as a global crisis that could impact climate

science. NOAA provides data and that support this models weather-climate monitoring,

forecasting and disaster preparedness worldwide.

For India, the monsoon forecasts, cyclone tracking, When ocean observations and climate projections rely on NOAA's models," Koll, who is also among the authors of reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change, said. He said the NOAA layoffs were not just a US issue, but a blow to climate science and action worldwide.

"Half of the Indian Ocean's observational network is backed by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Without backbone, early warnings for floods,

heatwaves, and storms will weaken, putting millions at risk," Koll said.

Another meteorologist said he has been receiving emails from his interlocutors at NOAA informing them about the layoffs and inability to continue work as before. "This is more than a budget

cut. It is a direct threat to climate resilience, research, preparedness The world and worldwide. cannot afford to lose NOAA," Koll, a Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awardee, said.

India has deployed a but no single country can do number of argo floats, it alone," Koll said.

moored buoys and drifting buoys observations for various weather forecasting models. While most of the instruments deployed by the Ministry of Earth Sciences are in the Indian Ocean, NOAA also has deployed similar instruments in the Indian Ocean as well as in other seas across the world. "Collaboration is key to science - and particularly climate research and action. Take this example — monitoring across global oceans is essential to predict India's weather and climate,

#### students for professional courses **PTI** ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha to provide training to 50 tribal

The Odisha government will Provide preparatory pilot training to 50 tribal students, mostly women, to make them ready for the professional course, an official said on Sunday.

The Commerce and Transport Department of the Odisha government has recently issued a tender to hire a professional agency to provide the training. As per the tender document, the government, through the selected private agency, will identify at least 300 tribal students, from whom 50 will be shortlisted through proper

screening to impart the preparatory training.
The selected 50 students,

mostly women, will receive coaching, covering all selection parameters of airline cadet assessment, pilot Bhubaneswar for eight weeks, the official said. The coaching is aimed at preparing the candidates to

clear the cadet pilot assessment and also make them ready for the basic foundation programme syllabus set by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and give an overview of the flying training course, he said.

## NGT summons Uttarakhand officials over illegal felling of 176 trees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

 $T^{\text{he National Green}}_{\text{Tribunal(NGT)has asked}}$  the member secretary of the Uttarakhand Pollution Control Board (UKPCB) and the state's principal chief conservator of forests to appear before it in a matter regarding illegal felling of 176 trees in Udham Singh Nagar district.

The NGT was hearing a petition unauthorised felling of trees during the development of a residential colony by private persons in the district's Chandpur village. In its order dated February

24, a bench of judicial member, Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member, A Senthil Vel said that according to a report submitted by a joint committee that was set up earlier, 176 trees were felled illegally and environmental compensation had to be recovered for it. The committee comprised

Taking note of the report, the tribunal sought a

and others.
"We also consider the personal appearance of the member secretary, UKPCB and conservator of (PCCF) before this tribunal physically or through video-

questions involved in the case. "Accordingly, they are www.dailypioneer.com

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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 the Budget for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural). Also, an amount of Rs 1,200 crore has been proposed under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana

(Rural). While the Prime Minister's empathetic leadership has ensured a roof over the heads of the poor, the state's economy has also been flourishing.

The government's efforts have ensured the economic growth rate of the state has been recorded at 11.6 per cent, which is higher than the national GDP growth of 9.6 per cent. Once considered a 'BIMARU' state, the estimated gross domestic product (GSDP) of the state has now risen to Rs 27.51 lakh crore, doubling from 2017-18. In line with this momentum, Uttar Pradesh's economy is expected to reach Rs 30 lakh crore in the next fiscal, which will significantly contribute towards making the state a \$1 trillion econo-

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 for the widening and construction of roads. A budget of Rs 2,900 crore has been proposed for the widening of roads. Also, a provision of Rs 1,450 crore has been made



THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY CONSTRUCTED MORE THAN 3.6 MILLION HOUSES IN RESOLUTION. PROVIDING FURTHER IMPETUS

TO THE CAUSE, A PROVISION OF RS 4,882 CRORE HAS BEEN MADE IN THE BUDGET FOR THE PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA (RURAL)

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 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'.

for the construction of Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, Rs 79,500 crore have been distributed to farmers while Rs 496 crore have also been disbursed under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. The state's sugarcane production capacity has also increased from 72 tonnes to 85 tonnes per hectare, boosting the income levels of farmers.

The recently presented Budget will not only take the development of the state to new heights but will also transform rural India. From roads to digital infrastructure, farmers to industry, and women empowerment to a bright future for the youth, this Budget has been able to ensure that the needs of every section of society are taken care of.

With the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and schemes aimed at boosting the rural economy and infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh is rapidly moving towards fulfilling the dream of a self-reliant India. I am confident that this Budget will realise the vision of 'growth and progress' of UP and propel the state towards the exalted status of the most developed state in the country.

The writer is Deputy Chief Minister of UP; views are personal)

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



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

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

cases that might otherwise seem hopeless.

Dr Bedi confirmed that he plans to patent the technique and publish his findings so that it can be adopted worldwide to benefit similar cases. In conclusion, Dr Harinder Singh Bedi's innovative "Cooling Turban" technique represents a significant advancement in brain-protective strategies during cardiovascular and thoracic surgeries. By focusing cooling efforts solely on the brain, this breakthrough minimises the risks associated with wholebody hypothermia and opens new avenues for treating oxygen deprivation during

surgery. With successful application in 48 cases and enthusiastic endorsement from leading experts, this pioneering approach underscores the ingenuity of Indian medical innovation. Dr Bedi's commitment to patenting and sharing his findings promises to influence global surgical practices, ultimately saving countless lives and setting a new standard in patient care with excellence.

(The author is a columnist; views are personal)

#### **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**



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 investmentrelated 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

or more by a court of law. The growing dependence of political parties on criminals for muscle power and electability must be stopped. It is high time all political parties came together and developed a consensus on keeping criminals-some with serious charges including kidnapping, rape, murder, grave corruption and crime against women-out of the system.

P Victor Śelvaraj | Tirunelveli

#### **US-UKRAINE TALKS FAIL**

Madam — The abrupt failure of US-Ukraine talks underscores a troubling low in American diplomacy. Trump's insistence on securing indefinite rights to Ukraine's rare minerals in exchange for past aid—while rejecting Zelensky's request for security guarantees—was a blatant betrayal of trust. The talks' undiplomatic nature, with raised voices, Trump walking out and Zelensky skipping lunch, further damaged

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 necessarimaintain 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

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# **FIRST COLUMN**

#### **DEALING WITH EXAM ANXIETY**

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



SAKSHI SETHI

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

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 DEVASTATED, DEGRADED AND FRAGMENTED. THERE ARE PATCHES OF FORESTS IN MEDHA LEKHA GRAM SABHA WHERE **ALL BAMBOO CLUMPS WERE** 

CLEARED IN ONE

STROKE IN 2012

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 deforesta-

states, further diluting the provi-

sions in 2012 to ignore the only

tion. IFRs have already been granted to 2.2 million tribal and OTFDs, covering nearly 5 million HAVE BEEN 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 BAMBOO estimates of the activists suggest that 30 million hectare forest lands comprising more than 40 per cent of the total forest area can be granted for CFRs and sustainable management.

