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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 against former chairperson of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Madhabi Puri Buch, SEBI whole-time members and two top officials of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) for alleged stock market fraud, regulatory violations and corruption.

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

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

necessitating an investigation.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

action on his complaint.

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

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

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

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

were not holding their respective positions at the relevant point of time, the court allowed the application without issuing any notice or granting any opportunity to SEBI to place the facts on record," the SEBI stated in its statement.

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

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

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

Hindenburg's report had alleged that as a whole-time member of SEBI, Buch was in communication managers of offshore funds, and wrote to India Infoline to redeem the units in the fund. Continued on page 2



Chamoli avalanche rescue death toll rises to eight

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

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

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

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

possible inclement weather on Monday, officials said.

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

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

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Frequent trips abroad land IPS officer in soup

PNS HYDERABAD

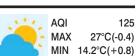
The Andhra Pradesh government on Sunday Andhra Pradesh suspended senior IPS officer PV Sunil Kumar for allegedly making repeated foreign visits without prior permission during the previous YSRCP regime. In a government order, Chief Secretary K Vijayanand stated that Kumar, a DGP-rank officer awaiting 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 All India Service (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969, the Government of Andhra Pradesh hereby places P V Sunil Kumar, IPS, under suspension with immediate effect," said the Chief Secretary in the order.

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

Continued on page 2

WEATHER



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 witnessing is internal turmoil. In a major decision on Sunday, BSP supremo Mayawati removed her nephew, Akash Anand, from all party positions. This comes just days after she expelled Akash's father-inlaw, Ashok Siddharth, from the party.

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

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

no significance when it comes to the party and the Ambedkarite movement," she 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 the BSP with full commitment and dedication until her last breath.

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

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

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

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

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



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

On Ramazan, Israel cuts off aid to Gaza

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

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

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

dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout and a lasting ceasefire. An Israeli official said the

decision to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration. There was no immediate

comment from the United Hundreds of aid trucks have

entered Gaza daily since the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, and it was unclear what the immediate impact of the aid cutoff would be ISRAEL SAYS THE NEW

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

Continued on page 2

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 around a decade ago, a government panel says that persistent gaps in fun species management hinder their overall success.

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

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

require not only enhanced funding allocation but also the comprehensive frameworks, adoption of standardised protocols, and



Photo: The Pioneer

improvements in genetic and demographic management

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

species identification, such as with the Alpine Musk Deer and Himalayan Serow, make

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

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

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

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Youths into excessive social media suffer sexual ailments

BISWAJEET BANERJEE LUCKNOW

onsumption 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 (KGMŬ) in Lucknow. The university's psychiatry department has observed a concerning trend, with nearly 90 per cent of patients aged 16 to 25 seeking treatment for sexual health issues identified as heavy social media users. Experts at KGMU attribute this rise to excessive exposure to unrealistic digital content, which is altering brain responses and diminishing sensitivity

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

their day scrolling through reels, shorts, and explicit images. This continuous exposure conditions their brains to expect exaggerated and often unattainable forms of intimacy, making them less sensitive to real-life relationships," Prof. Tripathi explained. Continued on page 2 PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

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

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

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

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

This happens only in from the groom Mohit's Judaula village. At around 2 o'clock in the night,

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

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

According to the bride's father Sevaram, he had sent the marriage invitation 'Lagan' for his daughter on February 23. At that time, he had given a

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,

other household items but the

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

The very next day on February 26, panchayat of Bhangrola and

bride.

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

procession returned without the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Daughter of Union minister molested in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

n a shocking development that embarrassed the BJP-led MahaYuti government on the eve of the start of crucial budget session of the Legislature, Maharashtra Union Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs Raksha Khadse's teenage was allegedly daughter 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 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 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 BJP 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 BJP -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. The photos of the person with Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Khadse surfaced in social

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

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

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 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhitva. Protection of 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 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 Harshawardhan president Sapkal said: "The fact that the daughter of a Union Minister is molested by thugs and security guards was extremely worrying. It shows that women and girls are not safe in the

Omar Abdullah holds prebudget meeting with allies

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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

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, Omar Minister Chief 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

The water of the Ganga river

I in Bihar is not fit for

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,

According to the Economic

Survey recently tabled in the state assembly, "The water

quality of Ganga indicates the

presence of a higher value of

(total coliform and faecal

coliform). This is mainly due to

discharge

sewage/domestic waste water

from cities located on the

banks of Ganga and her

The survey cited the latest

water quality test results of the BSPCB.

population

PTI ■ PATNA

officials said.

bacteriological

tributaries."

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 implementation of during manifesto 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 be followed by delimitation, elections and

Ganga water in Bihar unfit for

human use: state pollution board

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

propagation, fisheries and

Important towns located on

the banks of the river include

Dighwara, Sonepur, Maner, Danapur, Patna, Fatuha,

Bakhtiyarpur, Barh, Mokama,

Lakhisarai, Manihari, Munger,

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

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

Bhagalpur and Kahalgaon.

wildlife

(Saran),

Khagaria,

Sultanganj,

life,

irrigation," it said.

Buxar, Chapra

Begusarai,

Jamalpur,

concern.

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

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

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

coliform is 2,500 MPN/100

At most places, the presence of

total coliform and faecal

coliform in the Ganga is much

higher, indicating it is not fit for

The BSPCB is taking measures

to ensure that sewage

treatment plants (STP) in the

state function properly, the

'We have directed the

authorities concerned to

ensure that construction work

on certain STPs in the state is

completed at the earliest,

The BSPCB is also monitoring

the effluent/sewage quality

generated from the industrial

units as well as STP/sewerage

from different sources have

been collected by the board,"

As per the latest data of the

BSPCB related to the quality of

level of faecal coliform

measured at Kachchi Dargah-

Bidupur Bridge was 3,500 MPN/100 ml, Gulabi Ghat

(5.400 MPN/100 ml) and

drains. Presently, water/effluent/sewage samples

the survey said.

ml," Shukla said.

bathing, he said.

senior official said.

Shukla said.

Forty two more firearms surrendered in Manipur

PTI IMPHAL

 $F_{\text{and cartridges have been}}^{\text{orty-two more firearms}}$ 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 cartridges surrendered in Bishnupur district. country-made

Seventeen guns, nine 'pompi' (locally made mortars), 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

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 additional time.

Fadnavis denies rumors of rift in BJP-led Mahayuti

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

A head 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. Fadnavis' statement came

should be seen in the context of a claim made by the rival Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv the Ganga accessed by PTI, the Sena's chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut that Shinde had held a secret meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah during which he Triveni Ghat (5,400 MPN/100 complained against Fadnavis and sought the chief minister's

chair but was rebuked by Shah, who reportedly asked the deputy chief minister (Shinde) to merge Shiv Sena with BJP 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

"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 cool," Shinde said

Youths into excessive social media suffer sexual ailments

He emphasised that under normal circumstances, individuals form natural bonds with their partners based on real-world interactions. However, excessive exposure to digitally curated and exaggerated distorts s. "The perceptions. 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 hysiological," he added.

While much of the focus is on young men facing sexual dysfunction, experts stress that the impact of excessive

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 benchmarks. "We are seeing unrealistic cases of body

digital consumption is equally dysmorphia and low self- consumption," he urged. 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 exacerbating the situation. Parents, educators, and policymakers need to step in to establish boundaries and create awareness about responsible

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

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. supervision, and broader societal intervention

younger generation.

negative effects."

pathogens in water. According to the CPCB standards, the permissible limit of faecal **Zoos battling reduced funding**

taxonomic and Salamander which have despite committee noted.

safeguard the well-being of the

ambiguities Himalayan

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 Red-crowned 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 rescued solitary 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

management. The committee said that small populations. demographic and genetic improper monitoring, husbandry practices inadequate technical supervision, documentation, lack of animal

to breeding protocols and lack of coordination between zoos are common challenges across all groups of animals.

Buch booked

From page 1

"Habitat requirements and constrain the management of species like the Indian Wild shown minimal growth decades conservation efforts," the

members said.

without

identification, poor adherence

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 said Israel was prepared to 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

fulfilled all "We 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

consequences" 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 in return for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a 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 negotiations over Phase 2 in early February.

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

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 were cruel and degrading.

and the United Nations said 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 repeatedly pressed it to do more. Experts warned on several occasions that hunger was widespread in Gaza and that there was a risk of

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

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 The war began when Hamas-

led militants stormed into 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

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.

dead were combatants.

Chamoli avalance rescue death toll...

From page 1

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.

An Mi-17 helicopter is waiting in Dehradun to 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 RÉCCO unmanned aerial vehicles 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.

