

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2021



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Serbian Novak Djokovic faces Russian challenger Medvedev in Oz Open final

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Actor Ayushmann Khurana remembers days when he was told to be wary of taboo topics



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Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra being presented a model of plough during a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' in support of the ongoing farmers' agitation at Baghra in Muzaffarnagar on Saturday. — PTI

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Capital wakes up to dense fog, temp plummets to 10.4°C

New Delhi: Delhi woke up to "dense to very dense fog" on Saturday with the minimum temperature settling at 10.4 degrees Celsius, the Meteorological department here said. The visibility at Palam was reported at 0 metres and Safdarjung had the visibility of 100 metres. The humidity was recorded at 100 per cent at 8.30 am.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a "very dense" fog is when the visibility is between 0 and 50 metres.

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Drug arrest: Pamela blames BJP leader

Kolkata: BJP's youth-wing leader Pamela Goswami, arrested in a drugs case, on Saturday demanded the arrest of party colleague Rakesh Singh, accusing him of conspiracy, and sought a CID probe into the matter. She was held with around 90 gram of cocaine.

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'Dumpy' booked on complaint by Shazia

New Delhi: A case has been registered against former BSP MP Akbar Ahmad "Dumpy" on a complaint by Delhi BJP vice-president Shazia Ilmi accusing him of misbehaving with her at a private party, police said on Saturday. Ahmad could not be reached for his comments on the issue.

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Wake up, sir. You are sacked for disturbing CM's sleep!

WEATHER
Max: 28°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 48%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Navami till 3.38 pm
Star: Rohini till 8.41 am
Varjyam: 2.48 pm To 4.32 pm

Durmuhurtam: 4.44 pm to 5.30 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm To 6 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.15 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.53 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.22 PM
MOONSET TODAY 1.59 AM

Ulfa-I threatens to execute 2 abducted oil firm employees

'Will take ultimate step next week'

MANOJ ANAND
with agency inputs
GUWAHATI, FEB. 20

The outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom — Independent (Ulfa-I) has threatened to take the "ultimate step" next week on the two employees of the Quippo oil and gas drilling company who are being held captive by the outfit, prompting senior Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to appeal for their release.

The Paresh Barua-led outfit has demanded a ransom of ₹20 crore for the duo's release and had earlier set February 16 as the deadline.

The two, drilling superintendent Pranab Kumar Gogoi and radio operator Ram Kumar, of the Quippo Oil and Gas Infrastructure, were kidnapped by Ulfa-I rebels on December 21 last year from Kunchaika hydro-carbon drilling site in Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh. While Mr Gogoi is a native of Assam, Mr Kumar hails from Bihar.

The Ulfa-I in a statement to a local newspaper said, "As the Quippo representatives, after our negotiations between February 16 to 19, failed to provide any fruitful solution to our demands, we have decided to stick to our initial decision and will, accordingly, take the final actions against the two employees."

The outfit said this in a



P.K. Gogoi and P. Kumar

letter addressing the people of Assam, the governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and the families of the kidnapped duo.

"If our instructions are ignored, then in the case of any unfortunate situation, the employees, Quippo authorities, OIL, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh governments will be responsible for the consequences," the outfit said in the email written in Assamese.

The Ulfa-I also warned other Quippo employees to stay away from work and, instead, pressure OIL to rehabilitate them.

Mr Sarma urged Ulfa-I's commander-in-chief Paresh Barua "with folded hands" to release the two men unharmed. Mr Sarma said that in the case of any unfortunate incident, the world will again "look upon the Assamese as (members of) Taliban. We do not want any further bloodshed on the soil of India or Assam".

Gurugram-based Quippo was hired by Oil India (OIL) for drilling operations. Though the exact

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Daily Covid cases rise in 5 states

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency input
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

As the country sees a surge in new Covid-19 cases registering nearly 14,000 cases in 24 hours on Saturday, the Centre has said that five states — in Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh — have seen a rise in daily cases.

According to Union health ministry data updated on Saturday, daily Covid-19 cases in the country climbed to about 13,993, highest in 22 days, taking India's tally to 1,09,77,387, while the recoveries surged to 1,06,78,048. The death toll increased to 101 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 6,112. It is followed by Kerala with 4,505 while Tamil Nadu reported 448 new cases. Only two states — Maharashtra and Kerala account for 75.87% of total active cases. In last 7 days, Chhattisgarh has also seen a rise in daily active new cases.

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TMC slogan: 'Bengal wants own daughter'

Kolkata, Feb. 20: The Trinamul Congress on Saturday launched its slogan for the upcoming Assembly elections — Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chaye, adding to the shrill insider vs outsider debate while portraying Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the daughter of Bengal.

The slogan, which translates to Bengal wants its own daughter, with Banerjees photo was put up on hoardings across Kolkata as the states ruling party officially launched it from its headquarters off EM Bypass.



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates after defeating US' Jennifer Brady in the women's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne. — AP



TMC poster with Mamata pic and slogan

"The people of the state want their own daughter who has been by their side for the last several years as their chief minister. We dont want outsiders to call the shots in Bengal," TMC



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates after defeating US' Jennifer Brady in the women's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne. — AP

UN asks UAE for 'proof of life' of princess

Berlin, Feb. 20: The UN human rights office has asked the United Arab Emirates for evidence that an Emirati princess held against her will for almost three years is still alive. The Geneva-based Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said the case of Sheikhha Latifa bint Mohammed Al Maktoum has been raised with the UAE's mission to the UN.

Earlier this week the BBC released excerpts from video diaries Sheikhha Latifa said were recorded in a locked bath-



Sheikhha Latifa

2018 after she tried to flee Dubai in a yacht.

We raised our concerns about the situation in light of the disturbing video evidence that emerged this week."

Elizabeth Throssell, a spokeswoman

for the UN rights office told reporters. We requested more information and clarification about Sheikhha Latifa's current situation."

"We did ask for proof of life," she added.

Friends of the princess have said they are concerned for her safety because she hasn't been heard from since she stopped responding to text messages six months ago. The 35-year-old princess is the daughter of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the hereditary

ruler of Dubai who also serves as Prime Minister and vice-president of the UAE.

Ms Throssell stressed that it was standard practice for the UN human rights office to inquire about individual cases within its mandate. "That includes cases for whatever reason that have attracted wider focus."

In a statement her family has said that the princess is being cared for at home, supported by her family and medical professionals.

— AP

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 20

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik stirred up a hornet's nest on Saturday when, in his address at the

Prime Minister-chaired 6th meeting of the governing council of NitiAayog, he charged that elected governments are meant to



Naveen Patnaik

work for people, beyond the party line, but "every crime is being politicised and every action of the government is being seen from a political angle."

The 75-year-old CM, who was elected for the fifth consecutive term in 2019, added that it's high time elected governments stop behaving like political parties.

"Elections are an essential feature of democracy. However, the hallmark of a mature democracy is

that once elected, the governments are meant to work for people, beyond party lines. It's high time that we as a country have serious introspection on whether we are able to do the same. Every crime is being politicised, every action of an elected government is being seen from a political angle. This kind of atmosphere is one of the biggest threats to the pace of development and peace in the country. It's

■ Turn to Page 4



TMC poster with Mamata pic and slogan

"The people of the state want their own daughter who has been by their side for the last several years as their chief minister. We dont want outsiders to call the shots in Bengal," TMC



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates after defeating US' Jennifer Brady in the women's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne. — AP

Physical hearings in Delhi HC March 15

New Delhi: The Delhi high court will commence physical hearing of the matters on the daily basis from March 15, one year after the hearing went virtual in view of the coronavirus pandemic prevalent in the country.

The court may, in exceptional cases, permit any of the parties and or their Counsel to join the proceedings through video conferencing, subject to availability of requisite infrastructure.

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ing which was held amid the ongoing farmers' protest, did not deliberate on the controversial farm laws, sources informed this newspaper. Agriculture minister Narendra Tomar had been asked by the Prime Minister to attend the meeting, as agriculture was among the main subjects of the meeting.