They further argue that if this is done, it has the potential to secure the rights and livelihood of 200 million people including 90 million tribal. Local press in Hyderabad has recently brought out that seven lakh acres of forests have been occupied in 2022-23 and claims over four lakh acres for tribal were approved in Telangana before the 2023 Assembly election. State machineries have accepted the claims overlooking the reports of the concerned divisional forest officer. J Ramesh, Nature Friends

Environmental Development essential for the grant of rights i.e. 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 of Section 4 (3) of the Act is also

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 201 Forest officers were physically prevented from entering the area. Bamboo has not responded well to the clear feeling. The fresh regeneration is bushy and does not yield any usable bamboo culm. It yielded certain culms every four years when it was managed by the Forest Department.

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

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

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

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

7ith 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



**SAMEER MATHUR** 

Phygital combines the tangible benefits of traditional systems with the efficiency of digital technology, creating a hybrid framework that enhances accessibility, empowers local businesses, and fosters inclusive growth. In rural regions, where infrastructural deficits and resource limitations persist, phygital strategies are not about replacing established methods but rather integrating them with modern digital solutions. This approach is proving transformative across key sectors such as banking, commerce, agriculture, healthcare, and public services.

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

While FinTech has broadened access through digital banking, a fully digital approach can alienate those who lack familiarity with smartphones or online transactions. The phygital model addresses these gaps by merging digital convenience 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  $\bar{\text{or}}$  post offices have effectively transformed these outlets into mini banking hubs.

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



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

Reinvigorating Rural Commerce

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

consumers still rely heavily on cash transactions. A completely digital model often fails to resonate with these communities. Instead, the phygital model has emerged as an effective alternative by combining the reach of online platforms with the trust of local, physical commerce. Local kirana stores are increasingly functioning as pick-up points for online orders, ensuring that digital transactions are accessible even to those without digital payment 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 middlemen. At the same time, traditional mandi networks continue to play an essential role in the trading process.

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

(The writer is Managing Director and Founder of Roinet *Solution; views are personal)* 

# **Daughter of Union minister** molested in Maharashtra

In a shocking development that embarrassed the BJP-led MahaYuti government on the eve of the start of crucial budget session of the Maharashtra Legislature, Union Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs Raksha Khadse's teenage daughter was allegedly molested by a group of youths during a fair in Muktainagar in Jalgaon district of north Maharashtra.

On a day when the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) slammed the MahaYuti government over the incident and alleged that law and order had collapsed, the Jalgaon police named seven persons in the FIR registered in the incident, arrested one persons and launched manhunt for other absconding accused.

The Jalgaon police registered an FIR only after Raksha Khadse visited the local police station and spoke to the officers about the incident. Maintaining that no one would

be spared in connection with the alleged molestation

#### Frequent trips abroad land IPS officer in soup

From page 1

Georgia, the UAE, Sweden, the USA, and the UK were among the destinations involved in these alleged unauthorised visits between 2019 and 2024, the Chief Secretary noted.

He further said although Kumar was granted permission to visit Georgia from March 1 to 4, 2024, he allegedly deviated from the approved plan and visited the UAE within those four days without permission.

Similarly, Vijayanand pointed out that Kumar visited the USA between February 1 and 28, 2023, departing from Hyderabad without obtaining prior government approval, other such unauthorised trips. The state was ruled by the erstwhile YSRCP government, led by Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, between 2019 and 2024.

Devendra Fadnavis - who holds the State Home portfolio said: "Unfortunately among the accused, some of them are workers of a certain party. Of the accused, one has been arrested. ....This kind of harassment is wrong; they cannot be forgiven, and strict action will be taken...no one would be spared".

Raksha Khadse is daughter of NCP (SP) MLC Eknath Khadse, a former six-time BIP MLA from Muktainagar, former minister and ex-Leader of Opposition in Legislative Assembly. Her sister-in-law Rohini Khadse is the state NCP (SP) women's wing President. Much to the discomfort of the BIP -as can be seen from Fadnavis' statement, some of the accused belong to the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena. The accused have been identified as Aniket Bhoi, Piyush More, Saham Koli, Anuj Patil, Kiran Mali, and Sachin Palvi, Incidentally, More is linked to Shinde Shiv Sena MLA Chandrakant Patil.

media. The alleged molestation incident during a Yatra organised as part of the Maha Shivratri festivities last week.

The photos of the person with

Deputy Chief Minister Eknath

Khadse surfaced in social

"The Sant Muktai Yatra is organized every year in Kothali on the occasion of Maha Shivratri. I was in Gujarat. My daughter called me to ask for permission to go. I gave her the okay and asked her to take a guard and two to three staff members along. After going there my daughter and her friends were followed and pushed, and their photos and videos were taken. When my staff objected, the boys were very unruly...some 40-odd people gathered...the girls were freighted and the security team retreated for their safety," Raksha Khadse said.

"If such a thing happens under protection, imagine the plight of others. I have come as a mother seeking justice, not as a Union Minister and MP," Raksha Khadse said, while talking to media persons during her visit to the police station.

"These boys have taken videos of four or five girls. Crimes against women are increasing across the state, and the

Many girls hesitate to come forward, but we must not remain silent. That is why I have personally filed this complaint," the Union Minister

In a related development, Sub-Divisional Police Officer Krushnat Pingle said that the police had registered offences against the identified accused under Bharatiya Nyaya Protection of Sanhitva, Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) and Information Technology Act.

"The group of girls were stalked...their photos/videos were taken on a mobile phone. We have registered an offence of molestation," Pingle said. "One accused has been arrested, and the search for the others is ongoing. Aniket Bhoi already has two to four cases registered against him," Pingle

"The security guard of the Union Minister was present with one of the victims at the fair. A scuffle took place with him as well. His complaint has also been registered," he said. Denying that there was no delay in registering the FIR, Pingle said: "There is no pressure from any side. I have been personally present here for the last two days. These boys were part of the fair and

committed this act." Meanwhile, former senior state minister and Raksha Khadse's father Eknath Khadse said: "Criminals enjoy political from patronage local politicians. I have raised the issue in the legislature several times...the state government has failed to address such incidents. In Maharashtra women had to ensure their own safety as there is no faith in the police"

"If an incident like the molestation of a Union Minister's daughter can happen in Maharashtra, how will women and girls from ordinary families get justice?" Raksha Khadse's sister-in-law Rohini Khadse asked.

Talking to media persons, Maharashtra Congress Maharashtra president Harshawardhan Sapkal said: "The fact that the Harshawardhan daughter of a Union Minister is molested by thugs and security guards was extremely worrving. It shows that women and girls are not safe in the

# Omar holds pre-budget meeting with allies

**MOHIT KANDHARI** ■ JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah is all set to present the first budget of the newly elected government after the Abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A during the month long budget session beginning from March 3 in Iammu.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha will be addressing the maiden meeting of the budget session on day one. Elaborate security arrangements have been made in and around the civil secretariat complex which houses the J and K Legislative Assembly.

Ahead of the session separate meetings were convened by the leaders of the legislative parties in Jammu to chalk out their floor strategy. Later, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah chaired a joint meeting of the alliance partners at his official residence in Jammu.

Congress legislative party leader G A Mir and CPI(M) MLA M Y Tarigami, also attended the meeting to ensure smooth functioning of the house.

