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NTA takes SC call on NEET result

Citywise results announced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Saturday announced the centre and city-wise results for medical entrance exam NEET-UG, which is under the scanner over alleged irregularities. The results, which were initially announced on June 5, have been published in this format following an order of the Supreme Court, which is hearing several petitions about the alleged irregularities in the conduct of the exam, including paper leak.

The exam was conducted on May 5 at 4,750 centres in 571 cities, including 14 cities abroad, for more than 24 lakh candidates. The court had ordered that the results be announced while masking the identities of the aspirants, saying it wanted to ascertain whether candidates appearing at allegedly tainted centres secured more marks than those writing the exam elsewhere.

Candidates who appeared for the NEET UG 2024 can check their results on the official website of NTA NEET exams.nta.ac.in/NEET/ or neet.ntaonline.in.

On July 18, the Supreme Court directed the NTA to announce the NEET UG results by July 20, at 12 noon. The court mandated that the Agency publish the students' marks on its website without



Representational image

revealing their identities. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra instructed that the NEET UG results be published separately by city and centre by today noon.

The top court will resume hearing the arguments on Monday on a batch of pleas seeking cancellation, re-test and a court-monitored probe into the allegations of malpractice in the prestigious exam.

The bench comprising of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra ordered for the announcement of the results separately, city and centre-wise by Saturday noon. The court had also stressed that the NEET-UG re-examination can only be done on a concrete footing that sanctity has been lost on a large scale.

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Convoy of Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi arrives at the Police headquarters for a meeting, in Jammu, on Saturday

Army Chief in Jammu to bolster anti-terror ops

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

After more than 50 bravehearts have been martyred in the ongoing counter-terrorism operations in the Jammu region since October 2021, the top brass of the Indian army led by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Saturday landed in Jammu to fine-tune its counter strategy aimed at flushing out well-entrenched Pakistani terrorists from the 'Jammu Heights'.

The crucial security review meeting was convened here at the Police headquarters. Director General Border Security Force, DG CRPF, DGP Jammu and Kashmir police, representatives of the Union Defence and Home Ministry, and top brass of the Intelligence agencies attended the brainstorming session over two hours.

The Army Chief also interacted with the top commanders of the Northern Command headquarters to discuss possible strategic responses and measures to

counter the rising threats in the Jammu region. The high-level security review meeting assumes added significance as it comes close on the heels of the recent meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday.

The meeting took place amid a sudden surge in terror attacks in the Jammu region. Last month the Prime Minister had separately chaired a review meeting to assess the security situation in J&K.

Sensing the gravity of the prevailing security situation and to plug the gaps, the Indian Army has already inducted more than 3,000 troops comprising three infantry battalions in the Jammu region to take on the Pakistani terrorists. In addition around 400-500 elite para commandos have been deployed at various locations to minimise the response time in case of any exigency.

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Airports function normal, full recovery awaited

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Airport systems in India resumed operations normally from 3 am on Saturday, hours after major disruptions caused inconvenience to passengers. However, the overall system has not yet fully recovered, as confirmed by airport officials. The significant backlog of cancelled and delayed flights and yet-to-be-delivered baggage means full restoration of normalcy may take a couple of days. Additionally, the process of rebooking affected passengers or processing refunds will begin as the systems are back up.



Saturday issued a statement saying airline systems across airports have started 'working normally' and all issues related to travel adjustments and refund processes were being taken care of. Union Civil Aviation Minister K Rammoan

Naidu said airline systems across airports, have started working normally, and all issues are likely to be resolved by noon on Saturday. The Ministry is constantly monitoring the operations at airports and airlines to ensure travel readjustments and refunds are taken care of, he added. "Since 3 am (Saturday), Airline systems across airports have started working normally. Flight operations are going smoothly now," Naidu said.

At Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport's Terminal 3, passengers experienced some improvement today, but a few problems persist as the Digi Yatra system, remained non-operational.

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Notification for State Capital Region issued

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government, on the pattern of National Capital Region, has decided to create State Capital Region for planned urban development in state capital and its surrounding districts. A notification was issued by the state government on Friday for the formation of a State Capital Region (SCR) which would include Lucknow and five other adjoining districts — Hardoi, Sitapur, Unnao, Rae Bareilly and Barabanki — with a total area of 27,826 square kilometres.

The UP-State Capital Region comprising Lucknow and five districts is being formed keeping in mind the population pressure on the state capital city. The UP cabinet had approved a proposal to this effect in September 2022.

With an increased population in the state capital and surrounding districts, there is an emphasis on complaints about unplanned development and this decision has been taken keeping in mind future requirements for development.

According to 2011 Census, Lucknow has a population of 45.90 lakh, Hardoi of 4,483,992, Unnao of 3,108,367, Rai Bareilly of 3,405,559 and Barabanki has a population of 3,260,699. Combining six districts together, the SCR will have a population of nearly 2.3 crore people.

As per 2011 numbers, Lucknow has a population density 1816 per square kilometres which is more than twice the state population density (829 per sq. km). Lucknow's population density is the third highest in the state following Ghaziabad (part of Delhi NCR) with 3,971 people per sq km and Varanasi with 2,395 people per sq km. "People from different cities want to come here and make their permanent residence. The population pressure is also increasing in the surrounding districts and many times complaints of unplanned development are also received. In such a situation, keeping in view the future requirements, 'Uttar Pradesh State Capital Region' should be formed on the lines of National Capital

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UPSC chairman Manoj resigns

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

UPSC chairman Manoj Soni has resigned citing personal reasons before the expiry of his tenure in May 2029, official sources said on Saturday. His resignation is "not in any way connected to controversies and allegations surrounding the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) after probationary IAS officer Puja Khedkar issue came to the fore," they said.

"The UPSC chairman had tendered his resignation citing personal reasons over a fortnight back. It is yet to be accepted," a source said.

Eminent educationist Soni, 59, took over as a member of the Commission on June 28, 2017. He took oath as the UPSC chairman on May 16, 2023 and his term was to end on May 15, 2029. Sources said Soni was not keen on becoming the UPSC chairman and had requested to be relieved. However, his request was not accepted then, the sources said.

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RS handbook on Parliamentary etiquette for MPs

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

With a series of disruptions marking the Parliament proceedings in recent times leading to acrimonious scenes on floor of both the Houses — Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, a new set of "Handbook for Members of Rajya Sabha" has been circulated to the members drawing the attention towards Parliamentary customs and

conventions and Parliamentary etiquette. This includes improperly raising of slogans like "Vande Bharat", "Jai Hind" usage of words like "Thanks" and also abstaining from criticising rulings given by the Presiding officer and in this case Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. Sources said similar manual is to be issued for the members of the Lok Sabha which every Parliamentarian will have to abide. The Monsoon Session begins on

July 22 and is slated to conclude on August 12 and July 23 the annual Budget is scheduled to be announced. The manual has advised that MPs should not display "placards" on the floor of the House as this will tantamount to House is "not in order". "The decorum and the seriousness of the proceedings of the House require that there should be no 'thanks', 'thank you', 'Jai Hind', 'Vande Mataram' or any other slogans raised in

the House," said a bulletin by RS secretariat. The Opposition protests have been more frequent and aggressive in recent times following which Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar had engage in verbal duel with seniormost MPs as well. The bulletin issued by the Table Office of the Rajya Sabha has mentioned a total of 28 conventions and etiquette that are usually practised in Parliament.

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On the occasion of Guru Purnima

Pledge to promote and protect Sanatan Dharma

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Opposition engaging in appeasement politics, says Maurya

PLANTATION CAMPAIGN

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ/VARANASI

Targeting Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav during his visit to Prayagraj on Saturday, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya accused the opposition of engaging in politics centered around Muslim appeasement, lacking both vision and mission, and attempting to disrupt the sanctity of the Kanwar Yatra. This event was part of a programme at Azad Park where Maurya launched a massive plantation campaign. Maurya announced that a total of 36,50 crore saplings would be planted across the state, with 85 lakh of them specifically in Prayagraj. He encouraged widespread participation in the initiative and stated that he would also inaugurate the campaign in Kaushambi. Addressing media questions, Maurya criticised Akhilesh Yadav, suggesting that opposition members should participate in the Kanwar Yatra by carrying



Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya addressing mediapersons in Prayagraj on Saturday



(Left) CRPF personnel and others planting saplings in Kandwa area in Varanasi on Saturday; (right) tree plantation programme organised by IFFCO



'kanwars' and offering water to Lord Shiva to clear their minds of any distortions. The Kanwar Yatra, a significant event during the holy month of Shrawan starting on Monday, sees millions of devotees travelling to offer water to temples and 'Jyotirlingas' dedicated to Lord Shiva. Maurya asserted that those questioning the yatra were indulging in Muslim

appeasement politics and making false statements to tarnish the yatra's sanctity. In response to a query about the upcoming by-elections, Maurya confidently stated that the BJP would secure all seats in Uttar Pradesh, including Phulpur. He expressed determination to win the by-elections, emphasising the party's stronghold over the state. Additionally, he men-

tioned that ministers had been deployed to all districts to ensure the success of the tree plantation programme initiated by the Uttar Pradesh government, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath personally planting a tree in Lucknow to kickstart the campaign. Meanwhile, a plantation drive took place on the IFFCO Ghiyanagar Phulpur campus. The event featured Dr SC

