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THE HINDU

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on Sunday

CBI exhumes remains of rape-murder victim to probe 12-year-old crime
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NEARBY

NIA yet to file chargesheet in Pulwama attack case

NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has not filed a chargesheet in the Pulwama terror incident, nine months after the attack took place, as none of the key suspects are alive. The two main suspects, Mudasir Ahmed Khan and Sajjad Bhat, were killed in an encounter with security forces in March and June, respectively.

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Protests turn violent in West Bengal, Assam situation eases

Trains, buses torched over new citizenship law; Mamata appeals for calm

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA/GUWAHATI

The protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act took a violent turn in West Bengal on Saturday, while in parts of Nagaland schools and colleges were closed, markets were shut and vehicles remained largely off the road during a six-hour shutdown called by the Naga Students' Federation (NSF).

However, the situation eased in Assam.

As protesters torched railway stations and buses, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee appealed to people to shun violence.

Empty train coaches were set on fire at the Krishnapur and Lalgola stations in Murshidabad.

Raging fury: Vehicles set afire at Santragachi in Howrah district of West Bengal on Saturday. ▪ PTI

In certain areas like Suti, protesters tried to uproot the rail track. According to reports, trains were set on fire at five locations in these two stations.

Assam, however, showed signs of limping back to normalcy as the fight against the Act shifted to the Supreme Court.

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'TARGETED AT MUSLIMS' ▸ PAGE 11

Meghalaya CM for entry permit

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma on Saturday said an ordinance passed by his government for mandatory registration of outsiders entering the State is awaiting the Governor's approval. He raised it at a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah here on Friday.

Mr. Sangma said 63 people and eight policemen had been injured in protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

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Modi has to apologise for destroying economy: Rahul

Congress rally targets government on a range of issues

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

Amid a massive show of strength at the Congress's *Bharat Bachao* (Save India) Rally here on Saturday, all the members of the Gandhi family attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Former party chief Rahul Gandhi said he was "not Rahul Savarkar to apologise for speaking the truth" and party president Sonia Gandhi asserted that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act would "shred the soul of India".

Ms. Sonia Gandhi also vowed to protect "democracy and the Constitution until the last breath".

Mr. Gandhi refused to apologise for his 'Rape in India' comment and instead asked Mr. Modi to apologise for "single handedly destroying the economy, something that even India's enemies had not managed".

Party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra used the BJP's election slogan 'Modi makes it possible' to attack the government over onion prices, employment, and farmer suicides.

Full house: Congress supporters at the rally on the Ramlila Grounds in New Delhi on Saturday. ▪ SANDEEP SAXENA

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PRIYANKA'S PLEA ▸ PAGE 10

Against the Act

Many streams: Thousands joined a protest organised by various groups against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. ▪ R.V. MOORTHY (REPORTS ON PAGE 3)

Farooq's detention extended

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Jammu & Kashmir's Home Department on Saturday extended the detention of National Conference (NC) president and member of parliament Farooq Abdullah, 82, by another three months under the Public Safety Act (PSA).

The move "belies and betrays Union Home Minister Amit Shah's so-called return of normalcy narrative," the party said.

An official said a review meeting of the advisory board of the Home Department, also attended by Home Secretary Shaleen Kabra, took the decision.

NC MAY MOVE COURT ▸ PAGE 11

Girl raped, set ablaze in U.P.'s Fatehpur district

She is battling for life at a Kanpur hospital with 90% burns; accused is a relative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BANDA (U.P.)

In a chilling reminder of the recent Unnao case, an 18-year-old girl was allegedly raped and set ablaze at a village in neighbouring Fatehpur district here on Saturday.

She is battling for life at a Kanpur hospital with 90% burns.

The 22-year-old accused is her distant relative, who allegedly raped and set the girl ablaze when she was alone at her house in a village under the Hussainganj police station, Circle Officer Kapil Dev Mishra said.

On hearing her cries, neighbours rushed her to a local community health centre, from where she was referred to the Kanpur hospital.

On the complaint of the victim's father, an FIR has been registered against the accused and efforts are on to arrest him, the circle officer said.

The police officer said in initial investigation, it has come out that the girl was "romantically involved" with the man and a panchayat was held between their families over the matter on Friday.

An understanding on marriage was also reached, he said, adding that further probe was on.

'Data Protection Bill not in line with draft'

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

Retired Supreme Court judge, B.N. Srikrishna, who led the panel that produced the draft of the Personal Data Protection Bill, said it is a unique legislation and is in contrast to the recommendation that no data be processed without the consent of the person.

The Bill gives autonomy to the government.

"If this is passed in its current form, it should be challenged in the Supreme Court," he told *The Hindu*.

SAFEGUARDS LEFT OUT ▸ PAGE 11

Kejriwal gets Kishor's I-PAC on board

Political advocacy group to work for free, says AAP

JATIN ANAND
NIKHIL M. BABU
NEW DELHI

Political strategist Prashant Kishor's Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party convenor Arvind Kejriwal announced on Saturday, has been brought "on board" with elections to the State Assembly round the corner.

Party insiders privy to the development said senior AAP leaders – including its national spokespersons Raghav Chadha and Dilip Pandey – had been in touch with the Janata Dal (United) politician's political advocacy group "on and off" after the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections.

Sources said at least three meetings between Mr. Kishor, credited with having conceptualised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Chai pe Charcha' public outreach programme during the 2014 general election, and Mr. Kejriwal had taken place since the Punjab elections, two of them between August and early December this year.

'Structural vacuum'

AAP sources said the step was in reaction to a "structural vacuum" the party had felt after its performance in the Lok Sabha polls in which it failed to win any parliamentary seat in the Capital.

Currently engaged with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's campaign for the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, Mr. Kishor was also associated with the Assembly election campaigns of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in 2015, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh in 2017, the Congress in Uttar Pradesh the same year and most recently with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's campaign earlier this year.

"There is no question of hiring any company They are working for free, there is no commercial arrangement," Mr. Chadha told The Hindu. The AAP spokesperson, however, refused to disclose if I-PAC will be associated with AAP only for the Assembly polls or beyond.

ICF gets nod to make rakes of Vande Bharat Express

Target is to roll out 720 coaches by 2021-22, revised design approved by RDSO

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

Ending months of controversy over the move to import complete train sets by floating global tenders and the stiff resistance that followed from senior railway officials and political parties, the Ministry of Railways has accorded sanction to the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) here to roll out 45 rakes (720 coaches) of the Vande Bharat Express.

In a communication to the General Manager on Saturday, the Railway Board cleared the decks for the ICF to proceed with the procurement process immediately with the specifications issued by the Research Designs and Standards Organisation.

SPECIAL

Fresh tenders will be floated to procure the propulsion system with revised guidelines on the design and eligibility criteria of suppliers. The ICF was told to ensure that there was no compromise on the Make in India policy.

Confirming this to The Hindu, a senior railway official said the decision to approve manufacture of the rakes by the ICF was taken at a high-level meeting in New Delhi. The opinion of the General Managers of the Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala, and the Modern Coach Factory, Raebareli, was also sought on their capability to make the train sets so that they could be included in the programme to roll out the 45 rakes by 2021-22.

"This is a huge success for the ICF that manufactured Train18, India's first semi-high speed train, in a record 18-month time in 2018. The indigenously built self-propelled train, launched as Vande Bharat Express between New Delhi and Varanasi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February, has been acknowledged as one of the most successful products of the Make in India campaign.

CONTINUED ON ▸ PAGE 10

Timings
DELHI

SUNDAY, DEC. 15		
RISE	07:06	SET 17:27
RISE	20:36	SET 09:49
MONDAY, DEC. 16		
RISE	07:07	SET 17:27
RISE	21:41	SET 10:39
TUESDAY, DEC. 17		
RISE	07:07	SET 17:27
RISE	22:45	SET 11:25

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	19	10
Safdarjang	19	10
Palam	19	10

Delhi Palam Today
20°C Shallow fog with cool morning is likely. The day will be pleasant with partly cloudy sky. Pollution level likely to improve.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
20°C A cold morning with shallow fog is likely. Pollution level will improve further.

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THE HINDU
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Air quality of Delhi-NCR

Delhi	163	Gurugram	108
Ghaziabad	179	Faridabad	–
Noida	171	GreaterNoida	123

Good 0-50 | Satisfactory 51-100 | Moderate 101-200 | Poor 201-300 | Very poor 301-400 | Severe >401

AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) | SOURCE: CPCB

DELHI TODAY

Dance: Bharatnatyam arangetram of Naveena and Neelam, a disciple of Guru Bhavani at Triveni Auditorium, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 10:30 a.m.

Music: IHC Morning Ragas will feature a Hindustani classical vocal concert by Jayateerth Mevundi of the Kirana at Amphitheatre, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 10:30 am

Exhibition: "Family is Plural", an art show by artist Probir Gupta, curated by Shaheen Merali at Bikaner House, Pandara Road, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: 92nd All India Annual Art Exhibition by AIFACS at All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, 1, Rafi Marg, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

(Mail your listings for this column at cityeditordelhi@thehindu.co.in)

'If we don't migrate, we will starve to death here'

Sixteen of the workers who perished in the Anaj Mandi fire hailed from the villages of Haripur and Nariyar in north Bihar. ***Amarnath Tewary*** visits families of the deceased to find out what forces them to leave their homes in droves

On Saturday, December 7, when Parvin Khatun (26) spoke to her husband Mohammed Sadre Alam (28) over the phone, he was uncharacteristically happier than usual. He told her he would be visiting the family around month-end. Ms. Khatun, a mother of two sons, is eight months pregnant and both were excited about welcoming a third child into the family. "He said 'let me work for some more days to earn some more money and I'll be with you at the time of delivery', but…," she says before her voice tapers off and she starts wailing inconsolably. Nervous and puzzled, her children – Mohammed Hunja Ali (3) and one-year-old Mohd. Humdan – too start crying, as if on cue.

Sitting on a bare wooden cot with a pillow against a faded green wall under a thatch-and-tile-roofed mud house verandah, Ms. Khatun appears frail and pale. Because of her advanced pregnancy, she is unable to sit comfortably and often looks vacantly mid-sentence.

Sadre's mother lies in the courtyard on a broken cot, a tattered blanket covering her from head to toe. "She is suffering from brain tumour and has not taken anything for the last three days ever since she came to know of his demise," says the deceased's father, Mohd. Mansoor. "Sadre had spent ₹2 lakh on his mother's cancer treatment in Patna and was in heavy debt… now, it seems she too will not survive," he rues. Sadre's two elder brothers work as masons in Karnataka and Rajasthan; two of his three sisters are married. "He had promised to bear expenses of my last daughter's wedding but Allah willed something else," says the father of seven.

Mohd. Sadre Alam's story of extreme poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, forced migration for a living, meagre income and eventually death is the same as that of eight other young men of this village. Nine bodies of those who perished in the Anaj Mandi fire arrived on Wednesday in Haripur village under Singhia block of Samastipur district, while three others who were injured are still being treated at different hospitals in Delhi. "Not less than 50 men from this village are in the tailoring business in Delhi's Anaj Mandi area," says Mohd. Ashiq Ellahi, whose two sons, Mohd. Iman and Mohd. Babur, are fortunate to have survived. "*Allah ka lakh lakh shukr hai dono sahi salamat hain* (I thank the Almighty that they are both fine)," he says, raising both hands to the sky. Mr. Ellahi, along with a group of villagers, is sitting on plastic chairs near the village mosque waiting and tracking the movement of bodies of the dead on their way to the village from Delhi in ambulances. The village has 700 households. "There are 300 Muslim households… the rest are Hindus," he says. The village has one primary school and one madrasa, one Primary Health Centre and the nearest police station is 10 km away at Singhia.

Mohd Ulfat, 46, of the same village, has lost two of his children, Mohd. Sajjid (22) and Mohd. Wajjid (18). His third son, Mohd. Wajed, jumped from the third floor of the gutted building to escape and has broken his legs. "He is in hospital in Delhi," says Mr. Ulfat, a father of five. "Sajjid and Wajjid were the breadwinners for the family. They were working there for the past four years… everything is lost now," he says. Like others from the village working there in the bag stitching factory, they were earning ₹5,000-₹6,000 a month, he adds.

Similar is the pain of Mohd Farooq, 45, who lost his eldest son Mohd. Naushad, 23, in the inferno. The youngest of his nine children is four years old. In the courtyard, Naushad's sister Nazni Khatun is in shock and lying with a saline drip inserted in her hand. A group of village women have surrounded her. "I spoke to him on December 7 at 8.30 p.m. and he was all happy, but hours later I came to know about the tragedy from a relative… I tried Naushad's phone a hundred times but there was no response to my calls," says the heartbroken father, who was a vegetable loader on trucks in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh. "I suffer from a number of diseases… now who will look after such a big family?" he says.

(Left) The grieving mother of Md. Farid, who died in Delhi's Anaj Mandi fire on December 8, at Nariyar village in Saharsa district; (above) parents and siblings of Md. Atabul, who also died in the fire, at Haripur village in Samastipur district. ▪ RANJEET KUMAR

Like them, Mohd. Hassan has lost his third son Mohd. Ataul (18); Mohd. Moti has lost his son Mohd. Samiullah alias Chotu (20); Mohd. Mosim's son Mohd. Sajiid (21), Mohd. Mehraj's younger brother Mohd. Guddu (20) and Mohd. Razzak's son Mohd. Akbar (19) too have lost their lives in the Delhi fire. The entire village sports a grim look. Stark poverty stares every bylane and home of Haripur village in the face.

A village in mourning

Almost 70 km away from Haripur village is village Nariyar in neighbouring Saharsa district. Seven people from this village have died while three were injured. Four days after the tragedy, villagers were busy digging mass graves on the outskirts of the village with the bodies expected to arrive by late evening.

"This graveyard is encroached with no boundary wall. Please ask Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to fortify the graveyard and ensure it is encroachment-free… we'll bury our boys on our own," says Mohd. Shakim, taking a break with Mohd. Shagir and Mohd. Mohsin before they would start digging again.

In the village, Bibi Kamrun Nisha, mother of Mohd. Farid Alam (22), is wailing outside her thatched one-room hut. Her mother and a daughter try to console her as her husband Mohd. Alim alias Bhola has gone to Delhi to bring back the body of their son, the only earning member of the family. Her family appears to be among the poorest of the poor in the village – the hut has no cot, no vessel, no almirah and no foodstuff to eat. The mud oven seemed dried up for long.

"She has not eaten anything for the last four days… she faints often," says Farid's grandmother. The deceased's 12-year-old younger brother Mohd. Nazir looks distraught and lost.

Similarly, two cousins from a family – Mohd. Sanjaar Alam (19) and Mohd. Rashid Alam (19) – too have lost their lives in the Delhi fire and their wailing mothers in adjacent houses are lying on the ground on a faded blue plastic sheet with tarpaulin overhead, surrounded by village women trying to console them.

"Our whole world came crashing in a moment. I do not know how we'll survive now," says Sanjaar's elder brother Azhar Alam. Mohd. Faisal (24), Mohd. Gyas (18) and Mohd. Sajimuddin (54) too have died in the blaze and their family members were waiting for the bodies to arrive on the fourth day after the tragedy.

Flood-hit region

Every day hundreds of people from these flood-prone areas of north Bihar districts Saharsa, Samastipur, Sitamarhi, Purnea, Madhepura, Katihar, Madhubani and Darbhanga migrate to cities like Delhi, Gurugram and Ludhiana in search of their livelihood.

"With floods wrecking their lives every year and no employment opportunities, these youth from the Kosi area migrate in hordes every day to eke out a living for them and their family. They are forced to leave their children, old parents and wives at home waiting for their monthly remittance to come," says Shreekant, director of the Patna-based Jagjivan Ram Institute of Parliamentary Studies and Political Research.

According to an estimate, around 45 lakh youths migrate from Bihar every year to make a living. The exodus is exemplified by scenes at platform no. 2 of the Saharsa railway station any given morning. The Jan Sewa Express, train no. 15209, leaves from here at 8.45 a.m. every day for Amritsar in Punjab. It is locally known as the "Palayan Express" or migration train. Every day, passengers are crammed cheek by jowl in all 22 general compartments of this express train with a fare of ₹335 from Saharsa to Amritsar.

"Most of the passengers reach the platform a day before to board the train and get a seat in the compartment," says Mohd. Shakim from Nariyar village. Many relatives of those killed in the Delhi fire too caught this train on December 8 to reach Delhi to bring back bodies of their kith and kin, he says.

"It doesn't matter if death awaits us in the cities… if we don't not migrate, we will starve to death here. We have no option but to catch this train to eke out a living for ourselves and our families," says Mohd. Shagir from Nariyar village, before he goes back to digging the graves again.

A towering problem

Millennium City has hundreds of high-rises that measure well over 100 metres, but the city's fire dept. has just one 42-metre hydraulic lift to tackle a tragedy

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Measuring 175 metres, Ireo Victor Valley, a residential project in Sector 67, is the tallest building in Millennium City that has been granted a No Objection Certificate (NOC) by the Gurugram Fire Department. But it may soon lose its record to Raheja Revanta, an upcoming 61-floor residential project in Sector 78, or M3M's Trump Towers, a residential project in Sector 65 off Golf Course Extension.

Besides these projects, there are a hundreds of buildings across the city measuring over 100 metres.

The Gurugram Fire Department seems ill-equipped to deal with any major tragedy as it has just a single hydraulic lift, measuring just 42 metres; 30-odd fire tenders and a staff strength of 200, including some outsourced.

It has just 46 regular staff members, including 15 leading firemen, eight firemen and 12 drivers. It also has 159 outsourced staff members, including 92 firemen, 54 drivers and one fire consultant. The district has six fire stations and 38 fire vehicles, including 14 water bowzers, one water tender, four foam tenders, five small tenders and three rescue tenders. It also has seven water mist motorcycles to deal with small fires and reach congested areas. It also has 80 fire proximity suits.

Assistant Divisional Fire Officer, I.S. Kashyap, with several decades of service under his belt, maintained that the department was prepared well enough that it would not throw up its hands when face with a major incident, "*kam se kam kisi bhi paristhiti main hum poori tarah haath nahi uthayenge*".

The officer recalled a four-month-old incident when a fire broke out in a flat on the 17th floor of a building in Sector 31 and they had to seek help from DLF's fire station, which has a 90-metre-long hydraulic lift, to evacuate people. The building's fire system was fortunately operational and no deaths were reported, he added.

Besides DLF, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India Limited, two Air Force stations and Haldiram, a popular snacks and sweets brand, also own a couple of fire tenders and staff each, and work in cooperation with the Gurugram Fire Department in case of any major incidents.

Rule violations

Though the fire official does not see much of a challenge in terms of fire-fighting in New Gurugram, which is dotted mostly with group housing societies that largely adhere to fire safety norms and are built as per approved building plans, single staircases in several societies and the locking of doors to the terrace remain two major concerns.

As per the Haryana Fire Service Act, all residential multi-storey buildings must have two staircases to allow alternative exit to the residents in the event of a fire, but the buildings, with plans approved by the Department of Town and Country Planning, have only one.

"The matter came to light in 2017 when we rejected NOC to a few group housing societies for not having two staircases. Since the buildings were constructed with approved building plans, they were given provisional certificates following the intervention of the Chief Minister. But it has now been made mandatory for all buildings constructed after February 2014 to have two staircases and a Fire Department official is appointed to the committee to approve the building plans," said Mr. Kashyap, adding that not many group housing societies now have single staircases. The minimum width of the staircase should be 1,200 mm.

Biggest challenge

In 1979, when he was a young fireman, Mr. Kashyap recalled attending to a fire in the middle of the night and almost single-handedly dousing an inferno in a shop.

When the shop owner came to him the next day offering ₹100 as reward, the officer found that a portion of the establishment was filled with crackers and he actually had a narrow escape.

Mr. Kashyap said that such illegal hoarding of inflammable material was the biggest challenge to firefighting, even bigger than unauthorised colonies and the crowded markets.

Dundahera on the Old Delhi-Gurugram Road is a major area where illegal hoarding is a problem, said Mr. Kashyap. Though a residential area, garment units run illegally from the basements of several houses, posing a serious threat. Last year, four persons were injured when a boiler exploded in the basement of a building next to the local police station.

Ticking bomb

Sadar Bazar - one of the oldest market areas housing grocery, stationery, sweets and garments shops – is a "ticking bomb", added Mr. Kashyap.

The market, located near Civil Lines, has narrow lanes and low-lying tangled electric wires, which makes it nearly impossible for fire tenders to reach the site of fire.

The market is not only haphazardly developed, but the basements of the shops are stuffed with highly inflammable material such as clothes, ghee, oil, cooking gas cylinders, stationery and furniture, he added.

Mr. Kashyap recalled how during an inspection to a Sadar Bazar shop for fire NOC, he found one basement stuffed with two dozen cooking gas cylinders, match boxes and a large number of *bidis*. Since there is ambiguity in law over the need for fire NOC for buildings less than 15 metres in height, the shops in Sadar Bazar do not have fire NOCs. The officer said that making trade licences mandatory for shopkeepers in Sadar Bazar could bring them under the ambit of the Fire Department. The department has written to the government seeking clarity on law for buildings below 15 metres in height.

As a pre-emptive measure, the department has launched a survey to identify buildings that have not procured or renewed fire NOCs. Earlier, the certificate had to be renewed every year, but now it holds good for five years.

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Thousands turn out to reclaim their India

At Jantar Mantar, students, activists and members of the civil society demand rollback of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Thousands of people took to the streets on Saturday and demonstrated against the recently passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

A protest meet held at Jantar Mantar saw a massive turnout with students, activists and members of the civil society demanding the withdrawal of the Act, which mandates protection of non-Muslims who fled to India to escape religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Raising questions on the provisions of the Act, Yasmin Khan, a primary school teacher from Chandni Chowk, said, "India is my country. I was born here and will hopefully die here. I will not provide any document to prove my nationality. I am as Indian as any other citizen of this nation. We should all come forth to resist this as it is not about a single community but about the nation as a whole."

For Ishwar Nagar resident Nishat Gupta, who has had an interfaith marriage, the CAA is a "direct attack on families like hers".

"As my name suggests, I am a Muslim married to a Hindu. With this Act getting passed, what am I supposed to teach my children? Our country believes in humanity and there cannot be any discrimination based on religion."

Amidst slogans against the Centre, people were seen carrying placards like "*Kisi ke baap ka Hindustan thodi hain*?" (The country does not belong to one person only) and "We, the people of India, reject the Communal Arbitrary Betrayal (CAB)."

> **India is my country. I was born here and will hopefully die here. I will not provide any document to prove my nationality. I am as Indian as any other citizen of this nation**
>
> YASMIN KHAN
> Primary school teacher from Chandni Chowk

"Until now we had seen two kinds of critiques, one from the Northeast and the other the legitimate anxiety of the Muslim community. However, today's protest is a reflection of how those who are not directly affected by it have come out in large numbers to raise their voices. This shows that what the government is doing is not right," said Yogendra Yadav, national president of Swaraj India.

For 19-year-old Aanchal Goyal, being a part of the protest was important to uphold constitutional principles. "India is a secular country and the government is only a representative of the people. How can they implement something which is against the very same people?" said the second-year student of Khalsa College.

Bedashree, who hails from Assam and works in a publishing house here, said, "People who have been residing in this country for such a long time do not deserve this. It seems we have completely forgotten about what human rights are all about in this country." Speaking at the event, activist Harsh Mandar said, "The Indian Muslim population here is Indian by choice. If someone is questioning them, that shows how the government has failed to understand the core of the country's soul."

Social activist Nikhil Dey said the Act is not just an unjust one but is an assault on the basic structure of the Constitution.

Sadar Bazar resident Sitara summed it up in a line. "Hindustan hum sabka hain (India includes all of us) and it will remain so."

Protesters at Jantar Mantar; and in front of Assam Bhawan on Saturday.
▪ R.V. MOORTHY, SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Jamia Millia declares vacations till January 5

Students call off lockdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia students called off their university lockdown against the new citizenship law on Saturday, a day after violent protests rocked the campus area, even as the varsity cancelled exams and announced vacation till January 5 in view of the tension.

The university administration said those who indulged in violence and clashed with police on Friday were "outsiders" and not students.

Jamia students, teachers and alumni, said they have formed a coordination panel to hold peaceful protests against the amended Citizenship Act. They say the law is discriminatory.

The university had turned into a virtual battlefield on Friday when students and policemen clashed with each other as students tried to march to Parliament in protest against the legislation. The students had called for a lockdown of the university Saturday and planned to boycott exams.

Police have registered a case of rioting and obstructing government servants from performing duty against unidentified persons in connection with the protest. A senior university official said all exams at the university have been postponed and new dates will be announced in due course. The official said a vacation has been declared from Dec 16 to Jan 5 and the university will reopen on Jan 6 next year.

"The university would like to clarify and put the incident in proper perspective as to who were involved and why this happened. Thousands of people from nearby localities assembled at the site of the protest along with a section of students.

"The outsiders who have nothing to do with the university clashed with the police and not the students. In fact, the students tried to stop them from doing so. Students were caught in clashes resulting in injuries to some of them," the university official said.

Earlier Saturday, before the university announced the decision to postponed exams, students shared their experience during the violent clash on Friday.

'For our rights'

"Jamia will raise voice if anything wrong happens to our nation. We have boycotted classes and exams. We will march again and again for our rights," Nihal Ashraf, a 25-year-old student.

Wajahat, a 22-year-old student of BA Political Science, said, "On Friday, the Delhi Police brutally attacked us while we were marching and many students got injured. They used baton and tear gas against students. We have boycotted the exam."

"Everyone wants to live. This is not Israel or Syria. We should learn from Bangladesh how they killed extremism and opted for an economic democracy. The government is not focusing on main issues," said Pappu Yadav, another student.

At Bharat Bachao rally, tips from workers for Congress to improve

'There should be more meetings at the ground level and at regular intervals'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

As thousands of Congress supporters gathered at Ramlila Maidan for 'Bharat Bachao Rally' amid Rajasthani folk dance and artistes performing traditional instruments from Himachal Pradesh, party loyalists said that the Congress needed to strengthen itself.

While some said that leaders other than the Gandhi family should head the party, others vehemently opposed it. Congress supporters also said that the country should be saved from inflation and unemployment.

There were multiple over 25-foot-high cut-outs of Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi besides ones of party president Sonia Gandhi that were a couple of inches taller than that of the other two.

Amid chants of "Congress party zindabad", Mohammad Khan (65), who had travelled to the Capital Delhi from Rajgarh district in Madhya Pradesh, was glued to a speech. "The inflation is very high and at my shop back in Madhya Pradesh, the rate of biscuits has gone up to ₹75/kg and less people are buying them now," he complained.

He said that the country has to be saved from the inflation. However, when asked if the Gandhi family should continue at the helm of Congress, he referred to the murders of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and said, "Gandhi *parivaar ne balidaan diya hai desh ke liye. Aur kaun diya hai? Gandhi parivaar hi hona chahiye* [The Gandhi family had sacrificed for the nation. Who else has done that? Gandhi family should continue.]"

Bablu Sharma (32) who was standing on chair and listening to the conversation, quipped: "*Nahin, nahin. Aur log aana chahiye* [No no, other people should take the responsibility]."

Mr. Sharma, who hails from Rajasthan and makes sweets for a living, said: "[PM] Modi wins because of his speeches. But there is nobody in the Congress who can talk like him. *Modi damdaar hai, baashan mein. Humara bhi neta damdaar hai, par baashan mein nahin*. [Modi is very good in delivering speeches. Our leaders are also good, but not when it comes to giving speeches]," he said.

"Sachin Pilot or Scindia should be the president of the party," Mr. Sharma, whose father is also a Congress supporter and a Sarpanch in their village Akarsada, added.

"Congress does not listen to workers like it used to before. *Sangathan kamzoor hai* [the organisation is weak now]. Till you strengthen it, you cannot come back to power," said 40-year-old Arvind Mihra who said he is a former municipal vice-president in Madhya Pradesh.

Sanjeev Bhasksare (35) from Khargone in Madhya Pradesh said that the Congress lacked big leaders. "Rahul Gandhi is at least 40% behind Modi in terms of giving speeches. Scindia should be made the president of the party," he said. "Modi *ko takkar dene ke liye woh hi hai bas* [Only he can compete agiainst Modi]," he said.

Mr. Bhaskare said that they should strengthen the ground-level network. "Now workers are used only during elections and nothing happens after that. There should be more meetings at the ground level and at regular intervals," he added.

However, many elderly supporters were against the idea of someone from outside being the party president. "Gandhi *parivaar hi hona chahiye. Aur kaun hoga? Bataiye*. [It should be the Gandhi family at the helm of power. Who else will become the President? Tell me]," Parsadiya Sonkar (68) a farmer and labourer from Uttar Pradesh, who works for ₹200 a day, said.

Outside the ground, 17-year-old Tanihq Negi, a Class XII student from Vinod Nagar in Delhi, was part of over 100 youth Congress volunteers who held an over 100-metre-long banner with photos of Rahul Gandhi. "I have come to support the party. I am yet to become a member. I have came with my friends at 8 in the morning," an excited Tanihq said.

Next to the them, a seven-member team was performing a Rajasthani folk dance and a board on the background read: "India's unity is its diversity".

Congress workers dressed as students at a graduation ceremony fry fritters at Ramlila Maidan on Saturday; (right) The rally led to massive traffic snarls.
▪ PTI, SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Mother Dairy hikes milk prices by up to ₹3 per litre

Amul raises rates by ₹2 across States

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India's leading dairy firm Amul on Saturday announced hiking milk prices by ₹2 per litre across various States, while Mother Dairy increased rates by up to ₹3 per litre in Delhi-NCR due to rise in procurement cost.

The new prices will be effective from Sunday, Mother Dairy and Amul said in separate statements.

Prices of raw milk are generally lower in the winter, but this year they have risen due to late arrival of monsoon followed by excess rain.

Increase in milk prices by the two major dairy firms could impact retail inflation that spiked to a more than three-year-high of 5.54% in November due to costlier food products.

Mother Dairy has increased prices of token and poly pack or pouched milk by ₹2-3 per litre.

Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets dairy products under Amul brand, said it has decided to revise milk prices by ₹2 per litre in Ahmedabad and Saurashtra markets of Gujarat, Delhi-NCR, West Bengal, Mumbai and Maharashtra.

GCMMF supplies 1.4 crore litres of milk per day across the country, of which 33 lakh litres is in Delhi-NCR. Mother Dairy too sells over 30 lakh litres per day in the NCR.

2 foreign nationals held for cloning credit cards

They stole data to paste on empty cards

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two Nigerian nationals, including a former priest have been arrested for allegedly cloning debit and credit cards, the police said on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South West) Devender Arya said that the accused have been identified as Oluwatoyin Isaiah Adewale alias Old Soja alias Marito alias Mark (46) and Nosa Tony Lawani (43) who were arrested from Vasant Kunj based on a tip-off. The police said that 37 cards and electronic devices were recovered from their possession.

Skimmer devices

During interrogation, the police said, it was revealed that a Bulgarian national namely Eris used to steal the debit and credit cards data by placing skimmer devices and hidden cameras in ATMs and after decoding the ATM card numbers, he would send this data to Oluwatoyin to paste it on empty cards. "Nosa used to assist Oluwatoyin in pasting this data on the cards available with him with the help of a magnetic strip reader and writer machine. Thereafter, they used to withdraw money with these cloned cards," Mr. Arya said.

The police said that Oluwatoyin lives in Greater Noida and had come to India in 2012 for a medical visa. His visa expired a year later, but he continued to stay and worked as a priest at a church in Greater Noida. Later, he started a business of exporting hair to African countries, but could not make much profit. He then met Eris who taught him how to clone cards.

The police said that Nosa had met Oluwatoyin in 2018 at a party in Janakpuri after which the two started working together.

Three women killed in Shalimar Bagh blaze

2 minors and a senior citizen among four who sustained severe injuries in the fire

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Three women were killed and four persons, including two minors, sustained severe injuries as a residential building caught fire in north-west Delhi's Shalimar Bagh on Saturday evening, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said that the deceased have been identified as Kiran (65), Somvati (42) and Kanta Devi (75) and the injured as Vanshika (14), Akshit (16), Inna (28) and Lajwati (68) who are admitted in the ICU of a private hospital in Shalimar Bagh.

Delhi Fire Service Director Atul Garg said that they received a call about the blaze at 6.05 p.m. after which eight fire tenders were pressed into service. The fire was doused after two hours, he said.

Mr. Garg said that the building comprised a parking floor, ground floor and three floors above that. "The fire seems to have started from the kitchen on the ground floor and spread to upper floors. The ground floor was locked from outside," he said.

The fire department said that a senior citizen was rescued from the first floor, five persons were rescued from the second floor and one from the third floor – all of whom were rushed to a hospital. Three of them were declared brought dead, they said.

A senior fire official said that the persons who died were suffocated and none of them were charred. "It is suspected that the victims could not escape the building as the fire had started from the ground floor," he said.

Mr. Sharma said that police officers, including Station House Officer of Shalimar Bagh police station, reached the spot immediately and opened the door of the terrace to rescue two women who were lying unconcious. "The building was engulfed in smoke and the police had to take help of firemen to search for others who were stuck," he said.

> **The fire seems to have started from the kitchen on the ground floor and spread to upper floors. The ground floor was locked from outside**
>
> ATUL GARG
> Delhi Fire Service Director

Fire in Mundka

Another major fire broke out at a plywood factory in outer Delhi's Mundka in the early hours of Saturday, the police said, adding that nobody was reported injured in the incident.

A Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said that they were informed about the blaze in Mundka around 5 a.m., after which 20 fire tenders were pressed into service. "The fire also spread to the bulb factory situated opposite to the plywood factory. No injuries were reported in the incident," the official said.

The DFS also said that the fire at the factory in Mundka was brought under control by 9.30 a.m., while the cooling operation continued for the next few hours.

The police said that a case under Section 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered and two more kalandras under Section 133 (conditional order for removal of nuisance) of the Criminal Procedure Code have been made against the bulb and shoe factory in the area.

On December 8, a major fire broke out at a four-storey building housing illegal manufacturing units in north Delhi's congested Anaj Mandi. The incident claimed 43 lives and several others sustained injuries.

The fire broke out at a residential building in Shalimar Bagh. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Auto driver killed, another injured in road accident

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

An autorickshaw driver was killed and another man sustained injuries when the three-wheeler hit a truck in outer Delhi's Narela in the early hours of Saturday, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said that the deceased has been identified as Ratibhan Singh, who lived in Ashok Nagar, and the injured as Budhpal, a resident of Ashok Vihar Phase-II.

The police said that they received a call at 4.22 a.m. regarding an accident near Narela red light towards Sonepat. When a police team reached the spot, they found an autorickshaw in accidental condition. The injured were shifted to a hospital where Ratibhan was declared brought dead, while Budhpal was referred to a government hospital.

During investigation, it was revealed that the autorickshaw was speeding and hit a truck which was slowing down at the red light, they said. "It appears the negligence of the deceased autorickshaw driver had led to the accident," said a senior police officer.

A case under IPC Section 279 (rash driving), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety) and 304A (causing death by negligence) has been registered and further investigation is under way, the police said.

'Bond' fire

A mother and her child sit around a bonfire on a cold morning in New Delhi. ▪R.V. MOORTHY

Two held for duping people on pretext of investing money online

Accused had 15 accounts which saw transaction of over ₹5 cr.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two persons have been arrested for allegedly cheating people on the pretext of investing their money in online share market, the police said on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Thakur said that the accused have been identified as Vijay Masih (41) and Mohammed Abutalif Mansuri (27), both residents of Jharkhand's Ranchi.

12-17% return promised

The police said a complaint was received at Neb Sarai police station wherein one Mohammed Sajid Husain stated that he had received a call in May from one Rahi who asked him to invest in online share market trading company and assured return of 12-17% per month. "He also promised to get his money doubled in a very short span of time. The caller had introduced Masih as his boss and succeeded in convincing the complainant," said Mr. Thakur, adding that the complainant handed him ₹22 lakh to invest.

The complainant told the police that he had received some money as "interest" for two months, but stopped receiving any after that. He said the accused had also shut their Noida-based office. The police then registered a case on charges of cheating and began a probe.

During investigation, the police said, it was revealed that the accused had different bank accounts and that they had collected a huge amount of money from different people on the pretext of investing it online. With the help of technical surveillance, the accused were traced to a luxury hotel where they had come to collect money from a person on Thursday, the police said, adding that a trap was laid and the accused were arrested.

20-30 % commission

During interrogation, it was revealed that the accused had cheated more than 100 people. "Masih was the mastermind. He had employed four-five boys promising them 20-30 % commission in return of each target plus bonus on trapping huge investors. They opened 15 accounts in different names in different banks which saw transaction of more than ₹5 crore in two years," Mr. Thakur added.

'Neither the system, nor people changed since 2012 incident'

Nirbhaya's mother says parents need to empower daughters, teach sons how to behave with girls

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Nirbhaya's mother on Friday said that neither the system nor the people had changed over the past seven years since the gruesome incident of rape and murder of her daughter on December 16, 2012. She said it seemed that they were still in 2012.

Speaking at a day-long annual TEDx event themed, 'Bold + Brilliant – TEDx Gurugram Women 2019', at Westin Hotel near IFFCO Chowk here, Nirbhaya's mother said parents needed to empower their daughters so that they did not have to face what they had been through over the past seven years. She added that we also need to teach our boys as to how to behave with girls.

Jointly organised by Garage Society, a Hong Kong-based flexible co-working space provider, and TEDx Gurugram, the event saw participation of celebrated women working in different fields, such as media, urban transport, psychological counselling and documentary photography.

'Equal opportunities'

"We teach our boys to be bold and courageous, but scare our girls by asking them to be cautious every time they step out. We have to remove this fear from their minds. We need to treat them at par with our sons and provide them equal opportunities for education," she said.

Accompanied by her husband, she said her husband and elder son were her pillars of strength over all these years. She said her husband, despite working in a private firm, did not allow her to go alone for any event and had always managed to come with her.

She also recalled the family's financial struggle and how her husband sold their ancestral land in Uttar Pradesh to provide for their daughter's fee for a paramedical course.

In an indirect reference to the delay in execution of death sentence to the convicts in the 2012 gang rape-cum-murder case, she asked if only criminals had the human rights. "Our daughters also have some human rights," she added.

Among others, Rahagiri Day Movement leader Sarika Bhatt; Country Director, BBC Media, Priyanka Dutt; Psychological Counsellor, Chumki Bose and Documentary Photographer Cheena Kapoor spoke on different women-related issues pertaining to their respective fields.

Maliwal demands A.P.'s Bill nationwide

DCW chief pens letter to Prime Minister

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) chairperson Swati Maliwal on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding implementation of Disha Bill, which mandates disposal of cases of atrocities against women within 21 days awarding death penalty, across the country.

The letter written on Day 12 of Ms. Maliwal's hunger strike read, "It appears as if you have consciously chosen to ignore the cries and prayers of the country's daughters. Amidst this gloom and shocking indifference of the Central government, the Andhra Pradesh government on Friday passed the Disha Bills which are landmark legislation." She wrote she would continue her fast until the Disha Law is enacted.

Rain reduces pollution, Capital breathes easy

AQI improves to 'moderate' from 'poor'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi improved and entered 'moderate' category on Saturday after the city received rainfall over the past two days. The air quality index (AQI) is likely to deteriorate slowly towards 'poor' category by Sunday, said government-run monitoring agency System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR).

On Saturday, the average level of PM2.5 – deadly respirable particles, which is a chief pollutant – was 61.7 ug/m3, the safe limit being 60ug/m3, as per Indian standards, in Delhi and NCR at 7 p.m., according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The level is, however, more than twice the safe limit of 25 ug/m3 set by the World Health Organization.

Delhi's AQI on Saturday

was 163 (moderate) down from Friday's 240 (poor) and Thursday's 430 (severe), according to the 4 p.m. bulletin by the CPCB that is the average of the past 24 hours.

"The AQI is now forecasts to deteriorate slowly towards the 'poor' category by Sunday. SAFAR model suggests AQI is likely to be in the 'poor' to lower end of 'very poor' category on Monday. On Tuesday, AQI may further deteriorate, but will remain in the lower side of 'very poor' category," SAFAR said.

Unauthorised colonies: 'withdraw land acquisition proceedings or denotify it'

Baijal says it's a major step towards implementation of PM-UDAY

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Saturday issued directions to withdraw land acquisition proceedings, or denotify it, in respect of land situated within the delineated boundaries of 1,731 unauthorised colonies for the "smooth implementation" of the PM-Unauthorised colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana (PM-UDAY).

The move, Mr. Baijal said on Twitter, was a "major step" towards the implementation of the scheme which seeks to confer ownership rights on an estimated 40 lakh residents of such colonies - excluding 69 settlements inhabited by affluent sections of society.

"It's a major step for conferring ownership rights to the residents of Unauthorised Colonies & will pave way for smooth implementation of PM-UDAY.

Anil Baijal

#HousingForAll" the Mr. Baijal tweeted.

Detailed orders outlining the procedure for the same have been issued by the Land Building Department with the approval of the Lieutenan-Governor, the Raj Niwas said in a statement.

"The L-G stated that this is a major step taken for conferring/recognising ownership rights on the residents of UCs for land where ever the proceedings of land acquisition is not completed and will also help in smooth implementation of PM-UDAY (PM - Unauthorized Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana)," the statement said further.

'Arrangements on track'

In a related development, Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, took to Twitter to announce that procedural arrangements related to the implementation of the scheme were on track.

"With honest intentions Delhi will get the right development. Maps of Delhi's 1,500 unauthorised colonies are ready. 1,000 maps have been uploaded to the portal. On another portal 4,052 citizens have registered their names. This is the real speed of development," Mr. Puri tweeted in Hindi.

BJP leaders pay visit to unauthorised colonies

Some carry out signature campaigns

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP leaders, in the run up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally scheduled later this month, visited unauthorised colonies and slum clusters as part of a public outreach programme to apprise the residents of the steps taken by the BJP-led Centre to provide housing to an estimated 60 to 70 lakh of them, on Saturday.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel, in addition to organising a meeting of RWAs and NGOs at his residence to discuss the Centre's decision to confer ownership rights on the residents of unauthorised colonies in addition to the "*jahan jhuggi, wahin makan*" or in-situ rehabilitation project, took part in a signature campaign at unauthorised colonies in Mandawali.

Former Delhi BJP president Satish Upadhyay took part in a similar programme, which sought to collect 11 lakh signatures thanking the Prime Minister for both decisions, at Vikaspuri and South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri at Tughlakabad, in addition to others.

"Surveys in 32 colonies have been completed and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has started surveying 160 colonies. As soon as these survey ends, construction of these flats will be started. I have talked to the residents of *jhuggi-jhopdis* and they looked so happy," Mr. Goel said.

The scheme, he said further, sought to provide two-bedroom flats of 30 sqm on land where their tenements existed earlier. For this purpose, he said, the DDA will appoint a developer who will also arrange transit accommodation for those residents whose flats are yet to be constructed.

BJP to hold rally in city to thank Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP will initiate a massive public outreach programme on the heels of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally here later this month, Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari announced on Saturday.

The 'Dhanyavaad Rally' is scheduled to be held at the Ramlila Maidan on December 22 to thank Mr. Modi for the Centre's decision to confer ownership rights on an estimated 40 lakh residents of unauthorised colonies.

The Prime Minister had been "invited" to address the "massive rally" in the run up to which, the North East Delhi MP said, the party's State unit will initiate a signature campaign on December 14-15 with a target of collecting 11 lakh signatures from residents of such colonies in order to thank him for the decision.

Fear of uncertain future haunts AMU students, teachers

An uneasy calm prevailed on the campus as the central university is enveloped in three layers of police barricading

ANUJ KUMAR
ALIGARH

A day after the peaceful protest in the Aligarh Muslim University against the Citizenship Amendment Act, an uneasy calm prevailed on the campus. The central university is enveloped in three layers of police barricading. Inside, students are either taking exams or are discussing the possible fallout of the act and the proposed NRC across the country.

"Forget about carrying the baggage of the Partition, I was born after the Babri Masjid was demolished. I was not nurturing any ill-will against the BJP. My brother who is a science student used to appreciate the cleanliness drive of the Modi government. Instead of winning me over, suddenly, I find, my Indian identity is gradually being scratched to reveal a Muslim beneath,"

AMU students protesting at the university gate on Saturday. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

said Lubna Irfan, a research scholar in the History department, who participated in the protest. "My father, a businessman is optimistic, but our WhatsApp groups are full of messages that exude the fear of what's next? What documents we should collect to pass the impending NRC test." She said the government's track record proved that their statements and their actions didn't match.

A few years back, she said, there was an assertion of the Muslim identity, now we are being advised to hide it. "I am advised to put on a bindi in public places; some of my friends who used put on hijab, now don't cover their faces in public spaces," said Lubna.

The issue has not only brought together teachers and students but also different ideologies that prevail on the campus. Groups like Fatima Sheikh Study Circle, a "left to the centre" group, which organised a protest on Saturday and Lalkar, a "liberal" group are on the same page as the "conservative" elements of the Students' Union. Providing the intellectual heft is the Debating and Literary Club, part of the "cultural island" called the General Education Centre that also houses music and drama clubs, spaces that conservatives find "un-Islamic". Ansab Aamir, secretary of the club said it was these groups that started the protest against the CAB on December 9 before the Union took over. It from this 640 member club that the pamphlets and the explainers on the Act emerge. Aamir showed disappointment that the protest remained "symbolic" on December 13. "If we want to be heard, we have to take the protest outside the campus, without fearing about the consequences. Peaceful protest is our democratic right," he said.

A student of Mechanical Engineering, he felt that the CAA was a test for the judiciary but the fear was that it could "succumb" to the "national will" once again.

Mohibul Hoque, professor of political science, a popular figure among students said, "Our aim is to keep the students away from the increasing influence of leaders like Asaduddin Owaisi. As it would be counterproductive and falling into the trap of the BJP. I always say Muslim good can never be different from the national good but with the CAA and the NRC the fear is that the faultlines will emerge again. The government should realise that uneasy calm is not equal to peace," he said.

He feared that it would lead to demonetisation kind of situation with people queueing up for documents. A source in the Controller Office said people were asking for degrees dating back to 1933-34.

Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, Chairman of Department of History said, said there was "no fear" instead there was "a concern" that "our constitution was being torn to pieces by those who never believed in it." The impending NRC, he said, was essentially "anti-poor." "It is the landless farmers and the Dalits who would find it extremely difficult to prove their Indian identity."