The Congress legislature party also met separately at Residency Road party headquarters. Interacting with the media in

Jammu Congress legislature party leader GA Mir hoped that the budget being presented by the government will address the popular public issues and will also lay the foundation for the implementation of manifesto during financial year 2025-26.

He said the government has already passed a resolution for restoration of statehood in the last session held in Srinagar and so the delay is from the BJP-led central government which has made repeated promises to the people of J&K on the subject. "When the prime minister chaired the All Party Meeting of J&K leaders (in June 2021), we were all witness to his statement that reorganization will be followed by delimitation, elections and

then restoration of statehood. The centre should have fulfilled its promise after the formation of the popular government in J&K but the delay is on their side," he said. Mir said the Congress has been repeatedly saying that restoration of statehood was the biggest issue during last year's assembly elections and "INDIA alliance is committed

to it. Asked about PDP planning to introduce bills to push for the prohibition of alcohol and regularization of seek property rights of residents on public land, he said it is up to the house to decide on such bills.

Emerging out of the meeting NC MLA Aijaz Jaan told reporters the Chief Minister directed the legislators to address the issues of common citizens keeping in mind their hardships. Jaan claimed that the CM also discussed the budget proposals which are likely to be public centric and figured in their party manifesto during the 2024

# Forty two more firearms surrendered in Manipur

The

 $F_{
m and\ cartridges\ have\ been}^{
m orty-two\ more\ firearms}$ surrendered by the public in five districts of ethnic strifetorn Manipur, police said on Sunday. firearms

surrendered in Imphal West and East, Churachandpur, Bishnupur and Tamenglong districts on Saturday, a police officer said.

Five firearms, including two pistols, six grenades and over 75 cartridges were surrendered in Bishnupur were district.

country-made Seventeen guns, nine 'pompi' (locally mortars), made and cartridges were surrendered at Kaimai police station in Tamenglong district.
At least 10 firearms and

cartridges were surrendered at Yaingangpokpi, Porompat, Churachandpur and Lamsang police stations, the police officer said.

During search operations at Sairemkhul in Imphal West district, an INSAS LMG with one magazine loaded with 20 rounds of ammunition, one AK-56 rifle, three SLR rifles, one SMG 9mm carbine, one .303 rifle, one DBBL gun, four grenades without detonators, one Chinese hand grenade and other articles were also seized on Saturday.

Security forces dismantled two illegal bunkers at Mark Hill under Thingsat hill range in Kangpokpi district. Another three illegal bunkers were dismantled at Wakan hill range in the adjoining area in Kangpokpi and Imphal East districts on Saturday.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla had on February 20 urged warring groups to voluntarily surrender weapons robbed from security forces and other illegally held firearms within seven days. During the seven-day period.

more than 300 firearms were surrendered by the public, primarily in the valley districts.

Later, he extended the deadline for the surrender of looted and illegal firearms till 4 pm on March 6 following demands by people from both hill and valley areas for

# Ganga water in Bihar unfit for human use: state pollution board

PTI PATNA

he water of the Ganga river bathing at most places in the state due to the presence of a higher value of "bacteriological population", according to the Bihar Economic Survey 2024-

The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) monitors the water quality of the Ganga at 34 locations in the state on a fortnightly basis, officials said.

According to the Economic Survey recently tabled in the state assembly, "The water quality of Ganga indicates the presence of a higher value of bacteriological population (total coliform and faecal coliform). This is mainly due to discharge the

sewage/domestic waste water from cities located on the banks of Ganga and her tributaries." The survey cited the latest

water quality test results of the

"The other parameters... pH (acidity or basicity), dissolved oxygen and bio-chemical oxygen demand (BOD) have been observed within the prescribed limit in the river and her tributaries in Bihar. indicating that water is fit for aquatic life, wildlife propagation, fisheries and

irrigation," it said. Important towns located on the banks of the river include Buxar, Chapra (Saran), Dighwara, Sonepur, Maner, Danapur, Patna, Fatuha. Bakhtiyarpur, Barh, Mokama, Khagaria, Begusarai, Lakhisarai, Manihari, Munger, Jamalpur, Sultanganj, Bhagalpur and Kahalgaon.

Reacting to the report, D K Shukla, Chairman of the BSPCB, told PTI that the presence of a higher value of bacteriological population in the Ganga river is a matter of concern.

Faecal coliform bacteria are found in excreta that contaminates water through untreated sewage. The higher the level, the higher is the presence of disease-causing pathogens in water. According to the CPCB standards, the permissible limit of faecal ml).

coliform is 2,500 MPN/100 ml," Shukla said. At most places, the presence of

total coliform and faecal coliform in the Ganga is much higher, indicating it is not fit for bathing, he said.
The BSPCB is taking measures

to ensure that sewage treatment plants (STP) in the state function properly, the senior official said. "We have directed the authorities concerned to

ensure that construction work on certain STPs in the state is completed at the earliest," Shukla said. "The BSPCB is also monitoring

the effluent/sewage quality generated from the industrial units as well as STP/sewerage drains. Presently, 2,561 water/effluent/sewage samples from different sources have been collected by the board," the survey said.

As per the latest data of the BSPCB related to the quality of the Ganga accessed by PTI, the level of faecal coliform measured at Kachchi Dargah-Bidupur Bridge was 3,500 MPN/100 ml, Gulabi Ghat (5,400 MPN/100 ml) and Triveni Ghat (5,400 MPN/100

## Fadnavis denies rumors of rift in BJP-led Mahayuti

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

head of the budget session Ahead of the budget session of the Maharashtra Legislature, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday denied that there were any differences or the battle of oneupmanship among the ruling BJP-led MahaYuti allies.

Talking to media persons after the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) boycotted a tea meeting hosted by him, Fadnavis said that there were no differences among the ruling BJP and its allies -Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar).

Fadnavis came up with the clarification in the presence of his deputy chief ministers Eknath Shinde of the Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar of the NCP. Fadnávis' statement came should be seen in the context

of a claim made by the rival Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena's chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut that Shinde had held a secret meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah during which he ained against Fadnavis compl and sought the chief minister's Shinde said

chair but was rebuked by Shah, who reportedly asked the deputy chief minister (Shinde) to merge Shiv Sena with BIP before making any such demand.

On his part, Shinde contested Raut's claim and said that journalists should verify facts before they file their news reports. "This is the second session of

this government (after the winter session in Nagpur). Only we (Devendra Fadnavis and I) have changed roles. But yes, Ajit Dada's role is constant...We have started many projects which were stopped by the MVA government. Ajit Dada will present the Maharashtra budget," Shinde said. 'No matter how many

breaking stories you may file, but we (Mahayuti) will not break. Where is the cold war the media persons are speaking about ? There is nothing like that. In this scorching heat Maharashtra... how is a cold war possible?...things are thanda thanda cool

# Youths into excessive social media suffer sexual ailments

From page 1

He emphasised that under circumstances, normal individuals form natural bonds with their partners real-world based on interactions. However, excessive exposure to digitally curated and exaggerated content distorts these perceptions. "The brain becomes wired to seek heightened stimuli, leading to diminished attraction toward real-life relationships. This can manifest as psychogenic erectile dysfunction (ED), where the problem is psychological rather than physiological," he added. While much of the focus is on

young men facing sexual dysfunction, experts stress benchmarks. "We are seeing

digital consumption is equally troubling for women. Many young women develop body image disorders due to the unrealistic portrayals of beauty and intimacy in online videos and photos.