"Even during Covid-19, India saw a rise in

High time country gets out of poll mode: Patnaik to Centre

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 20

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Naveen Patnaik

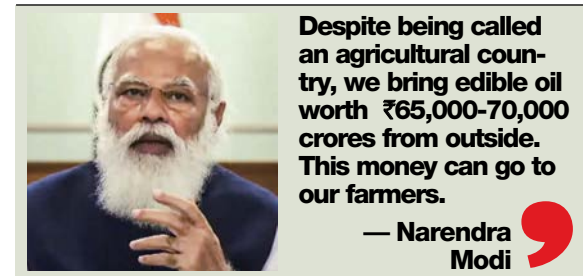
work for people, beyond the party line, but "every crime is being politicised and every action of the government is being seen from a political angle."

The 75-year-old CM, who was elected for the fifth consecutive term in 2019, added that it's high time elected governments stop behaving like political parties.

"Elections are an essential feature of democracy. However, the hallmark of a mature democracy is

exports in the agriculture sector. We have a lot of untapped potential in this sector. Wastage of our products should be as less as possible and we must thus concentrate on storage and processing," he said.

Mr Modi also advised extending help to the private sector as a key move to seek foreign investment and emphasised on strengthening MSMEs



Despite being called an agricultural country, we bring edible oil worth ₹65,000-70,000 crores from outside. This money can go to our farmers.

— Narendra Modi

and start-ups.

With the prime focus on developing agricultural best practices, strengthening local manufacturing in states and improving health care facilities, the meeting witnessed suggestions by several chief ministers on improving logistical support and reducing input costs to enable increased manufacturing in states.

The meeting which was held virtually was not attended by West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh (who was indisposed), Telangana chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani (who has tested positive to Corona virus).

Farmer, son kill selves over debt, new farm laws

Hoshiarpur: A debt-ridden farmer and his son allegedly died by suicide in Punjab's Hoshiarpur village, saying in a note that they were upset over the Centre's new farm laws and the state government's failure to waive their loans. The farmer, Jagtar Singh (70), and his son Kirpal Singh (42) were found dead at their residence in Muhadipur village on Saturday morning, the police said.

— PTI

■ More on Page 3

Delhi court reserves orders on activist Disha's bail petition

Conspiracy is in meeting of minds: Police

New Delhi, Feb. 20: A Delhi court on Saturday reserved orders on the bail application filed by climate activist Disha Ravi, who was arrested by Delhi Police over the "farmers protest toolkit" shared by global environmental activist Greta Thunberg.

During the hearing, additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana of Patiala House courts asked Delhi Police, "What exactly is the evidence collected by you against this lady connecting her to the violence perpetuated on Jan. 26? Is there any evidence, or are we required to merely work on surmises, conjectures?"

The additional solicitor general, S.V. Raju, appearing for the Delhi Police, submitted that Ms Ravi, 21, was in contact with pro-Khalistani organisations "Sikhs For Justice" and "Poetic Justice Foundation", and created the 'toolkit' to incite hatred against India



Disha Ravi

under the garb of farmers' protest. The judge asked if an imputation can be made against a person merely on the basis of her association with another person or organisation.

"The conspiracy is not that I knew a particular person and told them to commit violence, but that I created a document which I knew and intended to incite violence. The conspiracy is in the meeting of the minds," the ASG said. "Should I presume there is no direct link now?", the judge asked in return. The ASG replied that police are still investigating.

— Agencies

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PM Morrison: Facebook back at table, has 'friended' Australia again

Canberra, Feb. 20: Facebook Inc is back at the negotiating table, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Saturday after the tech giant this week blocked news on its site in the country.

Facebook's abrupt decision to stop Australians from sharing news on the site and strip the pages of domestic and foreign news outlets also erased several state government and



Scott Morrison

told a news conference in Sydney. "What I'm pleased about is that Facebook is back at the table again."

Facebook has publicly

indicated no change in its opposition to a proposed law requiring social media platforms to pay for links to news content. Morrison was not asked about that.

Australia's Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said on Friday he had spoken with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and further talks were expected over the weekend. It was not clear whether those talks have happened. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

2 brothers held for killing man

New Delhi: Two brothers were arrested for allegedly killing a person who used to assault one of them in North Delhi's Sadar Bazar area, the police said on Saturday. The accused have been identified as Ram (34) and Kamal (40), residents of Basti Julahan in

Sadar Bazar, it said. According to the police, complainant Suresh Kumar reported that on Friday, at around 9.30 pm, he was in his house when he heard noise from the street. He reached Sarla Chowk in Basti Julahan where he saw Ram quarrelling with his brother-in-law Jai Kishan alias Jacky (34), the police said. During the quarrel, Ram went to his house and immediately returned with a knife along with his elder brother Kamal.

Kamal caught Jacky and Ram stabbed him in the stomach. Meanwhile, one local resident, Saurav, tried to save Jacky but Ram also assaulted him with the knife, a senior police officer said.

2 arrested at IGI for smuggling gold

New Delhi: Two men were arrested by customs officials at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport here on Saturday for trying to smuggle into the country gold valuing about ₹1.77 crore, according to a statement. The accused, both Delhi residents, were intercepted after their arrival from Dubai on Saturday. During examination of one of them and his baggage, gold metal pieces weighing 4.1 kg and valued at ₹1.77 crore were found, Shaikat Ali Nurvi, the Joint Commissioner of Customs at the IGI Airport, said in a statement. Under voluntary statement, the passenger disclosed he had also smuggled gold weighing 2.5 kg valued at ₹1.11 crore during his earlier visits, the statement said. Hence, total offence value by him comes to ₹2.89 crore, it added. Further, during examination of the baggage of the second passenger, gold metal pieces weighing 3.6 kg valued at ₹1.58 crore were recovered, it said.

Air 'very poor' in Ghaziabad, Gr Noida

Noida: The average air quality in Ghaziabad and Greater Noida was recorded in "very poor" category for a sixth day in a row, while it was "poor" in Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon, according to data issued by a government agency on Saturday. Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Saturday was 336 in Ghaziabad, 324 in Greater Noida, 269 in Noida, 248 in Faridabad and 258 in Gurgaon, according to the CPCB's Sameer app. — PTI

'THREE-WHEELERS HIGHEST SELLING SEGMENT OF EVS'

New Delhi: Three-wheelers have emerged as the highest selling segment of electric vehicles in Delhi with the registration of over 5,500 units since August last year, the transport department said Saturday. The Delhi government's ongoing "Switch Delhi" campaign to promote electric vehicles focused on three-wheelers with various stakeholders providing positive feedback on it. The Delhi government will soon start facilitating the registration of e-autos, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said, according to a statement by the department. Since the launch of the Delhi EV policy in August 2020, three-wheelers have emerged as the highest selling EV segment in Delhi, he said, adding 5,534 new electric three-wheelers have been registered, with more users coming forward to make the switch. "We have been receiving a great response and it is heartening to see the efforts of the government in promoting zero-emission vehicles in the national capital," the statement quoted Ashwani Sehgal, the President of Electric Vehicle Manufacturers Society, as saying. — PTI

Disha's bail plea: Court to pronounce order on Feb. 23

If highlighting farmers' protest is sedition, it is better to be in jail: Activist

New Delhi, Feb. 20: There is no evidence to show that the toolkit on farmers' protest is responsible for the violence on January 26, activist Disha Ravi's counsel told a Delhi court which reserved for Tuesday its order on her bail plea.

"If highlighting farmers' protest globally is sedition, I'm better in jail," Ms Ravi said through her counsel on Saturday.

Ms Ravi's counsel was submitting arguments after the Delhi Police opposed her bail plea, alleging she was preparing the toolkit with those advocating Khalistan and was part of a global conspiracy to defame India and create unrest in the country in the garb of farmers' protest.

"This was not just a toolkit. The real plan was to defame India and create unrest here," the police said before additional sessions Judge Dharmender Rana.

It alleged that Ms Ravi deleted WhatsApp chats, emails and other evidence and was aware of legal actions she could face.

Why did Disha Ravi cover her track and delete evidence if she did not



Disha Ravi

▶ It alleged that Ravi deleted WhatsApp chats, emails and other evidence and was aware of legal actions she could face. Court on Friday heard Ravi's plea to restrain police from leaking to the media any probe material

commit wrong, the police said, alleging that his shows her guilty mind and sinister design.

Ms Ravi "was part of the Indian chapter of the global conspiracy to defame India and create unrest in the garb of farmers' protest," it alleged, adding she was in touch and preparing and sharing toolkit with those advocating Khalistan.

"It shows there was a sinister design behind this toolkit," the police told the court.