It was not that Muslims didn't feel the "fear" during the Congress regimes," said Aftab Alam, professor of Political Science. "But it was sporadic. Riots would happen and social amity would return. In this regime, it is everyday communalism. Nationalism is the new opium and I fear it will last 15-20 years," he said.

Meanwhile, at the GEC, the good old attendant Wasi, was busy serving. "I have six more months to retire, after that I will start collecting documents," he said. "I don't think the sarkar is not in such a hurry. The elections are still far away," he mused, looking at the grey skies.

Akhilesh meets family of Unnao rape victim

'Centre, State out to hoodwink people'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
UNNAO

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav here on Saturday met the family of the Unnao rape victim who was set ablaze by the accused and assured help in the fight for justice.

Mr. Yadav, who arrived at the victim's village under the Bihar police station area here, said, "Our party will fight for justice to the family of the rape victim."

"It is our responsibility that the family gets justice and the guilty get punished. I have told my partymen that if the family wants any help, we will together work to make it available to them," he said.

When told that the government had immediately rushed her to a Delhi hospital to save her life, Mr. Yadav said, "They [government] did not send the girl [to the hospital] to save her life but to safeguard themselves... The government was well aware of her health condition."

Taking a dig at the Centre and State government, he said that instead of taking steps to curb crime, they were presenting statistics belonging to earlier regimes.

"Both the governments are out to hoodwink people," he said.

The 23-year-old Unnao rape victim, who was set ablaze by five people, including two rape accused, had succumbed to burn injuries in Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital and her last rites were performed at her native village. She was attacked and set on fire while on her way to Raebareli.

All the five accused were subsequently arrested.

Change in distribution network caused M.P. urea shortage: Chouhan

Union Minister Tomar assures State of adequate supply

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

Amid reports of urea shortage in Madhya Pradesh during the *rabi* season, former Chief Minister and BJP vice-president Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday said the State government's negligence to act timely and change in the distribution network had led to the situation.

During a meeting with Union Minister for Agriculture Narendra Singh Tomar in New Delhi, he apprised him of the shortage. Assuring him of an additional shipment of 2.88 lakh metric tonne (LMT), Mr. Tomar said, "The State government will receive 15 rakes of urea in the next two-three days. And instead of 5 LMT quota for December, the government will get more than 7 LMT urea to meet the demand."

Mr. Chouhan's meeting came after Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Tuesday had asked the BJP in the Opposition to press the Centre to send additional urea shipments to the State, instead of "playing politics" over the shortage during the *rabi* season (October - February).

The area under wheat cultivation in the State has increased, given the extended monsoon towards the fag end of the *kharif* season (July-October), when more than 46% of annual average rainfall had ravaged crops, especially soyabean.

In November, Mr. Nath

Shivraj Singh Chouhan

had sought intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to expand the State's quota of 15.4 LMT by 2.4 LMT. Pointing to the shortage, he had said, "Against the allocated amount of 8.76 LMT of urea for the month of November, the State has received only 6.85 LMT of urea leading to a situation of shortage."

Meanwhile, seconding Mr. Chouhan's contention, Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, D.V. Sadananda Gowda, said the current crisis could be a result of issues with the ground-level distribution network. "Recently the State government has decided to distribute 80% of urea through cooperatives and 20% through private dealer network. This ratio was previously 50:50", he said. There is a heavy rush at State Markfed outlets which is being reported as shortage.

Accepting the demand for expanding the urea quota, yet stating there was enough of it with the State government, Mr. Gowda, during a meeting with State Agriculture Minister Sachin Yadav on Thursday, said, "The same has also been reported upon by representatives of State government during recent weekly video conferences with officers of my department."

> **Fertiliser companies have been advised to ensure urea dispatches on pro-rata basis to fulfil the field demand. The Railways has given priority to urea movement from the ports**
>
> UNION MINISTRY OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS

According to the Centre, the ongoing *rabi* season in the State had started with a comfortable urea opening stock of 5.96 LMT – more than one-third of its total seasonal requirement.

To address the peak demand during the current month, the Centre had ensured the supply plan for December was issued at its beginning. "Fertiliser companies have been advised to ensure urea dispatches on pro-rata basis to fulfil the field demand. The Railways have given priority to urea movement from the ports. In case of Madhya Pradesh, nearly 85 urea rakes had been dispatched from plants and ports," said a note from the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Snow block

Heavy snowfall left many trucks stranded on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway at Qazigund in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday. The Valley remains cut off. ▪NISSAR AHMAD

Prashant Kishor stands by his Act comments

JD(U) national vice-president had asked all non-BJP Chief Ministers to oppose it

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

After meeting Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar late on Saturday evening, party national vice-president and poll strategist Prashant Kishor said he stood by what he had said earlier on the issue of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). He also said that Mr. Kumar turned down his resignation offer.

Mr. Kishor earlier had tweeted against CAA and urged all non-BJP Chief Ministers to oppose it but his party JD(U) had voted in favour of the Bill in both the Houses.

Later, senior party leaders, like R.C.P. Singh and party State president Basishtha Narayan Singh had apparently took offence at Mr. Kishor's comment and said everyone should abide by the party line.

Amid speculations about Mr. Kishor's next move, he met Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday evening for over an hour at his official residence 1, Anne Marg in Patna.

"I still stand by what I had said earlier on CAA and I have briefed chief minister Nitish Kumar on the issue...now it all depends on him...he will brief media on the issue after his ongoing *Jal Jivan Hariyali* yatra across the state", Mr Kishor told journalists after his meeting Mr. Kumar.

Mr. Kumar's journey on climate change is expected to end by January.

Mr. Kishor further said that Mr. Kumar rejected his offer to resign from his party. Earlier, along with Mr. Kishor party leaders Pawan Verma and Ghulam Rasool Valiyavi too had openly made objections over party's stand on the issue of CAA.

Sukhbir elected as Akali Dal chief again

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal on Saturday re-elected Sukhbir Singh Badal as its president for the third time at a meeting held in Amritsar.

Mr. Badal's name was proposed by senior party leader Tota Singh and seconded by another senior leader, Prem Singh Chandumajra, while Jagmeet Brar endorsed it.

The Akali Dal, which observed its 99th foundation day, passed several resolutions during the meeting. One of its resolutions called for making the election manifestos of political parties a legally enforceable document, and said offending parties and individuals must be punished for enacting fraud on the people, said an official statement.

Rights of farmers

The party also demanded that minimum support price and procurement of agricultural produce must be made the "fundamental right" of farmers.

In a political resolution, the party called for an immediate dismissal of the ruling Congress government in the State, which it alleged was not functioning in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

Honeytrap case: ₹1 lakh for information on Soni

PRESS TRUST INDIA
INDORE

Authorities on Saturday demolished an alleged unauthorised industrial unit here, owned by relatives of Jitendra Soni, absconding owner of a newspaper which had published sensational reports about politicians and others targeted by a honey-trap racket.

In a related development, the reward for information about whereabouts of Soni, wanted in more than 30 cases including human trafficking, has been increased to ₹1 lakh.

An electroplating factory, spread over more than 2,500 sq feet at Polo Ground Industrial Area, was razed, an official of the Indore Municipal Corporation said.

The factory was run by Soni's brother Mahendra and nephew Jignesh Soni, and built without permissions of the IMC and in violation of the industries department's rules, he added.

Outlines of new Rajasthan industrial policy announced

It will offer timely disposal of grievances

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Industries Minister Parsadi Lal Meena has announced the outlines of a new industrial policy, which will attract investments and offer one-stop solutions and timely disposal of grievances, besides introducing several innovative measures, including bridge finance, to promote micro, small and medium enterprises. The new policy is likely to be released shortly.

Mr. Meena, at a first-ever dialogue series with entrepreneurs here over the weekend, said that the policy's "unique features" would generate employment and spur the State's growth. "As many as 104 permissions for new industrial units from 17 departments will be available at a one-stop window," he said.

Entrepreneurs attending the dialogue called for adoption of a new roadmap for the State's industrial development. Additional Chief Secretary (Industries) Subodh Agarwal said a plan of action had already been formulated for resolving issues related to power, water, pollution and revenue, identified in the dialogues organised at the divisional headquarters.

The suggestions made at the dialogue included installation of common effluent treatment plants, subsidy for charging of electric vehicles, simplification of land conversion procedure, release of gas connections in Bhiwadi and Neemrana industrial areas, reduction of power tariff and VAT on natural gas and granting the industry status to warehouses.

The State government has also announced a State-level export awards, under which 30 exporters in various categories have been selected. The awards, which will be distributed at a ceremony here later this month, were instituted to encourage exporters, promote shipments and bring in a healthy competition among the entrepreneurs.

Farmers highlight indigenous farming practices at conclave

Event focused on sustainable farming and safeguarding of forest, land and seeds

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

Farmers from the tribal belt of southern Rajasthan highlighted their struggle to save indigenous agricultural practices as well as their efforts for rainwater harvesting, soil conservation and farming of medicinal plants at Tribal Swaraj and Sovereignty Conclave held in Banswara earlier this week.

The event focused on sustainable farming and safeguarding of forest, land and seeds.

3,000 representatives

About 3,000 representatives from 1,000 villages in the tri-junction of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh attended the two-day conclave. Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi said at the event that there would be no threat to local communities and resources if the voice of elected representatives was the same as that of the people.

After observing the samples of traditional crops of the region at an exhibition at the venue, Mr. Joshi said they should be patented for

Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi observing the samples of traditional crops at a tribal conclave in Banswara. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers and generating revenue for the government.

"Village panchayats should revive traditional farming systems without the government's interference... Utilisation of untied funds may serve the purpose," he said.

The main organiser of the conclave was Banswara-based Vaagdhara group. Vaagdhara secretary Jayesh Joshi said a renewed emphasis on protecting the natural rain-fed agricultural techniques would help save uncultivated nutritious food and make the tribal farmers self-sufficient.

Experts addressing the conclave affirmed that the tribals had an "enormous storehouse" of knowledge on food gathering, shifting hill cultivation, pastoralism, labour and handicrafts.

> **Village panchayats should revive traditional farming systems without the government's interference... Utilisation of untied funds may serve the purpose**
>
> C.P. JOSHI
> Rajasthan Assembly Speaker

Tribal farmers should be encouraged to define their own food and agricultural systems in order to get healthy and culturally appropriate food produced in a sustainable manner, they said.

Prominent among the speakers at the conclave were B. Venkateswarlu, former Vice-Chancellor of University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad; Kumar Prashant of Gandhi Shanti Pratishthan; Savyasachi Das of Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network; Gandhian leader Sawai Singh; and Shailendra Pandya, member, Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

Dr. Venkateswarlu suggested that the farmers should go for soil testing first and try to make up for the missing nutrients before sowing the crops.

A collective approach for restoring traditional methods of water harvesting and formation of Kisan Sangathan for marketing of farm produce would yield a better value for farmers.

While Agriculture Minister Lalchand Kataria called for reducing the use of pesticides in farming, Bagidora MLA Mahendra Jeet Singh Malviya stressed the need for maintaining traditional practices in animal husbandry as well.

"Vaccination of milch animals for more milk and stopping the use of cow dung is not advisable," he said.

The issues raised and discussed in the conclave also included land degradation, community forestry, malnutrition-free tribal development, community seed management, circular economy, child labour and migration and the significance of Gram Sabha for empowerment of tribal communities.

Assam govt. employees to cease work on December 18

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI

Employees of the Assam government on Saturday announced that they will cease work on December 18 in protest against the new Citizenship Act.

Sadou Asam Karmachari Parishad (SAKP) president Basab Kalita said all employees of the State will not attend offices on December 18. "We have opposed the Bill since the beginning and will continue to do so till the Act is revoked," he said.

When members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) came to the State in May last year to take opinion of the people of Assam on the Bill, the SAKP had submitted a memorandum raising Mr. Kalita said. "We have also extended our support to the AASU in its three-day 'Satyagraha' from December 16," he added.

The employees had also supported the protesting students on December 11.

Meanwhile, officials said that Internet services across the State will remain suspended till December 16 to prevent alleged misuse of social media in disturbing peace and to maintain law and order.

Mahanadi bird population took a hit due to Cyclone Fani, says study

From 800 a day before the cyclone, the numbers dropped 81% to 153 a day after

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

Extreme weather events like cyclones can have severe impacts on bird populations of a region, a recent study on the impact of super cyclonic storm Fani on a stretch of 40 km along the Mahanadi river has revealed.

The study was conducted by researcher Subrat Debata, who accessed and kept a record of the bird population before and after the cyclone that made landfall on the Odisha coast on May 3, 2019.

The study has revealed that the population of sandbar-nesting birds along a 40-km stretch from Baideshwar to Kakhadi along the Mahanadi river declined by 81% .

"As of May 2, 2019, a day before the cyclone, there were a total of 269 active nests and 154 chicks along the 40-km river stretch. On May 4, 2019, a day after the cyclone made landfall, all the nesting sites were damaged and none of the active nests or chicks of any species survived," said Mr. Debata.

The study also found that the population of the birds a day before the cyclone was about 800, which dropped to 153 a day after the cyclone.

Great loss: Nesting habitat of the Indian skimmer before Cyclone Fani; the body of a river tern chick in the Mahanadi river after the cyclone. • SHIV SAHAY SINGH

The researcher said that out of 154 chicks of all species, he could only detect the carcass of 12 chicks of Indian skimmer and seven chicks of river tern in the river.

The highest decline was observed in the case of *Glareola lacteal* (little pratincole) whose population dropped from over 500 to 50 before and after the cyclone.

Details of the study have been published this month in the Journal of Threatened Taxa in a paper titled *Impact of cyclone Fani on the breeding success of sandbar-nesting birds along the Mahanadi River in Odisha, India*.

The study focused on eight species of sandbar nesting birds, which prefer riverine habitat and at times lay their eggs on the sandbars which emerge from the river when the water recedes during the summer.

The researcher said that an increase in the water level and high tide in the river resulted in the submergence and flooding of the islands.

Nests flooded

"The heavy rain and rise in water level might have resulted in flooding of the nests. Due to high tide and water current, the eggs and chicks might have drowned in water. As the wind speed was very strong during the time, there is a possibility that some of the chicks and adults might have also been blown away," the publication points out.

Among all the eight species of birds that breed along the Mahanadi, five are globally threatened, including *Rynchops albicollis* (Indian skimmer), classified as Vulnerable as per the IUCN Red list; *Sterna aurantia* (river tern), classified as Near Threatened; *Vanellus duvaucelii* (river lapwing), classified as Near Threatened; and *Esacus recurvirostris* (great thick-knee), also classified as Near Threatened.

Highlighting the significance of the study, Mr. Debata said the changing pattern of global climate would increase the frequency and intensity of storms worldwide, and the possibilities of cyclonic effects on birds are also likely to consequently increase. "The impact can be detrimental and could even lead to local extirpation of the species that represent limited population," the publication added.

Manipur CM's brother kidnapped, rescued in Kolkata; five arrested

The men had barged into victim's flat on Friday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

Five men pretending to be CBI officers went to the apartment of Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's brother Tongbram Lukhoi Singh here and kidnapped him, police said on December 14.

However, the police rescued him within hours and arrested the five accused, two of whom were from Manipur. The incident happened on December 13 when the accused carrying toy guns entered Mr. Singh's rented accommodation in New Town and kidnapped him and one of his associates, the police said, adding that they later called up Mr. Singh's wife and demanded ₹15 lakh.

Following a complaint lodged by Mr. Singh's wife, the police swung into action and rescued the two on the evening of December 13 and arrested the five accused from Beniapukur area in central Kolkata, a senior police officer said.

Of the five accused, two were from Manipur, two from the city and one from Punjab. The police seized two vehicles and three toy guns allegedly used by the accused, besides ₹2 lakh in cash during the raid at their hideout in Beniapukur, he said.

"The accused were working on behalf of someone from Manipur, who chalked out the plan," the police officer said.

The five accused are being interrogated.

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IN BRIEF

Cocaine, Ecstasy pills seized from foreigners

HYDERABAD

In the run-up to the New Year celebrations, Telangana Prohibition and Excise Department's Enforcement officials seized eight grams of cocaine, nine grams of MDMA and four Ecstasy pills from a Palestinian and an Omani national, on Banjara Hills Road Number 12 on Saturday. The police have filed a case against the alleged drug peddlers Saeed Ali, 33, from Palestine, and Abdurabu, 29, from Oman.

Driver held for sexually abusing minor daughter

KOLLAM

A driver of the Kerala State Transport Corporation was arrested here on Saturday for allegedly sexually abusing his 13-year-old daughter. Manoj, 40, was held on a complaint by the district childline authorities. "It seems he used to sexually abuse the child after getting drunk. The child informed her mother and the Child line was informed," a probe officer said. PTI

CBI exhumes bones in A.P. student case

Agency collects remains of rape-murder victim to investigate 12-year-old crime afresh

STAFF REPORTER
GUNTUR

Nearly 12 years after the rape and murder of a 24-year-old pharmacy student from Tenali in her hostel at Ibrahimpatnam, near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, a CBI team and experts from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) exhumed the remains of the victim at the Idgah in Chenchupeta on Saturday.

The re-post mortem was done over six hours in the presence of police, revenue officials, the student's parents and religious heads.

High Court directive

The CBI started a fresh investigation in the case after the High Court of Andhra Pradesh ordered the agency to take it up, based on petitions filed by the victim's parents alleging that vital evidence was destroyed in the lower court while the appeal petition was pending in the High Court.

On Saturday morning, the CBI team collected evidence at the burial ground site with the help of local revenue and police personnel. They collected bones of lower jaw, skull, elbow joint and preserved them in a box.

Professors of Forensic Medicine from Gandhi Medical College and Osmania Medical College were also present as the bones were placed in the form of a human body.

The CBI team refused to divulge details, while hundreds of locals gathered outside the ground. The remains would be taken to the CFSL in Hyderabad to piece together the evidence.

Father hopes for justice

Turning emotional after watching the procedure, the father of the girl said the family hoped that justice would be delivered after 12 years.

"This re-post mortem has been possible only after our religious heads gave their consent. We are hopeful that the real accused would be caught and justice would be delivered," he said.

The case hit the headlines with the trial court sentencing the accused, Satyam Babu, to life imprisonment and the High Court acquitting him. The State government had constituted a Special Investigation Team to re-investigate the case, before the High Court handed over the case to the CBI.

The case became controversial after allegations were made that those who perpetrated the crime had strong political connections, leading to a shoddy investigation and failed prosecution.

Digging deep

Key developments after the sexual assault and murder of a pharmacy student at a ladies hostel in Ibrahimpatnam in Andhra Pradesh on December 27, 2007

Aug. 2008: Police arrest suspect Pidatala Satyam Babu

Sept. 2010: Trial court sentences Satyam Babu to life imprisonment

Oct. 2010: Satyam Babu files petition in the High Court challenging the conviction

March 31, 2017: High Court of Judicature for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana acquits Satyam Babu

April 2, 2017: Satyam Babu released from Rajahmundry Central Prison

Murder trail: Re-postmortem being conducted at the burial site of the pharmacy student in Tenali on Saturday. • T. VIJAYA KUMAR

Aug. 2017: Government constitutes a Special Investigation Team to re-investigate the case

Aug. 2018: Parents of the victim tell High Court that vital evidence in the case was destroyed during trial

Nov. 2018: High Court hands over the case to CBI and directed it to investigate the case afresh

Dec. 2018: CBI registers separate FIR against the court staff for destroying the evidence

July 2019: CBI seeks permission from the victim's parents and the court to conduct re-postmortem

Dec. 14, 2019: Remains exhumed, re-postmortem conducted

Yediyurappa yet to approach BJP Central leaders

Cabinet expansion, a tough call

B.S. SATISH KUMAR
BENGALURU

B.S. Yediyurappa

Though Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa has cited the busy schedule of the BJP Central leadership for putting off the Cabinet expansion exercise to the fourth week of December, it is learnt that he is yet to formally approach the leadership on the issue.

"Mr. Yediyurappa is yet to come to us with a formal proposal regarding ministerial expansion," said a highly placed source in the BJP Central leadership.

"Yes, we are focussing on Jharkhand elections now. But every day, most top leaders return to New Delhi after campaigning in Jharkhand. The leadership will definitely find time to discuss the issue with Mr. Yediyurappa if he comes out with a formal proposal," he said.

All eyes have been on the Ministerial expansion ever since the BJP ensured stability of its government by winning 12 out the total 15 seats in the bypolls, the results of which were announced on December 9.

Political situation

The time being taken for expanding the Ministry even after the resounding victory is being seen as an indication of the complexity of the political situation faced by Mr. Yediyurappa in balancing various lobbies.

"The two defeated defectors, A.H. Vishwanath and N. Nagaraju (MTB), and another defector R. Shankar, who did not contest the bypolls, appear to be firm that they too should be accommodated in the Ministry along with the 11 who won. This has turned out to be a tough call for the Chief Minister as only 16 berths are vacant in the Ministry and he needs to accommodate others from the party too," a prominent BJP leader said.

Several senior party MLAs are also lobbying hard for ministerial berths. This is learnt to have complicated the matter as Mr. Yediyurappa would have to ensure a semblance of balance in the Ministry between the "outsiders" and those from the party cadre.

Mr. Yediyurappa may be taking time to negotiate with the defeated defectors and ministerial aspirants from the party, said another leader in the BJP State unit.

Meanwhile, the BJP Central leadership is learnt to have taken a firm decision against creating additional posts of Deputy Chief Ministers or removing any of the three existing posts.

Health Minister B. Sriramulu is said to be peeved at not getting a Deputy Chief Minister post. However, he told reporters on Saturday that he would "not embarrass the party" with any demands.

Dalits enter 200-year-old temple in A.P. village for the first time

Villagers take out a massive procession

TADI VIDURA
KURNOOL

Celebration rented the air at Hosur village of Pattikonda mandal in Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool district on Saturday when 300 Dalit families formally entered the temple for the first time. A massive procession, led by various caste organisations, was taken out from Ambedkar statue in Pattikonda town to the village.

According to the temple authorities, while the records for the Veerabhadra Swamy (village deity of Hosur) temple exist only from the 1960s, the temple is said to be about 200 years old. Dalits of the village were not allowed into the temple since the beginning.

Good beginning: Dalits entering the temple in Hosur village of Kurnool on Saturday. • U. SUBRAMANYAM

The village's power structures were challenged by young educated Dalits in early September. The Dalits demanded that they be included in the 'Peerla Panduga' (Muharram) processions. However, "caste Hindus" disagreed to include them.

When the police tried to intervene, "caste Hindus" along with Muslims hurled stones at officers damaging a few vehicles and injuring a few policemen. Later, cases were registered against a few people. This brought the village into the limelight.

This attention brought various caste organisations and the Human Rights Forum (HRF) to Hosur. These organisations alleged that the Dalits in Hosur were facing numerous issues, including exclusion from temples.

The district authorities took up the issue and held about four meetings with Dalits and "caste Hindus". In the meetings, Dhone DSP V. Narayana Reddy and the Adoni Revenue Divisional Officer A. Balaganeshaiah asked the "caste Hindus" to allow Dalits into the temple.

According to the authorities, the "caste Hindus" agreed to the propositions and told them that Dalits could enter the temple freely.

On Saturday, Dalits, led by Kula Vivaksha Porata Samithi (Organisation against Caste Discrimination, KVPS) and Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS), entered the temple. This was the first time in the village's history that Dalits formally entered the temple.

"It is a good day today," said the RDO while addressing the crowd. The Dalits marched for about four km to the village from Pattikonda town and entered the temple in a great furore.

UDF in a quandary over Kerala Congress(M) row

Both factions hold separate State committee meetings

HIRAN UNNIKRISHNAN
KOTTAYAM

The escalating factional war within the Kerala Congress (M) has entered yet another delicate phase with the rival groups led by Jose K. Mani and party working chairman P.J. Joseph deciding to go their own way, putting the United Democratic Front (UDF) leadership in a quandary ahead of the local body elections in the State.

With both groups holding separate State committee meetings here on Saturday, the doors of consensus between the factions now appear shut, at least for the time being. While the State committee meeting convened by the Joseph faction commenced the procedures to elect the new party chairman and fill the vacancies at the helm, the meeting by the rival group resolved not to share its seats with the Joseph group in the local body elections.

Armed with a few orders, including that by the State Election Commission in his favour, Mr. Joseph is determined to push ahead with his strategies to firm up his control over the regional entity.

Accordingly, the faction initiated the procedures for election of the new party chairman by appointing Sajan Francis as returning officer. The election to the posts, according to Joseph group leaders, will be based on consensus. Meanwhile, the existing office-bearers, appointed last year, can continue till 2021.

They also hinted at the possibility of Mr. Joseph seeking to initiate disciplinary action against Jose K. Mani for organising a parallel party meeting. "Mr. Mani is repeating his mistakes by convening unauthorised meetings for the second time. Let him release the photographs of the people who attended the meeting. A large majority of them are not actual members of the KC(M) State committee," Mr. Joseph said in Thodupuzha.

Mr. Mani, on the other hand, is resolved not to wilt under pressure and decided to field his own candidates in all the seats to be allocated to the KC(M) in the next local body elections.

Claiming transparency in all organisational activities of his faction, he pointed out that the State committee meeting had been convened based on a list endorsed by the State returning officer.

The wind in the winnows

Reaping benefits: As the sun sets, farmers winnowing paddy in Belagavi district of Karnataka on Saturday. • P.K. BADIGER

'Callous' driver causes boy's death in Kerala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A 13-year-old boy was injured after he was hit by a car in Palakkad district recently, but the driver allegedly abandoned him en route to a hospital. He was later pronounced dead at a nearby hospital, prompting the Kerala Human Rights Commission to register a suo motu case.

The police arrested the driver on Friday after the family filed a complaint.

Sujith, a Class 7 student, was hit by the car on December 12 at Kaithakkuzhi. The driver agreed to take him to hospital. A neighbour too went along. But en route, the driver told him that the car had a flat tyre and asked him to take the child in another vehicle. The police said the driver admitted to abandoning the boy and lying about the flat tyre.

Learn A-Z about all schools at this expo

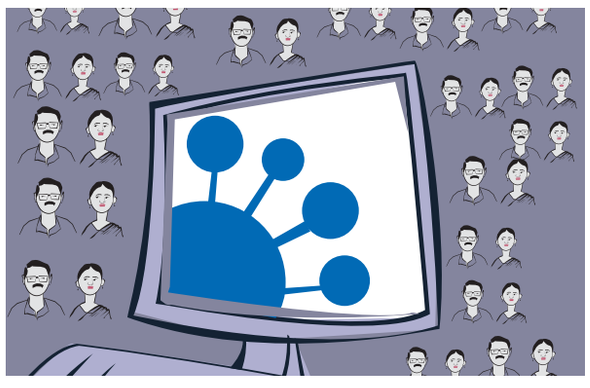
Parents get to know of admission norms and curriculum on one platform

TANU KULKARNI
BENGALURU

Which curriculum is best suited for your child? Is there a school that gives importance to both academics and extracurricular activities?

Admission season is well under way as emotionally fraught parents try to make the best choice for their children. And many are hoping to get answers at the Bangalore Schools Expo next month.

The genesis of this platform – which aims to bring students, parents and schools together – was a social media page on Facebook made seven years ago by one parent. Called Bangalore Schools, it began with a handful of followers, but has grown over the years. Today, it has nearly 43,000 members, a majority of whom are parents.



Firsthand review

In 2012, Shweta Saran, whose daughter is now a little over nine years old, made the page with the intention of helping people get reviews on schools from other parents. It has since evolved to cover more issues that are actively discussed. A group of parents help run the platform.

The social media page allows parents to take 'virtual' tours of 15 schools through Facebook live, which is followed by FAQs on various topics such as pupil-teacher ratio in classrooms, curriculum followed and so on.

The idea to organise an expo took root after they received requests from parents to organise events offline as well. Some schools have also agreed to come on board as sponsors.

A lot of thought and planning has gone into it. Manoj Thelakkat, co-admin, Bangalore Schools, said that they have been visiting several expos in the last one-and-half years. "None of them connected parents, students, educators, school managements and service providers on one platform and our expo tries to bring them together," he said.

The expo will be held on January 4 and January 5 at NIMHANS convention hall. Entry is free.

Stretch or shake a leg at office to keep fit

Kerala to fight unsavoury reputation of being the 'diabetes capital'

C. MAYA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

As Kerala fights to shed its unsavoury reputation of being the "diabetes capital" of the country, the Health Department is coming up with new ideas and creating opportunities at workplaces for employees to stretch or shake-a-leg.

Walk into the inner courtyard of the Directorate of Health Services at 11 a.m. and you will find them at it-...side stretches, back bends, touching the toe, twists, neck exercises...

"Initially, there was some smirking and embarrassment... till they began to see how that five minutes of stretching was actually making them feel good and invigorated. It has been a month since we initiated this routine – two five-minute "stretch breaks" at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. – and everyone seems to have embraced it," said Bipin Gopal, State Nodal Officer for NCD Control.

Staying fit: Employees doing stretches on the Directorate of Health Services campus in Thiruvananthapuram.

The idea of "stretch breaks" was introduced as part of the workplace interventions that the State NCD Control division has been planning, to introduce people to physical activity and to get people to move more to keep lifestyle diseases in check.

"We realised that the salaried class were at higher risk of developing lifestyle diseases because they had little opportunities for daily physical activity and most of them spent their entire work days just sitting. It was worse in the case of women. A good number of our employees had been newly detected with diabetes, hypertension, spondylosis or insomnia," saids Director of Health Services R.L. Saritha.

The stretch break routines were developed in consultation with a professional yoga expert, with focus on simple full body stretches that anyone could do.

On work days, when the bell rings at 11 a.m., everyone gets up and does the stretches, following instructions from the audio clip played over the public announcement system.

IN BRIEF

High legal costs cut access to justice: CJI

NAGPUR

Chief Justice of India Sharad Bobde said on Saturday that high legal costs block access to justice, and added that lawyers might have to see their role as mediators and not only as "professional men paid to argue". He also stated that "we need to introduce pre-litigation mediation". PTI

Withdraw advisory to TV channels: Editors Guild

NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India on Saturday sought the withdrawal of a recent advisory issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting asking all private television channels to desist from showing content that could incite violence or promote "anti-national attitudes". The Guild said it believes that the media's overall commitment to responsible coverage of developments in the country should not be questioned through such an advisory. PTI

Minor girl gang-raped, killed in Odisha

NABARANGPUR

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly kidnapped, gang-raped and subsequently killed in Odisha's Nabarangpur district, the police said on Saturday. The incident happened at Gumandli village on Friday night. Local residents found the minor's body on a paddy field on Saturday morning.

JNU VC says students tried to attack him

NEW DELHI

JNU Vice-Chancellor Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar on Saturday claimed that a group of 15-20 students surrounded him "in a violent manner" on the campus and abused and tried to attack him but the university security staff and police personnel rescued him. The university has been seeing protests over hike in hostel fees. PTI

Three lakh rural habitations lack quality drinking water supply

Rajasthan, Bengal, Assam, T.N. among worst affected

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

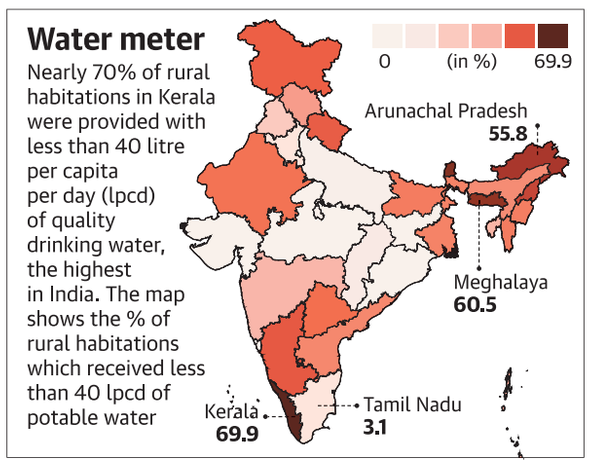
Over three lakh rural habitations across the country continue to be deprived of the government's minimum prescribed provision of 40 litre per capita per day (lpcd) of potable drinking water with assured quality.

With the ambition to now achieve a service level of 55 lpcd by 2024, the data presented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti in the Lok Sabha this past week notes that Rajasthan, West Bengal, Assam top the list where the coverage is facing quality issues or seeing diminished supply.

Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand are the other States which are battling the problem.

The Ministry noted that the coverage was monitored in terms of habitations having provision of a minimum 40 lpcd with sources at a reasonable distance.

"As reported by States/UTs till Dec., 2019, 81.27% rural habitations having 76.61% population have provision of minimum 40 lpcd of potable drinking water and 15.56% rural habitations having 19.69% population have service level of less than 40 lpcd, whereas 3.17% rural habitations having 3.69% population are with water sources having quality issues," noted Minister for Jal Shakati Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.



Fund sharing

He explained that the fund-sharing pattern between the Centre and the States/UTs for the National Rural Drinking Water Programme, a Centrally sponsored programme, was 100% for the Union Territories, 90:10 for the Himalayan & the north-eastern States and 50:50 for other States. The Ministry noted that in the past five years ₹31,569.77 crore had been made available to States and since 2014, to improve piped water supply in low income States, namely Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, ₹1,185.23 crore had been released with the assistance of the World Bank.

Also to provide safe drinking water to 27,544 identified arsenic and fluoride affected rural habitations, the National Water Quality Sub-Mission was launched and so far ₹3,690.34 crore had been released. "To meet the domestic needs of every rural household, the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) has been launched in August, 2019 which aims at providing potable water through Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) at service level of 55 lpcd by 2024 with an outlay of ₹3.60 lakh crore, in partnerships with States," said the Minister in his reply.

25% FASTag lanes to accept all forms of payment for a month

Hybrid lanes to ease traffic and avoid hardships to public: govt.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

To avert inconvenience to citizens, the government said on Saturday that up to 25% of FASTag lanes at the National Highway toll plazas would be treated as hybrid lanes for a month.

The hybrid lane will accept FASTag and other modes of payment. The government had earlier announced rollout of mandatory FASTag for electronic toll collection from December 1, which was later extended to December 15, 2019.

"Considering the request of the NHAI and further that citizens are not put to inconvenience... it is decided that depending on the traffic pile-up at high traffic volume fee plazas, not more than 25% of the FASTag lanes may be temporarily converted to hybrid lanes," the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways said.

This should be considered on a case-to-case basis, the Ministry added.

No waiting: The government had earlier extended the date to December 15 for making FASTag mandatory. S. SIVA SARAVANAN

"A daily evaluation of such cases should be made to take necessary corrective action," it said. It should be ensured that at least 75% lanes of every fee plaza remain operational as FASTag lanes, it added.

Temporary measure

The Ministry clarified that it is a temporary measure to be adopted for 30 days only to facilitate smooth flow of traffic.

The National Electronic Toll Collection programme, the flagship initiative of the Ministry, has been implemented on a pan-India basis in order to remove bottlenecks and ensure seamless movement of traffic and collection of user fee, using passive radio frequency identification (RFID) technology.

A customer may dial the helpline number '1033' for any assistance related to FASTags, the Ministry had said, and added that they could also reach out to banks to obtain FASTags.

NPPA hikes ceiling price of 12 essential medicines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has hiked the ceiling price of 12 essential first-line treatment drugs, crucial in the public health programme, by 50% to ensure availability of these drugs.

"Many companies have applied for discontinuation of the product on account of high cost of the raw material for these drugs. Access to these drugs cannot be jeopardised. Also, we did not want the public to be forced to switch to costly alternatives," the NPPA noted.

The NPPA invoked extraordinary powers under para 19 of DPCO 2013 for upward revision of the low-priced drugs. "To address the situation arising due to repeated price control, one-time increase of 50% from the present ceiling price is being considered in public interest as an exceptional measure," noted an order issued on December 13.

The drugs consist of 21 formulations of varying doses – BCG vaccine, Benzathine Benzylpenicillin, Benzypenicillin, Choloroquine, Dapsone, Furosemide, Metronidazole, Ascorbic Acid or Vitamin C tablets, Co-trimoxazole, Pheniramine, Prednisolone and Clofazamine.

Modi chairs first meeting of Ganga council

Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and several Union Ministers attend

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the first meeting of the National Ganga Council in Kanpur on Saturday. The council was constituted in 2016 to oversee the cleaning of the Ganga and is supposed to meet at least once a year with the Prime Minister chairing the session.

"Somehow this couldn't be done so far," an official told *The Hindu*, "but one of the points taken up was about having this meeting more regularly."

The meeting was also attended by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath; Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat; Union Ministers Prakash Javadekar, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Harsh Vardhan, R.K. Singh, Prahlad Patel, Mansukh Mandavia and Hardeep Singh Puri. Several officials from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal – all Ganga basin States – were also present.

Thorough appraisal: Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviews the Namami Gange project in Kanpur on Saturday. PTI

The full quorum of the Council – with the Prime Minister in attendance – is largely ceremonial. The work of coordinating, supervising and deliberating on funding Namami Ganga projects is carried out by an executive committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga that meets every month. The latest meeting was on December 3.

Mr. Modi also took a boat ride from Atal Ghat to Sisamau drain outfall point. The Sisamau drain was one of Asia largest drains that emptied nearly 140 million litres of untreated sewage into the Ganga and was a symbol of pollution in the river. It no longer empties sewage into the Ganga but the river continues to be unfit for bathing or use as a drinking water source, *The Hindu* reported in July.

On his return, Mr. Modi stumbled and fell on the steps of the Atal Ghat. The official cited earlier said he was in the vicinity and the Prime Minister appeared unhurt. One of the steps was uneven and probably may have caused Mr. Modi to stumble, the official said.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY

TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 16.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorms likely in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Cold wave conditions very likely in isolated pockets over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Dense fog likely in pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	-	29.0	12.7	Kozhikode	-	33.8	24.8
Ahmedabad	-	26.6	13.3	Kurnool	-	32.3	20.2
Aizawl	-	20.3	8.9	Lucknow	8.3	22.9	11.6
Allahabad	0.2	20.3	16.5	Madurai	7.6	26.8	23.1
Bengaluru	-	28.8	20.0	Mangaluru	-	36.1	22.8
Bhopal	-	25.9	13.8	Mumbai	-	30.6	-
Bhubaneswar	-	29.2	18.4	Mysuru	-	28.1	17.6
Chandigarh	38.3	19.2	10.3	New Delhi	-	19.2	9.7
Chennai	24.6	26.6	22.9	Patna	5.8	18.8	15.6
Coimbatore	0.2	24.6	22.9	Port Blair	-	30.4	25.4
Dehradun	8.3	18.9	7.3	Puducherry	28.4	29.6	21.7
Gangtok	12.8	8.1	5.4	Pune	-	30.1	14.8
Goa	-	34.4	22.5	Raipur	-	29.2	18.0
Guwahati	-	27.2	13.5	Ranchi	-	23.7	14.5
Hubballi	-	29.0	19.0	Shillong	-	18.9	5.1
Hyderabad	-	29.0	20.0	Shimla	16.2	6.2	-0.5
Imphal	-	22.3	6.5	Srinagar	24.5	-	-1.0
Jaipur	-	19.6	9.0	Thiruvananthapuram	3	32.6	24.5
Kochi	-	31.6	25.8	Tiruchi	13.8	26.7	23.4
Kohima	-	24.4	6.4	Vijayawada	-	30.5	22.6
Kolkata	-	28.1	20.0	Visakhapatnam	-	29.5	24.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing — **Yesterday**

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	29	.17	.7	109	88	
Bengaluru	4	.53	88	48	65	
Chennai	61	.40	65	85		
Delhi	11	217	61	211	.139	
Hyderabad	2	.65	42	92	87	
Kolkata	13	.97	51	318	.215	
Lucknow	22	7	62	183		
Mumbai		.72	19	101	.136	
Pune	90	.23	88	130	.105	
Visakhapatnam	11	.22	43	65	73	

In observation made at 4 p.m., Howrah, West Bengal, recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 312, indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Kurukshetra, Haryana, recorded a healthy AQI score of 33.

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Snakebites claimed 3,000 lives between 2016 and 2018

The figure provided is not even the tip of the iceberg, says expert

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

More than 3,000 people died of snakebite between 2016 and 2018, data provided by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence to Parliament says.

The number of deaths in the past three years stood at 3,013 – 1,068 in 2016, 1,060 in 2017 and 885 in 2018. West Bengal with 609 deaths in the three years –138, 268 and 203 – alone accounted for 20% of the victims.

The data, tabled in the Lok Sabha on November 29 in response to a question by P.P. Chaudhary, also points to the high incidence of the cases – 1.78 lakh cases in 2016, 1.58 lakh in 2017 and 1.64 lakh in 2018. The other States with high number of deaths are Odisha with 365 (120, 147 and 98) and Madhya Pradesh 248 (113, 96 and 39). Andhra Pradesh recorded 230 deaths (28, 85 and 117) and Tamil Nadu 132 (44, 38 and 50).

A common krait.

The Ministry described snakebite as an "accidental/occupational hazard in tropical and subtropical countries, where rural populations are mainly affected".

Jose Louise, who works with the Wildlife Trust of India, has along with other experts developed a web application called SERPENTS providing real time help to victims, location of hospitals and related information. He said the figures provided "are not even a tip of the iceberg." "The actual number would be much higher. By collating newspaper reports of the past four months in certain States, I could find hundreds of deaths in only a few States," Mr. Louise said.

Referring to a 10-year-old girl in Kerala who died of a snakebite in her school recently, he said it is good that people took note of it but such incidents happen everywhere. He said States like West Bengal are more prone to the problem as it does not produce anti-venom and sources it from Tamil Nadu.

'Not trained enough'

Dayal Bandhu Majumdar, West Bengal's State-level resource person for snakebite management and training, said the high number is because of high reporting of cases in the public hospitals of the State. A large number of deaths occurs because the primary health centres do not have anti-venom and doctors are not trained sufficiently to deal with bites, the doctor said. "In West Bengal since 2012 we have started in-service training of doctors to deal with bites. It should be tried across the country," he said.

Dr. Majumdar said over 90% cases are because of the 'Big Four' species which are common cobra, Russell's viper, saw-scaled viper and common krait.

In the reply, the Health Minister pointed out that there are five anti-venom manufacturing centres in the country.

10 Bhopal varsity students held for 'causing violence'

They were protesting against 'caste bias'

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

The police late on Friday arrested 10 students and removed several others from the premises of the Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication here while they were staging a sit-in demanding the suspension of two adjunct professors, including Dilip Mandal, for alleged caste bias in classrooms, on Twitter and public fora. They were released on Saturday.

"A case has been registered against 10 students and unidentified persons for causing violence on the campus and preventing the staff from carrying out their duties," said the police.

Stating the protest was instigated by right-wing groups attempting to stall efforts at "desaffronising" the campus, Deepak Tiwari, the Vice-Chancellor, told *The Hindu*, "The university stands for freedom of expression and academics. It functions on the principles of the Constitution and no other ideology. There will be no tolerance against violence." He added that the students had broken a gate outside his office.

The students said the protest was independent and not supported by any outside group. "We didn't cause any violence and whoever came to us from outside, we refused their support. This is not just a protest by general category students, there are those from backward communities too," said a first year student of media management, requesting anonymity.

"Mr. Mandal questioned students for wearing religious threads on their wrists and tilak on foreheads. Before speaking to anyone, he asked their surname first, attempting to divide students on caste lines. He is spreading viciousness against Brahmins on Twitter, " said a student of electronic media.

FROM PAGE ONE

Protests turn violent in West Bengal

Violence was reported in Howrah near Garfa Bridge on Kona Expressway where protesters attacked several buses and set them on fire. In the same district, a ticket counter at Sankrail was set on fire on Friday. Protests and road blockades by burning tyres was also reported from at Domjur and Bauria. At several places in the district protests and disruptions were reported at different railway stations.

More than half a dozen long distance trains of South Eastern Railways were cancelled and trains remained stuck at various stations. Surburban railway services in Sealdah Hasnabad section in North 24 Parganas were affected as protesters squatted on the railway track.

There were reports of protests from several places in the district as also from Murari in Birbhum district and a few places in Paschim Medinipur district.

Meghalaya Chief Minister for entry permit

A delegation led by Mr. Sangma met Mr. Shah late on Friday night and demanded that some "protection" on the lines of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) be also implemented in the State.

Mr. Sangma said the Amended Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Bill (MRRSA) 2019, similar to the ILP, which was passed by the Cabinet in the form of an ordinance in November, still awaited Governor Tathagata Roy's assent.

Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are under the ILP system and have been exempted from the Citizenship legislation.

"There are misconceptions around the ordinance, it is not to bar outsiders from visiting the State. It is an information collection mechanism and anyone who wants to come to our State has to register beforehand online or on reaching here. It is for the security of the State and also the person coming here. We told the Home Minister that the ordinance awaits the Governor's nod and he assured that he will exercise his mind," Mr. Sangma told *The Hindu*.

"The Home Minister assured us that the issue will be resolved soon," he said.

The Meghalaya government has decided to convene a special one-day session of the Assembly to bring in a resolution to implement the Inner Line Permit regime in the State.

'Modi has to apologise for destroying economy'

"The BJP asked me to apologise. My name is not Rahul Savarkar, it is Rahul Gandhi, and I will never apologise for speaking the truth. I will die, but I will not apologise for speaking the truth, nor will any Congressman do so. It is Narendra Modi and his assistant Amit Shah who have to apologise to the country for destroying India's economy," Mr. Gandhi said.

"All of India's enemies wanted that its economy, which is its strength, should be destroyed. That work [destruction] has not been done by the enemies, but by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. And, [he] still calls himself a patriot," he said.

The former Congress chief said the economy was hit so hard because of demonetisation that it is yet to recover and claimed that the actual growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 2.5% if one went by the earlier method of calculation.

Referring to the CAA, the Congress leader alleged that the BJP and Mr. Modi have set the entire north-east region on fire and States such as Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh are burning.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh criticised Mr. Modi for not delivering on his promise of making India a $5-trillion economy, double farm income in five years and offer two crore jobs to youth every year.

ICF gets nod to make Vande Bharat rakes

The second rake, flagged off a couple of months ago, is operating between New Delhi and Katra. The production was halted over the alleged procedural flaws in the making of the train," a senior railway officer said.

The tenders to make more Train18 rakes were withdrawn after the Vigilance Directorate launched a probe into the allegations that included one company being favoured in the making of the first two rakes.

While then ICF General Manager S. Mani retired from service, then Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer Shubhranshu, who played a key role in the project, and a few others were not only transferred but served questionnaires by the vigilance officials to respond to the allegations.

