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Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 18 Issue 197
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

DEHRADUN, THURSDAY JULY 18, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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UP CM Yogi prepares for critical bypolls



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with BJP leader JP Nadda

File Photo

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT
LUCKNOW

Deputy CM fends off Akhilesh Yadav

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday entrusted Ministers with the responsibility of supervising the bypolls to 10 Assembly seats and to stay for two nights in a week in the respective constituencies. The Chief Minister also asked the Ministers and leaders of party organisations to be active on social media to counter the negative campaign of the Opposition and the false narrative spread by INDIA Bloc parties. The Chief Minister has constituted a team of 30 Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of State to

Amid the buzz over possible changes in the Yogi Adityanath Government, the Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and main Opposition Samajwadi Party's leader Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday engaged in a verbal duel after which the latter said the people of UP are fed up with infighting within the BJP Government. In a sharp response, Maurya stressed that the BJP has strong Governments and organisation at the Centre

and in UP and the Samajwadi Party has no chance of a comeback. "There is infighting in the Government. BJP leaders are fighting among themselves. The people know about the corruption and are fed up with the game of thrones," Yadav said at a party event. Responding to the SP chief, Maurya tweeted this that the BJP's Governments and organisation in the country and the State are strong. "The return of SP's reign of goons in UP is impossible. BJP will repeat 2017 in the 2027 state polls," he posted on X.

supervise the bypolls to 10 UP Assembly seats. The Ministers are from the Bharatiya Janata Party and allies Rashtriya Lok Dal and NISHAD Party. The Chief Minister presided over a meeting of the Ministers and leaders of the party organisation. Three Ministers each have been given the responsibility of supervising the elections in the 10 Assembly seats going to bypolls. Yogi has specifically directed the Ministers to focus the attention on the preparations at the polling booth level and be in constant touch with the cadre and grassroot party workers. He said the party worker was the top priority and asked the Ministers in-charge of the poll bound 10 Assembly seats to meet the party workers, ascertain their problems and facilitate them in discharging their responsibility during the elections. The CM said the party workers should feel assured that both the government and the party organisation was solidly behind them. The meeting also discussed the measures to be taken for busting the false narrative of inflation, unemployment, abrogation of Constitution and caste-based reservation for the SC, ST and OBCs. He said the false narrative of amendment to the Constitution for abrogating the reservations need to be particularly busted.



Fire breaks out at Gulati Restaurant in Pandara Market in New Delhi on Wednesday Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Iconic Gulati eatery gutted, Delhiites left heartbroken

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A fire in the iconic Gulati restaurant, a favourite haunt of foodies, in the wee hours of Wednesday in the heart of the national Capital left its patrons broken-hearted. Serving the gourmet since 1959, this famous eatery has had among its clients a number of dignitaries regularly visiting the eating joint to savour the delicacies on offer. As the disheartening news of the fire that gutted a good portion of the restaurant spread by word of mouth, many Delhiites got nostalgic reminiscing about their times at the eatery which is etched in their memories forever. The restaurant that had a humble beginning as a small "dhaba" with simple wooden benches and tables, transformed into a fine dine restaurant in 2013, giving a perfect dining experience to the visitors. The restaurant was also known for its great ambience. The fire broke out at 2.48 am in the sitting area of Veg Gulati

restaurant adjacent the main restaurant, and is a vegetarian alternative to the same. The leaping flames soon spread to the first floor and caused extensive damage. Sharing their sense of loss, many fans of the restaurant told The Pioneer that the place was part of many family gatherings. Twenty-six-year-old Aditya Ahuja, who works as a content writer at Prasar Bharti, reminisced how he visited the place with his father as a toddler. According to an official of Delhi Fire Services (DFS), it took one hour for four fire tenders to bring the blaze under control. The cause of fire is suspected to be a short circuit. Police has said a probe is underway in the matter. Over the years, the restaurant has emerged as one of the best serving North Indian cuisine in the city. Long queues outside the place are a usual sight. However, this doesn't deter foodies from visiting the restaurant to savour their favourites dishes which include dal makhni, naan and dahi kebab.

NCP's Ajit Pawar suffers setback



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Still to recover from the Opposition MahaYuti's poor performance in the recent Lok Sabha polls, the Ajit Pawar-led ruling NCP suffered another jolt on Wednesday, as its Pimpri unit chief Ajit Gavahane and three other leaders quit the party, ahead of their joining the rival NCP (Sharad Pawar) on July 20. Apart from Gavahane, three other leaders who quit the ruling NCP (AP) and announced their decision to join the rival Sharad Pawar-led NCP are NCP's Pimpri-Chinchwad Students' Wing chief Yash Sane, former corporators Rahul Bhasale and Pankaj Bhalekar. Gavahane, Rahul and Pankaj submitted their resignations to NCP state President Sunil Tatkare. Sane had sent in his papers to the NCP Student Wing President Prashant Kadam earlier this week. The resignations by four NCP (AP) leaders come a year after Ajit Pawar rebelled against Sharad Pawar, brought about a dramatic split in the parent party and joined the BJP-led MahaYuti Government in the State.

Karnataka Government pushes pause button on job quota Bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

The Congress-led Karnataka Government on Wednesday landed in soup after the Cabinet first approved a controversial Bill mandating first 100 per cent reservation in private firms then revising it to two slabs for Kannadigas and finally "put on hold" facing backlash for 48 hours. The reservation in private firms for Group C and Group D posts was made public by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and later he deleted it, sharing another rectified post clarifying that the Cabinet approved the Bill to fix 50 per cent reservation for administrative posts and 75 per cent for non-administrative posts for Kannadigas in private industries and other organisations in the State. The decision was taken in the Cabinet meeting held on Monday. The move, however, did not go down well with industry leaders and late evening Government sources said the Bill which was to be tabled in the Karnataka Assembly on Thursday has been put on hold now. Sources said the Congress high command from New Delhi had to



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with leaders

File Photo: PTI

intervene given the "sensitivity" of the matter in the Bill as the State including the silicon city Bengaluru has a population from north India and else part of the country. "The Cabinet meeting held yesterday approved a Bill to make recruitment of 100 per cent Kannadigas mandatory for 'C and D' grade posts in all private industries in the state. We are a pro-Kannada Government. Our priority is to look after the welfare of the Kannadigas," the CM said in a social media post and then deleted it and replaced with another message. "It is our Government's wish that Kannadigas should be given an opportunity to lead

a comfortable life in the motherland. We are a pro-Kannada Government. Our priority is to look after the welfare of Kannadigas," he said. Karnataka's move is similar to a Bill introduced by the Haryana Government, mandating 75 per cent reservation in private sector jobs to the residents of the State. It was, however, struck down the Punjab and Haryana High Court on November 17, 2023. According to sources, the "Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024" will be tabled on Thursday in the Assembly.