However, Ms Ravi's lawyer rejected the allegations.

"There is no evidence to link me with Sikhs For Justice, a banned organisation. And even if I (Ravi) meet someone, there is no symbol on him that he is a secessionist,"

the defence counsel said. "The Delhi police gave permission for the farmers' march, which they're claiming that I (Ravi) asked people to join, so how did I become seditious," the lawyer said in court.

There's nobody arrested in connection with violence at Red Fort who says he was inspired for same because of the toolkit, Ms Ravi's counsel claimed, adding there is no evidence to show that the toolkit is responsible for violence during farmers' march.

The counsel also questioned the contents of the FIR and asserted that people can have a different point of view on a subject.

"There is an allegation in FIR that Yoga and Chai

are being targeted. Is it an offence? We are now reducing the bar that somebody can't have a point of view different," Ms Ravi's lawyer said.

"The talk about alleged genocide in Kashmir has been going on for years. How talking about it suddenly becomes sedition," the lawyer said.

A trial court had on Friday sent Ms Ravi to judicial custody for three days after her five-day police custody expired.

The Delhi high court on Friday heard Ms Ravi's plea to restrain police from leaking to the media any probe material concerning the FIR lodged against her.

The high court, in its order, asked media houses to ensure that no leaked investigation material is broadcast as it could affect the probe and directed Delhi Police to abide by its stand on affidavit that it has not leaked nor intends to leak any probe details to the press.

Ms Ravi was arrested by a Cyber Cell team of the Delhi Police from Bengaluru on Saturday and brought to Delhi. She was booked on sedition and other charges. — PTI

FIR against NGOs over financial irregularities

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

The Economic Offences Wing of the Delhi Police has registered a case against two NGOs in connection with financial irregularities, an official said on Saturday.

The case was registered on Thursday, the official said. Earlier this month, the Delhi Police had filed a case against the two NGOs in south Delhi under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act over alleged violations. According to police, the case under sections 75 and 83(2) of the Juvenile Justice Act along with Indian Penal Code Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) had been registered at Mehrauli police station on a complaint of the registrar of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) against alleged violations in Umeed Aman Ghar and Khushi Rainbow Home in south Delhi, both established by the Centre for Equity Studies (CES).

The CSE is being run by trustee member Harsh Mander, a retired IAS officer. However, no immediate reaction was available from Mander.

The case was registered after an inspection by teams of NCPCR in October 2020 in these homes, police said, adding that a probe into the matter underway. — PTI



Activists of Indian Youth Congress clash with police personnel during a protest against the hike in fuel and LPG prices in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

Former BSP MP Akbar Ahmad booked on complaint by Shazia

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

A case has been registered against former BSP MP Akbar Ahmad 'Dumpy' on a complaint by Delhi BJP vice-president Shazia Ilmi accusing him of misbehaving with her at a private party, the police said on Saturday.

The police said the case was registered under Sections 506 (threatening) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).



Shazia Ilmi

Mr Ahmad could not be reached for comment and did not respond to messages on the matter.

In her complaint, Ms Ilmi alleged that Mr Ahmad allegedly started "misbehaving with her and passed lewd

remarks" at a dinner party in Southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj area on February 5, according to the police.

DCP (Southwest) Ingat Pratap Singh said they received a complaint from Ms Ilmi and based on it the case was registered against Mr Ahmad on February 7.

The DCP said that an investigation is underway in the case.

Ms Ilmi, on Saturday, alleged that Mr Ahmad was "very much abusive and humiliating" towards her at the gathering.

17-year-old girl found murdered at home

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

A 17-year-old girl was found murdered when she was alone at her home in Rohini's Begumpur area, the police said on Saturday.

The police suspect that the reason behind the murder was her refusal to marry the accused.

"The victim has been identified as Neetu, a resident of Begum Vihar. She was allegedly killed by Laik Khan," DCP (Rohini) P.K. Mishra said. The incident took place on Friday, it said.

According to the police, the deceased earlier used to live with her family in Bawana area. However, they later shifted to Begumpur area.

Laik (25), who was their neighbour earlier, used to visit them often. He came to visit them on Friday also, the police said.

The parents of the victim work at a car floor-mat making factory. They were not present there at the time of the incident.

The police said that the victim's brother and cousin had gone out to buy some grocery items. When they returned, they saw Laik locking the house and rushing out of the area. They thought that Neetu was with him.

They waited there and when Neetu's mother came home, she called her on her mobile phone which was ringing inside the locked house. They broke open the gate and found her lying inside the house in a pool of blood with a head injury, a senior police officer said.

— PTI

Delhi reports 152 corona cases, death toll at 10,898

New Delhi, Feb. 20: Delhi recorded 152 fresh Covid cases and one new fatality on Saturday, as the positivity rate dipped marginally to stand at 0.24 per cent, authorities said.

With the fresh death, the city's coronavirus toll has grown to 10,898. According to the latest health bulletin issued by the city government Saturday, Delhi recorded 152 fresh Covid cases, while the positivity rate stood at 0.24 per cent, slightly lower than Friday's 0.26 per cent.

The overall infection tally in the city rose to 6,37,755 with the fresh additions, the bulletin said.

The new 152 cases came out of the 62,063 tests conducted the previous day, according to the health bulletin. The active cases tally on Saturday dropped to 1,025 from 1,053 the previous day, according to

▶ **THE NEW 152 cases** came out of the 62,063 tests conducted the previous day, according to the health bulletin. The active cases tally on Saturday dropped to 1,025 from 1,053 the previous day

the bulletin. The total number of tests conducted the previous day included 40,543 RT-PCR tests and 21,520 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation as on Saturday was 430, it said.

On Friday, 158 cases and one death were registered.

No death due to coronavirus was recorded in Delhi on Wednesday, the third time single-day fatality count stood nil in February.

Dense fog engulfs parts of Delhi, minimum temperature at 10.4°C

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

The maximum temperature in Delhi was recorded at 27.3 degrees Celsius on Saturday, while the minimum temperature settled at 10.4 degrees Celsius, the Meteorological department here said.

The city woke up to "dense to very dense fog", which is expected to fall between "moderate to dense" fog category on Sunday.

The visibility at Palam was reported at 0 metres and Safdarjung had the visibility of 100 metres. The humidity was recorded at 100 per cent at 8.30 am. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a "very dense" fog is when the visibility is between 0



People exercise in a park amid dense fog in New Delhi one Saturday.

— PTI

and 50 metres. In case of a "dense" fog, the visibility is between 51 and 200 metres, "moderate" 201 and 500 metres, and "shallow" 501 and 1,000 metres. The maximum and mini-

mum temperature on Sunday are expected to hover around 27 and 11 degrees Celsius, respectively.

On Friday, the maximum temperature settled at 27.8

SHORT TAKES

SECURITY BEEFED UP AT BIG B'S HOUSE AFTER CONG THREAT

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, FEB. 20

The security was tightened at senior Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan's Mumbai residence on Saturday in the wake of Maharashtra Congress chief threatening to stop his film shoots.

Meanwhile, Mr Patole on Saturday changed his stand and said that his party will not stop film shootings, but show black flags to Mr Bachchan and Akshay Kumar wherever they are spotted.

Mr Patole said, "I did not comment on Amitabh Bachchan and Akshay Kumar. But I commented on their deeds. There are not real heroes." He also said if they were real heroes, they would have been talking about the people's hardships. "If they want to continue being 'kagaz ke sher', then the Congress doesn't have any problem," he said.

Two days ago, Mr Patole said if actors Amitabh Bachchan and Akshay Kumar do not take a stand on the issue of fuel price hike, then screening of their films and shootings would not be allowed in the state. Confirming the development of security deployment, a senior IPS officer of the Mumbai police, requesting anonymity, said, "The police personnel have been deployed at Amitabh Bachchan's residence as precautionary measures."

DELHI COPS ARREST ODISHA YOUTH FOR ONLINE FRAUD

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 20

A police team from Delhi on Saturday arrested a 35-year-old man from Basta in Odisha's Balasore district on the charges of online fraud and duping an export and import company of the national capital. The accused, identified as Sanmay Panda, was held by Delhi's Amar Colony police with assistance of their Basta counterparts. Senior police officials said three mobile phones, three laptops, huge quantities of electronics items like printers, scanners, cartridges, hard disks, stolen automobile items and over 100 mobile SIM and Aadhar cards had been seized from Panda's possession. As per reports, Panda was operating one Aadhaar card correction and kiosk banking sub-centre in the name of Digital Seva at Basta. He allegedly cheated several customers by doing fraudulent transactions from their bank accounts as he used to store biometric data of the customers who came to his centre. It is alleged that Panda had fraudulently withdrawn ₹54,000 from the bank account of an elderly woman by finger print withdrawal and subsequently a case against him was registered by Basta police.