Chhattisgarh cabinet approves excise policy

STAFF REPORTER

The Chhattisgarh cabinet on Sunday approved Excise Policy for the financial year 2025-26, which will remain similar as compared to the policy of 2024-

The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting presided over by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai.

A sum total of 674 liquor shops, along with premium liquor outlets as required, will continue to operate. The supply of country liquor will adhere to the existing rate offer. The wholesale procurement and distribution of foreign liquor will continue to be managed by Chhattisgarh State Beverages Corporation Limited. The infrastructure development fee on liquor will remain unchanged, while the additional excise duty of 9.5% on retail foreign liquor outlets will be abolished.

For the upcoming financial year 2025-26, it has decided to abolish the "additional excise duty" previously imposed on foreign liquor. This duty was



equivalent to 9.5% of the liquor procurement price set by the Chhattisgarh State Marketing

As a result, the retail prices of foreign liquor, particularly in the medium and high-range categories, will decrease, thereby curbing the smuggling of such liquor from other states.

The removal of this additional duty is expected to reduce the retail prices of various ranges of foreign liquor by approximately Rs.40 to Rs.3,000 per

The cabinet has approved the draft of the Chhattisgarh Public Premises

(Eviction) (Amendment) Bill, 2025.

To enhance the ease of doing business, the Cabinet has decided to dissolve the empowered committee constituted for e-procurement. Presently, the PFIC (passive foreign investment company) approves projects exceeding Rs 100 crore, and large IT projects already require approval from an empowered committee. This duplication of the approval process necessitated the committee's dissolution.

The cabinet has approved the creation of an additional post of a member, to ensure expedited resolution of pending cases in the Chhattisgarh State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission and to facilitate timely

hearings on consumer matters.

The cabinet approved the rates recommended by the state-level committee for paddy and rice transportation under the Minimum Support Price scheme for Kharif marketing years 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25. The cabinet approved the draft of the Chhattisgarh Labour Laws Amendment and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2025, which includes amendments to the Factories Act, 1948, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, and the Trade Unions Act, 1976.

The cabinet decided to approve the draft of the Chhattisgarh Registration (Amendment) Bill, 2025.

To ensure the smooth functioning of registry offices, the Cabinet has decided to grant a one-time relaxation in the required five-year qualifying service for filling nine vacant promotion-grade posts of deputy registrars in the commercial tax (registration) department. The industrial development policy 2024-30 has been in effect since Nov.1, 2024. To further strengthen its implementation, the cabinet has approved a proposed amendment to the Chhattisgarh Store Purchase Rules, 2002, as presented by the department of commerce and industry.

The cabinet has authorized the state good governance and convergence department to sign a MoU (emorandum of understanding) with the Vyakti Vikas Kendra India (The Art of Living) for livelihood generation and the welfare in rural Chhattisgarh.

Congress to gherao ED office today

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

The Congress in Chhattisgarh will gherao the office of enforcement directorate (ED) in Raipur on Monday to protest against the alleged vindictive action of the anti-money laundering agency on its workers.

Congress Chhattisgarh unit incharge general secretary (organisation and administration), Malkeet Singh Gaidu had been forcibly detained for nine hours when he visited the ED office on Feb.28 to provide information regarding the construction of party office in Sukma district, Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chief Deepak Baij alleged.

"The grand old party is ready to cooperate with the anti-money laundering agency in its investigation. The party will give a befitting reply if the ED forcibly misbehaves with the Congress leaders," Baij added.

Over 8K participate in 'Abujhmad Peace Half Marathon'

STAFF REPORTER NARAYANPUR

 $M_{
m from\ India\ and\ abroad}^{
m ore\ than\ 8,000\ people}$ participated in the Abujhmad Peace Half Marathon' held in Chhattisgarh's insurgencyhit Narayanpur district on

Forest minister, Kedar Kashyap flagged off the marathon that started from Narayanpur High School Ground and culminated at Basing village in Orchha Block.

It consisted of races in three categories that is 5, 10, and 5 kilometres.

On the occasion, participants ran through



making the marathon not

dense forests and hilly roads, just a test of physical

opportunity to experience nature's challenges and beauty.

In the 21-km run, Akshay Kumar from Uttar Pradesh (UP) won in the men's category, and Hiwet Zebriwahid from Ethiopia won in the women's category.

Amrita Patel and Monu Kumar both from UP, won in the women's and men's categories respectively, in the 10-km run.

Meanwhile, chief minister, Vishnu Deo Sai said on his X handle that the marathon was not just a sporting event but a message of culture and peace.

The runners gave clear message of peace in the Bastar region, he said.

Health camp held to rouse awareness about affordable medicines among people

STAFF REPORTER

Authorities in Bilaspur district organised a health camp on Sunday to rouse awareness about the availability of affordable medicines on the second day

of the 'Jan Aushadhi Week.' On the occasion, doctors had done check-up of over 100 persons and informed them about the availability of high-quality and affordable medicines at the Jan Aushadhi stores.

On the first day of the campaign, on Saturday, an awareness rally was also taken out by women from the District Hospital premises to River View.

The Jan Aushadhi stores are part of the 'Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana.' They comprise about 1,963



medicines and 293 surgical devices covering all major therapeutic groups, it

may be noted. Health camp held to rouse

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Sunday released annual calendar of cooperative department in Raipur. The calendar 📓 is based on the motto of 'prosperity from co-operation' that depicts the activities of the department.

How brain plays central role in development of obesity



AGENCIES

study new Aoffered intriguing new insights into the origins of type 2 diabetes and obesity, as well as the brain's function as a critical control centre.

The hormone insulin plays a key role in the development of obesity. Up until recently, there have been numerous signs indicating insulin causes neurodegenerative and metabolic disorders, especially in the brain.

The latest study by the University Hospital of Tubingen, the German Center for Diabetes Research (DZD), and Helmholtz Munich now offers new insights.
Unhealthy body fat

distribution and chronic weight gain are linked to the brain's sensitivity to insulin. What specific functions does insulin perform in the brain, and how does it affect individuals of normal weight?

In their study, published in the journal Nature Metabolism, Professor Dr. Stephanie Kullmann and her colleagues at the Tubingen University Hospital for Diabetology, Endocrinology, and Nephrology found the answer to this query. findings

"Our demonstrate for the first time that even a brief consumption of highly

processed, unhealthy foods (such as chocolate bars and potato chips) causes a significant alteration in the brain of healthy individuals, which may be the initial cause of obesity and type 2 diabetes," Kullmann explained.

In a healthy state, insulin has an appetite-suppressing effect in the brain. However, in people

with obesity in particular, insulin no longer regulates eating behaviour properly, resulting in insulin resistance. In the healthy study

participants, the brain shows a similar decrease in sensitivity to insulin after a short-term high calorie intake as in people with obesity.

This effect can even be observed one week after returning to a balanced diet, said researchers.

Professor Dr. Andreas Birkenfeld, the study's final author, said, "We assume that the brain's insulin response adapts to short-term changes in diet before any weight gain occurs and thus promotes development of obesity and other secondary

He urged more research on how the brain contributes to the development of obesity and other metabolic illnesses in light of the current findings.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT WATER RESORUCES DIVISION, MARWAHI H.Q, PENDRA ROAD DISTT. GAURELLA-PENDRA-MARWAHI (C.G.)

PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE eProcurement Portal: https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in CORRIGENDUM NO. 1

IN NIT No.: 13 & 14/SAC/2024-25, Dated: 10.01.2025, System Tender No. 164168 & 164169 (2nd Call), Whose G-Number-242505308 following amendments are made-

Amendments

Amendment regarding Clause 2.1.6 (Disqualification) of Form-"B" as per Govt. of C.G. WRD, Raipur Order No. 466/F-7-7/S-2/31/2001, Nava Raipur, Date 27.01.2025 & Order No.

795/F-7-7/S-2/31/2001, Nava Raipur, Date 21.02.2025

Bid due date & time 06.03.2025 at 17:30 Hours. (The last date & time for submission of bid response, after which no bids can be submitted)

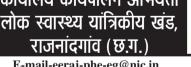
Bid Open start date and time 07.03.2025 11.30 Hours. (The date of opening of Envalope 'A' & 'B' online)

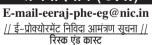
Note: Detailed Amendment in can be viewed on the website https://eproc.egstate.gov.in. Probable Amount of Contract (P.A.C.) is as per S.O.R. 01.08.2010. (As Amendments 2.08.2022). All other terms and conditions of NIT will remain unchanged.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER WATER RESOURCES DIVISION MARWAIH (C.G.) For, Chief Engineer
Hasdeo Basin Water Resources Departmen

G-242505621/4

कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता राजनांदगांव (छ.ग.)





