

IN BRIEF

TRAFFIC DIVERSION
FOR CM'S EVENT
IN VIJAYAWADADC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

Traffic will be diverted in Vijayawada city on Monday when Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is scheduled to present Seva Mitra awards at Poranki on outskirts of the city from 10 am to 12 noon.

Vijayawada police commissioner Battina Srinivasulu said all heavy vehicles coming from Machilipatnam and Gudiwada to Vijayawada will be diverted from Kankipadu to Punadipadu, Uppulur and Kesarapalli towards Vijayawada. APSRTC buses towards Gudiwada and Machilipatnam will be diverted from Benz Circle to Ramavarappadu ring, Enikepadu, Kesarapalli, Uppalur and Kankipadu.

No vehicle will be allowed towards Poranki from 10 am to 12.30 pm between Nidamanuru and Enikepadu. Only vehicles having permission for the programme can proceed to Poranki.

Parking facility for MPs, MLAs and ministers has been provided on western side of Murali resorts at Poranki. Parking for officials will be on the eastern side of Murali resorts. Other vehicles and buses can be parked at Chaitanya and Narayana college playgrounds.

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TD COMPLAINS
AGAINST CM IN
MANGALAGIRI PSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

Telugu Desam has lodged a complaint at Mangalagiri police station on Saturday against Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and government adviser Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, alleging that a post on YSRC digital media was insulting for Dalits.

The complaint, lodged by TD politburo member Varla Ramaiah and others, pointed out that Dr M. Gurumoorthy, the candidate of YSRC in Tirupati byelection, belongs to the Dalit community. YSRC digital wing has put out a photo of Gurumoorthy as sitting next to the feet of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and touching his feet. Ramaiah said such a photo is very distressing and insulting for Dalit community.

The TD politburo member said earlier too, Telugu Desam had lodged many complaints with the AP police about Dalit community members being insulted. But DGP Gautam Sawang has never taken any action on those complaints.

Ramaiah maintained that criminal cases under SC/ ST Atrocity (Prevention) Act must be registered against CM Jagan and Ramakrishna Reddy and both should be arrested forthwith.

● **THE COMPLAINT**, lodged by TD politburo member Varla Ramaiah and others, pointed out that Dr M. Gurumoorthy, the candidate of YSRC in Tirupati byelection, belongs to the Dalit community. YSRC digital wing has put out a photo of Gurumoorthy as sitting next to the feet of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and touching his feet.

SELL TICKETS FOR
VAKEEL SAAB AT
GOVT FIXED RATE: HCDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

The Andhra Pradesh High Court issued direction for sale of tickets in theatres screening the 'Vakeel Saab' at the government fixed rate only from Sunday.

The state government moved a House Motion on Saturday, challenging the single judge bench order favouring the petitioners, including distributors and theatre owners, allowing sale of tickets at a high price.

However, the court permitted sale of tickets at high cost only for Saturday and also screening of benefit shows for tickets booked online up to Sunday. Earlier, the state government issued an order disallowing screening of benefit shows and also raising the cost of tickets.

YSRC campaign



YSRC nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat Dr M. Gurumoorthy addresses the gathering at a public meeting during a party campaign in Gudur segment on Saturday. Deputy CM Narayana Swamy, ministers Anilkumar Yadav, Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and MP Mopidevi Venkata Ramana are also seen.

Naidu motivates leaders,
cadre during interaction

Sarvepalli in-charges thrilled when Naidu spoke to them directly

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 10

TD leaders and cadres are in an upbeat mood following the success of TD chief N. Chandrababu public meeting held on Friday in Podalakur, which is the native mandal of YSRC Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy and considered as a stronghold for the ruling party.

Speaking to this newspaper, party senior leader Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy said they were happy not only with the large turnout at the rally but also with their response.

The public responded with loud cheers when Naidu took serious view over police harassing partymen and warned that they will not spare those crossing their limits under any circumstances, Somireddy said.

Meanwhile, the former CM and his son Lokesh stayed in a marriage hall in Nellore and held deliberations on the strategies to be adopted to win the Tirupati LS byelection with the party leaders during closed-doors meeting at Nellore on Saturday.

Sources in the party said cluster in-charges of Sarvepalli were thrilled when Naidu spoke to them directly and gave suggestions to them after eliciting information on the ground realities.

He also made it clear by stating that he was a tough nut to crack when he chided a mandal leader for complaining against the partymen while stressing that it was the duty of the leader to sort out issues with his team.

"I don't want to hear ifs and buts, I want results. If you can't do it, we can ask someone else to do it," the former CM said curtly when some cluster in-charges failed to give details of booth-level voters.

Somireddy said that the TD chief boosted the morale of TD leaders of Sarvepalli constituency, by interacting with them for almost three hours unlike never before.

Somireddy said that he informed the party chief about attacks against TD men in Sarvepalli segment.



TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu addresses the gathering during a road show at Sullurpeta on Saturday. TD nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat Panabaka Lakshmi, TD MPs Ram Mohan Naidu, Galla Jayadev and Kanakamedala Ravindra are also seen.

Naidu says Jagan destroying
constitutional values in stateDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 10

TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu alleged that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was destroying the constitutional values.

Addressing a public meeting in Sullurpeta on Saturday as part of a campaign for Panabaka Lakshmi, TD nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, Naidu said, "Justice Alladi Kuppaswamy of Puduru village in Sullurpeta constituency participated in the drafting of the Constitution of India along with Ambedkar. Every-

one from the Prime Minister to the village-level leader should govern using the powers given by the Constitution. This is the place from where Indian Constitutional stalwarts dreamed a democratic Andhra Pradesh. However, under CM Jagan's rule with Rajareddy Rajyan-gam, the dreams of those who devised the Constitution are shattered."

Recalling the comments of Jagan that Covid-19 can be cured by using bleaching powder and paracetamol, he demanded to know why Jagan is hiding in Tadepalli palace.

Criticising Jagan's welfare schemes, Naidu said, "The amount which is being given as part of the Amma Vodi scheme is being taken off by Nanna bu-

ddi (dad's liquor bottle)." He also found fault with Jagan Mohan Reddy for opening liquor shops during the Corona pandemic and posting teachers on duty near the shops.

He rebuked the police personnel who supported the ruling party leaders and legislators during Panchayat Raj elections. Taking a dig at the police who followed the instructions of the ruling party legislators, he said they had threatened the candidates, stopped them from filing nominations, forced the villagers for unanimous polls, and resorted to many irregularities.

Now, he said, the CEC will not keep quiet about such acts by the police and they would be terminated if they repeat the same in



TD nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat Panabaka Lakshmi operates a spinning wheel to produce thread during an election campaign in Gudur division on Saturday.

the LS polls.

He asked the police personnel to respect the Constitution of India and not the 'Rajanya Constitution' that suppress the rights of the people.

Stating that he does not need the post of Chief Minister, Naidu said his struggle was for the people of the state who are in trouble.

Stressing that vote is the only weapon that can protect democracy, Naidu appealed to the people to use it to teach a lesson to Jagan. Vote to cycle and gave a huge victory to Panabaka Lakshmi, the former CM pleaded.

TD MPs Ram Mohan Naidu, Galla Jayadev, Kanakamedala Ravindra participated in the road show along with Naidu.

He said that he was ready with evidence pertaining to his contentions. He stated that he also enclosed a simple analysis of the planted evidence to prove how blatantly it was done.

Following the 'Articles of Charge' framed against him, he appeared before the Commissioner of Inquiries (Col) RP Sisodia from March 22 to April 4 and submitted a 12-page 'Statement of Defence' accusing "some senior officers who are expected to be responsible and accountable to Rule of

Law" of indulging in "nefarious acts such as witness tampering, forgery and evidence tampering."

Following it up with a letter to the Chief Secretary, Rao said during the inquiry by the Col, he noticed the forgery, fraud, witness and evidence-tampering that was indulged in by certain police officers and police organisations involved in conducting various enquiries and inquiries.

Rao said, "I take this opportunity to remind that

Official draft raises wards
in RMC to 52 from 50DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 10

Rajamahendravaram Municipal Corporation (RMC) commissioner Abhishikh Kishore has released a draft delimiting wards within the civic body and raising them to 52 from 50.

As many as 10 villages – Venkatanaaram, Thorredu, Katheru, Bommuru, Dowleswaram, Vemagiri, Rajavole, Satellite City, Pidimgoyyi and Hukumpeta, have been merged with the corporation.

It may be recalled that the recently held municipal polls could not be organised in the RMC as delimitation of wards could not be completed in time. Releasing the draft into public domain under Rule 8 of the Andhra Pradesh Municipal Corporation

(Delimitation of Wards) Rules, 1996, Abhishikh Kishore asked residents of the city and surrounding grama panchayats to file their suggestions and objections on or before April 15.

Many residents of Lalacheruvu and Diwancheruvu villages also be merged with the Rajamahendravaram Municipal Corporation. But these villages could not be included according to census rules, it is stated.

According to officials, 2011 population census has been considered for delimitation of wards, which have been divided with a minimum of 8,800 and a maximum of 9,600 voters, with 10 percent of them being included or excluded. According to an RMC official, Lalacheruvu and

Diwancheruvu did not meet these criteria and hence could not be considered for merger with Rajamahendravaram corporation.

Meanwhile, Telugu Desam leader and former MLC Adireddy Appa Rao has charged that delimitation has not been done properly.

He asked TD cadre to accordingly raise objections in their respective wards. Rajamahendravaram city Congress president Balepalli Muralidhar said draft notification of delimitation is unscientific, as no landmarks have been suggested for wards. Muralidhar wanted Rajamahendravaram Municipal Corporation to convene an all-party meeting and also call senior citizens before preparing a final list of wards within the RMC.

AP BJP TURNS
CRITICAL ON
NANI'S SARCASTIC
REMARKS ON PMDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

State BJP leaders turned critical on minister for information and public relations Perni Nani for making sarcastic remarks recently in Tirupati on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, branding him to be an 'actor', and targeting Union home minister Amit Shah saying that he was frightened while in jail in Sohrabuddin Shaik encounter case.

BJP state general-secretary S. Vishnu Vardhan Reddy said, "If the AP government is really interested for development of the state, it has to maintain good relationship with the Centre and by making such remarks on PM Modi and HM Amit Shah, it would certainly strain the relationship. The ruling YSRC is certainly nervous about the outcome of the upcoming bypoll to the Lok Sabha in Tirupati as it deployed 10 ministers to campaign for their party nominee even as it claimed good performance in the recently held gram panchayat and municipal polls. Either the minister or the YSRC party is having any right to criticise their leaders."

Former BJP state president Kanna Lakshmi Narayana said, "The YSRC leaders prostrate before our top leaders during their visit to Delhi and speak in a sarcastic manner in AP. If minister Perni Nani assumes that he will become a big leader by targeting our top brass, he will be mistaken. If you spit into the sky, it falls down on your face. It is better the minister knows his limits while talking about big leaders irrespective of the occasion and context." BJP Rajya Sabha member G.V.L. Narasimha Rao said, "We will certainly react on minister's comments on our top leadership at an appropriate time."

● **BJP STATE** general-secretary S. Vishnu Vardhan Reddy said, "If the AP government is really interested for development of the state, it has to maintain good relationship with the Centre and by making such remarks on PM Modi and HM Amit Shah

Adinarayana: Hang me
if I am found guilty in
Viveka's murder caseDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 10

Reacting to the allegations of Y.S. Vijayalakshmi who accused him in the murder of Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy, former minister C. Adinarayana Reddy categorically denied any links with the murder while speaking to the media in Tirupati on Saturday.

"Special Investigation Team has been investigating the case in Delhi. I am ready for the probe and hang me if I am found guilty," the BJP leader asserted, adding that police had included his name in the charge-sheet though he had nothing to do with the case. He demanded to know to what punishment his critics are ready to face if he is found not guilty. Adinarayana Reddy said he was with TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on March 14, 2019, discussing about the seat issues and he came to know about the murder through TV scrolling on March 15 morning.