Haryana Govt announces quota for Agniveers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

The Haryana Government on Wednesday announced a ten per cent reservation for Agniveers in the recruitment of constables, forest guards and jail wardens along with quotas in other posts. This decision came ahead of the Assembly polls in the State. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini also said the Government will provide interest-free loans of up to ₹5 lakh if any Agniveer wishes to set up their own business. "In direct recruitment to posts of constable, mining guard, forest guard, jail warden and special police officer made by the State Government, there will be a 10 per cent horizontal reservation for Agniveers," he said at a press conference in Chandigarh. He said in Group C and D posts, an age relaxation of three years will also be given. "However, for the first batch of Agniveers, this age relaxation will be five years," Saini added. In direct recruitment for Group C civil posts, there will be a five per cent horizontal reservation for Agniveers, the Chief Minister said.

Law Ministry advocates sunset clause in key Bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Law and Justice has pitched for the incorporation of a "sunset" clause or automatic repeal provision in certain type of bills to de-clutter statute books and has put it in its 100-day agenda. The sunset clause applies primarily to laws of temporary nature or those dealing with dynamic situations. Once their utility ends, they stand removed from the statute books. Sunset clauses have been widely used in the US, the UK and Germany for more than 20 years now. The legislative department in the Ministry has made "sunset clause" in new legislative



proposal a part of its 100-day agenda, saying steps will be taken in this regard in consultation with concerned ministries. Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed all Union Ministries and departments to draw up a 100-day agenda for the next Government. Former Union Law Secretary P K Malhotra explained that whenever the legislature —

Parliament or State legislature — want to restrict the life of a legislation being passed by it, it may as a matter of policy provide a sunset clause providing that after a lapse of a certain period — five or 10 years depending on the requirement — the law will come to an end. The legislature can pass a fresh law giving the statute, which has become inoperative due to the sunset clause, a fresh lease of life, Malhotra said. According to the legislative department, it seeks to incorporate sunset clause or automatic repealing clause in new legislative proposal in consultation with administrative Ministries and departments concerned. As and when the proposals in this

behalf are received by it, necessary action will be taken up, it noted. "This is a long-pending demand. This practice is prevalent in some other countries also. I think there are many legislations where this kind of clause can be put so that Parliament or State legislature is also vigilant that with the passage of time, if a legislation needs to continue, then they will give it a fresh look. "And if they do not want to continue, then on the day provided in the law, it will automatically come to an end," Malhotra explained. In the recent past, some commissions set up to look into legal reforms have also pressed or such a clause.

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RPF rescues 84,119 kids at risk of falling into wrong hands

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The RPF has during last seven years rescued 84,119 children, who were at risk in stations and trains, preventing them from falling into wrong hands, a press statement from the Railway Ministry said.

Each rescue is a testament to the RPF's commitment to safeguarding the most vulnerable members of society," it added.

This year 2018 set a strong foundation for the operation, highlighting the urgent need for such an initiative," the Ministry said.



street children. The consistent numbers showcased the persistent issue of children running away and needing protection," it added.

resurgence in their rescue operations, saving 11,907 children. This year saw a notable increase in the number of children found and protected, with 9601 children identified as runaways, 961 as missing, 648 as left behind, 370 as destitute, 78 as kidnapped, 82 as mentally challenged and 123 as street children," the Ministry said.

17,756 children, the highest in the recorded period. It said, "This year saw a significant number of runaways and missing children being found and given the necessary care and protection. 14,603 children were identified as runaways, 1156 as missing, 1035 as left behind, 384 as destitute, 161 as kidnapped, 86 as mentally challenged and 212 as street children. The efforts were bolstered by increased awareness and more coordinated operations across the railway zones."

months of 2024, the RPF has already rescued 4,607 children. "With 3430 children rescued as runaways, the early trends suggest a continued commitment to the operation "Nanhe Farishtey", the Ministry said. It added, "Through their efforts, the RPF has not only rescued children but also raised awareness about the plight of runaway and missing children, prompting further action and support from various stakeholders.



Indian CAPF, special commando dogs to secure Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ten specially-trained Indian CAPF and special commando force dogs are in France to provide a counter-terrorist and anti-sabotage security cover to various venues of the Paris Olympics slated to open next week, official sources said on Wednesday.

breeding and training school located on Taralu near Bengaluru, Karnataka, the second officer said. "The Belgian Malinois breed is considered to be the most preferred combat dog by security forces across the globe," he said.

Childhood obesity may lead to weakened heart, says UCL research

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In the midst of a rapid increase in childhood obesity both in India and globally, researchers from University College London have issued a stark warning: individuals who gain excessive weight from their 20s onwards may face weakened hearts by the time they reach their 60s.



aimed "to look at whether being overweight at earlier stages of adult life showed lasting associations with poorer heart health irrespective of people's weight in later life". The study included 1,690 people born in England, Scotland, and Wales in 1946.

Compensation for IAF soldier infected with HIV after blood transfusion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian Air Force (IAF) soldier, who contracted AIDS due to transfusion of contaminated blood at a military hospital in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba in 2002, has received Rs 18 lakh and the residual amount from over Rs 1.41 crore awarded to him as compensation has been deposited with the apex court registry, the IAF has informed the Supreme Court.



tempt of the directions issued by the top court in its 2023 verdict came up for hearing before the bench on Tuesday. Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Vikramjit Banerjee said they have filed a compliance affidavit in the matter.

(AIIMS), Delhi, for it. The bench said since the man resides in Ajmer, a good medical facility can be found in Jaipur to ensure he is not inconvenienced.