छत्तीसगढ के राज्यपाल की ओर से एकीकत पंजीयन प्रणाली अंतर्गत सक्षम श्रेणी मे नीकृत ठेकेदारों से प्रपन्न ''ए'' में जल जीवन मिशन अंतर्गत जल जीवन मिशन अंतर्गत एकल ग्राम/रेटोफिटिंग योजनांतर्गत राजनांदगांव के विभिन्न विकासखंडो के विभिन्न ग्रामों में रिस्क एवं कास्ट में शेष बचे कार्य जिसमें UPVC/HDPE पाईप लाईन जोड़ने बिछाने, उच्चस्तरीय जलागार निर्माण, स्वीच रूम, उच्चस्तरीय जलागार के चारो ओर बाउंडीवॉल निर्माण, सबमर्सिबल पंप का प्रदाय एवं स्थापना कार्य, विद्युत विभाग (CSPDCL) से इलेक्ट्रिक कनेक्शन इलेक्ट्रोक्लोरीनेटर स्थापना, क्लोरीनेटर रूम, घरों एवं शासकीय संस्थानों में कार्यरत नल कनेक्शन प्रदाय आदि एवं अन्य समस्त कार्य, टेस्टिंग, ०३ माह का ट्रायल रन, ०६ माह तक संचालन संधारण का कार्य (सम्पूर्ण कार्य सामग्री सहित, संलग्न शेड्युल अनुसार) की निविदाए दिनांक 25.02.2025 से ऑन लाईन पर आमंत्रित की जाती है।

उपरोक्त कार्य के निविदा की सामान्य शर्ते, धरोहर राशि, विस्तृत निविदा विज्ञप्ति, निविदा दस्तावेज व अन्य जानकारी ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट वेब पोर्टल https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in से दिनांक 04.03.2025 से डाउनलोड की जा सकती है तथा निविदा डाउनलोड करने की अंतिम दिनांक 18.03.2025 (शाम 5:30 बजे) तक है।

Φ.	ानावदा	।सस्टम	विकासखण्ड	याजना/ग्राम का नाम	।नावदा का	ानावदा का
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				कास्ट)		01.06. 2020 से लाग
2	11	165163	डोंगरगढ़	बागनदी (रिस्क एंड	44.71	एवं संशोधन
				कास्ट)		02/2020 21 तक तथा
3	12	165164	डोंगरगढ़	सहसपुर, जारवाही,	85.89	PWD
				केशली (रिस्क एंड		2015 का दिनांक 07.
				कास्ट)		04.2016 से
4	13	165165	डोंगरगढ़	जंगलपुर (रिस्क एंड	58.83	लागू
				कास्ट)		
		-				

कार्यपालन अभियंता लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खंड,

G-242505593/3

राजनांदगांव (छ.ग.)

Novel tech can allow people to taste coffee in virtual reality

AGENCIES

Scientists have devised a novel technology, which intends to redefine the virtual reality experience by expanding to incorporate a new sensory connection --The interface, dubbed 'e-Taste', uses a

combination of sensors and wireless chemical dispensers to facilitate the remote perception of taste - what scientists call gustation. These sensors are attuned to recognise

molecules like glucose and glutamate chemicals that represent the five basic tastes of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami.

Once captured via an electrical signal, that data is wirelessly passed to a remote device for replication, according to researchers from Ohio State University in

"The chemical dimension in the current VR and AR realm is relatively underrepresented, especially when we talk about olfaction and gustation," said Jinghua Li, co-author of the study and an assistant professor of materials science and engineering at Ohio State.

"It's a gap that needs to be filled and



we've developed that with this nextgeneration system," Li added.

The system, whose development was inspired by previous biosensor work of Li's, utilises an actuator with two parts: an interface to the mouth and a small electromagnetic pump.

This pump connects to a liquid channel of chemicals that vibrates when an electric charge passes through it, pushing the solution through a special gel layer into the mouth of the subject. Depending on the length of time that

the solution interacts with this gel layer, the intensity and strength of any given taste can easily be adjusted, said Li Based on the digital instruction, you

can also choose to release one or several different tastes simultaneously so that they can form different sensations," she said. The study was published in the journal Science Advances. Further tests assessing

e-Taste's ability to immerse players in a virtual food experience also analysed its long-range capabilities, showing that remote tasting could be initiated in Ohio from as far away as California. Another experiment involved subjects

trying to identify five food options they perceived, whether it was lemonade, cake, fried egg, fish soup or coffee.

"While these results open up

opportunities to pioneer new VR experiences, this team's findings are especially significant because they could potentially provide scientists with a more intimate understanding of how the brain processes sensory signals from the mouth,"

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

Government to go tough on drug traffickers: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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 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

release said. In pursuit of Ahmedabad in 2019, where 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

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 of imprisonment with a fine of 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 the NCB.

Two arrested accused in the case were sentenced to three years of imprisonment by a Punjab 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 of completion investigation, a special court sentenced him to six months In June, 2021, the NCB

intercepted a Zimbabwean woman on her arrival at the

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 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 trafficking. A local court sentenced them to 10 years in

India's policies needs comprehensive 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 Modi focussed on readiness 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 successfully.

economic reforms in addition to providing some stimulus The packages. momentum was restored," he

"It took several measures on

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

(PLI) Schemes and leveraging

of consumption base and demographic advantage of

In the context of the ongoing

India among others.

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 be our objective.

NHRC to organise human rights program for global south nations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is organising a six-day Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Executive 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.

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

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

The programme will be inaugurated by Chairperson of **Justice**

Ramasubramanian Monday. The programme aims to provide insights into various dimensions of human international

and share perspectives, NHRC, India's experience over the past three decades to enhance awareness among participants of various NHRIs. It seeks to strengthen South-South cooperation, enhance collaboration and networking, and improve human rights protection mechanisms through comprehensive capacity building and experience

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

partnerships at regional and international levels capability enhanced 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 enhance understanding and appreciation of various aspects of human rights and help in building capacity among

 $F_{\text{population does not have}}^{\text{orty per cent of the global}}$ access to education in a language 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 capacity to use home languages, unavailability of materials in home languages and community opposition, it said.

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

The team, which has come up with a report titled "Languages matter: Global guidance on multilingual education", noted that as migration increases, diversity linguistic 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 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 National Education Policy that advocates multilingual education. The three-language policy 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

40 per cent people have no access to education in mother tongue: UNESCO

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 technology in young people's lives but also by the impact of COVID-19, learning levels have dropped sharply in both 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. face diverse Countries

linguistic challenges education, stemming from historical 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 created educational 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,

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 and diversity, 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. GEM has The team

recommended educational language policies should prioritise contextapproaches specific language transition must be backed curriculum adjustments and supported by teaching and learning adapted for that materials grade. "In countries with

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

rhe Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday said the party has appointed its national joint secretary Bhaban Choudhury as the acting state president of the Assam unit, five months after replacing him from the post. As the party's permanent president Manoj Dhanowar is not active due to "personal senior functionaries of NHRIs. | reasons", the executive

committee in its meeting on Saturday unanimously chose Choudhury for the position. Choudhury was the chief of AAP Assam prior to Dhanowar taking charge as state president in September Immediately after assuming

Choudhury office, condemned the "increasing political violence, suppression of democratic protests and

the deliberate defamation claimed that the government Choudhury said. campaigns against opposition leaders and their families".

"The BJP government is systematically killing democracy by silencing opposition voices. No matter how much suppression they impose, the people of Assam will give them a befitting reply in 2026," he said in a statement. Highlighting the chaotic environment to instill "rising public discontent", he fear among the masses,"

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

immigration brings new

The frustration among the common people is growing

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) Biplah Kumar Sharma Commission report on the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) scam, calling it a politically motivated document.

NGT summons Uttarakhand officials over illegal felling of 176 trees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The National Green 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 the district magistrate, the Dehradun regional office of the Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, and the

UKPCB. Taking note of the report, the tribunal sought a

response from Uttarakhand chief secretary and others. "We also consider the

personal appearance of the member secretary, UKPCB principal forests conservator of (PCCF) before this tribunal physically or through videoconferencing on the next date of hearing to be essential for assisting this tribunal in just and proper

questions involved in the case. 'Accordingly, they are 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.

adjudication of

NIT Rourkela develops low-cost solar panel technology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELH**

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.