"Family members of Vivekananda Reddy initially said he had succumbed to heart attack but later changed the version and gave a statement that he was murdered. Many people suspect that family

members are behind the incident," Adinarayana Reddy said.

Pointing to Vijayalakshmi's argument that the BJP government in the Centre can take steps to expedite the investigation through CBI, he told her that CBI, Enforcement Directorate, Reserve Bank of India are independent bodies and they are not under the purview of the Union government.

He reminded that Vivekananda Reddy's daughter Dr Suneeetha, during a press meet in Delhi, expressed doubts against her family members and also on him because his name was in the FIR.

Rebuking the rule of Jagan Mohan Reddy for trying to scare the leaders and cadre of the opposition parties, Adinarayana Reddy alleged that the police are going to the homes of BJP cadres armed with red sander logs and liquor bottles and threatening to file cases against them for possessing these banned items. He found fault with the Jagan Mohan Reddy government for restrictions imposed on Pawan Kalyan's latest film Vakil Saab, even when he was taking up welfare programmes from the revenue of his films.

BJP IN FOREFRONT IN GIVING PRIORITY
TO SOCIALLY BACKWARD PEOPLE: SOMUDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 10

BJP state president and MLC Somu Veerraju said BJP was in the forefront of giving priority to underprivileged in the society while reminding that the party is responsible for making a Chaiwala, Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, Abdul Kalam as President and selecting former IAS officer Ratna Prabha as candidate for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

Addressing the gathering at a seminar on social justice for the socially and economically backward classes at a private hotel in Tirupati on Saturday, Veerraju claimed that the BJP aim was to develop the socially economically backward classes in all sectors by giving priority to them in the system.

He maintained that the BJP has been following this in the entire country apart from Tirupati and it is the only political party that maintains social equality in the country.

The MLC said the BJP leaders have been following the party slogan 'Sabhka Saath Sabhka Vikas' and giving equal importance to all sections of the society.

Referring to the statements of seer Paripoornanda Saraswathy, the BJP leader said that Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala needs lotus (BJP symbol) and not the fan or the cycle. He called upon the electorate of Tirupati Parliament segments to elect BJP contender Ratna Prabha as her rich experience in public service would help not only for the development of Tirupati but also for the state of AP.

FORGERY | ALLEGATIONS

Venkateswara Rao says documents were forged and tampered by some police officers

Suspended IPS officer seeks CBI probe into all charges

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

Director General of Police-rank officer A.B. Venkateswara Rao has urged the state government to order a CBI probe into acts of 'forgery, fraud, witness-tampering and evidence-tampering that was indulged in by certain police officers and police organisations' in the case pertaining to his suspension from service.

It may be recalled that Venkateswara Rao served as DG (Intelligence) dur-

ing the tenure of N. Chandrababu Naidu.

The Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government had on February 8, 2020, placed him under suspension over "serious misconduct in the process of procurement of security equipment" when he headed the Intelligence wing.

In a letter to Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das on Friday, copy of which was made available to the media on Saturday, the 1989-batch officer has named DGP Gautam Sawang, additional direc-

tor general (CID) P.V. Sunil Kumar, ACB director general PSR Anjaneyulu, officers of Intelligence departments and several others as those 'involved in the crimes'.

In his nine-page letter, Rao said "Since the officers involved are senior officers holding important posts, I request the government to consider whether their continuance in the same posts would be an impediment to a fair and timely investigation."

Rao said that documents were forged and tampered.

He said that he was ready with evidence pertaining to his contentions. He stated that he also enclosed a simple analysis of the planted evidence to prove how blatantly it was done.

Following the 'Articles of Charge' framed against him, he appeared before the Commissioner of Inquiries (Col) RP Sisodia from March 22 to April 4 and submitted a 12-page 'Statement of Defence' accusing "some senior officers who are expected to be responsible and accountable to Rule of

Law" of indulging in "nefarious acts such as witness tampering, forgery and evidence tampering."

Following it up with a letter to the Chief Secretary, Rao said during the inquiry by the Col, he noticed the forgery, fraud, witness and evidence-tampering that was indulged in by certain police officers and police organisations involved in conducting various enquiries and inquiries.

Rao said, "I take this opportunity to remind that

my case has several similarities with the case of Nambi Narayanan (ISRO scientist who was subsequently exonerated of espionage charges) that occurred in 1994. In view of the past experience as to how a government gets vilified due to illegal and mala-fide acts of certain police officers, I request that early action be taken against those involved in forgery and witness-tampering and thus protect the government from ignominy."

He found fault with the

role played by the then chief secretary Nilam Sawhney and GAD (Political) principal secretary Praveen Prakash, saying that the government issued an 'illegal and arbitrary order' placing him under suspension as a result of their non-application of mind.

He sought action against Sawhney and Praveen Prakash for issuing the orders and misguiding the disciplinary authority and the government due to their dereliction of duty.

IN BRIEF

Civic body gears up for spl drive

Nellore: As part of holding a vaccine festival as per the suggestion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Nellore Civic body is geared up to provide vaccine to the city population from April 11 to 14 in the city limits. The vaccine will be offered at all Sachivalyam offices apart from the Nellore Municipal Corporation office for those who are above 45 years old. Commissioner Dinesh Kumar disclosed this while speaking to the media here on Saturday. This special drive for four days is meant to provide vaccination to the vulnerable among the populations. He said that every person should bring Aadhaar card and wear a face mask while coming for the vaccination. He directed the ward secretaries to attend duties from Sunday and make the programme successful.

6 smugglers held, 20 logs seized

Kadapa: The police arrested six smugglers and seized 20 red sanders logs from them on Saturday morning near Pullampet mandal Bootumidapalle under Rajampet police sub-division. The smugglers included the son of a retired Forest Beat officer and two former Forest Protection watchers arrested. District SP Karur Karunapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan disclosed this at a press conference at the district police office on Saturday morning. The SP explained that the smugglers tried to attack them with hunting machetes.

₹3 crore cash, 1 kg gold seized

Kurnool: The Kurnool special enforcement bureau (SEB) police on Friday night seized ₹3,05,35,500 unaccounted cash at the border area between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana near Panchalingala check post on national highway 44, from a private bus going from Hyderabad to Bengaluru. The accused was identified as B.A. Chetan Kumar, native of Bengaluru, working as a driver in a private travels in his home city. On Saturday, the SEB police produced the accused along with seized cash before the media in the presence of district superintendent of police K. Fakeerappa. Addressing the media, the SP said, based on information the SEB police conducted searches in the bus and found the huge amount which was packed in two different bags. It was carried from Hyderabad to Bengaluru by one person B.A. Chetan Kumar, he added.

SUNNIS SEEK MEMBERSHIP IN WAKF BOARD

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

Leaders from AP State Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat (Sunnī) sought protection of Wakf properties and appointment of Jamaat members to nominated posts of Wakf Board. Jamaat leader Ahle Sunnat Wal and Sufi mentor Altaf Ali Raza Baba and other leaders addressing a press meet here on Saturday decried encroachment of Wakf lands. They objected to the appointment of persons from all other faiths except those from Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat. They appealed to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to appoint someone from the Jamaat to the Wakf Board.

Raza Baba said that according to a Wakf Board 1962 gazette, most of Wakf Board assets belong to Sunni Muslims. He mentioned that Sunni and Shia kings donated thousands of acres of lands for dargahs, peer panjas, deevidis and other worship places. He pointed out that the government had in 1958 conducted a survey of Wakf lands and established a separate Wakf Board four years later for protection of holy lands.

He said that no one has the right to sell or purchase Wakf lands, which were clearly meant for religious or charitable purposes.

Altaf and others said that the non-Sunnis worked against YSRC in the elections and now they are trying to destroy Wakf aim by illegally selling lands belonging to the Board. They alleged that most dargah lands have been encroached. They appealed to the Chief Minister to reshuffle Wakf Board by appointing those from Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat in order to safeguard lands from land-sharks.

State records 3,309 +ve cases, 12 deaths

Out of 1,53,97,672 samples tested so far, 9,21,906 infected

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 10

Andhra Pradesh registered 3,309 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 12 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Saturday that out of 31,929 samples tested, 3,309 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,53,97,672 samples tested so far, 9,21,906 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,95,949 were recovered while 18,666 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor topped the state with 740 followed by 527 in Guntur, 391 in Visakhapatnam, 296 in Kurnool, 279 in Srikakulam, 278 in Krishna, 174 in Prakasam, 133 each in Anantapur and Nellore, 124 in Kadapa, 111 in East Godavari, 97 in Vizianagaram and 26 in West Godavari.

Chittoor registered the highest number of the cumulative active cases at 3,486 followed by 2,615 in Guntur, 2,382 in Visakhapatnam, 2,161 in Krishna, 1,612 in Nellore, 1,230 in Kurnool, 1,045 in Prakasam, 1,023 in Srikakulam, 943 in East Godavari, 821 in Anantapur, 406 in Vizianagaram and 245 in West Godavari.

Among the daily Covid-19 deaths, three in Chittoor, two each in Nellore, Visakhapatnam and Anantapur, Guntur and Krishna. With this, the death toll rose to 7,291.

State health authorities discharged 1,053 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery.

Andhra Pradesh conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,88,346 samples per million population and registered a positive rate of 5.99.

● Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor topped the state with 740 followed by 527 in Guntur



Medical staff collects the swab from a child for Covid-19 testing at Sanjeevini Bus which was set up at Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

ACTION AGAINST NURSE FOR GIVING VACCINATION WHILE ON PHONE

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 10

The district medical and health officer of Vizianagaram Dr D.S.V. Ramana Kumari on Saturday issued a charge memo to a staff nurse working at urban health centre in Jagannadhapuram urban PHC in Parvathipuram of Vizianagaram. The nurse was found talking over her mobile phone while

injecting Covid-19 vaccine to a female person in the afternoon. The picture of the jab while the nurse was conversing over the phone went viral in the social media and caught the attention of the district collector and health officials. The DMHO further warned that stringent action would be taken against health workers if they were found negligent while administering jabs.

Temple closed as priest tests +ve

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, APRIL 10:

A priest in famous Lord Someswaram Swamy Temple in Kotipalli got Covid-19 positive and the temple has been closed for two days.

According to sources, after getting the Covid-19

report to the priest, the temple officials took immediate steps not to spread the virus to the devotees as well as the remaining priests. They closed the temple. The temple authorities said that after sanitising the temple, the devotees will be allowed.

SUDDEN SPURT IN COVID CASES IN SRIKAKULAM

DC CORRESPONDENT SRIKAKULAM, APRIL 10

The district witnessed a sudden spike in the Covid-19 cases on Saturday. Reports said 279 persons tested positive out of the 2,100 samples. It was hovering around 100 until Friday. Health officials said 828 are in home isolation, 94 in Covid-19 care centres and 101 in hospitals. So far 9,83,594 samples were collected since the outbreak of the virus last year and of them 48,041 tested positive.

“People are taking it lightly. They are organising big meetings, functions without wearing masks. Theatres and malls are also functioning full. This is also due to the entry of a new variant,” said district collector J. Niwas. He said the recently held grama panchayat elections need not be the main reason for spread of the infection.

Bus operators fail to observe Covid-19 SOPs

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, APRIL 10

As the Indian Railways may not resume its normal operations and general tickets are not available at any railway station, passengers have no alternative other than hiring taxi or travel by private buses for interstate journeys.

Private transport operators are not complying with the regulations set by the governments. They are not checking passengers with thermal scanners and sanitizers are not provided at the boarding points.

Lack of minimum preventive steps by private travel agencies and APSRTC for their services results in a rise in the spread of Covid-19 virus to urban areas and also the interiors. A traveller Dr Suresh who travelled to Hyderabad from Anantapur on Thursday night observed lapses on the part of travel agencies.

