

Yogi inaugurates projects worth ₹1,147 cr at SGPGI

'Advanced Paediatric Centre taking shape'



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a visit to Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences for expansion of healthcare facilities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced on Tuesday that the long-awaited Advanced Paediatric Centre is taking shape in Uttar Pradesh, crediting the efforts of the double-engine government.

Before 2017, medical colleges existed in only 18 districts, but now there are colleges in 64 districts. We are rapidly moving towards the goal of 'One District, One Medical College.'

Rain Basera. CM Yogi noted that SGPGI is one of the most prestigious medical institutions in the country, emphasising the need for access to beds for seriously ill patients from various regions, including eastern, western, central, Bundelkhand, and Vindhya.

world-class facilities, aims to perform serious heart surgeries on 5,000 children annually and offer second opinions to an additional 10,000.

UP conferred National Water Award for mgmt, conservation efforts

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh has been conferred with the prestigious 'National Water Award' for its work in water management and conservation under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

6 killed in Bulandshahr oxygen cylinder blast

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Six people, including three females, lost their lives and three others were wounded when an oxygen cylinder exploded in a house in Ashapuri Colony in Sikandrabad area of Bulandshahr district.



Bulandshahr: Bodies of victims, who were killed in a cylinder blast, being carried for last rites, in Sikandrabad of Bulandshahr district, Tuesday

The local police, Fire department, NDRF and medical personnel were involved in the rescue operation and gas cutters had to be used to pry open the house's iron roof beams. An excavator was used to clean up the rubble.

Akhilesh: BJP conspired to incite riots in Bahraich

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday alleged that the BJP was conspiring against its own people and that the ruling party was behind the communal violence in Bahraich.

of Bahraich district last week. "Shame on such BJP politics and BJP's hunger for power, which conspires to incite riots... for politics. Every day new revelations are being made in the case of Bahraich violence and the BJP is not able to show its face.



indulge in rioting," which was why party members were filing complaints against one another.

report on X in which two alleged rioters filmed on hidden cameras point towards a conspiracy behind the communal violence in Maharajganj and make several "revelations". Communal violence broke out in Maharajganj after a youth named Ram Gopal Mishra (22) was shot dead during a Durga idol immersion procession on October 13.

Sudhanshu Singh Rana as well as unidentified accused under relevant sections. The MLA alleged that when he, along with his bodyguards and other colleagues, reached the Bahraich Medical College to take Ram Gopal Mishra's body to the mortuary on October 13, Srivastava and his supporters raised slogans of 'murdabaad' against them and hurled abuses.

'Third eye' to monitor every inch of Maha Kumbh area

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In preparation for Maha Kumbh 2025, the Yogi Adityanath government is implementing advanced surveillance measures to ensure comprehensive security throughout the fair area.

ensuring security in line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directives to prevent any untoward incident. Dwivedi noted that for the first time, the Kumbh Police plan to employ three to four tethered cameras. These cameras, secured to large balloons, will be deployed at considerable heights to monitor the entire fair area.

Shaheed Wall to be inaugurated soon

Prayagraj (PNS): The Yogi government in Uttar Pradesh has constructed a 'Shaheed Wall' in Prayagraj, the martyrdom site of Shaheed Chandrashekhar Azad.

Increased demand raises income of hotel, house owners

Prayagraj (PNS): With the Uttar Pradesh government, headed by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, carrying out construction and beautification of roads, intersections, flyovers, parks, and hotels in Prayagraj ahead of the Maha Kumbh 2025, the city is witnessing an influx of national and international construction companies.

Restaurants and tiffin services are experiencing increased business as they cater to the needs of these temporary residents. This trend has not only bolstered the local real estate market but also provided a boost to the hospitality sector.

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FIRST COLUMN

THE PATH TO TRUE GROWTH

Constant comparison overshadows cooperation, empathy and joy of life



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

All of us, whether we like it or not, have to compete from the time we are born until the time we die. Though most of us indulge in healthy competition all the time, nevertheless, one thing common to all kinds of competitions is the underlying desire to win a victory for the self or to defeat others. While competing, a person brings out their skill, ability, art, acumen, or talent to show that they are superior, stronger, better, more powerful, more skilful, more learned, or more competent than others. It is this habit of making comparisons with others that creates the competition background.