Even as the investigation was on, the Railway Board proposed to procure 60 rakes by floating global tenders. The reason why production was halted at the ICF was that the rakes were found to be heavier and also consuming more power compared to the Shatabdi Express. The move drew sharp criticism from railway officials including Mr. Shubhranshu who recorded his protest in writing to the Chairman Railway Board, the All India Railwaymen Federation and a couple of political parties that raised the issue in Parliament.

The 45 rakes, meaning 720 coaches, that the ICF has been mandated to make now will be on a revised design of the Train18 model approved by the RDSO. Parrying questions on whether the new specifications would weigh lesser to minimise electricity consumption, the official who preferred not to be quoted, said the new design would conform to world class standards of comfort and safety.

Considering the fact that the earlier two rakes were made at a cost of ₹100 crore each, the 45 rakes for which tenders will be floated soon meant an order of at least ₹5,000 crore taking escalation in the cost of materials and other modifications into account, the official said. He said full credit to restore the project to the ICF went to Railway Minister Piyush Goyal who recently told Parliament that he was proud of the ICF which made the Vande Bharat Express, the first high-speed train made in the 168-year history of the Indian Railways.

A chorus to bring back Rahul

Younger leaders ask him to be the face of the fight against the Modi government

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

Not just Rahul Gandhi's aggressive speech but the whole *Bharat Bachao* (Save India) rally here on Saturday seemed to be a carefully planned setting for him to make a comeback as Congress president.

From party workers shouting Mr. Gandhi's name in chorus to having 30-foot-tall cutouts all over the historic Ramlila Maidan, the rally saw younger leaders such as Sachin Pilot, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Rajiv Satav asking him to be the face of the fight against the Modi government.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said the party may have lost the Lok Sabha election, but the issues such as economic slowdown, joblessness and alleged corruption in defence deals like the Rafale fighter jet were still relevant.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel credited the former Congress chief with promising higher minimum support price to the farmers of the State. "As Rahul*ji* had promised *nyay* [justice], I want to tell the people every farmer will get *nyay* by receiving ₹2,500 in their pockets," he said.

Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot urged Mr. Gandhi and his sister, Priyanka, to resolve to travel around the country and revive the country to take on the BJP.

Pitching for a change of regime in the country, Mr. Scindia said "the war cry at Ramlila ground should reverberate across the country under Sonia*ji* and Rahul*ji*'s leadership".

Congress leader from Maharashtra Rajeev Satav, who was handpicked by Mr. Gandhi, asked the former party chief to be "the face against the party's fight against the Modi-led government".

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, the only leader who addressed the rally in English, too talked about the ideology of Hindutva ideologues like M.S. Golwalkar and V.D. Savarkar being pursued by the government.

'Broken economy'

"Today, India is suspect in the eyes of the world. India's economy is broken, India's polity is broken and India's leadership has completely failed us. If it is one person who should bear the responsibility, it is Narendra Modi," Mr. Chidambaram said.

"They are pushing an agenda which does not belong to Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru or Babasaheb Ambedkar. The agenda they are pushing is the agenda of Golwalkar and Savarkar. Your job, my job, our job is to fight the agenda of Golwalkar and Savarkar which will break India. I want you to stand up and fight the BJP and save India," he said.

On Kashmir, he said the voice of 75 lakh people was being suppressed and now they had spread unrest in the northeast.

Venting their anger: Congress workers during the Bharat Bachao rally at the Ramlila grounds in New Delhi on Saturday. ▪ SANDEEP SAXENA

Oppose politics of divide, says Priyanka

'Our Constitution will be destroyed'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday launched a scathing attack on the ruling BJP for the "injustices" done by its government, and said those who did not fight "the prevailing situation today will go down in history as cowards".

Addressing the *Bharat Bachao* (Save India) Rally, Ms. Vadra urged everyone to come together to fight the "divisive and disruptive" policies of the BJP government.

"If you love India, please raise your voice. If we remain silent today, our revolutionary Constitution will be destroyed. The division of the country will start and we will all be as responsible for it as any corrupt leader of the BJP and the RSS," she said.

In an emotional speech, she recalled her father late Rajiv Gandhi and her meeting with the family of the rape victim in Unnao (Uttar Pradesh) who was burnt alive.

"When I saw the father of the Unnao rape victim burying his face in his palms and crying, I remembered my own father whose body I saw as a 19-year-old. My father's blood is in this soil just as the blood of the Unnao victim is nurturing this earth. This country is ours and it is our moral duty to save it," she said as her mother and party chief Sonia Gandhi and brother, Rahul, listened to her.

She also took a dig at the BJP election campaign *Modi hai to mumkin hai* (Modi makes it possible).

"The fact is under the BJP, it is possible that onion sells ₹100 a kilo, it's possible to have highest unemployment in 45 years, destroy 4 crore jobs or 15,000 farmers commit suicide," she said.

> **If we remain silent, the division of the country will start and we will all be responsible**
>
> PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA
> Congress leader

NIA yet to file chargesheet in Pulwama case

With prime suspects killed in various operations, the exact details of the attack are difficult to know

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has not filed a chargesheet in the Pulwama terror incident, nine months after the attack took place, as none of the key suspects are alive.

The two main suspects, Mudasir Ahmed Khan and Sajjad Bhat, were killed in an encounter with security forces in March and June, respectively.

The third, Adil Ahmed Dar, was on a suicide mission. On February 14, Dar, a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) member, rammed a vehicle into a CRPF bus on the Jammu-Srinagar highway near Pulwama in South Kashmir. All the 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in the bus were killed. The JeM is a Pakistan-based terrorist outfit. A senior government official said that since the prime suspects were killed in various operations, the exact details of the attack were difficult to know.

"We know the broad contours of the case but in a chargesheet the role of each individual has to be spelt out. We have identified the suspects and will file an overall chargesheet in the incident regarding the role of Pakistan and Pakistan-based terror outfits in planning the attack," said the official.

Another official said that after the Pathankot terror attack 2016, all the four terrorists who stormed the airbase were killed but after several months a chargesheet was filed against Jaish chief Masood Azhar and three others who are based in Pakistan.

Under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the investigation agency has 90 days to file a chargesheet in court but this can be extended if the suspects are dead or additional time is required.

In June, Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha that the Pulwama terror attack was not an "intelligence failure" and "the investigation by the NIA so far has resulted in identifying the conspirators, suicide attacker and the vehicle provider".

Sajjad Bhat's car was used in the Pulwama attack. It was first sold in 2011 and was then resold several times before Bhat purchased it on February 4, 10 days before the attack.

Mudasir Ahmed Khan, the other suspect killed in an encounter in March, had arranged for the explosives.

The NIA received the forensic report used in the attack but it is yet to trace the origin of the high-grade military explosives. Crucial evidence was washed away due to heavy rain at the site of the attack the next day.

Ground zero: The National Investigation Agency received the forensic report used in the Pulwama attack. ▪ REUTERS

Don't insult Savarkar, Sena tells Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Reacting sharply to Rahul Gandhi's 'my name is not Rahul Savarkar' barb, Congress ally Shiv Sena warned that Hindutva leader Vinayak Damodar Savarkar should not be insulted.

Savarkar is no less than "god" for the whole country and deserves reverence, Sena leader Sanjay Raut tweeted. "Veer Savarkar is a god ("daivat") of the whole country and not just Maharashtra. The name Savarkar denotes national pride and self-respect. Like Nehru and Gandhi, Savarkar too dedicated his life to the country. Every such god must be revered. There is no compromise on this."

Session productive, quality of debates improved: Venkaiah

'15 Bills were passed; MPs sat beyond scheduled hours'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The 250th session of the Rajya Sabha that was adjourned *sine die* on Friday recorded near 100% productivity. House Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu complimented the members for making the session productive and for improving the quality of debates.

"I am overall happy for this session but for the small disappointment which also could have been avoided," he told the House during his valedictory address at the completion of the session.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was present during the valedictory remarks.

"I am glad that collectively, all of you have risen to the occasion and kept up the happy tide. I would like to sum up the course of this historic session as one marked by seriousness and brevity," Mr. Naidu said.

The Chairman said the session had steadied the ship which had been facing stormy waters for some time now.

'Best show in 49 years'

He said the Upper House clocked the best performance in 49 years with an average 9.5 starred questions orally replied every day and 39% of the time spent on passing Bills.

Mr. Naidu said as against the scheduled available time of 108 hours, 33 minutes with 20 sittings, the House functioned for 107 hours 11 minutes resulting in a productivity of over 99%.

He said the monsoon session with over 100% productivity succeeded by equally effective winter session was perhaps the first time that the House had functioned so well for two consecutive sessions.

"A total of 11 hours, 47 minutes, accounting for about 11% of the available time of the House, has been lost due to interruptions. Spurred by the sense of duty, the members, however, sat for 10 hours, 52 minutes beyond the scheduled hours, resulting in a productivity of close to 100%."

The Chairman said that during the session, 39% of the functional time was spent on legislative business, 25.4% on raising and discussing matters of urgent public importance under various instruments, 13% on Question Hour and 5% on private members' bills.

He said 15 Bills were passed and the discussions were qualitative as "they have brought out the best from all sides of this august House. Spirited arguments and counter-arguments were made from both the sides."

He said 199 Zero Hour submissions and 115 Special Mentions were made at the rate of a record 14 and seven a day, respectively, as against nine and 5.5 during the previous session.

House business

The 250th session of the Rajya Sabha registered productivity of over 99%, House Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu said, praising MPs for their "seriousness and brevity"

SCHEDULED TIME: **108** hours, **33** minutes

FUNCTIONED FOR: **107** hours, **11** minutes

11 hours, **47** minutes were lost due to interruptions but made up by members sitting for **10** hours, **52** minutes beyond the scheduled time

TIME SPENT

39% Legislative business

25.4% Discussion on matters of public importance

13% Question Hour

5% Private Members' Bills

'IORA nations should build a common vision for Indo-Pacific'

'Countries west of India lack architecture to build on idea'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Saturday, that one of the problems in building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific maritime region was the lack of consensus on what such a concept meant or "even its geographic extent".

Indian Ocean Region (IORA) countries should, therefore, build on a common vision, he said.

They all had the guiding principle of ensuring that the region remained "open and free for inclusive partnerships with all, within the parameters of sovereignty, equality, and a rules-based system."

The challenge, however, was that countries to the west of India had fewer mechanisms than those to the east to pursue such ties.

"There is much less architecture that covers the Indo-Pacific region west of India, IORA notwithstanding, and certainly no architecture currently that spans the entire region from end to end," Mr. Jaishankar said at the Ministry of External Affairs' 'Delhi Dialogue' on partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, comparing the ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum.

While countries like the U.S. define the Indo-Pacific as reaching the Indian subcontinent, India and partners like Japan extend the idea to Africa.

Scientific initiatives

Mr. Jaishankar said connectivity was a major challenge for building better Indo-Pacific partnerships, and suggested initiatives to enhance delivery of development projects.

"Our scientific departments offered a number of new initiatives, including a Grand Challenges scheme for the IORA; a fellowship scheme for up to 100 post-doctoral scholars; place for partners on our oceanic research vessels; co-branded IORA research facilities; and sharing of the existing technologies in India for low-cost, low-energy consuming desalination facilities, which may be useful especially for island nations," he said.

Another major challenge was maritime security, he said, without specifying any nation or group seen as a threat in the Indo-Pacific.

Significantly, although the 'Delhi Dialogue' conference had participants from India's Quadrilateral (Quad) partners, the U.S., Australia and Japan, Mr. Jaishankar made no mention of the Quad in his address, in line with the government's objective of keeping the Indo-Pacific strategy separate from the Quad alignment.

In October, U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said 'the Quad' would "prove very important in the efforts ahead, ensuring that China retains only its proper place in the world," comments that New Delhi did not endorse.

"While we all need to work together to share maritime domain data to ensure that every link of the maritime security chain is equally strong, there are also challenges to human security that need to be addressed," said Mr. Jaishankar, addressing delegates from 30 countries, including Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, who delivered the keynote address.

Lack of consensus on the concept is a barrier, says S.Jaishankar

INTERVIEW | ABDULLA SHAHID

'Security ties with India a priority, but China a generous donor on infra'

New Delhi has means, location and a generous heart towards us which actually makes security relationship our reality, says the Maldives Foreign Minister

SUHASINI HAIDAR

Maldives Foreign Minister **Abdulla Shahid** *met his counterpart S. Jaishankar on Friday for the first India-Maldives Joint Commission to be held in four years. In an exclusive interview, he said bilateral ties on development projects are going apace, but also that the Maldives is staying the course on Chinese projects, despite misgivings over past loans.*

Your government has been in office for a year now. How is India-Maldives development progressing?

■ Unfortunately since 2015, we have not had a joint commission meeting, for obvious reasons, because we did not have the best of relations. I think it is essential that we continue the formal process. Since President [Ibrahim Mohamed] Solih took office a year ago, we have had a whirlwind relationship; the leaders have met so many times, in Male, Delhi and New York. The desire they both have is to get things done, to consolidate the relationship.

In particular, India has announced $1.4 billion in budgetary support in addition to a $8,000-million line of credit and others. Would you prefer India's focus to be on small development projects (SDPs) or in large infrastructure projects?

■ The good thing about the Indian assistance at present is that it is spread out. Already we have more than 100 million rupiah projects awarded which have social impact, and some of those have been completed in record time. We have an India-assisted convention centre on one of the islands, which has brought in livelihood for people as well as fish processing projects. Last week, the leaders announced three more projects.

What are your priorities on defence assistance? In the Yameen government's tenure, there were many irritants between the two countries.

■ Our security relationship with India goes back decades. Given the geographical location of India and the Maldives, it is India which is placed best to come to Maldives assistance immediately. India has the means and the location, but it also has the generous heart towards the Maldives, which actually makes the security relationship our reality.

V.V. KRISHNAN

What has changed geopolitically is China's foray in the oceans. Last year, Chinese warships docked in Male harbour, causing deep misgivings in India. Has New Delhi asked you for assurances that this will not happen again?

■ We have to ensure that the Indian Ocean remains peaceful, which is necessary for the stability of the Maldives. If we have rivalries play out in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives will suffer and we will not let other countries bring their disputes to our oceans. The Maldives is a large ocean state, with more ocean than land. So for us, the freedom of navigation, the total concept of the Indo-Pacific strategy is paramount, and we are fully part of it. In Washington this year, I assured Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that we will play our role as the heart of the Indian Ocean.

> **For us, the freedom of navigation, the total concept of the Indo-Pacific strategy is paramount**

How will your government deal with the issue of China's loans and infrastructure projects?

■ What I tried to say is that, to be fair to China, it has been a generous donor. It has invested in housing and infrastructure projects. There has been irresponsible borrowing by the previous government and unfortunately we have to deal with it. I was in Beijing in September and met the State Councillor and I found in the Chinese leadership goodwill to work with us.

That is a long way from the MDP's election campaign a year ago, where you said your government would cancel Chinese loans, projects would be stopped and the FTA would be revoked, and debt restructured. Does this mean the reality of governance is changing your perspective on China?

■ Our government's bone to pick is with the previous government. And to deal with the debt that we have had to face more practically. And that is why we are working and talking with everyone.

Speaker and Party leader Mohammad Nasheed has said that the Maldives wants to "rid itself" of the Chinese debt. Is that your position?

■ No comment. I think the Speaker should be allowed to speak for himself.

India is keen to see the Maldives as an international cricketing nation and build a cricket stadium there. How far has that project come?

■ Land has been allocated. India is not just building infrastructure but capacity. Our teams are already in India, being trained, and our trainers and coaches are also being trained, for which we are grateful. Who knows, we may one day even beat the Indian team (laughs).

IN BRIEF

Fuel shortage hits northeastern States

IMPHAL

The ongoing agitations in Assam have caused a shortage of fuel in the northeastern States since Assam is the supplier. Some States have started rationing petrol and diesel from Saturday. Meanwhile, roadside fuel vendors are profiting by selling at extortionate prices. So far, there is no report of arresting the illegal vendors.

RJD calls for bandh on December 21

PATNA

The Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on Saturday called a bandh in Bihar on December 21 in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, even as the police baton-charged Patna University students who protested against it. "The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is a black legislation that has blown the Constitution to smithereens. As a mark of protest, the Rashtriya Janata Dal will organise a Bihar bandh on December 21," RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav tweeted.

'Citizenship law and NRC targeted at Muslims'

Two MPs submit petitions before the Supreme Court

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, which welcomes "illegal migrants" into India selectively on the basis of religion and pointedly excludes Muslims, has an "unholy nexus" with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise, Asaduddin Owaisi, the MP who tore a copy of the Bill in the Lok Sabha, warned the Supreme Court on Saturday.

In his petition, Mr. Owaisi said a nationwide NRC had already been proposed by the government and was aimed at identifying "illegal migrants".

"While the NRC exercise would result in identification of persons as 'illegal migrants', the Amendment Act seeks to simultaneously offer illegal migrants who are Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian, citizenship on the presumed ground of persecution," the petition, filed through advocate Nizam Pasha, said.

Mr. Owaisi argued that the Act and the NRC are part of "one seamless chain".

Asaduddin Owaisi

The legislation effectuates discrimination on the basis of the intrinsic and core identity of an individual, that is, his religious identity as a Muslim.

'Singled out'

The Act ensures that only an illegal immigrant who is Muslim would be singled out and prosecuted under the Passports (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or the Foreigners Order 1949 and deprived of his personal liberty.

On the other hand, illegal migrants from the protected six religions would be entitled with Indian citizenship and the benefits that come with it. While Muslim migrants would have to show their proof of residency in India for at least 11 years, the new law allows illegal migrants from the six communities to be naturalised in five years' time.

Mr. Owaisi quoted Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, "in the name of democracy there must be no tyranny of the majority over the minority".

The Act follows a religion-based classification which is violative of Articles 14, 21 and 25 of the Constitution. In fact, it explicitly discriminates against Muslims as it assumes they do not experience persecution in these countries, the petition said.

A separate petition challenging the new citizenship law was filed by an MP from Kerala, T.N. Prathapan, represented by advocate Suvidutt M.S., in the court on Saturday.

Mr. Prathapan said the amendments in the Citizenship Act of 1955 are against the secular ethos of the country and unconstitutional.

A black day

Muslim women protest against the NRC and Citizenship (Amendment) Act at Iqbal Maidan in Bhopal on Saturday. ▪ A.M.FARUQUI

Ensure children are kept out of protests: child rights panel

They are used for stone throwing and other acts, it says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has written to the DGPs against the 'misuse' of children in protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, citing legal provisions applied in cases of organised begging and child marriage.

"This is to bring to your kind attention the misuse of children in the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in different parts of the country. It has come to the Commission's notice that certain groups of protesters are involving children in unlawful activities like stone pelting and other violent acts," wrote NCPCR Chairperson Priyank Kanoongo in a letter to the DGPs.

Mr. Kanoongo, an RSS worker before joining the NCPCR as a Member in 2015, cites provisions from the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 to support the advisory. It cites Section 83(2), which is used to nab adult offenders using children in organised begging or trafficking. The offence carries a punishment of up to seven years in jail along with a fine of ₹5 lakh.

France, Israel, U.S., U.K. issue advisories

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

France, Israel, the U.S. and the U.K. have issued travel advisories for nationals travelling to India in view of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

In a statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the U.K. has urged visitors to the northeast to avoid "all but essential" travel and "monitor local media".

It advised against all travel to Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and all areas (except Wagah) near the Pakistan border.

The U.S. asked citizens to "exercise caution". "The U.S. government has temporarily suspended official travel to Assam," the U.S. has announced.

The French and Israeli governments have urged their citizens to stay alert while travelling in India.

The advisories were issued after the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern saying the Act was "fundamentally discriminatory in nature".

NC may act against Farooq's detention

Denied meeting for nine weeks: MP

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

National Conference MP Hasnain Masoodi said on Saturday that he had not been allowed to meet party president Farooq Abdullah, whose detention has been extended by three months.

"I have written three times to the authorities to allow me to meet Dr. Abdullah. Besides being an MP, I am his legal aide. It is now nine weeks that we were denied any meeting," Mr. Masoodi said.

Guards outside the house of NC leader Farooq Abdullah in Srinagar. ▪ FILE PHOTO

On whether to challenge the Public Safety Act in court, Mr. Masoodi said, "Earlier, Dr. Abdullah was for release of all political detainees and decided against approaching the court for individual relief. I think the NC will have to look afresh now."

NC vice-president Omar Abdullah also remained detained since the August 5 decision to revoke J&K's special status.

Mr. Masoodi said the argument that NC leaders' release was "a threat to public order holds no water".

"NC leaders detained included Sakin Ittoo, daughter of assassinated Assembly speaker Wali Mohammad Itoo; another assassinated leader's son Ishfaq Muhammad; Showkat Gani, who lost his father and two brothers to bullets. The detention move is only aimed at disallowing any genuine political process in Kashmir," said Mr. Masoodi.

He also denied the reports that New Delhi was in touch with his party over Article 371.

"I am not privy to any such development. The NC stand is clear. Not only restore Article 370 but strengthen J&K's autonomy further," he said.

'Duplicity on BJP's part'

He accused the BJP of duplicity over the issue of granting special status.

"Where is Amit Shah's slogan of one country and one constitution when he reaches out to the States of the north-east with concessions on new citizenship law to safeguard their culture, language and identity. Article 370 precisely safeguarded the same things for J&K," Mr. Masoodi added.

Suggestions by Srikrishna panel left out

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The retired Supreme Court judge, B.N. Srikrishna, who led the committee that came up with the draft of the Personal Data Protection Bill, said all the safeguards suggested by the committee were no longer part of the Bill.

"We didn't have to pick and follow everything there is in the General Data Protection Regulation. So we built upon it in less than 18 months and mentioned all the safeguards which are no longer part of the Bill."

Commenting on the constitution of the Data Protection Authority of India, he said, "We had said in the draft that the DPA should comprise people who are independent, people who are representatives of the stakeholders and, maybe, some government nominee. However, now all we have is government nominees, so it will be like a government department. That's another dangerous part, it defeats the purpose."

He explained that the government could profile individuals and misuse data in several ways – which book you read, how much money you have in the bank. "All this information can be accessed without your consent. It will lead to framing people and implicating them."

Vote raises hopes and fears in N. Ireland

For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than unionist lawmakers to Parliament

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BELFAST

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's crushing election victory gives Britain a chance to move past years of gridlock over Brexit – especially in Northern Ireland, where social and political divides run deep. "We're leaving limbo," said Orlaith McKeever, preparing food for the lunchtime rush at St. George's Market in Belfast, a redbrick rabbits' warren of stalls and kiosks.

Thursday's snap general became a re-run of the 2016 EU membership referendum in which Mr. Johnson championed the Brexit cause. He ran this campaign on the promise to "get Brexit done" – a simple but effective message with profound implications for Britain's most politically volatile region.

Constitutional change?

Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain in the EU in 2016. Since then, it has become central to a Brexit deal with Brussels. Unease spread about the prospect of a no-deal Brexit and the re-emergence of a hard border with EU neighbour Ireland to the south. Border checks are associated with three decades of sectarian violence over British rule of Northern Ireland that left some 3,500 people dead. The potential removal of an open border – a plank of the 1998 agreement that ended "The Troubles" – has been seen as an unwelcome return to the past.

It also reopened the issue of Northern Ireland's place in the U.K. with England, Scotland and Wales, and the potential of a united Ireland.

For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than British unionist lawmakers to the U.K. House of Commons.

The largest republican party Sinn Fein even took the seat of North Belfast from unionist hands for the first time since it was drawn up in 1885.

Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald called it a "historic moment". "The discussion around constitutional change is now under way." "It's safe to say that Irish unity will be firmly on the agenda in a way that it has never been before," said Queen's University Belfast politics lecturer Jamie Pow.

But he said the combined republican vote share from Thursday "still amounts to a minority". Those describing themselves as neither republican nor unionist will be key in any vote. They would likely be swayed by changes in economic or political circumstance, including those Brexit is forecast to bring.

On a wider scale, the DUP's loss of influence in London could help kick-start talks for the resumption of the devolved legislative assembly in Belfast. The Assembly has not functioned since January 2017 after the power-sharing executive between the DUP and Sinn Fein collapsed over a mismanaged heating scheme.

Pro-Brexit demonstrators outside Downing Street in London on Friday. ▪NYT

'Scots want to have the right to choose'

REUTERS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson needs to "focus on reality" and recognise that the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been given a mandate for a second independence referendum, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Saturday.

The SNP won 48 of Scotland's 59 seats in the U.K. Parliament in Thursday's national election, prompting Ms. Sturgeon to step up her demands for another independence referendum. However, Mr. Johnson told Ms. Sturgeon by phone on Friday that he opposed another independence vote.

"Scotland very clearly wants a different future to the one that's been chosen by much of the rest of the U.K., and Scotland wants to have the right to choose its own future," Ms. Sturgeon said on Saturday.

I will repay your trust, Johnson tells former Labour voters

PM visits erstwhile Labour strongholds in northern England

REUTERS
LONDON

Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited former strongholds of his Labour opponents in northern England on Saturday and pledged to repay their trust for helping to deliver a stunning victory for his Conservative Party in Britain's national election.

The election saw the crumbling of Labour's "Red Wall" of formerly safe seats in working class areas across northern and central England where most people voted in a 2016 referendum to leave the European Union (EU). Mr. Johnson, the face of the "Leave" campaign in that referendum, fought the election on the slogan "Get Brexit done".

"I know that people may have been breaking the voting habits of generations to vote for us," Mr. Johnson told supporters in Sedgefield, a symbolically important seat as it was once held by former Prime Minister Tony Blair. "I want the people of the north-east to know that we in the Conservative Party, and I, will repay your trust."

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking to supporters on a visit to Sedgefield on Saturday. ▪REUTERS

Brexit was widely seen as the decisive factor in the election, with Mr. Johnson's promise to take Britain out of the EU by January 31, 2020, winning over many former Labour voters.

"What an incredible thing you have done, you have changed the political landscape, you've changed the Conservative Party for the better and you've changed the future of our country for the better," said Mr. Johnson. "First of all, what are we going to do to repay that trust? We are going to get Brexit done," he asserted.

Mr. Johnson, who called the snap election to break years of deadlock in Parliament over Brexit, has also promised to spend more money on health, education and the police.

Meanwhile, Labour's finance spokesman John McDonnell will not be in his party's next shadow Cabinet.

"The new leader will come in place, appoint the shadow cabinet, I won't be part of that shadow cabinet, I've done my bit," Mr. McDonnell told BBC television. "We need to move on at that stage with that new leader."

North Korea conducts test at satellite site

REUTERS
SEOUL

North Korea said it had successfully conducted another test at a satellite launch site on Friday to bolster its strategic nuclear deterrence, North Korean state media outlet KCNA reported on Saturday.

The test was conducted at the Sohae satellite launch site, KCNA said, citing a spokesman for North Korea's Academy of Defence Science, without specifying what sort of testing occurred. It was the second such test at the facility in a week.

KCNA on Sunday said that North Korea had carried out a "very important" test on December 7 at the Sohae satellite launch site, a rocket-testing facility that U.S. officials once said North Korea had promised to close. That KCNA report called the December 7 event a "successful test of great significance". South Korea's Defence minister Jeong Keong-doo said it was an engine test.

The reported tests come ahead of a year-end deadline North Korea has put forth for the U.S. to drop its insistence on unilateral denuclearisation.

Pyongyang has warned it could take a "new path" amid the stalled talks with the United States.

Sudan leader Bashir gets 2 years in corruption case

Former President convicted for receiving $25 million from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KHARTOUM

Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir was sentenced on Saturday to two years' detention in a correctional centre for corruption in the first of several cases against him. The charges stemmed from millions of dollars received by him from Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Bashir, who was deposed by the army in April after months of mass protests against his three-decade rule, appeared in court in a metal enclosure wearing a traditional white *jalabiya* and turban for the verdict. He was convicted of "corruption" and "possession of foreign currency", judge Al Sadiq Abdelrahman said, charges which can carry a prison sentence of up to 10 years. Instead, the court, taking into account his age, ordered the 75-year-old to serve two years in a correctional centre for the elderly.

Sudan's ex-President Omar al-Bashir sitting in an enclosure during the hearing in Khartoum on Saturday. ▪REUTERS

Second case

Mr. Bashir will serve his sentence after the verdict has been reached in another case in which he is accused of ordering the killing of demonstrators during the protests that led to his ouster, the judge said. The court also ordered the confiscation of 5.7 million Sudanese pounds ($1,28,000) found at Mr. Bashir's home. The ex-President will appeal the verdict, said one of his lawyers, Ahmed Ibrahim.

Sudan is now ruled by a joint civilian and military sovereign council, which is tasked with overseeing a transition to civilian rule.

Mr. Bashir admitted to having received a total of $90 million from Saudi leaders and the trial centred on the $25 million received from Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Mr. Bashir said the money seized from his home came out of the $25 million. The funds, he said, formed part of Sudan's strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and were "not used for private interests but as donations".

The trial does not relate to charges Mr. Bashir faces at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Bashir has been wanted by the ICC for years for his role in the Darfur war that broke out in 2003, when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against his Arab-dominated government which they accused of marginalising the region.

The Darfur conflict left around 3,00,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN.

Sudan's umbrella protest movement, which now has significant representation on a sovereign council that in August became the country's highest executive authority – recently said it has no objection to his extradition.

'Palpable sense of fear among Britain's Muslims'

U.K. Muslim body expresses concern

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

A prominent British-Muslim organisation issued a statement expressing a "palpable sense of fear" within the Muslim community in the U.K. following Prime Minister Boris Johnson's massive victory in the country's general election.

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which has been calling for a full-fledged inquiry into anti-Muslim conduct within the Conservative Party, used one of the key slogans from the election campaign to express fears that the strong majority in the House of Commons could mean that, like Brexit, Islamophobia is also "oven-ready" for the new government. "Mr Johnson commands a majority, but there is a palpable sense of fear amongst Muslim communities around the country," said MCB secretary-general Harun Khan in a statement on Friday.

He said: "We entered the election campaign period with long-standing concerns about bigotry in our politics and our governing party. Now we worry that Islamophobia is 'oven-ready' for government... Mr Johnson has been entrusted with huge power, and we pray it is exercised responsibly for all Britons."

Harun Khan, who heads Muslim Council of Britain.

Describing the 2019 general election campaign as being the most "divisive in living memory", the group called on Mr. Johnson and his team to work towards national unity. The MCB's statement came as the former Conservative Party chair, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, renewed her call for an independent inquiry into Islamophobia. "My party must start healing its relationship with British Muslims," she tweeted. "Independent Inquiry into Islamophobia is a must first step. The battle to root out racism must now intensify," she said.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Johnson was forced to formally apologise for any "hurt and offence" as he was confronted on the issue of Islamophobia and his own perceived anti-Muslim statements in newspaper columns in the past.

House panel approves impeachment charges

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump stood on the verge of impeachment on Friday after a House panel approved charges he abused his power and obstructed Congress, setting up a historic vote in the chamber next week.

In a grave moment for a deeply divided nation, members of the Judiciary Committee voted along party lines to approve two articles of impeachment against the President.

The panel recommended by 23 votes to 17 that the Democratic-led House ratify both articles, ahead of a vote by the entire chamber that is expected to make Mr. Trump only the third U.S. President in history to be impeached.

Hong Kong leader Lam visits Beijing

REUTERS
HONG KONG

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam visited Beijing on Saturday for her first trip to the Chinese capital since her government was handed a crushing defeat in local elections last month, prompting speculation about changes to her leadership team.

During a four-day visit, Ms. Lam is due to discuss the political and economic situation in China-ruled Hong Kong with Chinese officials. She will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday.

Protests on for 6 months

Hong Kong has been convulsed by daily and sometimes violent protests for the last six months as demonstrations against a now-withdrawn extradition Bill broadened into demands for greater democratic freedom.

Hundreds of thousands of people marched last Sunday to protest against what is seen as Beijing undermining freedoms guaranteed when the former British colony was handed back to China in 1997.

"Our sincerity to have dialogue with citizens has not changed," Ms. Lam said in a Facebook post on Saturday. She said her governing team would continue to pursue "different formats of dialogue to listen to citizens sincerely."

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

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Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

8	7	6	4	1	2	5	9	3
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2	8	7	1	4	5	6	3	9
9	5	1	2	3	6	8	7	4
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3	9	5	8	6	1	7	4	2
7	1	8	3	2	4	9	5	6

Ami Bera to chair key sub-committee on Asia

It also has jurisdiction over India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

Congressman Ami Bera, the longest-serving Indian American lawmaker, has been named the chairman of a key Congressional subcommittee that has jurisdiction over India.

Mr. Bera, a four-time Democratic Congressman from California, replaces Brad Sherman as the chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation. "I am honoured to chair the subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation. Asia is one of the most important and consequential regions of the world and the United States has deep and enduring ties to the continent," Mr. Bera said in a statement.

As the Chair, he said he will work to ensure that the U.S. is utilising all of its political, military, cultural and economic tools to support American interests, and maintain and enhance the U.S. commitments in Asia and the Pacific.

Four-time Indian-American lawmaker Ami Bera.

He said he looked forward to working with Ranking Member Ted Yoho and his colleagues on the subcommittee to ensure a sustained U.S. strategy that would help foster a more stable, free and open Asia. Mr. Bera also serves as the Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Korea and previously chaired the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans.

New Zealand police identify volcanic eruption victim

Australian Krystal Browitt was on a family holiday

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WELLINGTON

Divers searched seas around New Zealand's volatile White Island on Saturday for two people still missing five days after the volcano erupted, while police formally named the first victim.

Police deputy commissioner John Tims said the divers faced "unique and challenging conditions" as they searched waters "with between zero and two metres visibility". They were focusing on an area where a body was seen floating in the water earlier in the week.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, meanwhile, has called for a minute's silence to be observed at 2.11 p.m. (0111 GMT) on Monday in honour of the victims of the eruption. "Together we can express our sorrow for those who have died and been hurt, and our support for their grieving families and friends," Ms. Ardern said, with the minute's silence to start exactly one week after the eruption began.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at a prayer meeting in Whakatane. ▪REUTERS

Of the 47 people on the island at the time of the eruption, at least 16 were killed while 28 remain in hospitals in New Zealand and Australia with 21 listed as being in a "critical" condition.

Scientists monitoring the island said the likelihood of another eruption over the weekend was decreasing but the risk remained. "Their new calculation was that there is a 35-50 per cent chance of an eruption occurring," Natalia Deligne, a volcanic hazard and risk modeller, said.

New Zealand police on Saturday officially identified the first victim as Australian woman Krystal Browitt. Ms. Browitt, 21, was on a family holiday to celebrate her birthday in New Zealand when she joined her older sister Stephanie and father Paul on a visit to the island.

Her mother Marie stayed behind on the boat, and has since been by the bedside of her daughter and husband who were both originally in a coma in a hospital burns unit following the eruption, according to a GoFundMe page set up for the family.

All 13 Australians hospitalised have been repatriated. The current condition of Stephanie and Paul is unknown.

ELSEWHERE

Mahathir could stay as PM beyond 2020

DOHA

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. 94, again raised the prospect on Saturday that he could stay in office beyond 2020, declining to give a definitive pledge to step down. Anwar Ibrahim, seen as the likely successor to Mr. Mohamad, has previously said that he expects to take office by May 2020. REUTERS

Nine killed in 'insider attack' on Afghan militia

KABUL

At least one member of an Afghan militia opened fire on his fellow militiamen early Saturday, killing nine, in what the country's Interior Ministry called an insider attack. The Taliban, however, claimed the attack was actually a coordinated insurgent assault on the checkpoint where the shooting took place. AP

No SEBI relief to lenders in Karvy matter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Markets watchdog SEBI has refused to provide any relief to Bajaj Finance and three other lenders in the Karvy Stock Broking matter regarding pledged shares. The others are ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and IndusInd Bank.

On December 4, the Securities Appellate Tribunal denied immediate relief to lenders who had petitioned against the transfer of securities held with Karvy Stock Broking Ltd (KSBL) back to the clients.

The tribunal had directed the four lenders to approach SEBI. "... reliefs sought by the represented are not tenable and the remedy for the representors lies against KSBL before civil court of competent jurisdiction," SEBI Whole Time Member Ananta Barua said in the order.

Coffee Day targets 'financial health'

Nurturing Fresh & Ground an opportunity to build national brand, interim chairman tells investors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Coffee Day Enterprises, promoted by late coffee baron and serial entrepreneur V.G. Siddhartha, said it had identified financial health as the key agenda for the group in the next three years.

In his address to shareholders at the company's AGM held on Saturday, interim chairman S.V. Ranganath said, "We will continue to strengthen the much-loved Coffee Day brand, build on our relationships with millennials by offering newer, more relevant and a wider choice of products," he said.

CDE will continue to strengthen the Coffee Day brand, and offer a wider choice, says S.V. Ranganath. ▪ K. MURALI KUMAR

Another national brand

To add an additional large revenue stream, Mr. Ranganath said the company had entered into a 51:49 venture with Impact HD Inc. from Japan to set up a chain of convenience stores in India to expand its Fresh & Ground (F&G) business.

"About 425 retail outlets have been transferred to this subsidiary to be re-modelled into a chain of retail stores that will go by the brand name Essentials. Work is underway to develop this brand into a round-the-clock, go-to store for food and beverages (F&B) and convenience products. I see this as the perfect opportunity for us to launch yet another national brand, starting out from the largely local outlets of F&G," he told shareholders.

Keeping in view the current business health and long-term prospects, the group was looking to disinvest stake in a few business undertakings to reduce its overall debt, he informed shareholders.

The investigation – by former DIG of CBI Ashok Kumar Malhotra into the circumstances surrounding Mr. Siddhartha's demise and into the books of accounts of the company and its subsidiaries – is still underway and a final report is awaited.

The company's Same Store Sales Growth rose from 7.23% in FY18 to 9.55% in FY19.

"We continue in our leadership position in fresh milk-based automated coffee vending machines. Indus Plus, our IoT-enabled, Android-based touchscreen machine, has received encouraging response.

"The freshly brewed tea market is larger than that of coffee; we launched Indus Automated Tea Brewer, which uses innovative tea pods," he said.

Logistics, a gainer

He added that the logistics sector was going to be a big gainer in the coming years. However, he said group company Sical Logistics needed additional capital infusion for new initiatives it is undertaking. The company was exploring various options of divestment of its assets, including partial stake sale, to strengthen liquidity, he added.

"To ensure we remain relevant in the next decade, we continue to invest in three pillars: talent, technology and superlative customer experience. To continue the expansion of our business, as recommended by the executive committee, the board is exploring options of having suitable business or financial partners," he said.

Google wants U.S. Fed to follow India's UPI example

Planning, design were key: Isakowitz

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

In a thumbs up to India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) scheme, Google has written to the U.S. Federal Reserve Board detailing the successful example of UPI-based digital payments in India in order to build 'FedNow' – a new interbank real-time gross settlement service (RTGS) for faster digital payments in the U.S.

In a letter written by Mark Isakowitz, vice president, Government Affairs and Public Policy, U.S. and Canada, Google, the company said it worked closely with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the payment regulator governed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), to build 'Google Pay' for the Indian market.

NPCI deployed a real-time payment system UPI in 2016. UPI was thoughtfully planned and critical aspects of its design led to its success, Google said.

"First, UPI is an interbank transfer system [there are now over over 140 member banks, after initially launching with 9 participating banks]. Second, it is a real-time system. Third, it is 'open' – meaning technology companies can build applications that help users directly manage transfers into and out of their accounts held at banks," Mr. Isakowitz wrote to Ann Misback, secretary, board of governors of the Federal Reserve System.

10% of GDP

"After just three years, the annual run rate of transactions flowing through UPI is about 10% of India's GDP, including 800 million monthly transactions valued at $19 billion," said the company in the letter dated November 7, which surfaced on Saturday.

Google Pay's monthly active user-base grew three times to reach 67 million in September this year – up from 22 million in the same month last year.

According to the latest Worldline report titled 'India Digital Payments Report – Q3 2019', the total volume of UPI transactions in Q3 2019 in India touched 2.7 billion, a whopping 183% rise from a year ago. In value, UPI clocked ₹4.6 trillion, up 189% from Q3 2018.

The number of transactions done on mobile wallets was 1.04 billion, a rise of just 5% over the previous year period, while the value of transactions in the July-September period was ₹466 billion, an increase of 2% over Q3 of the previous year, the report said.

According to a recent Assocham-PWC study, digital payments in India will more than double to $135.2 billion in 2023 from $64.8 billion this year, with a compounded annual growth of 20.2%.

Google said after learning its lessons from the India digital payments market, it offered specific suggestions to the Fed Reserve to "support real-time low-value and high-value payments, use standardised messaging protocols with extended metadata, and provide clear standards for an Application Programming Interface (API) layer that enables licensed non-financial institution third parties to access and submit requests into this payment system."

'Banking' on deposits not a good idea, says this fund house

With savings accounts yielding low returns, Nippon India woos salaried class to deposit their pay with the MF for investments

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR
MUMBAI

A savings bank (SB) account, where pay is credited for millions of salaried-class people across the country every month, earns one of the lowest interest rates – mostly 3.5% – among most categories of deposit accounts.

As a result, a large chunk of money flows out from savings accounts every month after the salary is credited, as individuals eye a higher return by investing in fixed deposits, mutual funds, direct equities and public provident fund, among other avenues.

However, this requires some amount of paperwork or efforts, at least initially, as the money has to be moved from the savings account to another account.

As of November, the 'Salary Addvantage Program' had more than 37,000 investors. ▪ R.V.MOORTHY

Nippon India Mutual Fund, earlier known as Reliance Nippon Life Asset Management, is targeting this huge segment through its 'Salary Addvantage Program', wherein the salary of an individual is directly credited to his account with the fund house and not a bank, before it is invested in liquid funds to earn higher returns compared with bank deposits. "We directly approach companies and explain the benefits of the scheme. If they are convinced, we create accounts for their employees, wherein the salary is directly credited and invested," said Kapil Arora, segment head – New Business Initiatives, Nippon India MF. The scheme was launched in 2017 and the fund house has been able to bring on board over 200 organisations with names including Shapporji Pallonji, Ola, Swiggy, Bajaj Finserve, Angel Broking and Prabhudas Lilladhar.

As of November, the scheme had more than 37,000 investors with the monthly average inflow pegged at over ₹20 crore. Further, the assets under management of such investments is around ₹280 crore, with around 8,000 systematic investment plans as well.

Incidentally, an individual also has the flexibility of choosing the quantum of salary – say 50% or may be just 35% – that goes directly to the fund house and the rest remains in his SB account.

The aim is to generate higher returns than a savings account.

Nippon India Liquid Fund, in which the investments are made, delivered a compounded annual growth rate of 7.01% in the last three years.

According to Mr. Arora, liquidity is the biggest concern that investors have, since a savings account is completely liquid.

A debit card on offer

"An investor can withdraw a maximum of ₹50,000 per day. We also give Visa debit cards to all our investors that can be used across ATMs and shops," said Mr. Arora.

"There is huge potential for growth as there are still millions of salaried people whose salary is just lying idle in the savings account. With the right push and awareness, they can start investing without taking any undue risk," Mr. Arora said.

INTERVIEW | SACHIN PILLAI

Awaiting right time for IPO, says Hinduja Leyland Finance CEO

'Post DHFL issue, investor confidence has fallen'

N. ANAND

Hinduja Leyland Finance Ltd., a non-banking finance company of the Hinduja Group, which had deferred its Initial Public Offering, is adopting a wait-and-watch policy for investors' confidence to return, its chief executive officer **Sachin Pillai** *said in an interview. Edited excerpts:*

You planned to raise funds via IPO twice, but it was deferred. Why?

▪ We had filed the document in June 2018 and got approval in September. We started roadshows in India and the Asian market. Then, the DHFL issue came out. Post that, there has been a lack of confidence as far as the Indian BFSI, NBFC, HFI segments were concerned. That caused us not to go ahead with road shows and to wait and watch. After that, on a regular basis for two to three months, more names got added. Investor confidence has not yet come back.

How are you managing funds under these circumstances?

▪ In January, ₹200 crore came from existing shareholders. Over the last 16 to 18 months, the promoters and shareholders have put in ₹900 crore. While the intent of the group is to list the company, the capital was always made available. Growth was never compromised for want of capital. We are always well-capitalised. We will again look at the appropriate window to go ahead with listing the company.

Do you have a timeframe in mind?

▪ It depends on the market; how the confidence comes back for the housing finance and NBFC businesses. Till then, growth will remain unaffected. We will wait and watch for investors' confidence to return for NBFCs. The current capital is sufficient for the next one year.

How were the first two quarters in the backdrop of the economic slowdown?

▪ We are largely into financing medium and heavy commercial vehicles. It constitutes 40% of our book. We have three non-vehicle financing capital businesses – loan against property, wholesale financing of smaller NBFCs and affordable housing finance.

Given the varied diversified asset classes that we have presence in, certain asset classes [were] going through a sluggish period in terms of growth.

In this year's H1 compared to last year, we have grown our book 23%. So, on an overall basis, disbursement growth has been there. We have been able to counter the slowdown, given the fact that we are well-diversified on asset class and have to maintain the growth momentum.

We have a gross NPA of 4.3% and net NPA of 2.8%. Compared to other players, it is very much in line.

How will the remaining two quarters pan out?

▪ Historically, 40% of business has happened in H1 and the rest in H2 due to festivals, monsoon and kharif crop. We always see Q3 [as a] stable quarter and Q4 sees growth.

Even in 2013-14 when there was substantial de-growth in the vehicle sales segment, the same pattern played out. We expect Q3/Q4 much better than Q1/Q2. Last year, from November to March, we had de-growth. Going forward, in these five months, we will see lesser degrowth, or marginal growth. That's our expectation.

Will the transition from BS-IV to BS-VI affect your business?

▪ We don't anticipate slowdown per se to come in. However, there might be a brief period of wait-and-watch as far as customers are concerned, because it is a technology change happening.

What are your growth and expansion plans?

▪ We are looking at 20% growth in this fiscal; this is broadly in line with the expectation at the start of the year. We are present in 1,550 locations. Our distribution is largely in the trucking cluster. So, we are in semi-urban and urban areas and have 3% reach in rural areas. Rural could well be a growth engine for us in future.

How is your affordable housing subsidiary doing?