19-YEAR-OLD GIRL GANGRAPED BY 2 FRIENDS IN MP DIST

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, FEB. 20

A 19-year-old girl was gang raped by her two friends in Jabalpur district in Madhya Pradesh after being forcibly intoxicated, the police said on Saturday. The incident took place late on Friday in Bhedaghat. According to the police, the two accused, Gulsan Rajput and Satyam Rajput, took the alleged victim to Bhedaghat waterfall, nearly 26 km from head-quarter town of Jabalpur, for an outing on the Narmada Jayanti Day (celebrated to observe birthday of Narmada deity) on Friday. She was then taken to the house of Gulsan where she was forced to consume alcohol. The two accused then took turns to rape her, the police said.

Later, the alleged victim's sister spotted her being carried in the motorcycle by the two accused while she was looking for her. The two accused dumped the girl on the road after seeing her sister, police said. The alleged victim later filed a complaint against the two accused at the Gadga police station. The police has filed a zero FIR at the Gadga police station and later transferred the case to Bhedaghat police station. "Both the accused were arrested," a police official said.

Farmer, son end lives over farm laws & debt

Hoshiarpur (Punjab), Feb. 20: A debt-ridden farmer and his son allegedly committed suicide at a village here, mentioning in a note that they were upset over the Centre's farm laws and the state government's failure to waive their loans.

Jagtar Singh (70) and his son Kirpal Singh (42) were found dead at their residence in Muhadipur village on Saturday morning. DSP Munish Kumar said.

They had consumed a poisonous substance, the police said.

In a suicide note recovered from their residence, they wrote that they were taking the extreme step because of debt, accusing the Congress government in Punjab of not honouring its promise of waiving their farm loans.

They further mentioned in the note that they were distressed as the Centre did not repeal the new farm laws.

The two owned one acre of land.

The bodies were sent to the Dasuya Civil Hospital for a post-mortem, the police said.

Meanwhile, Opposition SAD and the AAP demanded CM Capt. Amarinder Singh's resignation.

The lies and deceit of the Congress government have been unmasked, SAD leader and former minister Bikram Singh Majithia said in a statement.

The SAD also asked the Union government to repeal the three agricultural laws.

Jagtar Singh and Kirpal Singh have clearly stated in their suicide note that they were also taking this extreme step due to the agony caused by the Centre's refusal to listen to the voice of the farming community, said Majithia. — PTI

Youth leader, held in drugs case, accuses BJP colleague

Kolkata, Feb. 20: BJP's youth-wing leader Pamela Goswami, arrested in a drugs case, on Saturday demanded the arrest of party colleague Rakesh Singh, accusing him of conspiracy and sought a CID probe into the matter.

Ms Goswami, the state secretary of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), was arrested along with a friend, Pradip Kumar Dey, and her personal security guard from south Kolkata's New Alipore area on Friday after around 90 gm of cocaine worth lakhs of rupees

was allegedly found from her handbag and car, according to police.

"I want a CID investigation. BJP's Rakesh Singh, the aide of Kailash Vijayvargiya, should be arrested. This is his conspiracy," Ms Goswami told reporters while being taken to lock-up from a city court.

Mr Singh, a BJP state committee member, alleged that the ruling Trinamul Congress and the Kolkata police were conspiring against him and have "brainwashed" Ms Goswami. He said that he has not

been in touch with Ms Goswami for more than a year and was ready to face any investigation.

"If I am involved, they can call me or Kailash Vijayvargiya or Amit Shah. I think the police have brainwashed her. I am not in touch with Pamela for more than one-and-a-half-years now," Mr Singh told PTI.

"This can be that the police is following the Trinamul Congress' instructions. They are conspiring against me. These are baseless accusations and I am ready to face any challenge," he added. — PTI

PM Modi like 'ahankari raja' from old stories: Priyanka

Addressing 'kisan mahapanchayat', also slams PM over fuel price hike

Rahul hits out at BJP govt over rising inflation

New Delhi, Feb. 20: Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday took a swipe at the BJP government over rising inflation and the hike in petrol and diesel prices.

"Development of inflation," he said in a tweet in Hindi, and expanded. "People started feeling afraid of telling the truth in front of him they would be grovelling. It seems our prime minister has also become an arrogant king of that type."

"He is unable to understand that the jawan who has kept this country safe is a son of a farmer," she

attached a picture of the problems suffered by common people due to rising prices of petrol and diesel.

The Congress has been demanding that the tax on petrol and diesel be reduced and the common people given relief in prices of fuel. — PTI

told the gathering. Launching a scathing attack against the prime minister, Priyanka Gandhi said government "mandis" and the MSP system would come to an end with the new farm laws.

"Your rights will also end. The way in which he has sold the entire country to his two-three

friends, in the same way he wants to sell you, your land, and earnings to his billionaire friends," she alleged.

In 2018, Priyanka Gandhi said the cost of diesel was ₹60 and today it is ₹80 somewhere and ₹90 elsewhere.

"The electricity bill has increased, the price of the gas cylinder keeps on increasing, but you are not getting the price for your sugarcane. It is at the same place," she said.

"The BJP government earned ₹3.5 lakh crore by imposing tax on diesel last year. I want to ask where the money has gone. Why has the person who works day and night for the country, and irrigates it with his blood and sweat not got this money?" she asked.

The Congress leader said there was nobody to listen to the farmer who is being harassed. — PTI

Nadda holds meet ahead of Modi address

New Delhi, Feb. 20: The BJP on Saturday held some key organisational meetings on the eve of the first physical meeting of its new set of national office-bearers, which will be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

BJP president J.P. Nadda chaired meetings of the party's national general secretaries and also general secretaries (organisation) of states.

Several party leaders deliberated upon the agenda of the Sunday's meeting. — PTI

Uttarakhand: 3 more bodies found, toll 65

Gopeshwar (Uttarakhand), Feb. 20: Three more bodies were recovered from the NTPC's flood-ravaged Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project site on Saturday taking the toll in the February 7 glacial disaster in Uttarakhand to 65, officials said.

The bodies were recovered from the desilting tank near the Tapovan project barrage on Saturday, NDRF commandant P.K. Tiwari said.

Search operation at the project site has been underway on a war footing for more than 13 days since it bore the brunt of an avalanche triggered by a glacial burst over Rishiganga river in

Chamoli district. The 13.2 MW Rishiganga hydel project was totally demolished in the avalanche while the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydropower project suffered extensive damage.

With the recovery of three more bodies, the toll in the tragedy has gone up to 65 while 139 people are still missing.

Meanwhile, Chamoli DM Swati S. Bhadauria on Saturday asked the NTPC to press into service additional equipment and divert the course of Dhauliganga river to the other side so that its water does not flow through the barrage into Tapovan tunnel hampering sludge clearing efforts. — PTI



A jockey guides his buffaloes on the slush track during Kambala competition at Moodabidri in Dakshina Kannada district, Karnataka, on Saturday. — PTI

13K fresh Covid cases, 101 deaths in India in 24 hrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

Daily Covid-19 cases in the country climbed to about 14,000 after nearly 22 days, taking India's tally to 1,09,77,387, while the recoveries surged to 1,06,78,048, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Saturday.

A total of 13,993 new cases were registered in a span of 24 hours. Deaths in the last 24 hours were recorded at 101 according to the data updated at 8 am showed.

On January 29, 18,855 daily cases were recorded.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,06,78,048 which translates to a national recovery rate of 97.27 per cent and the case fatality rate stands at 1.42 per cent.

The active caseload remained below 1.5 lakh. There are 1,43,127 active cases of Covid infections in the country which comprise 1.27 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 21,02,61,480 samples have been tested up to February 19, with 7,86,618 samples being tested on Friday.