That is why we always see this subtle desire in people who are winners, to hear some words of praise about themselves or their performance. To fulfil this ultimate objective of massaging their egos, one does not care if the other person feels disappointed, depressed, defeated and even humiliated, ridiculed, or booed. This drive to be recognised as “better” than others sometimes overshadows the simple joy of participating or improving oneself. To understand this kind of behaviour, one needs to understand human psychology because the roots of comparison and competition have been sown into our minds since our childhood days. From school grades to sibling rivalries, we are conditioned early to pit our success against others’ failures. Hence, they become more rigid with time. We need to understand that the core objective behind the competition is not simply the desire to win, but it is intertwined with the motive of laying aside the softer and nobler sentiments of cooperation, kindness, and gentleness, even if only for a while. In competition, one puts all energies and talents into bogging down or defeating another person, leaving them behind in the race while making a forward thrust to reach



the goal before anyone else. As the famous philosopher Schopenhauer said, “The world is a battle of will and intellect.” But in this battle, one often loses sight of empathy and connectedness, which are essential for human growth.

It may also put a limit on one’s spirit of giving, helping, cooperating and sacrificing. Remember! Anything small and insignificant in the beginning has the potential to grow and become big. Hence, we must not forget that even though a spark or flame of fire may be small to start with, it can reduce a big apartment with valuables to ashes if it grows into a big fire. Thus, we should be careful and vigilant, because if the whole society catches this contagion or infection of selfishness or rivalry, it may spoil the charm of life and the atmosphere in society. Some people link competition to motivation and developing an attitude toward high performance. But they fail to understand that this evil trait to defeat others, which may look like a harmless thing initially, may eventually develop into a spirit of revenge, feelings of hatred or enmity, bitter jealousy, confrontation, hostile attitudes and ugly outbursts. These effects are not limited to the individuals involved but spill over into communities, organisations and even nations. Look at global politics or corporate boardrooms, and you will see this principle at play on a massive scale. Hence, it all depends upon the emotional maturity of a person whether or not he or she is affected. Because this seed of evil, as it grows, takes the form of a big tree with many branches; so, too, does selfishness or the spirit to downgrade others to gain ascendance for the self. It may proliferate into many evils or obnoxious habits. Hence, one must try to curtail selfishness and give up the ambition of winning by vengeance for the applause and praise of the self. Remember! The only competition that should matter to us is the one that takes place within ourselves. Hence, it is better to defeat one’s inner demons first and become victorious from within to be an example for others to follow.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

NEP 2020: A blueprint for transformative education



GURMEET SINGH

While NEP promises radical changes through holistic learning and flexible assessments, implementation challenges continue to hamper its progress

NEP 2020 was founded on the guiding principles of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability. This was primarily to prepare the young ones to face the diverse national & global challenges for the present & future. The Policy aims to lead to a multi-disciplinary, holistic under-graduation syllabus, create wider choices of combinations of Subjects, Integration of Vocational Education with regular Subjects and multi-entry and multi-exit points with regular appropriate certification at various stages. The aim is to ensure that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth, economy and/or background. This should eventually lead to transformative changes which shall change the lifeline of education in our country. The emphasis is going to be on holistic education, early childhood care, flexible assessments, skill development, integration of technology, teacher training and higher education reforms. These are aimed at designing a learner-centric and inclusive education for a future-ready system;



By embracing these India is poised to provide quality education to everyone with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the 21st century. The motto has been to provide “Equitable and Inclusive Education” to ensure that no child should be denied quality education because of their socio-cultural background and 100 per cent GER is reached by 2030. Looking at all the facts presented alone, one gets a feeling that this is going to be a real game changer in the education system of our country but the reality remains that it has not taken off even after three years of its approval. The major reason is that a majority do not understand the spirit of this very meaningful policy. If implemented in letter and spirit then our country shall be comparable to the best in the world in the field of education. An in-depth analysis and exploring what lies ahead; One can divide this whole NEP-2020 into four main capsules which this Policy envisages:



INDIA IS POISED TO PROVIDE QUALITY EDUCATION TO EVERYONE WITH THE NECESSARY SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO THRIVE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. THE MOTTO HAS BEEN TO PROVIDE “EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION” TO ENSURE THAT NO CHILD SHOULD BE DENIED QUALITY EDUCATION BECAUSE OF THEIR SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Teaching in the mother tongue or spoken language, Learn to leave, Teach to Transform and Educate to Empower. These highlighted Capsules shall completely sum up the entire NEP-2020, which none has so far put appropriately and completely. Elaborating each one of these shall drive home all the points: **Teaching in spoken language:** The importance of this cannot be undermined. Original thinking comes only in the mother tongue (spoken languages) and this advantage has never been given to our students in any of our earlier policies. English has always been overemphasised and a wrong notion has been created that English is knowledge whereas the fact remains that it is just a language and not knowledge. Knowledge can always be acquired by knowing a language. Our beginners have always been worried about learning English rather than developing an understanding of a concept in their way, therefore majority of the students are lost in this learning of the English language rather than focussing on the original thinking. This has been given an appropriate weightage under NEP. A student shall learn to

develop an understanding of what subjects to learn and what to pick up eventually in higher classes which has not been the case so far. A course used to be thrust upon them. This very important facet has been very appropriately addressed in this.