The disability pension. In its 2023 verdict, the apex court had said, "It is held that the appellant is entitled to compensation, calculated at Rs 1,54,73,000 towards compensation on account of medical negligence of the respondents, who are held liable for the injury suffered by the appellant."

JP Nadda for global regulatory standards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid recent scrutiny of several drug companies over product issues such as cough syrup, Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Wednesday stressed the critical need for the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to draw a roadmap with timelines of adopting global standards in its regulatory functions.



work on highest principles of transparency to ensure that the products manufactured and sold by India meet the highest indices of global quality standards," he said. The Health Minister stated that it is important for CDSCO to be in continuous dialogue with the drugs' and medical devices' industry to understand their issues and support them to fulfill the quality expectations and standards of CDSCO.

most important statistic that explains India's inability to grow faster since 2014 is the "sluggish investment rate". "India has been locked into a cycle of low investment since 2014, due to a combination of erratic policy, rampant cronyism, and the ED/IT/CBI raid raj," Ramesh said in a statement.

tion with state-of-the-art facilities matching global standards," he said. On the topic of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector in drugs manufacturing and the issues faced by the small scale industries to meet quality standards, Nadda said, "Let us understand the issues faced by MSME sector and support them to strengthen their capacity and quality of products on the one hand, and encourage them to meet the regulatory requirements on the other."

Indian Embassy, OMSC working to rescue cargo vessel crew

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Comoros-flagged cargo vessel that capsized off the Oman coast has 13 Indians seafarers and the Indian embassy in the Gulf nation is in contact with the concerned authorities, official sources said on Wednesday.

90 per cent drop in water-borne diseases in Andaman Nicobar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Earth Sciences, Dr Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said that after installation of Kavaratti plant in Andaman Nicobar has cut down the incidence of water borne diseases by 90 per cent highlighting the health benefits and impact of provision of potable water.



tionalized in the coming weeks. The capacity of each of these LTTD units is around 1 Lakh litre of potable water per day which will be increased to 1.5 lakh litres per day in the coming time," he said.

400 m depth. The technology is indigenous, environmentally friendly and easy to operate. Dr. Singh also informed Patel that two re-mineralization plants are being made operational which will add the essential salts evaporated during the desalination process.



FIRST COLUMN TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

Accepting events as they happen brings a great sense of calmness



RAVI VALLURI

Aeons ago in ancient China lived an old farmer who worked on his land for several years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, a group of neighbours came to commiserate with him. "Such misfortune," the agitated group of villagers reacted. "Maybe," the farmer replied nonchalantly. A few days later the horse returned, accompanied by three wild horses. Another group of villagers approached the house of the agriculturist to sympathise. "Maybe," replied the aged farmer.

The following day, the farmer's son tried to mount one of the untamed horses and was thrown off. The strapping youngster broke his leg. The overwrought neighbours once again queued up to offer their sympathies at this misadventure. "Maybe," was the desultory answer yet again. A few days later some military personnel swooped on the village to draft young men. Looking at the incapacitated stripling, he was disqualified from being recruited. The exuberant neighbours congratulated the old grazier on the turn of events. "Maybe," was the laconic reply yet again. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has succinctly elucidated the significance of the aphorism, 'to accept people and situations as they are' in his teachings.

The 4 Ds of Abnormal Behaviour

Abnormal behaviour can be construed as behaviour that is disturbing (socially unacceptable), distressing, maladaptive (or self-defeating) and often the result of distorted thoughts (cognitions) as per Wikipedia. There are four strains in this abnormal behaviour. These are deviance, dysfunction, distress, and danger. Deviant behaviour is usually different, extreme, and unusual and could even include bizarre behavioural patterns. The second in the series is distressing behaviour.

People who are related to such individuals feel unpleasant and unsettled in their presence. Dysfunctional behaviour discommodates the patient to such an extent that it acts as a deterrent in his day-to-day functioning and behaviour and interferes with his range of activities. Five specific patterns of anxiety disorders fall into this category. The first is termed General Anxiety Disorder. This is a prolonged, vague, quite inexplicable fear having no objective basis, accompanied by hypervigilance, and attached motor tension of the brain. Next is what in quotidian parlance



is called panic disorder. These are none other than perpetual and frequent anxiety attacks which are accompanied by psychological symptoms such as breathlessness, palpitations, a trembling feeling, dizziness and even a sense of total loss of control over the self.

Next in the line of mental disorders are phobias. Humans have irrational phobias such as Acrophobia (fear of heights), Glossophobia (fear of addressing an audience), Claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), and Aviophobia (fear of flying). In such situations, a human being is preoccupied with a wide range of thoughts, which are normally irrational. Last, but not less distressing – on this ill-fated checklist is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These individuals suffer repeated and recurrent nightmares, flashbacks, impaired concentration, and emotional numbing which invariably follows traumatic or stressful events. Our country is plagued by three major issues namely, addictions, women's issues, and psychological disorders. Generally, citizens approach tantriks, babas, and quacks hoping for a miraculous cure. It is paramount to meet a qualified medical practitioner. The first step to recovery is medication under the expert guidance of a doctor. Next, after a period of treatment, it would be prudent to contact self-help groups, which sustain the treatment. For instance, undergoing the Happiness Course of the Art of Living, where one learns the Sudarshan Kriya breathing technique which harmonises the body and thought. "No matter how hard the past, you can always begin again," said Gautama Buddha.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Focus on employment, innovation and skill



DINESH SOOD

The Union Budget 2024 must factor in rising unemployment and need for innovation for boosting the economy and sustaining economic growth



The upcoming Union Budget on July 23 will shed light on initiatives that may reshape economic priorities under the Modi3.0 government. Amid various expectations and commitments, the government's focus on skills, employment, and innovation emerges as a key strategy in addressing current challenges and shaping future opportunities. The decision to rename the Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development to include livelihood emphasizes a shift to provide employable skills to the most vulnerable 67 per cent of the country's underprivileged population.

Placing skill development ahead of employment underscores a proactive approach to addressing the issue of a shortage of skilled workforce, especially in the health & wellness, manufacturing, and technology sectors. This not only recognizes the immediate need for a trained workforce but also positions skill development as a key driver for sustainable employment generation.