Shukla, regional officer of the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board in Prayagraj, as the chief guest. Various fruit and medicinal plants, including neem, mango, and jamun, were planted within the IFFCO premises, and saplings were distributed to border villages for further plantation. A total of 3,500 saplings were planted in the IFFCO Colony,

IFFCO Cordet, and IFFCO Plant, with plans to plant an additional 8,500 saplings over the next two days. Furthermore, 5,000 saplings will be distributed for planting in the border villages. Participants pledged to protect the environment by planting at least one tree each. The event was coordinated by senior manager EPC Umesh Kumar Shukla and saw active

participation from various officials, including general manager AP Rajendran, JGMs Anita Mishra, Arun Kumar, Arvendra Kumar, HoD (HR) Shambhu Shekhar, IFFCO Officers' Association president Anurag Tiwari, and general secretary Swayam Prakash, as well as IFFCO Employees' Union president Pankaj Pandey and general secretary Vinay Kumar Yadav. Numerous other IFFCO officers and employees also joined in planting trees, demonstrating their commitment to the environment. Meanwhile in Varanasi, Managing Director of Purvanchal Vidut Vitran Nigam Limited (PuVVNL) Shambhu Kumar, along with senior electricity department officers, planted saplings in Bhikharipur. Additionally, the 95 Battalion of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), in collaboration with Srijan Samajik Vikas Nyas and Nagar Nigam, planted trees at the Kandwa playground by the pond. The event was attended by Varanasi Nagar Nigam Deputy Chairman Narsing Das and presided over by

Commandant of 95 Battalion Rajeshwar Balapurkar. In a separate event, Namami Gange activists, joined by teachers and students from Composite Pre-Secondary School in Kabirchaura, took part in the state-wide plantation campaign. Regional coordinator of Namami Gange (Kashi) Rajesh Shukla emphasised the importance of trees for environmental protection, stating, "By planting trees, we can make our environment and surroundings clean and beautiful." Meanwhile, the programme was launched by Prof Vinod Kumar Mishra from Rajiv Gandhi South Campus (RGSC) of Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Additionally, a one-day camp organised by National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers, led by programme officers Dr. Savita Devangan and Dr. Shashidhar KS, saw the active participation of 200 NSS volunteers. They engaged in tree planting activities within RGSC and its surrounding areas, planting saplings of neem, bamboo, guava, banyan, peepal, and mahua.

DM inspects stadium in PM's adopted village

PNS ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate S Rajalingam made a surprise inspection of the under-construction stadium and the shelter for destitute cows in village Pure Bariyar under Sewapuri block after the end of the chaupal held in this village adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana. During his inspection, the DM gave necessary instructions to the officers present on the spot. During the inspection of the stadium, the gram pradhan said that facilities for playing volleyball and gym were available there. Chief Development Officer Himanshu Nagpal said that a track would also be made for the children to run. The DM directed the block development officer of Sewapuri and the gram pradhan present on the spot to get the entire stadium levelled so that waterlogging does not occur. During the inspection of the destitute cow shelter, the DM took information from the custodian about the number of cows, straw, green fodder, register etc and instructed them to ensure that the cows are pro-



vided with food, water and medical facilities on time. He warned that negligence will not be tolerated at any level in this. Also, the work of leveling and interlocking of the premises should be completed, he added. Earlier, presiding over the chaupal, the DM heard the complaints of the people one by one and directed the officers of the departments concerned to resolve them. The main schemes of the government, including the Pradhan Mantri and Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojanas, Kisan Samman Nidhi, Ujjwala Scheme, Bal Seva Scheme,

Kanya Sumangala Scheme, Har Ghar Nal Jal Scheme, toilet, Ayushman card, ration card, old age, widow and disabled pension schemes, and the current problems of the village were discussed and the DM directed the officers of the departments concerned to benefit the left out eligible beneficiaries by informing the government about them. After the end of the chaupal, the DM and CDO planted banyan and Ashoka saplings in the secretariat premises. Project director, BDO, DPRO, lekhpal, secretary and other officials, gram pradhan and others were present in this programme.

5-yr-old gets stuck in rotovator, dies

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In a tragic incident on Saturday morning, a minor boy sitting on a tractor died after getting stuck in a rotovator while ploughing a field in Rokdi village, Karchana police station area. The family cremated the body without informing police. Lalul Patel, a 5-year-old boy and the younger son of Birha Patel, was on the tractor during the ploughing. He fell off the tractor as it moved over uneven ground. Before the driver could react, Lalul was caught in the rotovator and died instantly. The family was devastated, witnessing the child's death right before their eyes. A large crowd of villagers gathered at the scene. The family promptly cremated Lalul's body at the local Ganga Ghat. Karchana inspector incharge Krishna Mohan Singh reported receiving information about the incident. However, the family had not informed the police. The police are now questioning the family regarding the circumstances of the incident. In a separate incident, Vartika, the 28-year-old wife of an advocate, died after falling into a 300-foot deep ditch while visiting Kyoti waterfall in Rewa. The accident occurred as she was taking a photo. Vartika had vis-

ited the waterfall with her husband Saurabh Patel. The couple lived in Lala Ki Sarai, Shivkuti, and Saurabh practises in the High Court. They had married in April earlier this year. On Friday, they left their home for a walk and reached Kyoti waterfall around 4 pm. Saurabh first took a picture, then began photographing Vartika. During this, Vartika slipped and fell into the ditch. Local police and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) launched a search that lasted six hours. Retrieving the body proved difficult due to the depth and darkness. The body was finally recovered on Saturday morning. Relative Dhananjay Singh and other family members arrived at the scene late in the evening. The deep ditch posed significant challenges for the rescue operation, particularly due to slipperiness and darkness, which increased the risk of accidents. Rewa police Laganj outpost incharge SI RB Singh explained that extracting the body at night was not feasible. Saurabh Patel was deeply shocked by the incident. He witnessed his wife fall into the ditch and was inconsolable when family members arrived from Prayagraj. The tragic accident left him and the family grieving profoundly.

Corruption complaints will not be tolerated: Jaiswal

PNS ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh's Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal said that complaints of corruption or convenience fee (bribe) will not be tolerated at any level. He was addressing a meeting with public representatives and officials on the major points related to development and public-related complaints in the district at the Circuit House here on Saturday. Jaiswal instructed the Electricity department to ensure uninterrupted power supply and to immediately fix local faults. Expressing dissatisfaction over the lack of expected work despite the availability of sufficient funds due to the efforts of the energy minister to strengthen the power system in the district, he instructed officials to get the work done expeditiously. Expressing deep displeasure over the complaints of convenience fee for electricity connection by some corporators, the minister asked officials to identify such persons and take strict action against them. He clearly said that corruption would not be tolerated at any cost. Jaiswal directed the officials concerned to ensure that in view of the rainy season, the problem of sewer overflow and waterlogging were resolved immediately and there should be proper drinking water and uninterrupted power supply so that the general public does not have to face problems. He directed the officers concerned to check the sewer and drinking water lines so that there is no supply of contaminated drinking water anywhere. He also gave instructions to make better arrangements for drainage at places where waterlogging occurs on PWD and nagar nigam roads. Along with better cleanliness in the city, there should be prop-



UP Minister Ravindra Jaiswal inspecting Panchkoshi Parikrama Marg in Varanasi

er arrangements for regular garbage pickup, he said and added that after cleaning, fines should be imposed on those who throw garbage on roads. He also gave instructions for better arrangements for drainage and cleanliness in rural areas as well. On the issue of slow progress of Jal Jeevan Mission scheme, raised by MLA from Ajgara, T Ram, instructions were given by the minister to the offices concerned to work in a quality manner along with expected progress in the said work so that proper supply of drinking water can be ensured to the general public. While reviewing the work of the Karsada garbage plant, he gave instructions for immediate disposal of the garbage dumped there. Along with immediate removal of permanent and temporary encroachments made on parks and roads, the minister gave instructions for better planning to solve the problem of traffic jams in the city. In view of a smooth traffic system, instructions were given for immediate removal of electric poles which are obstructing the roads and arrangements for systematic running of rickshaws and additional parking spaces. He also talked about shifting the fish market to a more suitable place near the Chowkaghat bridge. Issuing directives to the officials concerned of the Varanasi Nagar Nigam, Jaiswal said that

on priority basis, a permanent solution to the problem of sewer overflow, contaminated water supply and waterlogging should be ensured. He said strict action should be taken against the officers, employees and contractors who ignored the problem or deliberately created problems. He stressed on preparing a systematic action plan for the work to be done by liaising with the local corporators for a permanent solution to these problems. The minister also asked all the officers and police station incharges to pick up the phone calls of the public and public representatives and to solve their problems immediately. During the meeting, Cantonment MLA Saurabh Srivastava drew attention to the problems of sewer overflow, contaminated drinking water supply, waterlogging etc at various places during the rainy season and sought their immediate solution. Ajgara MLA also raised the issue of slow progress of the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme. All public representatives present raised the problems of their respective areas. District Magistrate S Rajalingam directed the officials that the points raised during the meeting should be resolved immediately and strict compliance of the instructions given by the minister should be ensured.

