

Five women constables seek permission for gender change

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In an unprecedented development, five women constables of Uttar Pradesh Police have submitted applications to the office of the director-general of police seeking permission to change their gender.

Among these applicants is a female constable currently posted in Gorakhpur. The revelation has raised concerns and prompted discussions among officers. This marks

the first instance of its kind in the police force and the authorities are now exploring ways to address this complex issue.

Reports indicate that the Allahabad High Court has held gender change as a constitutional right in a similar case, adding a legal dimension to the matter. However, the DGP's office has taken a proactive approach by requesting that letters be issued to police district captains where these women constables are deployed, facilitating counseling sessions to better understand their circumstances and decisions.

One of the constables, identified as Karishma (name changed), is posted in Gorakhpur. She revealed that she submitted an application to the DGP's office, where she also made enquiries about her situation.

Karishma cited gender dysphoria as the primary reason for her request, and she attached a medical certificate to support her application.

As of now, there has been no official decision from the DGP headquarters in Lucknow regarding this matter. However, Karishma expressed her intent to pursue legal action if a favourable resolution is not reached, emphasising her desire to undergo gender transition. Karishma, a resident of Ayodhya, joined the Uttar Pradesh Police force in 2019 and was initially posted in Gorakhpur. Her journey towards gender transition began in February 2023, when she approached various authorities, including the senior superintendent of police (SSP), additional director general (ADG), and the Gorakhpur headquarters. She explained that her experiences included the gradual realisation of changes in her hormone levels, prompting her desire for transition from female to male.

To facilitate her request, Karishma sought counseling from a prominent doctor in Delhi, who diagnosed her with gender dysphoria. She attached the doctor's report to her application for gender change. Once she obtains the necessary permission, she plans to initiate the gender transition process.

In recent times, Karishma's demeanor and behaviour have evolved to align more with traditional male characteristics. She adopts a masculine hairstyle and clothing style, even riding a Pulsar motorcycle.

Her daily attire consists of pants and shirts, and she enjoys shooting, further illustrating her inclination towards traditionally male activities.

Her childhood experiences were marked by discomfort when wearing skirts or engaging in activities stereotypically associated with girls.

The case of the female constable in Gonda mirrors Karishma's, as she has also submitted an application to the high court for gender change. In response, the Allahabad High Court asserted that sex change is a constitutional right, emphasising that denying or failing to acknowledge this right in modern society would only exacerbate gender identity disorder syndrome.

The court directed the UP DGP to promptly address the female constable's application. Inspired by the high court's decision, Karishma and four others now harbour hope that they will receive justice.

LEGENDARY DAY IN VARANASI



(Top) Indian cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar presenting a jersey to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. (Above) Sachin along with BCCI secretary Jay Shah at Vishwanath temple on Saturday

UP INTL TRADE SHOW

Experts share success mantras with investors

Lucknow (PNS): On the third day of the inaugural Uttar Pradesh International Trade Show being held at the India Expo Centre and Mart in Greater Noida, several sessions were conducted with the goal of offering a worldwide platform for Uttar Pradesh's products.

These sessions emphasised the significance of innovation in establishing industries within the state, explored the potential of startups, and instilled in the youth the entrepreneurial spirit while underscoring the importance of effective time management in the industry.

While experts from various sectors gave success mantras to the investors, they also gave information about the opportunities being provided by the Yogi Adityanath government. Additionally, the managing director of Mumbai Dabbawala emphasised the critical role of logistics, supply chain management and time management in business.

The trade show is not only offering local exhibitors a global platform but also providing global buyers with an opportunity to engage with Uttar Pradesh.

Distinguished experts from Abdul Kalam Technical University (AKTU) graced the session. Maheep Singh, head of the Innovation Hub, Ritesh Saxena, Innovation Hub manager and Vandana Sharma provided valuable insights into how innovation can enhance the industrial landscape of Uttar Pradesh. They elaborated on critical aspects, including the Startup Policy-2020 in Uttar Pradesh and funding mechanisms.

Maheep Singh said the growing prominence of Uttar Pradesh as a major industrial hub, highlighting that investors' keen interest in this unique trade fair, was a testament to the state's emphasis on innovation. He underscored that fostering innovation was crucial to attracting investments, adding that a comprehensive ecosystem was being nurtured within the state in this regard.

The second session focused on 'Academia Industry Partnership' experts from Sharda, Shiv Nadar and Amity University of Gautam Buddha Nagar participated in this session. The session featured a detailed discussion on the importance and possibilities of higher education in the state.

The third session featured a motivational program centered on the crucial aspects of logistics, supply chain management and time management.

Groundbreaking ceremony for ₹10 lakh crore projects by Dec

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The groundbreaking ceremony for the launch of private industrial and infrastructure projects worth nearly Rs 10 lakh crore is likely to be organised by the end of December this year.

These projects are part of the over 19,000 investment proposals worth Rs 35 lakh crore received by the state during its mega UP Global Investors' Summit (GIS) in February this year. The event will further reinforce the state as a preferred investment destination.

Initially, the government was planning to launch projects worth Rs 10 lakh crore at the maiden GIS groundbreaking ceremony by August or September. However, following inordinate delays in the Industrial department as well as in various industrial development authorities, the proposed GIS is now expected in December. "For a mega event like GIS, which is estimated to see an attendance of 10,000 investors and industrialists, the department requires a couple of months for groundwork. As such, the groundbreaking is likely by December," said an official.

In fact, UP Industrial Development Minister Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi' recently reprimanded officials for their failure to achieve the GBC target of Rs 90,000 crore set for Noida. So far, projects worth Rs 54,000 crore of the targeted Rs 90,000 crore have been lined up for the GBC in Noida.