Recalling the experi-

ence, Dr Suresh said he booked a ticket through a private travel agency to travel to Hyderabad from Anantapur on Thursday night.

When I entered the bus, there were no preventive steps in place.

He said all the transport operators should follow the standard operations procedure (SOP) under the Epidemic Diseases Act.

Considering the duration from the present level of the daily new cases to the peak India saw last year, the country is likely to reach the high in the second half of April.

The second wave, which could last until the end of May, could see an additional of 25 lakh cases if the present trends are taken into consideration. “Though the global Covid-19 experience shows the second wave was much higher in intensity than the first wave, the presence of vaccine makes the difference now,” Dr Suresh said.

India needs full sports law: Prof.

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 10

India needs a comprehensive sports law, said Prof. R. Venkata Rao, former vice-chancellor of National Law School of India University, Bengaluru. Prof. Rao elaborated on sports law and ethical aspects, athletes activism, violence, Covid-19 impact, fantasy and virtual sports.

He was speaking at a virtual seminar, ‘Sports law governance and regulation’, organised by Centre for IPR, Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University (DSNLU), Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

Several speakers said though there are various federations for different sports, India was largely failing in every major event such as the Olympics.

One of the main reasons for this is the lack of uniform regulation for sports. There is a need for legislation that governs sports and brings the various authorities into one roof.

4 ATMs gutted in fire mishap

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, APRIL 10

At least four Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) were left in ashes after fire mishap at the ATM point in Pamidi mandal headquarters on Saturday afternoon. More than ₹15 lakh cash was reportedly burnt during the incident and the bank officials were analysing the loss occurred due to fire mishap.

Sources said, the State Bank of India authorities set up ATMs were set up at busy centre of Pamidi mandal head quarters. Pamidi town has been

one of the top business centre in Rayalaseema region exclusive for garment industry and sales of various brands of cloths of suitings and shirtings. The ATM centre was located closer to bus stand area. On Saturday afternoon, a fire mishap occurred in the ATM centre suspecting due to short circuit. Flames spread widely in the centre and about to spread to surrounding areas where big generators and a two wheeler showroom on another side were located.

The locals alerted over spreading of flames.

2 FARMERS DIED, 4 INJURED AS LORRY HITS CART

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, APRIL 10

Two farmers and a bullock died and four were injured as a speeding lorry hit their bullock-cart in the early hours of Saturday near Borrampalem village of Gandepalli mandal in East Godavari District on NH 16.

According to the Gandepalli police, nearly 100 farmers and their family members belong to Raghudevapuram village of Sithanaragaram mandal started their journey in 50 bullock-carts to Kandrakota village of Peddapuram mandal to take a darshan of Goddess Nookalamma. When the bullock-carts reached Borrampalli village, a speeding lorry coming from Rajamahendravaram side hit two bullock-carts. The two farmers Haridasu Pedakapu, 55, of Raghudevapuram village died on the spot and Kandelli Veera Venkata Rao, 49, of Narsapuram village of Korukonda mandal died, while undergoing treatment in government hospital at Rajamahendravaram. Gandepalli Sub-Inspector Sobhan Kumar said that the injured persons were admitted in the government hospital for treatment. He said that due to negligent driving, the accident took place. Gandepalli police registered a case.

4 MEMBERS OF A FAMILY'S BID TO END LIFE

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, APRIL 10

Four members of a family including a 11-year-old boy attempted to commit suicide by consuming sleeping pills in Kandriga Sitaramavaram village in Kamavarupukota mandal of West Godavari last night.

According to Tadikalapudi police station Sub-Inspector K.Venkanna, the head of the family Adapa Mahesh was involved in many debts and he could not find the way for clearing the debts.

Unable to clear the debts, the family members wanted to commit suicide and they consumed sleeping pills.

On Saturday morning, the locals suspected that the family members did not open the doors of their house and noticed that they were unconscious. They informed the police and admitted them into government hospital at Eluru. The Tadikalapudi police registered a case.

4 SUSPENDED FOR WATER CONTAMINATION

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, APRIL 10

The District Magistrate G. Veerapandian has suspended four and constituted an inquiry committee to go into the details as to what caused the death of four people in Adoni town and Gorakallu village due to water contamination and scores of people still getting admitted into hospitals on complaints of diarrhea.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Nani has visited the affected areas on Friday and had a first-hand account of various lapses on the part of civic administration.

The Enquiry Committee on Aruna Jyothi colony of Adoni municipality consists of Ramakrishna Reddy (RDO), R. Srinath Reddy, SE, Public Health Ananthapuram district, and Surendra Babu, SE of Kurnool Municipal Corporation.

The District Magistrate has suspended from service rural water supply Panyam Assistant Engineer Pavan Kumar, Gorakallu village panchayat secretary G. Vijaya Bhaskar and T. Raja Sekhar Reddy Assistant Engineer water supply at Adoni Municipality and Eranna, Turncock, Adoni Municipality.

The Gorakallu mishap inquiry committee has been formed with Ms Kalpana Kumari (Sub Collector), Vidyasagar, and Prabhakar as members.

● Deputy Chief Minister Alla Nani has visited the affected areas on Friday and had a first-hand account of various lapses on the part of civic administration.

UGC direction on PhD to be examined

FROM PAGE 1

Though the state government proposed to consider the candidature of the previously qualified candidates, the High Court did not permit the government to do so.

Moreover, the University Grants Commission had earlier issued a direction stating that a PhD degree will be a mandatory qualification

for direct recruitment to the post of assistant professor in universities with effect from 01-07-2021. The state government will have to look into this issue too while taking up fresh recruitment of assistant professors.

The government has to further address the long-pending demand of ad hoc assistant professors working in universities

since long. They have to be fixed into a time scale before going in for fresh recruitment drive as, otherwise, they could take to legal course, which would again stall the entire recruitment process.

AP Higher Education Council chairman K. Hemachandra Reddy said, “Following a recent order of High Court, the state government will

take a fresh recruitment drive for all teaching positions in each of the 17 universities in Andhra Pradesh in two to four months from now. There will be a fresh screening test for recruitment of assistant professors. We have to take care of some other issues too before going in for the recruitment drive to avoid further hurdles,” he underlined.

FILM CHAMBERS SEEK FLEXIBILITY ON FILM CURBS

FROM PAGE 1

Telugu Film Chamber secretary K.L. Damodar Prasad said, “Though we offer a guarded welcome to AP’s move to impose curbs on screening premier shows and charging the fans more, we appeal to it to be flexible in certain aspects and address several other issues also to make the film industry thrive.”

Cop injured in PK fans attack

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, APRIL 10

A constable, among the few Pawan Kalyan fans, suffered injuries following clash at a Srinivasa cinema theatre in Narpala town in the district during second show of *Vakeel Saheb* movie on Friday night.

Constable Gouse suf-

fered stab injuries when one of Pawan Kalyan’s fans Sreenivas stabbed him with a knife in an embittered state at the cinema talkies.

The police sources said, the issue began with the throwing of a water packet on another audience by Sreenivas while the movie was screening.

tered their e-crop and got themselves connected to the Internet and uploaded information to the relevant mobile application. The information fed to the site are the farmer’s name, survey number, village, cultivated paddy, acreage, whether the land is dry or wet. The E-crop registration was already completed for the 2020 Kharif season.

Recently, officials sought fingerprints of the respective farmers. As the process begins in all dis-

tricts across the state, the pressure on the server increases and it slows down. This makes the process time-consuming.

However, to overcome this problem, the farmers are divided into three groups. In Kadapa district, it has been decided to work on any two days of the week and Sunday. The district needs to link fingerprints from 1,28,582 farmers, but so far only 65,713 farmers have been able to give their fingerprints.

More than 62,000 farmers would need to have their fingerprints linked to the net. Officials are trying to complete the work by April 15. Apart from the server problems, the biometric machines are malfunctioning. To catch up with time, the field staff is working even on holidays to feed information to the net.

In order to get insurance, the crop has to be registered first. Farmer fingerprints have also been made mandatory.

Over 62,000 farmers would need to have their fingerprints linked to the net

PEACE | OF MIND

Crop insurance regn in slow motion

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, APRIL 10

The progress of YSR free agricultural crop insurance scheme is slow in the district as farmers have to directly do the fingerprint for their registration and there are system problems too.

Every year, most crops are damaged by climate imbalance and farmers facing severe losses. Crop insurance can support farmers in such situations. The state govern-

ment launched the scheme last year. However, at the field level, officials are seeking the fingerprints of the growers to link them to the relevant website through the internet. Hence, the delay. The state government has allowed the district to implement the scheme for 13 types of agricultural and horticultural crops during the kharif season last year. Agricultural extension officers, village agricultural and horticultural assistants and

● Agricultural extension officers, village agricultural and horticultural assistants and multi-purpose extension officers working at the Rythu Bharosa Kendram (RBK) have already registered their e-crop and got themselves connected to the Internet and uploaded

multi-purpose extension officers working at the Rythu Bharosa Kendram (RBK) have already regis-

SHORT TAKES

10 KILLED, 40 HURT
AS TRUCK FALLS
INTO GORGE IN U.P.

Lucknow: At least 10 people were killed and over 30 injured as a truck on which they were travelling fell into a gorge in UP's Etawah on Saturday, police said.

"The incident took place in the Barhpura police station area after the driver of the vehicle lost control over it. There were 40 to 50 people travelling by the truck," Additional Superintendent of Police (City) Prashant Kumar Prasad said, adding that the accident took place in a ravine area.

A police PRO said, "The number of people who have died stands at 10 while 30-35 are injured. The injured have been admitted to the Etawah district hospital. Depending upon the seriousness of the cases, the injured will be shifted to higher centres for medical treatment."

CBI INVESTIGATES
NAXAL ATTACKS
IN CHHATTISGARH

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

Central intelligence agencies are investigating the possibility that some of the Maoists involved in the killing of 22 CRPF commandos in Chhattisgarh last week might have been trained in the use of sophisticated arms and explosives at terror camps operating in Myanmar, close to the India border.

The terror camps on the Myanmar border are run by northeast militant groups with active assistance from some elements of the Myanmar Army. Sources claimed that local unit of the Intelligence Bureau based in Raipur was conducting a detailed investigations of the Maoist ambush in south Bastar.

FARMERS
BLOCK KMP
EXPRESSWAY

Chandigarh: Intensifying their protest against the three farm laws, farmers blocked the KundliManesarPalwal expressway at some places in Haryana on Saturday.

The blockade started at 8 am and would last 24 hours.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting farmer unions spearheading the agitation against the agriculture-related legislations, on Friday gave a call for a 24-hour blockade of the KMP expressway.

The 136-km-long expressway is also known as the Western Peripheral Expressway.

Protesting farmers, however, said emergency vehicles will be allowed to ply.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (Lakhnowal) general secretary Harinder Singh Lakhnowal said the blockade would be for 24 hours.

Haryana Police in the meanwhile issued a traffic advisory, asking travellers to avoid the KMP expressway.

Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Navdeep Singh Virk on Friday said elaborate arrangements were in place to maintain peace and order, prevent any kind of violence and facilitate traffic movement and public transport on the expressway.

INDIA FINALISES
AIR BUBBLE PACT
WITH SRI LANKA

New Delhi: India has established a bilateral air bubble arrangement with Sri Lanka for operation of special international passenger flights between the two countries, the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Saturday.

With this, India now has such pacts with 28 countries, including Afghanistan, Bahrain, Canada, France, Germany, Iraq, Japan, the Maldives, Nigeria, Qatar, the UAE, the UK and the USA. Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international passenger flights can be operated by their airlines into each other's territories under restrictive conditions.