Learn to Leave: Having decided what course to take up for secondary and higher education, a student used to be trapped forever whether one liked the subject/course or not. (In the older education system for example if one had opted for Physics or Sanskrit: one was stuck with that forever whether one liked these subjects or not)

There was no way to move out unless one gave up higher education or started afresh. The other difficulty was that due to some odd circumstances if one had to discontinue the education there was no way to restart unless you lose years/time, but in this, one could leave anytime or rejoin anytime (Comes under Multi entry/ Multi exit system). In the present system if one stayed away for a few years one could not come back to education in desired subjects but under NEP-2020 one can restart anytime one’s education by including the credits earned before leaving. Therefore, under the present NEP, no one shall stay away or be denied education because of circumstances. This was not the case in the older system.

Education to empower: Under this education is to give due benefits to society by developing the right kind of skill. For Example, an electronic engineer is not able to do even basic electrical repairs or a mechanical engineer is not in a position to rectify even a basic fault. Integration of vocational courses with regular ones to provide practical skills for employment, benefiting students with diverse academic interests or limited access to traditional pathways or linking them with one another are some of the hallmarks of the present system.

Biggest flaw so far: Unfortunately, to date, not even 50 per cent of Institutions have reg-

istered themselves in this (in ABC) which is the real key to the success of this policy. This is a way to keep records of students’ subjects, their movements and credits earned.

Sharing of resources: Under NEP a wide umbrella of choice of subject, record of early education, movement from one institution to another and credits cleared/earned by a student shall be possible only if the resources are shared by various institutions. It will be impossible for any particular college to offer all subjects and to offer teaching in a variety of courses unless there is a huge staff to do this. It will be humanly impossible to achieve all this unless sharing is done particularly when online teaching has now come in a big way in our university system.

Similarly, the resources for science laboratories, libraries research facilities as well as Entrepreneurship schemes can be very effectively shared to make the education truly inclusive as per the aims of NEP 2020. Therefore, in conclusion, this policy shall succeed if: Every institution registers with ABC (Academic Bank of Credit) Sharing of resources starts in a big way in earnest in all areas like teaching, especially in online modes, libraries, Laboratories and instrumental facilities; Open schooling system for all without any conditions and Establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India immediately to monitor the registration of ABC etc. It shall not become a roaring success unless all agencies like MOE, UGC etc take concerted efforts to bring about a radical change.

Challenges: One of the biggest features of this has been the wide choice of subjects that one could take. Now this wide spectrum of subjects will be possible to be taken by students if there is a way to keep a record of a student’s movement and subjects taken. In a Country like ours which has more than 39K colleges, about 1000 Universities and 4.33 crores students (Nearly 80 per cent are in graduation and the remaining 20 per cent are from post-graduation classes), it shall be impossible to maintain a record of this kind unless there is a mechanism similar to computerised banking arrangement which maintains all types of record impeccably. For this an Academic Bank of Credit has been proposed where every institution shall be registered to enable a record of these movements of students, subjects taken and credits earned can be maintained like what is done in banking.

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Revolutionising India’s food security: Route optimisation cuts costs, carbon emissions

With over 81 crore beneficiaries, the Govt is now leveraging advanced data-driven route optimisation tools as part of the PM GatiShakti master plan

The Government of India provides free food grains to more than 81 crore beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) making it the largest food security programme in the world. This vast operation— from sourcing food grains from farmers to delivering them to ration cardholders— relies on a complex, decades-old supply chain. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), state procurement agencies, millers, transporters, warehouses, and Fair Price Shops (FPS) all play a critical role in this network. However, its design has historically been shaped by administrative convenience more than scientific optimisation. Supply routes were planned manually by