Moreover, the state has appointed special officers to coordinate with investors and facilitate approvals and land allotment so that the projects are launched without any hassle. The GBC is vital to achieve UP's goal of becoming India's first \$1 trillion economy in the coming years.

Meanwhile, UP Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) is looking to acquire 100 acres of land in the vicinity of each expressway project for ready allotment to industry. While four expressways are operational in UP, several other

CM asks DMs to submit reports on investments

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As part of the preparations for the groundbreaking ceremony (GBC), Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued a directive to all district magistrates asking them to submit investment-related reports within a month.

He has also instructed all the district magistrates and divisional commissioners to hold investment-focused review meetings and fix accountability at every level so that a large number of investment projects can be implemented through GBC.

Notably, Uttar Pradesh garnered investment proposals exceeding Rs 36 lakh crore during Global Investors' Summit, 2023. Throughout this period, investors expressed keen interest in investing in all 75 districts of the state. In a high-level meeting, the chief minister has directed all district magistrates and divisional commissioners to focus on providing land through land banks for investors. He emphasised the need to make GBC as grand as GIS-23 and instructed them to work with utmost transparency and end the pendency at the earliest. The chief minister stated that the current environment in the state is the best for investments. Even smaller districts like Mirzapur, Kasganj, Maharajganj, Sant Ravidas Nagar, Balrampur, Hathras, Ayodhya, Gonda, Barabanki and Sultanpur have received big investment proposals. In view of the proposals, the chief minister has instructed officials to hold one-on-one meetings with all investors and address issues of invest-

ment barriers, if any.

Additionally, all district magistrates have been instructed to submit investment-related reports to the Chief Minister's Office within a month. The chief minister said that he would personally review the report. During this process, the chief minister also stressed taking strict action in cases of negligence.

During the meeting, officials presented a report to the chief minister regarding Section 80 (conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land), which showed a rapid increase in applications to convert agricultural land to non-agricultural land after GIS-23.

So far, 42,706 applications have been received from various districts of the state. Out of these, 85 per cent of the total applications have been processed, accounting for 36,327. Currently, there are 6,388 pending applications. Among these, 1,224 pending applications fall within the 45-day time limit, while 5,121 pending applications are beyond the time limit.

Similarly, investors have submitted 1,017 application letters through Nivesh Mitra portal. Out of these, 89 per cent of the total applications have been processed, accounting for 904 applications. There are 113 pending applications, with 104 of them falling within the time limit while nine pending applications are beyond the time limit. Of these, two applications are pending in Kushinagar, one each in Bahraich, Barabanki, Bulandshahr, Lucknow, Shravasti, Siddharthnagar and Sitapur.

and Bundelkhand Expressway. The state is aiming to complete the Ganga Expressway project by December 2024 before the Mahakumbh Mela in Prayagraj in the early months of 2025.

Akhilesh slams govt on French tourist's death



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday slammed Uttar Pradesh government over the death of a foreign tourist in Agra.

He shared a screenshot of the news on a media site and wrote that due to non-availability of an ambulance, the foreign tourist lost life.

"Homage! Due to these news, the image of the country and the state gets tarnished at the international level. Where is the state government?" Akhilesh Yadav wrote on social media.

A French woman tourist died in an accident on Thursday. The foreign tourist was roaming with a group in Fatehpur Sikri, Agra. While taking a selfie from a height of about 7-8 feet, she fell on the ground.

A 34-member group of foreign tourists had reached Fatehpur Sikri from Bharatpur on Thursday. According to media reports, the woman's husband and other group members called for an ambulance after the accident. But due to lack of immediate treatment the tourist succumbed to her injuries.

Conditional ban on foreign cos in sensitive sectors

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant move to safeguard national security interests, the Government of India has imposed a conditional ban on the participation of foreign companies in sensitive sectors.

In this regard, the Central government has issued comprehensive guidelines to the Uttar Pradesh government, formalising this conditional ban through a government order issued by the Finance department.

Prior to this update, government departments or agencies were required to treat all companies, regardless of their country of origin, equally when inviting bids for projects.

However, a crucial amendment has been introduced by adding sub-provision 11 to Rule 144, governing the fundamental principles of government procurement. This sub-provision empowers the government to exclude specific countries from government procurement or

impose restrictions on them, especially concerning national security concerns.

The Central government has instructed the state governments to faithfully implement this order concerning public procurement.

Under this amendment, companies and citizens hailing from countries that share land borders with India will only have the right to participate in public procurement if they are registered with the Registration Committee established by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

Additionally, they must obtain political and security clearances from the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs, respectively, as mandatory prerequisites for bidding.

This order applies comprehensively to all programmes conducted under public-private partnerships (PPP) involving ministries, departments and subordinate bodies of the gov-

ernment. It extends to autonomous bodies, public sector banks, financial institutions, Central public sector enterprises, as well as entities funded by the government or public sector financial assistance. Union Territories and affiliated agencies are also encompassed by this directive.

The sectors categorised as sensitive under this policy include print and digital media, nuclear sector, defence, space, telecommunication, energy, banking, civil aviation, dams and river valley projects, electronics, mining, Railways, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, health, urban transport, 3D printing, data technology, chemical technology, information technology, software and other allied domains.

"This strategic move underscores India's commitment to safeguarding its national interests and security concerns while also ensuring transparency and accountability in government procurement processes," a government spokesman said.

Ram temple in Ayodhya to be a divine masterpiece

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The majestic Ram temple under construction in Ayodhya is poised to be a divine masterpiece that will stand the test of time.

Designed to be both grand and enduring, the temple is undergoing meticulous planning, including the possibility of adorning the main entrance of the sanctum sanctorum of Ram Lalla with gold and silver work, although a final decision on this is pending.