Heavy security arrangements for Kanwar Yatra

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

With the beginning of Shrawan, the Kanwar Yatra is set to commence from Monday. The police have made extensive preparations for the Yatra, deploying 3,000 policemen for the security of the Prayagraj to Varanasi route and the temples. Heavy vehicle entry on the Prayagraj-Varanasi route will be prohib-

ited, and traffic diversions will be implemented starting July 22, before the yatra begins. A significant measure is the reservation of one lane of the road and bridge for Kanwariyas. This lane will be exclusively for the Kanwar Yatra, with no vehicle traffic allowed. The route will be monitored by drones to ensure safety. Unlike in West Uttar Pradesh, shopkeepers' names

have not been written on the routes used by Kanwariyas in Prayagraj. Kanwariyas travel to Varanasi via Jhunsai, Sarai Inayat, Handia, and Bhadohi from Prayagraj. One lane will be reserved for them to accommodate the continuous passage of Kanwariyas, their yatra, and accompanying DJ systems throughout the night. Vehicle and pedestrian traffic will be restricted to the second

lane. DCP Abhishek Bharti is overseeing security arrangements, conducting meetings, and patrolling the route. He emphasised that one lane will be dedicated to the Kanwar Yatra, with security personnel present on the highway and at every temple. Patrolling teams have been deployed, and strong security measures are in place on various routes,

including from Phaphamau to Jaunpur via Sahason, Phaphamau to Pratapgarh via Mauaima, the route from Shringverpur Ghat, and the Pandeshwar Nath Padila Mahadev Dham route in Tharwai. These comprehensive measures aim to ensure the smooth and secure conduct of the Kanwar Yatra, which attracts millions of devotees annually.

CM reviews preps for Maha Kumbh



PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Prayagraj on Saturday to hold a review meeting with officials at the Circuit House regarding preparations for the Maha Kumbh-2025. Notably absent from the meeting was Keshav Prasad, who had already departed for Kaushambi before Yogi's arrival.

During the meeting, Yogi reviewed all ongoing construction works and instructed the officials to ensure timely completion of all projects. Following the review meeting, Yogi visited the residence of UP minister Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi' to bless his son and daughter-in-law. Upon Yogi's arrival at Nandi's house, the attendees raised slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram'.

Nandi's wife performed an aarti for Yogi, and both Nandi and his wife touched the CM's feet to seek blessings. Yogi stayed at the reception for about 15 minutes and took photographs with Nandi's family. Earlier, Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya had also visited Nandi's house with other BJP leaders, where they were warmly welcomed before Maurya left for Kaushambi.

Vivekananda Smriti Sthal to be developed with ₹25 cr in 3 phases

PNS ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh's Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal said that under the Tourism Development Scheme, Swami Vivekananda Smriti Sthal in LT College campus would be developed with about Rs 25 crore. Swami Vivekananda stayed in Gopal Lal Villa located on the LT College campus for 39 days (February-March, 1902), when he was unwell, just a few months before his death at Belur Math in Howrah on July 4 in 1902. According to the minister, this development work will be done in three phases without damaging the heritage. For this, he has entrusted the responsibility of making a comprehensive detailed project report (DPR) to the Culture department. Jaiswal reached LT College campus on Friday and inspected the site.

Minister Ravindra Jaiswal announced to give Rs 50 lakh from his MLA fund for the work to be done at a cost of one crore rupees in the first phase

During his visit, the minister announced to give Rs 50 lakh from his MLA fund for the work to be done at a cost of one crore rupees in the first phase in which a meditation centre, memorial halls etc will be built. As the land comes under the Education department, the minister directed the officials to write a letter to the government to transfer the land to the Culture department. On the occasion, regional culture officer Subhash Yadav, Tourism department officials and others were also present.



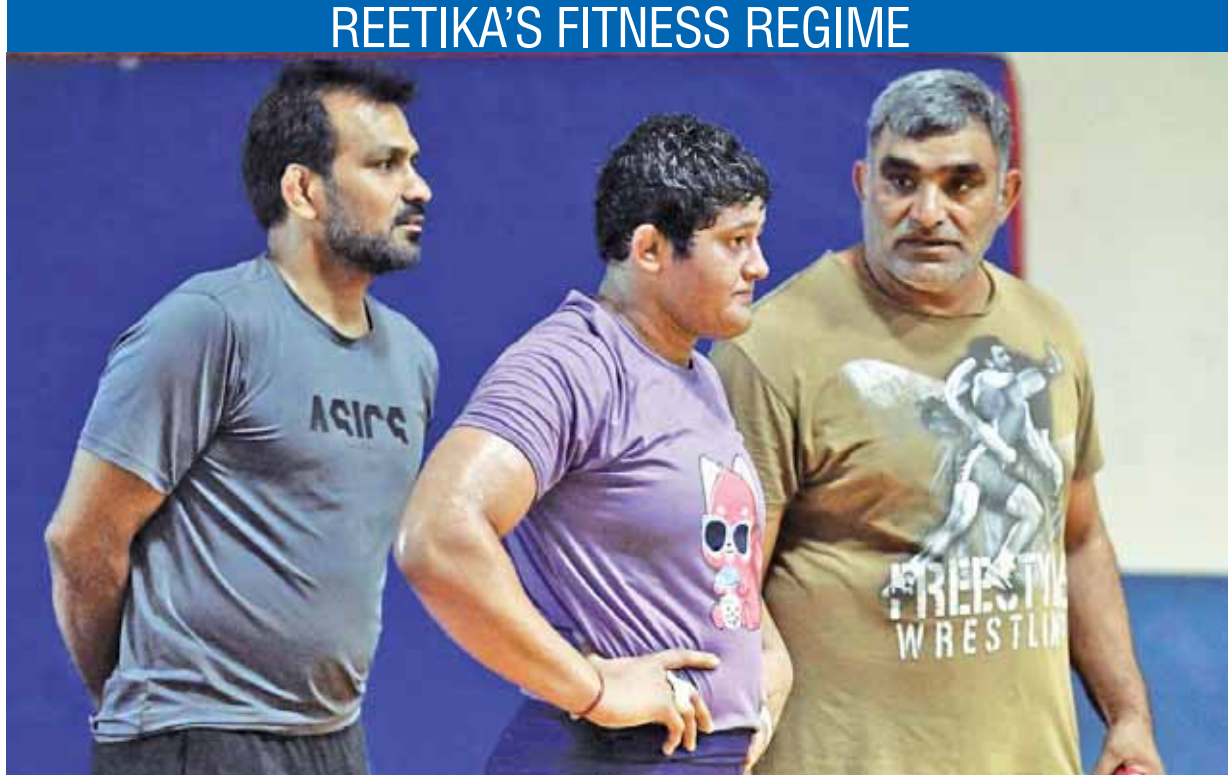
UHSND session being held at an Anganwadi centre in Varanasi on Saturday.

STORY OF INDIA'S FIRST OLYMPIC QUALIFIER IN HEAVY WEIGHT CLASS OF 76KG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Going through the painful and energy-sucking process of weight-cutting is a nightmare for wrestlers but Reetika Hooda did not have to worry about it. Wrestlers usually have to go without food, sometimes even without water, to ensure that the weight scale does not tilt against them. But Reetika's team ensures that she takes additional small meals to gain strength, and chicken was added to the meal plan, defying the family tradition. She goes through all these because the 22-year-old wrestler from Rohtak used to compete in 72kg but last year she jumped weight class to see if she can succeed in the Olympic weight-class of 76kg. She not only succeeded, but pushed out established wrestlers like Kiran Bishnoi, whom she idolises, to qualify for the Paris Olympics after crowning herself as the U23 World Champion. Her natural body weight is around 74-75 kg. So, it was never a great struggle to bring it to 72, not even now. Her

body type is such that weight drops quickly. But the real struggle is to take the weight to 78kg. "I just munch, train, munch, train and repeat. Of course, it's healthy protein intake. I have a different struggle," she said with a hearty laugh just before a training session. "I have 3 meals in my schedule and I have to eat in between as well. Before sleeping also, I take something. My nutritionist Mitali decides what I need to eat and mother ensures that I have that. "I had to start eating chicken for protein intake. It was difficult to develop a taste for that. My mother tried a lot of combinations and now I have settled for a semi-gravy type chicken. No one eats chicken in my family," she added. Her mother Neelam is aware of the requirement and learnt a few chicken recipes from YouTube. "We don't eat chicken at home. So, I had no clue how to prepare it. I was told that she had to be given home-made food. So, I took help from YouTube to learn. I don't like washing it (chicken), I get a strange feeling. But I do it for my daughter," said Neelam, a