SANJEEV CHOPRA

state officials, a process prone to sub-optimality, bias and human error. In October 2021, the Prime Minister launched the PM GatiShakti Master Plan aiming to enhance multimodal connectivity and optimise logistics across the country. One of its key pillars, “Optimisation,” envisions selecting the most efficient routes for transporting goods,

thereby saving time and reducing costs. In line with this vision, the Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) launched a national route optimisation exercise in March 2023, in partnership with the World Food Programme (UNWFP) and the Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT) from IIT Delhi. This exercise, targeting the annual transportation of 6.8 crore metric tons of food grains through the PDS, marks a transformative step towards building a more efficient and cost-effective food supply chain. The process was comprehensive: geo-locations of warehouses and FPS, along with their capacities and road distances, were collected from each state. Using this data, cus-

tom algorithms were developed for each state to determine the most optimal supply chain routes. More than 50 physical workshops were held by DFPD and FITT officials to guide states in data collection and demonstrate the benefits of route optimisation. These optimised routes were then validated on the ground to ensure they accounted for local conditions, and a state-specific intra-state optimisation tool was developed to allow for adjustments in the supply chain— such as adding or modifying entities like warehouses or FPSs. For instance, Bihar developed an annual movement plan based on its PDS requirements, food grain volume, and monthly transport routes. The customised algorithm factored in different



possibilities of local procurement within the state and the grain required to be sourced from the FCI. This gave the state a clear view of its yearly logistics, allowing for cost-saving adjustments. By choosing the optimal option, Bihar reduced transport distances by 19 per cent, saving over Rs 3.09 crore per month. Similarly, Mizoram optimised its routes by eliminating unnecessary transfers of food grains

between warehouses, achieving a 50 per cent reduction in distance and saving an estimated Rs 1.27 crore monthly. A significant milestone in this effort was the integration of the route optimisation tool with the GatiShakti platform, which now houses geo-locations of FPSs and warehouses across all states.

This integration enables the platform to generate the shortest possible motorable routes from FCI godowns to state godowns, and further from state godowns to FPSs. The platform also allows real-time route re-optimisation based on updated infrastructure data (such as new roads) from other ministries. Since March 2023, route optimisation assessments have been completed for 30 out of 31 states, with intra-

state route optimisation tools developed for 15 states so far. Early results from 12 states show tremendous promise, with transportation costs reduced by an estimated Rs 112 crore annually. Once fully implemented across all states, savings could exceed? 250 crore per year. This initiative is not only an economic win but also an environmental one. Global food miles—representing the distance food travels from production to consumption—account for nearly one-fifth of total food system emissions. Optimising India’s food distribution routes can contribute significantly to reducing CO2 emissions, aligning with the country’s climate change commitments under the Paris Agreement and its Conference of Parties (COP) targets. The

reduction in fuel consumption will also help conserve foreign exchange reserves. Looking ahead, DFPD is exploring the possibility of earning carbon credits under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), offering states an added incentive to complete the route optimisation process and earn tradable carbon credit certificates. This step would not only strengthen India’s commitment to a climate-smart supply chain but also potentially generate financial benefits. In conclusion, The integration of advanced technologies and data-driven tools is setting the stage for a smarter future in public distribution, one that safeguards both our resources and the planet.

(The writer is Secretary, Food & Public Distribution, Govt of India; views are personal)

Blinken arrives in Israel as US looks to renew cease-fire efforts

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Israel on Tuesday on his 11th visit to the region since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. The US hopes to revive cease-fire efforts after the killing of top Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, but so far all the warring parties appear to be digging in.

Israel is still at war with Hamas more than a year after the militant group's Oct 7 attack, and with Hezbollah in Lebanon, where it launched a ground invasion earlier this month. Israel is also expected to strike Iran after its ballistic missile attack on Oct 1.

Hezbollah fires rockets into central Israel

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Hezbollah launched a barrage of rockets into central Israel on Tuesday, setting off air raid sirens in the country's most populated areas but causing no apparent damage or injuries, a few hours before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in the region on a mission to restart stalled Gaza ceasefire talks.

He's expected to visit a number of Arab countries, likely to include Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. "Secretary Blinken will discuss the importance of bringing the war in Gaza to an end, securing the release of all hostages, and alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

resume cease-fire talks in Gaza following the death of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pledged to annihilate Hamas and recover dozens of hostages held by the group. Hamas says it will only release the captives in return for a lasting cease-fire, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The United States, Egypt and Qatar have brokered months of talks between Israel and Hamas, trying to strike a deal in which the militants would release dozens of hostages in return for an end to the war, a lasting cease-fire and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

of Israeli strikes that killed the militant group's top leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and most of his senior commanders. Israel is currently waging another major operation in already-devastated northern Gaza, which has killed hundreds of Palestinians over the last two weeks, according to local health authorities.

The US has also tried to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah, but those efforts fell apart as tensions spiked last month with a series

Two men plead guilty to murder of Air-India bombing suspect

PTI ■ OTTAWA

Two men accused of killing Ripudaman Singh Malik, a Sikh man acquitted in the tragic 1985 Air India Kanishka terrorist bombing case, have pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in a Canadian court, according to media reports.

