







## NEET RESULTS 2024

# Integrity and Fairness Goes For a Toss

Ummar Jamal

The recent announcement of NEET results has caused an uproar across India. With nearly 23 lakh students appearing for the highly competitive entrance exam this year, the stakes were incredibly high. The pressure on students is immense, given the limited number of prestigious medical colleges in the country. The expectation is that such a significant exam should be conducted with utmost integrity. However, recurring discrepancies and issues of paper leaks and exam misconduct have shattered this expectation, leaving students and their families in despair.

### Alarming Increase in Paper Leaks and Misconduct

In a disturbing trend, paper leaks and exam-related scams have become increasingly common over the past few years. Just days after the NEET exam 2024, Bihar police arrested 13 individuals involved in a paper leak scandal. On May 10th, a racket assisting NEET aspirants was uncovered in Godhra, Gujarat. Reports indicate that the accused had received large sums of money from students in exchange for completing their answer sheets. This particular scam was run by Parashuram Roy of Roy Overseas Company, along with another individual, Tushar Bhatt.

According to an investigation by the Indian Express, there have been 41 paper leaks in India over the past five years, affecting around 14 million job seekers. Such frequent breaches undermine the credibility of exams and the fairness of the selection process.

### The Impact on Students

For students who dedicate a year or more to prepare for these exams, such misconduct is deeply disheartening. Their hard work and hopes are dashed when their efforts are rendered futile by these scams. The introduction of NEET in 2013 was meant to streamline and bring transparency to medical entrance exams. Initially overseen by the CBSE, the authority to conduct NEET was transferred to the National Testing Agency (NTA) in 2019, with the aim of enhancing transparency. Unfortunately, the opposite seems to have occurred.



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### Questionable Practices and Results

The recent NEET results have raised several red flags. On February 9, 2024, NTA opened registration for the exam, with a deadline of March 9. This deadline was extended by a week, and a month later, the registration link was reopened from April 9 to April 10 "on the request of stakeholders." This raises the question: who were these stakeholders requesting an extension?

After the exam, reports of scams emerged from Gujarat, Bihar, and Odisha. The situation took a bizarre turn on

June 4, when the results were declared, showing 67 students achieving AIR 1. This is unprecedented; in the previous year, only two students scored 720 out of 720, and in 2022, the highest score was 715, with no perfect scores. In 2021, only three students achieved a perfect score. The sudden spike to 67 perfect scores this year is perplexing, especially when experts had predicted lower scores due to the tough paper.

NTA's explanation for this anomaly was vague. They stated that 50 out of the 67 toppers were given grace marks due

to discrepancies in the answer keys and time-related issues. However, this justification raises more questions than it answers. NTA claimed that these grace marks were awarded based on a 2018 Supreme Court judgment, which allowed for normalization in case of time loss. However, this judgment specifically excluded engineering and medical exams from its purview. How then did NTA justify its application to NEET?

### A Call for Transparency and Fairness:

The commotion surrounding the NEET results highlights the urgent need for a thorough investigation and systemic reform. The integrity of such critical exams must be preserved to maintain public trust and ensure that deserving students are not unfairly disadvantaged. Without stringent measures to prevent misconduct, the credibility of the entire system is at risk.

Restoring and ensuring the credibility of exams like NEET is not just a matter of academic fairness; it is a national imperative. The government must take a proactive stance in addressing the issue of paper leaks and exam misconduct. By implementing advanced security measures, establishing transparent processes, taking swift action against malpractices, and promoting a culture of integrity, the government can safeguard the future of millions of students and uphold the sanctity of India's education system. The time to act is now, and the responsibility lies with all stakeholders to ensure that the hard work and dreams of students are protected and valued.

Since the NEET results 2024 have been tainted by numerous reports of paper leaks and exam fraud, undermining the hard work and dedication of millions of students who prepare earnestly for this crucial exam. For now, conducting a new NEET exam is the only viable solution to restore fairness and integrity to the selection process. This moment must serve as a clarion call for comprehensive reforms, ensuring that such scams become a thing of the past.

*Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer*

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# An Arbitrary Decision

Govt's new policy on arbitration is short-sighted, needs swift reversal.

Sumeet Kachwaha

On June 3, the finance ministry announced a stunning policy decision. After trying to promote India as a hub for arbitration for decades, the government of India now suddenly feels that arbitration does not work for them and that the arbitration clause should be dropped from the contracts of all future government/government-controlled entities (except in relation to minor disputes of a value of 10 crore or less).

The new policy is set out in the form of an office memorandum and provides instead that the government departments/entities/agencies should, "... amicably settle as many disputes as possible... in overall long-term public interest, keeping legal and practical realities in view, without shirking or avoiding responsibility or denying genuine claims of the other party".

To facilitate amicable settlement, the government agencies will constitute "high-level" committees comprising former judges/retired senior officials to vet or approve such settlements. If settlement efforts do not work out, the dispute would be left to the courts for adjudication.

The core reason given in the office memorandum for this dramatic shift in policy is the government's perception that arbitrators often lack integrity and collude with private parties, and the resultant award becomes difficult to dislodge (given the limited grounds available in law to challenge an arbitral

award on merit).

The government's change of stance in abandoning arbitration and pitching all its hope in its ability to settle disputes "without shirking or avoiding responsibility or denying genuine claims" is fundamentally flawed and rests on misplaced wishful thinking. It will also prove to be a costly mistake and a major impediment in bridging the infrastructural gap, rendering projects bankable, and achieving the \$5-trillion economy aspiration.

One may start with the government's perceived lack of trust on arbitrators. First, arbitrators are meant to be independent and impartial and decide disputes on merit. They are not there to toe the government line or do its bidding. If the government is looking for "yes men", it is looking for biased arbitrators and destroying the sanctity of the arbitral process.

The government should be insightful enough to recognise that adverse orders do not necessarily mean that the tribunal has been compromised. More often than not, the correct conclusion to draw is that the government, its agencies, and officials have fallen short in meeting their legal obligations and must, therefore, face the legal consequences (as in any law-abiding jurisdiction). The government's alleged inability to find men and women of integrity and trust them to do the right thing cannot be a reason to abandon a widely accepted dispute resolution method and replace it with a dysfunctional one.

Moreover, if the government does not trust arbitrators as such (though



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it usually nominates former Supreme Court or high court judges as arbitrators), why would it repose greater trust in its officials in negotiating a settlement? It matters little that the settlement is approved by a "high-level" committee (comprising inter alia of former judges) as it is and will remain a voluntary, administrative decision. A mediator (if involved) cannot advocate any particular position.

He or she can only facilitate (and not recommend) any settlement. In terms of transparency and accountability, a settlement can never rest on an

equal footing with an award which is issued following a judicial process and by a process known to law (failing which it is liable to be challenged, including on the grounds of bias, fraud or corruption).

Further, the government is surely overestimating its ability to settle disputes anything close to the scale and extent required. The government is rule-driven and its officials are answerable to multiple (internal and external) authorities.

It is also answerable to courts for any arbitrary or discriminatory decision. The decision-makers are not immune to any later questioning by criminal investigating agencies. It is naïve to imagine that the decision-makers (no matter how senior in the hierarchy) will fearlessly sign off and agree to liability which can run into several hundred crores of rupees. This will be a road to nowhere.

The government's current attitude can be seen from its 2023 Vivad se Vishwas II scheme for contractual disputes, which stipulates that even when an arbitral award is rendered, the government may, instead of honouring the award, agree to a 35% discount on the sum awarded by way of a settlement. It is anybody's guess what its attitude would be when it is on a clean slate and there is no pronouncement of liability by an independent tribunal authorised by law to settle the dispute.