▪ We have a book size of ₹1,600 crore. We have presence in 480 locations. Our average ticket size is around ₹17 lakh. We will be focussing in the same space – on ₹17 lakh to ₹20 lakh loan size. We should be able to establish a growth of 25-30%.

'PNB under reported NPAs by ₹2,617 cr.'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Public sector lender Punjab National Bank (PNB) under-reported its non-performing assets by ₹2,617 crore for the fiscal year 2018-19, as per RBI's risk-assessment report.

In a regulatory filing on Saturday, PNB said the divergence in gross non-performing assets (NPAs) assessed by the central bank stood at ₹2,617 crore in FY19. The divergence assessed by the RBI in net NPAs was also ₹2,617 crore for the fiscal. Also, the divergence in provisioning for bad loans in FY19 was to the tune of ₹2,091 crore.

Consequently, based on the divergence assessed by RBI in provisioning for bad loans, PNB said it would have reported a net loss of ₹11,335.90 crore for FY19 as opposed to a net loss of ₹9,975.49 crore.

Plastics sector seeks cut in customs duty

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The All India Plastics Manufacturers Association (AIPMA), representing 22,000 industrial units, has called for immediate steps by the Centre to revive the industry.

Jagat Killawala, president, AIPMA, said, "The industry demands that customs duty on PVC should be brought down from 10% to 7.5%, as nearly half of the demand in India is being met through imports due to lack of domestic capacity. Any increase in customs duty will affect the agriculture sector due to [its] high use of PVC pipes and fittings." Customs duty on polypropylene and polyethylene should be retained at 7.5%, he added.

GETTY IMAGES

Tech titans under watch

Why are Amazon, Google, Facebook and Apple facing antitrust issues?

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The story so far: After years of blistering growth driven by an ever-growing share of the online ad market and big data, the giants of Silicon Valley, including Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google, are facing an unprecedented challenge – calls by lawmakers to curb their market monopoly power. There are two sources of tension relating to these four tech firms that have caused alarm across the United States, Europe and elsewhere: first, that they may have engaged in anti-competitive behaviour over many years thus undercutting smaller potential rivals and holding onto an outsized market share; and second, that as a result of this metastatic growth, they now have a vast influence on politics, policy and personal reputations across the spectrum, making cost of data privacy breaches by these firms catastrophic. Thus, in July 2019 the United States Justice Department and the House Judiciary Committee separately announced major antitrust investigations into Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple promising "a top-to-bottom review of the market power held by giant tech platforms."

What are the main concerns with each platform?

Amazon: Given the disruptive effect of its online sales platform on traditional retail markets and smaller sellers, lawmakers for years and in multiple countries have contemplated regulations to clamp down on Amazon's alleged anti-competitive practices. For example, questions have often been raised on whether Amazon favours its self-branded products over those of third-party sellers, by requiring other sellers to use its advertising services or fulfilment network, by rankings of product search displays, or by using data on other sellers to tweak its own offerings to its advantage. Regulators are also said to be looking into the conglomerate's acquisition of Whole Foods, an upmarket U.S. grocery chain.

Apple: In September 2019, U.S. congressional investigators demanded documents from Apple to shed light on the company's App Store policies, specifically regarding how Apple ranks search results on that platform, questions surrounding how Apple determines the share of revenue it takes from in-app purchases, and the exclusion of certain competing apps from the Store. For example, Spotify and those behind certain parental-control apps have filed complaints to regulators in the U.S., Europe, and Russia about Apple's alleged restriction of their apps once the tech giant introduced self-made competing services.

Facebook: Regulators have focused their attention on Facebook's acquisitive streak in capital markets, for example, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) enquiry into whether Facebook defensively purchased certain companies to maintain its pre-eminent market position in the social networking ecosystem. Specifically, questions have centred on Facebook's relationship with Onavo, a data analysis firm that Facebook purchased in 2013, which then allegedly helped the social media giant see off potential competitors. Investigators have also started looking into allegations that Facebook may have cut off certain third-party apps from its data.

> Attorneys-General across 50 U.S. states and territories have announced a joint antitrust probe into Google and Facebook; the House Antitrust Subcommittee has sought information details from all four tech giants

Google: This company handles more than 90% of online searches across the world, so regulators have been observing its delivery of search results under a microscope. In recent years concern has grown over the fact that Google has increasingly been sending users to its own sites to answer their queries, including products such as Google Flights and Google Maps. Thus, Google may find itself grilled by regulators over whether it is abusing its search dominance, to the detriment of rival content producers. The European Union has already fined Google $5.1 billion in 2018.

Who is leading the charge against the tech firms?

In March 2019 U.S. Senator and Democrat Elizabeth Warren announced as part of her 2020 presidential campaign, a plan to break up Amazon, Facebook, and Google. Shortly thereafter, on June 3, the House of Representatives' Antitrust Subcommittee announced a bipartisan investigation into competition and "abusive conduct" in the tech sector. In mid-July, the U.S. Department of Justice publicly announced that it had started an antitrust probe into "market-leading online platforms", following which Facebook confirmed that it was being investigated by the FTC, and Google that it was facing a Department of Justice antitrust probe. Over the next few months Attorneys-General across 50 U.S. states and territories announced a joint antitrust probe into Google and Facebook, and the House Antitrust Subcommittee made an enormous information demand to all four tech giants, requesting 10 years' worth of detailed records relating to competition, acquisitions, and other matters relevant to the investigation. The case against these four Silicon Valley firms is also bolstered by the fact that U.S. President Donald Trump could hardly be considered an ally. In August 2018, he warned that tech companies could be in a "very antitrust situation."

What is the prognosis for the antitrust case?

In the U.S. the cases against the four tech firms will likely be centred on possible violations of the Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts – two laws that have been foundational in the past century of federal antitrust prosecutions. While the firms have, more or less, complied with the various investigations against them, they have on occasion provided only limited information.

Why is the Northeast on the boil?

In Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, what is the unease over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019?

SUDIPTA DATTA

A flame torchlight procession protesting the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill — now an Act — in Guwahati, Assam, on December 9. ▪ RITU RAJ KONWAR

The story so far: Curfew was eased on Saturday for some hours in towns and cities of the Brahmaputra Valley including Guwahati in lower Assam and Dibrugarh in upper Assam after days of violent protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 since the Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha on December 11 and the President of India gave his assent on December 12. Some States were kept outside the purview of the Act, which will grant citizenship to Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities of three countries, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, under the Sixth Schedule and the inner line permit (ILP) system, but there is unease on the ground about what it will mean for the ethnic diversity of the region. In Assam, for example, observers say the division between the Assamese-speaking Brahmaputra Valley and the Bengali-speaking Barak Valley is likely to deepen; and that relations between tribals and the Bengali-speaking majority in Tripura will suffer. The rules of CAA under which Hindu and other minorities may get amnesty have not yet been specified.

Why is Assam agitated?

Between 1979 and 1985, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad spearheaded a movement against illegal migration, which had been simmering for long, leading to widespread violence and insurgencies by various outfits including the United Liberation Front of Assam. After thousands of lives were lost, the Assam Accord was signed in 1985 that aimed to address two key concerns of the Assamese people: stop "foreigners" from Bangladesh and provide some constitutional safeguards for Assamese citizens. First, the cut-off date for foreigners to gain citizenship was set at March 25, 1971, though, initially, the leaders of the movement wanted illegal migrants to be expelled as per the National Register of Citizens 1951 of Assam; agitation leaders had also spoken of a 1967 cut-off; and Clause 6 of the Accord stated that "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people." The AASU on Friday filed a petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the Act, according to the outfit's chief adviser Samujjal Bhattacharya. He told a gathering which had defied curfew to protest against the Act: "[Narendra] Modi had promised to deport all illegal immigrants after May 16, 2014. He did not send back a single illegal Bangladeshi, instead he is now welcoming them."

According to Census 2011, Assam has a population of 3.12 crore, with 61.47% Hindus, and 34.22 % Muslims. Around 12.44% of the population is tribal, comprising Bodos and others. Tribal States of the Northeast have got protection from the CAA with the ILP system, unlike Assam.

What about protection under the Sixth Schedule?

The CAA, 2019, while inserting a new sub-section 6B, listing out the provisions to grant citizenship rights to Hindu and other non-Muslim minorities of three countries, says "nothing in this section shall apply to tribal area[s] of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Tripura as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the area covered under 'The Inner Line' notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873".

The Sixth Schedule allows constitution of autonomous district councils in tribal areas: of Assam (three), Meghalaya (three), Mizoram (three) and Tripura (one) – 10 in all in the Northeast. Thus in Assam, there are the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (for the Karbi Anglong District), the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (for the Dima Hasao or the erstwhile North Cachar Hills District) and the Bodoland Territorial Council (The Bodoland Territorial Areas District). These regions are exempt from the purview of the Act.

How does the Inner Line Permit help?

As Home Minister Amit Shah met political and civil society groups from the region, one of the suggestions that came up was to expand the ILP system. The ILP regulates the visit of outsiders to States under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. It was in force in three northeastern States, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland, but on Wednesday, Manipur too came under the ILP regime, a demand of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government of the State. The ILP was withdrawn from Manipur in 1950.The State government's attempts to reintroduce it through three bills led to violent protests by tribals in 2015. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh mooted the idea again in 2018 and one of the bills, the Manipur People's Protection Bill, was passed after consultations with all stakeholders including tribals. The bill, which is awaiting the President's approval, sought to introduce a system similar to the ILP, regulating the entry of outsiders. After the Centre extended ILP to the State, Mr Singh said its implementation would protect the indigenous people of the State.

> The All Assam Students Union has filed a petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. Tribal States have got protection from the Act under the Inner Line Permit system, unlike Assam

Manipur has a population of 28.56 lakh, according to the 2011 Census, with 41.39% Hindus and 41.29% Christians and a host of tribes including the Tangkhul Nagas and Kukis.

In Nagaland too, Dimapur, the commercial hub of the State which had been outside the ILP, was brought under its purview. Dimapur has a large population of non-tribals. The Nagaland government notification says that every non-indigenous person who settled or entered Dimapur on or after November 21, 1979, will have to obtain an ILP within 90 days. Now that Dimapur too has become a "tribal belt", all 12 districts of Nagaland are under ILP. As the National Register of Citizens was being updated in Assam last year, the Nagaland Tribes Council, Tribal Hohos and a group of civil organisations petitioned the State government to seek changes in the colonial era law (Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873) to bring the entire State under ILP to protect the "indigenous people" from outsiders, including "illegal migrants" from Bangladesh. Around 19 lakh people have been left out of the final NRC list and have to prove their citizenship in Assam's foreigners' tribunals.

Why are Tripura and Meghalaya rattled?

After the passage of the Bill, Mr. Shah met delegations of the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, which is an ally of the BJP in the State, and Tripura's royal family head, Kirit Pradyot Deb Barman, who later tweeted: "Told him [Shah] we are going to SC [Supreme Court] against CAB as we cannot compromise! No retreat no surrender!" Around 32% of the people of Tripura, which has a population of about 36 lakh, are tribal. In 2015, after insurgency appeared to have waned, the Tripura government revoked the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA. The AFSPA, which had been in force in the State since 1997, was repealed after elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. It had been a long-standing demand of tribal parties such as the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura and the Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura. After the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was passed, protests broke out in at least four districts, shattering years of peace. Journalist Patricia Mukhim wrote in the *Mint*: "The state has been overrun by migrants, first from East Pakistan and later from Bangladesh. Now, the Bengali-speaking population is a majority in Tripura and runs the affairs of the state. Fears of a similar fate are real and widely held across all states in the region."

Most of Meghalaya is protected from CAB because of the Sixth Schedule – some areas of capital Shillong, however, fall outside its purview. But there is a demand to extend ILP to the State. Protesters want the Governor, Tathagata Roy, to give his nod to a proposed ordinance that seeks mandatory registration of outsiders entering the State. There were protests against Tura MP, Agatha Sangma (daughter of P.A. Sangma and sister of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma), who voted in favour of the CAB for the National People's Party, an NDA ally.

What does the doping ban mean for Russia?

Why has the World Anti-Doping Agency barred the country from global sporting competitions?

N. SUDARSHAN

The story so far: On December 9, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) announced a decision to ban Russia from global sporting competitions for a period of four years. The 12-member WADA executive committee voted unanimously to declare the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) "non-compliant" with global anti-doping rules. The move was a ratification of the findings by the independent Compliance Review Committee (CRC) which had recommended that Russia be banned. The anti-doping watchdog's decision is expected to affect Russia the most at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics where the nation's flag, name and anthem will not be allowed.

What triggered the ban?

It dates back to the lead up to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games when an independent commission set up by WADA found a "deeply rooted culture of cheating" in Russian athletics. Barely weeks before the Games, whistle-blower reports alleged that Russia ran one of the most sophisticated doping programmes in the world in which the Russian sports ministry, the intelligence service and the country's anti-doping experts colluded to hide large-scale violations. The 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi – in which Russia topped the medals tally – was under the scanner, where it was alleged that dope-tainted urine samples were replaced with clean ones. It led to a series of sanctions; the IAAF (now called World Athletics), the world athletics' governing body, suspended Russia's athletics federation (a ban that continues till date) before the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and WADA followed suit by de-recognising the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) and RUSADA respectively. Last September, as part of the resolution of the case, WADA threw a lifeline by asking Russia to turn over raw data stored in its Moscow laboratory in order to corroborate the findings in the whistle-blower reports. Russia reluctantly agreed, only for WADA to now rule that Russia had tampered with this evidence too, leading to the latest reprimand.

How far does the ban go?

Apart from the Olympics, the ban can extend to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, provided Russia qualifies. Sports and government officials from Russia will not be able to attend competitions, and Russia cannot host international events during the four-year period. It does not however apply to Euro 2020 which is considered a continental (and not global) football competition and Russia will remain a co-host. WADA's very own Athlete

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Committee, though, is dissatisfied and has termed the sanctions piecemeal. Even as Russia, the nation, stands barred, individual Russian athletes deemed untainted can still participate as neutrals, like they had at Rio and the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Games (South Korea). In the latter, Russia's men's hockey team played as the "Olympic Athletes from Russia" and even won the gold medal. The only meaningful action, according to the Athlete Committee, is a complete ban on Russian participation. The legendary Edwin Moses, the current chairman of the United States Anti-Doping Agency and a two-time Olympic gold medallist, said anti-doping leaders and the IOC have prioritised Russian sentiments over those of clean athletes from elsewhere. Moses told *The New York Times* recently: "The Russians are asserting their athletes that may be clean deserve the opportunity to compete. They destroyed all the evidence that could have exonerated them."

What is the International Olympic Committee's stand?

The IOC, under its president Thomas Bach, has always opposed a blanket ban. He has maintained that he favours "individual justice over collective punishment". An athlete whose views have played a significant role in shaping the IOC's thinking is Penelope (Penny) Heyns, a South African gold-medallist in the 100-and 200m breaststroke events at the 1996 Olympics. In an interview to *The New York Times*, she said it would be wrong to penalise an entire generation of Russian athletes for the misdeeds of their predecessors. "They were 10 or 11 when all of this was going down; they are not part of the system," Heyns said, referring to a swimming event where young Russian swimmers participated. "It's our duty to ensure all clean athletes have the right to compete, including those from Russia who can honestly prove their innocence." However, unlike during the Rio Olympics, where the IOC Executive Board had left the decision to allow Russian teams to individual sports federations, the orders this time are expected to come from the very top. Immediately after the CRC made its recommendations public, the IOC said that it will support "the toughest sanctions against all those responsible" and urged WADA "to take further action given the seriousness of the manipulation". Post ratification, the stance has remained unchanged. Seen along with WADA's standard code on compliance, the governing bodies of different sports are likely to enforce the strictures in a similar manner.

What next for Russia?

Russia has three weeks (from the date of the order) to appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and the signs are that it will. While Russian President Vladimir Putin said, "we have all the reasons to file an appeal," ROC's president, Stanislav Pozdnyakov, dismissed the ruling as "inadequate, illogical and excessive". According to Michael McCann, Sports Illustrated's legal analyst, CAS would consider the appeal under "de novo review". This is a form of appeal in which the court holds a trial as if no prior trial had been held, thus providing a window to produce new evidence and arguments. A line of defence already advanced by Russia is to discredit the whistle-blower, Grigory Rodchenkov, the former head of the Moscow lab who is now under the protection of the US Federal Witness Protection Program. Generally, an arbitration is expected to take six to 12 months, which means that regardless of whether an appeal is filed, Russia will not be present at the Winter Youth Olympic Games that starts in Lausanne, Switzerland from January 9, 2020.

> The International Olympic Committee, under its president Thomas Bach, has always opposed a blanket ban. Bach has maintained that he favours 'individual justice over collective punishment'.

SNAPSHOTS

Visitor from far
Comet 21/Borisov is an interstellar visitor that is drawing a lot of attention from astronomers now. The first identified comet to have come close to the sun from another stellar system, its bulk is made of loosely knit ice particles and dust. Spotted by the Hubble telescope, it measures 3,200 kilometres across, which is just nine football fields wide. Expected to zoom past Jupiter and leave the solar system by mid-2020, this is only the second interstellar visitor to have been spotted.

Samples from Bennu
OSIRIS Rex mission will be NASA's first to collect samples from an asteroid and return to Earth. It has been orbiting asteroid Bennu since last December. It will touch down on one of two selected sites, give out a puff of nitrogen and gather the dirt sample that is raked up, according to a report in *Nature*. The target area, known as the Nightingale site, is just 16 metres across and sits inside a large crater, 140-metre wide, in Bennu's northern hemisphere.

New molecule for rheumatoid arthritis may be effective in preventing cartilage destruction

It might prove a game-changer in treating rheumatoid arthritis if further tests and trials find it effective

R. PRASAD

A specific fragment of a protein secreted by the parasitic worm liver fluke *(Fasciola)* has been found to protect the articular cartilage of joints from being destroyed by the body's aberrant immune system, thus preventing rheumatoid arthritis from progressing. Besides protecting the cartilage from further destruction, the team of researchers from the Central Drug Research Institute (CSIR-CDRI) also found that the protein prevented the joint bone from being destroyed. In rheumatoid arthritis, the joint bone starts getting destroyed following cartilage destruction.

Targeted protection: The liver fluke peptide provides selective protection to the joints but does not alter the systemic immune system, says Naibedya Chattopadhyay (centre). ▪

Liver fluke secretion
Liver flukes secrete certain specialised proteins that help the parasites to evade recognition by the host immune system and also blunt the killing machinery of the immune system by dialling down the inflammatory responses.

The protein – Fasciola helminth defence molecule-1 (FhHDM-1) – secreted by liver fluke has similarity with a human protein that mitigates inflammatory responses. So the team led by Naibedya Chattopadhyay isolated a specific fragment of this protein having a high anti-inflammatory function. They then synthesised and tested it in a cell culture system followed by animal testing.

The results were published in *FASEB Journal*.

A mouse model that is vulnerable to rheumatoid arthritis was used for testing the protective effect of the protein. The type-II collagen protein the major component present in the cartilage matrix of the joints but not as a whole protein seen in blood was introduced in large quantities to trigger an autoimmune response. With this, the process of cartilage destruction was set in motion.

Twenty days after introducing the antigen protein to trigger an autoimmune response, the researchers introduced the synthesised peptide every second day to evaluate its potential to protect the collagen from destruction. "The peptide rapidly stopped further damage to the cartilage. The cartilage that has already been damaged was not repaired because the damage is irreversible in the case of rheumatoid arthritis," says Yasir Akhtar Khan from the Department of Zoology at the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, and the first author of the paper. "Besides preventing cartilage destruction, the peptide also prevented the joint bone from destruction."

Action on mice
The cartilage of animals that only received the type II collagen but not the peptide was completely destroyed by the end of the experiment (46 days), while the cartilage of the treatment group that received the peptide for four weeks was protected from further damage.

The effect of treatment in controlling cartilage destruction was assessed externally during the course of treatment by measuring paw swelling every day. "By 25 days of treatment, there was complete abolition of paw swelling compared with the diseased animals that did not receive any treatment," says Dr. Khan. All the animals were sacrificed at the end of 46 days and the joints examined.

"There was extensive structural damage to the cartilage in mice that did not receive the peptide. The barrier that insulates the cartilage was destroyed leading to disease progression," he says. "In the treatment group, the barrier was intact and comparable to the control group that did not have rheumatoid arthritis. We also did not see any immune cells in the joints of the treated animals."

In contrast to the currently used anti-rheumatic drug (methotrexate), the biggest advantage of using the liver fluke peptide is that it does not produce a wholesale suppression of the immune system. Even the monoclonal antibodies that act against individual inflammatory molecules have inherent problems. For instance, the monoclonal antibodies target and suppress the tumour necrosis factor (TNF alpha), which is the first line of defence against *Mycobacterium*. In the Indian context, the anti-rheumatic drug and even the monoclonal antibodies that target TNF alpha will leave the person susceptible to infections, including TB.

Immune system intact
"The liver fluke peptide only produces selective protection to the joints and does not alter the systemic immune system. So the body's ability to combat bacterial pathogens will remain intact. Dr. Chattopadhyay says. "We are yet to study the mechanism of selective joint protection (cartilage and bone) provided by the peptide."

Thus, in the Indian scenario, the peptide that specifically prevents joint inflammation and destruction without affecting the body's overall immune function might prove a game-changer in treating rheumatoid arthritis if further tests and trials find it effective.

Comparable: The molecule 's efficacy to disrupt biofilm was comparable with the last-resort antibiotic colistin, say Jayanta Haldar (left) and Swagatam Barman. ▪

Tackling drug-resistant *A. baumannii*

In 2-4 hours the novel molecule killed actively dividing drug-resistant strains

R. PRASAD

A novel molecule developed by chemically linking (conjugate) an amino acid (glycine) to a polymer has been found to possess high antibacterial activity against multidrug-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* while showing no toxicity whatsoever to human cells. The antibacterial activity was also seen against clinical isolates of *A. baumannii* that are multidrug-resistant.

The team led by Jayanta Haldar from the Antimicrobial Research Laboratory at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, found that the molecule has several other salient properties. The most important being its ability to kill even the dormant bacteria.

At 16 microgram per ml concentration, the molecule took about two hours to completely kill the actively dividing bacteria that are sensitive to drugs and two-four hours to kill drug-resistant strains of *A. baumannii*. However, at the same concentration, the molecule needed less than two minutes to kill the dormant, drug-sensitive bacteria, and about five minutes to kill the dormant, drug-resistant bacteria. "At this point in time we don't know the reason behind the rapid killing of the dormant bacteria," says Prof. Haldar.

Disrupting biofilm
Since *A. baumannii* bacteria display great propensity to form biofilm, the researchers tested the ability of the molecule to disrupt biofilm. They found that the molecule could disrupt the biofilm formed by both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant *A. baumannii*. "At 64 microgram per ml concentration, the efficacy of the molecule to disrupt the biofilm was comparable with the last-resort antibiotic colistin," says Prof. Haldar.

"One dose of the molecule was able to achieve 65% biofilm disruption when the concentration used was 64 microgram per ml. If we use the molecule repeatedly then it can completely disrupt the biofilm," says Swagatam Barman from JNCASR, the first author of a paper published in the journal *ACS Applied Materials & Interfaces*.

The toxicity of the molecule was tested using human embryonic kidney cell line. Not a single cell was killed when 8-16 microgram per ml concentration was used. Even when the concentration was increased to 500 microgram per ml, about 80% cells were still not killed. "The molecule did not show any toxicity at the concentration needed to kill both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant bacteria," Barman says.

The researchers also tested if the molecule killed red blood cells. Even at 1,000 microgram per ml concentration, which is several times the concentration needed to kill the bacteria, only about 1-3% of red blood cells were destroyed.

Killing mechanism
A. baumannii bacteria are already resistant to most antibiotics. So to evaluate how quickly the bacteria would develop resistance against the synthesised molecule, the researchers exposed the bacteria to the molecule for 14 days. "The bacteria did not develop any resistance against the molecule at the end of 14 days, while the bacteria exhibited 250-fold resistance against meropenem drug," says Prof. Haldar. "The bacteria developed a high level of resistance against the last resort antibiotic colistin too."

The molecule is able to destroy the integrity of the membranes thus killing even the multidrug-resistant *A. baumannii*, Prof. Haldar says. Gram-negative bacteria have an outer and an inner membrane thus making it difficult for drugs to effectively kill them unlike in the case of Gram-positive bacteria that have only one membrane.

The molecule was found to destroy the integrity of the outer and inner membrane and permeate through the membranes even at a low concentration of 5 microgram per ml. The permeability increased when higher concentration of 20 microgram per ml was used.

"We will soon be studying the efficacy of the molecule in animal models," Prof. Haldar says. "Based on the *in vitro* studies, we feel this molecule has immense potential for being developed as a future therapeutic agent."

Plants emit ultrasonic 'distress screams' when stressed

R. PRASAD

Researchers have for the first time found evidence of plants making airborne emission of ultrasound screams when subjected to stresses. The sound contains information that can reveal the state of the plant emitting it. The researchers experimented with tomato and tobacco plants and subjected them to two different stresses – drought and cutting of stems.

The ultrasound emitted is in the range 20-100 kHz and can be detected from a distance of 3-5 metres. The team led by Lilach Hadany from the School of Plant Sciences and Food Security at Tel-Aviv University which carried out the research speculates that if stressed plants can emit ultrasound, then neighbouring plants should be equipped to hear these distress sounds too.

"We don't know the mechanism of response in the plants yet. We have recently shown that plants' response to pollinator sounds involves their flowers, but we expect that receptors to ultrasound, if such exist, would be in the vegetative parts," Prof. Hadany says in an email to *The Hindu*.

Many moths, which use tomato and tobacco plants as hosts for their larvae, are already known to hear and react to ultrasound at frequencies emitted by the plants. "These moths may then potentially avoid laying their eggs on a plant that had emitted stress sounds," the write.

The results have been posted on *bioRxiv* preprint server; the manuscript is yet to be peer-reviewed.

Producing sound
The researchers suspect that the sounds are generated by a process called cavitation – where air bubbles form, expand and explode in the xylem causing vibrations. "Cavitation explosions have been shown to produce vibrations similar to the ones we recorded," they write.

The sounds were first recorded in the laboratory conditions using boxes that are acoustically isolated and then verified in greenhouses that were not acoustically isolated. They found that on average, tomato plants subjected to drought stress emitted 35 sounds an hour compared with tobacco that made just 11. However, when the stems were cut, the average number of sounds emitted by tomato plants dropped to 25 per hour while it increased slightly to 15 per hour in the case of tobacco. Controls emitted fewer than one sound per hour.

Greenhouse studies
In greenhouse, the researchers studied how the plants emitted sounds in response to lack of water. Watered tomato plants were placed in the greenhouse for 10 days without watering.

Very few sounds were emitted in the first three days when there was sufficient water. But the number of sounds per day increased on the fourth to sixth day and decreased as the plants dried.

Tomato and tobacco plants emitted ultrasound at different mean peak frequencies when subjected to the two stresses. In general, the two plants emitted sounds at a higher peak frequency when the stem was cut than when under drought. Under water-stressed conditions, the mean peak frequency was nearly 50 kHz for tomato and about 55 kHz for tobacco. When the stems are cut, the mean peak frequency was 57 kHz for tomato and nearly 58 kHz for tobacco plants.

Plants belonging to two different taxa also emitted ultrasound when subjected to the same stresses. "But the stresses were not identical, and we did not run a fully controlled experiment of them. We are sure that they emit sounds, and the peak frequency of the recorded sounds was in the same range, but all the rest would require additional experiments," she says.

Question Corner

Draining cell phones

Q ***How does a fully charged mobile phone lose its charge when left unused for several days together?***

A KINGSHUK ROY
IISER, Pune

Lithium-ion battery chemistries are associated with self-discharge phenomena. A passivation layer develops on the electrodes over time (on performing several charging-discharging cycles) which results in self-discharging of the battery. It means internal chemical reactions reduce the stored charge of the battery without any connection between the electrodes or any external circuit. Studies show a self-discharge rate of Li-ion battery is 5% in 24 hours, then 1-2% per month. It must be borne in mind that even when the phone is kept idle, there are a lot of applications working in the background like phone-watch, calender, to name a few. These applications in-turn cause a charge loss.

Q ***How does water rise up tall trees during autumn and winter when there is very less water evaporation from leaves?***

A SENTHIL SUBRAMANIAN
South Dakota State University, U.S.

During late autumn and winter deciduous trees are dormant. The colder temperatures during these seasons are not optimal for most physiological reactions in cells. Therefore, trees do not need a lot of water in the winter. The amount of transpiration is only one-sixth that during the peak growing season. Trees can also store water in their stems which they use during the winter. This also reduces the need for transpiration to obtain water during the winter.

This week's question

Are buildings with stilt parking (without a wall joining the stilts) at greater risk of collapsing during an earthquake?

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

Evidence of river Saraswati's existence found?

Analysing sand from 3-10 metres below modern Ghaggar, researchers estimate the date and source of the river

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The Indus valley civilisation which flourished in present day northwestern India and adjacent Pakistan was the largest and oldest urban civilisation in the world. Nearly two-thirds of the 1,500 archaeological sites of the Harappans occur on the dried up banks of the Ghaggar river. Today, the Ghaggar is a seasonal, monsoon-fed river originating in the sub-Himalayas. The question arises about the role played by the Paleo Ghaggar, ancient counterpart of this river, in the lives of the Harappans. Did the Harappans live on the banks of a perennial river, mighty and fed by the glacial rivers arising in the Higher Himalaya, or was Paleo Ghaggar also a monsoon-fed and seasonal river that rose in the sub-Himalaya?

These questions are tied to another. The Rig veda mentions a mighty, snow-fed river Saraswati on whose banks the literature was supposed to be derived. Was this then a description of the Paleo Ghaggar, making it the mythological Saraswati River itself? These questions are sought to be answered in a paper published in *Scientific Reports*.

Researchers from Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad, and Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, have analysed sand from 3-10 metres below surface of modern Ghaggar and found that it was indeed a perennial river, fed by glacial rivers in the past.

Ancient settlement: Nearly two-thirds of the 1,500 archaeological sites related to the Harappans occur on the dried up banks of the present-day Ghaggar river. ▪ V. V. KRISHNAN

Finding the source
"Coarse-grained white or grey sands that contain abundant white mica are typical of glacier-fed Higher Himalayan rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna and Sutlej... We found such sand layers 3-10 metres below the surface on both sides of the modern Ghaggar in a stretch of 300 kilometres up to the Pakistan border," explains Jyotiranjan S. Ray of PRL. "Presence of this sand itself is an indication of existence of a powerful river in the past."

The team identified the source of these sands by studying the strontium-neodymium isotopic ratios. They also measured the ages of the mica samples in the sand by argon-argon dating method. "We found that the isotopic ratios and Ar-Ar ages overlap with those of the rocks of the Higher Himalaya, thus we establish that these sands have been transported by the river from Higher Himalaya to the plains," says Dr Ray.

Further, the team established the depositional ages of the samples by radiocarbon dating and optical dating of mollusk shells found in the deposit. The researchers thus established that the ancient Ghaggar transported sands from glaciated regions of the Higher Himalaya. "Any river that originates from such region remains active round the year - doesn't depend on the monsoonal rains only," explains Dr Ray.

The key result of the paper is that the river Ghaggar had two distinct perennial phases: one during 80,000-20,000 years ago and the other during 9,000-4,500 years ago.

Early, late Harappans
"The paper contains excellent isotopic geochemical data on the sediments of the river Ghaggar. On the basis of their data the authors show that the Sutlej River was flowing into the Ghaggar River to make it perennial for the Early Harappans," says Jayant Kumar Tripathi of School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, who is an expert in the field. In a 2004 paper in *Current Science*, he has studied the later phase of the river Ghaggar. "However, what made mature Harappans to stay back on the Paleo Ghaggar, remains unanswered in their paper," Prof. Tripathi adds commenting on the recent work.

The authors write in the paper that the revived perennial condition of the Ghaggar, between 9,000 and 4,500 years ago can be correlated with the Rig vedic Saraswati, and that it "likely facilitated development of the early Harappan settlements along its banks".

Study pushes back evolution of speech by 20,000 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Researchers have shown that monkeys produce well-differentiated proto-vowels, an advance that pushes back earlier estimates of when speech evolved in animals by about 2,00,000 years.

The review study, published in the journal *Science Advances*, mentioned the theory of the "descended larynx", according to which the larynx –commonly called the voice box – must be in a low position to produce differentiated vowels before speech can emerge.

According to the researchers, including those from CNRS in France, monkeys, which have a vocal tract anatomy similar to humans, had a higher larynx, and could not produce differentiated vocalisations.

Considering the acoustic cavities formed by the tongue, jaw, and lips (identical in primates and humans), recent research showed the production of differentiated vocalizations is not a question of anatomy, but is related to the control of articulators.

According to the current study, if the emergence of articulated speech is no longer dependent on the descent of the larynx –which took place about 200,000 years ago – scientists can now theorise much earlier speech emergence.

The researchers said this could be as far back as at least 20 million years, a time when our common ancestor with monkeys lived, and already presumably had the capacity to produce contrasted vocalisations.

Young, black, poor and dead

The death of 9 black youth in police action at a slum in São Paulo has triggered mass protests

SÃO PAULO

Shobhan Saxena is a journalist based in São Paulo, Brazil

Paraisópolis is home to 1,00,000 people who live in a cluster of brick houses and shanties perched on hills, just across the leafy lanes of Morumbi, where million-dollar houses sit behind high walls in southern Sao Paulo. Every weekend, young folks of Paraisópolis gather for a night of "Baile Funk", a party form developed in the slums where they play hip-hop music. On December 1, the state military police (PM) stormed the party, causing a stampede that left nine persons – all young, black and poor – dead.

As the *favela* (slum) boiled with anger, the police claimed that they were chasing two criminals who fired at them and it led to the confusion in which the victims got trampled. But witnesses said the police came in firing bullets and tear gas into the crowd. Within a day, videos shot by *favela* residents began to emerge online. In one video, cops are seen kicking a boy as he lies on the ground. In another, an PM officer shouts, "Everybody is going to die", as another one strikes the youth with an iron bar.

The Paraisópolis incident has once again exposed the racial fault line that divides Brazil, where the blacks – mostly poor – are often at the receiving end of violence by police officers, mostly white. This division came to a boil last week as thousands of Paraisópolis residents took to the streets as the State government dithered in taking any action. "It was not a tragedy! It was murder!" residents shouted as they marched towards the office of Sao Paulo Governor João Doria. "The police come here only to beat us and to create problems and not to protect us. They do not like our parties. This time they went too far, causing the death of innocent people," says Julio Neto, 21, a slum resident wearing a T-shirt that read "Justice for the 9 of Paraisópolis."

Even as Paraisópolis waits for justice, a study has revealed how blacks and mixed-race people, who form 56% of the Brazilian population, face discrimination at every step of life. According to a report released by the country's top research firm in November, blacks represent three out of four people in the poorest group; in the richest group, blacks are only one in four people. The positions, said the report, with the highest salaries are held by a white majority. In 2018, for every seven white people in top positions, there was only one black woman. In the field of IT, the blacks have just 4% representation, the report said.

The only place the blacks have more representation than the whites is the country's notorious prison system, where they make up 64% of the inmates. According to a Ministry of Justice report published in 2017, a typical prisoner in Brazil is a "male, under 30 years of age, black and uneducated". A report released by Amnesty International in 2017 showed that of the 56,000 homicides in Brazil every year, 77% of the victims were young, poor, male and black.

Right-wing black

Despite such high inequality, a large number of Brazilians live in complete denial of race-based discrimination. In a shocking statement last month, Sergio Camargo, the head of Palmares Foundation whose mandate includes working with the Ministry of Culture to support "policies for the inclusion of Afro-descendants in the process of development", said racism in Brazil was only a "leftist propaganda". Mr. Camargo, a black man who supports President Jair Bolsonaro, also called for the abolition of the Black Awareness Day, celebrated every year on November 20. "Black Awareness Day is a shame and needs to be relentlessly fought until it loses its relevance and disappears from the calendar," said Mr. Camargo, who calls himself a "right-wing black who is against political correctness".

But the young Afro-Brazilians, like the ones who died in Paraisópolis, are not willing to take it lying down. For the past two weeks, they have been raising slogans against the police and campaigning on social media. Their effort forced Governor Doria, who initially defended his police force, to meet the family members of the victims and community leaders. In the past 10 days, Mr. Doria has removed 38 police officers, who were connected with the incident, from street patrolling and instructed the police to review their protocols while dealing with people. "I was very shocked when I saw the video of a PM unnecessarily beating young people out of a confined space," Mr. Doria said, adding that PM officers would be present at Baile Funk parties on Saturdays.

Paraisópolis residents, still fighting for justice, hope the police will be there for their protection, and not to crush the party.

Where Afghans fight each other

Afghan militias' night raids and U.S. air strikes have caused a large number of civilian deaths

BAGHLAN

Emran Feroz is a freelance journalist

"The situation here is not good. Actually, this place is never considered as safe", said Mir Suleiman, a teacher from the northern Afghan province of Baghlan. He grew up in an area called "the factory", which is named after an sugar plant that has been built in the 1940s near Pol-e Khomri, the provincial capital.

The area, once used to be an economic hub that attracted labourers and merchants from all around the country, is now haunted by violence. Several parts of Baghlan are controlled or contested by the Taliban. Fighting between the insurgents and security forces are taking place on a daily basis. "The other side of the [Kunduz] river belongs to the Taliban. You can see and hear their motorcycles from here," said Farzad Sattar, a local engineer.

While some youngsters are busy fishing, Mr. Sattar describes how the the war continues to tear apart families and friends in the province. "We all know each other here. But you will find people fighting on different sides, even within families. There is one brother who joins the Taliban, and there's another one who goes to the Afghan National Army. "Young men are often easily recruited by the Taliban and thereby leave their families. "I think it's not just the propaganda they are trapped in. We have to consider the fact that everyone in Baghlan grew up with violence. They don't know anything else," said Mr. Sattar.

While the U.S. restarted peace talks with the Taliban earlier this month in Qatar, people in Baghlan

do not think that even a peace deal would bring in any immediate change to their lives. The U.S.-Taliban talks are focussed on the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. It's not about ending the war in which Afghans are fighting Afghans. Most battles are taking place between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces.

"Any peace deal would be good, but we need to stop ourselves killing each other. A deal with the Americans would not guarantee enduring peace in Baghlan and many other parts of Afghanistan," said Mohammad Sultan, a local. He points out that government forces have become very violent too and often target civilians. "Often, they don't care if you are an insurgent or not. They just attack you and question later."

Civilian casualties on the rise

Recent reports underline that civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces increased in 2019. For example, a new report by the Human Rights Watch documents the violence caused by CIA-backed Afghan militias who are known for night-rime raids at homes in remote villages, forced disappearances, torture and summary executions.

"In case after case, these forces have simply shot people in their custody and consigned entire communities to the terror of abusive night raids and indiscriminate airstrikes," said Patricia Gossman, Associate Asia Director and the report's author, after speaking to three dozen witnesses of such operations.

In the 50-page report released last October, the New York-based rights group documents 14 cases across nine provinces over the last two years. According to HRW, the cases clearly illustrate that the Afghan forces trained and funded by the U.S. intelligence agency have shown little concern for civilian life and or accountability to international law. The militias are active all over the country, most recently in the provinces of Khost, Paktia, Paktika, Nangarhar and Wardak.

According to the UN, Afghan and international military forces have been responsible for at least 484 civilian deaths and 777 civilian injuries so far in 2009. At least 468 of those civilian deaths were attributed to foreign military forces. Most of these casualties are results of airstrikes. U.S. forces conducted at least 797 air strikes in the month of October alone, which amounts to an average of 26 strikes a day, according to the Pentagon.

"Airstrikes happen in Baghlan too, but there are much more in neighbouring Kunduz," said Mohammad Sultan, who grew up in the region. Large parts of Kunduz province are controlled by the Taliban. In 2015, its provincial capital fell into the hands of the insurgents for a few days. The temporary fall of Kunduz was a shock for both President Ashraf Ghani and his international backers. It was the first big city that was captured by the Taliban since 2001.

The city was recaptured later. But "it's wrong to believe that the Taliban are gone," said another local resident. "They don't control the city but they are everywhere else. Their fighters regularly come to Baghlan. This is happening because we have a weak and corrupt government."

California's new climate refugees

Nearly 2,00,000 people were evacuated from northern California due to wildfires this year

BERKELEY

Kunal Shankar is a journalist based in U.S.

"Perhaps because the U.S. is such a large, large country, we don't think in terms of ourselves as being refugees often, even though people are moving. And so, climate refugee is not a term we use to describe ourselves even though every time something like this wildfire happens, clearly, we are moving, you know?" Cynthia Strecker thought aloud sitting in her son's South Berkeley home. She had moved there following the Kincade Fire in northern California late October this year.

Ms. Cynthia, 73, a retired school teacher, has spent four decades living in the woods in Monte Rio, an idyllic town of just over 1,000 people along the Russian River, about 120 km northwest of Berkeley. But this October 26 was the first time she had to evacuate due to a wildfire. Nearly 2,00,000 people were ordered to evacuate from northern California's Sonoma County, the heart of the State's storied wine country.

Climate refugees is not a term that exists in international law, according to UNHCR. Climate change was not known in 1951 when the Refugee Convention was designed in the aftermath of the World Wars. The UNHCR refers to climate refugees as "persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change", clubbing them with other Internally Displaced Persons, who are not protected by a legal instrument unless they face armed conflict.

Moreover, movements due to climate incidents rarely evolve into international refugee migration, especially in large countries that offer habitable spaces in other regions.

But the lack of a universal legal framework to deal with climate-related displacements leaves such incidents to be dealt with largely by nation-states. Some fleeing the Kincade Fire camped out for days in their cars in Walmart parking lots and a cathedral as shelters and evacuation centres swelled. For some, this was their second year in a row. As the smoke from the fires spread, commuters in the Bay Area wore face masks handed to them by local non-profits.

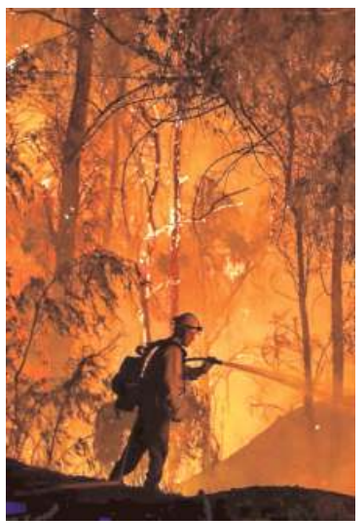
The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre states that of the 30.6 million people displaced in 2017, 18.8 million were disaster-related. The U.S. ranked sixth among the top 10 countries with nearly 1.7 million people moving due to disaster-related displacements in 2017 alone. That year, China topped the list with 4.5 million, followed by the Philippines with 2.5 million people displaced due to climate-related disasters.

In the U.S., the hardest hit are usually undocumented farm workers. Christie Lubin, who works at the Graton Day Labor Center, an undocumented workers' union for wine country daily wagers, said many members had lost nearly 10 days of wages and were struggling to pay rent for November. Ms. Lubin, along with her two daughters and their families, had to be evacuated from Graton.

'Fire tornadoes'

With lessons learnt from extremely destructive wildfires in the past couple of years, CalFire, the State's fire protection agency, was particularly pro-active this year. Residents also perhaps heeded calls to evacuate more readily than in previous years. Ms. Cynthia considers this sentiment as she sizes up the mind-boggling prospect of fire-proofing her redwood tree shingle-home.

The former Mayor of Palo Alto, Patrick Burt, called these fast-moving conflagrations "fire tornadoes". He



said it is something people had never witnessed before. Palo Alto is a small but wealthy city located in the heart of the Silicon Valley, sandwiched between the global headquarters of Google and Facebook. Administrators here fear a sea-level rise incident. When this reporter asked Mr. Burt how such climate events would be handled in the future, he said: "What is becoming apparent with the risk of massive wildfires and entire communities being eliminated, like in the case of Paradise – this is becoming a first world case of significant numbers of climate refugees. In more affluent countries, there are choices that could be made in the event of a climate-driven mass evacuation, which is the choice of return."

Mr. Burt added: "A small city administration would not be adequate to address climate change. On sea level rise, we have begun a San Francisco Bay wide coordinated plan, but there is no funding in place. In Palo Alto, we included an adaptation plan and looked at sea level rise and wondered which places to protect and places from where we would have to retreat. Could this be done without mass migration? We don't know, but displacement might be unavoidable".

Sri Lanka and the world under the new presidency

Colombo has seen both engagement and confrontation with outside world under new govt.

COLOMBO

Meera Srinivasan is *The Hindu*'s Colombo correspondent

In the weeks that followed President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's big election win, Sri Lanka witnessed some rapid international outreach – both from and to Colombo – reflecting the strategic and geographic prominence of the Indian Ocean island that is home to 21 million people.

India was among the earliest to reach out to the new leader, perhaps reflecting South Block's hope of emerging Sri Lanka's foremost partner.

Mr. Rajapaksa had barely assumed charge as President when External Affairs Minister Jaishankar landed in Colombo, to hand over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to New Delhi. In about a fortnight after his election, the newly-elected Sri Lankan President flew to New Delhi, promising to renew strong ties after a period of "misunderstanding" between India and the Rajapaksas. In an interestingly-timed interview to Indian website Bharat Shakti ahead of his departure, President Rajapaksa said his government will not do anything that would threaten India's security, and even spoke of possibly renegotiating the deal on the Chinese-built port in the southern Hambantota district where New Delhi's past concerns are known.

Both sides hailed the visit as successful, with India pledging a $450-million line of credit to Sri Lanka, in addition to telling media that New Delhi conveyed to President Rajapaksa its "expectation" that he will take post-war reconciliation forward. Mr. Rajapaksa tweeted about inviting Mr. Modi to be the first fo-

reign dignitary to visit Sri Lanka in his presidency.

The regional outreach would continue the following week, with the visit of Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. During his talks, Mr. Rajapaksa sought Islamabad's help in tackling the drug menace and extremism. Mr. Qureshi handed over an invitation from Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to his counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa, who accepted it.

Next to visit was Wu Jianghao, a special envoy from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, who called on the Rajapaksa brothers helming the country's two most powerful offices. Colombo's leaders, across party lines, have traditionally held a close relationship with China – one of its biggest donors – as well as with Pakistan.