Malik was shot dead in Surrey, British Columbia in 2022. He and co-accused Ajaib Singh Bagri were acquitted in 2005 of mass murder and conspiracy charges related to the two bombings in 1985 that killed 331 people.

crime, but in terms of any other specifics, it is another one of those situations where unfortunately it is just something that we as people on the outside will probably never know," Lopez lawyer Gloria Ng told Global News. "One of the things we certainly have in the forefront of our minds is the youth of our client — Lopez is a very young man and we are certainly hopeful with prospects for rehabilitation."

Crown and defence lawyers have agreed that Fox and Lopez should not be eligible for parole for 20 years. And they will next appear in court on October 31 for sentencing. The 1985 Air India bombing is among the worst terrorist attacks in Canadian history and in the history of the airline.

China holds live-fire drills opposite Taiwan

AP ■ TAIPEI

China is holding live-fire drills off the coast of its southern Fujian province facing Taiwan, just a week after a massive air-and-sea drill it called punishment for Taiwan's president rejecting Beijing's claims of sovereignty.

line with the dynamics in the Taiwan Strait," the statement added. Taiwan is a self-ruled island that Beijing claims is part of China. Tensions around the issue have flared in recent years. China has increased its presence in the waters and skies around Taiwan.

the US has continued what it calls "freedom of navigation" transits through the Taiwan Strait. On Sunday, the destroyer USS Higgins and the Canadian frigate HMCS Vancouver transited the narrow band of ocean that separates China and Taiwan.



Rescue workers search for victims at the site of Israeli airstrikes that destroyed buildings facing the city's main government hospital in a densely-populated neighborhood, in southern Beirut, on Tuesday.

COMMENTS ON HASINA'S RESIGNATION

Protesters demand removal of B'desh president

PTI ■ DHAKA

A prominent students' organisation, which spearheaded the protests against Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh, on Tuesday staged demonstrations in Dhaka, demanding the removal of President Mohammed Shahabuddin over his comment on the resignation of the deposed prime minister.

Khan, called Shahabuddin a "culprit" as he was "unlawfully" appointed by "killer Hasina." "We request him to resign immediately and vacate the Bangabhaban. Otherwise, we will start another movement like the one in July," he said. In his interview with the Bangla Daily, Shahabuddin said he heard that Hasina had resigned as prime minister before she fled Bangladesh, but he does not have documentary evidence.

S Korea warns it may supply arms to Ukraine

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea warned Tuesday it could consider supplying weapons to Ukraine in response to North Korea allegedly dispatching troops to Russia, as both North Korea and Russia denied the movements.

criminal group" that forces its youths to serve as Russian mercenaries for an unjustifiable war, the South Korean presidential office said in a statement. The officials agreed to take phased countermeasures, linking the level of their responses to progress in Russian-North Korean military cooperation, according to the statement.

tems and acquire a space-based surveillance system would pose a serious security threat to South Korea as well. North Korea and Russia intensify cooperation since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, South Korea has joined U.S.-led sanctions against Moscow and shipped humanitarian and financial support to Kyiv.

years. In June, they signed a major defense deal requiring both countries to use all available means to provide immediate military assistance if either is attacked. South Korea said at the time it would consider sending arms to Ukraine, a similar statement that it made Tuesday.

ponents. He accused the West of "circulating scaremongering with Iranian, Chinese and Korean bogymen, each one of which is more absurd than the one before."

Pollution affects Lahore most

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's cultural city Lahore has been declared the most polluted city in the world, with an alarming Air Quality Index (AQI) of 394, and the Pakistan's Punjab government has planned for artificial rain to mitigate smog impact.

Japanese police chief apologises to man acquitted after 50 years on death row

AP ■ TOKYO

A Japanese police chief on Monday apologised in person to Iwao Hakamada for his decades-long suffering that started from an overbearing investigation and wrongful conviction that had kept him on death row until last month, when he was acquitted in a retrial.

when the prosecution waived its right to appeal — though it complained about the ruling — finally ending Hakamada's nearly 60-year legal battle to prove his innocence. Shizuoka Prefectural Police chief Takayoshi Tsuda on Monday visited Hakamada at his home and offered an apology in person.



Former Japanese death row inmate Iwao Hamakada (left) on being released from prison

was finalized," Tsuda said, as he stood straight in front of Hakamada and bowed deeply. "We are terribly sorry," Tsuda promised a "meticulous and appropriate investigation."