Simultaneously, a directive has been issued to com-

plete all work on the temple's ground floor by December 15.

Dr Anil Mishra, a member of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, said that specific instructions had been given to ensure that the ground floor of the Ram temple was prepared by December 15.

He pointed out that the sanctum sanctorum of the temple is adorned with exquisite Makrana marble and the flooring work of the ground floor is currently underway.

Additionally, underground electrical wiring is being

installed and the construction of the passenger facilitation centre is progressing at a rapid pace.

In a two-day meeting of the Ram Temple Construction Committee, which commenced on Friday, committee chairman Nripendra Mishra made a comprehensive review of the ongoing projects, including the temple itself, through physical inspections.

He emphasised the need to expedite all ground floor work of the temple to meet the December 15 deadline.

Mishra also visited the

construction site and inspected the progress of the Ram Janmabhoomi Path, Bhakti Path, Yatri Suvidha Kendra, parkota, retaining wall, Kubera Tila and other vital components of the project.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the pace of work during the inspection of the Ram Janmabhoomi Path, Mishra urged expeditious completion of the canopy installation on the path by December.

He conveyed his displeasure at the sluggish progress and directed the executive body of Uttar Pradesh

Rajkiya Nirman Nigam (UPRNN) to ensure that the path was fully equipped with all necessary facilities by the stipulated deadline - December 15.

"The ongoing construction efforts underscore the commitment to create a remarkable and enduring symbol of devotion in the form of the Lord Shri Ram temple in Ayodhya, which is set to become a timeless masterpiece, both in terms of its grandeur and the meticulous attention to longevity and safety," Mishra said.

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Pressure mounts on Iyer, Ashwin for performances that count



PTI ■ INDORE

Shreyas Iyer will be desperate for some runs after missing out on a flat track while the skillful R Ashwin will be searching for wickets in the middle overs when India take on Australia in the second ODI here on Sunday.

Despite missing four first-XI players, including skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, India were able to win the first ODI rather comfortably and look on course to secure the series at the Holkar Stadium which usually produces high-scoring games.

Rain in the city has brought the temperature down which will be welcomed by the players from either side after experiencing unusual heat and humidity in Mohali. The game on Friday had enough positives for India, mainly the performance of Mohammad Shami and Surya-

kumar Yadav, but few questions still need to be answered ahead of the World Cup, beginning October 5.

India's designated number 4 Iyer, whose fitness came under the scanner in the Asia Cup even though he was coming back from a long injury-lay off, has not been able to get time in the middle due to different reasons.

While a back spasm ruled him out of the business end of Asia Cup, an avoidable run out on Friday ended his nervy 8-ball stay in the centre.

The right-hander will be hoping for a bagful of runs in the coming two games which would make him and his team feel much better going into the global event.

Ashwin, on the other hand, came up with a tidy bowling effort in his comeback game but was not able to put the Australian batters in much dis-

comfort on a flat track. He was not able to generate much turn and his flatter deliveries were easily negotiated by the opposition.

The champion spinner could still make a last minute entry into India's World Cup if Axar Patel doesn't get fit in time but the team management expects more from the 37-year-old than what he managed on Friday.

It also remains to be seen if another off-spinner Washington Sundar gets a game. If that happens on Sunday, Ashwin might have to warm the bench.

Shardul Thakur too would be looking for an improvement from the first game, having conceded 78 runs in 10 overs while all the other bowlers returned frugal figures.

He does have a knack of picking wickets and coming up with a useful cameo with the bat

but he has not been able to do that consistently in the ODI format. Thakur will only be used sporadically in the World Cup and therefore, he would be keen to make the most of the chances he gets in the ongoing series.

In the batting department, world's best T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav seems to have cracked the ODI code after a prolonged lean patch.

The management has told him to consume 45-50 balls every game, which is enough for someone like him to make a telling impact on the match. He just did that on Friday with a well paced half-century.

Like India, Australia too were missing some of their key players in the opener including Mitchell Starc, Glenn Maxwell and Josh Hazlewood. Skipper Pat Cummins hinted after the game in Mohali that they might only be ready by the third game

in Rajkot on September 27.

Australia won the series in India earlier this year and find themselves in a must-win situation on Sunday. Josh Inglis showed promise with a run a ball 45 but the middle-order needs to be more consistent.

Veteran opener David Warner has carried his good form from South Africa to India and would be looking to maintain it over the next couple of months.

Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne were guilty of throwing their starts in Mohali and a big hundred will be needed from either of them if Australia are to comeback in the series. The last ODI was played here in January when India amassed 385 against New Zealand with Rohit and Shubman Gill smashing hundreds.

Rohit will not be around but trust Gill to do an encore in front of a vibrant Indore crowd.

You shouldn't feel low if you are not playing XI: Shami



PTI ■ MOHALI

"When I was playing regularly, there must have been someone, who had to sit out and I wasn't guilty. So you can't feel low if you are sitting out because the team is winning," a pragmatic Mohammed Shami said when asked about the sporadic chances he has been getting in 50-over cricket of late.

The Indian team management has indicated that when it plays full strength during the upcoming World Cup, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj will be the two front-line pacers.

But after his match-winning figures of 5 for 51, Shami said that rotation isn't a bad thing when you play so many matches on the bounce.

"This is the team's plan and it is important to stick with it. You can't be always in the playing XI because a lot

depends on the team combination," Shami said.

"If you are playing, well and good and if you are not in the playing XI, then you should be supportive of those, who are playing. I think there is no point feeling low and I am ready to play the role the team gives me," Shami said as he steered clear of anything that could be remotely controversial.

He was also asked if he approves of this rotation policy where he has to sit out.

"What you are trying to know is beyond my comprehension but obviously when you build a team, (the) coach has a role to rotate players and, based on the situation, it is decided," Shami said with a wry smile.