Finally, if there is no settlement, the aggrieved party is left to the mercy of the courts. There can be no two opinions that the courts are not equipped to

handle heavy commercial disputes in any sensible way.

The courts are so overworked that they are barely able to deal with the award challenge proceedings (where the scope of judicial review is minimal). The 2015 amendment to the Arbitration Act prescribes that award challenges shall be disposed of expeditiously "and in any event" within one year.

The reality is that these challenges linger on for five years or so in the court of the first instance alone. What would be the fate of an original suit with substantial stakes, voluminous documents, intricate facts, and expert witness testimony (and where witnesses need to be directly questioned by the judge)?

Arbitrations may not be perfect, but they are clearly more workable than court litigation. To ask the private party to take its dispute to court is to turn a blind eye to reality and throw the litigant under the bus. Effective dispute resolution methods are a necessary adjunct to economic growth including rendering projects bankable and attracting investment.

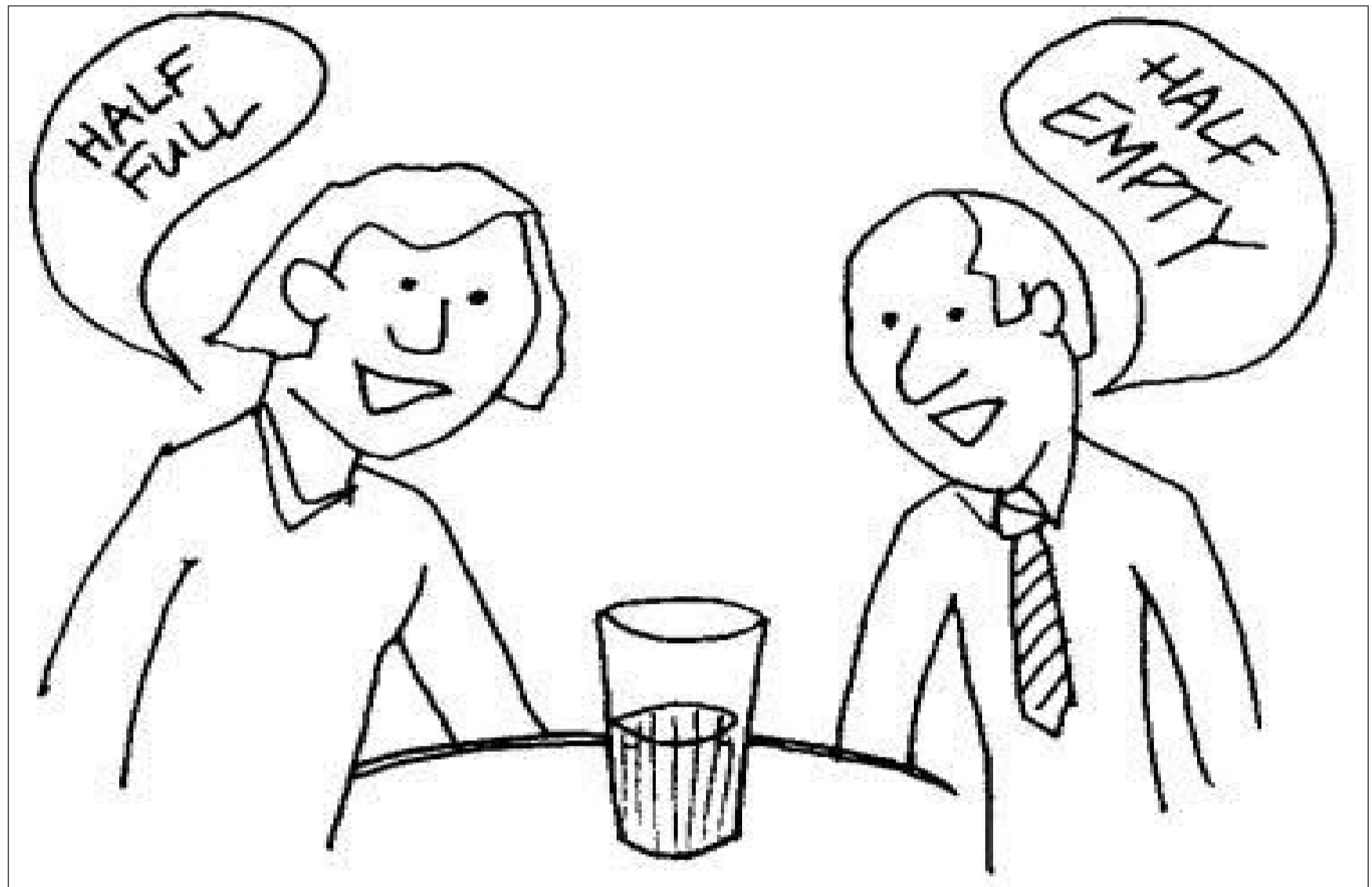
It is clear that the government has not thought this through, including how it can better address its concerns and what it can do to improve arbitrations. The policy change is short-sighted and needs a swift reversal.

*Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published by Financial Express*

# Wall of Perceptions in Our Life



**PERCEPTIONS CAN INFLUENCE OUR BASIC CHOICES IN LIFE.** For example, our choices in clothing are often sometimes influenced by societal perceptions. Certain colours, styles, or brands are associated with specific stereotypes or social statuses



Faria Bhat

Perception, defined as what we think or believe about someone or something, profoundly shapes our world. Often acquired through external influences, these perceptions mould our mindsets and frame our opinions. While perceptions can guide us, they also restrict us, creating barriers that limit our experiences and understanding. This "Wall of Perceptions" is evident in various aspects of life, including our views on people, communities, food, clothing, careers, and interests.

Human beings are inherently susceptible to forming prejudices. These biases, often based on limited or skewed information, influence how we interact with others. For instance, when meeting new people, we might unconsciously judge them based

on preconceived notions about their background. This form of prejudice prevents genuine connections and understanding. We miss out on rich, diverse relationships by clinging to stereotypes and failing to see individuals for who they truly are.

In many cases, communities also suffer from the Wall of Perceptions. We tend to categorise people based on their community, leading to generalisations that can foster division rather than unity. Such perceptions hinder social cohesion and perpetuate discrimination, making it difficult to appreciate the unique contributions of different groups.

Career choices are another domain where perceptions hold considerable sway. Young people are often influenced by societal expectations, parental pressure, or myths about certain profes-

sions when choosing a career path. These youngsters have preconceived notions which often deter them from pursuing fields they are genuinely passionate about, leading to unfulfilled potential and dissatisfaction.

For example, many might avoid pursuing careers in the arts or humanities because they perceive these fields lack financial stability or societal value compared to careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

This can lead to a homogenised workforce and lack representation in various fields.

Another aspect that often gets overlooked is how we perceive mental health. The stigma surrounding mental health in society often makes it difficult for people to seek the support they truly need. Myths surrounding mental health can create

harmful negative perceptions; people may be taught to fear people who have mental health disorders or to think that these people are in some way failing. These perceptions can lead to the isolation of individuals with such disorders, worsening their conditions.

If we can change or at least challenge these perceptions, then we can be hopeful of creating an environment that is largely supportive and has less stigma. This will mean people can have an open presence and kind reactions to people who have a mental health disorder, creating a healthier society.

Perceptions can influence our basic choices in life. For example, our choices in clothing are often sometimes influenced by societal perceptions. Certain colours, styles, or brands are associated with specific

stereotypes or social statuses. This can limit our self-expression and adherence to personal preferences. For example, we might avoid wearing a particular colour because it is deemed unfashionable or inappropriate by societal standards.