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

The innovation also responds

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"

Susovon According to Samanta, Associate Professor, Electrical Engineering, NIT Rourkela, Solar panels produce

electricity from sunlight, but

the amount of power they 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. It 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 require expensive current sensors, making them less 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) accurately more while maintaining stable and efficient steady-state operation, leading to improved tracking efficiency and better PV

harvesting," he added. Samanta explained that their method prevents small power fluctuations that 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 projects.

"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 are efficiency 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

issues tax notice to Ekana stadium

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE LUCKNOW

The Lucknow Municipal ■ Corporation has issued a ₹28.42 Crore property tax notice to the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee International Cricket Stadium, also known as Ekana stadium, officials said on Sunday.

The notice comes ahead of Women's Premier League matches scheduled this month and the Indian Premier League matches in April, raising concerns over their smooth conduct.

The stadium administration has termed the notice "unjust" and plans to meet Chief Minister Adityanath to seek relief. According to a statement from Additional Municipal Pankai Commissioner Srivastava, Zone 4 of the municipal corporation issued the notice on Saturday.

The amount includes ₹5.45 Crore in tax due since December 1, 2020, and an outstanding balance of ₹22.97 Crore, the statement said, adding, the decision has been taken as per legal provisions and will be strictly enforced.

Lucknow Municipal Corporation

Srivastava clarified that only the sports grounds and stadiums of governmentaided or recognised nonaided educational institutions are exempt from property tax. Since Ekana stadium does

not fall under this category, it is liable to pay the tax. "Ekana stadium hosts IPL professional matches, sports events and cultural programmes with ticket sales. Therefore, the property tax assessment is justified. Currently, only property tax is being levied, and there is no action on water or sewerage charges," Srivastava added. He said the stadium

administration previously objected to the tax assessment, but those objections were deemed baseless. Ekana stadium Director

Uday Sinha called the notice "against the rules."
"We will soon meet the Chief Minister and seek justice," he told PTI. Sinha questioned the rationale behind imposing

a ₹28 Crore tax liability arguing that the Lucknow Municipal Corporation's provide rules exemption for all types of stadiums. He also pointed out that

the notice does not mention a deadline for payment and expressed hope that the issue would resolved affecting IPL matches. Ekana stadium is the home ground for IPL team Lucknow Super Giants and is scheduled to host seven

IPL matches this season.

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 Atmospheric Administration (NOAÂ), saying any reduction in observation data could affect monsoon forecasts and cyclone tracking in India. Hundreds of weather

forecasters and other federal NOAA employees probationary status were fired last week included These

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

NOAA observations, there will be implications on weather forecasts. When ocean observations

reduce, there is less data to assimilate. Hence predictability will reduce," M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences,

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 models that support this weather-climate monitoring,

reduces forecasting and disaster preparedness worldwide. 'For India, the monsoon

forecasts, cyclone tracking, 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

backbone,

for

Atmospheric

Without

early

floods,

and

warnings

Administration.

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 worldwide. The world cannot afford to lose NOAA," Koll, a Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awardee, said.

India has deployed a number of argo floats, it alone," Koll said.

buovs for 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, but no single country can do

moored buoys and drifting

Odisha to provide training to 50 tribal students for professional courses

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government will I 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

preparatory training. The selected 50 students, mostly women, will receive parameters of airline cadet assessment, Bhubaneswar for eight weeks, the official said. The coaching is aimed at

basic overview of the flying training course, he said.

screening to impart the

coaching, covering all selection

preparing the candidates to clear the cadet pilot assessment and also make them ready for foundation programme syllabus set by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and give an

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

PTI HOSHIARPUR

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

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

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

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



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

The supply line of drugs is being snapped, drug peddlers are being put behind bars and the properties of the drug smugglers are being confiscated or razed, he added.

The chief minister said that inimical forces have been chalking out nefarious designs to disturb the hard earned peace in the border state, adding the Punjab Police has always foiled such attempts. Mann said it is imperative the police force is updated as per requirements in the field of

investigation, science and tech-

nology to further overcome major challenges faced by the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

clarifies voter ID duplication

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Haryana civic polls held, BJP exudes confidence

PTI CHANDIGARH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini exuded confidence that

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sunderlal Yadav, the BJP's may-



oters flaunt inked fingers after casting votes in Sonipat

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

Gurugram district's Farukh

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

In Faridabad, the turnout at 4 pm was around 32 per cent. Narnaund in Hisar district recorded a turnout of 74 per cent while Hisar registered 43

per cent. In Taoru of Nuh district, 68 per

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

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

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

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

Gurugram's five areas see 40.6 per cent voter turnout

ers in Gurugram district is

over 11.7 Lakh. These voters

will exercise their franchise at

1,109 booths in five municipal

areas including Gurugram,

Manesar, Pataudi, Sohna and

Farrukhnagar in Gurugram

The elections are being held in

33 municipal bodies eight

municipal corporations, 21

municipalities and four munic-

District Election Officer Ajay

Kumar said that the votes

would be cast for the post of

Mayor of the MCG and coun-

cillor in 35 wards of the MCG

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

ipal councils.

PARVESH SHARMA

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

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

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

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

Municipal Council.

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

The number of registered vot-



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

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

At the same time, in Municipal

wards of the MMC area.

In which over 22,000 men and

votes in 21 wards.

Committee Farrukhnagar, 7,683 men 6,961 women and one transgender will choose their government body for the post of councillor and chairStudents' union elections have not been held in the State for the past seven-eight years. As a group of Left students held protest rallies inside the camous and outside the Jadavpur Police Station local Trinamool Congress workers too organ-

who were involved in heckling the Minister and some univer

students think that if they can get away after doing anything. Even manhandling professors and heckling a minister then our boys are ready, and we can take control of JU in a minute, another TMC leader and State

by which the college and university students' elections

protesters said Basu would not listen to them and his car tried The driver of the vehicle said that he sped away to save the minister as "the students were pounding fist blows on the bonnet and windscreen" of the Minister's SUV which was

While the rear wheel of the

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN KOCHI the last four decades, Academy journal of literary criticism. Bank with the award money awards have become a laugh. The book had bagged the and royalty amount. Another stance. Even pornographic political ideology, caste and written with ulterior motive. book of this genre was community. There are persons books have some substance in "When it was published in "Moustache", a novel by S them but not the works of who have been eternal mem-2010, it turned out to be a damp squib. But when it was Hareesh. Ramanunni or Hareesh," said T

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

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

Sahitya Academy opts for Padma style nomination ing stock in the country.

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

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

Sahitya Academy Award for the best Malayalam novel despite it being termed by eminent critics like Prof Ravi Shankar Nair as the worst piece of literature they have read in their career. 'We can use this book to throw at stray dogs which are aplenty all over Kerala. Or else we can put this book as an obstacle underneath the truck to ensure that the vehicle does not run amuck," wrote Professor Nair in his literary column.

Despite the observations by Prof Nair, author Ramanunni laughed all the way to the

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

"These books are purchased secretly by voracious readers to G Mohan Das. He has reasons to get annoyed as Hareesh has claimed in the work that Hindu women go to temples to display their physique.

Despite these obscenities, these books manage to win national prizes thanks to the fact that the authors know the right people at the right places. "It is an open secret that the Sahitya Akademy awards are presented by jury consisting of writers with vested interests. The winbers of the juries," said Pillai. Tamil Nadu is no exception. "Despite the DMK's opposition to anything associated with Hindi instances of lobbying for Akademy awards are galore.

Only the chosen few get these honors," said Professor Josephine Jayashanti, a novelist of repute who is blunt in her opinion. She says that Perumal Murugan's "One Part Woman",

a novel based on an alleged tradition in Tamil Nadu's was a major controversy as desired by the author and publishers. It was written with the sole objective of tarnishing the Tiruchengode residents and portrayed them in poor light," said Jayashanti. Anandan Pillai feels that the

translated into English, there

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

Over 1.25 Crore pilgrims visit Ayodhya in 45 days KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA

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

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

ting a new benchmark in reli-

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 manage ment strategies, which ensured a seamless pilgrimage experi-

Anil Mishra, a member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, revealed that more than 1.25 crore devotees visited the temple during this period, with AIpowered tracking and door metal detectors recording the 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, flowers, and other religious offerings. Hotels, restaurants, and home stays, particularly those near the temple, remained fully booked, underscoring the success of government-backed employment schemes for local residents.

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

ensured adequate provisions

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 celebrations.

How Prayagraj learnt to live with Kumbh stampedes **PTI** PRAYAGRAJ

My uncle had saved his sister by pulling her out of the river waters by her hair as she slipped below amid the commotion, says city-based advocate Niranjan Lal recalling the 1954 Kumbh Mela stampede stories he had heard from his aunt who survived it.