He made it clear that rotation before a big event like the World Cup is a good thing.

"You have seen we have (had) got results due to rotation and I believe before the World

Cup, you shouldn't put too much workload in back-to-back games, and its going well and we are getting good results."

Shami had taken a break after the World Test Championship final and he didn't travel to the West Indies for the two Tests and three ODIs.

"It was important to take that break because I had played back-to-back games continuously for 7-8 months. At the back of my head, I felt I needed a break for a series."

"I discussed with coach (Rahul Dravid) and captain (Rohit Sharma) and took a break (from the West Indies series). But my break never seemed like a break for me because I have an elaborate training set-up at home (Sahaspur in UP's Amroha) and I end up training more at home than when I am with the Indian team," he stated.

He was asked if he did anything special to dismiss Steve Smith, but his answer was in the negative.

"Just tried to do my basics right and hit the top of off-stump and wait for the batters to make a mistake."

The conditions were humid and Shami was used in small spells. Could it be a template going into the World Cup?

"It depends on the situation. How a partnership (is) going and how well you are bowling at that time. Sometimes, you end up bowling a six-over spell as well while sometimes you bowl only three overs."

He admitted that heat does a play role.

"The heat does play a part and we are also human beings. It takes a toll on our bodies and on stamina. But when you have played international cricket for so long, it will not affect your fitness but it depends how much effort we are putting in," he concluded.



Pakistan await India visa for World Cup travel

PTI ■ INDORE

Players and team officials of Pakistan's World Cup-bound contingent are yet to get visas for their scheduled travel to India on September 27, two days before their opening warm-up fixture.

The Pakistan squad was supposed to reach Hyderabad via Dubai where a two-day team bonding exercise was planned before travelling to India on September 27.

The Babar Azam-led side is scheduled to play its first warm-up game against New Zealand on September 29.

PCB sources told PTI that the team bonding trip to Dubai has been cancelled as players await their visas from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad.

Sources also confirmed that the PCB has raised the matter

with the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Pakistan last visited India for the T20 World Cup in 2016. The arch-rivals only play each other in Asia Cup and ICC tournaments due to the tense relations between the two countries.

"PCB had sent its officials to Islamabad for passport collection yesterday but the visas are still in process. That has forced the board to cancel the team bonding trip in Dubai. If the visas come through, the team will reach Hyderabad on September 27 via Dubai," said a source.

Another source privy to the matter added: "the visas will come through after due vetting process. When it comes to issuing an Indian visa to a Pakistan passport holder, clearances need to come from three

ministries — home, external affairs and sports. That process takes time but it will happen."

A total of 33 members of the Pakistan contingent, including players, three travelling reserves and team officials, are awaiting their visas. Tournament host BCCI could not be reached for a comment.

Pakistan's second warm-up will be against Australia on October 3, also in Hyderabad.

They will remain in the city for their opening two World Cup games against Netherlands and Sri Lanka on October 6 and 10 respectively before flying to Ahmedabad for the big game against hosts India on October 14. Only two members from the current Pakistan squad have toured India for cricket - Mohammad Nawaz and Salman Agha.

Martin wins 11-lap sprint ahead of main race

Greater Noida (PTI): MotoGP championship contender Jorge Martin on Saturday topped the 11-lap sprint race ahead of the Indian Grand Prix.

The Mooney VR46 Racing Team rider and Martin's rival Marco Bezzecchi had set the qualifying time at one minute, 43.9470 becoming the clear favourite for the sprint race and the marquee event at the Buddh International Circuit here on Sunday.

Rain delayed the start of the sprint race by close to an hour.

Martin, however, had predicted the scenario after Saturday's practice sessions. "First lap at the sprint will be interesting," he commented.

"Turn one is a really tight corner. It looks a bit wider. The first gear corner we arrive is not easy. It's difficult to find the reference, maybe I found mine so I'm quite confident," he added.

And it turned out as he predicted. Starting number one on the grid, Bezzecchi's teammate Luca Marini's erroneous



braking on Turn 1, pushed the Italian off the track, and five others out of the race. While Bezzecchi was pushed down to the 17th position, Martin sped away main-

taining the lead throughout the sprint.

"I didn't need to put my 100% today. I was just trying to concentrate on the turn. My main target was to increase the gap and understand the conditions. We have some margin to fight back with Marco tomorrow," Martin said after winning the sprint.

Martin, who is second in the championship, took 12 points for the sprint while leader Francesco Bagnaia finished second with nine points and eight-time world champion Marc Marquez rode to third spot on the podium. This was Marquez's second podium of the season.

However, it was Bezzecchi who defined the exhilarating speed associated with the sport. He rode like there was no tomorrow.

From being pushed to 17th on the opening lap, he was fighting for the fifth place on lap 10. He successfully pipped Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo for the position.

Gambhir picks Babar as best player for World Cup

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Gautam Gambhir picks Pakistan captain Babar Azam over Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and David Warner for the upcoming ODI World Cup which will start from October 5 in India. LSG mentor also reckoned that Babar Azam has a different level of quality.

In the recent outing against

India in the Asia Cup 2023 Super Four clash Babar Azam was unable to fire runs from his bat he just scored 10 runs and Pakistan lost that match by a huge margin of 228 runs.

Gambhir reckons that Babar Azam will be the player to watch out in the upcoming tournament.

"Babar Azam. I mean Babar Azam has the quality that he can set this World Cup on fire. And I



have seen very few players who have so much time to bat. And I believe that Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, David Warner, Kane Williamson, Joe Root, but Babar Azam has a different level of quality," said Gambhir on Star Sports.

The first match of ODI World Cup 2023 will be played between defending champion England and New Zealand at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium.