"They start comparing themselves to influencers and digitally altered images, leading to self-doubt, anxiety, and a decline in sexual confidence," Prof. Tripathi noted. "This not only affects their mental well-being but also their ability to form healthy relationships."

Dr Anjali Sharma, a clinical psychologist added that the widespread use of filters, photo editing, and AIgenerated beauty standards has created unrealistic that the impact of excessive more cases of body

dysmorphia and low selfesteem, particularly among young women who feel pressured to match these unattainable standards," she

**FOR** POLICY INTERVENTION AND AWARENESS: Experts at KGMU are calling for urgent regulatory measures to control early exposure to smartphones and explicit content on digital platforms. Prof. Tripathi stressed the importance of a well-defined policy to mitigate these growing concerns.

"Unrestricted access explicit content is exacerbating the situation. Parents, educators, and policymakers need to step in to establish boundaries and create awareness about responsible

consumption," he urged. Additionally, Dr. Sharma highlighted the role of media literacy programs in schools and colleges. "Young people need to be taught how to critically assess the content they consume. Understanding the difference between digital exaggeration and reality is crucial in preventing these negative effects."

With digital consumption patterns increasingly shaping youth behavior, experts warn that unchecked exposure to explicit content could have long-term consequences on mental and sexual health. They emphasize the need for awareness, parental supervision, and broader societal intervention to safeguard the well-being of the vounger generation.

# **Zoos battling reduced funding**

"Habitat requirements and ambiguities taxonomic constrain the management of species like the Indian Wild Himalayan and Salamander which have shown minimal growth decades despite conservation efforts," the committee noted.

It said that some birds and reptiles, like vultures (Whiterumped and Indian Vultures), have seen population growth. However, problems such as unsexed individuals and poor use of founder stock limit genetic diversity.

Certain species, like the Nicobar Pigeon and Redcrowned Roofed Turtle, have small, stable populations but need better management. "Species like the Shaheen Falcon and Malabar Pied Hornbill have yet to see any structured conservation efforts, with populations primarily consisting of solitary or rescued individuals," the committee

They said that many species, such as the Indian Giant Squirrel and Indian Pangolin, are declining due to low

breeding success and poor tracking. The Himalayan Salamander has shown recent growth but only at one facility without structured

management. The committee said that small populations, poor demographic and genetic monitoring, improper husbandry practices, inadequate technical

supervision, poor documentation, lack of animal identification, poor adherence to breeding protocols and lack of coordination between zoos are common challenges across all groups of animals.

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And that during this time she had an interest in an offshore Singapore consulting firm, Agora, and it was only two weeks after she was appointed as SEBI chairperson that she transferred the shares to her husband.

However, in her defence, Mudhabi Buch had said "all disclosures as required have already been furnished to SEBI". The SEBI code for board members mandates that they disclose their interests which may conflict with their duties, along with transactions of family members.

# On Ramazan, Israel cuts off aid to Gaza

From page 1

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office.

Foreign Minister Gideon Saar in return for the release of said Israel was prepared to more Palestinian prisoners, a negotiate over the next phase of the ceasefire but was insisting on more hostages being freed during the talks. He said Israel had received a side letter from the Biden administration saying there was no automatic transition between the phases of the

truce. fulfilled all our commitments (under Phase 1) until the very last day, which was yesterday," he told a press conference. "Our position is that during negotiations, hostages should be released."

Hamas warned that any attempt to delay or cancel the ceasefire agreement would "humanitarian with Hamas.

consequences" for the hostages and reiterated that the only way to free them was through implementing the existing deal, which did not specify a timeline for freeing the remaining captives.
Hamas has said it is willing to

free the remaining hostages all at once in Phase 2, but only permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces. An Egyptian official said Hamas and Egypt would not accept a new proposal aimed at returning the remaining hostages without ending the war. The official noted that the agreement had called on the two sides to begin

early February. The official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said mediators were trying to resolve the dispute. There was no immediate comment from Oatar, which along with Egypt has served as a key mediator

negotiations over Phase 2 in

CEASEFIRE HAS BEEN

MARRED BY DISPUTES Under the first, six-week phase of the ceasefire, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces pulled back from most of Gaza and Israel allowed a surge of humanitarian aid to

But the first phase was marred by repeated disputes, with each side accusing the other of violations.

Israeli strikes killed dozens of Palestinians who the military said had approached its forces or entered areas in violation of the truce. Hamas paraded the captives - some of whom were emaciated - before crowds in public spectacles that Israel and the United Nations said were cruel and degrading. Hamas said Israel's aid suspension was another violation, saying the ceasefire and aid deliveries were

supposed to continue as the

sides negotiated the second

phase of the deal.

Israel was accused of blocking aid throughout the war Israel imposed a complete siege on Gaza in the opening

days of the war and only eased it later under US pressure. UN agencies and aid groups accused Israel of not facilitating enough aid during 15 months of war, and the administration Biden repeatedly pressed it to do more. Experts warned on several occasions that hunger was widespread in Gaza and that there was a risk of

famine. The International Criminal Court said there was reason to believe Israel had used "starvation as a method of warfare" when it issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu last year. The allegation is also central to South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide.

Israel has denied the accusations and rejected both court actions as being biased against it. Israel says it has allowed enough aid to enter and blamed shortages on

what it said was the UN's inability to distribute it. It also accused Hamas of siphoning off aid.

The war began when Hamasled militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostage. The militants are currently holding 59 hostages, 32 of whom are believed to be dead, after releasing most of the rest in two ceasefire agreements. Israel's offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says more than half of those killed were women and children but does not specify how many of the dead were combatants. Israeli bombardment and

ground operations pounded large areas of the strip to rubble and at the height of the conflict displaced some 90 per cent of the population of 2.3 million Palestinians. The war has left most of Gaza's population dependent on international aid for food and other essentials.

## Chamoli avalance rescue death toll... An Mi-17 helicopter is waiting in Dehradun to

From page 1

members said.

The avalanche hit the BRO camp between Mana and Badrinath on Friday, burying 54 workers inside eight containers and a shed. Earlier, it was believed that the total number of trapped labourers was 55 but one of them was on unauthorised leave and had reached home safely. By Saturday evening, 50 workers trapped under the snow were pulled out and

four of them had died. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami visited the Uttarakhand State Emergency Operation Centre here to take an update on the rescue operation.

"The ground penetrating radar (GPR) system is being sent to the avalanche site and the help of modern tools like thermal imaging cameras and victim locating cameras is being taken to trace the labourers. The weather may turn bad on Monday again. The effort is to trace the missing on Sunday itself," the chief minister

In a social media post, Dhami said he has instructed officials to expedite the ongoing operation. "The Indian Army, ITBP, NDRF, SDRF and other relief and rescue teams are working on a war footing at the site of the incident," he said.