REETIKA'S FITNESS REGIME

school level basketball player. As she prepares for the Paris Olympics, Reetika reveals that qualifying for 2024 Games was not even the target, and

actually, they have exceeded their own expectations. "I was considered a probable for 2028 Games. Last year's U23 world title motivated me

to do well at senior level." **THE JOURNEY: SWITCH FROM HANDALL:** Reetika is a strong believer in destiny. She says she can do what is in her

hands -- working hard -- rest everything will fall in place if it had to. Her career underlines that belief. She did not even pick wrestling

as her preferred sport. She used to play handball and even made it to the state team for the junior Nationals but as fate would have it, her father suggested that she pick an individual sport instead of a team game. The journey began in 2015. "My father took me to Chhotu Ram Akhada. I was asked to perform a certain attack by my coach Mandeep and he was happy the way I did it, so they took me in. Now wrestling is everything. I eat, sleep, dream about wrestling. I can't think of anything else," said Reetika. Neelam said it was Reetika's father Jagbir who wanted her daughter to pick an individual game. "She was picked to play Nationals as goalie of the state handball team. She came home and broke the story about her selection. Her father asked if she really wants to pursue sport seriously and when Reetika nodded, he said you should play an individual game. "He asked Reetika her preferred sport and she mentioned judo and kabaddi but her father suggested to take up wrestling and she agreed. On 15 August 2015, she was

enrolled in Akhada," recalled Neelam. Talk about the Paris Olympics, Reetika gets philosophical. "I can only put in hard yards, which I am doing. If you are meant to achieve something it will fall in your lap. I did not even think of winning the Under 23 world championship. "I didn't even know that I was up against a world champion (Kennedy Blades from USA) in the final. But it was meant for me so I got it. "I have idolised Kiran di (Bishnoi) since taking up this sport and see now I beat her in the Olympic trials. "I also beat Divya Kakran in the National Games. These wins boosted my confidence and I began to believe that destiny is pushing me in a certain direction and I will play along." Reetika says a tough draw and big names do not demotivate or scare her. "I actually enjoy competing against the big wrestlers. There will be 16 wrestlers in Paris. I have studied each and every wrestlers' game style through UWW videos and YouTube. "When the draw is made, I will know who are the four in my group but I am ready for anyone," she signed off.

We will pick a coach who can bring results, won't go by big names: AIFF president Chaubey



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey said the new head coach of the national team will be picked based on the ability to bring in right results, and a high-profile candidate will not be selected blindly. The AIFF Executive Committee is due to meet soon to decide the successor of Igor Stimac, who resigned as head coach after India lost nine matches and drew two in his last 12 games in charge. "I believe the result matters a lot. We will be looking at someone who can develop Indian football. And whoever gets appointed as chief coach, we want him to add a lot of potential to the national team's performance," Chaubey told PTI videos in an interview. The incoming head coach will have some important assignments such as a tri-nation tournament in October that also involves hosts Vietnam and Lebanon. Chaubey hoped the new coach can bring in some desired results from these events. "We are looking to utilise all the FIFA windows which we have in the month of September, October, November and March next year," he said.

These tournaments, Chaubey said, will give Indian players more international exposure. "No matter whether we play against a lower-ranked team or higher-ranked team, the aim is to win. It will also create more match time for players. Yes, these matches will also give more international exposure to the players," he added. Chaubey said there was an overwhelming response to the advertised position of the head coach of the Indian men's football team. "We have received a total of 291 applications and we have shortlisted 17 names from them. There are Indian and foreign names. We will have a detailed discussion about them in the Executive Committee meeting," he noted. Chaubey said former Indian captain IM Vijayan, who is now the head of the technical committee, will also be consulted. "We are in touch with the technical committee. As Vijayan is overseas now, he will be consulted through a virtual meeting," he said. Chaubey said players like Lallianzuala Chhangte have the potential to step in for former skipper Sunil Chhetri, who recently retired from international football. Chhangte was adjudged the Best Men's Player during the AIFF awards on Friday. "Who is after Sunil Chhetri? This question comes to everybody's mind. I think Chhangte, who has won the player of the year award this year, has a lot of potential. He can definitely make a long career. Such awards will inspire a player to put in an even bigger effort," he said.

I will miss my daughter, but it's also about achieving Olympic medal: Archer Deepika

PTI ■ JAUX (FRANCE)

Deepika Kumari is torn between two worlds. One where the doting mother longs to be with her 19-month-old daughter Vedika, and another where the ace Indian archer craves for an elusive Olympic medal. But the resilience she showed in fusing those two different spaces in her life has taken Deepika to the Paris Games, the fourth showpiece in her career. Deepika's determination to achieve glory in the ultimate sporting event in the world was evident when she stayed away from her daughter for two months to finetune her preparation. "It's difficult to explain the pain of being away from my daughter. But it's also about achieving what we have worked for over so many years," Deepika told PTI in an exclusive interaction. Finally, Atanu Das, her husband and himself an international archer, took Vedika to Army Sports Institute in Pune just before Deepika departed to Paris. It was an achingly emotional moment for Deepika. "I miss her a lot, but that's how it is. Thankfully, she has been really supportive and has adapted well with my in-laws and Atanu," added Deepika. But Deepika's turmoil had started immediately after giving birth to her daughter in December 2022. She developed muscle stiffness and lifting the 19-kg bow was next to impossible. "We had planned for the delivery in such a way that we would be able to compete in Paris. But it was like starting from zero after the delivery. "Forget about shooting or lifting the AIFF awards on Friday. "Who is after Sunil Chhetri? This question comes to everybody's mind. I think Chhangte, who has won the player of the year award this year, has a lot of potential. He can definitely make a long career. Such awards will inspire a player to put in an even bigger effort," he said.



But then came the flicker of hope. Deepika dominated the National Games in Goa last year, returning with two gold and one silver. It led her to the big decision of training under the legendary Korean coach Kim Hyung-Tak, the first full time coach under whom the archery heavyweights made their debut at Los Angeles in 1984. "It was not just about the skill aspect but his guidance also plays a part in bringing clarity to shooting. It really set me off," said Deepika, who won a silver at the Shanghai World Cup, her first podium finish in two years. Subsequently, the 30-year-old excelled in the three-month long selection trials, even though her husband-cum-mentor Atanu failed to make the cut. **LIM FACTOR:** Despite her phenomenal feats in other world meets, Deepika is yet to bag that coveted medal with five rings on it. She came close to it in Tokyo but lost to eventual gold winner An San in the quarterfinals.

But this time the Indian will have a 21-year-old South Korean Lim Si-hyeon to tame in Paris. Lim has defeated Deepika twice this year - at Shanghai and then at the Yecheon World Cup. Deepika is not worried. "I cannot change the past. I'm fully prepared and happy with the way I'm shooting. We will see what happens on the match day if at all we have a match-up," she added. **HAPPY PARIS MEMORIES, BUT NO PRESSURE:** Paris has been a happy-hunting ground for Deepika where she won a hat-trick of gold medals in the 2021 World Cup - individual, team and mixed team along with Atanu. She had also clinched a World Cup Final silver in 2013 and a World Cup silver last year in the French capital. But she wanted to treat the Olympics as any other top-level competition. "I don't understand why there is so much hype surrounding the Olympics in our country. Everyone looks up to archery once the Olympics nears and it creates unnecessary pressure.

"We have to take it like any other competition. The pressure (on the Indians) is more mental," she said. Deepika wanted to remain under the radar. "I don't want any attention. We have done well consistently to be able to make it here. We just have to get a good rank in the qualification to get a favourable draw." **DEEPIKA - DHIRAJ COMBINATION:** The individual rankings determine the mixed team and on current form, Deepika and Dhiraj Bommadevara could be shooting together. Dhiraj has been in phenomenal form winning 10 international medals in the last 12 months including a team gold beating Korea. He also won an individual bronze at Antalya World Cup stunning Tokyo silver medalist Mauro Nespoli. "He is young and uber cool and an individual medal prospect. He doesn't falter in big moments," said India's high-performance director Sanjeeva Singh. So, will Dhiraj take some pressure off Deepika? "If they top the qualifiers, they will be India's best recurve mixed team combination," he said. Deepika remembers the controversy in Tokyo when she had to unwillingly partner Pravin Jadhav in the mixed team event as the latter had qualified ahead of Atanu. The national federation could have changed the combination but they went by the rule and the team exited in the last eight. "I don't want to talk about what happened. Dhiraj has been shooting well and we hope for the best," Deepika added. Will she miss the presence of Atanu in Paris? "He has a greater responsibility -- to take care of Vedika," she smiled clutching an empty bag, a gift from her husband. "I've told her she must win the medal and bring it back in this bag," Das said. Perhaps, she can cram in it an Olympic medal and some baby clothes and toys.