"There is no use complaining to him after all these years. He was not involved in the case and he only came here as his duty," she told reporters afterward. "But I still accepted his visit just because I wanted (my brother) to have a clear break from his past as a death row inmate."

deny his first appeal for a retrial. His second appeal for a retrial, filed by his sister in 2008, was granted in 2014. The court ordered his release from his death row solitary cell but without removing his conviction, pending the retrial process.

India eye Paris revenge against Germany in Test series as international hockey returns to Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

International hockey will return to the capital after a 10-year gap when Olympic bronze-medallists India take on world champions Germany in a two-Test bilateral series starting here on Wednesday, aiming to test some new faces and extract revenge for a recent heartbreak inflicted by the visitors.

For the last 10 years, the capital's Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, once considered the spiritual home of the game, has not hosted any international match. The last game played here was the 2014 Hero World League Final, although inter-departmental hockey has been held here occasionally. But the two Tests against the world No.2 and Paris Olympics silver-winning outfit on Wednesday and Thursday would be a perfect comeback for the sport.

It has been learnt that over 12,000 fans have already registered for the free tickets on offer through a private ticketing portal. The National Stadium has a seating capacity of just over 16,000. The two Tests hold great



significance for Indian hockey, which is on an upswing following back-to-back Olympic bronze medals in Tokyo and Paris. In the French capital, the Indians, under the talismanic and in-form Harmanpreet Singh's leadership, lost 2-3 to Germany in a closely-

contested semifinal. "This series is not just about the two teams playing; it's about reviving the spirit of hockey in Delhi. We hope this will inspire more young players from the region to take up the game," Harmanpreet had said after the rubber was announced.

That sentiment aside, India also have a very good opportunity to avenge their loss in Paris. But the Germans will be a hard nut to crack as they are the reigning world champions and displayed that fortitude in Paris, going down only in the shoot-out to Netherlands in

the gold medal match. Going by rankings, the Germans are favourites as India are currently placed fifth in the world but in modern hockey, there is hardly any difference between the top 10 teams and anyone can beat a high-placed rival on their day. In the last five encounters between the two sides, India hold an edge, having won three and lost two. India have been on a high since the Paris Olympics. A new-look team retained the Asian Champions Trophy title in September, beating hosts China 1-0 in the final. That was India's fifth ACT title. The Indians have fielded a mix of youth and experience for the two matches, thereby highlighting chief coach Craig Fulton's vision of planning for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The most notable inclusion in the squad is defender and drag-flicker Varun Kumar, who is returning after a sabbatical from the game that was forced by allegations of sexual harassment by a junior volleyball player. His name has since been cleared in the matter.

The Indians will be led by star drag-flicker Harmanpreet, who is enjoying the form of his life and mid-fliedier Vivek Sagar Prasad will be his deputy. The hosts, however, will continue to miss the services of mid-field mainstay Hardik Singh, who is still recovering from an injury he sustained at the Olympics. Fulton drafted in some new faces in mid-fliedier Rajinder Singh and striker Aditya Arjun Lgale, who will be making their international debut. Besides Vivek, veteran Manpreet Singh will be in charge of the mid-field. Striker Mandeep Singh, who was rested for the ACT, will look to dazzle upfront in the company of Sukhjeet Singh, Abhishek, and Dilpreet Singh among others. The Indian goal will be manned by Krishan Bahadur Pathak and Suraj Karkera, who lived up to expectations in the ACT in Hulunbuir, China after the legendary PR Sreejesh's retirement. The two matches will provide the newcomers and comeback-men a chance to prove their mettle in front of the team management and national selectors.



American Sofia Kenin advances to second round at Pan Pacific Open in Japan

AP ■ TOKYO

Former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin has extended her perfect record against Wang Xinyu, beating the 10th-seeded Chinese player 6-1, 6-4 in a first-round match at the Pan Pacific Open on Tuesday. The 25-year-old American, who won the Australian Open in 2020 and was a French Open finalist the same year, won her fourth straight match over Wang. Her previous victories over Wang were twice at Wimbledon - in 2021 and 2023 - and at Auckland, New Zealand last year. Kenin beat Garbiñe Muguruza in the Melbourne Park Grand Slam singles final

in 2020 and lost to Iga Swiatek in the French Open final a few months later. After her Australian Open win, she achieved her highest ranking of No. 4, but a series of injuries over the past several years has seen her ranking slip to her current No. 155. She also had to withdraw from the 2021 US Open due to COVID-19. Kenin was joined in the second round by Canadians Bianca Andreescu, who beat Serena Williams for the US Open title in 2019, and Leylah Fernandez, who won their opening matches Monday. The top-seeded player in the Pan Pacific this year is Olympic gold medalist Zheng Qinwen.