The 101 new fatalities included 44 deaths from Maharashtra, 15 from

India gifts 1 lakh more Covid-19 doses to Maldives

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

India on Saturday gifted another one lakh doses of Covid vaccine to the Maldives, with external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar himself accompanying the fresh consignment on his two-day visit to the archipelago nation that started on Saturday. This takes the overall gift of Covid vaccine doses for the Maldives to two lakh from India since New Delhi had earlier already gifted one lakh doses.

The EAM also announced a "stand-alone new Line of Credit (LoC) worth \$40 million" from India for development of sports infrastructure in the Maldives during his address at a public event in the tiny nation which is India's south-western maritime neighbour. This fresh LoC is expected to be inked soon.

Kerala and 8 from Punjab. A total of 1,56,212 deaths have been reported so far in the country, including 51,713 from Maharashtra followed by 12,451 from Tamil Nadu, 12,887 from Karnataka, 10,297 from Delhi, 10,242 from West Bengal and 8,712 from Uttar Pradesh.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

Charges filed against Jharkhand-based firm

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a supplementary charge sheet against the Jharkhand-based firm Domco Pvt Ltd and its directors namely Binay Prakash, Rita Prakash and their two other firms in connection with its money laundering probe into a coal blocks allocation scam.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the Central probe agency said, "The supplementary charge sheet was filed before a Delhi court. The charge sheet has been filed under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The first charge sheet in this case was filed in December 2018."

The ED case, under various sections of the PMLA, was filed after studying a CBI FIR against Domco Pvt

Ltd, its promoters and directors, and other unknown persons for submitting "false" information with "dishonest intention" to the authorities concerned while applying for a captive coal block and securing allocation of Lalgah (North) coal block in West Bokaro coalfields in Jharkhand.

The agency alleged "a pecuniary benefit of ₹7 crore was obtained by accused Binay Prakash by offering to sell the shares of the company on premium, after allocation of the coal block to Domco Pvt Ltd, Ranchi."

The ED said, "Binay Prakash placed the proceeds of crime in the banking system and subsequently the amount was siphoned off, routed and invested through the entities owned and controlled by him."

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-NOTICE INVITING TENDER	
For and on behalf of President of India, Sr. Divisional Security Commissioner (Cord)/RPF/Northern Railway, Delhi Division, New Delhi invites 'e-Tender' in prescribed tender form for the following work:-	
1. Name of the work with its location	Repair along with Comprehensive AMC of 27 Baggage Scanner Machines installed over Delhi Division for two years.
2. Office Address	Sr.DSC(Co-ordination)/RPF, P.K.Road, New Delhi.
3. Approx. Cost of work (Tender value) (Rs)	Rs 1,90,15,329/- (excluding GST as per applicable)
4. E.M.D. (in Rs)	Exempted for OEM
5. Bidding start date (online)	26.02.2021
6. Bid closing date & time (online)	12.03.2021 up to 1500 hrs
7. Tender opening date	12.03.2021 at 1500 hrs.
8. Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
9. Cost of tender documents	Zero (due to e-tender process)
TENDER NOTICE No.-Sr.DSC(Cord.)/RPF/BSM-CAMC/DIV/2021 Date: 20.02.2021 399/2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

Roshani

General Public is hereby informed that one lady namely **Roshani W/o Banty R/o B-56**, Gali No.3, Vijay Colony, Bawana, Delhi has been missing since 24.01.2021 at 02:00 PM from the area of P.S. Bawana, Delhi. In this regard a case vide **DD No. 71-A Dated 28.01.2021** has been registered at PS. Bawana Delhi. The description of missing lady is as under :

Name : Roshani, **Husband's Name :** Banty, **Age :** 22 years, **Height :** 4'5", **Face :** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Complexion :** Fair, **Wearing :** Orange colour suit salwar, red swater & red colour sandal in feet.

If anyone having any clue/information, kindly inform the undersigned.

SHO
P.S., Bawana, Delhi
Ph.: 011-27752534
7065036321

Website : <http://cbi.nic.in>
e-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Fax : 011-24368639
Ph. : 011-24368638, 24368641
DP/781/ON/2021



SHORT TAKES

CONGRESS HALF-DAY BANDH IN MP RECEIVES BACKLASH

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, FEB. 20

The half-day bandh call given by Congress in protest against fuel price increase on Saturday evoked mixed response in Madhya Pradesh. While petrol stations remained closed, normal life however remained unaffected in most places in the state. Congress workers and leaders who were enforcing bandh in their respective areas in the state were seen facing resistances from the local businessmen at some places. One Krishna Pachouri, a local businessman here, lodged a complaint in Korada police station in Bhopal alleging misbehavior by Congress men while trying to intimidate him to close his shop. Similarly, a cloth merchant in Jabalpur Yogesh Bhatia lodged a complaint against some Congress workers in Ranji police station in Jabalpur alleging intimidation by them to force him to close his shop. In Bhopal, police took around 100 Congress workers including former minister P C Sharma into custody while enforcing bandh at a petrol station. Barring stray incidents of scuffles and heated exchanges between the Congress workers and local businessmen at some places, the bandh passed off peacefully in the state. Congress veteran and former chief minister Kamal Nath has claimed that the bandh was "total" in the state. However, the ruling BJP called it a flop.

Trinamul slogan: 'Bengal wants own daughter'

■ Continued from Page 1 added. State panchayat minister Subrata Mukherjee said that while other parties are struggling to find a chief ministerial face, the Trinamul Congress has Banerjee who knows the pulse of the people of Bengal. Ms Mukherjee said she knows how to protect the women. Ms Banerjee also has a soulful connection with rural Bengal and has built 34 lakh houses in the villages while providing electricity to 96 lakh households, he said. Total 1.18 lakh km of rural roads were built in the last ten years, Ms Mukherjee said. The party's slogan of Bodla Noy Bodol Chai, meaning don't want revenge but change, ahead of the 2011 polls turned out to be crucial in reaching out to the masses who toppled the 34 years of Left rule in Bengal. The slogan of Chup Chap Fuley Chap (vote for TMC in silence) during the Left rule is also considered iconic. However, Ma, Mati, Manush — the slogan Banerjee gave during the land agitation of the mid-2000s became the ideology of the party, helping it win rural Bengal along with the urban areas, election after election. — PTI

Ulfa-I threatens to execute abducted oil firm employees

■ Continued from Page 1 hereabouts of the kidnapped employees were not known to police, security sources feared that they have been taken to neighbouring Myanmar where a united front of banned outfit United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFWSEA) and other rebel bodies have their base camps. It is significant that the press statement of the outfit was issued jointly by Ulfa-I and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and signed by Rumel Asom, a member of its publicity wing. It also said that if negotiations turn futile, Quippo will be banned from operating anywhere in South East Asia. The family members of Mr Gogoi and Mr Kumar had recently called on Paresh Barua's brother who also appealed to the Ulfa leader to release the two. The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was formed in 1979 to establish a sovereign Assam through an armed movement. Paresh Barua was once the chief of its military wing. After a split in the organisation in 2011 over the leadership's decision to join peace talks with the government, he led a faction called Ulfa (Independent).

Fight against high fuel prices



Activists of Indian Youth Congress clash with police personnel during a protest against the hike in fuel and LPG prices, in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

Ghosh's convoy attacked in WB

BJP, TMC activists clash in North 24 Parganas, Trinamul party office vandalised

Barasat (West Bengal), Feb. 20: A convoy of cars led by West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh was on Saturday attacked in West Bengal North 24 Parganas district, triggering a scuffle between activists of the saffron party and the ruling Trinamul Congress, the police said. While the BJP accused the Trinamool Congress of attacking the rally at Minakha, the ruling party denied the charge and alleged that workers of the saffron camp ransacked its party office in

the area. The police said that at least two vehicles, which were at the rear part of the saffron party's "Parivartan Yatra" rally, were damaged after stones were thrown at them at Malancha under Minakha police station area. The BJP launched Parivartan Yatra rallies ahead of the Assembly election in the state, which is likely to be held in April-May. The BJP also claimed that four party workers were injured after bombs were hurled at two tableaux.