Wrestlers will continue medal-winning trend in Paris: Yogeshwar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

London Olympics bronze winner Yogeshwar Dutt is confident that wrestling will yet again fetch India a medal at the Olympic Games and the number could be more than one if the grapplers get a favourable draw. India will have a six-member wrestling contingent in Paris where the mat competition will begin on August 5. Only Aman Sehrawat (57kg) could qualify in the men's section but the women put up a strong show by qualifying in five of six Olympic weight divisions. Only 62kg is missing from the list. India have not missed a wrestling medal since 2008 Beijing Games where the legendary Sushil Kumar won a bronze. "A lot will depend on the draw. If India get a favourable draw, then I am expecting three medals," Yogeshwar Dutt told PTI Videos on the sidelines of an AIFF event. "In the last four consecutive Olympics, we got medals from Wrestling. So I hope, wish & pray the fifth time in a row, wrestling will bring medal for the nation. I wish all the wrestlers all the very best. I think they are well-prepared," said Yogeshwar. "After hockey, wrestling has given India the most number of medals. It has given seven medals ahead of all other Olympic sports. Wrestling is without doubt the number one individual Olympic sport for India." The former India wrestler, who is also a BJP leader now, feels that India will return with its best ever show in Olympics. "I am expecting Indian contingent to win more than 10 medals," he said.

AP ■ PARIS

Marta pursues soccer gold at Olympics while preparing to pass torch to Brazil's youngsters

Marta can't help but be nostalgic heading into her last big tournament with the Brazilian national team. But, for the 38-year-old six-time world player of the year, the time has come to step away finally. "I contributed what I (was) supposed to give to the national team, you know? I'm feeling so comfortable to leave because when I look around me, I see really, really good players, young players, who can keep doing the work and keep representing Brazil so well," Marta said. Marta will play in her sixth Olympics in France before handing the team she captains to the next generation. "It's been so much of my life since I was 14, I left home and then I just live soccer every single day," she added. "I just feel like maybe it's time to just take a little bit away from that and let the young players shine." A tournament championship would be the perfect way to cap an international career that has spanned over 20 years, and her teammates know it. "I feel like every time you step on the field, playing with Marta by your side, it's such a great responsibility. She's a great player and we have to play for her now,"

said defender Rafaela. "She was like my biggest idol since I was growing up. So, playing with her now is such a dream for me." Better known just by her first name, Marta Vieira da Silva has scored a record 118 goals in 183 international appearances with Brazil. In addition to her six Olympics, she has also played in six women's World Cups. She has the record for most World Cup goals with 17, and she has 13 Olympic goals, one away from matching fellow Brazilian Cristiane's record. Marta grew up playing street soccer with the boys in Dois Riachos, a town in eastern Brazil some 1,250 miles (2,011 kilometres) north of Rio de Janeiro. She was just 17 when she appeared at the 2003 World Cup, held in the United States. Over time, her role has changed in Brazil. In recent years she's been more of a player coach, guiding the team's up-and-coming stars. "Of course, I bring all of the experience that I achieved in my career, like playing in big



tournaments like the Olympics and the World Cup, playing against good teams, against good players," she said. "So, I try to share the best of me and

the best of what I live in soccer with the players to make them feel comfortable, or make them feel proud to be there. Like, we expect the best of you. That's why you are

here, so this is the goal and then do your best." Marta is still a valuable asset on the field, and she's proven it this season with the Orlando Pride, her club

team in the National Women's Soccer League. She's got five goals in 12 games this year with the Pride, who are undefeated and sit atop the league standings. Marta has played with Orlando since 2017. "I still can read the game, like, really well," she said. "And, I try to put myself in a good situation to give my best to the team. "So, I'm not going to compete all the time with a player that's 10, 11 years younger than me. But, I may be able to put my brain to work a little faster and then read the situation and try to do my best." With the many accolades Marta has earned throughout her career, one thing has eluded her: A championship trophy in a major international tournament. Brazil's best finish at the World Cup was runner-up in 2007. Brazil won silver medals at the 2004 and 2008 Olympics, but a gold medal has remained out of reach. "With her saying it's her last Olympics, it just brings more responsibility to her and to us to end this tournament on a good

note with this title that the national team doesn't have and she doesn't have either," Brazilian teammate Adriana said. "So, it's more motivation for us to help her with this and to hopefully win." While the Women's World Cup will be hosted by Brazil in 2027, Marta is not thinking about sticking around for another three years. But, she's told the federation she'll help in any way possible. She's wistful as she thinks about her favourite moment with the national team. The two that stick out to her are the 2004 Olympics, her first but fell 2-1 to the United States. And, the 2007 World Cup, when the Brazilians got revenge by beating the Americans 4-1 in the semi-finals. Marta scored twice in that match and won the tournament Golden Boot with seven goals despite Brazil dropping the title match against Germany. "It's the passion," she said about her love for the game. "The passion that we show when we play, the passion that we see from when the people celebrate a goal. We make people happy. "You make all the people happy and you make people dream - and it's not only about soccer - it's about what it's like to believe. Believe in yourself. Believe in your potential. So, soccer gives you a lot of things like that."

INDIA EYE UAE SCALP, WOMEN'S ASIA CUP SEMIFINAL BERTH

PTI ■ DAMBULLA (SRI LANKA)

Dominant India will be eager to perfect their tactics further while warding off United Arab Emirates which also can push them firmly towards the semifinals of the women's Asia Cup here on Sunday. Defending champions India's supremacy was evident in their facile seven-wicket victory over arch-rivals Pakistan on Saturday, and the UAE will require a giant-sized miracle to stop Harmanpreet Kaur's side. India currently have two points and a Net Run Rate of +2.29, and a win over the Emirates will take them to four points, which will also have a positive reflection on their NRR. It would not be an exaggeration to say that India will look more inwards in their match against the UAE, than fretting over the rivals. There were excellent spells from Deepti Sharma, Renuka Singh and Pooja Vastrakar, who though was slightly on the expensive side, against Pakistan, and their effort would have pleased the management to no limit. They will hope that left-arm spinner Radha Yadav, who returned to the India fold during the home series against South Africa recently, too can join the wicket-takers' list on Sunday. "It was a good spell and there was some assistance from the weather as well. Of course, I could execute all the plans that I have been working on at



nets," said Renuka in the post-match press meet. To top it, the Indian batters were ruthless in hunting down a non-challenging target with 35 balls to spare. Openers Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana gave the team a flying start adding 85 runs in just 9.3 overs and the loss of three wickets from that position was a minor aberration. Hence, India would hope that there would be a matching effort from the middle-order batters in the upcoming matches, starting with the

UAE. The Asia Cup also presents India with a wonderful opportunity to prepare for the T20 World Cup to be held in Bangladesh later this year. Renuka said India are treating this event as a preparatory ground for the ICC showpiece. "The Asia Cup is important for us because after this we don't have many matches (ahead of T20 WC) and we will have to rely on practice. "So, this is a learning experience for us, and the conditions (in Bangladesh) could be similar. So, this is a

good chance for us to get ready for the World Cup," she said. That said, India would do well not to lose focus on the present assignment and the UAE have the ability to give some tight moments as they showed against Nepal on Friday despite a six-wicket defeat. In the day's second match, Pakistan will look to bounce back with a win when they face a tricky Nepal.

Richa Ghosh (wk), Uma Chetry (wk), Pooja Vastrakar, Deepti Sharma, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh, D Hemalatha, Asha Sobhana, Radha Yadav, Shreyanka Patil, Sajana Sajeivan. UAE: Esha Rohit Oza (C), Kavisha Kumari Egodage, Rithika Rajith, Samaira Dharmidharka, Lavanya Keny, Emily Thomas, Heena Harish Hotchandani, Mehak Thakur, Indhuja Nandakumar, Rinita Rajith, Khushi Mohan Sharma, Rishitha Rajith, Suraksha Kotte, Theertha Satish, Vaishnav Mahesh.

TEAMS (FROM):
INDIA: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues,



Abhishek Nayar, Doeschate likely to join India in SL as assistant coaches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Abhishek Nayar and Ryan Doeschate are set to join the support staff of newly-appointed head coach Gautam Gambhir during India's white ball tour to Sri Lanka, starting from July 27. Nayar, who has played three ODIs for India, and Doeschate, who was a hard-hitting all-rounder for Netherlands, have worked closely with Gambhir at the Kolkata Knight Riders and are likely to come in as assistant coaches, the PTI has learned. Nayar comes with a high reputation as a sharp cricket mind and a lifestyle/motivational coach who have worked with the likes of Dinesh Karthik and

Rinku Singh. Doeschate is currently working with LA Knight Riders in the ongoing Major League Cricket (MLC) and Gambhir has openly expressed his admiration for the team-first attitude of the Dutchman. While there was no clear view on the appointment of the bowling coach, it seems that T Dilip, who was part of Rahul Dravid's regime, will continue in the role of the fielding coach. Gambhir had suggested to the BCCI the names of former India seamers R Vinay Kumar and L Balaji and former South African pacer Morne Morkel for the role of bowling coach. The PTI had reported on July 10 that Morkel could get the role ahead of Vinay and Balaji.