Chamoli District Magistrate Sandeep Tiwari said the search operation is expected to gain pace as the weather is clear and the GPR system from Delhi is expected to arrive here any moment to aid the efforts.

fly the GPR system to the avalanche site, he said. State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams with sniffer dogs are at the avalanche site to help in the search and rescue efforts, he said. Lt Gen Anindya Sengupta, GOC-in C, Central Command, and Lt Gen D G Mishra, GOC,

Uttar Bharat, are at the avalanche site to monitor the rescue operations. Six helicopters — three of the Indian Army Aviation Corps, two of the Indian Air Force

(IAF) and a civil chopper hired by the Army – have been engaged in the operation. Army officials said the rescue operation on Saturday was mostly carried out by the Army and IAF helicopters as the approach road was

blocked by snow at several points, making vehicular movement nearly impossible. The priority is to bring the rescued workers to the Army hospital in Jyotirmath and look for the four missing workers, they said. If weather permits, specialised RECCO radars, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), quadcopters and avalanche rescue dogs will be pressed into service to trace the missing

workers, Lt Gen. Sengupta said. "Everything depends on the weather," he added. More than 200 personnel from the disaster management authority, ITBP, BRO, NDRF, SDRF, IAF, district administration, health department and fire brigade are engaged in the rescue operations, he said.

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

Pritish Prime Minister Keir Starmer says Britain, 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 President Ukrainian Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Friday for being ungrateful for US sup-

port. 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



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 "It's going to be a damage lim- 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

Ukraine, protect European security, and secure our collective future."

The summit will also include leaders from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Canada, Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Romania. The Turkish foreign minister, NATO secretary-general and the presidents of the European Commission and European Council will also attend.

Zelenskyy received broad support from leaders across Europe after the White House fiasco, which was exceptional for featuring an attack on an ally — and because it was broadcast on live television. Starmer embraced Zelenskyy a get-together had been scheduled before the summit.

"As you heard from the cheers on the street outside, you have full backing across the United Kingdom," Starmer said. "We stand with you, with Ukraine, for as long as it may take."

Europe has been uneasy since Trump initiated direct peace talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had been isolated by most Western leaders since invading Ukraine

three years ago. The scramble to remain relevant and protect European interests as their once stalwart ally appeared to be cozying up to Putin was even more troubling when Trump called Zelenskyy a dictator and falsely said Ukraine started the

Meetings in recent days had provided some hope — until Zelenskyy's visit to the White House.

Visits to the Oval Office by French President Emmanuel Macron, who had declared his visit a "turning point", and Starmer were seen as steps in the right direction. The meetings were cordial and Trump even took a gentler tone toward Ukraine though he would not commit to providing US security guarantees and maintained Europe would need to provide peacekeeping troops.
Within 12 hours of Starmer's

return from Washington, the talk of peace seemed to collapse as Vice President JD Vance berated Zelenskyy for challenging Trump's assertions that Russian President Vladimir Putin could be trusted.

"Starmer did an impressive job of asserting Europe's agency in the war on Ukraine and conveying to President Trump that Europe is willing and able

to take a leading role in implementing any credible peace deal," said Rachel Ellehuus, director-general of Royal United Services Institute, a defence and security think

"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 legitimate for the US to shift its focus to dealing with China and Asia, also called for more defense spending as he called for unity among his neigh-bors. "We should have woken up earlier," Macron said. "I've been saying for years that we need a more sovereign, more united, more independent

# Private Iunar lander Blue Ghost aces moon touchdown

AP 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) awav.

"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

Blue Ghost — named after a rare US species of fireflies had its size and shape going for it. The squat four-legged lander stands 6-foot-6 (2 metres) tall and 11 feet (3.5 metres) wide, providing extra stability, moonwalkers, who got it caked according to the company.
Launched in mid-January from Florida, the lander carried 10

USD 101 million for the delivery, plus USD 44 million for the science and tech on board. It's the third mission under NASA's commercial lunar delivery programme, intended to ignite a lunar economy of competing private businesses

experiments to the moon for

NASA. The space agency paid

while scouting around before astronauts show up later this decade. Firefly's Ray Allensworth said the lander skipped over hazards including boulders to land safely. Allensworth said the team continued to analyse the data to figure out the lander's

zone in Mare Crisium. The demos should get two weeks of run time, before lunar daytime ends and the lander shuts down.

exact position, but all indica-

tions suggest it landed within

the 328-foot (100-metre) target

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

all over their spacesuits and equipment.

On its way to the moon, Blue Ghost beamed back exquisite pictures of the home planet. The lander continued to stun once in orbit around the moon, with detailed shots of the moon's gray pockmarked surface. At the same time, an onboard receiver tracked and acquired signals from the US GPS and European Galileo constellations, an encouraging step forward in navigation for future explorers.

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

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

**AP** ■ TEHRAN

Tran'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

Pezeshkian, who defended Hemmati, emphasised that the government is locked in a tough battle with the West. He called for greater unity and cooperation from Parliament to face these challenges. The decision comes amid rising tensions

over Iran's nuclear program and worsening relations with the West. Iran's economy has been severely affected by international sanctions, especially after the US withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal. In 2015, the rial was worth 32,000 to the dollar, but by the time Pezeshkian took office in July, it had plummeted to 584,000 to the dollar. Recently, it dropped even fur-ther, 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 confidence, causing many people to convert their savings into foreign currency, which in turn further devalued the rial. Hemmati acknowledged the tough economic climate during his five months in office, including a 10% reduction in inflation. However, he acknowledged that inflation remained high, standing at 35%. He assured lawmakers that his team was working hard to address the issue, but warned that the process would take time. This latest development is another chapter in Iran's ongoing political and economic struggles as the country continues to navigate a complex relationship with the international community.



A table is prepared for iftar, the fast-breaking meal, organized by the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), on the first day of Ramadan in the Jobar neighborhood

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

AP SEOUL

US aircraft carrier arrived A US aircrait carrier ...... in a show of force, days after North Korea test-launched cruise missiles to demonstrate its counterattack capabilities. The arrival of the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group at the South Korean port of Busan was meant to display a solid US-South Korean military alliance in the face of persistent North Korean threats, and boost interoperability of the allies' combined assets, the South Korean navy said in a statement. It said it was the first US aircraft carrier to travel to South Korea since June.

The deployment of the carrier is expected to infuriate North Korea, which views temporary deployments of such powerful US military assets as 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.

# Pope gets visit from Vatican secretary of state

**AP** ■ ROME

A stable Pope Francis had a Avisit Sunday from the Vatican secretary of state as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia, the Vatican said, but again skipped his weekly noon blessing to avoid even a brief public appearance from the hospital. Instead, the Vatican distributed

a message from the pope in which he thanked his doctors for their care and well-wishers for their prayers, and prayed again for peace in Ukraine and elsewhere.

"From here, war appears even more absurd," Francis said in the message, which he drafted in recent days from the Gemelli hospital, the Vatican said. Francis said he was living his

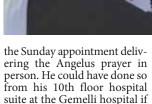
hospitalization as an experience of profound solidarity with people who are sick and suffering everywhere,
"I feel in my heart the blessing'

that is hidden within frailty, because it is precisely in these moments that we learn even more to trust in the Lord," Francis said in the text. "At the same time, I thank God

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

for giving me the opportunity

to share in body and spirit the



person. He could have done so from his 10th floor hospital suite at the Gemelli hospital if he were well enough. But many signs indicated he was recovering and improving.