As the Budget approaches, stakeholders across sectors eagerly await concrete measures that go beyond mere promises and lead to tangible outcomes. The effectiveness of these initiatives in translating into job creation, technological innovation, and sustainable economic growth will be carefully scrutinized. The government's steadfast commitment to enhancing skills holds the promise of unleashing India's potential as a global economic powerhouse in the years ahead.

The rebranding and revitalization of the 15-year-old National Skill Development Mission (NSDM) as the Skill India Mission under PM Narendra Modi has sparked concerns about the effectiveness of the ambitious Skill India program. This program has received support from two governments over 15 years — first the UPA and then the NDA. India is in the midst of an urgent unemployment crisis due to an employment



SKILL INDIA WAS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT UNSKILLED YOUNG PEOPLE AND EQUIP THEM FOR THE JOB MARKET, BUT UNEMPLOYMENT RATES REMAIN HIGH

deficit. Issues such as the delayed implementation of PMKVY 3.0 and lack of placement support are exacerbating this problem. The latest data underlines the severity of India's unemployment crisis, making it crucial to prioritize employment generation to confront the challenges facing the Indian economy, especially with a significant number of young people entering the working age each month.

In July 2015, PM Modi stated that "Skill India aims to build self-confidence among the underprivileged, rather than just providing jobs". However, nearly a decade later, the youth's interest in the program seems to be waning. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has implemented strict attendance monitoring and centralized student information. Unfortunately, this has led to a decline in student retention, with many dropping out due to the rigid attendance requirements. Skill India was designed to attract unskilled young people and equip them for the job market, but unemployment rates remain high. Data from the International Labour Organization reveals that the proportion of educated unemployed individuals has risen sharply from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2023. Established in 2014, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship absorbed the NSDC and other programs to train 300 million people by 2024. Despite partnering with various organizations and raising awareness, the programs have not been as effective as envisioned. Experts argue that even traditional degrees do not guarantee employment, and the education system is outdated and not job-focused. Only a small percentage

of candidates certified by the PMKVY program have found jobs, indicating a fundamental challenge with the current skilling initiatives. Boosting skilling programs and industry partnerships is an urgent necessity to create ongoing skilling avenues and improve employability for school dropouts, and unskilled, or semi-skilled workers who need to secure a livelihood.

Although the announcement of setting up 75 skilling e-labs for simulated learning in the 2022-23 Union Budget is a positive move, we must recognize that our problem is far-reaching. API-based trusted skill credentials and discovery layers to find relevant jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities won't suffice beyond a certain point, necessitating an urgent need to skill the masses and empower the country's youths. We must acknowledge that over 40% of Indians aged 15 to 24 are neither in education, employment, or training, which is significantly higher than the South Asian (30%) and global (24%) averages. Indian firms report substantial skill shortages compared to other countries, and they assess only about 46% of graduates as employable.

The majority of students lack the necessary skills, and the skills they do possess are not aligned with the needs of their employers. Every year, more than 12 million young people in India become employable, yet we are unable to absorb them into the workforce. Many of these individuals hold higher education degrees, but they lack the necessary employable skills. The India Skills Report (ISR) 2024 highlights that only 50.3% of graduates from higher education institutions are deemed employable. A skill gap study conducted

by the NSDC during 2010-14 indicates that by 2025, India will need nearly 109.7 million additional skilled workers across various sectors. While the government's interventions in promoting skill development are commendable, more needs to be done to bridge the skill gaps. Wish List: In the 2024-25 Union Budget, it is crucial to prioritize upskilling initiatives for gig workers, due to the eight-fold increase in young people's participation in the gig economy from 2019 to 2023, the majority of these youth come from Tier-I and Tier-II cities and rural areas.

While the government is working to make employable skills more accessible through public-private partnerships, there is a need to facilitate and incentivize the establishment of more skill development universities to steer the youth, especially undergraduates towards skills. This will help align the skill courses with global standards and significantly enhance the youth's skills, contributing to the nation's workforce development. I strongly urge a significant budget allocation to provide employable skills, particularly to school dropouts on a priority basis. This will not only empower them but also significantly contribute to the growth of the Indian economy, aiming to reach \$7 trillion by 2030 and position India as the world's third-largest economy.

(The writer is Co-Founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres.; Views expressed are personal)

Kerala: Beyond the well-crafted image of a tidy, literate State

Behind its progressive facades lies a struggle with industrial stagnation, healthcare shortcomings, and a surprising reliance on superstition

The assumption among the people outside Kerala is that it is the most literate, intelligent and hygienic State in the country. The ruling CPI(M) leaves no stone unturned to portray it as the land of people with a scientific temper and is the numero uno in all spheres of life. There are no countries in the world where you will not find expatriate Malayalees. S.K. Pottekkadu, the best travel writer the State has produced in the last 150 years has written articulately about the Keralites whom he met in South Africa and Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) even in the days when there were no diplomatic ties between India and these countries. The modern-day reality of Kerala is entirely different and far from



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

what is projected by the CPI(M). Malayalees are leaving en masse from Kerala to Europe, Australia, the USA, Canada, Latin America, Africa and of course the West Asian countries in search of livelihood and for higher studies. There are no major industries worth their names in the State other than some public sector companies like FACT, Cochin Refineries and Cochin Shipyard. Industrialists and entrepreneurs have translo-

cated their enterprises to neighbouring States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The claim by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his minister of health Veena George that the State is a role model in health care and well-being for the rest of the country and the world is a great joke. The chief minister boards the first available flight to the USA whenever he is afflicted with the common cold. Recently, a four-year-old girl was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode for the removal of her sixth finger. However, the doctor who performed the surgery operated on her tongue while leaving the finger untouched. Though her parents alerted the hospi-

tal authorities, the initial reaction was denial of the faux pas by the latter. Remember, the Kozhikode Medical College and Hospital is a most sought-after institution by prospective medical students! This is not an isolated incident as such things happen quite regularly in the State's government hospitals. The doctors have their justification for such mistakes. Most of them say they are overworked and underpaid. When they work under pressure, such errors are bound to happen, claim the doctors! The aim of this column is not to embarrass the doctors or their minister of health who was a mere news reader in one of the many TV news channels that have mushroomed in the State over the last two decades.