'No debt trap'

Recently, dismissing criticism of high-interest Chinese loans, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa told China's state-run Xinhua news agency that Sri Lanka's engagement with the China-initiated Belt and Road Initiative did not amount to a "debt-trap" as portrayed by some "western media". "If Sri Lanka and China have any problems, we can easily discuss and resolve them as friends," he said. However, not all matters on foreign relations have been pleasant. The U.K.'s Conservative Party may not have realised that omitting an Oxford comma in its manifesto would spark a diplomatic incident.

"We will continue to support international initiatives to achieve reconciliation, stability and justice across the world, and in current or former conflict zones such as Cyprus, Sri Lanka and the Middle East, where we maintain our support for a two-state solution," it read, leading some in Sri Lanka to interpret it as an endorsement of a two-state solution in Sri Lanka as well. Following criticism in Sri Lanka, the party clarified that the "two-state" reference only pertained to the Israel-Palestine situation in West Asia.

But another issue, regarding the alleged abduction and sexual harassment of a local staffer of the Colombo-based Swiss Embassy, has only escalated in the past few weeks, with Colombo and Bern putting out conflicting accounts of the incident.

Late November, the Embassy said its local staff member had been "detained" and "threatened" by a group of men in a "serious security incident". The Sri Lankan national, attached to the visa section, was reportedly forced to divulge sensitive information, soon after a senior police investigator probing cases involving members of the Rajapaksa family, sought asylum in Switzerland.

After a Colombo court imposed travel restrictions on the staffer and ordered a medical examination, the staffer has been testifying before the Criminal Investigation Department for hours together. Meanwhile the Secretary to the Defence Ministry has called the reported incident "a big drama".

Clearly, Colombo's foreign relations have seen both – proactive outreach and active confrontation – in the first month under the new administration. For foreign policy watchers here, 2020 might be a telling year for Sri Lanka and the world.

India starts as the overwhelming favourite in ODI series

Faltering Pant continues to be the cynosure; West Indies in a rebuilding mode in the 50-over format

WI IN INDIA

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

In a city known for its heat and humidity, the last two days have been a bit of an anomaly with gloomy weather and intermittent showers welcoming India and the West Indies ahead of the first One-Day International to be played at the M.A Chidambaram Stadium on Sunday.

While the teams wouldn't mind the pleasant weather, it has not exactly helped in terms of preparations with India's optional practice session being cancelled on Saturday.

However, it shouldn't matter much for the home team as it will start the overwhelming favourite despite not playing an ODI in the last four months.

Add to that, India's ODI record against West Indies in recent times has been impressive, the Men in Blue winning the last nine bilateral series.

West Indies' last triumph over India came 13 years ago – a 4-1 win in 2006 in the Caribbean islands.

Runs and tons: Rohit Sharma is an asset to India at the top of the order. ▪ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Potent force

Despite the absence of Shikhar Dhawan, India's top-order of Rohit Sharma, K.L. Rahul and Virat Kohli continues to be a potent force, especially with Rahul finding form in the recent T20Is, with three half-centuries from four outings.

While India's top-order is one of the best in the world, the same can't be said of the middle-order and that is something the team would want to set right in this series. It has been a cause of worry for the second-ranked side in the world for a while and it proved to be costly in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand.

Over the last few years, the team management has tried different players in the middle-order, from Manish Pandey and Ambati Rayudu to Dinesh Karthik and Vijay Shankar without satisfactory results.

This series provides an opportunity for the likes of Shreyas Iyer and Shivam Dube, who could make his ODI debut on Sunday, to show what they can do. Shreyas was impressive in his last two ODI appearances in the West Indies with two half-centuries and has had some valuable knocks in the T20Is as well.

Under fire

But all eyes will be on Rishabh Pant, who has been under fire in recent times and it will be a crucial series for the wicketkeeper-batsman. One good thing going for him, though, is the faith the captain and the team management have shown in him as they see the 22-year-old as someone with the X-factor who could become a genuine match-winner for the side.

The West Indies, on the other hand, is a side in rebuilding mode in the one-day format with five new players, who were not part of the T20I squad.

More than just flamboyance

The outcome of the match will be based on how the team handles the middle overs with both bat and ball, as it demands a certain level of patience, temperament and an ability to grind through, than just flamboyance.

A lot will depend on players like Shimron Hetmyer and Nicholas Pooran with the bat, while with the ball, the onus is on spinners like Hayden Walsh Jr. and Khary Pierre.

Another key player will be Roston Chase, who was the man-of-the-series for his all-round exploits in the 3-0 triumph over Afghanistan.

It was the West Indies' first ODI series victory in five years and Kieron Pollard's men seem determined to start a new chapter in this format as evident from the hard yards the team put on Saturday despite the rain.

Sunday will be the first chance to find where the team stands in the pecking order against one of the best sides in the world.

The teams (from):
India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, Mayank Agarwal, K.L. Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Manish Pandey, Shreyas Iyer, Kedar Jadhav, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur.
West Indies: Kieron Pollard (Capt.), Sunil Ambris, Shai Hope, Khary Pierre, Roston Chase, Alzarri Joseph, Sheldon Cottrell, Brandon King, Nicholas Pooran, Shimron Hetmyer, Evin Lewis, Romario Shepherd, Jason Holder, Keemo Paul and Hayden Walsh Jr.
Umpires (on-field): Shaun George, Nitin Menon; **Third umpire:** Rod Tucker; **Fourth umpire:** Anil Choudhary;
Match referee: David Boon.
Match starts at 1.30 p.m. IST

▪ India has won the last nine bilateral ODI series against West Indies

STAT SPHERE

India vs West Indies in ODIs
Matches - 130
India - 62
West Indies - 62
Tied - 2
No Result - 4

India vs West Indies in ODIs in India
Matches - 55
India - 27
West Indies - 27
Tied - 1

THE DATES
December 15, **Chennai**
December 18, **Visakhapatnam**
December 22, **Cuttack**
All matches begin at 1.30 p.m.
Live on Star Sports 1 (SD & HD)

COMPILED BY ANANTAAJITH RA

INDIA
TOP RUN-SCORERS

Player	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	Strike Rate	50s/100s
Kohli	35	2146	157*	76.64	97.1	10/9
Tendulkar	39	1573	141*	52.43	78.02	11/4
Dravid	38	1348	109*	42.12	74.39	8/3
Rohit	28	1265	162	57.5	89.97	10/2
Ganguly	27	1142	98	47.58	72.18	11/0

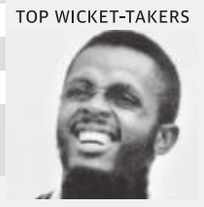
TOP WICKET-TAKERS

Name	Inns	Wkts	BBM	Ave	Eco	4W/5W
Kapil	42	43	4/54	28.88	3.62	1/0
Kumble	25	41	6/12	23.73	4.36	1/1
Jadeja	26	38	5/36	27.34	4.69	1/1
Harbhajan	30	33	3/32	34.27	4.26	0/0
Agarkar	21	32	3/24	24.5	4.49	0/0

WEST INDIES
TOP RUN-SCORERS

Player	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	Strike Rate	50s/100s
Haynes	36	1357	152*	42.4	64.28	9/2
Gayle	41	1334	140	32.53	88.99	6/4
Chanderpaul	41	1319	149*	35.64	76.37	10/2
Sarwan	31	1296	115*	58.9	75.65	11/1
Hooper	42	1279	113*	44.1	84.75	8/1

TOP WICKET-TAKERS



Name	Inns	Wkts	BBM	Ave	Eco	4W/5W
Walsh	38	44	4/16	24.15	3.24	2/0
Hooper	45	36	4/37	39.55	4.65	1/0
Richards	22	36	6/41	21.97	4.63	1/1
Ambrose	25	32	4/36	22.46	3.23	1/0
Rampaul	14	28	5/51	23.78	5.62	3/1

Pant can be the X-factor, says Rathour

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

India's batting coach Vikram Rathour laid out a strong case for persisting with wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant despite the youngster's lean patch with the bat.

Ahead of the first ODI on Sunday, Rathour explained the reasons for the long rope given to the 22-year-old Delhi player.

"The reason why we keep discussing him is that he has got immense ability. Everybody (the selectors and team-management) believes he can be the X-factor. He is working hard on his game and fitness and we hope he comes good. Once he starts coming good, he can be a match-winner. He has been given an opportunity because he has done well in this format in the past," said Rathour.

Complete backing: India's batting coach Rathour feels Pant has been given an opportunity because he has done well in the past. ▪ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

When asked if Pant needed a break considering the intense criticism he has come under, Rathour said, "I don't think the time has arrived yet (for a break). I think he is working on certain things, he is looking good in the nets and we are just hoping he comes good.

"He has played a couple of reasonable innings in the last few games in the T20s. Even in the last game, he was asked to do a certain job which he did, that's what the team looks for. It didn't come off, which happens on certain days."

On the issues with the middle-order, Rathour said the fact that top-order has done the bulk of the scoring meant the middle-order has often not had enough time.

"That's a difficult problem to address when the top-order is doing well.

"You are right, they are not getting enough balls to bat but I don't think we can do anything as a team to address it," said the former India opener.

'On a mission to do well in ODIs'

Pollard wants youngsters to embrace new methods to excel

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

On the back of a 3-0 series win over Afghanistan, West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard says his team is embarking on a mission to do well in one-dayers with a specific process and plans in place.

"We come with a clear mission and plan on how to approach 50-over cricket," said the big-hitting allrounder.

"We need to be clear on how to play the game and we need to get guys who are responsible and accountable for those things. It's a process that we are going through. There are things we are working on internally, and hopefully, the results will take effect in time to come. It's not going to happen overnight obviously, but we are willing to work."

Pollard, who took over as full-time captain in white-ball cricket ahead of the Afghanistan series in Lucknow, also added that he wants the youngsters to embrace new methods to excel.

"For the younger guys in our team, it is a matter of changing training habits and being more focused on what you want to do, what you want to achieve and put more into your game.

"I'm not saying the guys haven't done it – they've done it. But sometimes we need to do the extra, and that's something we've spoken about with this bunch of guys we have."

The 32-year-old also had words of praise for allrounder Roston Chase and the balance he gives to the side.

"He is, first of all, a Test batsman – he has Test hundreds – and that in itself is a great asset for us. Given that, he can bowl as well, allows playing an extra bowler or an extra allrounder or an extra batsman. He has come in [as] a left-field selection, but that's something that has worked for us."

Key players: Jason Holder, right, and allrounder Roston Chase will hope to give India a tough time. ▪ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Aussies in command despite collapse

Southee hits back with four scalps after Kiwi batting debacle

NZ IN AUSTRALIA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PERTH

Australia was in a commanding position despite a late batting collapse on the third day of the first Test against New Zealand here on Saturday.

Having led by 250 runs on the first innings, the home side was 167 for six at stumps, with Matthew Wade on eight and Pat Cummins on one – an overall lead of 417.

Cruising at 131 for one when Marnus Labuschagne (50) and Joe Burns (53) were at the crease, the Australians lost five for 29 under lights later in the day against some spirited bowling from the Kiwis, with Tim Southee claiming four for 63.

Labuschagne, dropped on four by Colin de Grandhomme off the bowling of Neil Wagner (two for 40), missed the chance to join elite company when he pulled a short ball straight to Mitchell Santner at mid-wicket from the same bowler.

Gone! Tim Paine is castled by Tim Southee. ▪ AP

Without a Test century only a month ago, he was on track to become just the second Australian, and fifth overall, to score four Test centuries in succession.

The only Australian to do so previously was Jack Fingleton in 1936.

Dar hurt

Santner couldn't get a wicket with his spin, but he was the centre of attention in the field, colliding with Aleem Dar late in the day and leaving the umpire with a knee injury.

Dar, umpiring in a record 129th Test, spent several minutes lying on the ground and needed medical attention before returning to his post.

Smith's relatively lean summer continued when he holed out to a short ball from Wagner for 16, the first time in his entire 71-Test career he has gone three matches without a half-century.

SCOREBOARD

Australia — 1st innings: 416.
New Zealand — 1st innings: J. Raval b Hazlewood 1, T. Latham c & b Starc 0, K. Williamson c Smith b Starc 34, R. Taylor c Smith b Lyon 80, H. Nicholls c Paine b Starc 7, N. Wagner b Starc 0, B-J. Watling b Cummins 8, C. de Grandhomme c Smith b Starc 23, M. Santner b Labuschagne 2, T. Southee c sub b Lyon 8, L. Ferguson (not out) 0; Extras (b-1, lb-2): 3. Total (in 55.2 overs): 166.
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-1, 3-77, 4-97, 5-97, 6-120, 7-147, 8-155, 9-166.
Australia bowling: Starc 18-2-52-5, Hazlewood 1.2-1-0-1, Cummins 14.4-3-46-1, Wade 2-0-8-0, Lyon 14.2-2-48-2, Labuschagne 5-1-9-1.
Australia — 2nd innings: D. Warner c sub b Southee 19, J. Burns c Nicholls b Southee 53, M. Labuschagne c Santner b Wagner 50, S. Smith c Raval b Wagner 16, M. Wade (batting) 8, T. Head c de Grandhomme b Southee 5, T. Paine b Southee 0, P. Cummins (batting) 1; Extras (lb-3, nb-5, w-7): 15. Total (for 6 wkts. in 57 overs): 167.
Fall of wickets: 1-44, 2-131, 3-148, 4-154, 5-160, 6-160.
New Zealand bowling: Southee 19-6-63-4, de Grandhomme 13-2-26-0, Wagner 17-2-40-2, Santner 8-0-35-0.

A waiter's tip to Sachin

Sachin Tendulkar.
▪ FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

SPORTS BUREAU
MUMBAI

Sachin Tendulkar, on Saturday, tweeted a video where he is seen enquiring about the identity of a certain staffer at Chennai's Taj Coromandel hotel who had 'helped' him during a Test series.

A waiter, who had come to Tendulkar's room to serve him coffee, told him about a change in his bat swing when he batted with an elbow guard. "I noticed that whenever you wear an arm-guard, your bat swing changes. He said he was a huge fan and used to watch every ball rewinding the action 5-7 times."

Tendulkar, who has called out to netizens to help him find the waiter, added: "I said, yes! You are the only person in the world who figured that out. You won't believe that I actually came back to my room from the ground and carried my elbow guard and redesigned it: the correct size, the right amount of padding, where the straps should be and all that."

IN BRIEF

Mark Boucher named South Africa head coach

CAPE TOWN

Former Test wicketkeeper Mark Boucher was on Saturday named as South African team head coach until 2023. The announcement was made by CSA interim director of cricket Graeme Smith. Enoch Nkwe was named assistant coach. AFP

FC Goa beats ATK

MARGAO

FC Goa beat ATK 2-1 in an entertaining match to go on top of the Indian Super League points table here on Saturday. After a barren first-half, the game saw three goals in six minutes.

With 15 points from eight matches, Sergio Lobera's team displaced ATK at the top of the table. Antonio Habas' men are second with 14 points.

The result: FC Goa 2 (Mourtada Fall 60, Ferran Corominas 66) bt ATK 1 (Jobby Justin 64). PTI

Pakistan-Sri Lanka first Test: fourth day called off

RAWALPINDI

Overnight rain and poor light continued to mar Pakistan's first home Test in a decade on Saturday, with the umpires calling off the fourth day's play due to wet conditions and poor light. Sri Lanka was 282 for six in its first innings with Dhananjaya de Silva unbeaten on 87 and Dilruwan Perera not out on six. AFP

Salah's strikes help Liverpool pull further away

Klopp's men 10 points clear at the top; Sociedad shares honours with Barca in four-goal thriller

Dan the Don: Gosling was in the thick of things for Bournemouth against Chelsea. ▪ REUTERS

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCIES
LIVERPOOL

Liverpool moved 10 points clear at the top of the Premier League after a brace by Mohamed Salah gave it a 2-0 win over Watford at Anfield on Saturday.

Salah produced the two moments of real quality from Jurgen Klopp's men by finishing off from a rapid counter-attack off a Watford corner to open the scoring before flicking home a second a minute from time.

In La Liga, Barcelona was held to a 2-2 draw by high-flying Real Sociedad.

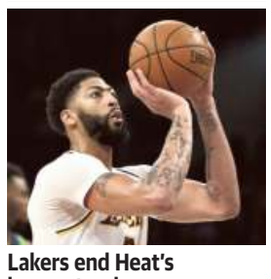
A mistake by Barca's usually excellent goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen gifted la Real an equaliser in a thrilling contest at Anoeta between two of the most attacking teams.

The results:
Saturday: EPL: Burnley 1 (Wood 58) bt Newcastle 0; Chelsea 0 lost to Bournemouth 1 (Gosling 84); Leicester 1 (Krul 38-og) drew with Norwich 1 (Pukki 26); Liverpool 2 (Salah 38, 90) bt Watford 0; Sheffield United 2 (Fleck 50, 73) bt Aston Villa 0.
La Liga: Real Sociedad 2 (Oyarzaval 12-pen, Isak 62) drew with Barcelona 2 (Griezmann 38, Suarez 49); Granada 1 (Machis 60) lost to Levante 2 (Rochina 55, Bardhi 89).
Bundesliga: Bayern Munich 6 (Coutinho 45, 63, 78, Lewandowski 45+3, 72, Mueller 75) bt Werder Bremen 1 (Rashica 24); Hertha Berlin 1 (Darida 53) bt Freiburg 0; Mainz 0 lost to Borussia Dortmund 4 (Reus 32, Sancho 66, Hazard 69, Schulz 84); Cologne 2 (Cordoba 73, Bornauw 84) bt Bayer Leverkusen 0; Paderborn 1 (Proeger 33) drew with Union Berlin 1 (Ingvartsen 7)
Serie A: Brescia 3 (Chancellor 32, Torregrossa 44, Spalek 61) bt Lecce 0.
Friday: **La Liga**: Alaves 1 (Joselu 81) drew with Leganes 1 (Braithwaite 43).
Bundesliga: Hoffenheim 2 (Skov 14, Locadia 80) lost to Augsburg 4 (Max 11, 51, Jensen 56, Iago 85).

TV PICKS

NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 a.m.
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka: 1st Test, Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.
Australia vs New Zealand: 1st Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.
BWF World Tour Finals: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.
India vs West Indies: 1st ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m. , 7.30 p.m. & 1 a.m. (Monday)
Premier League: SS Select 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m. & 9.30 p.m.
ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Bundesliga: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 10 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Monday).

IN BRIEF



Lakers end Heat's home streak

LOS ANGELES

Anthony Davis scored a game-high 33 points and delivered a pep talk to LeBron James as the Los Angeles Lakers handed the Miami Heat their first loss at home with a 113-110 victory on Friday. James scored 28 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds and leading scorer Davis also had 10 rebounds for the Lakers, who extended their winning streak to six games.

The results: Houston 130 bt Orlando 107; Philadelphia 116 bt New Orleans 109; Lakers 113 bt Miami 110; Indiana 110 bt Atlanta 100; Charlotte 83 bt Chicago 73; Milwaukee 127 bt Memphis 114; Utah 114 bt Golden State 106; Clippers 124 bt Minnesota 117; New York 103 bt Sacremento 101. AGENCIES

Olympic legend Peter Snell dead

WELLINGTON

Three-time Olympic champion and World mile record-holder Peter Snell has died in Dallas. He was 80. Snell, who is regarded as one of the greatest middle-distance runners, won the 800m at the 1960 Rome Olympics and the 800-1,500 double at the 1964 Tokyo Games. He was the first man since 1920 to win the 800 and 1,500 at the same Olympics. No male athlete has done so since. Snell also won two CWG gold medals in the 880 yards and mile at Perth in 1962. AP

Lara weighs in for blind cricket

Lauds the initiative for providing a platform for disabled women

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

West Indian great Brian Lara has lent support to cricket for the blind by associating himself with the cause ahead of the Blind Cricket Nationals for women, sponsored by the Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled.

In an effort to promote equality and parity, Cricket Association for Blind in India (CABI) has taken the initiative to organise this tournament, to be held in the T20 format from December 16-19.

With India's marquee woman cricketer Smriti Mandhana championing the cause, CABI hopes to nurture the dreams and aspirations of talented women's cricketers and mould them into role models for the future.

CABI is also looking for support from BCCI and recently met Board president Sourav Ganguly. "Sourav is very inclusive and I am sure he will support blind cricket," Lara said.

"Disability should not be considered a hindrance to achieving one's goals," said Lara.

"I thoroughly appreciate this fantastic initiative taken by CABI and Samarthanam Trust and I am convinced that if such strong stakeholders come together around the world, there is no reason why blind cricket will not see a growth world over. Such competitions will also provide a platform for talented women and empower them."

On blind cricket, Lara added, "I'm not blind. And I'm very grateful and blessed to have all my faculties to be able to do the things that I've done throughout my career.

"But if I was, I suppose I will feel some sort of injustice. I would be like I wasn't given a fair share. But I'll come to terms with it. And I'd want to do the same things that I have done, as opposed to what I say.

"I would want to go to school, want to learn. Want to be educated, want to have a job. I would want to have recreation. I feel very proud and humbled to be in their presence. I feel this is wonderful."

Seven teams representing the Delhi, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and West Bengal will fight it out in the league stages over the first two days spread over three venues in Siri Fort Sports Complex, DDA Sports Complex in Saket and Jamia Milia University.

The final will be played at the Siri Fort Sports Complex.

For a worthy cause: Brian Lara with cricketers at the launch of the Blind Cricket Nationals for women on Saturday. ▪RAKESH RAO

Young chalks up victory

MRF CHALLENGE

SPORTS BUREAU
SAKHIR (BAHRAIN)

Dylan Young of Australia showcased his vast experience to chalk up a fluent win in the final race of the second round of the MRF Challenge, a support-event for the FIA World Endurance Championship, at the Bahrain International Circuit, here on Saturday.

Young, 30, while scoring his second win in the championship following his success in the first round at Dubai last month, ended the Bent Viscaal-David Schumacher domination.

The results notwithstanding, championship leader Michelangelo Amendola of Belgium, who had won three of the five races in Dubai, maintained his top position.

He took his tally to 143 points, followed by Young (127) and Joshua Mason (Britain, 115). The title will be decided in Chennai, which will host the final round at the MMRT from Feb. 14-16 next year with a six-race card.

The results:

Race 2: 1. David Schumacher (Ger, 20:24.266s); 2. Bent Viscaal (Ned, 20:25.968); 3. Dylan Young (Aus, 20:25.994).

Race 3: 1. Viscaal (20:16.541); 2. Schumacher (20:17.306); 3. Yuven Sundaramoorthy (USA, 20:23.243).

Race 4: 1. Young (20:27.236); 2. Manaf Hijjawi (Jor, 20:28.071); 3. Schumacher (20:29.810).

On the podium: Dylan Young, centre, flanked by Manaf Hijjawi, left, and David Schumacher. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Schiavone defeats cancer

Schiavone. ▪GETTY IMAGES

ROME
AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Former French Open champion Francesca Schiavone said on Friday she had defeated cancer, defiantly telling fans: "I'm still breathing". The 39-year-old, who became the first Italian woman to win a Grand Slam title with victory at Roland Garros in 2010, revealed her diagnosis in a short video on her *Instagram* account. "A cancer had been diagnosed to me. I fought a tough battle and now I have won this fight. And now I am back in action," she said. AFP

Crespi takes EB to the top

I-LEAGUE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Marti Crespi netted a goal a minute from time to help East Bengal beat TRAU FC 2-1 in an I-League fixture Saturday. The victory took the red-and-gold brigade to eight points and top of the standings after four rounds.

The hosts went ahead in the first half through Marcos de la Espada, but the strike was neutralised by Deepak Devrani who found the target during injury-time in the opening period.

Riding on the confidence of its 4-1 win away at Neroca, East Bengal began strongly. The host missed Spanish attacker Jaime Santos, who was suspended. He was replaced by Ronaldo Oliveira.

Samad Ali Mallick made a move for East Bengal in the eighth minute, but his attempt, from the top of the box, went off the cross-piece. Samad turned provider 10 minutes later, his floater into the TRAU box helping Espada nod home. East Bengal failed to hold on to its advantage for long as TRAU defender Deepak scored the equaliser in the first minute of added time.

East Bengal struggled to break through TRAU defence after the break. It finally found a way, in the 89th, when defender Crespi provided the perfect finish.

The result: East Bengal 2 (Marcos de la Espada 17, Marti Crespi 89) bt TRAU FC 1 (Deepak Devrani 45+1).

Altered course will challenge the best

TSK 25K

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

An altered course will challenge some of the best long distance runners from across the world and India in the sixth edition of the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K here on Sunday.

A 9km stretch, including a significant hill and a flyover, has been altered to make the route a one-way path. The change will help participants get a clear course and drastically reduced traffic.

Double World marathon champion and Olympic silver medallist Abel Kirui from Kenya, former Olympic 10,000m bronze medallist Tariku Bekele of Ethiopia and former World cross country silver medal winner Leonard Barosoton of Kenya will be part of the international men's field in the IAAF Silver Label event, which offers a total prize money of $100,000.

Tariku, who is targeting 2:02 in marathon, has taken inputs from his brother and 2017 champion Kenenisa Bekele and will use this race as training for big marathons.

For runners like 10,000m specialist Barosoton of Kenya and 3000m steeplechaser American Stanley Kebenei, it will be a test ahead of stiffer road races.

Debele and Matanga in top shape

Among women, promising Ethiopian marathon runner Birke Debele and Tanzanian long distance specialist Failuna Matanga, who placed third two years ago with 1:26:11, are in top shape to give their best.

Sydney marathon third place finisher Tejitu Daba, who has switched from Ethiopia to Bahrain, and Ethiopian Guteni Shone, who ended inside top three in two marathons this year, will be among the top contenders.

Delhi half-marathon podium finishers Srinu Bugatha and Harshad Mhatre among men and local girl Shyamali Singh and Priti Lamba among women will try to claim top positions in the Indian category.

The race has attracted an overall 15,445 entries.

AICF ignores Ministry suggestion

CHESS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Ignoring the Sports Ministry's suggestion that its urgent General Body Meeting be cancelled, the All India Chess Federation (AICF) went ahead with the meeting here on Saturday.

In one of the important decisions taken at the meeting, called by president P.R. Venketrama Raja, the AICF decided to advance the organisational elections to February 10, from May/June, 2020.

It was also decided not to discuss the charges of forgery and financial irregularities during the National sub-junior tournament against the Bengal Chess Association. This was done so that the issue could be taken up in the presence of the Sports Ministry's observer at the GBM in Bhopal on Dec. 28.

It was also decided to form a four-member committee, comprising AICF secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan, treasurer Kishor Bandekar, Madhya Pradesh secretary Kapil Saxena and FIDE Zone 3.7 president Ravindra Dongre, to assist the president in the election process on February 10.

It is learnt that representatives of 17 associations participated in Saturday's meeting.

War Hammer clinches Bangalore 2000 Guineas

BENGALURU: Prasanna Kumar-trained War Hammer (Suraj Narredu up) won the Bangalore 2000 Guineas, the chief event of the races held here on Saturday (Dec. 14). The winner is owned by Dr. C.A. Prashanth, Mr. Gautam Basapa, Mr. Manjunath B.S. and Mr. Apana Subaiya P.

Suraj, who kept War Hammer a handy close last position till the home stretch, started manoeuvring his mount in the last 300m from outside and overtook the longtime leader Northern Alliance near 100m and justified the favourite tag to win comfortably.

THE RESULTS:

1 **GULBARGA PLATE** (1,100m), rated 00 to 20: **DEBONAIR** (A. Imran) 1, Kanthaka (Rajesh K) 2, Air Force Our (Darshan) 3 and Love Music (S. Shareef) 4. 2-3/4, 2-3/4 and 2-1/2. 1m 08.42s. ₹15 (w), 12, 11 and 18 (p), SHP: 27, THP: 39, FP: 37, Q: 29, Trinella: 175 and 113, Exacta: 264 and 86. Favourite: Debonair. Owner: Mr. Dayanand Kachuwah. Trainer: Faraz Arshad.

2 **MEKEDATU PLATE** (2,000m), rated 60 & above: **COSMOS** (Suraj) 1, Velocidad (Srinath) 2, Corybantic (I. Chisty) 3 and Indian Pharaoh (David Allan) 4. 5-3/4, 4 and 3/4. 2m 05.50s. ₹13 (w), 10 and 15 (p), SHP: 21, THP: 50, FP: 19, Q: 25, Trinella: 174 and 151, Exacta: 268 and 95. Favourite: Cosmos. Owners: Mr. Rienzie M.K. Edwards & Mrs. P.P.M. Edwards. Trainer: Darius Byramji.

3 **S.V. SUBRAMANIAM MEMORIAL TROPHY** (1,200m), rated 45 to 65: **KVASIR** (J.H. Arul) 1, Akita Pro (S. Shareef) 2, Silver Dew (Darshan) 3 and Spanish Beauty (S. John) 4. 1, Shd and 2. 1m 13.32s. ₹232 (w), 36, 16 and 29 (p), SHP: 57, THP: 57, FP: 2,046, Q: 624, Trinella: 10,726 and 6,895, Exacta: 95,818 and 20,532. Favourite: Roma Victor. Owners: Mr. Rajan Aggarwal & Mr. Gautam Aggarwal. Trainer: Pradeep Annaiah.

4 **AIR FORCE CUP** (1,600m), rated 30 to 50, 4-y-o & over: **THREE WISHES** (Donoghue) 1, Marco Polo (Srinath) 2, Casey (Antony) 3 and Spirit Bruce (R. Manish) 4. 2, 3/4 and 3-3/4. 1m 39.52s. ₹26 (w), 15, 10 and 31 (p), SHP: 32, THP: 65, FP: 76, Q: 38, Trinella: 500 and 256, Exacta: 3,305 and 1,175. Favourite: Marco Polo. Owners: Mr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy Chettiar of Chattinad Charitable Trust rep. by. Mr. A.C. Muthiah. Trainer: S. Ganapathy.

5 **BANGALORE 2000 GUINEAS** (1,600m), 3-y-o only, (Terms): **WAR HAMMER (AIR SUPPORT-SOVIET LAKE) SURAJ 1,** NORTHERN ALLIANCE (Gusto-Allonia) David Allan 2, SOUTHERN RULER (Saamidd-Farha) Donoghue 3 and ON THE TROT (Win Legend-Windunderherwings) S. John 4. 1-3/4, 3/4 and 4-1/4. 1m 39.35s. ₹12 (w), 11 and 11 (p), SHP: 16, THP: 14, FP: 16, Q: 11, Trinella: 16 and 10. Favourite: War Hammer. Owners: Dr. C.A. Prashanth, Mr. Gautam Basapa, Mr. Manjunath B.S. and Mr. Apana Subaiya P. Trainer: Prasanna Kumar.

6 **KENTUCKY STAKES** (1,200m), maiden 3-y-o only, (Terms): **AACHEN** (C. Umesh) 1, Cavaliere (S. John) 2, Musterion (Donoghue) 3 and Asgardia (Suraj) 4. Hd, 1/2 and snk. 1m 13.66s. ₹107 (w), 31, 13 and 21 (p), SHP: 38, THP: 46, FP: 542, Q: 209, Trinella: 1,044 and 575, Exacta: 14,008 and 2,668. Favourite: Cavaliere. Owner: Mr. Arun Alagappan. Trainer: Irfan Ghatala.

7 **KRISHNA RAJA SAGARA PLATE** (1,400m), rated 15 to 35, 4-y-o & over: **ALEEF** (A. Vishwanath) 1, Back Of Beyond (Md. Asif Khan) 2, Honey Trap (S. John) 3 and Adios (B. Harish) 4. Not run: Zala Princess. 3/4, 2-1/2 and 2-1/2. 1m 27.83s. ₹163 (w), 27, 32 and 16 (p), SHP: 96, THP: 48, FP: 1,166, Q: 1,083, Trinella: 6,443 and 2,259, Exacta: 1,25,600. Favourite: Honey Trap. Owner: Mr. A. Wajid. Trainer: Mahmood Khan.

Jackpot: ₹6,19,801 (one tkts); Runner up: 15,625 (17 tkts); Treble (i): 1,080 (15 tkts); (ii): 9,626 (four tkts).

Share of glory: BTC chairman D. Vinod Sivappa, third from left, along with owners of The Bangalore 2000 Guineas-winning horse War Hammer, from left, Dr. C.A. Prashanth, Gayathri Basapa, Gautam Basapa, P.A. Nanjappa, Apana Subaiya P and Manjunath B.S. and jockey Suraj Narredu, third from right. ▪K. MURALI KUMAR

Two women and one goal

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

They wield two different racquets, but when it comes to taking Indian sport forward through the initiatives of Indian Oil, badminton champion Manjusha Kanwar and tennis ace Rushmi Chakravarthi work in sync.

Both Manjusha and Rushmi have had impressive international careers. They understand sports and thus help their organisation coordinate well with the massive talent pool, and also provide support to prominent stars.

Rushmi and Manjusha. ▪KAMESH SRINIVASAN

"I joined IOCL in 1993. I had the freedom to pursue sports for 10 years. After the SAF Games in 2004 in Islamabad, I thought it was important to give a junior player a chance in the team. I was posted as coordinator in the Northern region, and have now moved to the corporate office," said Manjusha, who had won the Commonwealth Games bronze in 1998.

Rushmi has an impressive record of having won 40-odd singles and doubles titles on the international circuit, and competed in the London Olympics with Sania Mirza. With Sania, Rushmi had also won the bronze in the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010.

"I feel tremendous satisfaction when young athletes capitalise on the support and grow into champions, joining the organisation full-time to further pursue their sport," said Manjusha.

Manjusha and Rushmi have a common goal: to see Indian Oil step up its support for Indian sport and take it to a different level. They have done their bit to drive Indian sports, powered by Indian Oil!

Aayushi and Vikrant strike gold

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL

Aayushi Gupta and Vikrant Sharma paced themselves through two spells of qualification to eventually strike gold for Uttar Pradesh in mixed air rifle in the 63rd National shooting championship on Saturday.

The Uttar Pradesh team outplayed the Army duo of Harshita Dahiya and Pankaj Kumar 18-6 for the gold, after having qualified in the second place for the gold match, 0.3 point behind the Army team.

Interestingly, in the first qualification stage, the Uttar Pradesh team was in seventh place among eight teams that made the cut.

The Haryana pair of Arshdeep Singh and Vinita Bhardwaj, which had topped the first stage with 626.1 ahead of Mehuli Ghosh and Srinjoy Datta, did not complete the second stage, as Arshdeep's rifle malfunctioned.

Mehuli and Srinjoy, who missed the chance to fight for gold by 0.2 point to the eventual champions, finished third as they beat Chandigarh's Disha Jadhav and Gagandeep Singh 17-13.

In the youth mixed air rifle, it was a similar story as Haryana, which qualified in the eighth place in the first stage, went on to beat Himachal team of Zeena Khitta and Surya Pratap Singh Banshtu 16-12 for the gold.

Maharashtra's Janhavi Khanvilkar and Rudrankksh Patil which won the youth bronze, had won the junior gold by beating Mehuli Ghosh and Srinjoy Datta 17-13.

The results: 50m rifle prone: Men: 1. Om Pakash Choudhary 622.8; 2. Akhil Sheoran 621.9; 3. Niraj Kumar 620.2.

Juniors: 1. Niraj Kumar 620.2; 2. Fateh Singh Dhillon 618.4; 3. Surya Pratap Singh Banshtu 618.1.

Mixed air rifle: 1. Uttar Pradesh (Aayushi Gupta, Vikrant Sharma) 16 (4185.8; 622.1); 2. Army (Harshita Dahiya, Pankaj Kumar) 8 (416.1; 623.3); 3. West Bengal (Mehuli Ghosh, Srinjoy Datta) 17 (415.6; 623.8); 4. Chandigarh (Disha Jadhav, Gagandeep Singh) 13 (414.5; 622.4).

Juniors: 1. Maharashtra (Janhavi Khanvilkar, Rudrankksh Patil) 17 (417.4; 621.2); 2. West Bengal (Mehuli Ghosh, Srinjoy Datta) 13 (418.7; 621.8); 3. Rajasthan (Manini Kaushik; Divyansh Singh Panwar) 17 (416.0; 626.4); 4. Karnataka (Natasha Jhaveri, T.R. Srijay) 15 (415.6; 622.3).

Youth: 1. Haryana (Ramita, sidharth Gaur) 16 (415.0; 616.5); 2. Himachal Pradesh (Zeena Khitta, Surya Pratap Singh Banshtu) 12 (418.1; 622.1); 3. Maharashtra (Janhavi khanvilkar, Rudrankksh Patil) 16 (412.1; 616.9); 4. Uttar Pradesh (Vidisha Saxena, Vidit Jain) 8 (414.3; 618.9).

Perera joins Kapil in the lead

Consistent: Mithun Perera was on a roll, sinking two 15-footers and a 10-footer on the back nine. ▪RAJEEV BHATT

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

An excellent back nine helped Sri Lankan Mithun Perera card a five-under 67 to be tied at the top on 208 with Kapil Kumar after the third round of the ICC RCGC Open at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club course on Saturday.

A PGTI regular, Perera has now carded three consecutive under-par rounds. He started on a bright note, grabbing birdies on the first and fifth holes before bogeying the seventh and eighth.

Accompanied by the caddie, Saltu, who had assisted him when he won the East India Amateur title in 2007, the 32-year-old sank 15-footers on the 10th and 14th and a 10-footer on the 17th.

"I feel good about my game. My putting was good," said Perera.

Kapil, who stayed on top for the third successive day, led Perera by two shots before dropping one each on the 17th and 18th. The Delhi golfer, who managed four birdies and as many bogeys, was again troubled by his below-par chipping.

Sanjeev Kumar and Abhinav Lohan, who carded an identical 67, jumped to third and tied-fourth respectively. Local lad Sunit Chowrasia was the other one in fourth.

Shamim Khan scored the best round, a six-under 66, to be at joint-sixth.

Leading scores (third round): 208: Mithun Perera (71, 70, 67) and Kapil Kumar (68, 68, 72); **210:** Sanjeev Kumar (75, 68, 67); **212:** Abhinav Lohan (75, 70, 67) and Sunit Chowrasia (70, 72, 70); **213:** Anil Mane (69, 68, 76) and Shamim Khan (74, 73, 66); **214:** R. Mari Muthu (70, 72, 72), Mohammad Sanju (70, 71, 73) and M. Dharma (73, 65, 76).

Internationals stay ahead

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MELBOURNE

A gutsy comeback from Marc Leishman and Abraham Ancer gave Ernie Els' Internationals a massive confidence boost at the Presidents Cup on Saturday as Tiger Woods' USA stormed into contention.

The pair was five down against Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler after 10 holes in the foursomes, but fought back to halve the tie on the 18th.

Woods' team won the foursomes 3-1 after losing the morning fourballs 2.5-1.5 to leave the contest on a knife-edge ahead of Sunday's 12 singles. Internationals leads 10-8, with Woods calling the day "a win" for USA.

The result: Internationals 10 leads USA 8.

THE HINDU

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DELHI
Sunday, December 15, 2019

Magazine

BIG SCREEN

Scarlett Johansson is on a roll. She has much-lauded performances in two critically acclaimed films this year p4

SPOTLIGHT

Bangladeshi photographer-activist Shahidul Alam has his first musuem show in the U.S. p5

WIDE ANGLE

Jagatsinghpur villagers are branded as 'criminals' but it isn't stopping their fight against the next big steel plant p6

LITERARY REVIEW

There's something about Ubud in Bali, with its ancient yet familiar past, that unlocks the inner artist in you p7

COVER

Look back in wonder

Did you know that India's beautiful cheetahs became extinct in the 1940s? With a project in the pipeline to bring them back, a look at what killed them in the first place p3

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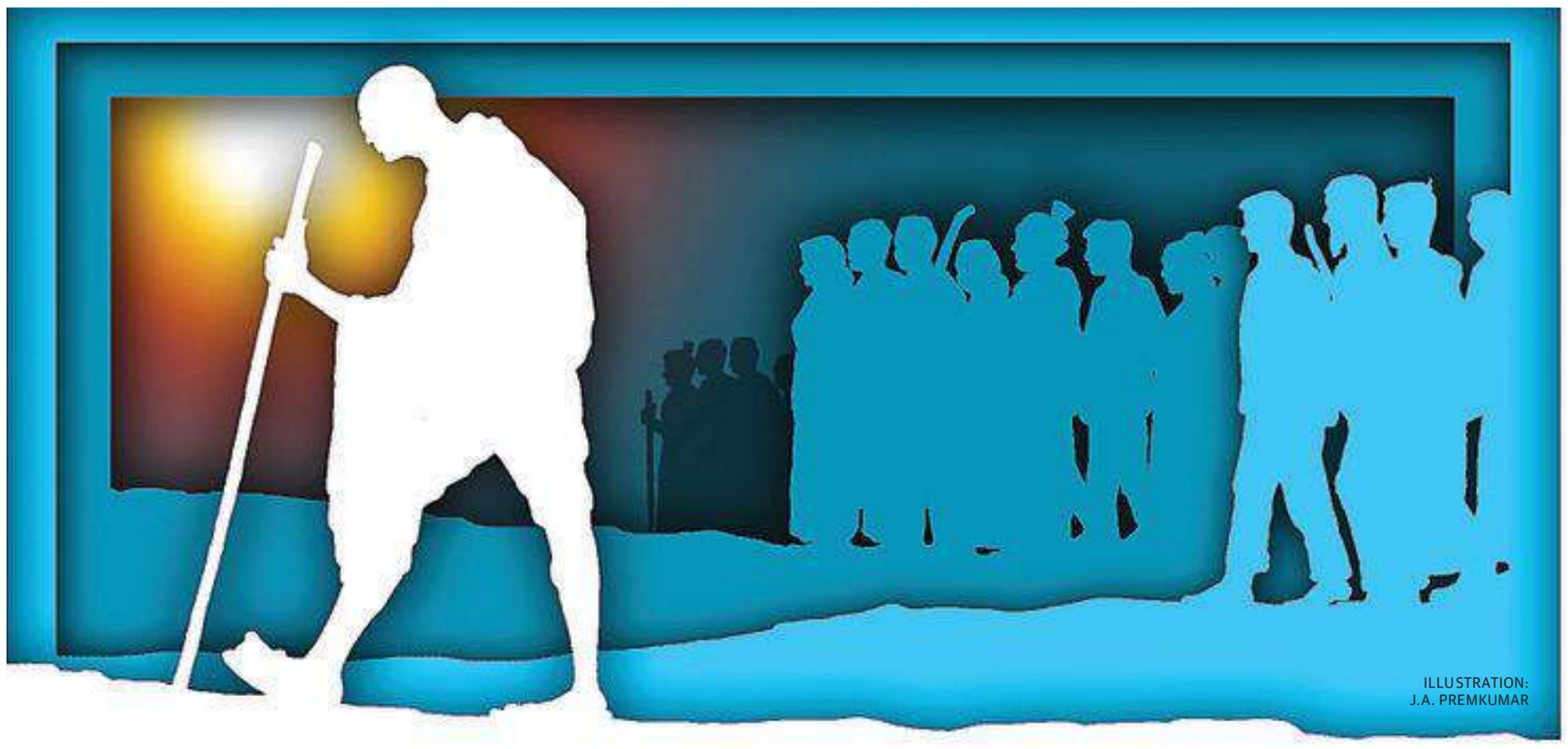

ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

Mahatma's BIG STRIDES

Gandhiji walked all his life, made others walk with him, and also had the courage to walk all by himself

Madhav Nayar

Some of the most iconic images of Gandhiji are those of him walking. Reflecting on the images of his walking during the Dandi March or through riot-affected Noakhali, one cannot but think that walking and Gandhiji were inseparable. Walking for miles each day was an integral part of his ethos and his graceful gait was part of his charisma.

Walking reflected some deeply held Gandhian beliefs and philosophies. At one level, it was an attempt to disrupt, if not deconstruct, the mechanical rhythms of industrial time and reconnect with natural time. It represented forward movement, progress and the onward march of the satyagrahi. Walking was an essential component of many Gandhian movements, the Salt Satyagraha being the most prominent.

Gandhiji built an entire political praxis around walking, developing an entire philosophy of walking.

As a mode of thinking, it enabled him to navigate through complex problems and questions, and as a mode of being, it enabled his body to connect with its natural rhythms and with itself. It is while walking that the body becomes a witness to its own motion and its limits. It is like a conversation the body has with itself and nature.

Gandhiji walked all his life, made others walk with him, and had the courage to walk all by himself. Walking for him was a way of conditioning the body and subjecting it to rigorous practice. Bodily rigour, he believed, was necessary for disciplining the mind. Apart from walking, some of the other practices he used for conditioning his body included abstaining from sex and and observing fasts and silence.

Gandhiji's emphasis on subjecting the body to harsh discipline finds echo in the Indic traditions, which are in a way wary of the *deha* or the body. Subjecting the *deha* to rigorous discipline was like practising *tapa*, which in this tradition is recognised as a way of gaining control over oneself and the surroundings.

Channelling the libidinal energy for the larger cause of the national movement was a recurrent concern through Gandhiji's political life. He subjected his *deha* to all kinds of austerities, which thus became the site of most Gandhian experiments.

Gandhiji always believed that his personal experiments had larger implications.

He had a unique way of bridging the personal and the political. Faced with communal riots in Noakhali, he camped in the area to douse the flames.

Gandhiji built an entire political praxis around walking, developing an entire philosophy of walking

An everyday grammar

Gandhiji's genius lay in his ability to convert everyday acts into deeply political activities. The grammar of his politics drew on the everyday. He developed a unique political vocabulary steeped in the wisdom and traditions of the land.

Like walking, his spinning sought to question the foundations of large-scale industrialisation and the caste system. By this logic, his silence was a call to the alienated man to connect with himself and be attentive to the rhythms of his own body and mind. Each of Gandhiji's everyday activities had deep political implications. But it was a political vocabulary and repertoire accessible and available to all.

Even the weakest and the poorest could resort to civil resistance to oppose unjust laws. But the practice of civil resistance or disobedience required rigorous training of the body. The Satyagrahi had to be a disciplined soldier, who would not resort to violence under any circumstance. The very impulse towards violence had to be eliminated. Conditioning or training the body thus constituted the bedrock of Gandhian politics.

To attain Swaraj, one had to first master the *swa* or self. In other words, attaining political sovereignty required one to first attain sovereignty over one's own self. This sovereignty of, and over, the self is essential for understanding Gandhiji's conception of Swaraj.

For him, we are never truly free till we master and understand our own selves. Political sovereignty for Gandhiji was a corollary to this individual sovereignty.