I love to put myself in challenging situations: KL Rahul

PNS ■ MOHALI

India's stand-in captain KL Rahul believes it is always good to put himself in "challenging situations", especially after returning from a long injury lay-off.

Leading the side in the first two ODIs against Australia in absence of Rohit Sharma, Rahul struck an unbeaten 58 as India won by five wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match dress rehearsal series before the World Cup.

"Not the first time, always happens with me. I'm used to it, I love it," Rahul said about leading the side in place of regular skipper

Rohit Sharma.

"I think the intensity in the afternoon was great, after Colombo this felt like heaven at the start but it was really hot and humid. It gets tough and physically challenging, but we've all worked on our fitness and that's showing on the field."

Rahul said it was imperative to build a partnership with Suryakumar Yadav (50) once set Shubman Gill (74) and Rituraj Gaikwad (71) departed.

"After Shubman got out, it was a bit tricky with the set batter out. But managed to build a good partnership with Surya, need to put

myself in such challenging situations.

"We kept talking about hitting good cricket shots, rotating the strike and this is something all our batters are working on. We didn't want to get bogged down, we were always on par so we wanted to take it deep," he said.

Man-of-the-match Mohammed Shami, who returned with brilliant 5 for 51, felt good after bowling his full quota of 10 overs on Friday in hot and humid conditions.

"It depends on the captain and the game situation, but despite the heat you feel like bowling 4-5 overs



with the new ball," Shami said of bowling longer spells in the sultry conditions.

"I enjoyed the wicket of Marsh, that's a different feeling when you get the outside edge, when you control your swing nicely. It was important to hit the right lengths on this wicket, either at full pace or go slow, but bowling the right lengths were key," he said.

Australia captain Pat Cummins said it was not an overall performance from his injury-ridden side but hoped the series would help them to build a good rhythm in the run-up to the ODI World Cup starting in India next

month.

"Personally, happy to be back. Good to get my first game in India. A few guys batted well, few guys bowled well but overall not good enough."

"(On injuries) They'd probably not be ready for the second game, maybe the third game. Maxi (Glenn Maxwell) has just arrived in India. (Steve) Smith's first hit as well, and Davey (David Warner) was brilliant," he said.

"Good to see them out there together. We've got one eye on the big tournament, but you want to set the standards early and build a good rhythm," he added.

"I just don't really believe in mistakes and worst choices. Everything I have done and not done has made me who I am"
— Elisabeth Moss



ENVIRONMENTAL AWAKENING GADGIL'S REVEALING MEMOIRS

Professor Gadgil's *A Walk Up the Hill* sheds light on the crisis in the Western Ghats, unveiling widespread illegal activities, and conflicts between the Church and political entities, writes **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

The memoir, "*A Walk Up the Hill*," authored by Professor Madhav Gadgil, a distinguished environmental scientist who headed the government-appointed Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), is poised to make a significant impact in India. The WGEEP was established by the Central Government through an order dated March 4, 2010.

The panel's mandate included assessing the current ecological status of the Western Ghats region, demarcating areas within the Western Ghats region in need of designation as Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZs) under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986. Additionally, the panel was tasked with making recommendations for the conservation, protection, and rejuvenation of the Western Ghats region, following a comprehensive consultation process involving the people and governments of all concerned states.

The report by the Gadgil committee was presented to then Union Minister for Environment and Forest Jairam Ramesh on August 30, 2011. This, in itself, was a rare event, as a committee usually submits its final report years after it was constituted, availing as many extensions as possible so that the head of the panel and members could continue receiving funds indefinitely.

Though Prof Gadgil was told that the WGEEP report would be made public on September 21, it was not to be. The Government had a change of heart, and the panel members were instructed not to discuss the contents with the public or the media. The Delhi High Court had to intervene to make the report public, and the Ministry for Environment and Forest uploaded it on its website.

The reasons behind the ministry's initial opposition to releasing the report were numerous. What the Gadgil committee members witnessed during their studies across the Western Ghats was shocking. A cabal of private industrialists, contractors, and elected representatives of the people were involved in

plundering the ecologically fragile Western Ghats, despite the resistance of both the local population and the local self-governments. Although the Constitution of India demands that no industrialisation or commercial exploitation of ecologically and environmentally sensitive regions should be undertaken without obtaining green clearance from the local population and the Gram Sabhas, these laws were blatantly violated by politicians, religious leaders, and contractors whose sole ambition was to make more money without making any investment.

"The Western Ghats, the mountain chain running parallel to the west coast of the Indian peninsula, covers an area of 1,60,000 sq km over a stretch of 1,600 km spanning across the States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. All over the world, such mountains, endowed as they are with high levels of environmental heterogeneity, are treasure troves of natural diversity. In the Western Ghats, the annual rainfall ranges from as much as 8000 mm in the southwestern corner of upper Nilgiris to a mere 500 mm in the Moyar gorge just 30 km to its east... The Western Ghats are no ordinary biome. They constitute the water tower of peninsular India, providing water to 245 million people and draining a large part of the country's land surface," writes Gadgil.

The studies conducted by Gadgil and other ecologists have confirmed the fact that Western Ghats have become an ecological hotspot. Only 7 per cent of the Ghat's primary vegetation has survived and it has 51 critically endangered species. Climate change will cause further stress. Observations and inferences made by Gadgil and others have proved to be true as the entire area that comes under the shadow of the Ghats experience unexpected torrential downpour, landslides and even dry spell lasting months.