The recent controversy about sorcerers digging out (or mining?) copper plates, miniature artefacts and bones of some birds like hens or ducks from the residence and office of K. Sudhakaran MP who is president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee is an issue that shows the large scale obscurantism prevailing among the descendants of Jawaharlal Nehru, the wholesale dealer of scientific temper. According to sources close to Sudhakaran, the sorcery was the handiwork of people in the party itself who wanted to see the KPCC chief remain in bed for the rest of his life. There are black magicians across Kerala who have the "expertise" to neutralize one's enemies or help you to become a minister or even chief min-

ister! This is not an exaggerated statement as this writer himself has spoken to a sorcerer who was into this kind of business for decades. When Oommen Chandi was the chief minister (2011-2016), there was this Congress leader who felt left out during the formation of the UDF Government. When his efforts to become a minister failed, he approached a sorcerer from Malabar who offered the former to make him a minister and that too with a plum portfolio by performing puja. The sorcerer said that witchcraft had to be done and it would cost the politician Rs 12 lakh and the latter accepted the proposal with glee. The magician rang up this writer and said that the puja would begin the next morning

and the politician would become the minister in three months. Presto, in three months, the politician was sworn in as a minister with a coveted portfolio! The story did not end there. The sorcerer was not paid the promised money and he had to warn the politician that he had the know-how to get the minister dismissed from the government. Last heard, the politician (nay, minister) hushed up the issue by paying half the amount he had agreed to pay earlier. Politicians cheating the electorate is quite common but hoodwinking even wizards and warlocks is new information. Sorcery and black magic are not confined to Kerala. They are a global phenomenon with even our Dravidian politi-

cians who swear by rationalism seeking guidance from astrologers, wizards and sorcerers for survival. Some of the countries that played in the World Cup football championship in the 1970s and 1980s used to have an official sorcerer for the team. His mission is to perform witchcraft near the rival team's goalposts to ensure that the ball enters the post without failure! If you feel that sorcery is restricted to politics, business and sports, you are mistaken, Sir. There are many instances of it being used by scientific researchers in the US and Russia. Wait for another occasion.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views expressed are personal)

Nikky Haley 'strongly endorses' Trump

PTI ■ MILWAUKEE

Indian-American Republican leader Nikky Haley has endorsed her former boss Donald Trump as the party's candidate for the presidential election...



even on our worst day, we are blessed to live in America," said the former South Carolina governor and the US Ambassador to the United Nations.

"If we have four more years of Biden... or a single day of Harris... our country will be badly worse off."

indoctrinated to think our country is racist and evil. The Jewish community is facing an obscene rise in antisemitism. Too many minorities are trapped in communities devastated by crime...

Iran rejects accusations

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran has rejected accusations regarding plots to assassinate former US President Donald Trump, while citing legal action for the 2020 assassination of a revered general by US drone...

Traces of cyanide in blood of 6 dead Bangkok hotel guests

AP ■ BANGKOK

Doctors who performed autopsies on the six Bangkok hotel guests who died mysteriously confirmed Wednesday that they had traces of cyanide in their blood.

Lt. Gen. Trairong Piwpan, chief of the Thai police force's forensic division, said there were traces of cyanide in the cups and thermoses that police found in the room...

and left Thailand on July 10. Police believe the seventh person had no involvement in the deaths. The Vietnamese and United States embassies have been contacted over the deaths...

Won't stop telling the truth about Trump: Biden

AP ■ DUBAI

President Joe Biden returned to the campaign trail Tuesday for the first time since the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump...

ing why Trump's administration was "hell" for Black Americans, including the former president's mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic...



seized on Trump recently referring "Black jobs," drawing big applause by joking, "I love the phrase."

female justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson. Biden's trip comes as Democrats have been engaged in a weeks-long crisis of confidence over his candidacy...

The president made indirect reference to unrest in his own party on Tuesday, recalling President Harry S Truman famously saying, "If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog."

Two attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels strike ships in Red Sea

AP ■ DUBAI

Two attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted ships in the Red Sea on Monday as a new US aircraft carrier approached the region to provide security for the key international trade route...

Operations centre reported. "The vessel conducted self-protection measures, after 15 minutes the small craft aborted the attack."

Early Tuesday, the US Central Command confirmed the attacks and identified the names and flags of the ship. "This continued reckless behaviour by the Iranian-backed Houthis threatens regional stability and endangers the lives of mariners across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden..."

Israel's military will begin drafting ultra-Orthodox men on Sunday

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli military on Tuesday said it would begin sending draft notices to Jewish ultra-Orthodox men on Sunday — a step that could destabilise Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

after more than nine months of war against Hamas militants in Gaza. The army summons is the beginning of a months-long enlistment process that could be difficult to enforce if there is large-scale refusal to comply.

threatened if their followers serve in the army. Netanyahu's government relies on the support of ultra-Orthodox parties that oppose changes to the system.

back pushed the crowd back, and officers dragged protesters away. Police said nine people were arrested. "The army is not an army for fighting. It's an army with indoctrination" against religion, said Yona Kay, a protester.

Not enough info on Covid-19 vaccine deals shared with public: EU court

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Commission did not allow the public enough access to information about COVID-19 vaccine purchase agreements it secured with pharmaceutical companies during the pandemic, the EU general court said Wednesday.

issue of transparency surrounding the negotiations for vaccines between the EU and big pharmaceutical groups. The EU Commission was mandated by member countries to organize the joint procure-

behalf of all 27 member states allowed the bloc to quickly gather 2.7 billion euros (\$2.95 billion) to place an order for more than a billion doses of vaccines.

Post violence, Bangladesh asks all universities to close down

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Authorities in Bangladesh urged all universities to close on Wednesday, after at least six people died in violent protests over the allocation of government jobs. Some universities quickly moved to comply, but others, including the major university at the center of the violence, were still deciding how to respond.

Court voids US Marine's adoption of Afghan orphan

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A Virginia appellate court ruled Tuesday that a US Marine should never have been granted an adoption of an Afghan war orphan and voided the custody order he's relied on to raise the girl for nearly three years.

though she remained in Afghanistan as the government there tracked down her extended family and reunited her with them. The family fled Afghanistan with thousands of other evacuees when the Taliban took over in the summer of 2021.

who should ultimately get to raise the girl, and she remains with the Mast family for now. No government agencies involved would clarify Tuesday what the next steps might entail, or what their role might be in determining where the child should live as the remaining legal fight unfolds.