Satyagraha, too, at one level, was a relentless pursuit of truth by an individual. If we were to go by its literal meaning in Hindi, then it is a "struggle for truth". It was as much spiritual as it was political. The individual self and its mastery over its body and its spiritual self thus constituted important elements of the Gandhian discourse on politics.

If we want to walk on the path set out by the Mahatma, we must first know and understand what walking actually meant for him.

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Speaking without words

In her struggle to make her toddler twins pick up language, a mother discovers new ways to connect using stories, games and pictures

Smitha Vallathol

"That cloud over there is a bear," my son commented from the back seat as we sped through a California highway. His words, to me, were a butterfly net that scooped all the excitement out of the road trip and replaced it with something more permanent, palpable. I was thrilled, because my son spoke in a metaphor.

It is not unusual for a five-year-old to do so. But for us, this called for a picnic and ice cream. We celebrate words, every turn we take towards discovering them, because two-and-a-half years ago, a doctor told us that our twins, the boy and a girl, might be facing autism spectrum disorder. Ruling it out depended on how early they would talk.

The children sat in the other corner of the room, exploring the play area, blissfully unaware of how much anguish their vocabulary of just about 20 words was causing their parents.

The doctor's surmise thrust us into uncertainty. It would take a few months to find out what the future held for us. We had to wait for the diagnosis that would define our children.

Accretion of words

It marked our entry into a world replete with appointments, assessments, evaluations and therapy. It also marked the beginning of my struggle with words, as I relinquished everything I could afford to, to take over as the therapy parent. I picked up words for my children, one by one, wrapping them up in stories, playtimes and pictures, until these would enter their selves. We celebrated every word.

It was an excruciating time, but it was also enlightening. In the absence of words, I realised that eyes are all that children need to convey their joy, the overwhelming quality of their sadness, their elation, their excitement, and their unbridled, immeasurable love. Even as one half of me desperately trained them to use words, the other half was constantly researching, contemplating and living a life that terrified me with its absence of words. The experience completely reshuffled my expectations of my children, and saved us all from being shoved into any compartments and conditions for growing up.

And now, as they are slowly but surely treading down the world of language, I revel in the realisation that my children know exactly as much as they should at their age. They sometimes remember a joke and laugh as they gently slip off into sleep. A trip to the library and new books are their idea of a good day. They have an intense ability to care. They greet people with a smile and a wave. They will compliment a delicious meal. They will tell if they are hurt or happy. They know enough not to bully. They can hurt and they can apologise. They can forgive. They can forget. They are fiercely possessive and helplessly sensitive. They learn ruthlessness as they venture further and further into society, and at home, we together unlearn it all.

They have taught me many lessons in love, but the biggest is that a five-year-old only has to connect – with a touch, word or look.

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The braveheart of icy, hostile Khardung La

Tsering Dolkar, a casual labourer with the BRO, saved the life of a man buried under an avalanche

Asha Vombatkere

My Army husband is fortunate to have spent over five years in Ladakh, a wonderful but little known part of India that we both fell in love with. We had got to meet and know many Ladakhis, and among them is Tsering Dolkar, a casual labourer with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). During one of our visits to Ladakh, we went and met her in her home in Ganglas at 13,000-ft altitude, the last habitation on the road up Khardung La.

Her three children had grown up. The eldest, a son named Tashi Namgial, was in government service and had recently got married. Her daughter, Phunchok Dolma, in her mid-twenties, was at home because jobs are hard to come by, though she had studied up to Class 10. Her youngest, a son named Tundup Dorje, was a soldier in the Army's Ladakh Scouts, then posted on the Siachen Glacier.

About 25 years ago, Tsering's husband was not supporting her, and if her three children were to have any future, she would have to leave him and fend for herself and her little ones. Without formal education, there were few jobs open to her. So this determined young woman prepared to toil, and enrolled as a labourer with the BRO.

Road maintenance at high altitudes, manually clearing snow in sub-zero winters, is hard. For a single mother with little children at home, it was doubly so. But by the mid-1980s, she was a familiar face on the road between Leh and Khardung village and on Khardung La at 18,380-ft altitude. Ever smiling with a cheerful "Juley!", sincere and hard working, she was always there to clear snow and boulders and channel snow melt. She toiled for many years, to feed, clothe and educate her children with her meagre earnings.

Triumph over adversity Tsering Dolkar, right, with her sister and daughter, Phunchok Dolma. ▪ ASHA VOMBATKERE

Day of reckoning

December 31, 1988, must have dawned like any other winter day for Tsering, yet it was to be a day like no other. She was working with the snow clearance team on the road just north of Khardung La when an avalanche struck the bulldozer component of the team. The bulldozer was buried in snow, but the operator and the overseer were carried away about 1,000 feet down the steep, snow-covered slope. The bulldozer operator managed to come out, but overseer Ram Naresh was buried in snow.

Realising that if he was not rescued quickly, he would die of hypothermia, and without a thought for her own safety, Tsering rushed down the slope, removed the snow covering the unconscious man with her shovel, lifted him onto her back and carried him to safety. She was awarded the Uttam Jeevan Raksha Pathak by the President. The citation ends thus, "Smt Tsering Dolkar showed exemplary courage and devotion beyond the call of duty in saving the life of a hapless man."

As I held Tsering's calloused hands, I felt humbled. Her eyes spoke of dignity, gentle strength and self-respect coupled with a humility that I have noticed in many Ladakhis. This unlettered woman had liberated and empowered herself. She had shown selfless courage throughout her life. Her name is mentioned in BRO history, and she remains a heroine of Ladakh.

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FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in

Cover story

The cover story ('Where are Margazhi's millenials?', Dec. 8) presented a bird's eye view of the famous festival. However, charges that a few vocalists and accompanists corner a lion's share of the concerts while younger and gifted artistes lack a stage indicate that everything is not okay and that there is a lack of a level playing field.

C.V. ARAVIND

■ I feel the article has been written comparing Carnatic music with Western Jazz. The focus is on the scope for improvisation, or manodharma as we know it, which can bring in the millennials. But let us not forget one important thing about Carnatic music. Except for padams, javalis and tillanas, all the songs are based on one emotion: bhakti. If that is taken out, it becomes equivalent to film or folk music. Aruna Sairam's abhangs are devotional. Sanjay Subrahmanyan has identified rare Tamil compositions, but the dominating factor is again bhakti. In short, the mandatory qualification for Carnatic music is humility, bhakti, a good voice and clear diction. Other frills are optional.

GOPALARAMAN SWAMINATHAN

■ This was talked about even 60 years ago when I was in school. But the number of sabhas has grown, the programmes have increased, and young musicians are singing more. Sponsors are available for almost all concerts.

T.S. GOPALAKRISHNAN

■ Unlike Kerala, where Carnatic music is not seen as Hindu or Brahminical, in Tamil Nadu, with the weakening of Brahminism, it is no surprise to see Carnatic music being less patronised. Also, except for a handful of singers, the music has become commoditised.

SRIRAM P.S.

■ Concerts should start at 7 a.m. or 9 p.m., so that working people can attend. After Carnatic music was removed from the Corporate Social Responsibility list, corporate support has declined significantly. The government should consider putting it back. Some sabhas have started webcasting, but more needs to be done. It helps widen the listener base.

SRI

Brahmin bashing

The extract from B.R. Ambedkar's book ('Why did Brahmins become vegetarian?', Dec. 8) was interesting but posed some basic questions. Stating that it was done for 'supremacy' over Buddhism assumes that vegetarianism is better than non-vegetarianism. With the rise of Buddhism, there might have been chances of a conflict with existing belief systems, but peaceful coexistence is the nature of a true religion. Buddhism was not formed to degrade existing belief systems but to show a way to enlightenment. Likewise, Hinduism also has strong belief systems as is clear from its proclamation of living with the divine.

ARUN B ASOK

Ancient craft

The photo feature ('Jackfruit veenas and mridangams', Dec. 8) was excellent. After this generation, what would be future of these instrument-making cottage industries as the younger generation might not be interested in these crafts. Can governments help through financial assistance and by promoting the plantation of trees required for these instruments?

J.P. REDDY

Patriot games

Sandip Roy's 'God save us from patriots' (Dec. 8) was stimulating. It's true that I've read more about Gandhi and less about Godse. From what little knowledge I have, I can definitely say that Godse was neither a patriot nor a good Hindu. If he were a patriot, he would not have killed Gandhi who fought for India's independence. If he were a good Hindu he would not have killed Gandhi, whom R.S.S. chief Mohan Bhagwat recently called "a staunch Hindu." True, God should save us from such patriots and fanatics.

R. SREENIVASULU

More on the Web

thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

A short-sighted lifestyle

A myopia boom is on in India, much like in South-east Asia, due to rigorous academic pursuits

MANJULA JAYAKUMAR

Of carol evenings and Christmas

Not once would Santa disappoint us! Much to our cheer and wonder, he would grant all our wishes

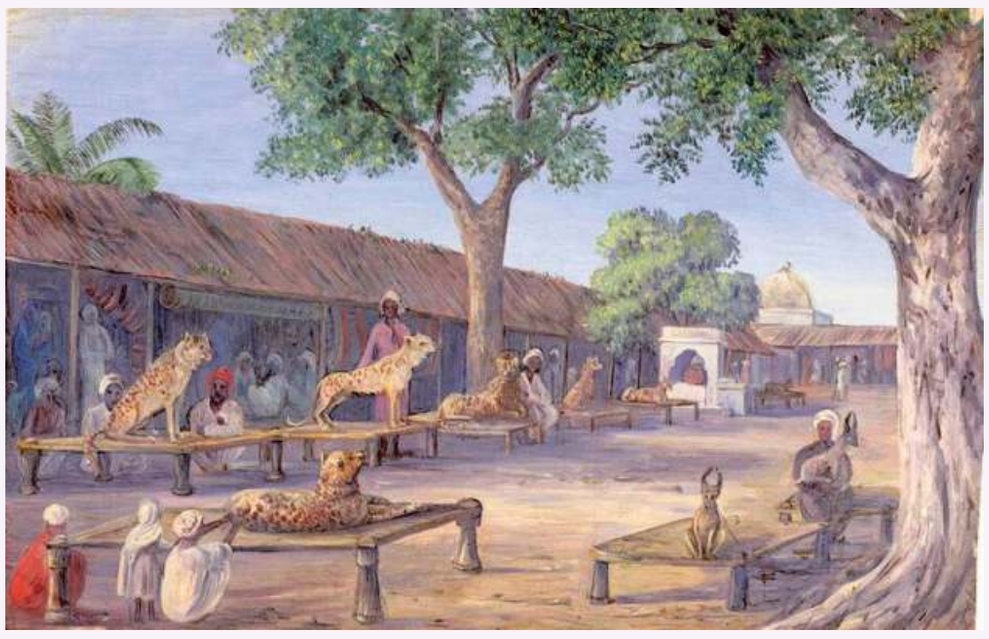
RAJESH KRISHAN

Unplugged and unhurried

Your mind does well with spells of idleness, and you need these times to build creativity

NITASHA DEVASAR

This page consists of reader submissions. Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to openpage@thehindu.co.in. Please provide a postal address and a brief background of the writer. The mail must certify that it is original writing, exclusive to this page. The Hindu views plagiarism as a serious offence. Given the large volume of submissions, we regret that we are unable to acknowledge receipt or entertain queries about submissions. If a piece is not published for eight weeks please consider that it is not being used. The publication of a piece on this page is not to be considered an endorsement by The Hindu of the views contained therein.



House cat The cheetah, when tamed, was as gentle and docile as a dog. This 1878 painting from Marianne North's book shows cheetahs and lynxes chained to charpais by their keepers in Alwar. ▪ COURTESY BRITISH LIBRARY'S ONLINE GALLERY.

WILDLIFE

How India lost its spots

Did desertification really cause cheetahs to go extinct in India? Research suggests otherwise. These docile cats were hunted and captured indiscriminately in the 1700s and 1800s until one day not one was left

Raza Kazmi

I was out on leave by myself, chiefly after lions. My native shikari (game tracker) came into my tent with an auspicious grin, just as I was finishing my breakfast, and said, *'Sahib, I think I have got the big lion for you at last today; I have marked a big beast under a tree about four miles off; what it is I do not know...,'"* Colonel E.A. Hardy of the 21st Hussars wrote in 1878, in his book *Our Horses*. The Colonel set out for his hunt, and some 30 yards away, he saw what he thought was a single large beast lying fast asleep. "I fired. To the shot up sprang six cheetahs, beautiful brutes, growling and rushing over each other, one evidently severely wounded. I was really so taken aback myself, I was stupid for a moment; but before I could determine whether to fire my second barrel or to bolt, the old shikari yelled out, *'Come quickly for your horse, they are cheetahs, you can spear them; we'll kill them all!'"*

Within a century of this book's publication, we had indeed killed them all; the last Asiatic cheetah, the lesser-known cousin of its more famous African counterpart, was shot in 1947 by Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of the little-known princely state of Koriya in present-day Chhattisgarh.

But what really sealed the fate of India's cheetahs?

At the recent meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 14), a researcher from the Indian delegation pronounced desertification as the primary cause of the extinction of the cheetah (and also the still-extant great Indian bustard) in India.

This generated great debate and critique, but also for many people a realisation that cheetahs indeed no longer existed in the country: in many Indian languages, the word *cheeta* is still used to refer to the leopard and is, therefore, confused with the rosetted cat.

So was desertification really the cause? Not exactly. What we know is this: two idiosyncratic traits of the animal undeniably led to its end. One, the cat was very easy to tame: it was often trained to race down and hunt animals, almost like a hound – a 'sport' called coursing – and so was caught in large numbers for use in such hunts. Second, cheetahs were nearly impossible to breed in captivity.

Two traits of the animal undeniably led to its end. One, the cat was very easy to tame, and so was caught in large numbers. Second, they were nearly impossible to breed in captivity

Breeding captive cheetahs was such an incredible rarity that in 1613, Emperor Jahangir formally recorded the first and only instance, up to the 20th century, of a cheetah bred in captivity anywhere in the world in the book *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*.

Caught for sport

The earliest reference to their domestication for the sport of coursing is from *Manasollasa*, the 12th century chronicle of the court activities of King Someshvara III of Kalyani. The sport gained popularity across peninsular India during the medieval age. From this era emanate numerous records of retinues of cheetah trained to hunt down black bucks (India's second fastest mammal) for a legion of nobles and princes. But their inability to breed while in captivity meant that wild cheetahs needed to be constantly trapped from their natural habitats, especially cubs, to keep the sport alive over centuries.

Charles E. Clay, a railway officer, recounts in a 1901 article how he bought a cheetah cub in South Canara in 1896 from "a couple of junglewallahs," which he then raised for hunting in the Deccan. The cost of a cheetah caught from the wild at the time was "anything you can agree upon, from ten rupees up", but rose steadily with the degree of training it subsequently received.

"The price of a well-broken [or trained] hunting cheetah is from one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty rupees," wrote Major Henry Shakespear, Late Commandant of the Nagpur Irregular Force and a hunter in the 1840s.

Such was the scale of cheetahs being taken out from the wild that Emperor Akbar is said to have acquired a staggering 9,000 cheetahs for his royal menagerie during his 49-year reign in the 16th century. Eventually, somewhere around the early 18th century, the constant removal of cheetahs from the wild, especially cubs, reached a tipping point.

And so, while their prey base and habitat survived till much later, the cheetahs were already very scarce by the time the British consolidated their hold over India and started recording the occurrence of cheetahs. In a recent paper, the wildlife historian and scholar Divyabhanusinh and I recorded written references to a mere 414 individual animals between 1772 and 1997.

Another factor worked against the animal: its intrinsically docile nature. The big cat was so benign that it has been likened to a dog. It never evoked the fear that tigers, lions and leopards did. "The hunting leopard is easily tamed, about six months being required to reduce him to a complete state of obedience and to complete his training. Many of these animals, when tamed, are as gentle and docile as a dog, delighting in being petted, and quite good-tempered even with strangers, purring and rubbing themselves against their friends, as cats do. They are usually kept, when tame, on a *charpai* or native bedstead, attached by a chain to the wall, and are not shut up in a cage," wrote the English naturalist W.T. Blanford, the editor of *The Fauna of British India, Including Ceylon and Burma* in 1888.

Classified vermin

In fact, there is just a single record of a human fatality from a cheetah attack that we know of – the death of O.B. Irvine, Agent of Governor in Visakhapatnam, who died after being mauled by a captive cheetah that belonged to the Raja of Vizianagaram, during a coursing hunt in 1880. Yet, incredibly enough, this didn't stop the British government from classifying cheetahs as "vermin" and offering rewards for their destruction. Rewards were given both for adult cheetahs and for cubs from around 1871 onwards, as environmental historian Mahesh Rangarajan has noted in his 1998 paper in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. This was, perhaps, the final nail in the coffin that sealed the fate of the species in the country.

In 1951-52, cheetahs were considered de facto extinct by the Indian government. But there were some credible, albeit rare, sightings reported well into the early 1970s – two from the forests of Koriya and the adjoining Surguja in Madhya Pradesh in 1967 and 1968, and then from the open forests around a village named Danto Kalan in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh district in 1975.

The British government classified cheetahs as "vermin" and offered rewards for their destruction. Rewards were given both for adult cheetahs and for cubs from around 1871 onwards, as environmental historian Mahesh Rangarajan notes

In Pakistan's Balochistan province, the last stragglers survived right up to the late 1990s with one cheetah being reportedly shot in the Chagai plains of Balochistan in 1997; the same year, another female and two cubs were sighted around Ormara in the same province. In fact, the term 'Asiatic cheetah' gained currency only after the species' extinction in India; before this, it was known as the Indian cheetah.

The word 'cheetah' is derived from the Sanskrit *chitraka*, which means 'spotted'. The earliest visual evidence of the Asiatic cheetah, dating back to 2500 to 2300 BCE, is found in cave paintings in Kharvai and Khairabad, and in the upper Chambal valley, in Madhya Pradesh. In 1935, a supplement published by the *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* gave an indication of the cheetah's erstwhile range: it roamed from Bengal to the United Provinces, Punjab and Rajputana, Central India to the Deccan.

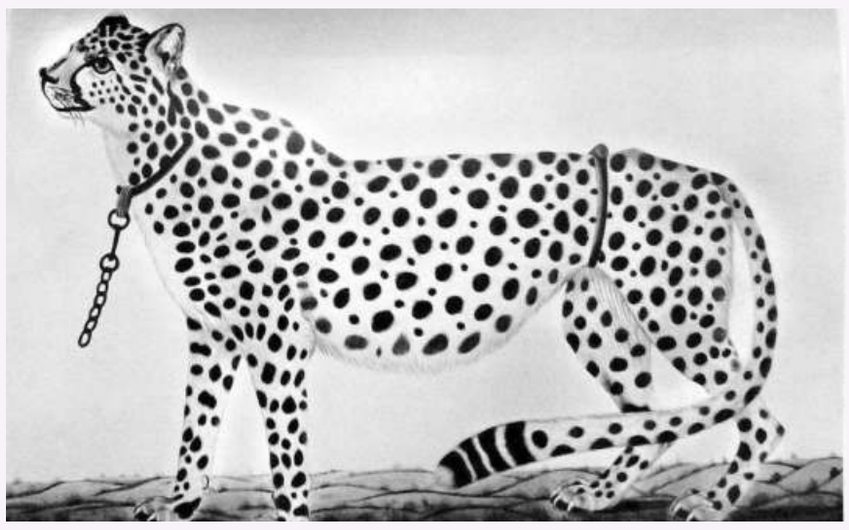
"Outside India, the range of the Cheetah is said to extend northwards to Russian Turkestan and Trans-Caspia. In South-Western Asia its range is believed to reach from the frontiers of Sind through parts of Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Persia and Mesopotamia to Syria and Palestine," it added. It also regretfully accepted that "in India the Cheetah is all but extinct in the wild state."

Diverse habitat

Unlike the popular visual depiction of African cheetahs speeding across vast open grassland plains, in India, the cheetah's habitat was diverse: scrubs, bushlands, arid and semi-arid open lands. As the cat was pushed back further, the last cheetahs found refuge in a niche habitat around the edges of sal forests in east-central India – until one day, their tracks faded away forever from the country.

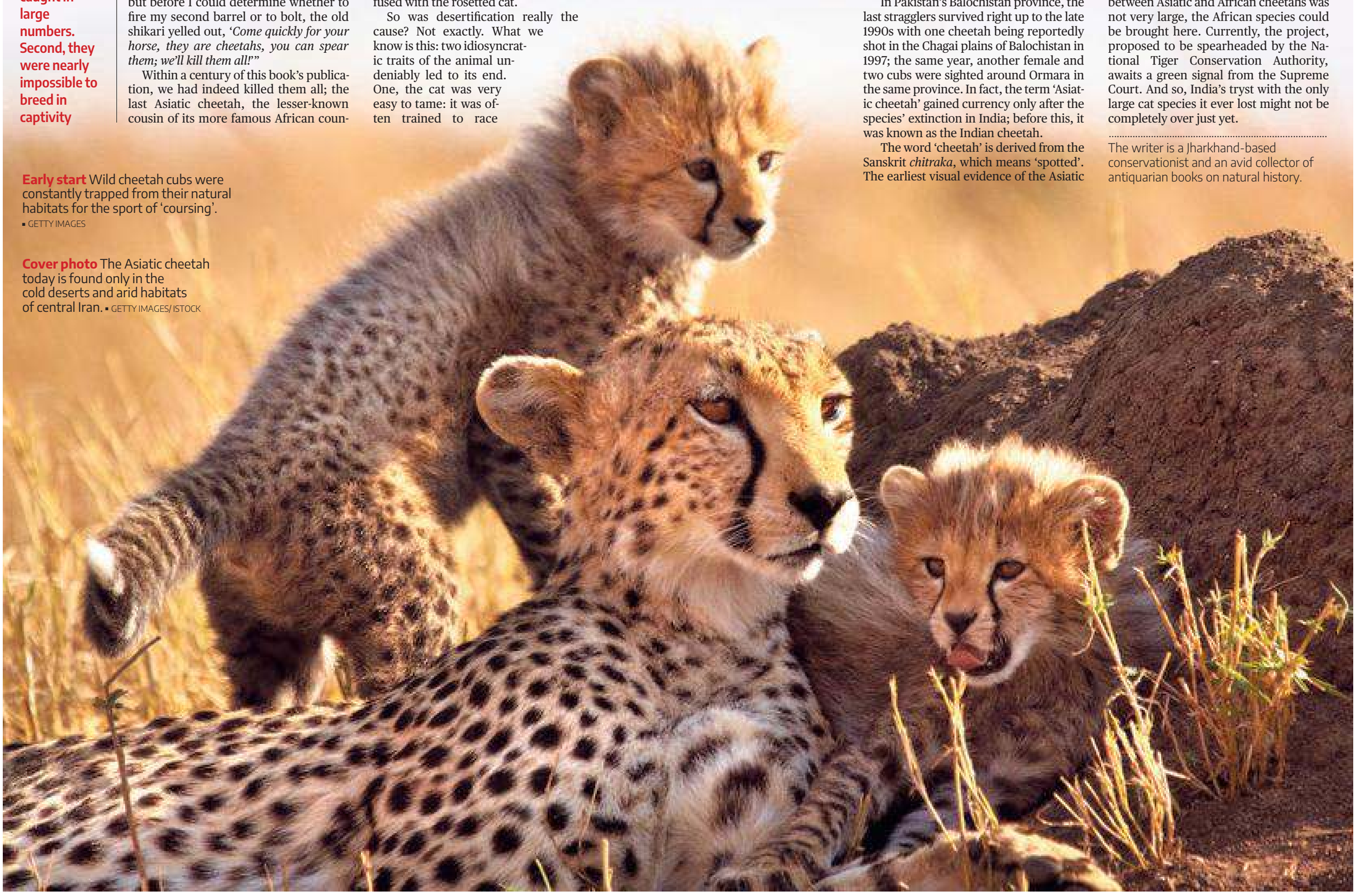
Today, the animal is perilously close to being wiped out from Asia itself. The world's last Asiatic cheetahs – barely numbering 50 individuals according to latest estimates – roam the cold, stony deserts and arid habitats of central Iran. And even in Africa, where the last few thousands of their cousins are to be found, their numbers are under immense threat.

Since the early 1970s, there were talks between Indian officials and their Iranian counterparts towards bringing the cat back to India. Iran, in return, wanted India to provide it with two big cats that it had lost in the past century – the tiger and the Asiatic lion. However, despite preliminary negotiations, the project never took off primarily because cheetah numbers in Iran were critically low and the animals were dispersed over thousands of square miles of rugged hinterlands with none in captivity. In recent years, India once again showed interest in reviving the project, and looked towards Africa. It was suggested that since the genetic difference between Asiatic and African cheetahs was not very large, the African species could be brought here. Currently, the project, proposed to be spearheaded by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, awaits a green signal from the Supreme Court. And so, India's tryst with the only large cat species it ever lost might not be completely over just yet.



Last few A painting of Tipu Sultan's hunting cheetah. ▪ WIKI COMMONS

The writer is a Jharkhand-based conservationist and an avid collector of antiquarian books on natural history.



Early start Wild cheetah cubs were constantly trapped from their natural habitats for the sport of 'coursing'. ▪ GETTY IMAGES

Cover photo The Asiatic cheetah today is found only in the cold deserts and arid habitats of central Iran. ▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

BIG SCREEN

The year is Scarlett

With pivotal roles in two of this year's most talked about films, *Marriage Story* and *Jojo Rabbit*, Scarlett Johansson is the actor to look out for

Hopeful act Scarlett Johansson in stills from (clockwise from bottom) *Marriage Story*, *Jojo Rabbit* and *Lost in Translation*.

Namrata Joshi

In the opening montage of Noah Baumbach's *Marriage Story*, Charlie (Adam Driver) points out that he loves the way his wife Nicole (Scarlett Johansson) listens to people, often too patiently, and makes them feel comfortable even about the most embarrassing things. It perfectly sums up the warm and empathetic aura of the character, delicately interpreted by Johansson, in this microscopic look at a collapsing marriage.

There is a doggedness with which Nicole wants to pursue the "act of hope"– of moving on from a seemingly happy marriage, finding herself again, not just as a professional screen actor but also an individual – and seizing life. She might have been the one to take the difficult, decisive step, unfathomable to Charlie, yet not once does Nicole come across as the villain of the piece. You hear her when she says that all these years she had never felt alive for herself but for "his aliveness". "I got smaller," she says, of her shrinking stature.

There's regret, rancour and anger but also residues of togetherness, an overwhelming protectiveness towards what was once a family, and also an admission that she will never stop loving Charlie even though it may not make sense any more. Johansson makes sense of the contradictory emotional pulls, bringing dignity and compassion to even the ugliest of confrontations. There is an immense sense of loss, but no bleakness; a sense of growing apart, but not quite getting torn asunder. Love might be dead, but long live love.

Nicole in *Marriage Story* could well be the grown-up version of Charlotte from *Lost in Translation*; the Charlotte who is finally able to get in touch with herself and walk out of an unhappy marriage

"She is my favourite actress," confesses Charlie about Nicole in the film. And many are saying the same thing of Johansson's performances this year. While the jury is still out on whether Renée Zellweger has outdone everyone playing Judy Garland, it has been Johansson's special year, with the actor featuring in two of the most rewarding films, *Marriage Story* and Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit*.

Diverse films

Marriage Story has already fetched her a Golden Globe nomination, and the 35-year-old could well bag her first Oscar nomination too.

Just about everything seems to be going right for Johansson. Earlier this year, she starred in the highest-grossing *Avengers: Endgame*. And coming up next is her eighth Marvel film, a standalone movie centred on the character she plays, secret agent Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow, for which she has reportedly been paid almost the same amount as Chris Evans (Captain America).

The only sour note has been the controversy last year around her playing the lead of a trans man in the movie *Rub & Tug*, for which she faced ferocious backlash. "In hindsight, I mishandled that situation," she said in a recent interview.

Playing Black Widow would be consistent with the actor's experiments with films across genres. She has worked with a diverse set of filmmakers, from Woody Allen to Christopher Nolan.

She even played the voice of Samantha, a computer operating system in Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013). The film premièred at the Rome International Film Festival, where she won best actress; a rare honour for a voice part.

Born and raised in Manhattan, Johansson took to acting, singing and dancing very early. Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) proved to be her first adult breakthrough role. In fact, 2019 harks back to 2003, the year of Peter Webber's *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, in which she played Griet, the young 17th-century servant in the household of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. She got a Bafta nomination for best actress in a leading role and was nominated for the Golden Globe for both films; she won the Bafta for *Lost in Translation*.

Common thread

In hindsight, Nicole could well be the grown-up version of Charlotte from *Lost in Translation*. Johansson essayed both with a similar honesty. Newly married but bored and lonely, lost in a foreign land, amidst strangers, in an alien culture she can't comprehend, Charlotte makes the silence around her talk about her own misplaced sense of self in a marriage that doesn't seem to be holding well even in its early days. Nicole then could be Charlotte finally being able to get in touch with herself and walking out.

There is a lot in common in the two Johansson films this year as well. The thread of motherhood, for instance. Johansson is parent extraordinaire in *Marriage Story*, one who 'plays' and never tires of the demands of her child, day or night. In *Jojo Rabbit*, even as a fleeting presence, she is luminous as the mother who sets an example for her son by being the personification of humanity, stealthily keeping Jews safe in Nazi Germany. "I wanted her to feel like a safe place, a loving and vivacious person in the middle of her life, so that you really felt the profound loss when she's not there," said Johansson of her role.

On a slightly different note, in both of Johansson's outings this year, shoes seem to play a key role. They mark important mileposts in her character's life trajectory. In *JoJo Rabbit* they symbolise the end, but also a continuity of resistance to oppression.

In *Marriage Story*, despite the relationship being all in knots, she is still the centre; the one to rely on; the person who will tie up life's little loose ends. Who but Johansson could have imbued with such extraordinarily deep meaning a throwaway moment like tying your shoelaces?

ONE MOMENT PLEASE

Of lonely men

Scenes where there's just you and the character on the screen, communing with each other

In the final scene of Martin Scorsese's epic *The Irishman*, protagonist Frank Sheeran (Robert De Niro) sits old and alone in a nursing home; it's Christmas, but he has nothing to celebrate. Frank has asked that his room door be left ajar, and the film's last shot has the camera outside, watching him through the half-open door.

The shot worked for me on multiple levels. For one, it's as intimate and heartbreaking as, though more static than, the closing shot of Scorsese's previous feature, *Silence*, where we glimpse something of a man's inner life after he has died – a Jesuit priest who renounced his religion but has a tiny cross in his hand as he is being cremated. Like Rodrigues in that film, Frank gave up something too, and we can't say for certain how much he regrets it.

The Irishman scene also calls back to mind a mysterious moment earlier in the film where, shortly after Frank begins working for the powerful union leader Jimmy Hoffa, he spends a night in Hoffa's suite – and sees that his boss has left the door to his own room partly open. This could be a personality tic, or a sign of trust. But for Frank, it also represents an entry point to another world. He goes from living a truck-driver's itinerant life – spending time on the road, away from family for long stretches – to finding an identity in a new community.

Ominous signs

It's a set-up in some ways, though, and will eventually lead to (moral and physical) desolation. At what should be the hour of Frank's big triumph – a banquet in his honour, well-attended, by people he looks up to – he also gets ominous signs that he may soon have to pick sides against a friend. And this leads to his ultimate fate as a lonely old man trying to maintain some connection with a world that has passed him by: entombed, cut off from everyone, most notably from his daughter Peggy who could have served as his conscience.

That closing scene also reminds me of other movie characters who have isolated themselves – from civilisation, from their families, or even from themselves. And other doors in which such people are framed so that only we can see them. The most prominent such scene is from a work that Scorsese (part of a generation of American directors who were movie nerds first) was deeply influenced by as a youngster – a film made, as it happens, by an Irishman: *The Searchers* (1956) by John Ford.

Desolation A still from *The Searchers* (1956) by John Ford.

The protagonist here, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), is one of the loneliest men in cinema, someone who is a wanderer to begin with but who, at the beginning of the story, at least has a family of sorts. When this family is massacred in an Indian attack, Ethan embarks on revenge but starts to lose his moral compass, even coming close to killing his niece who had been abducted as a child.

Steeped in madness

Eventually order is restored, and there is a "happy" ending – but not for Ethan, who is too far steeped in blood and madness. If the film began with a door opening and Ethan riding towards his brother's house from a distance, it ends with him framed by another door, which then closes on him as he walks away. And between these two scenes, there is another crucial shot of Ethan silhouetted in an entryway, bent in grief, neither inside nor outside.

Scenes like these have a very particular effect on a viewer. When two or more characters are on screen together, occupied with each other, it's easy to maintain the illusion that we are passively watching a story. But when we are alone with a lonely character, we feel more like participants – confidantes, sympathisers.

Late in *The Irishman*, Frank speaks to a priest but is unable to say what he needs to say. The priest doesn't understand, but we viewers – omniscient, hopefully empathetic – have seen everything unfold over the preceding three hours. As we do with other lost people – like Ethan Edwards, or like Citizen Kane murmuring "Rosebud" on his deathbed, or Norman Bates at the end of *Psycho* (1960), looking into the camera, still possessed by his dead mother – we get to play the priest, listening, in a confessional.

Jai Arjun Singh is a Delhi-based writer and film critic who finds it easier to concentrate on specific scenes as he grows older.

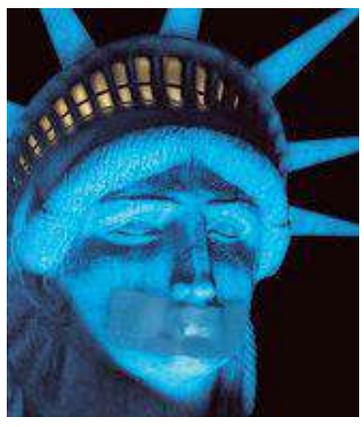
SCANNER

Life of Attenborough

A documentary on the life of David Attenborough, produced in conjunction with the World Wildlife Fund, will premiere at the Royal Albert Hall in April. *David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet* will highlight mankind's devastating impact on the natural world while following Attenborough's career from the age of 28.

Probir Gupta exhibition

A solo exhibition by artist Probir Gupta is on at Bikaner House in Delhi until December 29. The collection, which includes paintings, sculptures and installations, has a contemporary, socio-political focus and highlights mass movements, with one work inspired by both the Arab Spring and the aftermath of the Nirbhaya rape.



On safe spaces

A documentary by comedian Adam Carolla and political commentator Dennis Prager looks at the issue of 'safe spaces' and identity politics in America, and how this might impinge on the freedom of speech. *No Safe Spaces* takes a right-wing perspective, with a number of conservative commentators weighing in.

STAGE WHISPERS

Singular performances

Solo shows and two-handers are impressive feats of confidence and stamina on the actors' part

In the last week of November, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Mumbai organised a three-day festival to mark its 50th anniversary. The place transformed into a bustling community centre with a hectic schedule of cultural activities. I swung by to finally catch Yuki Ellias' much-talked-about one-woman show, *Elephant in the Room*. This show, a quirky retelling of the adventures of young Ganesha, has been a runaway success, bagging a few Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards, and having had successful tours in Australia, Edinburgh, and Hong Kong. Ellias's performance, where she plays many characters with different voices and body language, is quite a feat, and she goes through the 60 minutes tirelessly.

The play made me think of other one-actor shows I had watched. I have always been in awe of the confidence and stamina of actors who take on such shows. I've never produced or directed a solo performance. We have done a series of monologues, but I'm referring to full-length solo pieces.

One of the earliest I saw was *The Final Rehearsal*, during one of our Thespo years. Pawan Kumar, now an acclaimed Kannada film director, acted and directed. He deservedly won best actor. Ali Fazal, currently shooting with Gal Gadot for a Kenneth Branagh film adaptation of an Agatha Christie novel, once did a riveting show of *Scaramouche Jones*, about an ageing clown. It was a work in progress, but an inspiring performance nevertheless. Other Indian productions I can recall being rather impressed by include *Nine Parts of Desire*, performed by Ira Dubey, *Shakkar ke Paanch Daane*, a *tour de force* by Kumud Mishra, *C Sharp C Blunt*, performed by singer-actress M.D. Pallavi, and of course *Einstein*, performed rather fittingly by Naseeruddin Shah. Seema Pahwa does an interesting solo performance called *Saag Meat*, during which she prepares the mutton dish of the title, and serves it to the audience in the end. Some of these performances tend to get very physical, like most of Jyoti Dogra's much-acclaimed one-woman shows, since the actor has nothing but himself or herself to keep the audience engaged. It is a tough performance.

Globally, a series on Amazon Prime called *Fleabag* has become quite a phenomenon. What is interesting is that it started off as a one-woman show with the same title, written and performed by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who is now quite a household name.

Kitchen drama In Seema Pahwa's solo act, *Saag Meat*, she prepares the mutton dish and serves it to the audience. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Double acts

Another play I finally caught was a two-hander. *Mosambi Narangi*, based on *Stones in His Pockets* by Marie Jones, performed by Ajeet Singh Palawat and Rajit Kapur. 120 minutes of two actors playing multiple characters with energy levels staying way up there. I caught the actors between two shows, and they were visibly and justifiably exhausted.

We have had quite a few prominent two-handers. *Dear Liar*, performed by Ratna Pathak Shah and Naseeruddin Shah, which chronicles letters written by George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Patrick Campbell to each other over a span of 40 years. *Love Letters*, featuring Shernaz Patel and Rajit Kapur; and *Tumhaari Amrita*, featuring Shabana Azmi and the late Farooq Sheikh, also dealt with the exchange of letters, and had hugely successful runs. A Marathi play, *White Lily and Night Rider*, a love story set in chatrooms, also made some serious waves. One of my favourites remains Abhishek Majumdar's *Gasha*, featuring Adhir Bhat and Sandeep Shikhar, which told a poignant tale of Kashmir.

The two-hander is quite popular across the world. Most budding theatre people attempt *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee. Indian theatre groups have always been fascinated with plays like *Educating Rita* and *Same Time Next Year*. We have had recent productions of *Constellations*, *Guards at the Taj*, and *Venus in Fur*. Naseeruddin Shah and Rajit Kapur also starred in a very topical adaptation of *A Walk in the Woods*, in which two diplomats of countries with stressful relations develop a less stressful personal relationship.

Like solo performances, the actors have to do a lot of heavy lifting, and their chemistry is critical. We have attempted a few two-handers of our own. *A Guy Thing* (originally *The Dirty Talk*) by Michael Puzzo did very well. With two heartthrobs in it, Ali Fazal and Neil Bhoopalam, it is a hilarious play about the complexities of being a man. We also attempted *Blackbird*, a dark play about paedophilia, with Akash Khurana and Shernaz Patel, and *Tuesdays With Morrie*, again with Khurana playing the ailing professor. Both plays had an additional female cameo, but featured two actors for the most part.

Personally, I prefer a few more people in the rehearsal room. Camaraderie comes with crowds. But that's the director (and foodie) in me speaking. The producer in me would love solo performances. Can there be a play more cost-effective and travel-friendly than that?

Akarsh Khurana, a theatre producer and director, is often broke. To cope, he writes and directs films and web series and occasionally acts, albeit reluctantly.

SPOTLIGHT

Light, shadow and struggle

Shahidul Alam's first museum exhibition in the U.S. is a testament to how photography and activism can go hand-in-hand

Bansie Vasvani

If there is any question about the social impact of photography, there's no better example than Shahidul Alam's three-decade oeuvre and dedication to his native Bangladesh. The acclaimed activist-photographer and *Time* magazine's 2018 Person of the Year found his calling perchance when a camera purchased for a friend never found its way to its rightful owner – so it became a gadget he experimented with. Spurred by the power of the camera, Alam swapped careers after obtaining a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of London. He returned to Dhaka in 1984, where his campaign against the autocratic regime of General Hussain Muhammad Ershad began.

In his first exhibition in a U.S. museum, over 40 photographs highlight his purpose to reveal the truth. 'Shahidul Alam: Truth to Power' at New York's Rubin Museum has works from Alam's 'A Struggle for Democracy' series, in which ordinary people are turned into heroes. Black-and-white images of protest against General Ershad's martial rule like 'Dhaka Siege Day', 1987, and 'Rejoicing at Ershad's Fall', Dhaka, 1990, reveal the mood of the capital city at a crucial moment in history. Here Alam's brilliant moulding of light is critical to his narrative. In the former image, darkened figures loitering in a desolate commercial centre during the uprising capture the city's fitful mood. Their stark silhouettes on a sunny day heighten the collective significance of their unheard voices. Alam reverses this deft mechanism of sharp contrasts in the latter image by illuminating a gleeful truckload of young men celebrating after Ershad's downfall. Seen against a dark background, these wonderfully lit people appear to be uplifted by the halo of light.

Decisive moments

The decisive moments that Henri Cartier-Bresson referred to abound in Alam's compositions. Take 'Smriti Azad at Protest at Shaheed Minar', 1994. The young woman's fervour and passion in a crowd of agitators is palpable. With just the right click, Alam catches her arm lifted like a graceful ballet dancer's and her head and flowing ponytail tilted back as she shouts. Part investigator, part bard, Alam straddles art and activism in equal measure.

The plight of the "majority world" — a term coined by Alam to reflect the global demographics of people of colour — informs much of his practice

From photographs like 'Bishwa Ijtema', 1988, one becomes acutely aware of his edict that the photographer is the "authenticator of the image" and "the primary witness". Taken during the largest annual gathering of Muslims in Bangladesh, the hazy light in the background barely camouflages thousands of devotees gathered in the distance. In the foreground, bands of men huddled around steaming pots on makeshift fires as they ready for the pilgrimage hint at Alam's concern that Bangladesh had slipped from a country founded on secular principles to one pushed by Ershad to embrace Islamic strictures.

The plight of the "majority world" – a term coined by Alam to reflect the global demographics of people of colour – informs much of his practice. The devastating effect of floods in the low-lying regions of Bangladesh is captured in many of his photographs. In 'Woman Wading in Flood', 1988, and 'Woman Cooking on Rooftop', 1988, the woman's misery is emphasised by the drama of darkness and theatrical lighting. Like a movie still, light shines on the water as a woman whose back is to the camera wades through the knee-deep water. Several others are perched in boats and on bicycles. The scene is reminiscent of a dreamscape. Poetic despondence permeates the photograph of the woman cooking on the roof of her hut. Her skeletal body seems to be covered with the same rags that hang off the shacks below her, while ominous dark clouds hover threateningly above. These photographs, like many others, in the series are majestic, but still compel us to focus on what they intend.

Intimate portraits

Although Alam's colour photographs from the 'Brahmaputra Diary' series are more picturesque, it is his eye for composing honest, unpretentious portraits of his subjects that unites the images. Life on the delta plains of the Ganga (Padma), Brahmaputra (Jamuna), and Meghna rivers is captured through intimate photographs of villagers migrating on a boat with a bicycle and petrol cans tethered to the hull, a pensive family huddled together on a canoe, and colourful fishing boats floating on a river. Yet in all the works the unpredictable sky looms above, conspiring to wreck havoc.

Alam's fierce devotion to empowering his countrymen by telling their stories is single-minded, be it by memorialising the belongings of Kalpana Chakma, the feminist activist who disappeared; or by creating alternative spaces for social justice interventions like the Pathshala South Asian Media Institute and the Drik Picture Library. In August 2018, Alam was jailed for speaking out against his government's repressive practices. After his release, he continues to use photography to advocate for equality and freedom of speech.

The New York-based writer reviews exhibitions based on Asia, Africa, and West Asia.

Drama of darkness (Clockwise from left) 'Woman Cooking on Rooftop, 1988'; 'Dhaka Siege Day', 1987; 'Smriti Azad at Protest at Shaheed Minar', 1994. ▪ SHAHIDUL ALAM/ DRIK/ MAJORITY WORLD

Kumbh Mela show

A collection of photographs of Naga Sadhus and transgender devotees at the Ardh Kumbh Mela earlier this year, taken by Delhi-based photographer Parul Sharma and titled 'Mystic India', is on show at Museo Marino Marini in Florence, Italy until December 16, part of the River to River India Festival that wrapped up last week.

Hair love short

An animated short film written by ex-NFL player Matthew Cherry, available online, challenges some of the stereotypes associated with African-American culture. *Hair Love* is about encouraging black girls to appreciate their natural hair, as a father — defying the absent father trope — and daughter bond while trying to style her thick, curly hair.

DELHI THE HINDU ▪ Magazine
Sunday, December 15, 2019

FIELD NOTES

The 'dacoits' of Jagatsinghpur

Some 2,000 villagers from Odisha who resisted POSCO have been slapped with a string of criminal cases. Undeterred, they gear up for the next battle, this time against an even bigger steel plant

Satyasundar Barik

In eight villages along Odisha's Jagatsinghpur coast live some 2,000 'criminals'. They are charged with a range of crimes, some even with kidnapping and murder. Some of them have over 60 cases filed against them. And what is the one common 'crime' these men and women committed? Between 2005 and 2017, they opposed the acquisition of land for a mega steel project proposed by South Korean steel major POSCO. The project had to finally be shelved.

The villagers are physically, emotionally and financially exhausted with the legal battles they have fought all these years. Yet, they are unfazed as they prepare now to face one more tumult in their lives. Another, bigger steel plant has been proposed for the Jagatsinghpur coast, and the villagers are gearing up to resist it. They shrug off the prospect of facing more criminal charges, but they know the stakes are high.

The new project is a 13.2 million tonne per annum (MTPA) steel plant, proposed by JSW Utkal Steel Ltd., led by industrialist Sajjan Jindal, and it is to come up at the site once allocated to POSCO. Besides this, a 900 MW captive power plant and a 10 MPTA cement grinding and mixing unit are also proposed near the villages of Dhinkia, Govindpur, Nuagaon, Bayanala Kanda, Polanga and Jatadhar under Ersama Tahsil in Jagatsinghpur District.

The villagers say they will not go down without a fight. They have pledged to save their traditional livelihoods, which are based on fishing, betel leaf farming and paddy cultivation. Betel leaf cultivation is a roughly ₹50 crore industry here. Leaves are sold inside India and exported as well, and its cultivation generates large-scale employment. Fishing and agriculture take care of their local food needs. The villagers are resistant moreover because they remember how their neighbours and friends, who gave up land for projects such as the Indian Oil Corporation refinery, had to turn to daily labour for wages once the project came up. Says Debendra Swain from Dhinkia, "Many people gave away their lands in the hope that they would get work in the refinery, but they never got a job. Now, they work in our fields."