Perception also greatly influences how we experience food, a significant part of our culture and everyday lives. Many people decide not to taste new foods based on their initial thoughts on the taste and their presumptions about ingredients. Part of what ties us to our food choices is a fear of the unknown and our comfort with familiarity. Hence, sticking to our "safe" food choices limits our ability to explore the world through our culinary experiences.

Lastly, our interests and hobbies are not immune to the Wall of Perceptions. We might avoid

certain activities because they do not align with societal norms or because we fear judgment. For instance, a man interested in knitting might hesitate to pursue it due to the stereotype that it is feminine. Challenging these perceptions allows us to explore various activities that bring us joy and fulfilment.

In conclusion, perceptions create barriers to what is feasible in the world. By being aware of our preconceived notions, we can chip away at the Wall of Perceptions and help make the world more inclusive and diverse. Going on this journey of openness and acceptance will improve our personal experience and increase the chance of a more accepting, understanding world.

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## How Publishing A Book And Becoming An Author Has Become The Latest Fad

Asha Iyer Kumar

At least three people I know are now in the midst of writing their debut novel, and many others, armed with unique life experiences, have serious intentions of documenting them in memoirs. Writing and publishing a book has never been this easy. Anyone who has a tale to tell or skill to share and a language to say it in is jumping on the bandwagon of authors, aided by tools that make publishing books a heady side hustle. And this, even when writing is not anymore a lucrative business.

Books are rolling out in reams regardless of the fact that readership is rapidly shrinking. Writing is not any longer a serious undertaking that took years and profound thinking to materialise. Given this, I wonder what significance modern writing (I hesitate to categorise today's frivolous booky endeavours as literature) will have for mankind and its future. Is the era of writing for change, to positively influence societies, to impart courage, to reflect the good and denounce the bad and to comfort a deeply wounded global civilisation over? Is literature now turning into mere candy floss with little gains for the reader except satisfying the senses?

We live in a highly sensitive

world that takes umbrage at the slightest hint of criticism. Rancour is the foremost sentiment that governs human behaviour, and while compassion and em-

pathy are still values that are spoken about highly, there is a dearth of these good old qualities in real time. And this dearth probably has begun to show in the kind of writing that is being churned out, making me suspect that we are more easily influenced and shaped by incendiary (and often indecent) works than by narratives of hope. Traditional



publishers are now betting on the returns a manuscript would bring than the comfort and message it would give. Literature, like all other forms of art, has fallen

into a deep malaise characterised by greed and selfishness.

What prompted many distinguished literary figures of the past to put their thoughts on paper was not fame or the reward it was likely to bring, but an urgent, private need to decode themselves and explore their existential strife. Many including Emily Dickinson, Franz Kafka and John Keats led re-

clusive lives and did not even have their works published during their lifetimes. Their journals were only discovered after their death and publicised.

Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali is known to have brought comfort to a world torn by war and oppression in the early 20th century. It offered spiritual solace to readers and drew them away from external chaos, inspiring peace and contemplation. Anne Frank's simple yet deeply stirring accounts of war in The Diary of a Young Girl

(1946) brought huge respite to populations exposed to the horrors of World War II. Victor Frankl's memoir Man's Search for Meaning chronicling his experiences as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps couldn't have come at a better time. It underlined the efficacy of literature in bringing hope and purpose to life even in dire circumstances.

People who have gone through turmoil write about it not just to expose the pain they endured, but also to shine a torch on the resilient nature of human beings in the face of hardships. They wrote because they wanted to tell the world that they had survived the worst, and so will we all if we had the will and mindset.

By this, I don't mean that literature has to always have a meditative and philosophical slant, but when writing descends to levels of serving only the senses and not the spirit, it becomes debauched and demeaning. When people write cookie-cut books with the sole intention of adding the suffix of "author" to their names to fuel their professional lives or to boost their egos, literature falls from grace.