"India has finalised an air bubble agreement with Sri Lanka, making it the 6th such arrangement in SAARC region and the 28th in total," the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Twitter. "All the eligible passengers will be able to travel between the 2 countries in the near future," it noted. Scheduled international flights have been suspended in India since March 23, 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Uddhav signals harsher, longer lockdown, awaits Centre nod

In Delhi, Kejriwal says lockdown not option, restrictions will be imposed

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI,
APRIL 10

In view of rising Covid-19 cases, Maharashtra is all set for a harsher and longer lockdown, the date and time for which is yet to be finalised. During the all-party meeting called by Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday, it was decided that a lockdown of minimum one week and maximum 15 days can be imposed in the state to break the chain of transmission of Coronavirus. However, a final decision in this regard will be taken in a couple of days after consulting health experts.

The Centre too is yet to give its nod for such a plan as the Union government had suggested that states go for "micro-level" lockdowns instead of shutting down the entire state. Thackeray said lockdown is the only option given the high volume of cases and difficulty in contact tracing.

"Last year during lockdown people were at home so it was not difficult to trace the infection. Since everything is open now, it is practically very difficult to trace people. The Centre must understand this. I have been speaking to many people from different sectors, even private hospitals for the last few days. All are ready to support the government," Thackeray said.

Maharashtra on Saturday reported 55,411 fresh Covid-19 positive cases with 309 deaths. Out of this, Mumbai had 9,327 new cases and 50 deaths.

In a new high, India reported over 1.52 lakh fresh cases of Coronavirus with 795 deaths in 24 hours on Saturday. Among the latest to catch infection in Maharashtra is RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. The rising cases have put substantial pressure on the health infrastructure of the country with several states reporting shortage of Remdesivir, Oxygen and hospital beds. As state governments scramble to test and treat Covid patients, there were also reports of shortage of RT-PCR kits in some places.

With several vaccination centres in Maharashtra shut due to shortage of vaccines, former MP and farmer's leader Raju Shetti has threatened to stop Serum Institute India's supply of Covid-19 vaccines to other states.

In a letter written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS) head Raju Shetti has stated that if supply of vaccines



A health worker collects swab sample from a labourer for Covid-19 test, at Koyambedu Vegetable Market in Chennai, on Saturday.

— PTI

Assam stares at vaccine shortage

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, APRIL 10

Amidst the growing number of Covid-19 positive cases, Assam government has issued guidelines for upcoming festive season of the state with focus on social distancing, hand sanitisation and strict use of masks. The guidelines underlined the norms of public gathering to be followed during the Bohag Bihu festival which is going to start from April 14.

Though, state government has also been asking the eligible persons to take the vaccine, Assam

is also staring at a shortage of Covid-19 vaccine, with officials confirming that the existing stock would be exhausted in two to three days. The state had around 2.70 lakh doses of vaccine on Saturday morning.

"Central government has said that a consignment of vaccines will be sent by April 12. Though there is no confirmation yet, we are hopeful," sources in the state health department said while confirming that in some districts they are providing vaccines only to those who are eligible for a second dose of vaccine. "The

Dibrugarh Joint Director health has stopped vaccination of first dose from Saturday through a notification," sources said.

Meanwhile the state government has asked the health officials to focus simultaneously on the three Ts — Testing, Tracing and Treatment while ramping up the vaccination for eligible beneficiaries as part of its Covid-19 management strategy.

The guidelines for celebration of Bihu festival further said that event organisers will have to seek prior permission from the district adminis-

trations and the programmes will have to conclude by 11 pm. All the organisers and volunteers will have to get tested three days prior to the event and after the event.

The event site should be spacious for maintaining adequate physical distance and should have multiple entry and exit points. Also, all participants should be screened for symptoms.

Passengers coming from Mumbai and Bengaluru will have to undergo compulsory Covid-19 tests in the airports and railway stations of Assam.

Sonia slams Centre's Covid Management

New Delhi, Apr 10 (PTI) Congress president Sonia Gandhi accused the Centre on Saturday of "mismanaging" the Covid situation and creating a vaccine shortage in the country by exporting it, as she called for cancelling all public gatherings and poll rallies in view of the rising number of Coronavirus cases.

Addressing a virtual meeting with the chief ministers of the Congress-ruled states and ministers of the party in states where it is in power in alliance with others, she said the priority should be to test, track and vaccinate.

She was reviewing the efforts by the states ruled by the Congress to tackle the second wave of the Coronavirus infection in the country.

Rahul Gandhi called for putting money in the hands of the poor.

All public gatherings and poll rallies should be cancelled as the number of Covid-19 cases is on the rise.

"Mass gatherings for elections and religious events have accelerated Covid-19 for which all of us are responsible to some extent. We need to accept this responsibility and keep the interest of the nation above our own," Sonia Gandhi said.

— PTI

According to Kaul's sister Satya Devi, the actor, popular for playing the role of Lord Indra in B.R. Chopra's "Mahabharat", died on Saturday due to Covid-19 related complications. He was 74.

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MAHARASHTRA
GOVT ORDERS
PROBE AGAINST
PARAM BIR SINGH

Mumbai, April 10: The Maharashtra government has ordered a Preliminary Enquiry (PE) against former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh with the main focus on how officers like suspended API Sachin Waze, who was arrested by the NIA in the Mukesh Ambani security scare case, went rogue while working under Singh.

The PE has been ordered after the Mumbai Police submitted a report in connection with the security scare case to the state Home department, an official said on Saturday. The PE order was issued on April 1, he said.

The PE will try to find out if there was any negligence on part of Singh in submitting a report on the probe of the recovery of an explosives-laden SUV found outside the south Mumbai residence of Mukesh Ambani on February 25, to the state government in the background of Assembly sessions (in some states).

The PE will also ascertain if there was any dereliction of duty and the violation of All India Service (Conduct) Rules by Singh in (not) controlling Waze who was working under him.

Senior IPS officer Sanjay Pandey has been directed to conduct the PE.

Pandey has been given the additional charge as the Director General of Police (DGP), Maharashtra.

The home department had sought information on certain specific points in its letter to the Mumbai Police dated March 24 about the Ambani security scare case.

After the arrest of API Sachin Waze in this case, the involvement of personnel of the Mumbai Police Commissionerate was found in the conspiracy and Waze himself was the investigating officer of the case, the home department order said.

The PE will ascertain if Param Bir Singh had failed to control Waze, who headed the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU). Waze was arrested by the NIA on March 13. — PTI



'Bombay Begums' poster.

— Twitter

NCP CR SUMMONS
MUMBAI POLICE
OFFICIAL OVER
'BOMBAY BEGUMS'

New Delhi, April 10: The apex child rights body NCP CR has summoned a senior Mumbai police official on Monday with action taken report on alleged "inappropriate" portrayal of children in Netflix's "Bombay Begums" series.

In a letter to Raju Bhujbal, DCP Enforcement, Mumbai Police, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCP CR) said the Mumbai police commissioner had forwarded the commission's complaint against the series to Bhujbal, but no response had been received in the matter yet.

"The Commission is constrained to issue this summons for you to appear before the Commission through video conferencing on April 12, 2021 at 1100 hours on (Monday) along with the requisite compliance/action taken report," the commission said.

The NCP CR had last month taken cognizance upon a complaint received from two Twitter handles in regard to Bombay Begums series streaming on Netflix, where children were allegedly shown indulging in snorting drugs and taking innocent pictures.

It had asked the Mumbai police to register a complaint against the series and take necessary action. The Netflix series delves into the lives of five women from different sections of society, who all want different things in life.

Earlier, the child rights body had directly asked Netflix to stop the streaming of the series on their platform till the time they came to any decision on removal of the scenes, and held a meeting with officials of the online streaming platform. — PTI

LEAKED | AUDIO

Kishor says Dalits voting for BJP a major factor

BJP releases Kishor's audio chat with scribes, creates stir

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

In the electoral battle for West Bengal, leaked audio clips purportedly between chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's election strategist Prashant Kishor and some journalists ended up creating a major embarrassment for the ruling party with the BJP claiming that the TMC has conceded the BJP is winning.

As BJP leaders latched onto the leaked audio clips and tried to pull down the TMC, Kishor dared the BJP to release the full chat on ClubHouse, a social media platform, and reiterated that the saffron party will not get more than 100 Assembly seats in the elections, for which fourth phase of polling took place on Saturday.

In the several excerpts of the conversation that



People arrive to cast their votes at a polling station at Kalikapur, under Jadavpur assembly constituency of South 24 Parganas district during the 4th phase of the west Bengal State Assembly Election on Saturday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

were shared by the BJP's IT cell head and co-incharge of the state, Amit Malviya, Kishor is purportedly heard saying that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "as popular as" Banerjee in the state, that there is anti-incumbency sentiment against the TMC and that "polarisation is a reality". He is also allegedly saying that the Scheduled Caste votes

are a factor in the elections and about the BJP's election machinery. Kishor is also heard saying that Dalits and the Mathua communities voting for the BJP is a very important factor.

Sharing the clips, Malviya claimed, "TMC's election was just thrown away!" The chat session took place on ClubHouse late Friday and the BJP shared the



IN BRIEF

B'desh mosque attacked, 12 hurt

Dhaka, April 10: Activists of a hardline Islamist group attacked devotees inside a mosque in northern Bangladesh, injuring at least 12 persons, according to a media report.

The incident took place on Friday at the mosque in the Gaibandha district when self-proclaimed Hefazate-e-Islam activists snatched the mic from the Imam and preached about the organisation, Dhaka Tribune reported.

They attacked the devotees who tried to intervene, Imam Motlob Uddin said.

Blasphemy: 2 Pak nurses booked

Lahore, April 10: Two Christian nurses have been booked under blasphemy charges in Pakistan's Punjab province following a complaint by hospital authorities, police said, as people staged demonstrations against the duo demanding strict action against them.

An FIR has been registered against the two, Mariyum Lal and Newish Arooj, working in District Headquarters Hospital, Faisalabad, on Friday on the complaint filed by Deputy Medical Superintendent Dr Mohammad Ali.

Indonesia quake kills 7 in Java

Malang, April 10: A strong earthquake killed at least seven people, injured 12 others and damaged more than 300 buildings on Indonesia's main island of Java and shook the tourist hotspot of Bali, officials said Saturday. No tsunami warnings were posted. The US Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.0 quake struck off the island's southern coast at 0700 GMT. It was centred 28 miles south of Sumberpucung town of Malang District in East Java province, at a depth of 82 kilometres. Rahmat Triyono, head of earthquake and tsunami centre, said the tremor did not have the potential to cause a tsunami.

US unveils the colour coding

Washington, April 10: The State Department has unveiled new rules for US government contacts with Taiwan that will likely anger China but appear to reimpose some restrictions that had been lifted by the Trump administration.

The department announced the changed policy in a statement that said the Biden administration intends to "liberalise" the rules to reflect the "deepening unofficial relationship" between the United States and Taiwan. But, these don't include changes put in by ex-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the waning days of the Trump administration.

Pompeo had lifted virtually all restrictions on contacts with Taiwan, including allowing Taiwanese military officers to wear uniforms and display the Taiwanese flag at meetings with officials from

APARTMENT OF RUSSIAN SCRIBE RAIDED

Moscow, April 10: Russian authorities took a prominent investigative journalist in for questioning after searching his apartment, and the news website he works for said the actions were likely connected to a story about one of President Vladimir Putin's closest associates. Roman Anin, chief editor of the *Vazhnikh Istori* website, is considered a witness in a criminal case for violation of privacy.

Anin's lawyer, Anna Stavitskaya, said that Anin refused to answer questions and was released but is to be interviewed again on Monday.

Istori said the questioning likely involved a 2016 story Anin wrote.

for the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta that alleged a lavish super-yacht belonged to Igor Sechin, head of Russian state oil company Rosneft.

Novaya Gazeta was ordered to retract the story as a result of a civil court case, but a criminal case in the matter has been pending for years.

Rosneft is Russia's second-largest state-controlled company, reporting \$79.6 billion in revenue in 2020. Oil exports are key to Russia's economy, and Sechin's position gives him considerable influence.

He was a deputy prime minister under Putin before taking the helm at Rosneft.