Zverev sympathises after routing local wild card in Vienna

AP ■ VIENNA

No. 3-ranked Alexander Zverev was sympathetic for Joel Schwazerler after hammering the 18-year-old wild card in his hometown debut at the Erste Bank Open. Zverev won by a quick 6-2, 6-2 then gave 347th-ranked Schwazerler, appearing in his second ATP tour-level match, encouragement when they met at the net. "When you come to your home tournament and probably the biggest crowd you have played in front of, as an 18-year-old and you're playing the world No. 3, it's not the easiest thing in the

world," Zverev said. "I've been there. I did that as a 17-year-old in Hamburg, where I got to the semifinals and all of a sudden had a sold out stadium and was playing against a certain David Ferrer. The match was over half an hour later and I won one game. I know exactly how (Schwazerler) feels. It's not an easy situation to be in but he's a wonderful player and he's going to have a wonderful career." Zverev's 60th win of the year equalled his season best from 2018. In other matches, Italians Matteo Berrettini and Flavio Cobolli were also winners.

Hockey, shooting, cricket, badminton among major sports axed from 2026 Glasgow CWG

PTI ■ LONDON

In a body blow to India's medal prospects in the Commonwealth Games, key sports such as hockey, badminton, wrestling, cricket and shooting have been dropped from the 2026 edition by host city Glasgow, which unveiled a pruned roster of 10 disciplines to keep the event budget-friendly. Table tennis, squash and triathlon have also been axed in a bid to limit the cost and streamline logistics given that only four venues will host the entire showpiece. The total number of events at the Games will be nine fewer compared to the 2022 Birmingham edition. "The Games will include 10 sports - striking a balance between ensuring the event has a multi-sport feel and the need to manage financial and operational risk," the Commonwealth Games Federation said in a statement. "The sports programme will include Athletics and Para Athletics (Track & Field),

Swimming and Para Swimming, Artistic Gymnastics, Track Cycling and Para Track Cycling, Netball, Weightlifting and Para Powerlifting, Boxing, Judo, Bowls and Para Bowls, and 3x3 Basketball and 3x3 Wheelchair Basketball," the Commonwealth Games Federation said in a statement. The 23rd edition of the Games is scheduled to take place from July 23 to August 2, marking Glasgow's return as host after 12 years. "The Games will take place across four venues -- Scotstoun Stadium, Tollcross International Swimming Centre, Emirates Arena - including the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, and the Scottish Event Campus (SEC). Athletes and support staff will be housed in hotel accommodation," it added. The roster is a massive setback to India's medal prospects given that bulk of the country's medals came from the removed disciplines in the past editions. Shooting was never expected to return



after being dropped from the Birmingham programme four years ago, owing to logistics. While announcing the Glasgow schedule, the CGF said "Glasgow 2026 will feature a 10-sport programme concentrated across four venues within an eight-mile corridor". This ruled shooting out of the roster as the Barry Buddon centre in Dundee -- the venue during the 2014 CWG -- is more than 100km away from Glasgow. Also, archery

continued to be ignored. The sport last featured at the Games in the 2010 Delhi edition. Glasgow Green and the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, which hosted hockey and wrestling in 2014, has been dropped from the list of venues, while Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, where badminton was held that year, will be used only for cycling this time. Aside from cost, hockey's exclusion could also be down

to the fact that the Games are being organised close to the World Cup that is scheduled two weeks later from August 15 to 30 in Wavre, Belgium and Amstelveen, Netherlands. The Australian state of Victoria was the original host of the 2026 edition but pulled out last year due to rising costs. Scotland then stepped in to save the Games. Hockey's omission from the Games would be a significant blow for India. The men's team has won three silver and two bronze medals, while the women have also shone, clinching three medals, including a historic gold in the 2002 Games. In badminton, India has racked up an impressive 31 medals -- 10 gold, eight silver, and 13 bronze. Notably, the nation was to enter the 2026 edition as defending champions in men's and women's singles, as well as men's doubles. Shooting was a stronghold for India, with a staggering 135 medals to its name. The count included 63 gold, 44 silver, and 28 bronze.

The wrestling competition has yielded 114 medals for the nation, including 49 gold, 39 silver, and 26 bronzes. After the cricket's reintroduction in 2022, the Indian women's team claimed a silver. Para-athletes have been a part of the Games since the 2002 Manchester edition and will continue to be there in the 2026 edition as well. "Para sport will once again be fully integrated as a key priority and point of difference for the Games, with six Para sports included on the sport programme," CGF said. The CGF said that the Games will deliver over 100 million pounds of "inward investment into the city" and is expected to add an economic value of over 150 million pounds for the region. The body asserted that all this would be possible thanks to a model "that has been specially designed to not require public funding for the delivery of the Games."