The verdant forests and greenery of the region have given way to barren lands. Unabated felling of trees and uncontrolled mining and quarrying have taken its toll as the forest and mining mafia have taken control of the entire stretch. Readers may be remembering forest brigand



THE SHOCKING DISCLOSURES MADE BY THE ECOLOGIST ARE WHAT HE CAME ACROSS IN THE WESTERN GHATS. THE FORESTS, RIVERS, MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS ARE ON DEATHBED AND ARE ON LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS. THE WESTERN GHATS HAVE BEEN EXPLOITED TO THE HILT BY THE MINING AND TIMBER MAFIA. THE REGION COULD NOT WITHSTAND ANY MORE INVASIONS ON ITS ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

Veerappan kidnapping Kannada matinee idol Rajkumar to the Sathyamangalam forests in Tamil Nadu. The reason for the kidnapping was the turf war between various mafia groups engaged in looting the forest wealth, including exotic trees and mining of costly granites from the reserve forests in the Ghats, though Gadgil has steered clear from this part.

The shocking disclosures made by the ecologist are what he came across in the Western Ghats. The forests, rivers, mountains and valleys are on deathbed and are on life support systems. The Western Ghats have been exploited to the hilt by the mining and timber mafia. The region could not withstand any more invasions on its environment and ecology. The WGEEP committee, after a series of brainstorming sessions, suggested to the government that enough was enough and it was time to put a full stop to mining activities and tree felling. Some of the crucial recommendations made by Gadgil and his colleagues include no special economic zones, no new hill stations, rescheduling reservoir operations to improve downstream flows, participatory sand auditing and strict regulation of sand mining, rehabilitation of mined areas with special focus on reviving water resources, promoting organic agricultural practices and precision agricultural practices, strictly controlling use of dynamite and other explosives to kill fish, no mining in areas demarcated as Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ1), where mining exists it should be phased out in five years, by 2016 illegal mining to be stopped immediately, etc. The report was submitted to then minister Jairam Ramesh.

The UPA governments began its hide and seek game with the Gadgil committee report and it refused to divulge the details of the same. The Delhi High Court intervention made the ministry upload the report on its

portal. But the report caused an earthquake in Kerala. The church reacted as if it had seen red despite the fact that it remained a closely guarded secret. Then Bishop of Idukki Mathew Aanikuzhikkattil issued a laity message with instruction to read the same on weekly congregations. He said in the message that the attempt has a diabolic nature and has been conceived to evict the population from the forests. The bishop also alleged that the report if implemented would make hundreds of thousands of people staying in the region homeless and destitute. The campaign was of the same style as we saw in the aftermath of the Citizen Amendment Bill getting legislated in Parliament. A campaign was unleashed across southern India alleging that the Bill was an attempt to get rid of a particular community from India.

Jolted by the stance of the church, the then Kerala Government passed a resolution in the Assembly condemning the Gadgil committee report. Though Gadgil was a fellow traveller, his comrades in the State had no qualms in lambasting the report. The resentment by the church led the Centre to appoint a committee headed by space scientist Kasturirangan to study the viability and feasibility of the Gadgil report. Kasturirangan did what he was asked to do and the story ended there. The Western Ghats continue its downward slide without any interruption. The man-animal conflict has become a regular event in the region as elephants, leopards and tigers come out of the forests in search of drinking water and a square meal which would sustain their lives. Who cares?

Even as Gadgil recounts his Western Ghats odyssey, another equally important study from Chennai-based CPR Environment Research Centre led by Dr Nanditha Krishna has more shocking

disclosures to make. Sacred groves across India, home to local flora and fauna and mini biosphere reserves have shrunk and most of them have disappeared altogether from the face of the earth. "Sacred groves represent an ancient Indian conservation tradition protected by local people out of reverence, respect and fear. These untouched patches of forest contain some endangered rare and threatened medicinal plant species. The rural folk conserve and preserve species diversity that are the last remnants of native vegetation," explained Dr Nanditha Krishna, the first winner of Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskaar for her relentless campaign against destruction of sacred groves which are known as Swami Shola, Koil Kadu in Tamil Nadu, Pavithra Vanam in Andhra Pradesh, Kavu in Kerala, Mawlong in Assam and Meghalaya, Manganon in Western Ghats, Dev Vana in MP and Karnataka.

This is a unique conservation style which makes use of religion and tradition to preserve ecology as a natural heritage. Wherever there are sacred groves, they are adored as spiritual retreat. Before concluding, let me draw readers attention to what SK Pottekat, the legendary travelogue writer, wrote in 1955 about his experience in Finland. "Pine trees are the main source of income for European countries. When one cuts down a pine tree, he has to convince the authorities that six pine saplings have been planted." Did we have such laws in India at any time?

(The writer is special correspondent, *The Pioneer*)



Khalistan terror: Globalised 21st century challenge

The rise of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the 1980s posed a threat to India's territorial integrity. Since then, it has transcended the borders of India. The way the 21st-century Khalistan movement is shaped and propagated to its followers is markedly different from the violent upsurge of the 1980s. It is much more globalised now. While hardcore advocates like Amritpal Singh have followed in the footsteps of the Bhindranwale cult, the worldwide network of Khalistani sympathisers has provided the movement with an easier source of sustenance than in the past.

The history of Khalistan lies in the roots of Sikhism. The revered Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak in Punjab in the 15th century. It boasts more than 25 million followers worldwide, with Sikhs constituting a minority group in India, making up less than 2 per cent of the country's total population of 1.4 billion today. However, they are a majority in their home State of Punjab.

The word "Khalistan" signifies the establishment of an ethno-religious sovereign state for the Sikhs, referred to as the land of the Khalsa. This is defined as the "land of the pure." Additionally, Khalsa encompasses both a community of believers who consider Sikhism their faith and a group of initiated Sikhs. Devout orthodox Sikhs are ritually admitted to this community upon reaching puberty. The very concept of Khalsa was established by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, in the year 1699.