IMF, WB urged to ensure timely vaccine delivery

Jt. ministerial panel asserts virus effects will be felt for years

Washington, April 10: Asserting that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will be felt for years, a joint ministerial committee of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank has urged the two global financial bodies to ensure timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries.

"Timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries is critical to ending the pandemic, especially as new variants emerge. Developing countries need to strengthen their readiness for vaccination campaigns and develop coordinated strategies to reach vulnerable populations," the Development Committee said in a communique after the Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank here on Friday.

The panel noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented public health, economic and social crisis, threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions.

The economic shock is increasing poverty, worsening inequalities and reversing development gains. As the global economy begins a gradual recovery, uncertainty surrounds near- and medium-term prospects, it said.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the deadly Coronavirus pandemic that is likely to have originated from the Chinese city of Wuhan in 2019 has so far infected 134,545,099 people and claimed 2,914,590 lives globally. "We call for sustained, differentiated, and targeted financial and technical support for an adequate policy response, strong coordination across bilateral and multilateral organisa-



A French gendarmier officer scans the QR code of a driver at an exit of the A10 motorway linking Paris and Bordeaux, during the lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Virsac, southwestern France, on Friday. — AFP

tions, and further support to the private sector. We urge the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in line with their respective mandates, to work closely together and with other partners to contain the impacts of the pandemic," the communique said.

The committee called for redoubling the efforts to support manufacturing capacity for vaccines and the pandemic-related medical supplies in developing countries.

"The pandemic has triggered far-reaching consequences, and we must strengthen global preparedness for future pandemics, and at the same time make progress in building robust health systems with universal coverage," it said. — PTI

Iran: Begun testing new advanced nuclear centrifuge

Tehran, April 10: Iran said Saturday it has begun mechanical tests on its newest advanced nuclear centrifuge, even as the five world powers that remain in a foundering 2015 nuclear deal with Iran attempt to bring the US back into the agreement. Iran's IR-9 centrifuge, when operational, would have the ability to separate uranium isotopes more quickly than the current centrifuges being used, thereby enriching uranium at a faster pace.

The announcement carried on state TV came on Iran's annual Nuclear Day. The IR-9's output is 50 times quicker than the first Iranian centrifuge, the IR-1. Iran's nuclear program is also developing IR-8 centrifuges. Since January, Iran has begun enriching uranium at

up to 20% purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade levels, though Iran's leadership insists the country has no desire to develop a nuclear weapon. Former US President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the nuclear accord in 2018, accusing Iran of failing to live up to the agreement, opting for what he called a maximum-pressure campaign of stepped-up US sanctions and other tough actions.

Iran responded by intensifying its enrichment of uranium and building centrifuges in plain violation of the accord, while insisting that its nuclear development is for civilian not military purposes.

Israel maintains Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons. — AP

Lanka onstage melee: Mrs World gives up crown

Colombo, April 10: The reigning Mrs. World 2020, has been accused of injuring Pushpika De Silva, who was crowned Mrs. Sri Lanka on Sunday at a televised pageant in Colombo. Jurie was arrested on Thursday and later released on bail. In a video statement Friday, Jurie said she stood against "injustice" and said the pageant was "tainted."

"My only intention was to stand up for the injustice caused to the competitors throughout this competition which was tainted with heavy politicisation," she said. Jurie added she wanted to ensure that every contestant had an equal opportunity, because she had seen "from the beginning" that the contest was corrupted. She stressed she did not favor anyone. "I am now ready to hand over the crown," she said, before removing the crown from her head.

Following Sunday's bust-up, De Silva clarified that she is separated, but not divorced, from her husband. Mrs. Sri Lanka belongs to the Mrs. World beauty contest for married women. De Silva said: "Being apart is one. Divorce is something else," in a statement on Facebook. But on Friday, Jurie said: "How I see it, the purpose of Mrs. World is to celebrate all women who are married and still strive to conquer their dreams." — AP

Vaccine shortage hit poor countries

London, April 10: As many as 60 countries, including some of the world's poorest, might be stalled at the first shots of their Coronavirus vaccinations because nearly all deliveries through the global programme intended to help them are blocked until as late as June.

COVAX, the global initiative to provide vaccines to countries lacking the clout to negotiate for scarce supplies on their own, has in the past week shipped more than 25,000 doses to low-income countries only twice on any given day. Deliveries have all but halted since Monday.

During the past two weeks, according to data compiled daily by Unicef, fewer than 2 million COVAX doses in total were cleared for shipment to 92 countries in the developing world — the same amount injected in Britain alone. On Friday, the head of the World Health Organisation slammed the "shocking imbalance" in global Covid-19 vaccination.

WHO DG Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that only one in 500 in poorer countries had got a dose against one in four people in rich countries. — AP

US warns of consequences to Russian aggression in Ukraine

Washington, April 10: The Biden administration is carrying a review of its policies against Russia over its escalating aggression in eastern Ukraine and there will be "consequences," some seen and some unseen, to Kremlin, the White House has warned. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki during her daily briefing said the US is in close consultation and working with partners and allies in the region over Russia's troop movements on Ukraine's borders.

Of the actions that have already been taken, that we've had an ongoing review about we've been clear. There will be consequences, some unseen and some seen. We will hope to have more about those soon, Psaki said on Friday.

As it relates to the escalating Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, including Russia's troop movements on Ukraine's borders, we are, of course, in close consultation and working with partners and allies in the region to assess, to share intelligence, to determine what's happening, and what can be done about it, Psaki said.

Responding to a question, Psaki said there's ongoing diplomatic engagement between the US and a number of countries in the region, including Russia, including Ukraine,

including European partners and allies who share a number of American concerns about the aggression of Russian movements on the border.

The long-running conflict in Ukraine's mainly Russian-speaking east has claimed more than 13,000 lives since 2014. Fighting in the conflict, which erupted after Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, subsided in 2020 as a new ceasefire agreement took hold last July.

But clashes have picked up again since the start of the year. Ukrainian separatists are widely seen as having Russia's political and military backing,

GOLDEN | AGE Team of archaeologists had started excavations in September

Egypt unveils 3,000-year-old 'lost' city

Luxor, Egypt, April 10: Archaeologists Saturday showed off their finds at what they say is the "largest" ancient city ever found in Egypt, dating to a golden age of the pharaohs 3,000 years ago.

At the site near Luxor, home of the legendary Valley of the Kings, workers carefully carried ancient pots and showed human and animal remains dug up from the earth as members of the media toured around curved brick walls and rudimentary streets. "This is a large

city that was lost. It was connected with the god Aton and Amenhotep III," famed Egyptologist Zahi Hawass enthusiastically told reporters Saturday.

"We found three major districts: One for administration, one for workers to sleep in and another for industry," he said.

Spaces include workshops for drying meat, making clothes and sandals, and crafting amulets and small statues.

Mostafa Waziri, head of the country's Supreme Council of Antiquities

said the site was not limited to buildings. "We can see... economic activity, workshops and ovens," he said.

Hawass had announced earlier this week the discovery of a "lost golden city", and the archaeological team said the find was "the largest" ancient city ever uncovered in Egypt.

"We found one portion of the city only," Hawass told AFP Saturday. "The city extends to the west and the north." The team began excavations in September.

Pentagon chief to visit Israel amid Iran talks

Jerusalem, April 10: US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin is due to arrive in Jerusalem on Sunday, the highest ranked member of President Joe Biden's administration to visit Israel. The two-day visit comes as the Biden administration attempts to return to an Iran nuclear deal abandoned by its predecessor — a deal Israel opposes.

Austin is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defence Minister Benny Gantz and armed forces chief Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi. The trip will also include a tour of the Nevatim air force base and visits to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and to a Jerusalem memorial to fallen soldiers. Austin arrives days after representatives of the remaining parties to the troubled 2015 nuclear deal launched talks in Vienna on bringing the United States back into it.

Then president Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018. The Vi-

enna talks are focused not only on lifting crippling economic sanctions Trump reimposed, but also on bringing Iran back into compliance after it responded by suspending several of its own commitments. All sides said the talks, in which Washington is not participating directly but has the European Union as intermediary, had got off to a good start.

Israel opposes the US attempt to rejoin the accord. Speaking last week, Netanyahu said Israel would not be bound by its terms. "An agreement with Iran that would pave the way to nuclear weapons — weapons that threaten our extinction — would not compel us in any way," Netanyahu said in a speech on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Iran and Israel have both recently attacked each other's commercial shipping, reports say.

Austin will also visit Germany, the United Kingdom and Belgium on his tour, according to the Pentagon. — AFP

N. Ireland riots: 14 cops hurt

Belfast, April 10: Irish prime minister Micheal Martin warned against a "spiral back" into sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland on Saturday, after a week-long streak of unrest continued with 14 police injured in the latest night of clashes.

Disorder sparked in pockets of Belfast — the regional capital of the British province — on Friday night with petrol bombs and masonry thrown at officers, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

said. A car was also "hijacked and set on fire and pushed towards police lines", as the total number of officers injured in recent disorder reached 88.

Elsewhere, police clashed with a crowd of 40 in the northern town of Coleraine and a man was charged with "possessing petrol bombs in suspicious circumstances" following disorder in Newtownabbey, a suburb north of Belfast. Saturday marks the 23rd anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday Agr-

COMPETITION CHARGE: ALIBABA FINED \$2.8 BN

Beijing, April 10: China's antitrust regulators on Saturday slapped a record fine of \$2.78 billion on Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company, for abusing its dominant market position as Beijing tightened the screws on the country's tech giants. Closing a months-long investigation that began last Christmas eve, China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) slapped a fine of 18.23 billion yuan (\$2.78 billion) on Alibaba, headed by the country's top billionaire Jack Ma, setting a precedent for the ruling Communist Party to use the anti-monopoly rules to regulate tech giants.

The SAMR said that it had made an administrative penalty decision under China's anti-monopoly law, ordering Alibaba Group to stop illegal activities and imposing a fine of 4 per cent on its 2019 domestic sales of 455.71 billion yuan, totalling 18.23 billion yuan. The market regulator alleged that Alibaba has been abusing its market dominance since 2015. — PTI

FLOYD CASE: CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER TAKES THE STAND

Minneapolis, April 10: The chief county medical examiner who ruled George Floyd's death a homicide took the stand Friday at former Officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial, saying he did not watch the harrowing video of the arrest before examining Floyd so that he would not be biased by what he saw.

"I was aware that at least one video had gone viral on the Internet, but I intentionally chose not to look at that until I had examined Mr. Floyd," said Dr. Andrew Baker. "I did not want to bias my exam by going in with any preconceived notions that might lead me down one pathway or another," Baker, the Hennepin County medical examiner, concluded last year that Floyd died from cardiopulmonary arrest — that is, his heart stopped — complicated by the way police restrained him and compressed his neck as the 46-year-old PoC man lay on the pavement last May.

Another medical expert Friday blamed Floyd's death on the way police held him down, as Chauvin's attorney pressed the witness with hypothetical questions and other means to suggest that Floyd's drug use or heart disease killed him. — AP



A picture taken on Saturday shows workers carrying a fossilised fish uncovered at the archaeological site of a 3000-year-old city, dubbed The Rise of Aten, dating to the reign of Amenhotep III, uncovered by the Egyptian mission near Luxor. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

11 APRIL 2021



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

Indian subnationalism past its expiry date?

Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu — all awaiting new governments in early May this year — are the last bastions of strong linguistic and cultural regionalism which have resisted the mainstreaming of politics under BJP's "one country one party" theology. Assam capitulated in 2016 and is expected to remain within the BJP's fold in May this year.

It is not as if other Indian states have no binding cultural roots. Punjab, for instance, is actively demonstrating its independence of spirit and community strength via the ongoing anti-farm bill agitation.

Smaller states in the North-East have a similar ethos. Sikkim, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland — all have a strong preference for self-rule by locals per local culture and customs, although they are not averse to partaking of the bountiful central endowments, showered on them annually, in exchange for remaining politically aligned with the ruling party in Delhi — a domestic version of the subsidiarity which Imperial China demands from its subalterns in Southeast Asia.