"The night was quiet, the pope is still resting," the Vatican said in its Sunday update.
Cardinal Pietro Parolin and his chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, called on the pope Sunday morning, their second visit since Francis' February 14 hospitalisation, according to the Vatican spokesman, Matteo

Bruni. There were no details of what was discussed, but the mere visit suggested Francis' 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 sig-nificant 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

government under former

insurgent leader Ahmad al-

Sharaa, has been in control and

many fear that the country

could turn into an Islamic

state, although al-Sharaa has so

far promised to respect 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

a new flavour. This is the

Ramazan of victory and liber-

ation," said interim Minister of

Religious Affairs Hussam Haj-

Hussein in a televised state-

Most countries around the

world, including Saudi Arabia,

gious minorities.

Some restaurants and coffee Shops in Syria were closed during the day on Saturday while others opened as usual as observant Muslims began fast ing 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.

Associated Press journalists who toured Damascus on Saturday said some coffee shops were opened but had their windows closed to that people can't see who is inside. Insurgents led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, overthrew President Bashar Assad's secular government in early December ending the 54-year Assad familv dvnastv. Since then, Syria's new Islamist

Indonesia and Kuwait began observing Ramazan on Saturday, while a few other countries such as Malyasia and Japan, as well as some Shiite Muslims, will begin the fast on Sunday.

ment.

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 with a US-brokered ceasefire that went into effect in late November.

In the Gaza Strip, a fragile ceasefire deal, which has paused over 15 months of war between Israel and Hamas, nears the end of its first phase, and many Palestinians are 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 prohibi-tion of publicly breaking the fast, with violators facing imprisonment," said Damascus resident Munir Abdallah.

"This is something new, good and respectable, meaning that the rituals of Ramadan should be fully observed in all their aspects.

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 methodologies used to deter-

mine the start of the month.

# Government fails to find right candidate for BPCL top job

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After Hindustan PESB order. appointed chairman.

Petroleum Corporation It advised the administrative in November 2024. Limited (HPCL), the ministry "to choose an In June last year, PESB government headhunter appropriate course of interviewed eight struggled to find a suitable candidate for the top job at including the search cum Bharat Petroleum, as most selection applicants were narrow specialists multidisciplinary experience needed to run a large organisation.

candidates including BPCL director (finance) Vetsa PESB in May 2023 did not Ramakrishna Gupta and its make any recommendation director (refineries) S for the top post at Indian Oil Khanna but found none Corporation (IOC) and the suitable for the job of task was then entrusted to a chairman and managing search cum

further action for selection candidates, including committee," according to the order. lacking Incumbent G Krishnakumar

superannuates as chairman and managing director of BPCL on April 30 this year. The Public Enterprise BPCL is the fourth company Selection Board (PESB) last in the oil sector where PESB month interviewed a dozen couldn't find a suitable

> selection Bharat committee.

appointed chairman of IOC

eight 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-cum-

selection committee picked

Petroleum Corporation Ltd That panel picked Arvindar Arun Kumar Singh, the companies are not creating (BPCL), according to a Singh Sahney who was former chairman and leaders with wide exposure. managing director of BPCL, for that job.

board-level Most appointments at public sector companies are done basis on the recommendations of the PESB but the government headhunter has been struggling to find suitable candidates for top jobs that fell vacant since 2021 in the oil sector. 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

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

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

7,500 tonnes.

sector.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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 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 them multidisciplinary exposure.

IOC had a route called the department of business development where a refinery, finance or marketing person could get exposure to streams other than his core competence. This created tall leaders like Subir Raha, Prashanto Banerjee and several others after them, another official

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

explained.

"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

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

official said.

He was an executive director in the business development division, handling the This gave him multidisciplinary exposure. Another official said the situation at HPCL is the most grim as potential candidates have spent all of their professional careers in iust 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 of an outsider being appointed at HPCL or BPCL is not ruled out, sources

# FPIs withdraw ₹34,574 Crore from equities in Februrary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

"Elevated valuations of Indian equities, alongside concerns about corporate earnings growth, have led to a sustained outflow of FPIs," Vipul 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.

has resulted in the BSE's sector benchmark Sensex falling over six per cent year-to-date. The recent market sell-off has been influenced by rising United States (US) bond vields, 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. This issue is further compounded by falling commodity prices and reduced consumer spending, which adversely impact corporate profits and 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 The massive selling by FPIs 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 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. Wave Group, Agristo to invest ₹750 Crore in UP production line for export quality french fries at Bijnor," Chadha said. Wave Group and Belgium's Agristo NV will invest around ₹750

He said the total investment 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 markets.

The JV is into business to business (B2B) segment

"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, " said Chadha.

Princess Astrid of the Kingdom of Belgium, Finance Minister of Uttar

Pradesh Suresh Kumar both domestic and export Khanna and Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh Manoj Singh attended the 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 firm has helped in enhancing farmers income of this region, Chadha said.
"We are helping farmers in accessing good quality seeds for potato production. We are 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 have been provided livelihood sustainable opportunities through the plant's interventions.
The productivity of potato

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

markets, with North America, Middle East, South East Asia and Japan being the key destinations overseas.

Filip Wallays, Co-CEO of Agristo, said, "The Bijnor plant is a testament of how results can be achieved when vision and technical expertise are combined. Partnering with Masa Global Food has allowed us to contribute in a meaningful manner to the rapidly evolving Indian agriculture and food processing sectors and

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.

ensure development of all

The joint venture firm is also assisting farmers in this region in farm 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 community.

# Radico Khaitan expects ₹500 Crore sales in FY26: MD

PTI NEW DELHI

ncouraged by the ongoing Epremiumisation in the alcoholic beverage (alcobev) actually 25 frames actually 25 frames are perfectly actually 25 frames actu segment, Radico Khaitan expects sales of ₹500 Crore from its luxury brands, including single malt 'Rampur' and Jaisalmer Indian Craft Gin, in the next fiscal, its Managing Director Abhishek Khaitan

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 better."

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 luxury 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," Khaitan said. 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 the momentum to continue. Tailwinds from growing per

capita income and young demographics, such as India 20 Million new people company maintain 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 segment.

"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 by the Indian liquor companies, including Radico Khaitan will help them reduce costs.

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 added.

In the single malt and premium end, Radico Khaitan competes with Haryana-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 PTI NEW DELHI

company focused on the electrical systems of its On the financial front, and assessment market, has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to raise ₹700 Crore through an initial public offering (IPO).
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
Dhananjaya Sudhanva,
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 Excelsoft Technologies of land and construction of Surala Net Co Ltd, Excel public School and The software-as-a-service (SaaS) upgradation and external Chartered Quality Institute. existing facility in Mysore. funding upgradation of the company's IT infrastructure and for general corporate

purposes. With over two decades of experience, Excelsoft provides technology-based solutions across diverse learning and assessment segments through longterm contracts clients enterprise

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 clients are Pearson Education, Inc, AQA Education, Colleges of Excellence, NxGen Asia PTE LTD, 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 Excelsoft reported a revenue from operations at ₹198.3 Crore in fiscal year 24, with a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹12.75 Crore. As per the draft papers,

there are no listed 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 specialised, 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) Services, said. From macroeconomic space, ctivity of foreign investors this week, analysts said.