However, the demand for the establishment of Khalistan is a relatively recent development, originating during the period of British colonialism in India. It primarily emerged in the Punjab region. Some proponents of Khalistan assert that their envisioned state encompasses the current Punjab State, while others advocate for the inclusion of the Punjab region in Pakistan, along with a demand to incorporate other significant neighbouring states such as Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and the Chandigarh region.

Furthermore, Shimla and Lahore are considered the two potential capitals of Khalistan. The original call for the formation of Khalistan was, in fact, a response to the Pakistan Resolution of 1940. This resolution, also known as the Lahore Resolution, was authored and prepared by Muhammad Zafarullah Khan and ratified by the All India



Muslim League on March 23, 1940. The term "Khalistan" was first coined by Dr VS Bhatti to signify an independent Sikh State in March 1940.

The primary objective behind the Khalistan demand was to secure better representation for Sikhs in political institutions and to establish a homeland for the community. After the partition of India in 1947, the Sikhs were deeply affected as Punjab was divided into two parts — one remained with India and the other with Pakistan. This further fueled the demand for a Sikh homeland.

The Canadian connection to the Khalistan movement is longstanding. The current controversy surrounding Khalistan has strained the relationship between India and Canada, particularly after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in Canada's Parliament that there were credible allegations linking Indian Government agents to the June murder of the Sikh separatist leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The Indian Government promptly denied any involvement in Nijjar's killing. It is evident that Trudeau is attempting to avoid openly addressing the issue of

the growing Khalistan movement in Canada.

India has repeatedly accused Canada of continuously supporting the Khalistan movement, which is banned in India. However, this movement enjoys widespread popularity among a substantial section of Sikhs worldwide.

What Trudeau is doing today amounts to nothing more than resorting to vote bank politics in Canada. According to Indian estimates, nearly 8,000-9,000 Khalistani radicals exert influence over approximately 15 gurdwaras, using them as centres for fundraising and garnering support for political parties in Canada. Their primary sphere of influence lies in political mobilisation in Brampton, Ontario, as well as Vancouver and Surrey in British Columbia. Instead, Trudeau should have recognised the gravity of the situation and cooperated with the Indian Government in expelling all Khalistani activists from his country.

The day will come when they may pose a potential security threat to Trudeau's fellow citizens. There is an abundance of evidence pointing to

the growth of Sikh militancy in Canada. In June 2020, Indian intelligence agencies issued a warning that criminal gangs based in Canada, comprising Indian expatriates from Punjab, including Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), are directly providing funding to the Khalistanis. The infamous Dhaliwal and Grewal gangs, operating in the British Columbia Province and involved in a drug-trafficking network, have connections to Gurbatwant Singh Pannu of the SFJ. Additionally, another notorious syndicate called the Brother's Keepers of Vancouver has been linked to these gangs.

Furthermore, the SFJ is establishing close links with the Pakistani establishment and agencies in order to reignite the Khalistan movement. It is reported that the SFJ is diligently working to organise a referendum for self-determination on the issue of Khalistan. Canadian authorities must take note that SFJ activists in Punjab and the Tarai region of Uttar Pradesh are consistently receiving substantial funds from gangs based in that country.

Pannu has issued a threat to Indo-Canadian Hindus, urging them to leave Canada and

return to India. In a public video message, he stated, "Indo-Canadian Hindus, you have renounced your allegiance to Canada and the Canadian Constitution. Your destination is India. Leave Canada and go to India."

This has sparked another diplomatic dispute between India and Canada. This will result in significant economic losses for both nations. Moreover, the expulsion of diplomatic staff from both sides, along with visa restrictions, will only lead to a severe strain in their bilateral relations.

"While there is currently no active insurgency in Punjab, there has been ongoing support for the Khalistan movement in the State. Consequently, successive Central governments issued repeated warnings about Khalistanis attempting a resurgence and seeking to influence the youth of Punjab.

Moreover, Punjab's political instability, fueled by infighting within the Congress and the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party to power, has created an environment where neighbouring Pakistan, its state agencies, and Sikh extremist factions based in Canada have been relentless in their efforts

to destabilise Punjab in recent times.

The warning issued by Ganga Singh Dhillon was stark: "We are not seeking just a piece of land. We are looking for a territory where Sikhs can safeguard their women and children. Where a Sikh can determine his own destiny — where our religious shrines are not subject to being overrun by army tanks. You can call it an independent Punjab, a sovereign state, or Khalistan. What we are requesting is a homeland for the Sikh nation" ("Give us Khalistan and leave us in peace," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, July 21, 1985).

However, Harjot strongly contends that the emotional attachment with Punjab among Sikhs is relatively recent and does not trace back to the early days of the Sikh community as some Khalistan ideologues might assert today. It is the convergence of history and geography, discourse and space, territoriality and metacommentaries that has transformed Punjab into Khalistan. Both Punjab and Khalistan are human-made constructs, and there is nothing inherently natural about them (Harjot S Oberoi, "From Punjab to

Khalistan: Territoriality and Metacommentary, Pacific Affairs, Spring 1987)

Answers to these underlying currents are not very difficult to find in a globalised world. We are all part of a flat world where identities and cultural insignia are often overshadowed by economic desires, in contrast to what we experienced in a pre-globalised era. Migration has become a way of life. As more and more Sikhs migrated abroad, particularly to the US, the UK, and Canada for a better life, these extremist elements started relying on this extensive diaspora for their sustenance.

Back in India, all these groups are banned, and authorities are closely monitoring their activities and local connections. Consequently, they have found Canada to be a favourable ground for promoting and motivating many youths to support their agenda. For a long time, Khalistanis have been organising against India in Canada, and successive administrations in Ottawa are well aware of this.