While Vinay and Balaji have associated with Gambhir at the KKR, Morkel worked alongside him at the Lucknow Super Giants. If indeed Morkel gets the nod, he could be the first foreign bowling coach after Australian Joe Dawes, who did the duty under Duncan Fletcher until the tour of England in 2014. Morkel was also the bowling coach of Pakistan until the 50-over World Cup in India. The Indian team is scheduled to travel to Colombo from Mumbai in a chartered flight on July 22. Nayar and Dilip could also be travelling with the team while it's not yet clear when Doeschate would link up with the side.



ICC keep watch on security situation in Bangladesh, venue of women's T20 WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said it has been keeping a watch on the security situation in Bangladesh, the venue of the women's T20 World Cup later this October. The Bangladesh Police imposed curfew and military forces patrolled Dhaka on Saturday after violence escalated in the capital and elsewhere over protests by students, demanding reforms of the quota system for government jobs. "We have independent security monitoring across the world. So, yes, we are keeping a watch on it (the situation in Bangladesh)," an ICC Board member told PTI on conditions of anonymity. Australia are the most successful team in the women's T20 World Cup winning the tourna-

ment a record six times in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2020 and 2023. England and the West Indies won the event once each, while India under Harmanpreet Kaur will look to grab their maiden title. India are currently playing in the Women's Asia Cup in Dambulla, Sri Lanka, and pacer Renuka Singh had said the team was using the tournament as a preparation for the ICC showpiece. "The Asia Cup is important for us because after this we don't have many matches (ahead of T20 WC) and we will have to rely on practice. "So, this is a learning experience for us, and the conditions (in Bangladesh) could be similar. So, this is a good chance for us to get ready for the World Cup," she said.

Indian archery, rowing teams first to check in at Paris Games Village

PTI ■ PARIS

India's chef-de-mission for Paris Olympics, Gagan Narang on Saturday informed that archery and rowing contingents are first from the country to check in at the Games village and said the athletes are eager to begin their campaign at the sporting extravaganza. While archery and rowing contingents checked in at Paris Games village on Friday, the Indian men's hockey team will arrive on Saturday from the Netherlands, where it was undergoing its final preparation. "I arrived in Paris on Thursday night and have taken stock of the arrangements inside the Games Village for the Indian contingent. Archery and rowing were the first Indian teams to arrive on Friday and have comfortably checked-in. The athletes are slowly settling in and are exploring the Village," said Narang, the 2012 London Olympics bronze medalist shooter. He further stated the mood among the athletes is that of excitement and anticipation. "The mood is certainly upbeat. We have the Indian men's hockey team arriving on Saturday. Surely, I am



reminded of my hey days at the Olympics as an athlete. "While there is a lot of excitement, athletes will also want to get some game time in the competition arenas. We want to make sure the athletes' have everything they need ahead of the start of their respective events," added Narang, a four-time Olympian. The decorated Indian shooter, who is also the recipient of the prestigious Khel Ratna and the Padma Shri awards, expressed his gratitude to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) for appointing him as the chef-de-mission for the Paris Games. "It is a matter of great honour for me to travel with the Indian contingent as the Chef-de-

Mission for Paris Olympics. I express my heartfelt gratitude for considering me for the role, and giving me a chance to once again serve my country on the sports' biggest stage," Narang said. "As an athlete myself, I fully understand the requirements of elite athletes at the world's greatest sporting extravaganza. I will work strenuously to motivate and inspire the Indian contingent, while also safeguarding their priorities to perform their optimum. "I am delighted to have the opportunity to play the role of the primary liaison between our athletes, the organising committee, and other relevant stakeholders during the

Games and will ensure a smooth and efficient process," he said. India will be represented by 117 athletes across 20 disciplines at the Paris Olympics. "It is a matter of great pride for me to see the growing number of medal contenders in the Indian contingent. Each and every athlete in our contingent is capable of not only being on-par against the best athletes of the world but can also surpass them and bring laurels to the nation," Narang said. "Having a strong contingent puts India on the hot seat as we gear up for Paris." The Paris Games will be held from July 26 to August 11.



Mayank, Devdutt, Vyshak among retained players ahead of KSCA T20 auction

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Some of the top state cricketers such as Mayank Agarwal, Devdutt Padikkal and Vyshak Vijaykumar have been retained by the teams ahead of the Maharaja Trophy KSCA T20 auction later this month. The third edition of the tournament will be held from August 15 to September 1 at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here. Defending champions Hubli Tigers, runners-up Mysore Warriors, Gulbarga Mystics, Bengaluru Blasters, Mangaluru Dragons and Shivamogga Lions retained four players each from their previous season's squad. The Hubli outfit retained the services of skipper Manish Pandey, wicketkeeper Shrijith KL and young all-rounder Manvanth Kumar and ace medium pacer Vidwath Kaverappa. Mysore Warriors, the last year's

runners up, chose to stay with captain Karun Nair, CA Karthik, SU Karthik and the hard-hitting all-rounder Manoj Bhandage. The Mystics have retained Devdutt Padikkal even though he missed the previous season's campaign due to an injury. Vyshak Vijaykumar has also been retained by the Gulbarga side along with Smaran Ravi and Anesh KV. The Shivamogga Lions retained Abhinav Manohar, the most expensive player in last year's auction with a price tag of Rs 15 lakh. Nihal Ullal, Shivraj and pacer Vasuki Koushik have also been retained by the Lions. The Mangaluru Dragons handed retention to Nikin Jose, Rohan Patil, Siddharth KV and Paras Gurbax Arya. The Bengaluru Blasters' retentions include Agarwal, Suraj Ahuja, Shubhang Hegde and Mohsin Khan.

Katie excited about swimming after all these years

AP ■ INDIANAPOLIS

For Katie Ledecky, there is seemingly no such thing as burnout. Sure, there are times when it all gets a bit monotonous, staring at that black line at the bottom of the pool, turning lap after interminable lap with nothing on the line. Yet, a dozen years after she burst on the scene with a surprising gold medal at the London Olympics, Ledecky keeps finding ways to enjoy swimming as much as ever. The times may not be quite as fast. But the ultimate payoff is staying on top year after year, Olympics after Olympics, even as other swimmers struggle to deal with the mental and physical demands of a grueling sport that only provides once-every-four-years gratification. Ledecky is one of the most consistent swimmers in history. "I pride myself on that consistency," the 27-year-old Ledecky said. "I challenge myself to stay

consistent. Yeah, I mean sometimes it can be tough feeling like you're not having a breakthrough. But to be really consistent is something I'm really happy with. I've learned to just really enjoy each day of training and take in every moment and just appreciate the fact that I've been able to have this long of a career, stay injury free, stay pretty healthy, be able to do this for this many years." Perhaps the greatest freestyle swimmer history, Ledecky heads to her fourth Olympics in a familiar role. A gold-medal favourite. The focus of so much attention. The template for sustained excellence. "Such a big influence," said fellow American swimmer Erin Gemmill, who has looked up to Ledecky much of her life and will be joining her as an Olympic teammate. "I don't think I would really be here if it weren't for her." Gemmill's father used to coach Ledecky. Young Erin once dressed

up as Ledecky for Halloween. They've spent so much time together at the pool, Gemmill had a unique perspective on Ledecky's tedious brilliance. "It's really special to be able to be that close to someone who is so inspirational, getting to see the day-to-day work that they put in," Gemmill said. "It makes it seem more achievable, in a way, being so close. It makes them seem a lot more human." Ledecky isn't as dominant as she once was, but she'll definitely be the swimmer to beat in the two longest freestyle events, covering 800 and 1,500 metres. She already has six individual gold medals, the most of any female swimmer in Olympic history. "Every athlete, as they get older, has to learn new ways to set goals, learn new ways to evaluate the results," Ledecky said. "I wanted to get back to that level, prove that I wasn't just a one-hit wonder," Ledecky said. "At the same time, I reminded



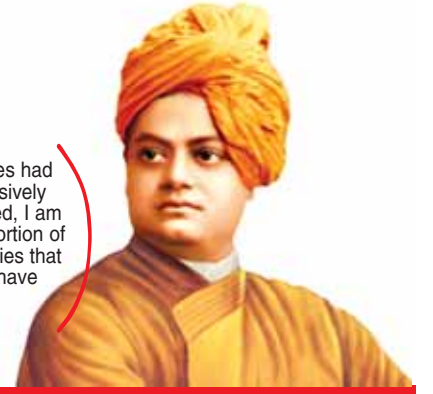
with a gold medal in the 800 freestyle. She provides further perspective on that experience in her new book, "Just Add Water, My Swimming Life." "I wanted to get back to that level, prove that I wasn't just a one-hit wonder," Ledecky said. "At the same time, I reminded

myself that anything more than that is just like icing on the cake, the cherry on top, because, I just never thought I'd make it to that one Olympics." All these years later, after all those trips to the top of the medal podium, she feels much the same way.