Markets may face volatile trends going ahead as investor sentiment continue to remain weak due to escalating trade tariff concerns and foreign fund outflows, experts noted. 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 Research, Geojit Financial

US tariff, FIIs key drivers for markets

PMI data during the week would also be tracked by investors. We expect market to continue

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

subside," Vinod Nair, Head of 2.80 per cent, and the Nifty tanked 671.2 points or 2.94 per cent.

"Uncertainty often weighs

tariff related developments, announcement of HSBC more than the actual event, and global trends and trading manufacturing and services the market is currently grappling with potential trade Additionally, persistent FII Institutional (Foreign 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 while employment is increasing in India, real wages for regular jobs have not kept pace with inflation over the

past 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 in 2017-18.

"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 when 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 everyone needs skills only to become an AI (artificial intelligence) or electronic engineer. We also have to think about those children

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 member said.

"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

#### 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.

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)

Bharti Airtel's market valuation

valuation diminished by ₹29,718.99 Crore to ₹6,14,236.97 Crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank slumped

Crore ₹20,775.78 ₹8,49,803.90 Crore. Hindustan Unilever's mcap declined by ₹11,700.97 Crore to

₹5,14,983.41 Crore. The valuation of ITC dipped ₹7,882.86 Crore to ₹4,93,867.57

# YOGASANAS FOR BELLY FAT LOSS

#### **SURYA NAMAKSARA:**

A series of 12 asanas combined to form a perfect combination we call sun salutation. It is also known as the mother of all asnas. It starts with namaste and stretching the abdomen and then stretching the hamstrings bending forward and so on! The sequence we all know it, if you don't and are completely new to it, just google it. It will burn the fat faster resulting

in a smooth and toned belly shape that every person desires when roaming beachside. There is and never be another substitute for Surya Namaskar.

It helps in overall blood circulation in the body and stretching abdomen muscles resulting in good appetite and reduced bowel

# **Tasty** Recipe Using **Pistachio**

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 by preping the recipes:

Chef Sanjeev Kapoor, Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake is by Chef Shivesh Bhatia You can have a taste of all these dishes

#### BY YASH GUPTA

most common problem the among elderly as well as the youth, the people and their lifestyle are forcing them to walk and have poor posture, which results in low confidence and prone to diseases. Due to sitting all day in front of a computer and workstations, it is obvious the belly from the button will say hello before you can speak. So, if you think there is a remedy that will burn the fat without you moving an inch, everyone would do it. It's better to choose your hard, either regret or discipline. Here we will look at the top 5

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

yoga asanas to reduce belly fat quickly. The flat-

ter the stomach the more

fabulous the life. Health is

the new currency of the

era. Make sure you own

it and keep the wealth as

#### NAUKASANA

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

empty stomach and women on periods must avoid the asana. Make sure to continue breathing while holding onto the posture and relax in Shavasana verv





#### PADA CHAKRASANA

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

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

PADA SANCHALANASANA

Let me simplify, cycling. You don't have

to go for cycling outside. Just relax and

lie down on your back place your palms

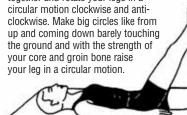
diamond shape under your lower back,

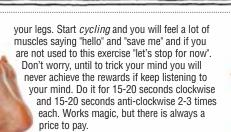
recommendation to put both your palms in a

on the ground for support (personal

gives you comfort) and

together and rotate your legs in a circular motion clockwise and anticlockwise. Make big circles like from the ground and with the strength of your core and groin bone raise





When performing Pada chalanasana keep in mind to intain proper alignment of your spine, core muscles & leg lower back.

#### Pick Me Up Pista Bomb By Chef Sanjeev Kapoor

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

#### **INGREDIENTS**

1 cup American Pistachios;√ 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 tbsps water and cook till the sugar melts. Add rolled oats, puffed amaranth, and

coarsely processed pistachios. Add honey and cinnamon powder and mix till well combined. Transfer on to a plate and allow to cool slightly

 Take small portions of the mixture with greased hands and roll each portion into



#### <u>Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake</u> By Chef Shivesh Bhatia

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

#### **INGREDIENTS-**

- 1 tbsp butter;1 cup kunafa dough;2 cups pistachios; 1 tbsp oil; • 3 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 into a paste.

with oil and icing sugar.

- Combine this pistachio paste with the roasted kunafa to make the filling for the
- 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.

#### • Work on yourself, because it is the only thing that will stay Work on yourself because it is the only thing

- you are working on at the end of the day. Work on yourself because you have to leave
- a legacy behind
- Work on yourself because this is how vou win the mind.



**PURN-PAVANMUKTASANA** 

to burn belly fat is to perform

pavanmuktasana, as the name

Another wonderful and effective way

suggests yes you thought that right,

it not only promotes belly fat loss but

helps in gastric issues in the system

Simply lie down on your back bring both your knees to your chest and

place your arms around your legs like you are giving a hug, keep

breathing and duck your nose in

position for 20-30 seconds and right

before releasing the stretch, you may

rock like a child back and forth

and side to side. It will give a

good massage to your spine

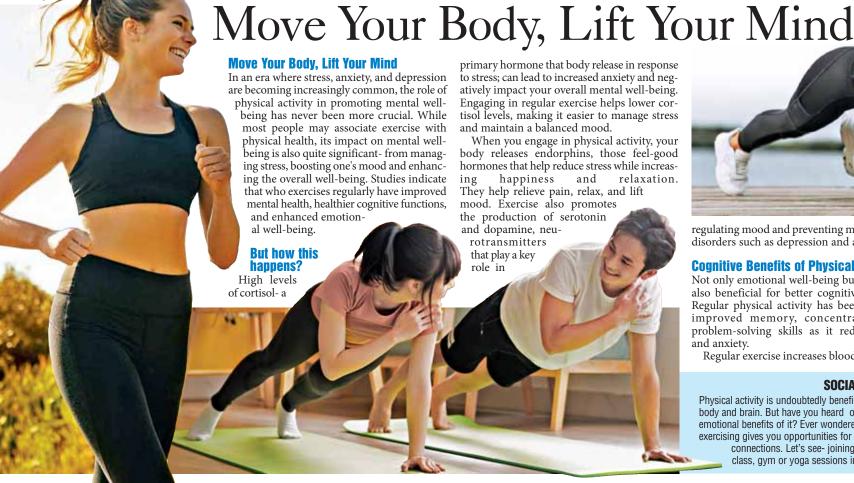
and previously mentioned in

healthy life. People with knee

problems must do it under

earlier articles, a healthy spine

between your knees. Hold this



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

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

# India outplay Kiwis, to meet Australia in semis Vidarbha wins

hreyas Iyer's pressure-defying fifty and Varun Chakravarthy's spin masterclass helped India script a 44-run win over New Zealand here on Sunday to tog Group A, setting up the seminal accient Australia in the Champions against Australia in the Champions Trophy. Iyer made a composed 79 off

98 balls under pressure but New Zealand, led by pacer Mark Henry (5/42), managed to stifle India to an under-par 249 for

Chasing 250 was not a tall order for New Zealand's capable batting unit but they struggled against India's spin quartet led by Chakravarthy (5/42) to be all out for 205 in 45.3

CHAMPIONS TROPHY overs. Kane Williamson's gritty 81 went in vain.
India will face Australia, who

finished second in Group B, in the first semifinal here on Tuesday while the Kiwis play South Africa in the other semifinal in Lahore on Wednesday.
As they have been doing throughout

this tournament, the Indian spinners placed efficiency ahead of wizardry, and bowled in a manner suited to the conditions.