The police, however, said that no bombs were used in the attack and there was no report of any casualty. Activists of the two parties were engaged in a scuffle after the vehicles were attacked, police said. "BJP's #ParivartanYatra attacked by Trinamool goons at Malancha in Basirhat, that falls under Minakhan police station. Four BJP karyakartas are in critical condition after crude bombs were thrown on two tableaux," saffron party leader and co-in-charge of West Bengal

tweeted. West Bengal's BJP MP Arjun Singh alleged that stones were thrown from a TMC party office and bombs were used in the attack. TMC leaders alleged that BJP workers vandalised their party office in the area. A few days ago, BJP leader Fitoze Kamal Gazi alias Babu Master was injured in an attack in Minakha area. BJP national president J.P. Nadda's convoy was attacked in December last year in South 24 Parganas district. — PTI

BJP chief in Maha: Kalam was made Prez by Modi

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, FEB. 20

Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrakant Patil has created a controversy claiming that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made A.P.J. Abdul Kalam the President of India. "Mr Modi is not anti-Muslim and he never discriminated against the Muslims," he said. Mr Patil launched the "Yuva Warriors" campaign organised by the Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha at Pune on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, he tried to dispel the allegations of Mr Modi being an anti-Muslim. "We will keep fighting the forces who are acting against the country, but we do not oppose all the Muslims. Prime Minister Modi himself has promoted several Muslims in various aspects. Just because Abdul Kalam was Muslim, he did not sideline him. Mr Modi made him the President of India. He honoured him as a scientist," said Mr Patil. BJP state chief Chandrakant Patil leader said that the Prime Minister's image as an anti-Muslim is not true.

'Metro Man' courts row, calls Vijayan an autocrat

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 20

Ahead of his entry into the BJP, 'Metro Man' E. Sreedharan courted controversy by calling Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan an "autocrat" and evoking a sharp reaction from the CPM leadership. Sreedharan said it would be a tragedy if Left Democratic Front (LDF) were to come back to power again in Kerala after the Assembly polls scheduled to be held soon. In an interview with a regional channel, the well-known engineer, who is set to join BJP next week, said the CM was depending on the flawed advice of bureaucrats. Sreedharan heaped praise on the Opposition



E. Sreedharan

Congress-led United Democratic Front. He said former chief minister Oommen Chandy was highly regarded. Chandy, Ramesh Chennithala, Aryadan Mohammad and P.K. Kunhalikutty wanted good to happen to the state, he said. He said Vijayan's LDF government had blocked important projects. "They opposed the Nilambur-Nanjangud railway line which pained

me. In place of Nilambur-Nanjangud, they wanted the Thalassery-Mysore railway project." Sreedharan said he was expecting to be nominated either from Palakkad or Malappuram. "I am contesting to become a part of the government," he said and added that there was a branding of BJP as a communal party and this image needs to be changed. The CPM reacted sharply to Sreedharan's comment against the Chief Minister. "He may be a good engineer but unfortunately he has no sense of history. A person who is calling Kerala Chief Minister autocratic, is joining a party whose credentials are well known," the party said.

TN: Declare Godavari-Cauvery plan a national project

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 20

Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare the Godavari-Cauvery river linking project as a national project so as to benefit lakhs of people in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Addressing the sixth governing coun-

cil meeting of NITI Aayog, he said river Cauvery and its tributaries had to be rejuvenated on the lines of "Namami Gange" and requested the Centre to accord sanction and extend financial assistance to the State at the earliest. "We are meeting after a year, during which period the world has been struck by the most extensive pandemic we have seen. A

series of timely and effective measures taken in Tamil Nadu by calibrated relaxations, effective RT/PCR testing, tracking and conduct of fever camps have ensured total control of the spread of Covid in our State," he said. He said the State had been ranked Number One in the Good Governance Index released by the Government of India and

had bagged the 'Best Performing State' title in the National Water Award, 2019. The State received the highest share of investment proposals (16 per cent) in India during April 2020 to September 2020, as per the CARE ratings report, he said, adding that through the on-line single window portal, investment of ₹22,332 crore and employ-

ment potential of 76,835 persons had been cleared. He also listed the various business projects launched in the State like the Multimodal logistics park being developed near Chennai in around 150 acres of land. "The Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Act, is a historic enactment to protect the fertile agricul-

tural lands and safeguard the livelihoods of farmers and agricultural labourers in the Cauvery delta," he said. Palaniswami said Lakhs of farmers were successfully enrolled under the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme and compensation of ₹9,365 crore was disbursed in the last 4 years to 54.12 lakh beneficiaries.

India and China hold talks

■ Continued from Page 1

understanding last year, a buffer zone on both sides of the LAC was to be created in these areas of stand-off. However, the disengagement was not fully implemented at Gogra-Hotsprings. As per the agreement on Pangong Tso, Chinese troops will move east of Finger 8 in the north bank of Pangong Tso and Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3. There will be a "temporary" freeze on patrolling by both sides in the area between Finger 4 to 8 on the Northern banks of Pangong Tso till both sides reach an agreement in diplomatic and military talks.

In Depsang plains, Chinese troops are blocking Indian patrol teams from going to Patrolling Points 10 to 13. A Major General level meeting was also held on August 8 last year at Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) to discuss disengagement at Depsang plains. The Corps Commanders meeting on Saturday was held a day after China on Friday for the first time after nearly eight months, officially acknowledged that its four soldiers were killed and one officer seriously injured during clashes with Indian troops in June last year in Galwan Valley. The Indian Army lost 20 soldiers, including Col B. Santosh Babu, Commanding

Officer of 16 Bihar, during the clash. Earlier this week, the Indian Army's Northern Commander Lt. Gen. Y.K. Joshi had referred to the Russian news agency TASS' report which had put out a figure of 45 Chinese soldiers killed during the clash. Chinese state affiliate media on Friday had released a propaganda video purportedly of the Galwan where it tried to show Indian troops crossing the river and coming towards Chinese soldiers. China media has been trying to blame India for the Galwan clash and the heavily edited video seemed to be part of that narrative which China is trying to build.

'Time nation gets out of poll mode'

■ Continued from Page 1

high time the country gets out of this election mode and allows elected governments to function," he said. Though the CM, who heads the regional Biju Janata Dal as its founder president, a key rival of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), did not mention any political party, his remarks were a direct rebuff of the saffron party's persistent attack on his government and other non-BJP state governments over various issues. BJP leaders have been constantly attacking the Biju Janata Dal gov-

ernment on various issues, including chit fund and mining scams, irregularities in procurement of healthcare hardware and mismanagement Covid-19 crisis. BJP and Congress leaders have also castigated the BJD government for the distribution of Rs 5,000 each to all farmers during rabi and kharif season under KALIA (Krushak Assistance of Livelihood and Income Augmentation) scheme, saying it was an attempt to buy votes. Like Trinamul Congress leaders who were incarcerated for

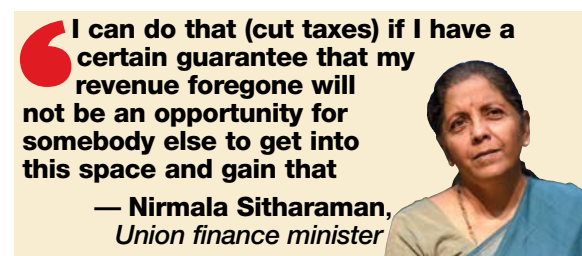
their alleged links with ponzi firms, nearly half-a-dozen top BJD leaders were arrested earlier by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the chit fund scam. A senior BJD leader and state minister is also facing a murder charge while another minister's name is being accused of allegedly protecting the accused involved in the "kidnapping and murder" of a five-year-old girl in Nayagarh district. The chief minister also urged NitiAayog to re-evaluate the UPSC, NEET, JEE examination patterns in the

country. "A critical look is needed to re-evaluate the examination pattern for these prestigious and highly sought-after exams. Should not we have exams that focus on equality and attracting merit as opposed to exam patterns that are heavily dependent on highly-paid coaching classes. This will truly eliminate merit in the long run and deny justice to lakhs of our children who live in rural areas and don't have physical or economic access to coaching classes," said Mr Patnaik.

Fuel prices: FM says it's a vexatious issue

Govt, states need to work together to lower prices: Sitharaman

Chennai, Feb. 20: Amid an outcry over record high petrol and diesel prices, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the Centre and state governments will have to together work out a mechanism to bring retail rates to reasonable levels.