In Govindpur village, 200 villagers were accused in 150 cases and close to 700 non-bailable warrants were issued. In Gada Kujang, 100 villagers were named in 25 cases

Rooted protests

The first public hearing for environment clearance for the Jindal steel project was scheduled for last month, but was cancelled; women uprooted the bamboo poles placed around the venue to demonstrate their disapproval and determination to resist corporate entities. Now, another hearing has been scheduled for December 20.

It is not going to be easy. At Dhinkia village, once the epicentre of resistance against land acquisition for the POSCO project, some 1,500 villagers have been shuttling between courts in Jagatsinghpur and Kujang to get reprieve in the 2,500 non-bailable arrest warrants issued against them.

In Govindpur village, 200 villagers were accused in 150 cases and close to 700 non-bailable warrants were issued. In Gada Kujang, 100 villagers were named in 25 cases.

The leaders of the movement have been slapped with grave charges including murder, rape, dacoity and kidnapping. Abhaya Sahu, who led the movement against POSCO, was charged in 68 cases. Even two years after POSCO formally withdrew from Odisha in 2017, the cases against the villagers remain.

"We had not even seen a police station before 2005, when the land acquisition process began. These cases must be dropped," says Swain, who stands accused in 22 cases. The social and economic cost of resistance has been immense: many villagers lost years of their youth, some had to drop out of school. "My children could not get the higher education they wanted – their movement was restricted during the resistance," says Akshaya Das, 55.

In the neighbouring hamlet of Patna, Akshaya's namesake, an 80-year-old, says that he, his wife and their three sons together have 17 criminal cases registered against them.

But the cases haven't dampened their spirits: Manorama Khatua played a crucial role in mobilising women during the anti-POSCO movement; women who later became the face of the movement. She has 22 cases against her, including charges of murder, dacoity and rape. But she is undeterred: "We have started regrouping and villagers have begun to spontaneously attend the preparatory meetings," she says.

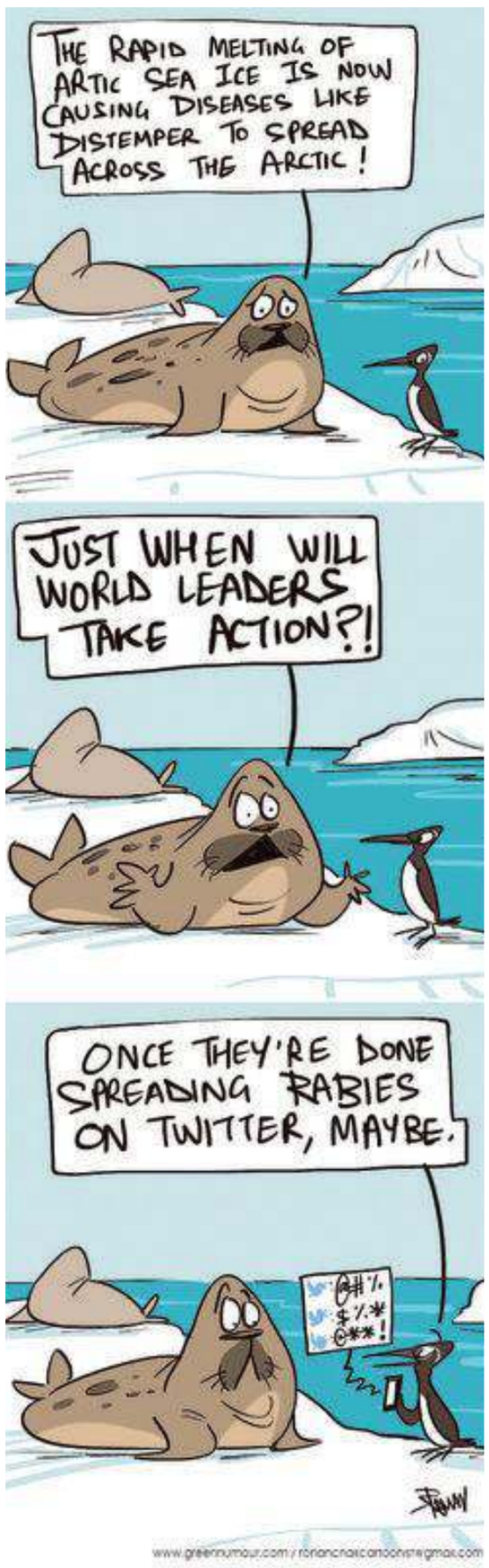
The resistance (Clockwise from above) Dhinkia villagers regroup to fight the new steel plant; a villager works in a betel vineyard; activist Manorama Khatua prepares to continue the protest. ▪ BISWARANJAN ROUT

Unseemly rush

Both the Odisha government and the Centre appear to be in a hurry to fast-track the Jindal mega steel project. The environment ministry has accepted the Odisha government's proposal to transfer the forest clearance permission acquired for POSCO to Jindal. This means the new project could escape the Gram Sabha scrutiny mandated under the Forest Rights Act.

Says Prafulla Samantra, activist and winner of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize: "As per the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, acquired land that has not been used for five years has to be returned to the original owners or occupants. The villagers had planted betel vines on 2,700 acres of land that the government claims to have in its possession. Now, villagers want the land back."

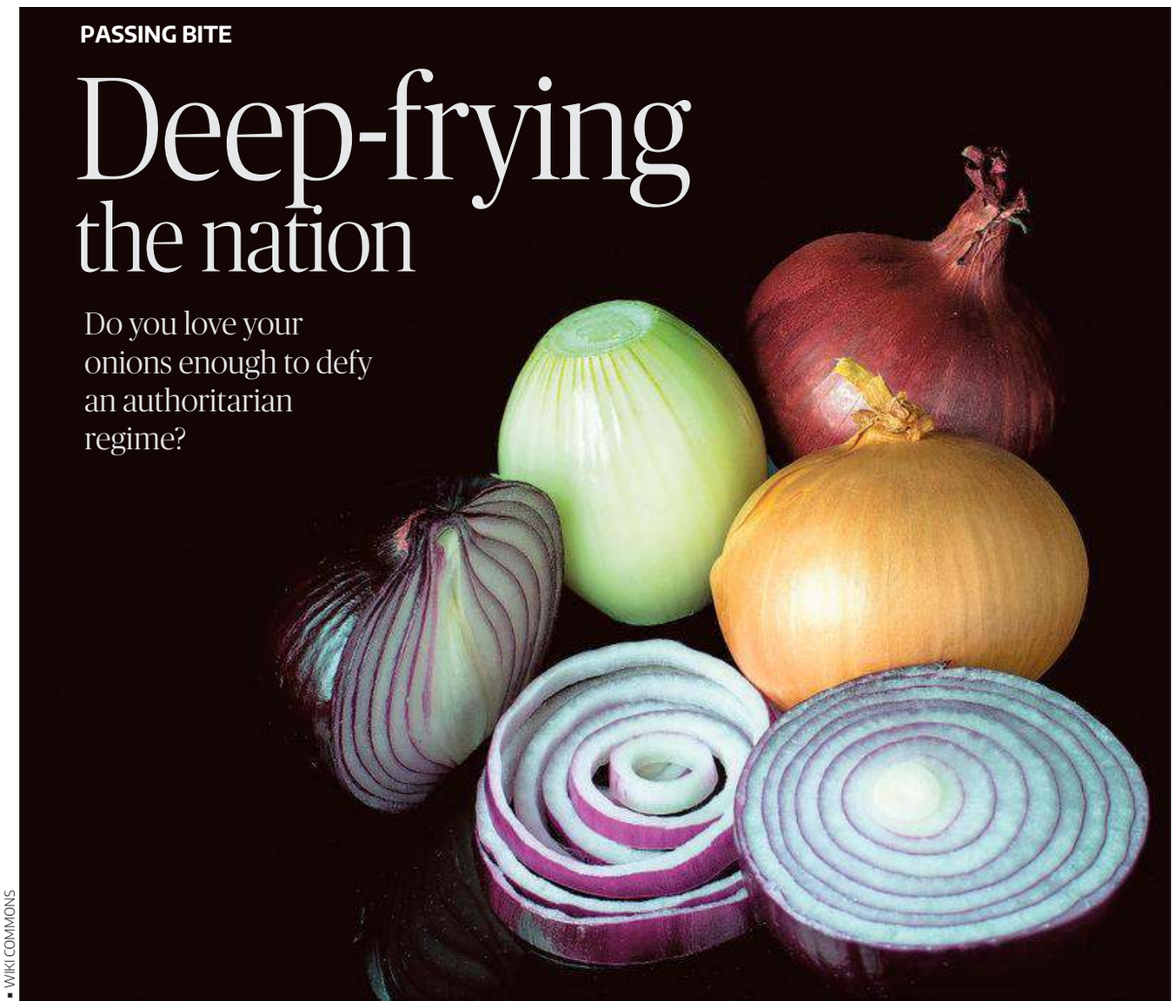
GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY



PASSING BITE

Deep-frying the nation

Do you love your onions enough to defy an authoritarian regime?



▪ WIKI COMMONS

Now, someone who is indifferent to onions could find themselves in a position of great power in this country. In fact, that person — perhaps an important minister — may even detest onions

I don't know if you eat onions in your house, in my house I certainly do. Sometimes foreigners ask me: "You say you're from a Hindu background and you grew up vegetarian – does that mean garlic and onions were also banned from your house?" I have to hasten to deny that my family had any quarrel with onions and garlic. "It's observant Jains who don't let garlic and onions into their house," I explain. "In fact," I point out, "onions and garlic were two of the great pillars on which our type of Gujarati cuisine stood."

Ah, I remember onions very well. All sorts of food in the house would be totally dependent on onions, which in Gujarati we call dungali or kanda. Then, in the streets outside, one would get the waft of the classic Bengali piyaaj philluri, onion filluries – basically laces of onion dipped in spice and chilli-flavoured chickpea flour and then deep-fried. The commonly used names for this snack are philluri or piyaaji, with the latter also doubling as an insult – *ekta piyaaji* – meaning a person who's a sidey, of as little consequence as a strandy onion bhajiya.

Going to the nearby South Indian eateries, the vengayam was to be found in the sambar, in the pearl onion rasam, or embedded in the uttapam or onion rava dosa. Later, graduating to eggs, onion also appeared in omelettes and anda bhurji. Moving to non-veg, the doughty and versatile pyaaz was, of course, ubiquitous in everything from kababs to chicken and mutton gravies. One of my best memories is of lunches at a mid-level Bombay inn near Kala Ghoda, which served a very nice dish of dry roast beef and onions to accompany the beer. In all this time of growing up, I rarely came across people or households that shunned onions.

Know your onions

Going abroad, you realised that there were many different kinds of onions: not just the dark purple ones but white ones, small ones and large ones, with different shapes and subspecies with different names, such as leek/ poireau and shallots/ echalottes. You discovered that the onion was the background kingpin of so many different cuisines. You came across it served raw in salads or woven deep into the most complex sauces. Returning to India, you found onion on the plates of the urban rich and you found it served in the poorest village homes, a wedge served alongside a green chilli to go with the simplest meals. Like green chillies, onions contain vitamin C, plus other vitamins and nutrients. They also contain antioxidants and potassium and have antibacterial properties. All in all, onions are a good thing to eat, and, besides the great taste, the Allium provides good, cheap nutrition. Well, cheap, that is, until recently.

Now, someone who is indifferent to onions could find themselves in a position of great power in this country. In fact, that person – perhaps an important minister – may even detest onions. Echoing the French queen who sneered at the poorest in her country and said, "If they don't have bread, let them eat cake," the minister could say, "They don't have much to eat, so let them also not eat onions."

Layers and layers

That wouldn't be fair or just, but perhaps the minister might be part of a cabinet that wasn't interested in being fair or just. In fact, it could be that the cabinet and its captain and vice-captain were actually *eager* to be unfair and unjust. Perhaps they might see themselves as followers of a particular religion, a great and complex religion, which contained myriad variations in its practice, but these powerful people might want to impose their version of the narrow sect of the religion they claim to follow. Impose it not only on their co-religionists but on people of every religion in the country. Totally totalitarian, unfair and unjust, but hey, perhaps that's exactly what they want to be.

It would then depend on you and how much you love your onions in all their variety. Or how much you love your freedom to worship or not worship the way you choose. Depending on that, you would have to decide whether you accept what is being imposed or protest and fight back. It could be that this leader, his deputy, the cheerleader cabinet and the vassal political parties in the ruling coalition all want to turn a large section of the population into second- or even third-class citizens. It would be up to you to accept or resist this agenda. If you accept that a large section of your compatriots can be legislated into people of no consequence, then remember, it might be you and your section of society that is being deep-fried in the next batch of human piyaajis being cooked.

Ruchir Joshi is a writer, filmmaker and columnist.

Literary Review

The Last Englishmen

Deborah Baker's *The Last Englishmen* has won the Kekoo Naoroji Book Award for Himalayan Literature. The award was set up in 2005 by the Himalayan Club in association with the Naoroji family and Godrej Industries for the best literature on the Himalaya.

Czech again

Czech-born author Milan Kundera has got back his citizenship after spending more than 40 years in exile. He has been living in France since 1975 after he was thrown out of the Czechoslovakian party for "anti-communist activities" and his citizenship rescinded.

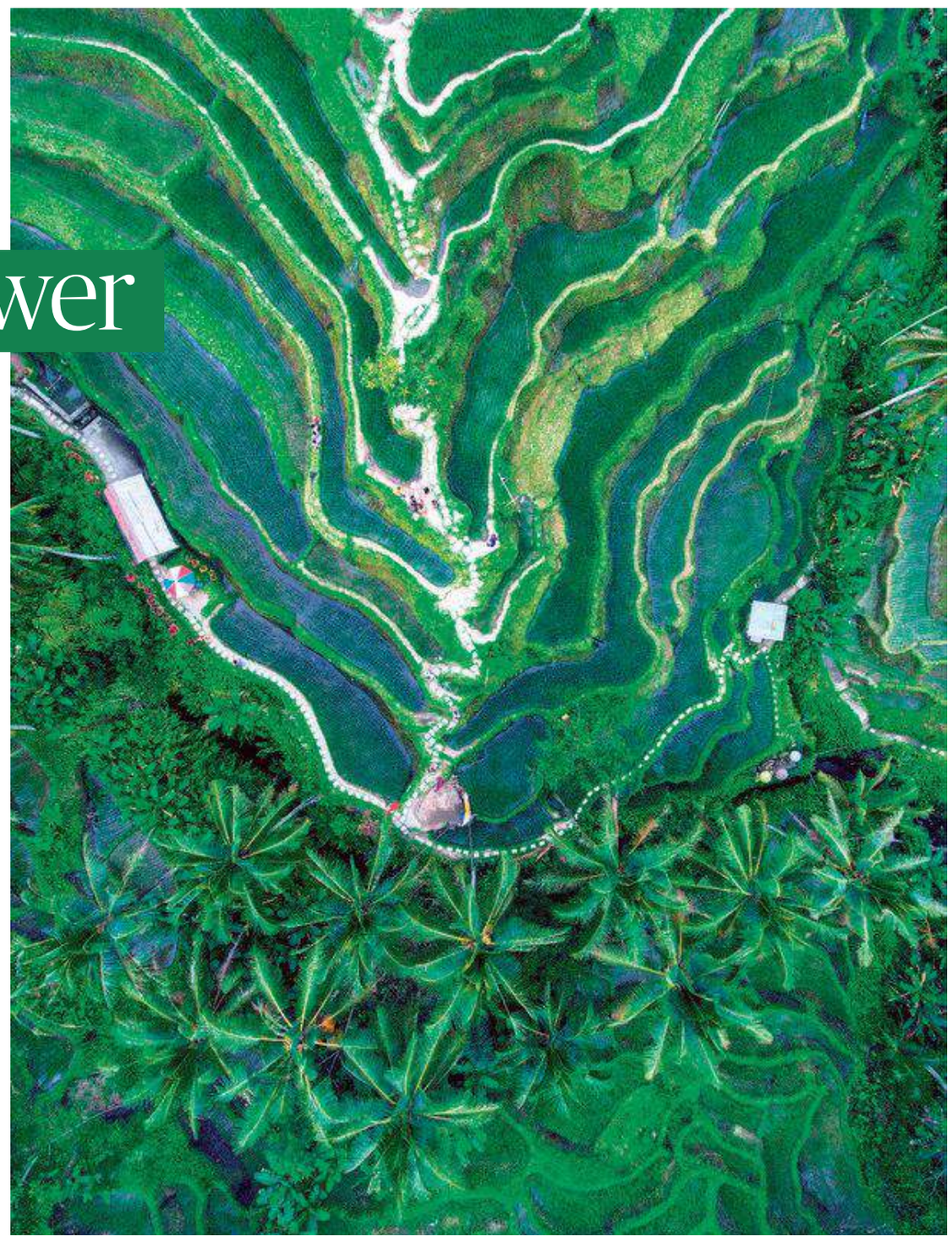
Utopia Avenue

Booker shortlisted author David Mitchell has announced that his next book, *Utopia Avenue*, to be released in June 2020, will be the story of a British band. Set in psychedelic London of 1967, the book will cover street riots and revolutions in the head.

THE LEAD

And she lets the rivers answer

There's a coiled-up energy in Ubud's languid air that blooms into a thousand flowers in creative minds



▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Jaideep Unudurti

I am on the way to Ubud, in central Bali. As we approach the city, both sides of the road are lined with endless rows of carvings and statues. There are innumerable Ganeshas, horses assembled out of twisted wood, jaunty *dwarapalakas* with hibiscus in their ears, giant Buddha heads carved out of black volcanic stone, their serene expressions a counterpoint to the violence of the source material.

The sculptures give way to paintings, then giant paper kites that pull and fret on the doorways, yearning for the tropical blue of the skies.

For the modern, MacBook-toting 'creative', this can't be beat: a town where every prospect discloses a coffee shop, rice fields to walk in and take the air, strange ruins melting into the jungle, and everywhere the resonance of an ancient, yet familiar past.

I am here for an unhurried week. I have no itinerary, no particular plans. I do hope to write, but improving upon the empty page is not easy. I also do have a small assortment of books referencing Bali which I plan to read during my stay; including *All the Lives We Never Lived* by Anuradha Roy and *The Ocean of Churn* by Sanjeev Sanyal. There is a unique pleasure in reading a travelogue or historical fiction, knowing that you can be at the location tomorrow morning if necessary.

According to legend, the city was founded by a sage from India, Rishi Markandeya, who beheld a vortex of hidden energies at the confluence of two small but fast-flowing rivers. He built a temple at the Campuhan or confluence

Art to life

All travellers from India experience a sense of familiarity about Bali, a sense of walking on a bridge across vast gulfs of time. Tagore, who visited Ubud in the 1920s, wrote enthusiastically, "Some puranic age seemed to have come back to life before our very eyes, some picture from the Ajanta caves come out from the realm of art into the realm of life to revel in the sunshine".

This connection to India goes down to the very bedrock. Till Wegener's theory of continental drift, the West saw the Earth as immutable, perfectly preserved as it was from the day of creation. The ancient Balinese, however, were less sanguine. Legend holds that in the beginning, Bali floated freely on the primeval ocean, causing chaos.

It was Lord Shiva who broke off a fragment of Mount Meru and anchored the wandering island to the ocean floor with it. This fragment is Mount Agung, the louring volcano that is going through a current cycle of eruptions. I'd seen Agung from the plane on the approach, aloof, so tall that it pierces the boiling milk of the cloud cover. One glimpse instantly erased the interminable hours in the cramped plane.

The Indian traveller today only has to fear the avariciousness of low-cost airlines, which delight in cramming them into impossible densities. The same could not be said thousands of years ago, when enterprising merchants from present-day Odisha set out across untamed seas, braving storms, rumoured sea monsters and, in a pre-insurance age, potential financial ruin. Sanyal in *The Ocean of Churn* posits that the knowledge of the complex system of monsoon winds enabled seafarers to make ocean-spanning voyages millennia before the Europeans.

There are only a few traces of this left in India, "a fair is held every year in Cuttack called Bali Yatra... families, especially women and children, gather at the edge of a waterbody and place paper boats with oil lamps in the water; this is how the families of the ancient mariners would have bid goodbye to their loved ones".

However, this trade would have a profound impact on Southeast Asia as a whole – the traders didn't just export textiles, they were also transplanting the seeds of Indian culture.

Hidden energies

Ubud is located inland, right on the foothills of the spine of volcanoes that pulled up the island from the oceanic depths. There are no beaches to be had, so travellers who come are typically seeking other coasts, shores to interior seas.

According to legend, the city was founded by a sage from India, Rishi Markandeya, who beheld a vortex of hidden energies at the confluence of two small but fast-flowing rivers. He built a temple at the Campuhan or confluence.

This comes in *All the Lives We Never Lived*, a novel that follows a man's search for his mother after she leaves for Ubud with a German artist, Walter Spies. She is bedazzled by the place, declaiming at one point, "All around are things I want to paint! There are not enough days in my life to paint all the pictures I have in my head".

Spies, I find out, is a real-life character, emblematic of the turmoil of the 20th century – a recurring theme in his life is imprisonment in prisoner-of-war camps in both World Wars. He took up an offer in the 1920s by a prince of the royal family of Ubud to set up an artist's commune. The royal guest house overlooking Campuhan became his studio, thus continuing the pattern laid down by Rishi Markandeya millennia earlier.

I walk alone

After settling down in a small but comfortable guest house on Monkey Forest Road (the forest is the top tourist attraction, where you can spot troops of monkeys gambolling fearlessly and occasionally relieving tourists of the burden of carrying hats or water bottles), the initial blur of narrow street ablaze with the lanterns of cafés and the rioting assortments of frangipani and *kecombrang* slowly resolves.

Solo travellers are few, and when we see each other in the cafés or on the streets, a knowing glance passes. I think about our illustrious forbearer, a Javanese prince turned ascetic who wrote a travelogue, the *Bujangga Manik*, in the 15th century after a tour of Java and Bali. Seeing a wandering hermit, people called out to him:

'"Where are you going?
Why are you so unusually walk
ing all alone?
Thus questioned,
He never replied"'.

Always smile

A routine emerges, out of not having a routine. A long walk at dawn, an unhurried wandering through one of the temple complexes black with years, and then escape the afternoon heat by reading in one of the coffee shops.

In a chapter in *To Stir with Love*, Janet DeNeefe, who runs a string of highly-regarded restaurants in town, says, "there is something so distinctive about the flavour and aroma of Bali coffee, a certain earthiness, nuttiness and maybe even a mellow hint of chocolate that makes it so addictive, some say it is redolent of sweet mango". Coffee is the beverage du jour here; Ubud isn't really a place to drink yourself senseless.

During one of the walks, seeking to escape the mid-day heat, I slip into a corner bookstore. It is like stepping into the cool of a book-lined cave. Like all really good bookshops, the Ganesha looks bigger on the inside than the outside. Antique Balinese musical instruments hang from the ceiling, driven there by the floor-to-ceiling shelves.

I pick up a Basa Balinese booklet. The phrases are divided into four registers or levels: Ceremonial, Formal, Polite and Casual, with small icons denoting which is which. I notice the precept by the authors: "Always smile, even if you are displeased, things will go a lot smoothly and you'll be respected."

Why not?

Despite the languid air, there is a sense of possibility, of potentialities. There are notice boards everywhere advertising yoga courses, healing by standing on nails, acupuncture, relaxation through singing bowls and so on. I spot a notice for a writing retreat, described as a "playful swoop into creative and commercial writing, replete with stimulating word-food". Intrigued, I mail one of the organisers, Peter Boydell, a screenwriter.

"Why Not at 4 p.m.?" is his response, in one of the streets not too far from the monkey forest. The late afternoon light glimmers off the paddy fields that run alongside the road. Why Not? is a bar, and I approach the only man intensely staring at his laptop.

I disturb him in his labours and drag him back 12,000 kilometres from the M62 highway in Liverpool. Boydell is scripting a crime caper set in his native north of England. I look at the tropical sunset that is unfolding behind us, as distant a possible setting from what I imagine are the rain-lashed streets of England. Is it tough to write in such a different atmosphere? "Writing is taking your mind out of your mind and into your body," he says gnomically.

Why Ubud? "There is a special energy here," he says, mentioning one of the leaders of the retreat, a Finnish novelist called Johanna Elomaa, who'd said that she'd been writing sporadically all year, but the moment she arrived, it has been flowing very well. He quotes her, "Everything is coming, I don't where it is coming from."

I can't help but think of the Campuhan, an endless confluence of waters and energies across time.

The writer is a freelance journalist and graphic novelist.

POEMCETAMOL

Verse over the counter

Feeling weary, worthless, stressed? A dose of easy-to-swallow poetry pills might perk you up

When things fall apart Henri Matisse's 1921 oil, 'Reading woman with parasol'. ▪ WIKI COMMONS

Anupama Raju

It was at a lit fest in Cornwall several years ago that Sieghart was set up in a tent, with two armchairs and a prescription pad, and the session was a hit

It is a particularly depressing evening. On the surface, everything seems to be going well. Perhaps most people will tell me to be grateful for what I have. And yet, there is a certain emptiness – call it ennui – that fills the soul. And it is on one such evening that I read 'My Brilliant Image' by Hafez.

I wish I could show you,
when you are lonely or in darkness,
the astonishing light
of your own being!
(translated by Daniel Ladinsky)

Healing words

Now if this poem were a pill, I would pop it every day to make my lows go away. It reminds us we have immeasurable power within us, power we often don't see. It is also the 'prescribed' poem for loneliness and other conditions such as general malaise, loss of self-esteem, or low motivation in the book called *The Poetry Pharmacy*.

That literature is therapeutic is something we can relate to. But perhaps it also draws most of its healing powers from poetry, that poignant well of words that gives us wings when the darkest clouds are over us.

This book of poems brought together by William Sieghart as "tried-and-true prescriptions for the heart, mind and soul" caught my attention when Sieghart was holding a poetry pharmacy session at the Jaipur Literature Festival earlier this year.

It was in Cornwall, at another lit fest several years ago, that the idea of such a pharmacy came to life. Sieghart was set up in a tent, with two armchairs and a prescription pad, and the session was a hit.

Everybody hurts

Even before I owned a copy of the book, I could see why it had become such a success. What makes the pharmacy relevant is the manner in which it binds us to the rest of humanity. We are all bound by our suffering. We all feel pain, or as that popular song goes, "...everybody hurts." And at such moments, a poem makes us feel just a little better.

I remember how Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' had cut through my veins the first time I read it. I was shocked and terrorised by the images, but I took solace from the connection she and I shared.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew *it was you.*
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

I was 17, but those lines gave me courage and a power to come to terms with the anger knotted up inside me. So for a long time, that was a self-prescribed poem I read and drew strength from.

I think of you...

Perhaps Sieghart – also the man who set up the Forward Prizes for Poetry and established National Poetry Day in the U.K. – realised there were many people who needed a poem's shoulder to lean on. He explains in the book that he used to put up posters of 'The Price' by Stuart Henson, in and around London, hoping it would help people in some way. In the book, the poem is prescribed for dissatisfaction with life and angst.

And though such poems don't make the pain go away or present any solutions, we accept them gratefully and ask for more, because they are silent and willing listeners that put their arms around us or make us smile in some way.

I was convinced of this recently when, on a rushed day, I was telling a colleague about this book and she asked me, "Do you have anything for stress?"

She was amidst a million chores and needed a break. I turned to page 13 and presented her with Adrian Mitchell's 'Celia Celia':

When I am sad and weary
When I think all hope has gone
When I walk along High Holborn
I think of you with nothing on

She burst out laughing and laughed each time the lines came back to her. For a few moments, the poem had given her a much-needed break.

Monsters in the head

Proof of *The Poetry Pharmacy*'s resounding success can be seen in its sequel, *The Poetry Pharmacy Returns* (published this September). The latest in the series is *The Poetry Remedy*, published this October.

And now there is even a physical poetry pharmacy in Shropshire, England. Deborah Alma (known as the 'Emergency Poet') who has provided "poetic first aid service" at festivals and schools, is the person behind this mission. Feeling weary and worthless? You could get a dose of easy-to-swallow 'Poemcetamol' here.

If I don't manage to make a trip there, I can always visit the 'Poetry Rx' column in *The Paris Review*, in which poets prescribe poems to readers who write in with problems. Death, unrequited love, loss of self-respect, disillusion – all those monsters that confront us in the middle of the night – find a mention here.

In one such column, a reader who has lost her friend receives 'Separation' by W.S. Merwin, who died earlier this year.

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

More readers and publications seem to be recognising the therapeutic power of poetry, making it a more tangible part of the fabric of our daily lives. I find it reassuring and comforting in a world which otherwise seems to be crumbling. And when conflicts abound, poet Alvin Pang recommends 'A Great Wagon' by Rumi:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

There is possibly such a field waiting for us in some poem or the other.

The writer's book of poems, *Nine*, was published in 2015.

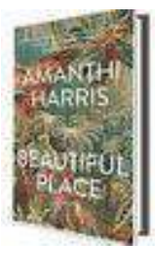
▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

REALISM

In the heart of light, the silence

Sri Lanka's beauty may be paradisical but the darkness of violence overhangs it. This book sketches the light with more ease than the shadows

Pasan Jayasinghe



Beautiful Place
Amanthi Harris
Pan Macmillan
₹599

Fiction set in Sri Lanka is often haunted by the paradox of the island's obvious physical beauty and its equally present darkness. Amanthi Harris attempts to make sense of both in *Beautiful Place*.

Next to an idyllic beach in southern Sri Lanka, the young and bright Padma lives in a lush villa. Its owner, designer and Austrian expat Gerhardt, adopted Padma when she was young, from her abusive father, Sunny, who had tried to sell her to him. Gerhardt pays Sunny to keep him away from her. After a failed stint at university in Colombo, Padma returns to the villa to open it up as a guest house, and finds her life beginning to commingle with a slow stream of guests who are also searching for purpose.

Family trappings

Sri Lanka's beauty is exotic and expansive in *Beautiful Place*; Harris paints sunsets and frangipani trees, beers by the beach and spicy fish curries, sunshowers and humid nights, in consistently rich detail. This, however, is easier than capturing the country's darkness, especially placing it next to the beauty. Harris approaches the task in multiple ways. Outside her villa, Padma's seaside tourist village swirls with drug dealers, brothels, corrupt politicians and watchful eyes, under the ever-present spectre of violence. There is a comic book element to these depictions, especially the violence, through Sunny's criminal presence and the increasing threats to Jarryd, Gerhardt's bohemian yogi friend, who has written a controversial book on Sri Lankan society. Escalating turns of the fist, knife and pistol sit a little too simplistically beside the lush setting, as if the complement to 'beautiful place' is always 'ugly people'.

> Escalating turns of the fist, knife and pistol sit a little too simplistically beside the lush setting, as if the complement to 'beautiful place' is always 'ugly people'

Fortunately, more nuance in the dichotomy can be found elsewhere, as Harris takes on growing societal ructions in contemporary Sri Lanka. There is growing class resentment, portrayed through the villagers' envy of Padma's inherited wealth, and their bitterness at being enmeshed in the pervasively corrupt and criminal tourist industry. The novel does not, however, press too hard on the happy service of the array of housekeepers, cooks and drivers attached to the main characters. This leaves their rarefied privilege intact, and doubles up perhaps to underline the fantastical quality of Padma's unusual life.

Rising Sinhala Buddhist extremism is also hinted at, particularly through Jarryd's encounters with elements provoked by his book. Extracts of it scattered through the novel do nevertheless border on being distractingly didactic – an unnecessary CliffsNotes to a place Harris is much better at describing.

More successful are Harris' judicious takes on family as a source of darkness. Padma's upbringing with the caring, sensitive Gerhardt has freed her from many conventional Sri Lankan family trappings. Yet her biological family – Sunny, her apparently subjugated and ailing mother Leela, and wayward, criminal brother Mukul – constantly intrude on her life, bringing with them bitterness, suspicion and violence.

Invisible lines

Elsewhere, Padma's guests, who are all escaping their predetermined futures set by their families in one way or the other, capture the oppression created by family expectations. Harris renders the burdens of obligation, as applied to career, marriage and who you're seen with and where, in claustrophobic detail.

The novel endorses unconventional families and free choice as the key to happiness. While its characters are able to exercise this choice more freely than most, Harris commendably does not paint them as immune to the pressures created by any arrangement of love. Padma wonders how her life would have been without Gerhardt who, in turn, worries that his expectations for her have smothered her.

Harris' approach to her characters is considerate and quietly affecting. This is particularly successful when the meandering between characters leads to the viewpoints of one being evaluated by another – the mental sizing up of each other by Padma and her guests is often filled with amusing, sparkling energy.

Throughout *Beautiful Place*, the idea that Sri Lanka is a place of splendour so long as its deeper structures are not questioned rings true, and feels particularly apt in a tourist context. For the foreigner wanting to get away, indulging in the simpler pleasures and paying lip service to the locals is enough to retain the image of the place.

Things become more complicated only when the invisible, unspoken lines between country and guest, foreigner and local, wealth and need are probed a little too intently, as Padma and Gerhardt find out.

In the end, the novel does not come to any resolution between Sri Lanka's beauty and darkness, for there really can be none. Suffering for good people and providence for the bad are constants, even in paradise.

For those lucky enough to be able to experience the beauty and avoid the violence, the fiction of the island can be maintained. *Beautiful Place* shows, however, that even for those that fortunate, the illusion collapses so very easily.

The writer is a researcher based in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

ROMANCE

The last of the golden days

The one thing the book is not is 'urgent,' but it is affecting and appealing in a wistful sort of way

▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Aditya Sudarshan

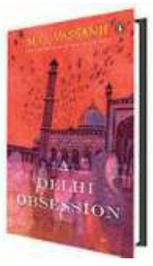
It is hard to imagine a modern-day Indian English novel revolving steadily around Khan Market, Lodhi Gardens, and the IIC bar in Lutyens' Delhi, and never spinning off into satire or self-loathing. But M.G. Vassanji, a Canadian citizen of Indian origin, must have both a cultural sympathy for the Anglicised Indian, and a foreigner's immunity from the heaped and heated embarrassments of that identity, because *A Delhi Obsession* does exactly that.

Love under a shadow

Vassanji's primary protagonist is the (autobiographical-seeming) Munir Aslam Khan, an ageing Canadian writer at a loose end in life and work, visiting Delhi on a whim (it was his grandfather's old home). At the bar in the Delhi Recreational Club (a thinly fictionalised India International Centre), Khan bumps into and falls in love with Mohini Singh, an elegant, chatty columnist married to an Indian intelligence official. Their romance develops quickly, but clandestinely, shadowed always by the looming presence of the husband, the government, and the Hindu right-wing, for whom any ostensible 'love jihad' is despicable.

Almost without one realising it, Vassanji draws us into the inner lives of Munir and Mohini, slipping into their skin with disarming ease. The reader grows to understand Munir's anomie; his vague, dwindling success as a writer; his successful but hollow first marriage; his affectionate but distanced relationship with his daughter. We recognise and sympathise with a man who has "run into dry ground," whose hopes "now consisted of histories mainly" – as he gropes for personal roots in Delhi, and daydreams, in tune with his nostalgia, about the last days of the Delhi Sultanate.

Meanwhile, Mohini too is remarkably humanised, as a woman full of good intentions, who lacks forcefulness in any particular direction. She regards herself, instinctively, as a fine product, "an educated, liberal Hindu woman of the generation after Independence," yet discovers that neither her well-arranged marriage, nor her duties as daughter, wife and mother (worry about her daughter's poor marks in maths besets her), nor her smattering of intellectualism, nor her habitual Hinduism, has given her a firm psychological foundation. She falls helplessly in love with Munir, in the hectic manner of an adolescent (it is on this dreamy plane that the two are united). In the throes of her extra-marital affair, she visits Shirdi with her family, and gazing "at the benign, holy image of the saint", can only plead: "I am not a bad person, Baba."



A Delhi Obsession
M.G. Vassanji
Viking/ Penguin
₹499

Bogeymen cometh

And the reader will agree. The careful rendering of these two persons is the major achievement of Vassanji's novel, and it suffices as a reward for the reader. However, although Vassanji's particular perspective enables him to access the vulnerability of liberal, Anglicised Indians, whom other writers of our time might insist on exalting in postures of defiance, or satirising cruelly, he does not sound the depths of their human situation either.

> Vassanji draws us into the inner lives of Munir and Mohini, slipping into their skin with disarming ease

This is because the defiant posturing has only been dodged, not understood, while the critical malaise remains unattended. The fault of weakness (which La Rochefoucauld regarded as the only incorrigible fault, inasmuch as there is no external help for it) is writ large not just over Munir and Mohini's characters but also over the authorial voice. For this reason, Vassanji winds up presenting a pure caricature of Hindu right-wingers (Munir and Mohini's most significant opponents).

They figure in this book like the bogey-men of a fearful child's imagination ("the slimy-looking one in the corner at the front – in the pure-white oufit... Don't look. He's Jetha Lal of Ahmedabad. A Hindu purifier"); of whom the only thing that is definitely known is that they are absolutely invincible. And while these ectoplasmic forces, we sense, are busy setting up inexorable stratagems to stamp out his protagonists, the author allows Munir and Mohini to ruminate, in the grip of nostalgia, for 230 pages.

The one thing that *A Delhi Obsession* is not, therefore, is 'urgent', as the blurb describes it to be. Instead, it is an appealing, affecting portrayal of a people who have laid down their arms already, and are dressing up in all their finery to die; reminding us, infuriatingly, of all the reasons they had to live.

The writer is the author, most recently, of *The Outraged: Times of Strife*.

NOVELLAS

Her love burns bright at both ends

K.R. Meera's gritty and unapologetic women are not for the faint-hearted

Bageshree S.

The narrator-protagonist of 'The Deepest Blue', the last novella in this collection, warns the readers before she sets out to narrate her story – "Only the firm-hearted are advised to proceed."

This statutory warning could serve almost the entire repertoire of K.R. Meera, who in her stories dives unflinchingly into the darkest depths of the human mind. These are depths where all the binaries of the surface – be it love and violence, life and death – fuse inextricably. At their best her stories are darkly lyrical and metaphorically rich; occasionally, though, the unmitigated horror and angst can prove exhausting.

The titular story in *The Angel's Beauty Spots* centres on Angela, a single mother with grit and gumption, living unapologetically outside conventional morality. The story is interesting for the play of extreme vulnerability and strength of Angela's character. She says, "This body is a huge liability. Very hard to lug without a job! And hard to find a job with it! So, wherever I go, I look for the top man there..."

Radhika in the second novella, 'And Forgetting the Tree, I...', has settled into the staid rhythm of middle-aged life after a traumatic childhood and youth. But storm strikes again as her lover from the past re-enters her life. This story effectively uses the metaphor of a tree to speak of various nuances of life and love. "Whenever he could, he swung the axe hard at the base of the tree, believing that the tree was truly realised in the axe..."

The "good wife" of the last novella longs for what her husband and family cannot offer – an all-consuming love that transcends the moral code of the time, and indeed, the notion of time itself.

The Angel's Beauty Spots
K.R. Meera, trs J. Devika
Aleph
₹399

Love is central to the stories of all the three women protagonists, but it is the sort of love that burns bright and briefly at both ends and sears all things around it.

"This love is not only strange, but also painful. Anyway, what is love without pain? It must ache as if your bosom has been cleaved apart... I will tear out my wings and fly to him... I will defeat him with blood and pain," says the wife of the third novella. This is certainly not "strange" in the world of Meera's atypical characters, so many of whom have been excellently translocated from Malayalam into English by J. Devika.

MURDER MYSTERY

Beauty and the beast

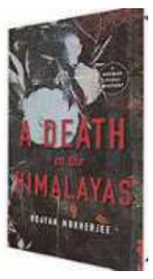
A nice Scooby-Doo romp if you can close your ears to the lectures

Mihir Balantrapu

We never tire of murder mysteries because they give us precisely what we want. As humans, we're obsessed with death, so they give us murder, and we're thrilled by the adventure of figuring it out, so they give us mystery. Throw in the power of conventional drama tropes – the titillating contrast of an intrigue in an idyllic locale, a whodunnit with a protagonist who is like a Parsi Keanu Reaves, a real-world right-wing vs. left-wing parable – and Udayan Mukherjee bakes us a book that could easily be a Netflix series.

Why is Neville Wadia, the new fictional detective on the block, named after a famous industrialist? A former investigator, haunted by his traumatised conscience, has retired to a quiet life in the Kumaon hills. But you just can't keep a top cop out of the action, not when he has such potential for catharsis and an impeccable knack for the third-degree. The book definitely makes you think deeper about which side of the political divide you are on. Even if it eventually picks a villain that is both timeless and convenient.

It takes first-hand experience to truly understand the socio-economic dynamics of an ecosystem. Mukherjee has clearly lived among the hills and cherished its calm and its people; his book may be a page-turner, but certain pages make you linger. But even as you enjoy the end-game stretching across the scenic route from Birtola to Satbunga to Nainital and back, you're desperately wishing for a clearer sky, because the plot straddles that nervous balance between overcomplexity and sentimentality.



Death in the Himalayas
Udayan Mukherjee
Pan Macmillan India
₹499

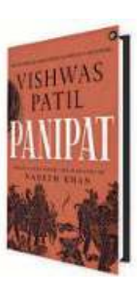
That this is a work of fiction by a journalist is unmistakable. The narrative is a pot-pourri of various social issues that have preoccupied the Indian media these last few years – violence against civil rights activists, the growing unassailability of political power, corporate mafiadom, sexual abuse.

Mukherjee might not have got away with it if the story didn't make for a nice Scooby-Doo romp, where the gang finally busts the unexpected villain after a string of dud leads. And that's a job well done for a crime writer.

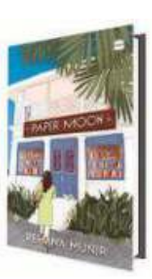
BROWSER

In the Company of Strangers
Awais Khan
Simon & Schuster India
₹399
Mona, part of Pakistan's elite, has everything, but craves emotional release. She meets a wounded young man, years younger, and begins an affair that threatens to shatter Lahori society's facade of conservatism.

Panipat
Vishwas Patil, trs Nadeem Khan
Westland
₹899
The third battle of Panipat, fought between the Marathas and the king of Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Abdali, had disastrous consequences for the Marathas. Vishwas Patil's Marathi novel was first published in 1998 and has been translated into English for the first time.



Paper Moon
Rehana Munir
HarperCollins
₹299
Fiza's father passes away, leaving her an inheritance, with instructions to open a bookshop with it. Even as the shop begins to take shape in Bandra, Fiza is wooed by Iqbal, a mysterious customer, while she is still unsure about her feelings for her ex. Can Fiza take charge of her life?



Just a Housewife
Rakesh Varma
Rupa
₹295
Three women, Barkha, Anjali, Aradhya, explore the meaning of love, marriage, home, death. Their lives are falling apart in some way or the other and this goads them to search for their identity. But society questions their ways and they must fight disapproval.

DEFENCE

A general in his labyrinth

Former Army chief V.P. Malik recounts past strategies from the Northeast, Kargil to Male

Kallol Bhattacherjee

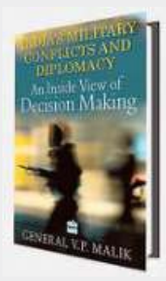
Just three decades ago, the Northeast was saddled with many insurgency movements. Acronyms for the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) appeared in news bulletins for the violent activities they carried out in the strategically significant area which sits like the head of the Southeast Asian region. Following the Assam Accord and several other agreements, the fire of separatism in the region was contained. That of course is one part of the story. The other part is narrated by General V.P. Malik in *India's Military Conflicts and Diplomacy: An Inside View of Decision Making*.

Myanmar outreach

The separatist outfits did not survive on a local sense of alienation alone. They were actively aided by Myanmar and in some cases they exploited the lax security infrastructure in the country's north where they built extensive infrastructure to target Indian interests.

India had given refuge to the deposed Prime Minister U Nu, and relations nosedived almost immediately as the military rule under General Ne Win took a hostile position. This coupled with Myanmar's own weakness and other regional players ensured safety for the insurgents of the Northeast.

Finally, in 1999, the Government of India reached out to Myanmar and sent General Malik, then army chief, who met with General Maung Aye first in Myanmar and then in Shillong and began a security partnership with Myanmar that built up pressure on the insurgents. Myanmar did not disappoint. On January 8, 2000, Gen. Malik handed over a map that highlighted certain Naga militant camps in Myanmar's northern lawless areas. Within few days the camps were raided by the Myanmar Army and uprooted.



India's Military Conflicts and Diplomacy: An Inside View of Decision Making
General V.P. Malik
HarperCollins India
₹699

The book by General Malik is full of interesting details and is a must to understand several key strategic gains that India made during the late 1980s till the early 2000s.

As the army chief during the Kargil war, he convinced the Vajpayee government to lift the political ban on the manufacturers of the Bofors gun which was at the centre of a controversy. The gun was instrumental in India securing victory in Operation Vijay against Pakistan. The section on his visit as the first Indian army chief to Israel makes for interesting reading. Also, on then Prime Minister Vajpayee's orders he oversaw the building of a field hospital in Tajikistan's Farkhor Air Base where Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Massoud was treated after he was hit by a suicide blast on September 9, 2001.

Operation Cactus

But the most exciting part is the account of Operation Cactus that India launched within hours after a group of Tamil militants attempted an armed coup in Male in 1988. Gen. Malik's narration of his morning meeting with the then vice-chief of army staff Lt. Gen. Sunith Francis Rodrigues and the flight to Male in an IL-76 aircraft are straight out of a thriller. Such was the hurry that only after the aircraft took off, Gen. Malik – then a Brigadier in the Military Operations Directorate – realised that the food packed by his family had remained untouched in his briefcase. By next morning Indian commandos had escorted Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom to safety and the attempted coup was over.

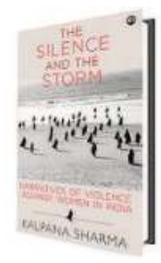
SOCIETY

Things we are quiet about

Why has India been unable to stop violence against women? Who is to blame? What is the way out? There are no easy answers as a journalist and writer explains

Sudipta Datta

Over the past fortnight the horrifying attacks on women in public places at Hyderabad, Tonk, Coimbatore, Unnao has only made it clear that the narrative of violence against women in India has barely changed. When there's an assault or rape, it is followed by an outpouring of anger but then a weak system usually allows the perpetrators off the hook till another heinous crime grips our imagination.