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

Seventy-one years later, a stampede took place on January 29, again on Mauni Amavasya day as a massive crowd sought to enter into the Triveni Sangam waters for the 'Amrit Snan'. Lal, 67, and his wife were camp-

ing in a Swiss cottage in Sector 6 of Mahakukbh Nagar, when they got a call from their son at home late night, cautioning them not to go to the Sangam due to the stampede 'We didn't step out from the camp until the sun came out, and at around 11 am, we went to

Dashashwamedh Ghat on

Ganga, located near Sector 6.

There were huge crowds in the

mela area, in the streets and at the

ghat. We were aware of the tragedy that had unfolded a few

hours ago, and therefore we were alert, and being a local resident knew what to $\bar{\text{do}}$ in case the crowd became unmanageable, Lal said. "But, we didn't go back feeling

fearful. My wife continued to camp until the 'kalpwas' period was over, continuing the multigeneration tradition of our fam-" he said. Lal belongs to an old family of Allahabad (renamed Prayagraj in 2018), many of whose members

have performed 'kalpwas' and

bathing rituals at all Kumbh

held here post melas Independence. His wife, Saloni Niranjan kept the family tradition, and observed the rituals at Maha Kumbh this year, after her mother-in-law's death in 2019.

We were married in 1988, and few months later, the 1989 Kumbh Mela happened. And, I and my wife have been part of all successive Kumbh also since then. But, the 1954 tragedy is something my uncle and 'bua' (aunt) used to talk about. She told me how she was saved by my father's elder brother while she was drowning during the incident," Lal reminisced, adding, his 'bua' who was born in 1920s and also used to observe rituals, died in 1986.

Lal's father, Govind Prasad, a government officer was at the family camp in the mela area when the disaster took place. The incident of the 1954 stampede was then described as a

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

ing the 1954 stampede. The scale of the tragedy was such that the entire country was shaken. Every other old family in Allahabad either has a personal story attached to it, or they know someone having some link with the tragedy," he told PTI.

The young scholar, who even

wrote a 100-odd-page book "Kumbh: A Divine Show at Allahabad" in 2013, has researched extensively on the Another stampede took place at Allahabad Junction (now

Prayagraj Junction) during the

2013 Kumbh Mela in which scores of people died. After the 1954 stampede, an inquiry committee was set up and it made a slew of recommendations for better crowd manage

ment and ensuring the safety of pilgrims. If one looks at the Maha Kumbh 2025, a VVIP culture was promoted during it, and aggressive marketing and '144 years' hype was used to draw people to the

mela. The authorities were some-

how complacent and some so-

called celebrities were telling on social media that arrangements were 'great' and people should flock to Sangam, which were a factor for overcrowding and eventually a stampede," he

alleged.

The Uttar Pradesh government had, however, maintained that ample arrangements were made and the theme itself was 'Bhavya Divya Surakshit Maha Kumbh' PTI spoke to many other residents of the city who either witnessed January 29 stampede or its aftermath or knew someone who was present there in the mela.

said, she saw piles of footwear and bags at the ghats and also many floating in the river the day the stampede took place. "I saw people being taken away

Renu Devi, a domestic help,

in ambulances, it was panic all over," she said. For people like Devi, however,

faith overpowers fear, as she said, "I took holy dip for five times during this Kumbh, mostly after the stampede' Maha Kumbh, the spectacle that takes place once in 12 years, was

held this year from January 13 (Paush Purnima) to February 26 (Mahashivratri) and saw grand processions of Naga Sadhus and three 'Amrit Snans'. The mega religious gathering

drew a record over 66 crore pilgrims during this period.

SFI calls academic strike post chaos in JU

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

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

ised rallies demanding immediate arrest of the students

sity professors who had assembled to take part in a meeting of West Bengal College and University Professors' University Professors' Association - backed by the 'We believe in democracy and peace but if the CPI(M)-backed

minister Arup Biswas said. The students had on Saturday noon gheroaed Minister Basu and were asking a statement from him regarding a deadline

would be held in the State. versions Contradictory emanated from both sides as the Minister said he was ready to talk to the agitating students and in fact received a deputa-tion from the Students' Federation of India (SFI) the to speed away without caring for the students who were standing in front of his vehicle.

partly damaged. Two students were injured in the incident as the car sped

vehicle rolled over the leg of a student another of his colleague Indranuj Roy whose left eye got seriously injured. He was presently undergoing treatment in a private medical college and hospital adjacent to the University. As the news of Roy getting

injured by the Minister's vehi-

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

place in Hooghly, Burdwan and Howrah.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

A clash of diplomacy and dignity

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

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



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

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



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

A new era for rural revival and inclusive growth

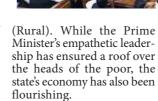


With a sharp focus on strengthening infrastructure and boosting holistic rural development, the UP budget underscores a visionary and inclusive agenda

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

The mainstay of the economy of the state is the rural sector and the government has been continuously working towards ensuring that the benefits of the schemes reach the deprived sections of the society. Believing in the credo of selfreliance, the government has been focusing on fortifying the development arcs of villages to make them self-reliant as they will play an important role in creating a strong Uttar Pradesh. While over 96 lakh rural families have benefitted under the State Rural Livelihood Mission (UPSRLM), on the other hand, financial transactions worth Rs 31,103 crore have been facilitated through 39,556 Banking Correspondent Sakhis. Until now, more than two lakh women have become "Lakhpati Didi," helping them become self-reliant. Uttar Pradesh is also the first state in the country to guarantee concrete houses to

Fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', the state government has already constructed more than 3.6 million houses in resolution. nectivity and highway Providing further impetus to the cause, a provision of Rs 4,882 crore has been made in for the widening and conthe Budget for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural). Also, an amount of Rs 1,200 crore has been proposed under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana



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



THE STATE **GOVERNMENT** HAS ALREADY CONSTRUCTED MORE THAN 3.6 MILLION HOUSES IN RESOLUTION. **PROVIDING FURTHER IMPETUS** CAUSE, A PROVISION OF **RS 4,882 CRORE**

HAS BEEN MADE IN THE BUDGET FOR THE PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA (RURAL)

Under the Pradhan Mantri for the construction of bridges and railway over-Kisan Samman Nidhi bridges to ease traffic conges-Yojana, Rs 79,500 crore have been distributed to farmers tion. The incredible growth has taken into account the while Rs 496 crore have also need to further bolster youth been disbursed under the empowerment and job cre-Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima ation. A budget of Rs 1,000 Yojana. The state's sugarcrore has been allocated cane production capacity has under the Chief Minister's also increased from 72 tonnes to 85 tonnes per Youth Entrepreneur Development Scheme. hectare, boosting the income Under the levels of farmers. Vivekananda The recently presented

Budget will not only take the Sashaktikaran Yojana, 49.86 development of the state to lakh smartphones/tablets have been distributed to pronew heights but will also mote smart education. transform rural India. From Free coaching is also being roads to digital infrastrucprovided to the youth ture, farmers to industry, through the Abhyudaya Yojana. Renewable energy and women empowerment

and artificial intelligence youth, this Budget has been have been given special able to ensure that the needs emphasis to ensure that youngsters do not fall behind. While the Artificial of every section of society are taken care of. With the Pradhan Mantri Intelligence City will be set Awas Yojana and schemes up in Lucknow, plans are aimed at boosting the rural underway to set up a 500 economy and infrastructure, MW solar power plant which Uttar Pradesh is rapidly moving towards fulfilling will entail a cost of Rs 2,500 the dream of a self-reliant crore. Prime Minister Narendra Modi places spe-India. I am confident that cial emphasis on ensuring this Budget will realise the the wellbeing of farmers and vision of 'growth and progress' of UP and propel wants to ensure they do not fall behind in these changing the state towards the exalted times. In line with this, status of the most devel Annadatas have been placed oped state in the country. at the top of the priority list

(The writer is Deputy Chief Minister of UP; views

to a bright future for the

THE EDITOR

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

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

in the mission of achieving

the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.



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

mer head was entangled in so many controversies due to her own financial favours along with her husband's investment-

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

ment with market evangelism. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

nature. Good governance gets seriously undermined when, for instance, criminals, gangsters, or mafia dons become the political bosses of bureaucrats and subvert the system to serve their interests. In 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that a sitting MP or MLA will be disqualified from contesting the election if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years 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 necessarily maintain the nation's moral or strategic responsibilities or commitments. The fallout from this episode will have lasting consequences on international alliances and geopolitical stability.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

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FIRST COLUMN

DEALING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

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



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

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



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

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

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Is Forest Rights Act driving deforestation?