Marine Maj. Joshua Mast

their unlawful actions - actions which have led to profound and unnecessary suffering." Charlottesville Circuit Court Judge Claude Worrell last May vacated Mast's adoption order, which was granted by another judge in 2020, but left in place a custody order that allowed the child to stay with the Masts.

that Mast failed to inform the court of key developments, including that the government of Afghanistan never gave up its claim to the girl, that she had been given to Afghan relatives and that a federal court had already rebuffed his efforts to stop that reunification.

adoption proceedings and conduct a hearing on the Afghan couple's adoption petition, which is currently pending before the court. The Masts may file their own petition as well, Ortiz wrote.

Pak delivers strong demarche to Afghanistan over terror attack

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Wednesday lodged a strong protest with the Afghan interim government over the deadly terrorist attack this week at a key military cantonment, reiterating its call for "decisive action" against militants hiding in the neighbouring nation.

The terror attack on the Bannu Cantonment in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday killed eight soldiers and injured many others. Security forces also killed all 10 terrorists who launched the attack at the major military cantonment.

moned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to "deliver Pakistan's strong demarche over the deadly terrorist attack", the Foreign Office said in a statement on Wednesday. "The Bannu Cantonment attack is yet another reminder of the serious threat posed by terrorism to regional peace and security," it said.

and effective action against the perpetrators of the Bannu attack and prevent the recurrence of such attacks against Pakistan using the territory of Afghanistan. The Foreign Office said such incidents also go against the spirit of bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries.

Indian killed in attack on Oman mosque

PTI ■ DUBAI/MUSCAT

An Indian national was among six people killed in a rare shooting attack by Islamic State militant group near a Shia Muslim mosque in Oman's capital. The shooting on Monday night near the Imam Ali Mosque also claimed the lives of one policeman and four Pakistan nationals, while injuring 28 others.

Nepal PM Oli to seek vote of confidence on Sunday

PTI ■ KATHMANDU



Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli will take a vote of confidence in Parliament on July 21, as required by the Constitution, a media report quoted the chief whip of his party as saying on Wednesday.

ment that faces the daunting challenge of providing political stability in the Himalayan nation. Nepal has faced frequent political turmoil as the country has seen 14 governments in the past 16 years after the introduction of the Republican system.

UK's new govt announces legislation for 'national renewal'

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's new Labour Party government promised to calm the country's febrile politics and ease its cost-of-living crisis as it set out its plans for "national renewal" at the grand State Opening of Parliament on Wednesday.

environment. The risk is he may end up pleasing no one. In a written introduction to the speech, Starmer urged patience, saying change would require "determined, patient work and serious solutions" rather than easy answers and "the snake oil charm of populism."

building to nationalising Britain's railways and decarbonising the nation's power supply with a publicly-owned green energy firm, Great British Energy. The government said it would "get Britain building," setting up a National Wealth Fund and rewriting planning rules that stop new homes and infrastructure being built.



Britain's King Charles wears the Imperial State Crown on the day of the State Opening of Parliament at the Palace of Westminster in London, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

mer Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised but largely failed to deliver. Though Starmer eschewed large-scale nationalization of industries, the government plans to take the delay-plagued train operators into public ownership.

has foxed previous governments: reforming the House of Lords. The unelected upper chamber of Parliament is packed with almost 800 members - largely lifetime political appointees, with a smattering of judges, bishops and almost 100 hereditary aristocrats.

port for Ukraine and promised to "play a leading role in providing Ukraine with a clear path to NATO membership." Wednesday's address was the second such speech delivered by Charles since the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022.

Islamic State attacks on track to double in Iraq and Syria: US

AP ■ BAGHDAD

The US Central Command said Wednesday that the Islamic State group is trying "to reconstitute" as the number of attacks in Syria and Iraq is on track to double those of the previous year.

of the United Kingdom where it attempted to enforce its extreme interpretation of Islam, which included attacks on religious minority groups and harsh punishment of Muslims deemed to be apostates.

over the US military presence. From October to February, an umbrella group of Iran-backed militias calling itself the Islamic Resistance in Iraq launched regular drone attacks on bases housing US troops in Iraq and Syria, which they said was in retaliation for Washington's support of Israel in the ongoing war in Gaza and were aimed at forcing U.S. forces to withdraw from Iraq.

Floods could sweep N Korean landmines across border, warns South Korea

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean landmines could be swept into South Korea by flooding, South Korea's military warned Wednesday, after the North has recently placed tens of thousands of additional deadly explosives along the rivals' heavily fortified border.

were shared with The Associated Press. Concerns about possible North Korean provocation have deepened after Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, threatened new countermeasures Tuesday against South Korean civilian activists' efforts to drop leaflets over the north by balloon.

how many they have planted or where they are. It's not unusual for wooden North Korean mine boxes to wash downriver in summer, causing deadly incidents in South Korea. A 2015 mine explosion blamed on North Korea maimed two South Korean soldiers and pushed the rivals to the brink of an armed conflict.

Russia, Ukraine swap 95 prisoners of war each

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine and Russia exchanged 95 prisoners of war each, officials in both countries said Wednesday, three weeks after their last swap and as part of what have been occasional agreements to send captured troops home.

with both Moscow and Kyiv. Zelenskyy posted photos of mostly gaunt servicemen with shaven heads and wrapped in Ukrainian flags standing in what appeared to be an open area of countryside. "No matter how difficult it may be, we are looking for everyone who may be in captivity. We have to return everyone," Zelenskyy wrote in the post.

Kin of those killed in MH17 tragedy mark 10th anniversary

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Relatives of passengers killed when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over Ukraine gathered with officials at Australia's Parliament House on Wednesday to mark the 10th anniversary of the tragedy that claimed 298 lives.

happened was wrong and that Russia should not have been waging war," the son added. The conflict has since escalated into a full-scale war with Russia's invasion of its smaller neighbour in February 2022.

The International Civil Aviation Organization Council, or ICAO, over its alleged role in bringing down MH17. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong told Wednesday's service she was "appalled" that Russia had withdrawn from the ICAO proceedings in June.