Jammu and Kashmir — another border state previously (now a Union territory) with a strong cultural identity, including its delectable *wazwan* — erred in confusing notional constitutional autonomy with the freedom to act independently. The result was that the BJP — never one to shrink from radical political disruption — took the unprecedented step of reordering the constitutional relationship making its subsidiarity nature both de facto and de jure in 2019.

The BJP has a stunning record in mainstreaming border areas. Assam is the best example of deep mainstreaming per the prevailing political philosophy in the heart of India, spreading out in a 1,000-kilometre radius around Nagpur. A dispassionate observer could reasonably conclude that regionalism is past its expiry date in India.

Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, represent exemplar benchmarks for regionalism with deep political, social, linguistic and cultural roots. Not surprisingly, all three are coastal states with thriving, historical, global commercial links. All three are unlikely to roll over and succumb to the centralisation of politics, which the BJP represents. But of the three, West Bengal appears the most vulnerable.

"Didi", alias Mamata Banerjee, diehard, street fighter and firebrand politician, the presiding deity of the All-India Trinamul Congress (AITC), has ruled Kolkata now for a decade and the political scene shows. Not for nothing, has the redoubtable political spinner, Prashant Kishor, who now advises her, rebranded her moniker "Didi" — meaning sister, who, per mainstream Indian tradition, leaves the family to start another — into "Banglar meye" — daughter of Bengal — implying a familial obligation on all Bengalis to support her.

The idea is to "other" the BJP as a modern-day East India Company. Any Bengali voting for becomes a default "Mir Jafar", whose chicanery smoothed the way for the defeat of Siraj-ud-Daulah, the then Nawab of Bengal, at Plassey and the subsequent ingress of the British into India in 1757.

This strategy is rich in irony. Didi projects herself as the great assimilator of a heterogeneous, cultured, secular Bengal spanning all religions. She paid monthly stipends to mullahs from 2012 to Hindu priests from this year — a caricature of even-handed "ersatz secularism" and a gesture which, perversely, benefits upper castes only because dalits and tribal folk do not perform such services. More gratifying, the liberalism does not include "foreigners" like "Gujaratis" — thereby labelling all Gujaratis as "Non-Resident Indians".

Didi herself, was a political disrupter, a decade back, cutting through the three-and-a-half-decade old Communist gridlock on Bengal by consolidating the have-not votes. Over the past decade, she has systematically sandpapered the Red remnants into a bright Blue — the AITC colour code. Her strategic depth is substantial — gender is a trump card, "secularism" is another, her deliberate "ordinariness" is another, although the levers of power have unveiled authoritarian streaks in governance, to match those of the BJP.

The BJP increased its vote share from 4.1 per cent in 2011 to 10.2 per cent in the 2016 Assembly elections and an exaggerated 40.6 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal. All this despite its strategic disdain for seeking Muslim votes to win an election — its defiant signature tune. If votes were polled the way stocks are chosen — on trailing growth trends — the BJP should be able to encroach on the disempowered dalit and tribal vote banks, reducing the 2016 vote share of the AITC (44.9 per cent) CPI(M) (20 per cent) and the INC (12.3 per cent) to, at the very least, force Didi into uncomfortable coalitions with other parties for survival.

Should the AITC, Congress and the Communists have come together to fight these elections? Yes, of course. But the Indian political class favours the hubris of exclusive control over a party, even with just one bird in hand, rather than collaborating to go after the many other birds in the bush — a doomed strategy, as illustrated by the decline of the once storied Indian National Congress.

Meanwhile, in Kerala — the template of secular democracy — the Left Democratic Front is expected to retain power, not least because of its performance during the pandemic and despite the perceived personal pull of BJP's "metro-man" — E. Sreedharan. Looking ahead, Kerala could well become the crucible for a new version of the Left movement in India — less pedantically ideological, less anti-wealth and more pro-poor for delivering shared growth and equity.

Tamil Nadu remains the most insulated from the assault of the "Northern invaders" for the moment. Time will tell whether, despite the passing of stalwart leaders — Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi — credible substitutes emerge which are able to keep their Northern gates firmly shut.

As things stand, ironically, by the first week of May 2021, the BJP's political empire could replicate that of the last Great Mughal, Emperor Aurangzeb. Only Didi stands, like a diminutive David, between the Goliath BJP and the fulfillment of that aspiration.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



The long view from New Delhi



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

The persisting stand-off with China must make India rethink its relationship structures both in the Asian and global context.

How is India geo-strategically placed currently? On its northern borders it confronts an aggressive China. On its western borders it is currently in a state of a partial thaw qua Pakistan. A melt that can again go back to a state of deep freeze at any point of time. On the east the strains with regard to the economic blockade of Nepal in 2015 still continue to linger. Bhutan is caught in the Sino-Indian cleft stick. Bangladesh, though reaffirming the centrality of India to its external environment, is both conscious of and eager to leverage the rise of China. Myanmar is in the throes of violent convulsions following a military coup d'état on February 1, 2021, that is having reverberations across the Indo-Burmese border as well.

Down south, the Rajapaksa administration in Sri Lanka still continues to bend to the Chinese wind. Relations with Maldives have definitely improved after Ibrahim Mohamed Solih ascended to office in September 2018. His predecessor President Abdulla Yameen foreign policy was most eloquently summed up by current Maldivian foreign minister Abdulla Shahid in the following sentence, "The mistake President Yameen made was to play India against China and China against India. That is a childish way of dealing with international relations; it will blow up in your own face." However, Maldives' debt to China that ranges from 1 to 3 billion USD should worry India, too, for Maldives' GDP is only 5.46 billion USD in 2021. Things could easily go the Hambantota way. On balance it does not seem to be a very happy situation

for India overall.

However, it is the reinvigorated "great game" in Afghanistan that could once again have a profound impact on the future of the region. As the Americans desperately attempt to sever the two-decade-old umbilical chord in Afghanistan, a deep void may open up in that country once more. Pakistan, Iran, Turkey China and Russia view this vacuum from their own strategic perch. India should also seriously evaluate what its hard strategic interests are in Afghanistan and then proceed accordingly.

Further west, the Saudi Arabia-UAE-Israel triangle is not going to have a free run of the Middle East and Gulf region as it did under the Trump Administration. President Joe Biden is seeking to pick up the threads of the Donald Trump aborted Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) colloquially referred to as the Iran Nuclear deal once again in Vienna through the E3+2 process.

The JCPOA signed on July 14, 2015, was further endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, adopted on July 20, 2015. President Trump unilaterally walked out of this arrangement on the 8th of May 2018 and reinstated sanctions against Iran.

The irony is that none of the Second Nuclear Age powers are party to the current process as they were not to the previous one either.

For India, the Iran situation is further compounded by the epic 25-year Sino-Iranian Strategic Partnership agreement signed on the 27th of March 2021 that envisages a range of investments by China into Iran in fields ranging from oil to agriculture. Interestingly, Iran metaphorically booted India out of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway link in the

July of 2020, citing a lack of interest by the Indian side. If the Iran nuclear deal gets reinstated it would further expand Iranian influence in the Middle East.

Iran has been the biggest gainer of the ill-conceived American intervention in Iraq and the subsequent developments in the region post 2003. The US invasion of Iraq allowed Iran to create the Shia crescent encompassing Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and embracing the Shia populations in each of these countries. Anchored by Tehran, it spawns major surrogate satellites such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthis, and southern Iraqi militias. A rejuvenated Iran in partnership with China having its own strategic interests in Afghanistan and profoundly averse to the growing Saudi-UAE-Israel-India bonhomie would be something New Delhi should watch closely.

India's great power relationships are also far from rock steady. With Russia warming up to both Beijing and even Pakistan and the United States also requiring Pakistan's help qua the Taliban to action the Doha deal signed between the US on February 29, 2020, things look rather messy for India.

What then are India's options to protect its broader strategic interests, namely, keep the Chinese at bay, guarantee that the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the Indo-Pacific open, not allow Afghanistan to become Pakistan's strategic depth, insulate India's energy security from the evolving dynamic in the Middle East and ensure that the "great powers" while acting in their own interests do not end up acting against

India's interests?

One option that needs to be focussed upon among myriad others is to renege with the European continent across the spectrum. This essentially from a strategic perspective entails an assignation with Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Arrangement) Conceived as a cold war construct in April 1949 to keep the Soviet Union at bay, Nato, over the years, has evolved both in its role and character.

An engagement does not mean that India should become a Nato adjunct or be designated as a Non-Nato ally by the United States. What it would mean is that India would be able to have access to both political and the military-to-military relationship with 30 odd European nations. Europe remains the neglected template that can still be leveraged by India to further its interests

The experience and evolution of the Nato alliance over the past seven decades could provide interesting institutional pointers to New Delhi if it were to consider at some point in time in the future the possibility of turning the "Quad" between US, Japan, Australia and India into the linchpin of a broader Asian Nato.

Moreover, India's engagement with Nato would also be a salutary signal to even Russia that, while India values the "special relationship of the erstwhile years", it would not be averse to exploring alternative avenues, including alliance arrangements, if Russia's relationships with China or Pakistan start becoming too close for comfort.

To the Chinese, the message would also be clear that its belligerence would only expand the hub and spoke US-anchored security architecture in Asia currently from Japan all the way downwards to Australia into a more multilateral framework with Nato as the foundational template. It is an idea whose time may have come.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari

LETTERS

VACCINE POLITICS

At present, India is deep in the throes of the second wave of Coronavirus (Rise to C-virus challenge; don't play vaccine politics, DC, April 10). Political one-upmanship amid a health emergency will make it more exacerbated. The pandemic can be defeated only if the healthcare systems are ramped up and vaccination scaled up at different centres. Further, the importance of Covid-19 protocols cannot be underestimated to contain the virus.

Dr C. Ghanshyam

Visakhapatnam

It's quite unfortunate that blame games have become the order of the day with regard to availability of Covid-19 vaccines to states. They must have followed a protocol for their distribution. The home minister has declared at the top of his voice that there is no shortage of vaccines. It is an irony to blatantly blame mismanagement and wastage of vaccines by the states. The vaccines must reach all the depleted vaccination centres for celebration of the 'Vaccination Utsav' as suggested by the PM.

K. Nehru Patnaik

Visakhapatnam

We were serious in the beginning when lockdown started. When unlock started, we started taking things easy. We are not prepared to stop or postpone exams or elections. We do not skip going to temples like Tirupati. Huge number of devotees attend prayers. We do not drop Kumbh mela with pilgrims taking a holy dip in rivers. We are not prepared to keep distance. We do not use masks. What is wrong with us? We are in a hurry to start IPL.

K.L. Rao

Visakhapatnam

MOTOR MOUTHS

Mamata Banerjee allegations against the BJP of planning to assassinate her and Adhir Ranjan of the Congress predicting that the TMC and the BJP will form a coalition in the event of a hung assembly, are as believable as Aesop's fables (DC, April 10). They must be taken with a bucket of salt. After campaigning, Mamata can write a book titled "Myth and reality" and a collection of campaign jokes from West Bengal.

Parthasarathy Mandadi

Tirupati

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Indira rules out decentralisation of licensing

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today turned down a suggestion by Federation of India Chambers of Commerce and Industry President D.C. Kothari for transferring to the States certain powers of licensing along with foreign exchange allocation to the States.

Inaugurating the 44th annual session of the FICCI, Mrs. Gandhi said such a suggestion would amount to ignoring certain basic factors.

"The development of industry and the allocation of foreign exchange must necessarily be fitted into an overall scheme of national priorities."

"How can this be achieved with the decentralisation of licensing and allocation of a scarce resource such as foreign exchange?" Mrs. Gandhi asked.