"That's the perspective that I've been able to maintain and that keeps me focused and keeps me enjoying the sport so much, enjoying the teammates and the people that are around me," Ledecky said. She's an old soul, for sure. Even in her teens, Ledecky had young swimmers looking up to her. "I was definitely an annoying child," Gemmill said, grinning. "But I think she was just so welcoming to a little 7-year-old fan. When I think about it, she was only a sophomore in high school at the time. I think if someone had acted like that towards me when I was a sophomore in high school, I would have been really weirded out. But she was kind and welcoming with all of it." Eight years ago in Rio de Janeiro, Ledecky turned in one of the greatest performances in swimming history. She took gold in the 200, 400 and 800 freestyle with a pair of world records (the 1,500 was not yet an

Olympic event for women, or she undoubtedly would've won that, too). For good measure, she anchored the US to a gold in the 4x200 free relay with a time that was more than a second faster than anyone else in the final. Five years later in Tokyo, the rest of the world began to catch up in the shorter races. For the first time, she was beaten in an individual race when Australia's Ariarne Titmus took gold in the 400. Ledecky didn't even reach the podium in the 200, setting for fifth. Ledecky doesn't plan to swim the 200 free in Paris even though she won that event at the US Olympic trials. She's a definite underdog in the 400 free, where Titmus and Canadian phenom Summer McIntosh would appear to have the upper hand. McIntosh might even give Ledecky a run for the gold in the 800 free - an event Ledecky has won at the last three Olympics - after beating her at a low-level meet this year.

"If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practiced, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished"
— Buddha



A MODEL FOR INDIA'S SMART CITY ASPIRATIONS

From integrating advanced technologies to fostering community engagement, New Taipei City offers a wealth of lessons that can guide Indian cities towards a smarter and more sustainable future, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

New Taipei City, Taiwan's most populous city, has emerged as a leading example of smart city development, integrating advanced technology, sustainable practices, and citizen-centric services. As India embarks on its ambitious Smart Cities Mission, there are valuable lessons to be learned from New Taipei City's approach to urban planning and management.

One of the biggest achievements of New Taipei City is its involvement of citizens in various facets of planning and execution and participation. New Taipei City actively involves its citizens in the planning and decision-making process. "Through public consultations, digital platforms, and community programs, residents are encouraged to participate in shaping the city's future. This collaborative approach has fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens," says Dr Tih-Ju Chu, deputy mayor of New Taipei City, Government of Taiwan.

As far as the Indian smart city concept is concerned, it has been a bureaucratic exercise where citizens have had hardly any role to play. Engaging citizens in the smart city development process is crucial for ensuring that the initiatives meet the needs and aspirations of the people. Indian cities should leverage digital tools and community engagement strategies to involve residents in planning, implementation, and monitoring of projects. We embarked upon making Varanasi into Kyoto but have reached nowhere. Perhaps the biggest reason for this has been the government's top-down approach where people come last. Local people know their city better than any bureaucrat or politician and their input can go a long way in preserving the cultural heritage of the city and modernising it at the same time.

New Taipei City fosters a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, providing support for startups and encouraging technological advancements. The city has established innovation hubs, incubators, and co-working spaces

“ONE OF THE BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENTS OF NEW TAIPEI CITY IS ITS INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS IN VARIOUS FACETS OF PLANNING AND EXECUTION AND PARTICIPATION. NEW TAIPEI CITY ACTIVELY INVOLVES ITS CITIZENS IN THE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. THROUGH PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS, DIGITAL PLATFORMS, AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS, RESIDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN SHAPING THE CITY'S FUTURE”



that nurture talent and drive economic growth. Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship should be a priority for Indian smart cities too. By creating supportive ecosystems for startups, providing access to funding, and facilitating collaboration between academia, industry, and government, Indian cities can become hubs of innovation and economic development. After all, no city can thrive without a robust locally sustained economy. People must find jobs and reasons to settle in a smart city, else it may end up like several ghost cities of China. Yet another initiative that makes New Taipei City a model is sustainability. "The city mayor places a strong emphasis on sustainability, incorporating green building practices, renewable energy, and

efficient waste management systems. The city has extensive green spaces, promotes the use of public transportation, and encourages eco-friendly practices among residents," says Dr Tih-Ju Chu. Indeed, sustainable urban development should be at the core of India's smart cities initiative. By prioritising green infrastructure, renewable energy projects, and comprehensive waste management systems, Indian cities can reduce their environmental footprint and enhance the quality of life for their residents. New Taipei City has implemented intelligent transportation systems (ITS) to enhance mobility and reduce traffic congestion. These systems include smart traffic signals, real-time traffic monitoring, and integrated public transportation

networks. The city's focus on multimodal transportation options has made commuting more efficient and accessible. Unfortunately, traffic and commuting are one of the biggest challenges. In a city like Bengaluru, India's IT hub, commuting is a nightmare. To address urban mobility challenges, Indian smart cities should invest in ITS, including smart traffic management, real-time public transport information, and infrastructure for non-motorized transport. Developing a comprehensive and efficient transportation network can alleviate congestion and improve the overall commuting experience. One of the cornerstones of New Taipei City's success is its adoption of cutting-edge technology to

streamline governance. The city has implemented an integrated digital platform that connects various departments, enabling real-time data sharing and decision-making. This has resulted in efficient public service delivery, reduced administrative costs, and improved transparency. Indian smart cities can benefit from creating unified digital platforms that foster inter-departmental collaboration, enhance service delivery, and promote transparency. Investing in robust ICT infrastructure and data analytics can drive more informed policy decisions and optimize resource allocation. Sited in a region prone to natural disasters, New Taipei City has prioritised building resilient infrastructure and robust disaster management systems. The city employs advanced monitoring and early warning systems, conducts regular drills, and has developed comprehensive emergency response plans. Implementing early warning systems, conducting regular drills, and involving communities in disaster management plans can significantly reduce the impact of disasters.

Let us face it, India's smart city project faces several significant challenges that hinder its progress. Foremost among these is the bureaucratic approach that often sidelines citizen participation and local insights, resulting in top-down planning that lacks community buy-in. Additionally, there is a persistent lack of robust infrastructure and technological integration, impeding the development of effective digital platforms and smart solutions. Moreover, coordination between various government departments and private stakeholders is often fragmented, leading to inefficiencies and delays. Without addressing these fundamental issues, the ambitious vision of India's smart cities may remain unfulfilled. We must be open to such initiatives outside of India and there would be no harm in trying the best practices from around the world. The lessons from New Taipei City serve as a blueprint for India's smart cities to follow, ensuring that they meet the needs of their residents while addressing the challenges of the 21st century.

LOBSTER LOVE

PAWAN SONI discovers how Delhi is experiencing a culinary renaissance with new venues offering world class ingredients



PAWAN SONI
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

Getting high-quality lobster in Delhi can be quite a challenge. This is why I make it a point to attend most crab and lobster festivals in the city, where the freshness and quality of these exquisite sea creatures are guaranteed. I have enjoyed several memorable meals at Shang Palace, Shangri-La Eros Delhi, and the ongoing 'Clawsome Chobster' meal was no exception. This special menu features dishes made with both chicken and lobster, likely to appeal even to those who don't typically enjoy shellfish. We began with a lobster and mango salad, a perfect summer dish. The sweetness of the lobster meat and fresh mangoes, combined with the coconut sauce, was perfectly complemented by the texture of lettuce and the acidity of lemon. For those who enjoy Chongqing chicken with its bullet chili heat, the lobster version is a must-try. The lobster, with its meat still clinging to the shell, is truly a palate pleaser. After tasting this, I wonder if I'll ever enjoy the chicken version as much. The only chicken dish we tried in starters was the bang bang chicken. Coated with the panko/breadcrumbs for the extra crunch for this juicy chicken breast filling, it surely had the bang. Though for the sauce, I missed the mayonnaise in the dip which is normally



mixed with sweet chilly sauce. In the dim sum selection, we tried the kaffir lime lobster dumplings served with oscietra caviar. Though the kaffir lime flavor was somewhat subdued, these beautifully crafted dumplings were delightful. The lobster and chicken siu mai were expertly made with thin skins and juicy fillings. Feeling quite full after the starters, we decided to skip the carbohydrate dishes, which

included fried rice with lobster, chicken, and egg. Another intriguing option was the Chobster, a whole grilled chicken served with lobster rice. This dish, as our server mentioned, requires about 45 minutes to prepare, so we opted for the chili pepper lobster tail instead. During our meal, Mr. Abhishek Sadhoo, General Manager of the hotel, stopped by, and we exchanged pleasantries. When

asked about the sourcing of their lobsters, he proudly shared that they are flown in from Canada. I am eagerly anticipating their new festival offerings, which will feature an abundance of lobster, reflecting their commitment to bringing top-quality seafood to India. Shhh... keep this secret between us. Delhi is experiencing a culinary renaissance, with new venues offering world-class

ingredients. If you love seafood as much as I do, don't miss this special menu, available only until July 21, 2024.