Kuala Lumpur. Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus will represent Australia at that monument, were 298 trees were planted to commemorate each victim and sunflowers like those that grew at the crash site.

Malaysia and Australia concluded that the Buk missile system that destroyed MH17 belonged to the Russian 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade. The investigation concluded the missile was driven into Ukraine from a Russian military base near the city of Kursk and returned there after the plane was shot down.

Abbott said. "Then as we were going back into the conference - and this was really quite an extraordinary thing - he suddenly turned, grabbed the elbows and tried to shake me and then pushed me away. And he said in English, where he's quite fluent: Look, you are not a native Australian but I am a native Russian, and pushed me away," Abbott told ABC.

Setback for TikTok

Advertisement for Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd. with details on tender enquiries and contact information.

GHTP-57/24

IOA chief PT Usha chides WFI ad-hoc panel for exclusion of Antim's coaches in long list

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
IOA President P.T. Usha on Wednesday came down heavily on the ad-hoc panel that managed the suspended WFI, saying the committee did not do due diligence and missed out on giving the names of wrestler Antim Panghal's coaches in the long list, sent to the Paris Olympic Games organisers. The Indian Olympic Association's reaction came in the wake of delay in visa clearance for Panghal's preferred coaches for the Games. The 19-year-old Panghal, who trains in Hisar, was the first Indian wrestler to qualify for the Paris Games when she won a bronze at the World Championship in 2023. She wants her coaches Bhagat Singh and Vikas to travel with her along with physiotherapist Heera. The IOA has cleared all

the names but the support staff members attached with Panghal are still awaiting visa clearance. "Antim won India an Olympic quota as early as in September 2023 by claiming a bronze medal in the World Wrestling Championships in Belgrade. In its wisdom the Ad Hoc Committee, administering wrestling, chose not to include the names of Antim's coach or physiotherapist in the long list of names sent to the Olympic Games Organising Committee," Usha said in a statement. The wrestlers are supposed to reach Paris on August 3 and the supports staff members have got appointment for bio-metrics for August 2. IOA had, in December 2023, named its EC member Bhupendra Singh Bajwa as the head of the ad-hoc panel and made MM Somaya and Manjusha Kanwar as the other



members. The IOA President also took an indirect dig at SAI for not being attentive enough. "It is strange that the responsible authorities, who approved the long list of athletes, coaching and support staff, did not deem it fit to recommend the inclusion of Bhagat Singh or Heera or Vikas. "It was only after Antim's father came to IOA a few days ago that I stepped in to have them cleared by the Ministry," Usha said. Meanwhile, an IOA source told PTI that Panghal instead of going to VFS (Visa Facilitation Services), should have approached IOA for intervention. "If they had come to us, we would have requested the French Embassy and it would have been done easily since the embassy is very supportive. We would have intervened and sought a solution but I think they were being misled by someone," the official said. The IOA chief appreciated the French Embassy for its support. "Many athletes will vouch that IOA has been proactive in getting their coaches and support personnel accreditations or visas from the Embassy of France in India. "The Embassy in Delhi and its consulates elsewhere have extended the greatest support in processing visa requests not only from such personnel but also from journalists who do not have accreditation," she said. "We are confident that despite such misleading reports, IOA will be able to facilitate a speedy processing of visa requests of those coaches and support staff cleared by the Ministry," Usha said.

Chelsea begins disciplinary action after Fernandez's involvement in Argentina player chants

AP ■ LONDON
Chelsea has begun disciplinary action after midfielder Enzo Fernandez was involved in a video where members of Argentina's Copa America-winning squad appeared to sing about French players with African heritage. FIFA also said it was also looking into the incident after the French soccer federation pledged to file a complaint with the sport's world governing body over "racist and discriminatory remarks." Fernandez said he was "truly sorry" and Chelsea said discriminatory behaviour was "completely unacceptable."



Instagram appeared to show Fernandez and Argentina players chanting about France's team as they celebrated. The same chants - by some Argentina fans - emerged before the team beat France in the World Cup final in 2022. The derogatory chants single out France players of African heritage, from several countries, and holding a French passport. Fernandez apologized for "getting caught up in the euphoria of our

Copa America celebrations." "That video, that moment, those words, do not reflect my beliefs or my character," he said on Instagram. "I am truly sorry." Fernandez became the most expensive player in British soccer history after joining Chelsea from Benfica for 106.7 million pounds (\$131.4 million) in 2023. Chelsea's response comes after one of Fernandez's clubmates, France defender Wesley Fofana, posted the video on his social media accounts Tuesday and called it "uninhibited racism." Fofana has family ties to Ivory Coast and is among several French players who are Black in the Chelsea first-team squad. FIFA President Gianni Infantino has said soccer and its 211 national federations must have a zero tolerance approach to racism and in May committed to relaunching a task force to monitor incidents. "FIFA is aware of a video circulating on social media and the incident is being looked into," the governing body said Wednesday. "FIFA strongly condemns any form of discrimination by anyone including players, fans and officials." It is unclear what jurisdiction FIFA has over the incident on a team bus after a tournament, but the governing body likely could act if the Argentina federation's handling of the case is considered unsatisfactory.



Express yourself in Paris: Kapil's advise to Olympics-bound Indian athletes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Former India skipper Kapil Dev, on Wednesday, advised Olympic-bound Indian athletes to express themselves fearlessly at the mega-event starting July 26 and hoped that the country would hit double digit mark on the medals tally. India will be represented by a strong 117-member athlete contingent in Paris and the country hopes to better seven-medal count it logged in Tokyo. "I can't really say for anybody but I can just wish them all the luck and hope we should win more medals this year and that's important," Kapil, who is also the president of Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) said here on the sidelines of the launch of second edition of the Trinity Golf Champions League (TGCL). "My advise to all (Indian athletes) would be to go and express yourself. I cross my finger and why not if we believe it (double digit medal haul) will happen." Kapil, however, refrained from commenting on Indian cricket and newly-appointed head coach Gautam Gambhir. "If Gautam Gambhir is taking that position (of head coach of Indian cricket team), I wish good luck to him and the team. I hope they do better than what we have done previously. I want to wish the Indian players all the best." Kapil, who played a lot of amateur event back in the day,