The Silence and the Storm: Narratives of Violence against Women in India
Kalpana Sharma
Aleph
₹599

No social reform

In *The Silence and the Storm*, journalist and writer Kalpana Sharma tries to explain why despite laws being reformed, social structures that justify the violence have remained the same over the decades.

She argues that sexual crimes against women are inevitably linked with the kind of divisive politics that dominate society today. Sharma doesn't talk about only the crimes that take place in the open, she writes about those who are not heard, about violence in the home, raising critical questions: Who benefits? Who loses? Who carries the burden? Who pays the price? Who makes the decisions?

In 1972, women's groups across India came together to demand changes in the laws governing rape after an Adivasi girl was raped in custody by two policemen in Maharashtra. Cut to 2018, and boys and girls were out on the streets again to seek justice for the rape and brutal murder of an eight-year-old girl in Kathua, Jammu. In between in 2012, the shocking rape and killing of a 23-year-old in Delhi led to outrage across the nation. But as Sharma elaborates, the conclusions to each campaign were identical: "The government made some changes in the law, yet the system that implements the law, the justice delivery system, remained the same."

Between 1985 and 2018, the period she has studied, a great deal has changed in India, but not that much for a lot of women. Activists have grudgingly admitted that women in India are not a homogenous group. Sharma noticed that during times of conflict, like for example during the Mumbai riots after the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992-93, women identified with others of their own community or caste or religion rather than being sympathetic towards their fellow sisters. Dalit feminists have pointed out that they experience discrimination first as members of a caste, and then, in addition, as women.

> In both the Maharashtra and Kathua incidents and in many other cases, 'the protector and the predator have the same face'

Danger at home

Sharma describes the ostensibly 'safe' space within the four walls of the home as sometimes the most dangerous place.

"Crime data has established that more than 90% of assaults on women and girls are from men known to them." In both the Maharashtra and Kathua incidents and in many other cases, "the protector and the predator have the same face."

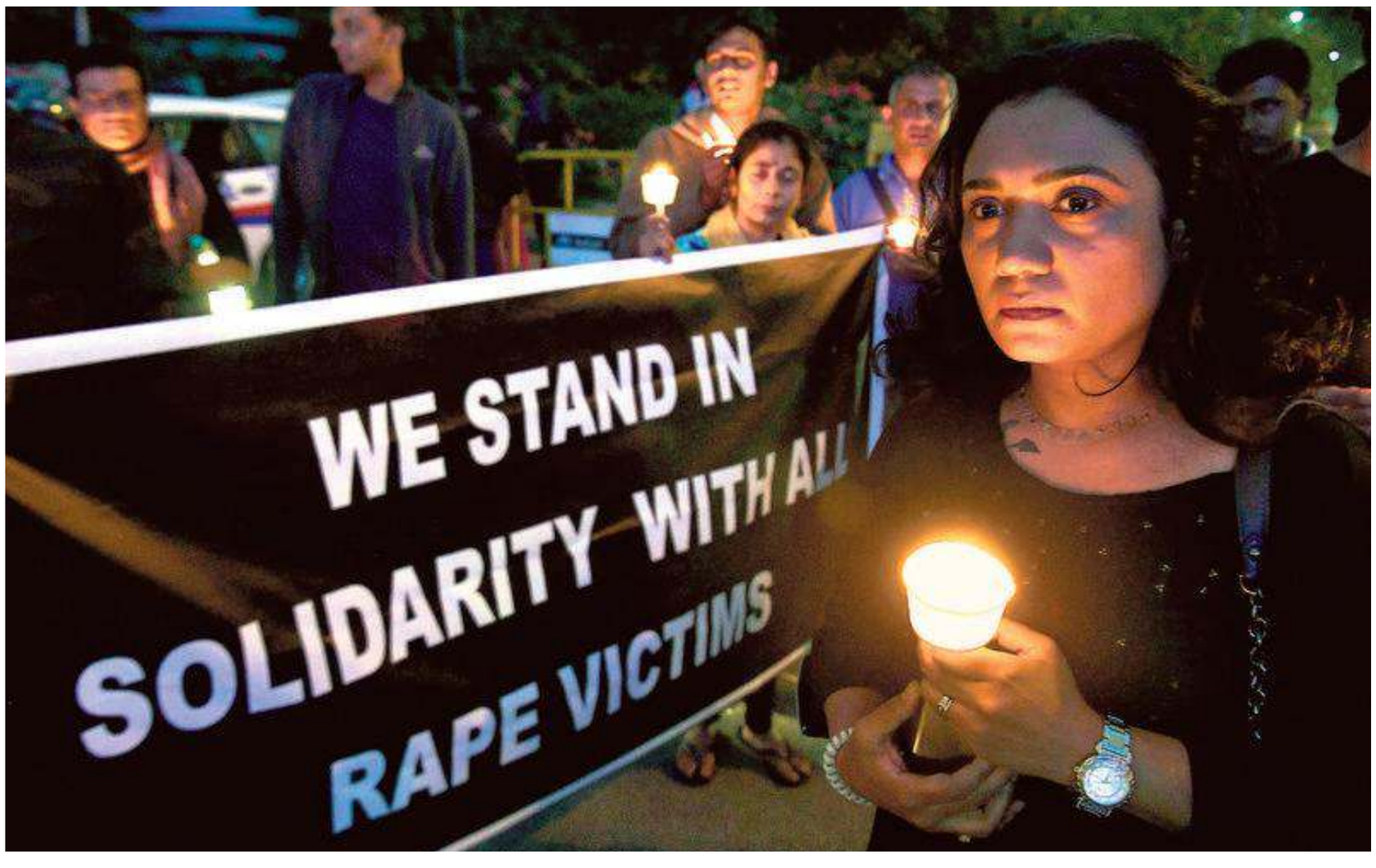
She makes the important point that sexual violence is as much about women as it is about men. Unfortunately in large swathes of India, succeeding generations of men are led to believe that they have the "right to demand and to get what they want from women – 'their' women and 'other' women. And that, if their demands are not met, these women deserve punishment." Men are considered to be heads of families; and women are expected to 'serve and conform.'

Forgotten cases

The Justice J.S. Verma Committee, set up after the Nirbhaya tragedy in Delhi in 2012, made widespread recommendations about changes in the law relating to rape and sexual assault. But the government of the day adopted them only in part, ushering in changes through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013, but overlooking some key suggestions including one that held that the death penalty does not necessarily act as a deterrent against such crimes.

Sharma meticulously lists cases that have been forgotten, including a terrifying one at Khairlanji in Maharashtra. Priyanka Bhotmange, a 17-year-old Dalit and a class-topper, was stripped naked, paraded, beaten up, raped and killed, along with her mother in 2006 for daring to testify against members of a dominant caste in a dispute.

The writer is convinced that "as long as our society concurs with the belief that one set of persons is superior and entitled and the other inferior and to be excluded, then whether it is caste, or gender, there can be no real change." Laws have reformed, not mindsets.



Beyond words A candlelight vigil in support of sexual assault victims in Bengaluru. ▪ AFP

CULTURE

The syncretic age of Persia in India

A historian questions the notion of seeing the vibrant and diverse culture of the subcontinent between 1000 and 1765 through a religious lens

Sudhirendar Sharma

Richard Eaton, who teaches history at Arizona University, argues that India was never a self-contained stagnant civilisation as is often believed but one that evolved over centuries of intense engagement with other peoples and cultures. Starting from the conquest of Mahmud Ghazni to the exploits of Nadir Shah, Eaton reconstructs the most compelling but consequential historical accounts, from 1000 to 1765, which produced a hybridised composite civilisation that has sustained its distinct identity.

India in the Persianate Age defines these seven centuries as an epic period of engagement with other regions, especially the Persian, which had contributed to producing a rather harmonious society. It was the British who reduced it to the Hindu-Muslim binary, thereby inflicting a deep divide that has continued to dominate the socio-political discourse ever since.

In his brilliant exposition spanning the prolonged medieval period in history, Eaton questions the convention of seeing a diverse and vibrant culture through a religious lens. "Imagining geographical spaces through religion limits our understanding by imposing and justifying an ideology at the cost of ignoring its inherent richness." The reading of history in terms of mutually exclusive religions has only helped one form of nationalism, however, at an enormous recurring cost to society. Decoupling history from such an assumption alone can provide an unbiased measure on acceptance of the political authority, notwithstanding a ruler's own religion, by a socially, linguistically and religiously diverse Indian society.

What the colonial historians read as 'Muslim conquest' was indeed a period in history that had consolidated multiple ethnic identities like Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs, and empowered them to define their terms of collaboration with the then rulers. Far from acknowledging it, the self-serving Anglophone historians sought to paint the entire period as despotic and unjust to lay unilateral claim on pulling India from centuries of so-called Muslim subjugation towards modernity. It is no less than a historical conspiracy to erase that part of history as 'dark and backward,' with the sinister aim of justifying the brutal suppression by the British as 'mild and equitous.' Curiously, the colonial takeover was not branded as a 'Christian conquest.'

Challenging the colonial claims on introducing India to modernity, the book provides a comprehensive account of the cultural exchanges between Sanskrit literary traditions and the Persian cosmopolitan outlook that led the Mughals to rationalise their empire by applying the secular outlook to the religious traditions of their subjects. Noticeable is the fact that both Sanskrit and Persian were not the 'language of place,' and consequently expanded over much of Asia not by force of arms but by emulation, and without any governing centre. This is a significant takeaway from the book which provides a perfect backdrop to medieval India becoming the centre for the patronage of Persian literature and scholarship.

Biryani and a melting pot

What makes Eaton's assessment of the medieval history distinct and insightful is its treatment of the otherwise illustrious period on its own terms without today's biases. From architecture to science and from trade to cuisine, the assimilation of the Sanskritic universe with its Persianate counterpart is well evident. The persistence of several Persian words including *hukm* (God's command), *langar* (communal meal) and *biryani* (flavoured rice cuisine) in everyday usage signifies that it was a neutral language for daily correspondence and literary expression. Covering vast swathes of the Persian influence on the making of India, Eaton pays a fine tribute to the evolution of India as a compassionate civilisation.

Ambitious in its undertaking, *India in the Persianate Age* has enough to ruffle feathers of today's nationalists. It is a thick but immensely readable volume that elaborates the long-term process of cultural interaction and assimilation that is reflected in language, literature, attire, science, art, music, governance and warfare. It goes to the rich cultural traditions of India that those who came to conquer it, in the end, were conquered by it.

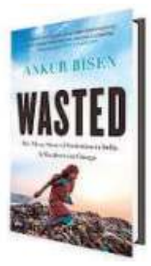
India in the Persianate Age
Richard M. Eaton
Allen Lane
₹999

The independent writer is a researcher and academic.

Unleashing the Vajra: Nepal's Journey Between India and China
Sujeev Shakya
Penguin Random House India
₹599
Located between India and China, Nepal has historically been at her most prosperous when it has leveraged this geographical position. A writer outlines the economic, social and political factors that will determine Nepal's future.

Gambling with Violence
Yelena Biberman
Oxford University Press
₹1,295
This volume tackles a global problem relevant for Pakistan and India: state outsourcing of violence to ordinary civilians, criminals and ex-insurgents. Drawing on interviews, research and fieldwork across Asia, Europe and North America, Biberman explains state-nonstate alliances in civil war.

Wasted: The Messy Story of Sanitation in India, A Manifesto for Change
Ankur Bisen
Pan Macmillan India
₹699
Urban India generates close to three million trucks of untreated garbage every day. The need for attention to sanitation is urgent and long-term. This book explains why India struggles with this issue.



Love, Loss, and Longing in Kashmir
Sahba Husain
Zubaan
₹595
An activist and researcher documents her involvement with the politicised terrain of Kashmir. As she gets to know the people caught in conflict, Husain focuses on certain key areas including health, militancy, its changing meanings for local people, and the search for justice.

DELHI THE HINDU ▪ Magazine
Sunday, December 15, 2019

Notes from Istanbul

Arunima Mazumdar

▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Breathing in the morning air perfumed with freshly roasted doner kebabs and chestnuts, I make my way down the cobbled road and pass many a baklava shop leisurely rousing to life

It rained last night here in Istanbul, and this morning. The sky has turned the bluest of all blues and cotton candy clouds are napping in the cool light of the day. Having lived off its age-old cliché – where Asia meets Europe – Istanbul is a magnificent blend of the old and new. With multiple pasts reigning its present, it is a city layered with fascinating legends and cultures.

I am at İstiklal Street – Istanbul's most famous avenue that stretches from Taksim Square all the way down to the historical Galata Tower. The boulevard is dotted with high-end clothes and make-up studios, chic boutique hotels, modern restaurants and terrace bars. These Ottoman era buildings were later designed into Renaissance style.

İstiklal Street

There's a Starbucks prepping for the day ahead and an already busy McDonalds plonked across it. It's almost reminiscent of Champs-Élysées, only narrower. Why not, this is after all the European side of the city.

Despite its fancy, foreign appeal, İstiklal Street retains subtle traces of old Istanbul. Amidst the upmarket stores one can spot the bright red Nostaljik Tramvay doing what it does best – run routinely up and down the length of it.

Breathing in the morning air perfumed with freshly roasted doner kebabs and chestnuts, I make my way down the cobbled road and pass many a baklava shops leisurely rousing to life. I am headed over to the Beyoğlu district (formerly known as Pera) which, since the 1980s, continues to be the heart of Istanbul's Western-minded, cosmopolitan quarter – cool graffiti adorning the walls, snoozing cats photo-bombing every single frame, and trendy stores lending to the active atmospheric setting.

My stop here at Beyoğlu is at the Homer Kitabevi, a 25-year-old bookshop best-known for its collection of English books in all of Istanbul. Don't be fooled by its humble, almost easy-to-miss entrance. Step inside and you'll see that every corner of the store is crammed with books.

The eye-catching part, however, is the store's signage: a floor board right outside has a clever wordplay – books to the right/ traffic to the left; the wall outside sprayed with abstract graffiti; books hanging off the window rails; and a ladder-style bookshelf leans along the entrance which is stacked with a curated collection of books across genres, handwrapped in brown paper, tagged with clues alluding to the book, encouraging readers to go on a 'Blind date with a book' and not judge it by its cover.

Galata Bridge

I pick some stationery and hail a taxi to get to the Asian side of Istanbul. We're crossing over Galata Bridge which once witnessed the pulse of the city and now merely exists to connect the divided sides. At one time, the bridge was a hangout zone for artists and political demonstrations, and a thriving cultural centre. Now one finds it teeming with street vendors selling *simits* (sesame bread rings, most common snack here) and fishermen with their rods slumping over the rim waiting for a lucky catch.

The mood changes automatically when you're on the other side. This is where it begins to feel exotic, the city's character, unabashedly rich with ancient history, its *hammams* and towering minarets, and *azaan* reverberating in the milieu.

I get off at Sultanahmet Square, the heart of the old historic quarter of Istanbul and home to Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, both facing each other at opposite ends of the square. During the holy month of Ramadan, practising Muslims from all over the world and Turkey gather in the lush green manicured lawns for *iftar*. The green, blue and white İznik tiles of the mosque dazzle with the spirit of the evening.

I find some space in the corner of the courtyard, away from the praying and partying crowds. Religion, when embraced together, can be beautiful. I watch in wonder as I hear Turkish coffee bubbling in agreement inside the shiny copper kettle in the cart next to me. The vendor, a young boy, hands me my cup and greets me.

The independent writer is Delhi-based.

LETTER FROM A CONCERNED READER

Weight, please

Respected Madam/ Sir,

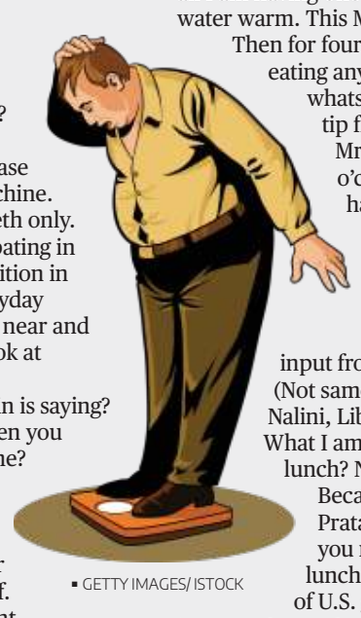
In Malayalam there is one saying. Don't take snake on the fence and put it inside the lungi. This only happened to myself this week.

Five six days back I was standing in bathroom and brushing teeth. Brushing and brushing. Brain is thinking and thinking. World news. Politics. Sports. Food items. Actress Gautami, *Avasara Police 100* superhit film, like that things. Suddenly through the mirror behind dirty clothes bucket I saw one corner of one thing.

What is that thing, Madam/ Sir? Weighing machine.

Ok, immediately what brain should have said? Retired person means what the brain should say? It should say Mathrubootham please ignore weighing machine. You please brush teeth only. As if you are participating in Mr. Chennai competition in Elder category. Everyday *paralokam* is getting near and near and you will look at weight? Nonsense.

Instead what brain is saying? Mathrubootham when you check weight last time? During Deepavali is it? Ok please check again. Looking slim these days but better make sure. Check off.



▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Madam/ Sir, I went and stood on weighing machine and found weight is now 81 kg, increased minimum 4 kg since Deepavali. Guruvayoorappa, what is this.

Mrs. Mathubootham came running. I said, "Kamalam I have increased weight by 4 kg since Deepavali." She said, "Old man, nonstop eating rasmalai and drinking rosemilk means you will become actor Madhavan?"

Day and night this woman thinks of Madhavan only.

That evening I met Dr. Shankaramenon and Mohammed Usman at Senior Intermediate Yoga. Afterwards Usman is asking what happened Mathrubootham? Face is longer than Marina Beach?

I said, "Friends what to do, weight has increased 4 kg. Any advice is there?"

Madam/ Sir, whether you have ever asked any people for advice of losing weight? It is even worse than asking feedback on PM Modi. Within two minutes entire Intermediate Seniors are standing around like jackals around buffalo in Panchatantram story. For one hour I got idea after idea.

I went to Mrs. M and said, "Kamalam, I am thinking of doing these ideas for weight loss. Any thoughts?" She laughed and laughed like anything and said, "100% you should try from today itself."

So, after waking up first thing I am having ginger water before any and every activity. This Usman said. Then after brushing teeth and all I am having one glass lemon water warm. This Mrs. Nalini said.

Then for four hours I am not eating anything whatsoever. This is tip from upstairs Mrs. D'Costa. At 11 o'clock I am having breakfast of curd with honey and one cup black coffee. This is important input from Mrs. Nalini (Not same Nalini, other Nalini, Libya return). What I am having for lunch? Nothing at all. Because Mr. Pratapan, maybe you remember, said lunch and all is fraud of U.S. government to increase farmer business. Actually, humans must eat only two meals. Then for dinner? Lavish food? What nonsense you are talking. Dinner is one vegetable soup. Yoga teacher Miss Saroja said soup means good relaxing sleep will come.

Last five days I am doing all this. Today morning I stood on weighing machine and Eureka 4 kg lost. I ran to kitchen and said, "Kamalam, my dear, Kamalam, my darling, weight is reduced by 4 kg. It is a miracle."

She said, "Old man, I checked my weight this morning. Small adjustment problem was there. I repaired it. Before it was showing wrong weight. Now it is correct."

Madam/ Sir, fridge is full of curd, ginger, honey and lemon. Whether anybody in your office is wanting? Please take and go.

Yours in exasperation,
J. Mathrubootham

GOREN BRIDGE

Power of the nine

Both vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

NORTH
♠ 9 4 3
♡ J 6
◇ K J 10 8 5 2
♣ K 5

WEST
♠ A Q J 10 7 5
♡ 5 4
◇ A 7
♣ Q 9 3

EAST
♠ 8
♡ Q 9 8 7
◇ Q 9 6 4 3
♣ 8 4 2

SOUTH
♠ K 6 2
♡ A K 10 3 2
◇ Void
♣ A J 10 7 6

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♣*	1♠	2◇**	Pass
2♡	2♠	3◇	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♡	All pass

*Strong and artificial
**Natural and game forcing

Opening lead: Five of ♡

South in today's deal was American expert Eddie Wold, from Texas. The opening heart lead went to the six, seven, and 10. Wold led a club to dummy's king, a club back to his ace, and ruffed a club – pleased to see the suit split evenly. He ruffed a diamond back to his hand and cashed the two top hearts before taking a moment to think.

West was known to have six spades from the auction, and had followed to two trumps, three clubs, and one diamond. He had one diamond remaining, likely the ace. At this point, Wold made the inspired play of leading a low spade from his hand toward dummy's nine. West couldn't duck, as the nine would win and Wold would ruff a diamond back to his hand, felling the ace. He would run clubs until East ruffed, and East would then have to lead a diamond into dummy's king-jack. Declarer would end up with 11 tricks.

West won the low spade with his 10, but he had no answer. A spade would set up the king of spades for Wold's tenth trick, and the ace of diamonds would eventually lead to East's being endplayed, just as if West had let the nine of spades win. West decided to cash the ace of spades, holding Wold to 10 tricks. Nicely played!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Virtue has its own reward, but no sale at the box office: Mae West

Berty Ashley

1 Released on December 15, 1939, when adjusted for inflation this movie is still the highest-grossing film in history ($3.7 billion as of 2019). It tells the story of a Georgia plantation owner's daughter and her romantic interests. It went on to win 10 Oscars including the first ever by an African-American. Which movie was this that was based on a novel of the same name by Margaret Mitchell?

2 The second-highest-grossing film at $3.2 billion was released in 2009. Set in the mid-22nd century, it follows the conflict between humans who are colonising a moon in the Alpha Centauri system and the humanoid species indigenous to that moon. The film's title refers to a genetically engineered body of that species that's operated from the brain of a remotely located human. It went on to win three Oscars, and two sequels are slated to be released in the coming years. Which movie is this that wowed audiences with its visual effects?

3 The third on the list, at $3.1 billion, was also made by the director of the film in the previous question. At that time it was the most expensive film ever made. It went on to win 11 Oscars and became the first movie to reach the billion-dollar mark. Which movie was this that pretty much entirely takes place in the Atlantic Ocean?

4 Released in 1977, this epic film is the first instalment of the first trilogy in an overall series of nine films. It won seven Oscars and went on to be selected by the U.S. Library of Congress for its historical and cultural impact. The film launched an extremely successful stream of revenue through merchandise, novels, video games and amusement parks. Which movie is this that started a saga that will finally come to an end 42 years later on December 16, 2019?

Classic tale Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh in the 1939 film that's still the highest-grossing of all time when adjusted for inflation.

5 This film, released in April 2019, serves as a conclusion to a certain universe that had been the setting for 22 films at that time, and ended the story arc for several main characters. Which movie was this that also holds the World Record for 'the most viewed trailer in 24 hours' – a staggering 289 million times?

6 Initially intended to be a limited road show theatrical release, this film became a major commercial success globally. It's an adaptation of a stage musical that was based on a memoir by Maria Augusta Kutschera, a nun who was asked to teach the seven children of a widowed naval commander. The film won five Oscars and the soundtrack album reached number one on the Billboard 200 and remained on the chart for 238 weeks. Which movie is this that is also one of the greatest musicals of all time?

7 This film released in 1982 and was entirely shot on a budget of just $10.5 million. It's a story of both friendship and science fiction. The director apparently came up with the titular character after his parents' divorce. There is a theory that the movie also borrowed concepts from a script by Satyajit Ray. Which movie is this that has grossed more than $2.5 billion?

8 This religious epic was the most expensive film ever made when it was released in 1956. Most of the expense went into the immense sets and logistics required to handle 14,000 extras and 15,000 animals. One of the most stunning scenes was also the hardest to film. It involved a huge water tank with a U-shaped trough, with close to 14 lakh litres of water released from the sides. Which movie is this that dramatises the story of an adopted Egyptian prince?

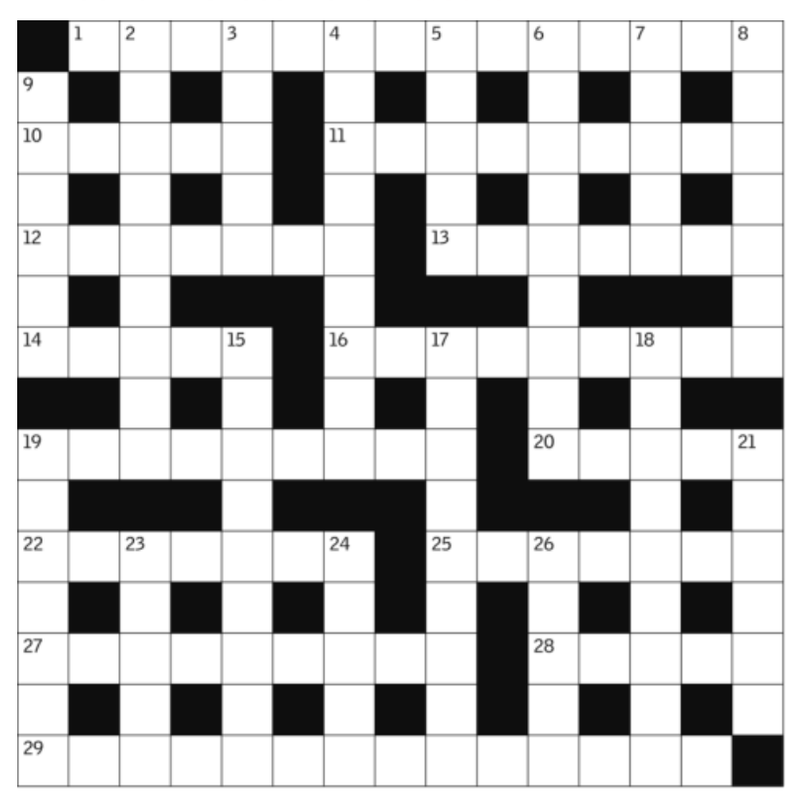
9 Released in 1965, this romantic drama tells the story of a medical practitioner whose life is altered by the Russian Revolution. It went on to win five Oscars and became a global hit. The movie was based on a book of the same name by Boris Pasternak. Due to the Soviet Union's ban on the book and reaction to the movie it was almost entirely shot in Spain. Known for its brilliant cinematic scenes and romantic storyline, which movie was this that is known for its signature 'Lara's theme?

10 If you were to take the high-grossing films year by year in the 20th century, there is one director who occupied the top spot in a record six years – 1975, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1989 and 1993 – and is the highest-grossing director in history. Who is this?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers
1. *Gone with the Wind*
2. *Avatar*
3. *Titanic*
4. *Star Wars*
5. *Avengers: Endgame*
6. *The Sound of Music*
7. *E.T.*
8. *The Ten Commandments*
9. *Doctor Zhivago*
10. Steven Spielberg

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3078



Across
1 Cluedo. Mortal sin. I will be outstanding suspect! (7,7)
10 Tip describes good philosopher (5)
11 Pastry: victual cooked with oven (wanting no internal combustion?) (3-2-4)
12 Manners princes, queens curtly display (2,3,2)
13 Competitor permitted to enter re-staged heat (7)
14 Begin to incriminate (3,2)
16 Conservatives pursue fun in ecclesiastical dwellings (9)
19 Typical! EU corrupted by oil suppliers (9)
20 Bang on, demand and obtain (5)
22 Broadcast to omit sudden lowering of food supplies (7)
25 Creator of effigies leaving EU bigwig and Arabian unfinished (7)
27 Teens seen around Elvis' home (9)
28 Source of alcohol the drunken yokel emptied (5)
29 Chicken? Playwright has yen to get a bit of pudding (7,7)

Down
2 Corgi a stick's helping to make frenzied (9)
3 Tipsy — oldies almost sozzled! (5)
4 Parts of roof fall away, exposing a snoop (9)
5 Month on topless resort somewhere in the Med (5)
6 Ill-frequented locale where forbidden sauce is stuffed into fish (5,4)
7 Comrade Lenin provides cover for artist (5)
8 Deserted soul singer, not given intro, panics (7)
9 Fashions displayed by quiet monkeys (6)
15 Hairy figure to dismiss two batsmen, according to Spooner (5,4)
17 A neurotic ordered strong liquor (9)
18 Wanting kiss, exhilarant, worked up and rabid (2,1,6)
19 The Spanish bubbly (cava, primarily) is reminiscent of rubber (7)
21 Not dead drunk, embracing one in orderly fashion (6)
23 Renovate Magritte, perhaps, with tip of hacksaw (5)
24 Unhealthy-looking pie (5)
26 Got a whiff of fish (5)

Solution No. 3077

Ready to fly Students warm up before practice. Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind in Bengaluru has been teaching Bharatanatyam to visually challenged children since 1985.

MOVEMENTS

Dancing in the dark

These dancers proved sceptics wrong when they entered the Guinness World Records

Bhagya Prakash K.

When Bharatanatyam was introduced as a subject for students at Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind in Bengaluru in 1985, many people were sceptical. Could the visually challenged students really excel in a visual art, they asked. No one could have anticipated that the students – some partially and others fully blind – would one day enter the Guinness World Records.

Dance has also had an immensely positive effect on other aspects of their lives. Amirta, one of the teachers, says the students' movement, coordination, orientation and mobility have all improved.

Three decades down the line, many students from the school have performed in India and abroad; some have taken it up as a full-time profession, while others have studied for degrees from the Karnataka State Board dance exams.

Watching the students learn and perform is a unique experience – the way they measure their steps to get a sense of space, or the way teachers use touch to teach posture, mudra and expressions. "When nature takes away one of the five senses, the other faculties get fine-tuned. The sense of hearing and touch is heightened," says Shruthi M.S., one of the teachers.

Dinesh V.K. and Dharmaraju S., who joined the academy at a young age, now teach as well as perform. "Many people discouraged us, but we decided to take it up as a career," says Dharmaraj. Their performances today are indeed on a par with other professional dancers.

In step Duet on stage.

Rhythm and moves Dancing in tandem during a practice session.

Right move A student's posture corrected during a practice session.

Swirl of colour Students being taught to use props.

Kohl-lined In the green room before a show.

Spotlight Giving a commissioned performance.

DELHI THE HINDU ▪ Magazine
Sunday, December 15, 2019

60 MINUTES WITH SUSMITA MOHANTY

'I hope the next ISRO chief is a woman'

The founder-CEO of India's first private space start-up company says privatisation can create thousands of jobs in the space sector

ILLUSTRATION: R RAJESH

Madhumathi D.S.

Susmita Mohanty, founder-CEO of India's first private space start-up, Earth2Orbit, responds to everything that is space – be it engineering, enterprise, research, design, architecture, international advocacy, adventure or imagination. She carved out her many extraordinary roles at a young age and across three continents. She has been named among BBC's 100 Women of 2019. A self-confessed "daughter of ISRO" and protégée of Arthur C. Clarke, the "anti-status-quo-ist" Mohanty, based in Bengaluru, articulates some bold ideas on the world of space and its women and space-related enterprise. Edited excerpts:

- Has a Master's in Industrial Design from NID, Ahmedabad, and a Ph.D in Aerospace Architecture from Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden
- Acclaimed science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke sponsored her Master's at the International Space University in Strasbourg
- Worked for the International Space Station programme at Boeing, California, and did a short stint at NASA-Johnson
- One of a few to have visited the Arctic and Antarctica, on invitation

The BBC 100 Women 2019 recognises your role in the space arena. What do you think of the representation of women in space in India and across the world?

■ I grew up in the early 70s among the pioneers of the Indian space programme. To me, women in space were not a novelty. My father and his colleague, Dr. Dipti Rastogi, were deputy directors of ISRO's Space Applications Centre. ISRO has one of the best gender ratios among space agencies, as we saw during the Mars Orbiter Mission. NASA has always had a fair number of women scientists and engineers. Since the late 90s, when I began my space career, the European Space Agency (ESA) too has improved its numbers. JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) still has some way to go.

And what about women in leadership positions in space agencies?

■ Abroad, we are starting to see more women leaders in space organisations. Pascale Ehrenfreund is the [head] of the German space agency, DLR, and Simonetta Di Pippo is Director of the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). The three of us are members of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Space Technologies. Last month, Ehrenfreund became the first woman president of the International Astronautical Federation. MIT's Dava Newman was Deputy Administrator of NASA under Obama. Mazlan Othman used to head the Malaysian space agency. I hope ISRO gets a woman chairperson in the near future.

Do you think ISRO's women scientists are being groomed for leadership roles? This year's Chandrayaan-2 was led by two women.

■ ISRO has a formidable set of experienced and capable women scientists. To name a few – Anuradha T.K. heads the satellite communication programme, D.R. Suma used to head the Launch Vehicle Programme Office, and V.R. Lalithambika is Gaganyaan programme director. But it is disappointing that ISRO has not yet had a woman heading a major centre in its 50-year history.

When we lost contact with the Chandrayaan-2 lander, the ISRO Chairman was seen in a huddle, but I was surprised to find that the two key women, mission director Ritu Karidhal and project director M. Vanitha, were not a part of the deliberations.

What led you to found Earth2Orbit, India's first private space start-up.

■ Earth2Orbit (E2O) is my third venture; and my first in India, co-founded in 2009. I chose to go the entrepreneurial route not for chasing IPOs but to be able to speak my mind as well as to challenge and change the status quo and probably make a difference in our space scene. In 2001, I co-founded a U.S. space consulting firm called Moonfront, when I was 29 and the word 'start-up' didn't exist. My Vienna venture Liquifer designs planetary habitats, simulators, rovers, greenhouses and other exploration systems.

What does E2O do?

■ The first seven years, we focussed on launching international payloads on the PSLV. We helped launch a Japanese satellite called PROITERES-1 in 2012. E2O also played a pivotal role in opening up the U.S. launch market for the PSLV. In the past three years, we have combined remote-sensing satellite data and data analytics and generated intelligence to make cities and agriculture climate-smart.

> Space entrepreneurs in India are struggling despite our decade-old collective effort and advocacy to push for change

Starting 2020, E2O plans to curate and broadcast inspiring space-related content for youngsters, on Gaganyaan and other narratives from India and exciting non-Western missions like Hayabusa and Rosetta.

What was E2O's role in bringing small satellites from the U.S. market to be launched on the PSLV?

■ The U.S. has the biggest market for small satellite launches, but the PSLV's access to it was closed due to the U.S. embargo of 1998, which still exists. When Skybox Imaging, a Stanford start-up, approached E2O in 2009, we decided to take up what seemed like an impossible mission. The major hurdles were the stringent International Traffic in Arms Regulations, and the lobbying by U.S. space companies against letting the launch business leave their country.

Over nearly three years of soft diplomacy, alongside sustained efforts by the Skybox team, I met about a dozen diplomats and bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., and New Delhi. The U.S. State Department granted permission to launch the first ever U.S. small commercial satellite on the PSLV. It was like bringing down a mini Berlin wall.

In April 2014, E2O made history when Skybox Imaging became the first U.S. company to sign a launch service agreement (LSA) with ISRO's Antrix Corporation. [Skybox was briefly owned by Google as Terra Bella back then.] After that, the U.S. State Department started to allow small satellite launches on the PSLV. Although Spire Global signed the next LSA with Antrix, its nanosatellites flew first in September 2015. They were very small and easier to accommodate on the launcher than our client's 110-kg SkySat-C1 – which went up in June 2016.

Do you think the PSLV will continue to enjoy its leading position in the international launch market?

■ The PSLV cannot take its current sweet spot for granted. There's Europe's Vega, Electron from New Zealand and Russia's Soyuz. SpaceX has a far more customer-friendly interface than ISRO's marketing arm. China is supporting over two dozen rocket start-ups such as iSpace, for instance.

Space entrepreneurs in India are struggling despite our decade-old collective effort and advocacy to push for change. The funding ecosystem is abysmal, compared to the U.S. and Europe. To survive, they have to look for foreign clients.

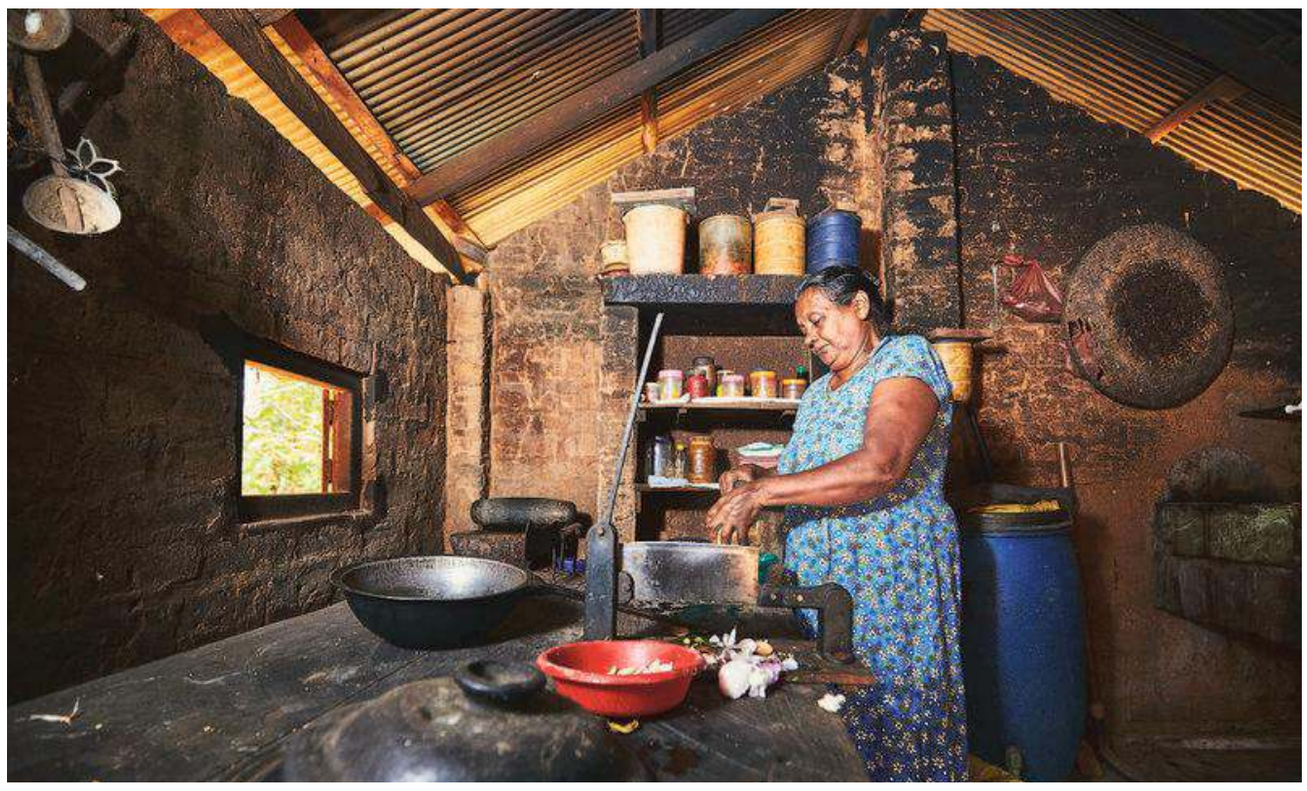
ISRO can easily invest a hundred million dollars or more in the start-up ecosystem each year. Why can we not emulate the NASA model, which spends millions each year supporting innovation and disruption by small businesses and start-ups? ESA too funds and provides incubation support for research and innovation.

How do you view the pace of and the environment for privatisation of space activities in India?

■ Excruciatingly slow! Since 2008, we have been hearing about the outsourcing of PSLV's assembly to a consortium but nothing has happened yet. The 2016 spacecraft assembly contract with a consortium is conservative and will not allow companies to grow beyond ISRO's needs or its shadow. If we were to pursue privatisation and commercialisation as in the U.S., Europe and now China, we would create thousands of employment opportunities in the space sector, much like in the IT sector.

Do you foresee an innovative venture like SpaceX coming out of India one day?

■ Nearly impossible for a SpaceX to happen in India for the next 10-20 years. We don't have the policy framework for it or the open-mindedness to embrace young risk-takers.



GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

NOSHTALGIA

Some like it hot, some like it with bee pollen

Some days, we wolfed down Mary's warm rava porridge with toasted almonds; other days, we relished her gloopy oatmeal porridge with cold milk and treacle

Raul Dias

On a particularly ferocious winter morning exactly 54 years ago, the nuns of St. Angela Sophia boarding school in Jaipur had finally reached their wits' end. The object of their collective exasperation was a preternaturally rebellious 12-year-old. This time she was vehemently refusing to touch her breakfast bowl of salted oatmeal porridge And she was in trouble. Again.

Muttering under her breath that it smelled like old socks, the girl was 'banished' to the kindergarten section. There, her punishment was to hold the bowl of porridge high above her head with both hands while kneeling in front of a phalanx of giggling toddlers. She had to continue doing so till she decided to give the porridge a go. She never did. And she hasn't to this day. That defiant little terror was my mother.

Despite Mum's rather Dickensian boarding school tales, and, more pertinently, her utter revulsion for porridge of any kind, I simply love the gooey, unctuous stuff. And I have our Mangalorean cook Mary to thank for that.

Having worked for an expatriate British family for years before she came into our family, Mary had amassed an astounding cache of porridge recipes – both Indian and international – that were soon a firm fixture on our breakfast menu.

One of her greatest hits was the delicious-tasting Goan vonn that's very similar to the divine Tamil sakkarai pongal. Also known as soji in South Goa, this rather complex porridge is made with a host of ingredients, chief of which is chana dal (split Bengal gram), bits of which are cleverly left whole in the final preparation for texture. The porridge is further enhanced by the addition of thick coconut milk and palm jaggery; the latter lending an earthy, warm flavour that almost tastes like what petrichor would perhaps.

Now, long before the story of fussy Goldilocks and her trio of porridge-loving bears became a favourite of ours, my older sister and I played out our own version almost daily. Some days we were particularly partial towards Mary's iteration of a simple milk-enriched, warm rava porridge, where toothsome grains of semolina competed with slivers of toasted almonds.

On others, which were more often than not, we relished the gloopy consistency of her steel-cut oatmeal porridge sliding down our throats. One that she'd top up with cold milk and a splodge of treacle to sweeten the deal. It would be decades later, on a work trip to Belfast, when I would discover the Irish way of truly 'enjoying' a bowl of oatmeal porridge... with a splash of peaty Irish whiskey added for a smoky finish!

Savoury delight

However, it isn't just the sweet porridges that have managed to rouse me out of bed every day over the years. I am equally fond of the savoury stuff. I love the wholesome taste of ragi ambali. Though mostly consumed as a thick drink in Karnataka, I prefer the light pink-hued concoction as a porridge. This is achieved by adding a little more than the usual amount of sprouted ragi (finger millet) flour to the water-buttermilk slurry to which a bit of salt has been added. But it is the final tempering with mustard seeds, curry leaves and green chilli that makes the ragi ambali truly scrumptious for me. On the absolute opposite end of the spice spectrum of savoury porridges is another Goan porridge called pez. Simply put, pez is just another name for a bland gruel made with rice and water and one that is known multifariously as kanjee or kunji south of the Vindhyas. We Goans like to have our pez either with a bit of dried, salted mackerel pickle called parra or served with a side of tora shiro mango water pickle.

Decorated congee

Whenever I find myself travelling in East Asia, I am quite surprised when I'm offered a breakfast porridge of the Chinese iteration of good old kanjee that they call, funnily enough, congee. Only here, one is presented with a virtual smorgasbord of condiments and toppings like fried shallots and garlic, cubes of sweet lap cheong pork sausage, chopped spring onions, salted duck eggs, and the ubiquitous soy sauce to enhance the flavour of the simple rice gruel.

> On a work trip to Belfast, I discovered the Irish way of truly 'enjoying' a bowl of oatmeal porridge... with a splash of peaty Irish whiskey

It really is testament to the prowess of porridge that we now have several porridge-only cafés and restaurants across the world in places as diverse as Edinburg and Copenhagen, which serve the breakfast dish in the most interesting and, dare-I-say, often contrived combinations. A recent trip to New York City saw me tuck into a bowl of cold oat and almond meal porridge topped with rice milk and a sprinkling of raw Colombian cocoa nibs and bee pollen at the world's first all-oatmeal café simply called OatMeals.

At London's 26 Grains porridge café, I tried a warm quinoa porridge accentuated with a tart burst of antioxidant-rich acai berry purée, which I was told had been foraged from the Brazilian Amazon forests. Every spoonful of the exotic bowl was like discovering the joys of porridge all over again.

Now, if I could only convince Mum to try some.

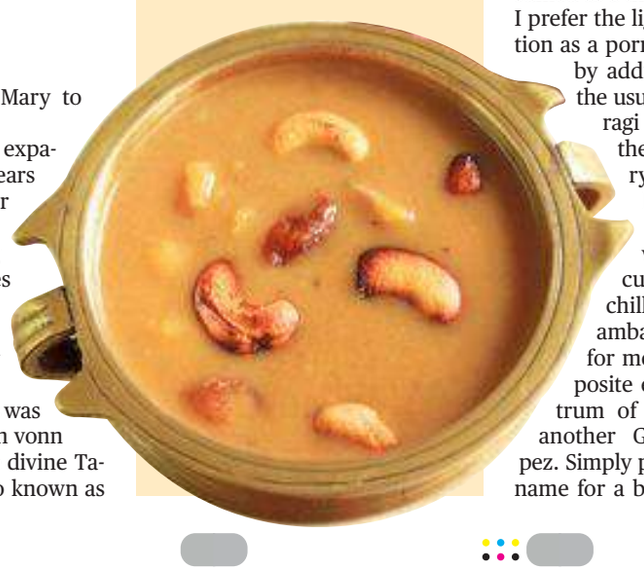
The Mumbai-based writer and restaurant reviewer is passionate about food, travel and luxury, not necessarily in that order.

SUNDAY RECIPE

Vonn

INGREDIENTS

Chana dal 1/4 cup
Water 3 cups
Salt 1/2 tsp
Rice flour 1/4 cup
Palm jaggery (chopped into bits) 3/4 cup
Coconut milk 1 1/2 cup
Cardamom powder 1 tsp
Chopped cashewnuts 1/4 cup

METHOD

1. Soak the chana dal in water for at least two hours before using.
2. Boil the soaked dal with the 3 cups of water and salt for around 15 minutes on a medium-high flame till the dal is cooked, but not mushy.
3. Make a thick paste of the rice flour by adding a little water to it.
4. Add the chopped palm jaggery to the chana dal and stir till fully incorporated.
5. Add the coconut milk and bring to a slow boil, making sure the milk does not split.
6. With the fire on low, add in the rice flour paste, stirring to ensure no lumps are formed.
7. Once thickened, sprinkle in the cardamom powder and chopped cashewnuts.
8. Serve either warm, at room temperature or chilled!