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A CULINARY COACH

Introducing Capital Diner, a unique restaurant located in a refurbished railway coach, providing travelers and locals with a nostalgic and immersive dining experience at the New Delhi Railway Station

Nestled within the bustling confines of New Delhi Railway Station lies Capital Diner, an enchanting escape that seamlessly blends the nostalgia of old-world train journeys with the flair of contemporary dining. This innovative restaurant, housed within a meticulously refurbished railway coach, promises an unforgettable culinary experience for travelers and locals alike. Stepping into Capital Diner is equivalent to embarking on a journey through time.

Capital Diner offers a unique blend of history, ambiance and exquisite cuisine, making it an ideal spot for travelers and locals alike. Upon entering Capital Diner, guests are transported back in time, as the restaurant's design combines the charm of American diners with the luxury of old-world train journeys. The interior, fashioned from a retired Indian Railways coach, exudes an air of elegance and charm reminiscent of the bygone era of train travel. Rich brown vertical stripe wallpaper, evoking memories of the legendary Orient Express, complements plush mallard shade suede booth seating and tasteful mosaic tiling. Soft beige LED lighting strips cast a gentle, starlit glow, enhancing the ambiance with a touch of luxurious warmth. Beyond its captivating aesthetics, Capital Diner delights diners with a diverse menu that celebrates both traditional Indian flavors and international cuisines. From hearty kadhai paneer paired with freshly baked naan to creamy penne tomato pasta with succulent chicken, every dish is crafted with meticulous attention to detail and premium ingredients. Each bite is a witnessed testament to the culinary expertise of the restaurant's dedicated chefs, ensuring a gastronomic journey that satisfies even the most discerning palate.



railway travel meets the sophistication of modern dining," shares Mr. Harish Kumar Arora, Founder of Capital Diner. "Our aim is to create a dining experience that not only tantalises the taste buds but also evokes cherished memories of train journeys past."

Capital Diner stands as a testament to innovation in the culinary landscape of New Delhi, offering more than just a meal but an immersive experience that celebrates the cultural heritage of India's railway history. Whether seeking a quick bite before catching a train or a leisurely dining experience amidst the station's vibrant atmosphere, Capital Diner promises an unparalleled fusion of nostalgia and culinary excellence.

So, next time you find yourself at New Delhi Railway Station, don't just pass through - immerse yourself in the allure of Capital Diner. Indulge in the ambiance, savor the flavours and rediscover the magic of train travel through a dining experience like no other.

FAST FACTS

Circulating Area, New Delhi Railway Station, Near Ajmeri Gate, Connaught Place, New Delhi. Hours: 11 AM to 11 PM
Price for Two: INR 600 Instagram: @capital.diner

EMBRACING VEGANISM IN ZURICH

When considering a trip to Switzerland, famous for its chocolate and cheese, you may question if it suits vegans. Yet, surprisingly, Switzerland is an exciting destination for vegans, offering unexpected delights. In Zurich, there are chances to explore innovative sustainable dining options

BY AKANKSHA DEAN

Switzerland pleasantly surprised me with its vegan options. Local supermarkets carry a variety of vegan products such as plant milk, tofu, lentils, and Swiss vegan brands like New Roots Cheeses and Planted Vegan Meats. The cities like Zurich, Geneva, Lugano, Bern, and Lucerne offer many vegan-friendly restaurants listed on Happy Cow. Zurich and Geneva stand out in the vegan scene, but other cities also provide for vegans. Be sure to check food labels for hidden dairy ingredients. Swiss cities feature diverse vegan eateries like Tibits and Hiltl serving global cuisine. Do try the traditional Swiss dish Röstli. During my month-long stay in Zurich following a vegan diet, I discovered the city's vibrant vegan scene, surprising given its reputation for banking and luxury shopping. Haus Hiltl, the world's oldest vegetarian restaurant on Sihlstrasse 28, 8001 Zürich, offers classic dishes like house-made meatballs and rich Bolognese bowls. Guests can enjoy a la carte options or the vegetarian buffet, allowing them to savour various flavours. Hiltl Sihlpost near the main train station offers buffet options for breakfast and other meals. One remarkable aspect of Haus Hiltl is its carefully curated menu, making it a top choice for those with specific dietary needs like gluten-free, nut-free, or soy-free preferences. Discover and savour these top dining destinations in the city.

REDEFINING GASTRONOMY

Zizi Hatab, a Moroccan immigrant raised in a multicultural setting near the Mediterranean coast of Spain, is redefining gastronomy with plants. Despite starting with a background in Spanish fishing gastronomy, Zizi's journey led her to Barcelona for engineering studies, where she balanced hosting dinners in her student dorm with exploring tapas venues. Transitioning to a corporate engineering role in Switzerland, Zizi's passion for cooking persisted. Without professional culinary experience, she boldly approached top Swiss chef Andreas Caminada, securing an internship at his renowned restaurant, Schloss Schauenstein. Returning to Zurich in 2019 to prepare for the launch of her debut restaurant, KLE, Zizi made a bold decision to offer an exclusively plant-based menu and lifestyle. Despite scepticism from various quarters, Zizi remained steadfast in aligning her values with her culinary vision, believing in the transformative power of a plant-based diet and food's ability to connect people. Through KLE, Zizi aims to inspire a change in consumer habits by offering a culinary experience based on love, innovation in plant-based cuisine, and sustainability. Emphasizing locally sourced ingredients and sustainability, Zizi creates a welcoming atmosphere for both her teams and guests, fostering memorable dining encounters. Her pioneering work in plant-based



fine dining at KLE has garnered recognition both locally and internationally, solidifying her influence in the gastronomic realm. Her second establishment, DAR, swiftly became recognized and was highlighted as a top spot by The 50 Best. Particularly noteworthy is DAR being awarded a distinguished Green Michelin Star in 2022. This accolade marks Zizi as the first Swiss vegan chef to attain such an honour, affirming her status among the global culinary leaders. In the same year, Zizi was honoured as one of the 10 emerging chefs influencing the evolution of gastronomy in the 50 Next prestigious list.



ELEGANT YET APPROACHABLE FINE DINING AT KLE

Located in the vibrant District 3 of Zurich, KLE's diverse team brings a multicultural flair to Zurich's dining landscape, creating an intimate and welcoming atmosphere. An inviting outdoor terrace provides a charming setting for open-air dining when the weather is pleasant. Recently awarded both a green and red Michelin star, KLE stands out as Switzerland's first plant-based restaurant to receive such recognition, a testament to the chef's dedication to culinary excellence. Each dish emphasizes quality ingredients, such as the 'black pearl mushroom' with a

sauce crafted from 25 locally sourced elements like Weggis lemongrass. The house bread, reminiscent of Moroccan buns, served with egg-free aioli made from 'aqua-faba' and Moroccan hummus, along with unique pickled vegetables, showcases the chef's inventive twists on traditional flavours. Sauerklee, a cherished ingredient in various cuisines, highlights KLE's blend of local and global culinary influences, inviting diners to savour a sensory exploration of the chef's culinary heritage.

DAR & ITS COCKTAIL BAR

My visit was truly eye-opening. DAR, meaning 'to give' in Spanish, fuses Moroccan and Spanish influences to create a remarkable plant-based dining experience. The menu showcases fresh seasonal vegetables, artisanal bread, and delectable desserts, inviting diners to explore global flavours like salted lemon mustard buns and turmeric-infused roasted beets. Opting for the chef's selection treats guests to a well-curated array of snacks, entrees, and sweets that leave a lasting impression. Reserving ahead is essential for a table at DAR, especially for the popular weekend vegan brunch featuring delightful honeycomb-shaped pancakes. Adjacent, the Cocktail Bar offers sustainably crafted vegan drinks that embody the vibrant tastes of Spain and Morocco. This 'slow fast food' concept extends to enjoying homemade vegan burgers while respecting the environment.

DAR's atmosphere celebrates guilt-free pleasures that blend taste, tradition, and ethical dining, offering a truly gratifying experience.

PINTXOS AND WINE AT COR

Cor on Weststrasse is a hidden treasure in the heart of Zurich, offering a cosy atmosphere where wine and tapas are the stars. Zineb and Bernd Vogel's love for Catalan cuisine is evident in the carefully crafted plant-based tapas and pintxos. The wine selection, featuring mainly Spanish and French wines, adds elegance to the experience, promising a diverse culinary journey with each bottle. Savouring delights like stuffed peppers and 'pa amb tomaquet' reveals Cor's dedication to organic, local ingredients. What distinguishes Cor is its innovative wine menu, constantly evolving to complement the diverse menu offerings. Whether for an impromptu aperitif or a relaxed dinner, Cor's charming ambiance and delicious offerings make it a top choice in Zurich's dining scene. A visit to Cor promises a delightful blend of flavours, setting, and warmth that truly elevates the dining experience in Zurich.

AKANKSHA DEAN is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.