Rod Liddle



The dilemma of vaccines: Why all need to take the Covid-19 jab

In Britain, we have a government which is basically libertarian in its instincts, despite its current affection for telling us what we can and can't do on a daily basis. This seems like a paradox or a non-sequitur, but it isn't really, because in a sense it's a coalition between libertarian politicians and a big-statist regulatory medical clergy. It's an interesting political marriage, a marriage of expediency. And it will soon become very strained.

The government is about to run into big problems over its rollout of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which many scientists believe could have a causal link to the prevalence of blood clots in a very small minority of the people who take it. The European Medicines Agency will soon announce its official finding on all this. Britain's own medical regulator may soon suggest the jab not be given to under-60s. Many British epidemiologists have suggested a causal link is more likely than not.

This will unquestionably deter some people from getting their jab, especially in the younger age groups. The government's advice is that we should

continue to receive our first and second jabs because the risk of not doing so far outweighs the risk of thrombosis. But I am not entirely sure that's correct. The risk to society is far more dangerous if we don't take our jabs. But the risk to certain individuals may be too close to call, frankly, or even the other way about.

Look at the figures. The health regulator has said 30 blood clots were reported out of the 18.1 million people in the UK who already had the Oxford vaccine, of which seven people have died. That seems, on the face of it, an incontestably tiny proportion — which is why, of course, the government and the doctors wheel it out. But there are problems with this figure. The blood clots tended to present themselves in the younger age groups: we don't yet have the statistics for precisely what age group is the most vulnerable. However, we do know that of those 18.1 million vaccines, the overwhelming majority were given to people over the age of 60. It was only one month ago, fully 12 weeks into the rollout, that people in their 50s were asked to come forward for their first shots.

The further you go down through the age groups, the more blood clots are likely to appear — which is perhaps why everyone is beginning to get worried about them now, because they have only recently started to present in numbers.

The point I am making is that 30 thromboses out of 18.1 million vaccines is rather misleading. The likelihood, indeed certainty, is that it becomes very much higher than that because hitherto it has largely been the elderly who have been vaccinated, and they are apparently far less susceptible to this unfortunately lethal side effect. The overall figure would probably be closer to the 1.5 per 100,000, which has been suggested by various international agencies.

Now, imagine that you are a healthy twentysomething woman and are weighing up the pros and cons of having your jab. The figures so far suggest that women are more susceptible to the blood-clotting side effects than men, particularly younger women. What are your chances, if you are a woman within that age range, of contracting Covid-19 and then dying as a

consequence of it? On the latest figures, your chance of having been diagnosed with the wretched bug has been almost one in ten, while your chance of dying of it has been approximately 2.3 in 100,000. That is a similar level of risk to getting a clot from the vaccine, even on that 1.5 per 100,000 figure which we already know is an underestimate for people in your age range, because it covers all ages.

In other words, the reluctance of people to come for their shots — which will be described as witless plebeian jackasses misunderstanding the science by the experts and government ministers — probably has a very good scientific rationale, even if they don't know it. Nor should we single out poor old AstraZeneca, mind. Who knows what side effects will attend those vaccines which have not been given to huge numbers of people so far? The caveat to my numbers, incidentally, is that while there may be a causal link between the vaccine and blood clots, we don't know that there was a causal link in every one of those who developed the clots. The other caveat is that all these figures still represent only a

tiny amount of risk.

So, a reluctance to take the jab may be well founded in some age groups. Further, that reluctance is likely to be deepened by the fact that if they do take their jab, their own lives will not be enhanced as a result. Still masked up and barred from travel, etc. The government is aware of this, which is why the debate over Covid passports has suddenly gained such traction. The ministers know that an incentive is needed among those age groups for whom Covid-19 poses very little risk indeed — at the very most a risk comparable with having the vaccine.

The only way you can sell the vaccine, then, is through engendering a sense of communitarianism. Or at least, that's the only honest way. You are taking this jab, despite the tiny risk that goes with it, not to benefit yourself, but for the good of the country. If it's sold the right way, with sufficient wartime exhortations of sacrifice and duty, people might sign up. Otherwise, they might just smell a rat.

By arrangement with the Spectator

INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

NON-FICTION

1 **BORN A MUSLIM: SOME TRUTHS ABOUT ISLAM IN INDIA**
Ghazala Wahab
Aleph, ₹999

2 **THE CODE BREAKER**
Walter Isaacson
Simon & Schuster, ₹899

3 **GHALIB: A WILDERNESS AT MY DOORSTEP: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY**
Mehr Afshan Farooqi
Allen Lane, ₹799

4 **ALL ROADS LEAD NORTH — NEPAL'S TURN TO CHINA**
Amish Raj Mulmi
Context Westland, ₹799

5 **REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**
Aanchal Malhotra
HarperCollins, ₹599

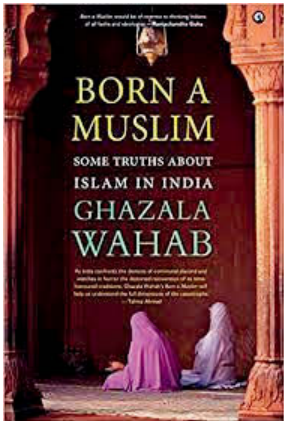
6 **INDUS BASIN UNINTERRUPTED**
Uttam Kumar Sinha
Penguin Vintage, ₹799

7 **THE FRONTIER GANDHI**
Abdul Ghaffar Khan,
Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada
(Translator)
Roli Books, ₹695

8 **THE MYSTERY OF THE PARSEE LAWYER**
Shrabani Basu
Bloomsbury, ₹699

9 **MIDNIGHT'S BORDERS**
Suchitra Vijayan
Westland, ₹699

10 **RAJ & NORAH**
Peter R. Kohli
& Shaina Kohli Russo
HarperCollins, ₹699



FICTION

1 **THE LAST QUEEN**
Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni
HarperCollins, ₹599

2 **KLARA AND THE SUN**
Kazuo Ishiguro
Faber & Faber, ₹699

3 **SHUGGIE BAIN**
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹499

4 **THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING**
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld
Faber & Faber, ₹499

5 **JUNGLENAMA: A STORY OF THE SUNDARBAN**
Amitav Ghosh
HarperCollins, ₹699

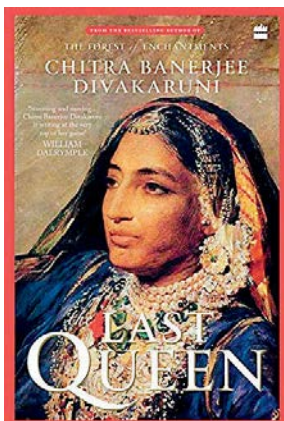
6 **SHUGGIE BAIN**
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹499

7 **TAKEDOWN**
Brad Thor
Emily Bestler Books—
Atria, ₹599

8 **MURDER AT THE MUSHAIRA**
Raza Mir
Aleph, ₹799

9 **THE BEGUM AND THE DASTAN**
Tarana Husain Khan
Tranquebar, ₹499

10 **A TIME FOR MERCY**
John Grisham
Hodder & Stoughton
₹699



Bahrison, New Delhi

Onus on the moderate Muslim to reclaim Islam's heterodox legacy



Sucheta Dasgupta

review

Had it not been for the bitterly-wrought Partition, Sufism, which had its origins in the Arabian peninsula during the Prophet's lifetime but flourished in India in the 13th and 14th centuries, would have emerged as the signature model of inclusive and, as it happens, syncretic Islam. It would have acted as the counterweight to the Saudi-born fundamentalist Wahhabism. And it would have been, largely, an Indian contribution. This is the thesis of Ghazala Wahab's timely book that is simultaneously a ready-reckoner for Islam as well as an appeal to moderate Muslims to reclaim their faith.

Wahab's urgent intervention pertains to the current moral crisis afflicting Muslims who number over 1.9 billion and form about 25 per cent of the globe. Written in crisp prose filtered through a lens of empathy and humour, her quest to examine Islam draws equally on scripture, memoir and reportage. She interviews the who's who of Muslim India from politicians and bureaucrats to seminary heads and theologians. But she also has her ear to the ground, and is careful to catch every dilemma and strand of opinion of the common man and woman, be they a humble tradesman, the "new Muslim" or the successful professional, a dadi at Shaheen Bagh or a young student at the madrassa.

So far, the discourse on the Islamic question has been chiefly contained in the West, conducted as it has been by the likes of Susan Okin ("Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some

Tensions"), Ayaan Hirsi Ali (maker of *Submission*, belonging to the alt-right camp), Irshad Manji (founder of the Muslim refusenik movement), Ameena Wadud and "ex-Muslim" Sarah Haider. Barring Hasan Suroor's important 2019 work, however, this is the first book coming out of India capturing this discourse as it plays out in this country. The last fact makes it all the more accessible to the lay reader.

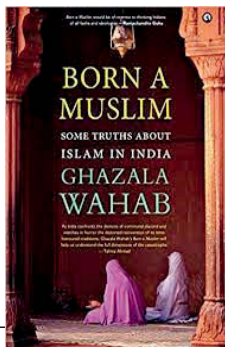
The reader, for instance, may be aware that much of the problems of the moderate Indian Muslim stems from their religious obligation to follow the Muslim orthodoxy, the ulema. But did they know that, as a phenomenon, the overarching influence of the mullahs is fairly recent? It began only after the collapse of the Mughal empire, before which the influence of the Sufis who were championed by the emperor was more widespread.

The predominant view about Sufism is that it exists outside Islam as a cult born out of the admixture of Hinduism with the Prophet's faith. But this is self-serving propaganda spread by two sources, the prejudiced West which failed to reconcile the sophistication of Sufi writings with what, in its view, was a "desert religion", and the Islamic orthodoxy itself. The origin of Sufism much predated its presence in India. Hazrat Rabia of Basra died in AD 801.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (AD 1058-1111) was the first scholar to lend theological heft to Sufi mysticism, marrying it with Sharia. While Golden Age (Abbasid) philosophers like Averroes and Avicenna were

among the first Muslim rationalists, it was Ghazali who arguably laid the foundation of Islamic heterodoxy. He said that as long as one believed in Allah and Muhammad, Islam could be practised in different ways. Nevertheless, this ruled out the philosophy of atheism. Neither of the Abrahamic religions is known to accommodate it.

Until a generation ago, there were two kinds of Muslims in India, the Communists and the conformists, Wahab says. The conformists were the regular moderate Muslims. If sceptic, they were careful to hide their worldview from the ulema. For them, the personal was not political. The Communists, on the other hand, identified as agnostic. They were, at best, cultural Muslims. While they had been drawn to this ideology because it resonated with the Islamic ideals of equality and justice, since they did not identify as true-blue Musalmans, within their community, their voices went unheard. Nor did they themselves find it important to address the dogma and bigotry from within by say, reforming the clergy. Thus Wahab illustrates the failure of Left politics to address the fundamental reality of identity as well as



BORN A MUSLIM: SOME TRUTHS ABOUT ISLAM IN INDIA
By **GHAZALA WAHAB**
Aleph, ₹999

the Islamic problem.

Now, if Wahab is critical of Hindutva and Saudi preponderance on the clergy, she is equally irked by the Congress governments' minority politics.

Citing Wajahat Habibullah's 2016 article, she mentions M.J. Akbar's role in the passage of the Rajiv Gandhi government's infamous 1986 Muslim women's bill. It was Akbar who had prevailed on Rajiv Gandhi to contest the Shah Bano judgment, saying that if he did not, it would appear that the Prime Minister did not regard the Muslim community as his own. Akbar was subsequently seen expanding this point in a Doordarshan debate against Arif Mohammad Khan.

The Hadith is contextual, writes the author, as is the Quran. The custodians of the faith need to move with the times in order to prevent the religion from atrophying. But what if one differs from the holy book in one's analysis of context? Is it not bowing to stereotype to regard the status of women as subhuman in tribal Arabia before the arrival of the Prophet? If so, what of the example of Khadija, the Prophet's first wife? Should have the Prophet's wives and honest, thereby more capable, women, rather than the already less powerful slave women, been robbed of their agency to operate in the cause of good via physical encumbrance only so as to distinguish one group from the other? Is covering up also either a moral or an ultimately effective way to combat sexist aggression? There are no easy answers. These are some areas that the book does not go into.