hoped that the sport will continue to grow in the country. "When I started playing cricket, I never thought golf will reach this height. I hope to see golf reaching the heights of cricket one day," he said. "We just need good sponsors to promote the game. Without sponsors nothing is possible. In 5 years time we should reach there," added Kapil, who is the ambassador of TGCL and also plays in the league. Buoyed by the resounding success of the inaugural season last year, which featured four teams, TGCL this year will feature eight teams -- seven from India and one from Sri Lanka. The event will be held in Bengaluru from September 2 to 7. The league is a IPL kind of a venture and will be played in the Ryder Cup format with 20 players in each team, which includes professional, celebrity and amateur golfers playing together. The winning team will be richer by Rs 30 lakh, while second and third placed sides will get Rs 15 and Rs 10 lakh respectively. "It's a unique concept, never seen something like this. I hope the prize money for the winners of TGCL will be one million dollars in the next five years," Kapil said. The eight teams participating in this year's TGCL are debutants, Wave Riders, Mumbai Warriors, Chandigarh Titans, Chennai Hustlers, Dakshin Rangers, Lahari Lions, Golfism and Colombo Lions.

Asian Paralympic Committee appoints Deepa Malik as representative for South Asia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's first woman Paralympic medallist Deepa Malik has been named sub-regional representative for South Asia by the Asian Paralympic Committee (APC). This appointment, which was confirmed during the 34th Executive Board meeting of the APC, signifies a significant step forward for gender diversity and athlete-centric leadership in para-sports. She will take up her post immediately. The former Paralympic Committee of India chief's appointment brings the number of female representatives on the APC Executive Board to five, making it the highest female representation on the board in the history of the organization, according to a media release. "Having more women during



our Executive Board meetings is a very positive step forward, especially when one voice is of someone with the experience, skills and wisdom of Dr. Deepa Malik," APC President Majid Rashed said. "The APC acknowledges Dr. Deepa's extensive experience and is confident that our members from the South Asia Sub Region will be excellently represented by you on the APC Executive Board," he added. Malik's role will involve representing South Asia and advocating for the development and promotion of para-sports across the region. "It is an honor and an

Can Indian wrestlers deliver in Paris or medal-winning trend under risk

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Indian wrestlers have delivered a medal every single time at the Olympics since the 2008 Beijing edition. Success in four consecutive editions has enhanced the status of wrestling as a prime Olympic sport in the country. There was success at junior level too. The sport also produced U23 world champions. It raised hopes of big success in Paris. It was Sushil Kumar who changed the way wrestling was perceived in the country by winning a bronze in 2008. He bettered his medal four years later in the London Games, where he fetched a silver. While Yogeshwar Dutt also won a bronze in the British capital. Sakshi Malik carried forward the trend by bagging a bronze in Rio in 2016 and Ravi Dahiya and Bajrang Punia made it a double delight in the delayed Tokyo Games (2021). However, the sport which was soaring high and was expected to reach even greater heights, was brought down to earth by the prolonged protests against then Wrestling Federation of India chief by the country's



(Left to right): AMAN SEHRAWAT (Men's freestyle 50kg); VINESH PHOGAT (Women's 50kg); ANTIM PANGHAL (Women's 53kg); ANSHU MALIK (Women's 57kg); NISHA DAHIYA (Women's 68kg) and REETIKA HOODA (Women's 76kg)

elite wrestlers. National camps and domestic competitions came to a halt. Confusion prevailed. No one knew how or when normalcy would return. There were allegations and counter-arguments. WFI elections were held and the national body got suspended but finally when UWW lifted its suspension, things began moving. Only one male and five female wrestlers qualified for the upcoming edition. There is hope, but doubts too. PTI takes a look at the strength and weakness of all the six contenders. **AMAN SEHRAWAT (Men's**

freestyle 50kg): With his steady progress, Aman did what was unthinkable: replacing Olympic silver medallist Ravi Dahiya, the most formidable Indian wrestler, in the men's 57kg weight division. Aman's biggest strength is his stamina and endurance. If the bout lasts six minutes, it will be difficult to beat him. However, what is lacking in his game is limited strategy and technique. It was evident when he was pitted against Rei Higuchi in the Ranking Series event in Hungary. He did not seem to have a plan B. At this stage, planing against each rival is key.

His biggest threats are Higuchi and Uzbekistan's Gulomjon Abdullaev. **VINESH PHOGAT (Women's 50kg):** Without doubt, Vinesh Phogat is one of the best women wrestlers that India has produced. A solid defence and equally impressive attack are her strengths. However, what could trouble her is lack of quality mat time against top wrestlers in the last year or so. Lowering the weight class to 50kg means more stress on her body. Cutting the weight cut ahead of the bout is a painful process, it sucks the energy out of the body and hers is an

aging body. She is almost 30. Her natural body weight is about 55-56kg. Much would depend on how Vinesh copes with it. In the recent Grand Prix of Spain, the weight relaxation was 2kg but that won't be the case in Paris. **ANTIM PANGHAL (Women's 53kg):** The firebrand wrestler from Hisar her is lack of quality mat time against top wrestlers in the last year or so. Lowering the weight class to 50kg means more stress on her body. Cutting the weight cut ahead of the bout is a painful process, it sucks the energy out of the body and hers is an

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trap her. She has the spark and fire. However, she has not competed since the Asian Games. A back injury forced her to miss the Asian Championship this year. The lack of mat time and competitive action could prove to be her bane. **ANSHU MALIK (Women's 57kg):** Anshu's career graph has not really taken off the way it was expected after her exploits on the junior circuit and the smooth transition to senior events. Injuries have troubled her and et she is one of the best bets in Paris for India. Quick movement on the mat to go with an aggressive game style is Anshu's biggest strength. She also has the experience of competing at the Olympics. She was not ready for the big stage in Tokyo as a teenager but now has a fair idea what is required in such a highly competitive field. Her fitness, though, is a worrying aspect as she enters the Olympics with a suspected shoulder injury. She claims it's just a neck spasm but she has not been tested. **NISHA DAHIYA (Women's 68kg):** Away from the limelight, Nisha Dahiya has quietly made her way into Paris Games. She had shown