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

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

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

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

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

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



FOREST AREAS GIVEN FOR THE SUSTAINABLE **MANAGEMENT** OF GRAM SABHAS HAVE BEEN

DEVASTATED, **DEGRADED AND** FRAGMENTED. PATCHES OF BAMB00 FORESTS IN **MEDHA**

LEKHA GRAM SABHA WHERE ALL BAMBOO **CLUMPS WERE** CLEARED IN ONE STROKE IN 2012

states, further diluting the provisions in 2012 to ignore the only scientific evidence of satellite imagery interpretation among the evidence to be relied on in support of the claim. The claims of the tribal community, who had only to prove the occupation as of December 2005 were easily acceptable initially, but that too is now two decades old. Left-leaning forces and NGOs fought for claim cases of individual forest rights (IFR), community forest rights CFR) and rights to manage the forest resources sustainably.

This has accelerated the deforestation. IFRs have already been granted to 2.2 million tribal and OTFDs, covering nearly 5 million ha of forest land. Several activists have written articles in newspapers and magazines showing a satisfactory performance over the grant of IFRs and suggesting the states focus their attention on CFRs and grant of forest rights for sustainable management to avail the provisions that have been neglected by the states so far. The estimates of the activists suggest that 30 million hectare forest lands comprising more than 40 per cent of the total forest area can be granted for CFRs and sustainable management.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Approach



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, health-care, and public services.

Driving Financial Inclusion

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

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

nience with physical touch-Systems like Aadhaar-enabled

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

transfer money within their

Commerce



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

Reinvigorating Rural

E-commerce has revolutionised urban shopping by altering customer habits and

payment methods, but rural

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

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

Transforming Agriculture Agriculture remains the backbone of India's rural economy, providing livelihoods for more than 42 per cent of the population and contributing around 18.2 per cent to the nation's GDP. However, farmers have long contended with issues such as limited market access, dependence on intermediaries, and unpredictable weather. Phygital solutions are beginning to address these challenges by integrating digital tools with conventional agricultural practices. Platforms like eNAM enable

farmers to compare prices and market their produce directly, thus reducing reliance on mid-dlemen. At the same time, traditional mandi networks continue to play an essential role in the trading process.

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

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

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

PTI LONDON

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

Starmer says the plan emerged after talks among the four countries leaders following Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Oval

Office blowout with US President Donald Trump.
The prime minister told the BBC he believes the US president wants a durable peace in Ukraine. He repeated his assertion that American security guarantees will be needed to make it stick.

Starmer is hosting a summit of European leaders in London on Sunday to discuss Ukraine. It was supposed to cap a week of whirlwind diplomacy

advancing the prospect of peace in Ukraine. But a summit of European leaders on Sunday has been overshadowed by the extraor-

dinary scolding by US President Donald Trump of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Friday for being ungrateful for US sup-

The London meeting has now taken on greater importance in defending the war-torn ally and shoring up the continent's defenses.

"There's a real problem for European leaders to pick up the pieces and try and move forward," Peter Ricketts, the former British national security adviser, told BBC radio on Saturday.

"It's going to be a damage lim-



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

do we go from here?"

The meeting at Lancaster House, a 200-year-old elegant mansion near Buckingham Palace, follows a charm offensive last week to engage with Trump at the White House to put Ukraine at the centre of negotiations and tilt his allegiances toward Europe. British Prime Minister Keir

Starmer, who is hosting the leaders of more than a dozen countries and other officials, said he is determined to find an end to Russia's war on Ukraine. 'We have an opportunity to come together to ensure a just and lasting peace in Ukraine that secures their sovereignty and security," Starmer said in advance. "Now is the time for itation exercise. It's going to us to unite in order to guaranhave to be an exercise in where tee the best outcome for private meeting — a day before that Europe is willing and able

Ukraine, protect European security, and secure our collective future?

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

port from leaders across Europe after the White House fiasco, which was exceptional for featuring an attack on an ally — and because it was broadcast on live television. Starmer embraced Zelenskyy

a get-together had been scheduled before the summit.

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

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

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

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

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

peacekeeping troops. Within 12 hours of Starmer's return from Washington, the talk of peace seemed to collapse as Vice President ID Vance berated Zelenskyy for challenging Trump's assertions that Russian President Vladimir Putin could be trusted.

"Starmer did an impressive job of asserting Europe's agency in the war on Ukraine and conveying to President Trump to take a leading role in implementing any credible peace deal," said Rachel Ellehuus, director-general of Royal United Services Institute, a defence and security think

"Unfortunately, Friday's White House meeting was a major step backward.

Ukraine can no longer count on military or political support from the US after Trump declared himself neutral in negotiations, Ellehuus said. She said Europe needs to step in and could release some 200 billion euros (USD 207 billion) in seized Russian assets to help fund that effort.

"The immediate goal of the meetings in London must be to keep Ukraine in the fight so it can negotiate from a maximum position of strength," she said. Starmer pledged this week to boost military spending to 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product by 2027. Other European nations may follow

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said Saturday that Europe faces a historic test and has to care for itself. He said European countries have to increase their arms spending to reach at least 3 per cent of GDP.

"If we don't increase our effort fast enough and let the aggressor dictate its conditions we won't end up well," he said. Macron, who said it was legit

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

Private Iunar lander Blue Ghost aces moon touchdown

experiments to the moon for

NASA. The space agency paid

USD 101 million for the delivery, plus USD 44 million for the

It's the third mission under

NASA's commercial lunar

delivery programme, intended

to ignite a lunar economy of

astronauts show up later this

Firefly's Ray Allensworth said

the lander skipped over hazards

including boulders to land

safely. Allensworth said the

team continued to analyse the

data to figure out the lander's

exact position, but all indica-

tions suggest it landed within

the 328-foot (100-metre) target

The demos should get two

weeks of run time, before lunar

daytime ends and the lander

It carried a vacuum to suck up

moon dirt for analysis and a

drill to measure temperature as deep as 10 feet (3 metres)

below the surface. Also on

board: a device for eliminating

abrasive lunar dust — a scourge

for NASA's long-ago Apollo

zone in Mare Crisium.

shuts down.

decade.

science and tech on board.

PTI ■ CAPE CANAVERAL (US)

Aprivate lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kickstart business on Earth's celestial neighbour ahead of astronaut missions

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon's northeastern edge of the near side.

Confirmation of successful touchdown came from the company's Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles (360,000 kilometers)

'You all stuck the landing. We're on the moon," Firefly's Will Coogan, chief engineer for the lander, reported.

An upright and stable landing makes Firefly — a startup founded a decade ago — the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Even countries have faltered, with only five claiming success: Russia, the US, China, India and Japan.

A half hour after landing, Blue Ghost started to send back pictures from the surface, the first one a selfie somewhat obscured by the sun's glare. The second shot included the home planet, a blue dot glimmering in the blackness of space.

Two other companies' landers are hot on Blue Ghost's heels, with the next one expected to join it on the moon later this week.

Blue Ghost — named after a rare US species of fireflies had its size and shape going for it. The squat four-legged lander stands 6-foot-6 (2 metres) tall and 11 feet (3.5 metres) wide,

moonwalkers, who got it caked providing extra stability, according to the company. all over their spacesuits and Launched in mid-January from equipment. Florida, the lander carried 10

On its way to the moon, Blue Ghost beamed back exquisite pictures of the home planet. 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 competing private businesses constellations, an encouraging while scouting around before 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 pro-

gramme in 1972.

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

 $I^{
m ran's}$ parliament on Sunday impeached the country's economy minister and voted to remove him from office, amid growing concerns over the crashing rial and accusations of mismanagement.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf announced that 182 out of 273 lawmakers voted to dismiss Abdolnasser Hemmati, just six months after President Masoud Pezeshkian's government took

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

over Iran's nuclear program and worsen-

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



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

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

PTI ■ SEOUL

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

is expected to infuriate North Korea, which views tempo rary deployments of such powerful ÛS military assets as major security threats. North Korea has responded to some of the past deployments of US aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and nuclear-powered submarines with missile tests. Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, President Donald Trump has said he will reach out to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un again to revive diplomacy.

The deployment of the carrier

Pope gets visit from Vatican secretary of state

PTI ■ ROME

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

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

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

Francis said he was living his hospitalization as an experience of profound solidarity with ople who are sick and suffering everywhere,

"I feel in my heart the blessing' that is hidden within frailty, because it is precisely in these moments that we learn even more to trust in the Lord," Francis said in the text.