Ravindra Jadeja found massive turn off the pitch but the New Zealand batters were done in by the effort from Chakravarthy who relentlessly targeted the stumps.

Spinners took over once Hardik Pandya got rid of Rachin Ravindra

Williamson, who was dropped on 17 by stumper KL Rahul off Axar Patel, played a refined innings full of placements and elegance, but there hardly was any support for him from the other end.

There was a 44-run alliance between him and Daryl Mitchell for third wicket, but just as it was blooming Kuldeep Yadav trapped the latter in front.

They lost Tom Latham (14), Glenn Phillips (12) and Michael Bracewell (2) in quick succession, however, Williamson however, Williamson remained unruffled by

the rumblings. He used soft hands for deft placement of balls through the gaps, but two lofted cover drives off Iadeia for fours adorned his innings like bright

diamonds. But Axar deceived an on-charge Williamson with a slightly fuller and slanted delivery, and Rahul just had to remove the bails from the stumps. The dismissal effectively sealed the match in favour of India.

Earlier, Iyer shared a well-paced 98 runs alliance with Axar (42 off 61 balls) for the fourth wicket and Hardik (45 off 45) played a quickfire innings towards the end to help India survive a top-order meltdown. It was a slightly different situation for Iyer as in the last few matches, the top three batters had given him the cushion of runs. It had enabled him to bat with some degree of



freedom in those matches.

But here he had to build the innings from the scratch and he did that job with perfection while making fifty off 75 balls with a single off Ravindra. The natural flair was on show on occasions as Iyer once lofted pacer Will O'Rourke for a six over long on and Axar gave him excellent company on a rather slow

But Axar departed against the flow of the game when his attempt to

scoop Ravindra over short fine leg ended in the hands of Williamson. A century was there for the taking for Iver but a feeble pull off O'Rourke was gobbled by up Will Young inside the covers.

Rahul, who now bats at a rather inexplicable No. 6 slot, looked promising while making 23 off 29 balls that contained a brilliant hit over long-on for a six off Ravindra. But Latham latched on to a lovely catch behind the stumps off the edge

off left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, who once again came up with a good spell that contained a series of speed off balls at just over 70 kmph.

Those dismissals hurt India but Hardik, who produced some beefy hits, ensured that India reached near the 250-mark. Before Iyer's rescue act and Hardik's fire, India were tottering at 30 for 3 with skipper Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli getting out cheaply.

collection," the New Zealander said. World No. 2 Jeeno Thitikul fought hard to chase Ko down, but her charge fell just short. Ieeno 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

9-under but couldn't maintain the pressure. Charley Hull, just one shot 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,

two birdies in the first four

holes to trail Ko by a stroke at

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

# third Ranji **Trophy title**

**PTI** ■ NAGPUR

magnificent run in domestic cricket 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 matches giving them 40 points. Unlike Kerala who also had luck on their side in the knockouts when they beat and Kashmir Iammu (quarterfinal) and Gujarat (semifinal) by barest of margins and progressed on basis of firstinnings leads, Vidarbha grabbed outright wins.

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 286 runs. 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 spinbowling all-rounder in making for India. The 24-year-old Yash Rathod, a bespectacled lefthanded 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 well. The veteran Nair, who had joined Vidarbha for this season, not only led their charge in the Viiay Hazare Trophy with five tons but also finished as the fourth highest run-getter in the Ranji Trophy, making 863 runs The 21-year-old Malewar, who

in nine matches at 53.93 with four tons and two fifties. In the final, Nair struck 86 and 135. 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.

# Praggnanandhaa scores second victory in Prague Masters

**PTI** ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa scored his second victory on the trot,

outwitting Vincent Keymer Germany compatriot Chithambaram at the top on three points after the end of Keymer, meanwhile, r the fourth round of the Prague Masters here.

Arayindh survived some 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 two leaders pitted against the race for the title will be each other and between the two Indians only with five rounds still to come.

a month back Almost Keymer had beaten Praggnanandhaa in the Tata beaten Steel Masters and the Indian

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

Keymer was caught off guard ent Keymer in the middlegame.

to join Praggnanandhaa went for the trade of queens and got his

> on time and wasted some moves moving his rook back and forth to just draw. The 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. The players eventually arrived at a theoretically drawn rook and pawns endgame where an extra pawn for Shankland did not matter much.

> The next round will see the Praggnanadhaa will play 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 Asia's major to my major

**PTI** ■ SINGAPORE

Lydia Ko finally conquered the LPGA's HSBC Women's Championship, clinching her first title at her 11th attempt with a dominant four-stroke win over Ayaka Furue and Jeeno Thitikul in 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"

and "legendary" players. Richards, a long-time admirer

of Kohli's indomitable spirit

and passion for the game, also

hailed the India batter for

silencing critics through

performances on the field. "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

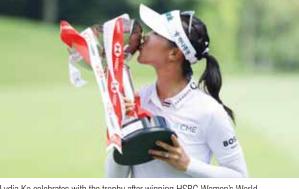
character that we are speaking

about," said Richards, a

governing council member for the International Master

League, during a virtual

PTI MUMBAI



Lydia Ko celebrates with the trophy after winning HSBC Women's World 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

my game." "I started off really steady, and "It's exciting to finally add

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

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

Kohli reminds me of myself

Asked about batters he

admires, the former West Indies captain said Kohli

"A lot of batsmen... Before you

reminds him of himself.

way," he added.

Kohli's energy on the field. "His energy reflects his passion. He goes to show you that his involvement in the

you know, didn't really put myself in trouble that much. I think that was going to be the

key for today." Kos previous best finish here was a lone second place in

# Viv Richards praises Kohli, calls him 'legendary' player

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 confident at all times and whenever it needs to be aggressive, and confront opponents, you need guys like that."

"I appreciate seeing guys who, had people like Sachin



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 from the fact that they saw

believes, very passionate some very good player," he about the game. You never said. 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 with 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

"I will never make 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 Kohit

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

Real Madrid stumbled in the State of the Sta 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 Rodríguez and Madrid 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

away from us," Ancelotti said. "This is a hard blow, and we have to react. Today we didn't play well."

is now struggling with just one victory its last five rounds, a poor run that includes a defeat at modest Espanyol. Next for Madrid: Tuesday's Champions League round-of-

16 game against Atletico.

Madrid had led the league but

Isco torments old team Isco left Madrid three years ago, having helped it win five Champions League titles before he lost his starting job and then struggled to get off the bench. But Madrid might wish it had him back after the 32-year-old initiative and the result got midfielder was the most



decisive player on the field at and a million different ways it the Benito Villamarin. Isco, however, shared the credit for the win with his teammates.

can hurt you, so if it weren't for the hard work of the entire team we wouldn't have been "Madrid has the best players able to do this," Isco said, before Madrid started strong and them ahead from the spot.

that he was still "grateful" for his time at

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

looked ready to romp when Mbappé played Ferland Mendy through and the left back squared the ball for Brahim to score.

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 down, Courtois had to make a 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 defending as the hosts frustrated any thoughts of a Madrid rally after Isco put

"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, including midfielders William Carvahlo and Marc Roca.

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