Trudeau should not have aligned himself with one of the banned terror groups in India. He is well aware that he is on the wrong side. These Khalistanis have no allegiances; they simply want to keep their agenda alive so that their supporters and sympathisers remain intact for the long run.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended a helping hand to Trudeau, and he should have responded by taking decisive action to eradicate these criminal gangs from Canadian soil altogether.

We all must understand that terrorists recognise no religion or boundaries. They are enemies of civil society and universally recognised liberties of modern society. They stand against peace and humanity. As two democracies, India and Canada must join forces in the fight against Khalistanis. It is now time to prevent them from spreading their agenda and destabilising peace in both countries. The resurgence of the Khalistani movement is a warning signal for both Punjab and all of India. This must be addressed with a superior security and intelligence strategy and network. Undoubtedly, Delhi today possesses much stronger anti-terror infrastructure and more robust leadership than it did in the 1980s to deal with Bhindranwale-like symptoms.

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The rise of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the 1980s threatened India's integrity. Today's Khalistan movement is more globalised, with a worldwide network of sympathisers. Khalistan movement has ties to Canada, straining India-Canada relations. Khalistanis aim to influence Sikh youth in Punjab. Addressing this threat requires a robust security and intelligence approach. It is imperative for India and Canada to collaborate against terrorism, transcending boundaries and religions.



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

India's healthcare in uncertain times

Health insurance is vital, especially during unpredictable times like the Covid-19 pandemic. It helps cover medical expenses and provides financial security. India has made progress in healthcare accessibility through schemes like RSBY and AB-PMJAY, aiming to leave no one behind

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, individuals experienced the unfortunate loss of their loved ones, and a significant portion of them also had the dual burden of losing both loved ones and financial resources while their hospitalisation for treatment. There exists a well-known adage that posits food, clothing, and shelter as the fundamental necessities of human existence.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge an additional element that is often overlooked by the majority of individuals: the acquisition of health insurance. The natural world displays a significant degree of unpredictability and predictability, which is mirrored in the fragility of human existence. Any form of misfortune has the potential to lead to varying degrees of harm, ranging from minor injuries to severe consequences, including loss of life. Sickness or disease does not give advance notice before affecting the human body.

While it is indeed accurate that money cannot purchase life itself, it can provide assistance in navigating challenging circumstances for both indi-

viduals and their families. In contemporary society, possessing a robust health insurance coverage is imperative due to the prevailing uncertainties. It is a cornerstone of personal financial planning, encompassing an individual's comprehensive financial inflows and outflows.

A significant portion of the population lacks awareness regarding medical inflation, of medical inflation, which is the highest form of inflation. Specifically, it compounds at an annual rate of 15 per cent. This implies that a medical treatment currently priced at ₹10,00,000 will escalate to ₹40,00,000 over a period of ten years. Therefore, one may comprehend the significance of possessing a comprehensive health insurance policy.

Undoubtedly, India's healthcare infrastructure has shown significant progress in recent years. In order to provide universal access to healthcare services for all citizens inside the nation, the government has implemented various measures. The Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-



PMJAY) are India's two main public health insurance schemes. RSBY was established in 2008 to offer those living in poverty access to health insurance. The scheme has now been combined with the 2018-born AB-PMJAY. This programme was created to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its overarching promise to "leave no one behind".

Aiming to cover 100 million households, or around 500 million individuals, nationwide with health insurance, is AB-PMJAY. As of April 2023, data from the National Health Authority shows that over 50 million hospitalisations under AB-PMJAY had been authorised, with a total cost exceeding ₹80,000 crore. Additionally, the programme has enrolled over 23,000 hos-

pitals nationwide, which offer beneficiaries a wide range of medical services.

As of March 2022, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) reported 62 non-life insurance companies in operation, with 29 offering health insurance products. In addition, the country possessed a total of six autonomous health insurance carriers.

According to data from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), the health insurance market in India has experienced significant growth over a period of time. As of March 2022, health insurance companies had accumulated a total of INR 64,230 crores in premiums, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 15.2 per cent. During the corresponding time period, a total of 7.69 crore policies were successfully sold, indicating a growth rate of 12.6 per cent compared to the previous year.

In today's era, it is crucial for individuals to protect their families by obtaining comprehensive health insurance coverage to guard against unforeseen medical emergencies.

There are some crucial factors to take into consideration before purchasing a health insurance policy:

- 1) The sum insured ideally should be 15 to 20 times of your annual income.
- 2) Purchase super top up policy along with base insurance policy to increase sum insured cover, once your base policy cover will exhaust then super top up will come into existence.
- 3) If you are a family person then go for family floater plans.
- 4) Claim settlement ratio should be above 95 per cent.
- 5) High number of network hospitals with cashless treatment facilities.
- 6) Pre and post hospitalisation expenses should be covered.
- 7) Less waiting period for named ailment and pre-existing diseases.
- 8) No claim bonus or cumulative bonus in case of claims also should be there.
- 9) No room rent capping should be there in the policy.
- 10) Policy should have day care; in-patient care treatment, ICU cover and ambulance cover up to sum insured with-

out any capping.

11) Automatic unlimited recharge or restoration benefits should be there for unrelated or the same illness without any waiting period.

12) Covid-19, Ayush treatments, domiciliary hospitalisation and organ donor cover should be there up to sum insured.

13) Ideally claim settlement should be done within 30 days of last document submission to the hospital or insured by the insurance company.

14) No Co-payment clause should be there.

Given the substantial cost of healthcare in India, the inclusion of health insurance is an essential element in individual financial strategising. Health insurance provides individuals and families with a sense of security by safeguarding them from the economic strain caused by medical emergencies. This is made possible by the availability of many insurance plans and the benefits offered by insurance providers.

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DIPANSHU NIJANDANI