"At the same time, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to share in body and spirit the condition of so many sick and

suffering people." Signs point to a recovery: It marked the third weekend in a row that Francis has cancelled

There were no details of what was discussed, but the mere visit suggested Francis' condi-

the Sunday appointment delivering the Angelus prayer in person. He could have done so from his 10th floor hospital suite at the Gemelli hospital if

he were well enough But many signs indicated he was recovering and improving. "The night was quiet, the pope is still resting," the Vatican said in its Sunday update. Cardinal Pietro Parolin and his

chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, called on the pope Sunday morning, their second visit since Francis' February 14 hospitalisation, according to the Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni.

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 ele-

vated white blood cells, which

would signal his body was still fighting an infection.

Doctors on Saturday reported that Francis was in stable condition, with no mention of him being critical. Their upbeat assessment came a day after a respiratory crisis that resulted in him being put on noninvasive mechanical ventilation.

But the 88-year-old pope had a "good response" in his gas exchange levels even during the "long periods" he was off the ventilator mask Saturday and only using high-flow supplemental oxygen, the Vatican

The fact that Francis was able to use just high-flow oxygen for long periods, without any significant effect on the levels of oxygen in his blood, was a sign his respiratory function was improving.

Doctors were cautious however and kept his prognosis as guarded, meaning he wasn't out

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

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

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

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

Syrians begin fasting during Ramazan without Assad family

ome restaurants and coffee Shops in Syria were closed during the day on Saturday while others opened as usual as observant Muslims began fasting during the holy month of Ramazan, the first since the fall of Assad family rule in the wartorn country.

Syria's interim Ministry of Religious Endowments reportedly called for all restaurants, coffee shops and street food stands be closed during the day and that people must not eat or drink in public or face punishment. Those who violate the rule could get up to three months in jail

However, it did not appear that any official order had been issued by the government to that effect

ilv dynasty

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 Muslims, will begin the fast on Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, overthrew President Sunday. Bashar Assad's secular government in early December ending the 54-year Assad fam-

Since then, Syria's new Islamist

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

gious minorities. Under Assad's rule during the Muslim holy month of Ramazan, when observant Muslims abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, people were allowed to eat in public. This year, many people are abstaining from eating in public fearing reprisals. "Ramazan this year comes with a new flavour. This is the

far promised to respect reli-

Ramazan of victory and liberation," said interim Minister of Religious Affairs Hussam Haj-Hussein in a televised state-

Most countries around the world, including Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Kuwait began observing Ramazan on Saturday, while a few other countries such as Malyasia and Japan, as well as some Shiite

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 ate their first iftar in the middle of the rubble where their houses used

to be. 'This year, after the fall of the regime, there are many confirmations regarding the prohibition of publicly breaking the fast, with violators facing imprisonment," said Damascus

resident Munir Abdallah. "This is something new, good and respectable, meaning that the rituals of 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.

US court rules head of watchdog agency must keep his job

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

from unlawful treatment will continue. The judge said the special

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

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

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

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

Yawning wealth gap widening inequalities in China: Report

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

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

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

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

nomic recovery, the Post reported on Sunday.
The country is grappling with weak consumption and a languishing property sector, where the rich park most of their assets.

ignite a private sector-led eco-

Much of the economic strain is being felt by those in the middle and lower-middle classes, it

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

trade fights with Beijing.
Already, Chinese goods were hit by 10 per cent tariffs by Trump earlier this month.
During his election campaign, he threatened to slap 60 per cent tariffs on Chinese goods to cent tariffs on Chinese goods to

address US concerns over fen-

tanyl, a potent opioid drug blamed for widespread drug addiction in the US. addiction in the US.

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

fidence in the country to

reverse the economic slow-

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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to a message about whether that would happen. Trump shut down the Spanish version of the website during his first term. It was restored when President Joe Biden was inaugurated in

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Tesla did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

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

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

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

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

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



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

Child dies of Ebola in Uganda,

Imran Khan seeks global help for democracy, regional stability

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

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

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

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

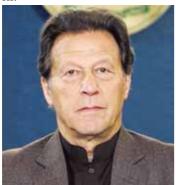
He underscored that his imprisonment and the charges brought against him were politically motivated attempts to stifle his advocacy for

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

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

reaching consequences, not only for

the country but also for regional and



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

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

been reduced to a tool of political persecution.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Officials concerned about militant attack in Karachi

PTI ■ KARACHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

raising concern over surveillance

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

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

PTI KAMPALA

the end of January

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

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

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

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

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

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

told The Associated Press on

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



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

Purposes.

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

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

PD(1607)C

Government fails to find right candidate for BPCL top job

board-level

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

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

(BPCL), according to a PESB order.

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

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

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

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

eight candidates, including director on HPCL board and managing director of Indraprastha Gas Ltd, for the post of chairman and managing director at HPCL but rejected them all.

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

the problem is these selection committee picked

chairman former managing director of BPCL, for that job.

Most

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

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

companies are not creating leaders with wide exposure.

Most of the candidates who

appeared for interviews for HPCL and BPCL had spent

all their professional careers

HPCL refine crude oil into fuels like petrol and diesel, make petrochemicals, and retail fuels, ONGC produces

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

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

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

than his core competence.

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

'Take the instance of Arun

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

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

official said.

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

multidisciplinary exposure. Another official said the situation at HPCL is the most grim as potential candidates have spent all of their professional careers in just one or two disciplines. "While it is easy to blame PESB and the petroleum ministry, I think the oil companies have to share the blame of not creating a leadership pipeline and nurturing talent," the first

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

official said.

FPIs withdraw ₹34,574 Crore from equities in Februrary

 $F_{\text{pulled out }}^{\text{oreign investors have}} \xrightarrow{\text{have}}$ from the Indian equity markets in February pushing total outflows to ₹1.12 Lakh Crore in the first two months of 2025 amid rising global trade tensions and concerns over corporate earnings growth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But in the process, they are selling in the best performing valuations," Chief Vijavakumar Investment Strategist, Geojit

Financial Services, said. An important paradox in FPIs selling is that they are selling heavily in financial services, the sector which is doing well and the valuations are attractive.

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

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

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

Crore amid aggressive rate hikes by global central banks.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wave Group, Agristo to invest ₹750 Crore in UP

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

The joint venture had

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

The JV is into business to business (B2B) segment

markets.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

has gone up from 17 tonnes per hectare to 32 tonnes per both domestic and export with markets, America, Middle East, South East Asia and Japan being destinations the key overseas.

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

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

also assisting farmers in this region in mechanisation.

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

NCL aims for 139 MT production target in FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coal India arm Northern Coalfields Ltd (NCL) expects to achieve the production target of 139 Million Tonnes (MT) for the current fiscal.

In a statement, NCL said that till February the subsidiary produced 128.13 MT and "we are hopeful that we will also achieve our annual target". The company's dispatch was 125.78 MT in the April-

February period of the current fiscal. NCL's dispatch target for the current fiscal is 139 MT. The company known for its highly mechanised mines and critical role in ensuring the country's energy security, said that it has launched the first aid training programme for homemakers on a large scale. By extending awareness about first aid beyond the workplace and into the homes of its

workforce, NCL is fostering a primary-care-conscious community.

Radico Khaitan expects ₹500 Crore sales in FY26: MD

PTI NEW DELHI

Incouraged by the ongoing expects sales of ₹500 Crore from its luxury brands, including single malt 'Rampur' and Jaisalmer Indian Craft Gin, in the next fiscal, its Managing Director Abhishek Khaitan

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

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

Radico Khaitan's luxury portfolio consists of Rampur Indian Single Malt, Jaisalmer Indian Craft Gin, Sangam World Malt and Spirit of Victory 1999 Pure Malt. "For the first time in Q3

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

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

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

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 momentum to continue.

Tailwinds from growing per

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

the government's decision to slash import duty on bourbon whiskey to 50 per cent and said it is very "minuscule" in size in the Indian liquor market and "that would not have so much pressure on the local companies".

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

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

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

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

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

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

Excelsoft Technologies files for IPO with SEBI | US tariff, FIIs key drivers for markets to utilise the proceeds of the

fresh issue towards purchase

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

of land and construction of a new building and for upgradation and external electrical systems of its existing facility in Mysore, funding upgradation of the company's IT infrastructure purposes.

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

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

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

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

As per the draft papers,

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

week, analysts said.

Equity markets will take cues from the United States (US) tariff related developments, global trends and trading activity of foreign investors this

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

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

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

subside," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From macroeconomic space, announcement of HSBC manufacturing and services PMI data during the week would also be tracked by investors.