As much as 60 per cent of the retail price of petrol, which shot above ₹100-mark in some places in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and is at an all-time high elsewhere in the country, is made up of Central and state taxes. Taxes make up for about 56 per cent of the record high diesel rates. Ms Sitharaman, who had increased central excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record margin last year to mop up gains arising from international oil prices plunging to two-decade low, remained non-committal on cutting taxes to give relief to consumers. "This is a very vexatious issue. An issue in which no answer except reducing the price (of fuel) will convince anyone. I know I am treading on an area and whatever I may say, to

bring in the reality into picture, will only sound like I am obfuscating." "I am avoiding my answer. I am shifting the blame," she said addressing a gathering at an event organised by the Chennai Citizens' Forum in Chennai. She went on to explain the tax structure and how production cuts by oil cartel OPEC and its allies had led to a rally in the international oil prices, leading to a hike in retail rates in India. She, however, said the answer may lie in bringing petrol and diesel under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, which will end the cascading impact of taxes and bring uniformity. Currently, the Central government levies a fixed rate of excise duty while

states levy different rates of VAT. Under GST, the two would merge and bring uniformity, solving the problem of fuel rates being higher in states with higher VAT. "What I am saying is that this is a vexatious issue and no Minister can ever convince anybody because Indians being Indians and I am one of them, (will not be convinced)," she said. "It is a matter of fact that both Centre and states will have to talk." Stating that the states levy ad valorem rates of sales tax or VAT which help them get more revenue whenever prices go up, she said it won't serve any purpose if the Centre were to take the moral high ground and bring down excise duty to zero. — PTI

BJP challenges Mamata to fight only from Nandigram

Kolkata, Feb. 20: The BJP on Saturday challenged West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee to announce that she will contest the coming state election only from Nandigram if she is confident of her victory, prompting TMC to hit back and ask the saffron party to first name its chief ministerial candidate.

Over dozen turncoats, BJP leaders given VIP security

New Delhi, Feb. 20: Over a dozen MLAs and MPs from West Bengal, including those who recently joined the BJP from the TMC and other parties, have been given VIP security cover by the Centre, officials said Saturday. The security has been approved by the Union home ministry after analysing a "threat assessment" report and recommendations prepared by the central security agencies, they said. All the political leaders have been granted the lower categories of central VIP security cover like "X" and "Y" for their movement within West Bengal, they said. They said the Central Industrial Security Force has been tasked with providing the cover. Sources told PTI these latest VIP security arrangements are "temporary keeping in mind the protection and well-being of the politicians during the forthcoming elections season and once the activities at the hustings are over, the cover will be reviewed". — PTI

The TMC rode the crest of the movement and came to power in the state in 2011 ending the 34-year rule of the L.F. In 2016 the Nandigram seat in East Midnapore district was won by the then TMC heavyweight Suwendu Adhikari, who recently switched over to BJP and has publicly vowed to defeat Ms Banerjee by 50,000 votes. Mr Vijayargya in his tweet said, "Mamata Banerjee has announced to contest Assembly elections from Nandigram. But, she did not say that she will contest from here only! If she is confident of her victory, make this announcement tool... Otherwise, it will be understood that you do not trust Nandigram!" BJP national secretary Anupam Hazra said if TMC did not announce it now, it will be understood that that Banerjee will fight the election from more seats. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

21 FEBRUARY 2021



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

Concrete threat coexists with bignonia, birdsong

You are so lucky that you moved to Dehradun from a city, I get told all the time. As cliches go, it's a great line. I see the foothills of the Himalayas every time I look out of the window. I am surrounded by countryside. I have a garden full of flowers.

Especially after the pandemic, you read articles or you hear about people from Gurgaon, Delhi, Meerut, looking to move to Dehradun. I get calls from friends about the availability of land or flats. The horrors of pollution and the rat race have been brought home in full force after almost a year of "work from home". They use the line I myself used when I moved here six years ago: all you need is a good Internet connection.

I know, you're looking for the poetry. The dawn chorus, the bird song through the day, the evening choir, which depending on the season could start at three in the afternoon or three hours later. Every November, you wait for the Himalayan Whistling Thrush to make its annual visit. Winter has begun when you hear its beautiful call early in the morning. Then the song stops but the bird stays, hopping the garden, and glinting when the Sun catches its brilliant dark blue with speckled wings and a yellow beak.

Some sounds are all-India sounds but evocative of the seasons and their gifts nonetheless: the thok-thok of the Coppersmith Barbet, the cooing of the doves, the summer frenzy of the Brainfever Bird, the persistent call of the Koel. Others like the plaintive Grey Hornbill or the did-you-do-it cry of the Red Wattle Lapwing come and go through the year.

The birds alone, even if you are ignorant from one page of Salim Ali to the next, are worth it.

It's the sheer privilege of course. The privilege of knowing that even if the mountaintops are covered in summer or winter haze, the air is clear and fresh. That when visitors arrive for the first time, the enormous hit of oxygen makes them sleepy.

And it's those little pleasures that are hidden privileges. Garden privileges. Of camellias and magnolias. Of discovering daffodils and tulips when your orientation is tropical. Of making your own compost from kitchen and garden waste. Of having the time to meander. Of staring at the sunbirds while they feed on the vine or pose on the passionflower.

But, there has to be a but. It's not all sap-suckers and sappy stories. There are those harsh realities of the countryside. Of the lack of basic amenities. Health, education, migration for work. Of environmental destruction and the resultant devastation.

Why did I move to Dehradun all those years ago? I moved to live with my parents. I left Mumbai, the city I have also felt the closest to, left my friends, my colleagues, my little flat with its verandah garden, to start a new chapter. For me, it was family and that's a different kind of poetry. Not romantic lyricism but something far deeper, more elemental.

And it has been a struggle, as it was for my Mother when she made the move from Calcutta post-retirement. You have to rejig your mind and your expectations. From the ridiculous — o lord, there is not one decent restaurant — to the sublime — where are the art galleries to feed my soul.

And for me, where is Arif who brought me my breakfast brun pao every morning, on his cycle, fresh from the bakery? Tiwariji who took me to work in his taxi every morning, and was always a phone call away for any emergency? Or Yadavji, ready with his taxi for the day when family came to visit? Or Baba who would travel miles for any electrical emergency, and had saved up enough to buy an old small flat that I had once lived in? Or Lalji, who smiled his way through every carpentry disaster? Or Anita, who cooked like a dream and then fulfilled her own dream with a little food stall near a school?

Living in Mumbai was heady, a mix of enterprise, collaboration and trust every day. Going home from work by public transport at any time of the night. Putting in those commuter miles, whether by train or bus or auto or taxi. Three hours a day or more, gone. How did we do it? How do people still do it? And that buzz. That ineffable, glorious, unquantifiable, addictive buzz of big city life. I have not found it in any other Indian city. They have other attractions. Soul perhaps, entitlement definitely. But not buzz.

Dehradun has no buzz. It has higgledy-piggledy growth. Almost none of it is organic. It is all concrete boxes. It has locals trying to adjust to the status of a capital. Some hate it. Some love the increased scope of income and business. Most rue the degradation of a slow life because of increased speeds and influxes. Many watch aghast as the very reason for living here vanishes with loss of tree cover and garbage-dammed streams.

You will argue that all these concerns are universal. The planet revolts around us, wherever we live.

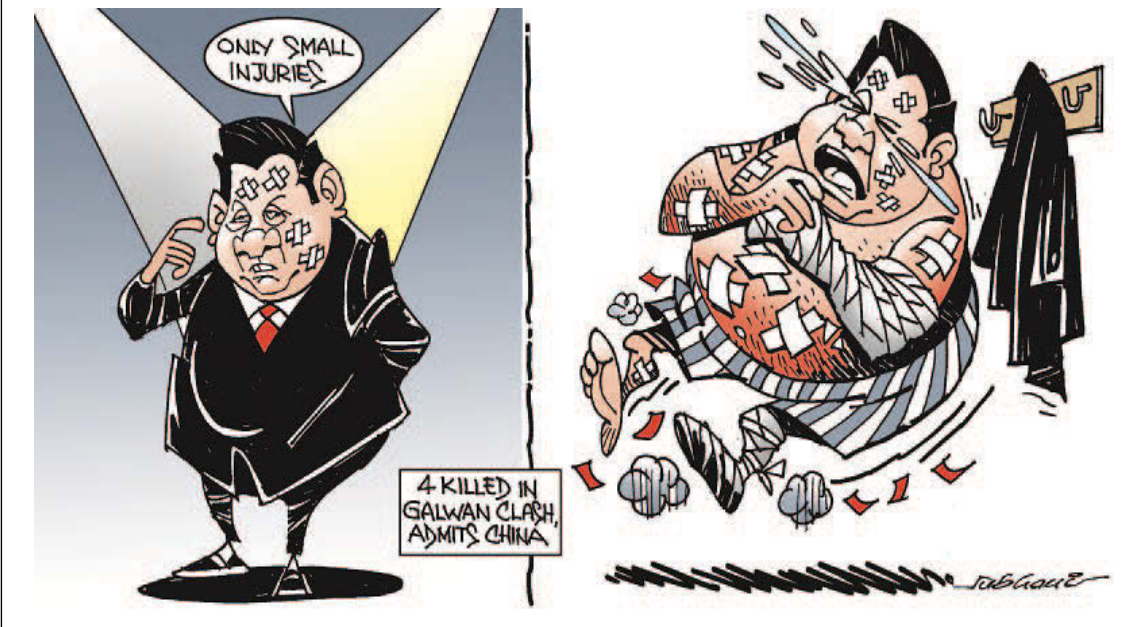
So while I can raise my eyes to the hills and this new-old life. It's spring. The bignonia venesta is a riotous celebration of colour. And I pretend I can't see that ugly new building beyond.