Neymar back after a year out and helps Al-Hilal in Asian Champions League

AP ■ AL AIN

Neymar returned to action after a year out through injury and helped Al-Hilal beat Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates 5-4 in the group stage of the AFC Champions League Elite. Neymar signed for the Saudi Arabia club in August 2023 but played only five times before tearing an anterior cruciate ligament last October. He came off the bench 369 days later for the four-time Asian champion with 13 minutes remaining at Al Ain. He almost scored

immediately when his low shot from left of the area shaved the post. In a thrilling match between Al-Hilal and the defending champion, Renan Lodi gave Al-Hilal the opener after 26 minutes. Soufiane Rahimi, the tournament top scorer last season, leveled soon after. By the break, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Salem Al-Dawsari put Hilal 3-1 ahead. Mateo Sanabria pulled a goal back just after the hour but Al-Dawsari scored twice more to complete a hat trick, and Rahimi achieved the same feat to make it 5-4.

The win maintained Al-Hilal's perfect record in Asia after three games. Elsewhere, Saudi Arabia's Al-Ahli won at Qatar's Al-Rayyan 2-1 thanks to goals from Gabri Veiga and Firas Al-Buraikan. Iraq's Al-Shorta drew with Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor 0-0, and Qatar's Al-Sadd defeated Iran's Persepolis 1-0. Al-Nassr and Cristiano Ronaldo are in action on Tuesday against Esteghlal of Iran. The game was moved from Tehran to Dubai due to the security situation in Iran.

India eye top spot, Bangladesh seek crucial draw in SAFF showdown

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

With a semifinal spot already secured, India will look to reaffirm their dominance when they take on Bangladesh in their final Group A match of the SAFF Women's Championship here on Wednesday. For Bangladesh, a win would hand them the top spot in Group A. As things stand now, India lead the table with three points, while second-placed Bangladesh have a superior goal difference (0) against Pakistan (-3), with both teams sitting on one point each. A draw would leave Bangladesh as group runners-up with two points. The Blue Tigresses clinched their place in the semifinals with a commanding 5-2 victory over Pakistan but now their focus shifts to topping the group and avenging a painful memory of 2022. In that edition, Bangladesh dealt a shocking blow on India by ending their unbeaten streak in the championship with a decisive 3-0 win in the group stage. It marked the first time India had lost to their South Asian rivals in SAFF history, and the Blue Tigresses will be eager to



set the record straight. "We have faced Bangladesh before, and we watched their last game against Pakistan. Our sole focus now is to win this match," skipper Bala Devi said. "We have both senior and young players and we are prepared to push for a win. We have had productive training sessions, and I hope we can put what we have practiced into action." "As the captain, I aim to lead by example and support the team in every way. Bangladesh has some fast and

youthful players, but I believe our mental strength gives us an edge, which will be crucial in tomorrow's game," added the 34-year-old from Manipur. Head coach Santosh Kashyap has led the team through five days of training in Kathmandu, preparing for the challenges that lie ahead against Bangladesh. He has carefully assessed all the potential threats posed by the opposition. "Tomorrow's match will be challenging, as Bangladesh are a strong side with a

foreign coach and have solid tactical plans. Although we have already booked a spot in the semi-finals, we are taking it one game at a time, aiming to win every match. "I prefer playing attacking football because it's not only effective but also entertaining for everyone. It's a style that I, as well as the players, enjoy, and we will try to maintain that momentum," Kashyap said. Defender Dalima Chhibber, who was named the Most Valuable Player in the 2019 SAFF Women's

Championship, is making her return to the tournament after missing the 2022 edition. She was absent last time due to playing three seasons in Canada, but now she's back and ready to compete in the SAFF Championship once again. Bangladesh and Pakistan are currently tied on one point each after a 1-1 draw in their group-stage match. For Bangladesh, the absence of coach Golam Rabbani Choton, along with key players like defender Akhi Khatun and Anai Mogini, will be felt. However, the team have brought in fresh talents, including young players such as Afeida Khandakar, Matsushima Sumaya, and Aitun Khatun. "We are coming up against an Indian team, who, in my opinion, are probably the best team in the tournament," Bangladesh head coach Peter Butler said. "They are very disciplined and organised in their manner and their demeanour of actually how they walk around the hotel. I think it'll be quite an attacking game. The most important thing is to try and share out the workload with all our players.