It is to such insufferable kitsch that we are largely treated to in the new age of shallow writing ably aided by writing tools and thought purveyors. Somewhere in the midst of telling stories

that exaggerate human misery, over-simplify man's failings and crank out sleazy fare that will titillate, writers seem to have given the main purpose of literature – to inspire – a massive pass. Books are getting written for the sole purpose of claiming individual glory and not for a combined cause.

There can be fluffy stuff and chick lit that provide temporary escape to readers from the harsh realities of life and to occupy our breezy layovers; but as long as the written word does not bring perspective to our everyday struggles and give us an opportunity for emotional catharsis and empathetic considerations, no writer has done justice to this glorious craft. The power of the written word lies in its ability to find a universal reason for our existence, by navigating through our experiences and recording them for posterity.

Doubtlessly, the demand for juicy pieces of writing and reporting human conditions will only grow, making us all wanton voyeurs. Writing will plumb the depths of mediocrity further unless as readers we seek uplifting themes, and as writers, we delve into our souls before punching each word down.

The article was originally published by *Khaleej Times*





## JKFA Spring Legacy Knockout: ARCO FC Beats SWFC



Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Friday's match of the JKFA Spring Legacy Knockout Football Tournament 2024 First Edition saw SWFC Kashmir take on ARCO FC at Polo Ground here.

At full time, the game ended in a 0-0 draw and was decided in a penalty shootout. ARCO emerged victorious in the tie-breaker, winning the shootout 4-3.

The player of the match was awarded to ARCO goalkeeper Saleem.

## CUS Holds Women Hockey Trials



Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Cluster University Srinagar on Friday conducted hockey trials to select the university's female hockey team from among the students of its constituent and affiliated colleges.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor, Prof. (Dr.) Qayoom Hussain referred to the importance of hockey as India's national game and its role in fostering sportsmanship and teamwork.

Those present on the occasion included Registrar, Dr. Syed Wilayat Hussain Rizvi,

Incharge Dean Academic Affairs and Dean Humanities, Dr. Deeba Sarmad, Controller Examinations, Dr. Khurshid Ahmad Mir, Dean Sciences, Dr. Naseer Hussain Shah, Dean Social Sciences, Dr. Nazir Ahmad Kotey, Dean Commerce & Management, Dr. G.M Lone, Dean Teacher Education who is also the Sports Secretary of the university, Dr. Munir Ahmad Mir, hockey coach from Sports Council and other dignitaries.

The trials adhered strictly to the established rules of hockey to ensure fair play and an equitable selection process.

## T20 WC: Virat Kohli's Form A Concern As India Faces Canada

Press Trust of India

**LAUDERHILL:** Star batter Virat Kohli's continuing struggle with low scores is a growing concern for India as they gear up to face Canada in their final group match of the T20 World Cup on Saturday. The hope is that the match in this city remains unaffected by the torrential rains that have tormented parts of Florida.

India has already secured its place in the Super Eight stage with three consecutive wins. Kohli, who dazzled in the IPL with over 700 runs for Royal Challengers Bengaluru, has yet to replicate that success in this ICC showpiece event, seen as his last big hurrah in T20 cricket.

Since the tournament began, Kohli has amassed just five runs at an average of 1.66, including a 'Golden Duck' against the USA. This subpar performance juxtaposes the otherwise inconsequential



match against Canada but offers him a potential turnaround. The Broward County stadium pitch might provide a more favorable condition for Kohli, unlike the challenging tracks in New York.

**SHUBMAN GILL & AVESH KHAN RELEASED AHEAD OF SUPER EIGHTS**

In a strategic move ahead of the Super Eights stage, the Indian cricket team has decid-

ed to release reserve opener Shubman Gill and speedster Avesh Khan following their final T20 World Cup group league game against Ireland.

A senior BCCI source, on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the decision was pre-planned and aligns with the team's focus on carrying only essential players. Moving forward, only designated finisher Rinku Singh and left-arm pacer Khaleel Ahmed will remain with the squad for the Caribbean leg of the tournament.