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

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

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

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

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

SVP, research, Religare Broking Limited, said. Gross GST collections rose by 9.1 per cent to about Rs 1.84 Lakh Crore in February, boosted by domestic

consumption and indicating potential economic revival. As per the official data released on Saturday, on a gross basis, mop up from Central GST stood at ₹35,204 Crore, State GST at ₹43,704 Crore, Integrated GST at ₹90,870

Crore and compensation cess of ₹13,868 Crore. Satish Chandra Aluri, analyst,

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

Wages drag as employment rises: Virmani

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

increasing".

As per the PLFS Annual Report 2023-24 (July-June), the worker-population ratio in terms of persons of all ages increased to 43.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 34.7 per cent in2017-18.

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

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

"As far as my assessment is concerned, the main reason for wages not increasing as per inflation is the lack of skills. We are not hiring skilled jobs. I have seen the data of many countries. Based on that, I would say that we need to

work on this (skill). It is in a

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

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

"According to the analysis we have done, skill development is needed at every level of education. Many children drop out of school midway, they need to be given skills accordingly. It is not that 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 understood."

Mcap of eight valued firms plummet by ₹3 Lakh Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

dropped 1,383.7 points or 5.88 per cent. The Sensex lost 4,302.47 points or 5.55 per cent. The market valuation of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) plunged ₹1,09,211.97 Crore to ₹12,60,505.51 Crore, the most among the top-10 firms. With the sharp decline in its market valuation TCS slipped to the third rank in the top-10 most valued firms chart from the previous second place. HDFC Bank overtook TCS to become the second most valuable firm. The valuation of Infosys tanked ₹52,697,93 Crore ₹7,01,002.22 Crore. Bharti Airtel's market valuation

eroded by ₹39,230.1 Crore to

₹8,94,993.67 Crore and that of

Reliance Industries dropped ₹38.025.97 Crore to ₹ 16.23.343.45 Crore. State Bank of India's (SBI) valuation diminished by ₹29,718.99 Crore to ₹6,14,236.97 Crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank slumped Crore

The valuation of ITC dipped ₹7,882.86 Crore to ₹4,93,867.57

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

₹5,14,983.41 Crore.



Tasty Recipe Using **Pistachio**

n the occasion of World Pistachio Day, Chefs have shared with The Pioneer delicious recipe that you can make using pistachios on behalf of American Pistachio Growers. Pick Me Up Pista

Bomb is a recipe by Chef Sanjeev Kapoor, Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake is by Chef Shivesh Bhatia You can have a taste of all these dishes by preping the recipes:

Pick Me Up Pista Bomb By Chef Sanjeev Kapoor

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

INGREDIENTS

 1 cup American Pistachios;
 ■ 1/4 cup brown sugar; • 1 cup rolled oats, toasted; • 1 cup puffed amaranth (rajgira); • 1/4 cup honey; • 1/4 tsp cinnamon powder

METHOD

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

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

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



Chocolate Pistachio Kunafa Cake By Chef Shivesh Bhatia

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

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

 Set a non-stick pan on medium heat and add butter to it.

• Once the butter has melted, add the

kunafa dough and roast till it becomes golden brown. Set it aside.

To make the pistachio paste, add California pistachios in a blender jar along with oil and icing sugar. Pulse the entire mixture at regular intervals of about 1 minute until the

pistachios start releasing some oil and turn into a paste. Combine this pistachio paste with the roasted kunafa to make the filling for the

cake. To assemble the cake, place a layer of

chocolate sponge on a stand or turn table Spread the pistachio kunafa filling generously over the cake layer and sandwich it with another chocolate sponge. Now tightly wrap an acetate sheet around the assembled cake. Pour the chocolate glaze over the cake and pull the acetate sheet up to let the glaze drip down from all sides.

Move Your Body, Lift Your Mind **Move Your Body, Lift Your Mind** primary hormone that body release in response In an era where stress, anxiety, and depression to stress; can lead to increased anxiety and negatively impact your overall mental well-being. are becoming increasingly common, the role of physical activity in promoting mental well-Engaging in regular exercise helps lower corbeing has never been more crucial. While tisol levels, making it easier to manage stress most people may associate exercise with and maintain a balanced mood. physical health, its impact on mental well-When you engage in physical activity, your being is also quite significant- from managbody releases endorphins, those feel-good ing stress, boosting one's mood and enhanchormones that help reduce stress while increasing the overall well-being. Studies indicate happiness and relaxation. that who exercises regularly have improved They help relieve pain, relax, and lift mental health, healthier cognitive functions, mood. Exercise also promotes and enhanced emotionthe production of serotonin and dopamine, neual well-being.

But how this

happens?

High levels

of cortisol- a

rotransmitters

that play a key

Work on yourself because you have to leave

Work on yourself because this is how

a legacy behind

you win the mind.

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 yourselves.

Vidarbha wins third Ranji Trophy title

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

matches giving them 40 points.

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

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

Overall, Vidarbha won nine of the 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

World No. 2 Jeeno Thitikul

fought hard to chase Ko down,

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

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

star made an early push with

two birdies in the first four

holes to trail Ko by a stroke at

9-under but couldn't maintain

Charley Hull, just one shot

behind Ko entering the final round, saw her title hopes fade

after a frustrating 74, settling

for a share of fourth at seven

but her charge fell just short.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the IOC will vote on March

20 in the Greek resort of

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

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

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

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

Neeraj Chopra winning gold

and silver respectively in

Praggnanandhaa scores second victory in Prague Masters

PTI ■ PRAGUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

matter much.

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

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

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

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

on Nos. 7 and 8, seizing control of the leaderboard from then Despite dropping two bogeys

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

after the turn, the world No. 3

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

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

fighting spirit, energy, and passion put him in the

category of cricket's "great"

Richards, a long-time admirer

of Kohli's indomitable spirit

and passion for the game, also

hailed the India batter for

silencing critics through

Well, I think he answers all of

us, really. Before the World

Cup for the ODIs, where he

wasn't doing that well and

then he came back in

magnificent form, so, that is

true testament to the

character that we are speaking

about," said Richards, a

governing council member for

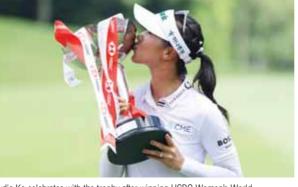
League, during a virtual

International Master

performances on the field.

and "legendary" players.

PTI MUMBAI



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

"I started off really steady, and

interaction. "This is why I put

him in the category of being

great and legendary... Not all

the time that you get players

who can come back when

they're down. His fighting

spirit, energy and passion to

do well make him stand out."

Richards said if he was still

playing, he would love to have

"His energy reflects his

passion. He goes to show you

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

He's just magnificent in that

way," he added.

Kohli reminds me of myself

Asked about batters he

admires, the former West

Indies captain said Kohli

"A lot of batsmen... Before you

had people like Sachin

reminds him of himself.

Kohli's energy on the field.

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

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

under alongside Im Jin Hee, who fired the day's best round of 67, and Gaby Lopez (70). The Singapore tournament is the second of three events on the LPGA's first Asian swing of iv Richards praises Kohli, calls him 'legendary'

the pressure.

that his involvement in the game all the time. There's a Tendulkar, who has retired," passion for that. There's not a he said.

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

"I appreciate seeing guys who,

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

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

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

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

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

some very good player," he said.

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

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

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

Real Betis defeats Real Madrid 2-1 in Spanish league

PTI BARCELONA

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

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

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

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

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

per cent."
"We weren't able to keep our initiative and the result got away from us," Ancelotti said. This is a hard blow, and we

have to react. Today we didn't play well. Madrid had led the league but

at modest Espanyol. Next for Madrid: Tuesday's

is now struggling with just one victory its last five rounds, a poor run that includes a defeat

Champions League round-of-16 game against Atletico. Isco torments old team

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

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

the Benito Villamarin.

Isco, however, shared the credit for the win with his teammates. "Madrid has the best players and a million different ways it can hurt you, so if it weren't for

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

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

"It is a dream of any player to play for his national team," Isco said after the win. "I haven't played for Spain in

six, seven years, so of course I would like to." Madrid has good start and little

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

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

"We went for the win and generated more scoring chances than they did," Pellegrini, a former Madrid coach, said.

"They played better in the first 15 minutes and deserved their goal, but from there on it was our match? Madrid was without Jude

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

Carvahlo and Marc Roca. Atletico takes advantage Álvarez scored from a pass by Marcos Llorente in the 66th after both came off the bench to

including midfielders William

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

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

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

Williams.

Dodi Lukebakio continued to provide a bright spot in Sevilla's otherwise drab season by

scoring his 11th league goal in the 81st minute to secure a 1-1 draw with Rayo Vallecano.