Elsewhere, the author does write that the opportunity for freethinking is limited when exercised from within the Islamic faith. Liberal Islam may indeed be an oxymoron, by that token. All the same, it is interesting to note how key definitions from other faiths sit perfectly inside it. The author's own liberal rational-

ism is the Buddhist way of the instinct- and deed-driven mahayana, while the orthodoxy's essentialism would be the intellect-driven hinayana way. Quite startlingly, the Hindu dichotomy of *dvaita-advaita* (dual and singular manifestations of God) also exists within Islam because the Naqshbandiyah order of Sufism rejects the Chishti and other silsila on the ground that the identification of the self with Allah is subjective and does not produce any objective manifestation, hence leading to idolatry.

The author's caveat is that the moderate Muslim even today has no voice or traction within the larger Muslim society. They are caught between the Hindu right wing that regards them as exceptional and thus invisibilises them and the Muslim right wing which disparages them for their apologetism. She exhorts these people to give up their conformism and take responsibility for their beliefs. Simultaneously, she notes a rise of Muslim exceptionalism and reverse identity politics among community members in reaction to Hindutva, as evidenced in the *La illah ila Allah* sloganeering during the 2019 CAA protests.

"Young working professionals are overnight discovering headscarves. The more one points to the headscarf as a symbol of Islamic patriarchy or women's oppression, the more professional women turn up in one to register their protest." (p. 367)

Such an assertion of identity leads to the closedness of the mind in a way that runs contrary to freedom and modernism, she surmises.

Clearly, a gap exists between expressions of Muslim identity and its spirit of fearless large-heartedness. It is this gap that the book strives to fill. And in so doing it perhaps becomes the vehicle through which the writer bears her own shahadah to her Muslim heritage.

Urgent, cogent, matter-of-fact ready-reckoner on the C-virus



Ranjana Banerji

review

If you had to read just one book to explain the coronavirus pandemic that stopped the world in 2020, Anirban Mahapatra's Covid-19 should be it.

Written by a scientist for the lay reader, Covid-19 charts a fascinating course, from the life of a virus to its growth and spread, and animal and human responses to viruses. Mahapatra is a microbiologist who writes on science. I came across him on Twitter (@bhalomanush) as someone who explains fascinating inside stories of science without talking down or pontificating. That same easy tone makes this book easy to read even as it is filled with fact and explanation.

Covid-19 however does not just tackle the coronavirus pandemic from only the scientific perspective. Rather, it looks at historic, social and psychological angles as well. Earlier pandemics, how they affected humanity and the natural world, the way we responded and continue to respond to this "new normal" all come under consideration.

But it is the science that is the most gripping. What a virus actually is, how it expands its own lifecycle and propagation, how it jumps from life form to life form: in clear language and perspective we learn about the possible "RNA World" of almost billion years ago, the way evolution left the virus behind and yet how it continues to have such a devastating effect. We are fascinated with dinosaurs because of their size and ferocity. But down here at the micro level, one coronavirus can be far more dangerous than a few *Tyrannosaurus rexes*!

One of the biggest achievements of this book is the lucid, non-judgmental manner in which Mahapatra debunks all the various swirls of misinformation around Covid-19 and its spread. For instance, terms like "herd immunity" which are t h r o w about with that peculiar conviction that is born from incomplete understanding. He uses science and reason rather than anger, sarcasm and frustration to zap all the What's App wisdom people are still fed with. How viruses spread, how they adapt themselves, how the human body fights them, why science finds it easy to find vaccines for some viruses and not others, most notably HIV-AIDs. We also learn how doctors and scientists grappled with existing medicines and the hope that some of them would work against Covid-19, and which worked, and which didn't and why.

The issue of vaccines is also tackled, with explanations on how and why the vaccine process was and could be fast-tracked for this pandemic. From the Black Plague to Spanish Flu to Covid-19, we have made enormous progress. What path did all the vaccines on offer take to completion and why are they so different from each other? Why should we trust them? All this is painstakingly and clearly explained.

Interwoven into this is the politics of the virus, how different governments and countries responded and how some policies worked better than others. We learn how human behaviour past and present, how climate change and the environment all make life easier for rampaging viruses. The fact that the mental health impact of the virus has yet to be assessed and understood.

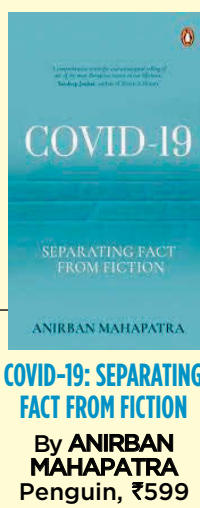
Published in 2021, barring the impact of large-scale vaccination, this is a very up-to-date book. It ends however with the large implications of this pandemic. Scientists have long warned us that one was overdue, but we did not take those warnings seriously enough. This bizarre year should at least teach us that we need to be ready. Mahapatra says over and again that this virus is going nowhere. Humanity has to be prepared, socially, culturally, politically and medically to deal with it.

Already today we see cases rising again all over the world. Masks and distancing will still be needed. The prospect of lockdowns in some parts of the world loom again. In his words, "We are a vulnerable species and for all our control of the planet, we are subject to its vagaries. Climate change, the emergence and resurgence of infectious diseases, deforestation and the rapid loss of species, overconsumption and socioeconomic inequities can no longer be pushed under the carpet".

This is a clearly etched warning of what happens when we are nonchalant, uncaring or just plain stupid.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough for anyone who is interested in viruses, the pandemic and our future.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjana.



WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT RAPE

New Delhi: What happens after rape? As the world moves on after expressing outrage, what happens to the survivors who are left to fend for themselves in a hostile society and a nonchalant judicial system?

In *After I Was Raped*, we meet five individuals — a four-year-old girl, two dalit women, an eight-month-old infant and a young professional. Through extensive interviews with them and their families and communities at large, Urmi Bhattacheryya reveals the stories of these survivors of sexual violence, as they recount how their lives and relationships have changed in the aftermath of assault. Shamed, ostracised and weighed down

AFTER I WAS RAPED

By **URMI BHATTACHERYYA**
Pan Macmillan
India, ₹399

by guilt and depression, they continue to brave the most challenging realities.

This book picks up where most news reports about survivors leave off — enters bedrooms and courtrooms, and picks up the threads of their lives today, years after their rape, and in the midst of their continuing wait for justice. Thus its sensitive portrayal of the lives of these little-known survivors raises difficult but important questions. Urmi Bhattacheryya is an independent journalist based in New Delhi. She worked as Gender Editor at *The Quint* and won the UNFPA Laadli Award for Gender Sensitivity for her reporting on child sexual abuse in 2020.

After I Was Raped (Pan Macmillan India, ₹399) is releasing on April 22, 2021.



FAST FACT: Philosopher **Julia Galef** is one of the most exciting new voices not just in American rationalism but in American writing. Her book, *The Scout Mindset* (2021), explores two different modes of thinking, the 'soldier' and the 'scout' mindset. Drawing on stories from Warren Buffett's investing strategies to reddit threads and modern partisan politics, Galef explores why our brains try to deceive us and reveals how we can overcome biases.



A decent sort of madness



Sridhar Balan

review

The publishing business involves putting a book out there after a careful scrutiny of its contents and being convinced of a readership. Publishers back their books with a firm conviction and some books do cause them a great deal of happiness to publish and can raise a chuckle or two while the text is being read. *The White Umbrella* is one such book. It has the additional caveat of being published for a restricted market, South Asia only, which would also mean a restricted print run. The book may not make it to an all-time bestseller list but we are glad the publisher decided to include it in its list.

While the author Brian Sewell has been a renowned art critic for *The Guardian*, he is equally famous for being a confirmed animal lover.

The White Umbrella tells us about the extraordinary adventures of an eccentric Englishman and his donkey who decide to make an overland journey from Peshawar to London. The circumstances through which this came about are also extraordinary. Mr B a wiry man in his fifties was in Peshawar to make a documentary film on the ancient history of northern Pakistan along with a television crew from London. The crew consisting of a director and cameraman along with a young odd job person called Dominic were finding the filming a very tiresome process. Mr B a histo-

ry buff was actually interested in finding some traces of Alexander the Great's historic march from Macedonia to Pakistan over two thousand years ago while the crew was more interested in history and more in the sights and sounds of contemporary Peshawar. Within two days of arrival, the crew was not on talking terms with its presenter Mr B an epithet they applied to him to show their frosty relationship, and in the ensuing two weeks, the relationship had reached breaking point. Something had to "give" and it did.

One early evening when the dense rush hour traffic was moving at a snail's pace on a busy Peshawar road, Mr B suddenly opened the door and leaped down on to the road and sprinted away dodging cars, lorries, buses and motorcycles. This was extreme behaviour even for an eccentric Englishman, and the astonished crew stopped their white Land Rover and sprinted after him. It was the young and more agile Dominic who first caught up with him and by the time the slightly corpulent director and cameraman catch up with them, they find Mr B with his arm around a very young donkey dabbling with his handkerchief at four deep wounds on her back caused by a wicker saddle to carry heavy loads. Mr B was furious and declared that the donkey was far too young, less than six months old and far too young to carry loads. The crew tried its

best to wean Mr B away from the donkey and get into the car. They had to drive to Islamabad and catch a flight to London the next day. A fierce argument ensued with Mr B determined not to leave the donkey and the crew particularly the director losing his temper. The director's threat to leave Mr B and make his find his own way home, is answered by 'please do. I will walk home with the donkey'. Finding Mr B adamant, the crew leaves him with Dominic returning to the car to fetch Mr B's knapsack and his umbrella. Now, no picture of an Englishman is complete without his 'broily' and this was no ordinary umbrella. It was of strong white canvas on a frame of metal ribs with a stock that could double as a heavy walking stick. It had been specially designed for him by James Smith and Sons (and grandsons, great-grandsons and more and more, from their first

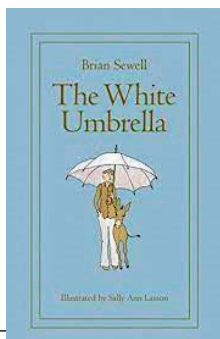
umbrella in 1830). Dominic left Mr B and the donkey reluctantly with a hug but not before telling Mr B that he would inform the Foreign Office "and Mrs B of course".

Christening the donkey "Pavlova" after the famous ballerina on account of its long legs, Mr B and his ward do not quite walk all the way home. They travel by a variety of transport, trucks, buses and train through Quetta, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey and the Balkans. Among the extraordinary people they meet, two truly stand out. One is Laetitia, the British Ambassador's wife in Istanbul who befriends Mr B, and personally escorts him across the Greek border and puts him on a train to Thessaloniki. We are not quite told Laetitia's country of origin but she was a true representative of her majesty's service.

The other is Hector, in a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, who stops to give him a lift and states the donkey was the main reason for him to do so. Hector is a bibliophile and collector of manuscripts and old books, and drives him across Belgrade and into France but not before spending a night in a medieval monastery. At Calais, they smuggle Pavlova across the Channel by a generous dose of sleeping pills and by unscrewing the front seat of the car and making her sleep in its well.

They finally reach Mr B's home in Wimbledon, greeted rapturously by Mr B's dogs and perhaps less ardently by Mrs B who had long realised that animals always came first in their home.

The writer is a senior publishing industry professional who has worked with OUP and has been a senior consultant with Ratna Sagar Books



THE WHITE UMBRELLA — THE ENGLISHMAN AND THE DONKEY OF PESHAWAR

By **BRIAN SEWELL**
Simon & Schuster,
Speaking Tiger
(South Asian rights), ₹299