With ample cover for potential injuries to key players like skipper Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli, the team is confident in their strategy. Notably, Gill did not get significant net time during sessions in New York, and the team sees Rinku's dual utility as vital in the middle order. In the event of any injury to Arshdeep, Khaleel will serve as a like-for-like substitute.

## Paris Olympics: AI To Shield Athletes From Social Media Abuse

Agencies

**LAUSANNE:** The International Olympic Committee will deploy AI in order to block any abuse on social media directed at 15,000 athletes and officials at the Paris Olympics next month, President Thomas Bach said on Friday. The Games are being staged amid ongoing wars in Ukraine, following Russia's invasion in 2022, and between Hamas and Israel in Gaza - events that have already led to cases of abuse on social media.

The Olympics kick off on July 26 with more than 10,500 athletes competing across 32 sports, and is expected to gen-

erate more than half a billion social media engagements during the 16 days of the event, according to the IOC.

"The IOC will use AI at Paris in different areas," Bach told a press conference.

"One is safeguarding, since we expect half a billion social media posts during these Games. If someone were to take only one second to read each post it would take them 16 years to go through," he said. "The IOC will instead provide a pro-active AI safeguarding tool to protect athletes from cyberabuse. This AI tool offers extensive monitoring, covering 15,000 athletes and officials. This automatically

erases abusive posts to shield athletes."

Russian and Belarusian athletes will not be competing under their flag but have been allowed to take part only as neutral athletes, angering Moscow. The measures will cover all kinds of abuse, not just political attacks. The IOC gave no details of what kind of access to their accounts athletes would be expected to give it.

Bach also said political developments in France and upcoming snap parliamentary elections only weeks before the Olympics would not derail either preparations or the Games themselves.

## Cycling Gold Medallist Felicitated In Anantnag



Observer News Service

**ANANTNAG:** The Government Girls Higher Secondary School Qazigund on Friday celebrated the achievement of its student Muntazir Javid with a grand felicitation ceremony.

Muntazir, a ninth-grade student, clinched the gold medal in the District Level Cycle Race, organised by the Department of Youth Services & Sports. The race, held over a 5km stretch, saw fierce competition from female students across 12 zones, with Muntazir emerging victorious with a significant time gap, showcasing her dedication and

sportsmanship. The felicitation ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including the District Youth Services & Sports Officer of Anantnag, Raja Yaqoob Ali, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The institution's Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO), Has-eena Parveen, also honored the event with her presence.

Key attendees from the Department of Youth Services & Sports included District Activity Incharge Muhammad Abass Dar, Bilal Ahmad Dar, Ashiek Hussain Lol, along with media representatives Shahid Altaf Khan and Subzar Akhoun.

## Amir, Arshid Named Fitness Trainers For Summer Kabaddi Camp

Observer News Service

**JAMMU:** Jammu & Kashmir Amateur Kabaddi Association on Friday announced Mohd. Amir and Arshid Ahmed as Coach/Fitness Trainers for its Summer Kabaddi Coaching Camp.

Both coaches are working with J&K Police department. The camp will be organised under

the banner of Jammu & Kashmir Amateur Kabaddi Association in collaboration with Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council.

The Summer Kabaddi Coaching Camp for boys will see 70 Junior players from Jammu province compete in Mendhar, Poonch, while 70 Junior players from Kashmir province will train in Bandipora.

## Sumit Nagal Enters Perugia Challenger Semis

Press Trust of India

**PERUGIA:** Sumit Nagal continued his splendid form by entering the semi-finals of the ongoing Perugia Challenger here on Friday. The sixth-seeded Indian

overcame the challenge from the unseeded Maks Kasnikowski of Poland in the quarterfinal, winning in straight sets 6-4, 7-5. This is his eighth successive win since the start of Heilbronn Challenger in Germany.

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