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



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Subhani



Not much righteous about Ram temple funds drive



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

It is good that the Ram Temple at Ayodhya is being built largely through public donations. This was the model for the reconstruction of the Somnath temple in 1951. The initiative to rebuild it was taken by Sardar Patel; Gandhiji approved of it, but asked that the funds for this purpose be raised through voluntary donations, rather than an outgo from the government exchequer. This advice was followed, and K.M. Munshi, a minister in Nehru's cabinet, spearheaded the raising of funds and the rebuilding of the temple.

The same model is reportedly being followed for the Ram temple. The cadres of the RSS, the BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, are in the forefront for raising funds from the public. Many ordinary Hindus are more than willing to make contributions. Many non-Hindus may also be willing to contribute. So long as this entire exercise is carried out voluntarily, on the bedrock of genuine public support, it should pose no problem.

But there are disturbing stories doing the rounds of coercive methods being employed. It has been reported that bands of "bhakts" are combing residential areas and housing societies asking people to donate, and judging them by their response and the quantum they give. It has been reported that stickers are put on the doors or entrances of those who have paid, thereby marking out in those who have not. In a close-knit residential habitat, this identifies people who are not "adequately" Hindu, or sufficiently demon-

strative about their devotion to Lord Ram. Such people then face social ostracisation, and are portrayed as betrayers of the faith.

If these stories are true, it is a matter of deep concern. The noble cause of building the temple cannot be sullied by mob intimidation bordering on extortion. Most Hindus hold Shri Ram in great reverence, and may wish to donate; but those that do not want to hand over cash to people they don't know, or are unsure about their credentials, or unconvinced about the accountability of the money they give, are entirely free not to donate, and cannot and should not be penalised for it. The use of stickers or crosses to identify those who do not comply has very ominous implications.

Besides, Hinduism by definition is a religion of choice. Even in temples, there is no compulsion to put money in the donation box, however prominently it may be placed. Many Hindus worship Rama; for others, the subject of devotion is Shiva; and, for still others it is Devi. At one level, of course, all Hindu gods stand for that one divinity which is omnipresent and indivisible. This is the Nirguna — attributeless — Brahman. But Hinduism consciously

The real danger is that Shri Rama is being used as a means to make Hinduism a prescriptive religion. Such a development is mutilating to the cerebral essence of Hinduism.

Hinduism allows for Hindus to be atheistic, pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic or animist; and is more than happy with those who see God everywhere or nowhere and do not even wish to visit a temple

derogates this pervasive cosmic consciousness to the Saguna or attribute-full level, to enable devotees to worship a more accessible god. At the saguna plane, each Hindu is free to choose more than one god, or elevate any one of them to primary status. For instance, in West Bengal, a great many people are devotees of Durga. Is there anything wrong if a Hindu in Kolkata chooses to donate a part of his meagre disposable income for Durga Puja rather than a temple for Rama?

Moreover, what kind of precedent does such an exercise set? Today, the aim is to raise money for the Ram temple. Tomorrow, if the same cohort comes around to ask for money to celebrate the birth of Rama, Ram Navami, who will stop them? If at Dussehra, the same gang fans out to raise money for a yatra or a function, how can ordinary Hindus, afraid of being marked out for not being "sufficiently devotional", resist their demands? Even powerful politicians have spoken out openly against the manner in which money is being asked for. Fear and unlawful pressure cannot be a basis for religious or spiritual pursuits.

The real danger is that Shri Rama, the compassionate (*deen dayala*) merciful (*kripalu*), and the epitome of rectitude (*maryada purushottam*), is being used as a means to make Hinduism a prescriptive religion. Such a development is mutilating to the cerebral essence of Hinduism. The tragedy is that those who assume to dictate to

other Hindus on how they should behave in order to be "good" Hindus, don't know the fundamentals of Hinduism in the first place. More often than not, their evangelical illiteracy is orthodox, upper-caste, patriarchal and ritualistic. Little would they know that Hinduism allows for Hindus to be atheistic, pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic, animist, or any combination of the above; and, at the level of philosophy, Hinduism is more than happy with those who see God everywhere or nowhere and do not even wish to visit a temple.

Shri Rama's aura should not be sullied by the taint of money and politics. It would have been much better if the government had issued explicit instructions that donations for the Ram temple, by those who wish to make them, would only be valid by online transfer, with an electronic receipt. It would have been good, too, if the government had set up a more transparent mechanism for donors to know how their hard earned money — in times when petrol and diesel prices are skyrocketing — has been utilised for the construction of the temple. Herds of people of a particular political orientation, roaming the streets and neighbourhoods demanding money with little accountability, is not something that Shri Rama would have wanted for his temple.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

Herds of people of a particular political orientation, roaming the streets and neighbourhoods demanding money with little accountability, is not something that Shri Rama would have wanted for his temple

LETTERS LOOSE TALK

A special court in West Bengal trying cases against MPs and MLAs has issued summons to home minister Amit Shah to appear before it on February 22, either personally or through a representative, in connection with a defamation case filed by Trinamul Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, on August 28, 2018. According to the petitioner, Mr Shah had said that PM Modi has sent Rs 3,59,000 crore for residents of a village which had subsequently been gifted to Mr Banerjee and his "syndicate" so the money did not reach them. The way the BJP leaders indulge in loose talk is shameful. Mr Shah's comment made during Bihar Assembly elections that if BJP loses, crackers will be burst in Pakistan, had come back to haunt him.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

LESSON FOR BJP

THE CONGRESS went on a rapid decline as it erred in neglecting regional undercurrents in the belief that it can ride on an overarching central approach. Today the farm issue may be a trigger but reverting to regional leadership has paid it dividends in Punjab. But is not the BJP, too, riding on central dominance and personality cult? The RSS, which had all along been adverse to personalities overriding ideology, could be apprehensive lest in time the BJP loses touch over nuances specific to states. Then the parivar will have to step in for damage control.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

CHINESE ADMISSION

BREAKING ITS SILENCE eight months after the LAC clash, China on Friday admitted for the first time that it had lost four soldiers, including a battalion commander in the June 15 last clash in the Galwan Valley. The PLA said the announcement was aimed at honouring the soldiers and "setting the record straight" and accused India of "distorting the truth" and "slandering the Chinese border troops". Twenty Indian soldiers died in the clash, which marked the worst violence on the border since 1967.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

WAY TO GO, NAOMI

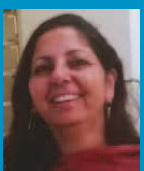
KUDOS TO NAOMI OSAKA for winning her second Australian Open and her 4th overall Grand Slam Trophy since 2018. Right since 2018, she has won at least one Grand Slam title every year. The way she played this tournament and totally dominated against Serena Williams in the semifinals, beating Jennifer Brady in the finals, is praiseworthy. At this rate we are sure she will go on to win more Grand Slams this year.

Janaki Mahadevan
Chennai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



BJP for Sourav as Bengal CM; Cong farmer cell has no chief

What do Tamil superstar Rajinikanth and cricketing hero Sourav Ganguly have in common? Both have been wooed assiduously by the Bharatiya Janata Party which is making strenuous efforts to expand its footprint in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the home states of the two legends. And both Rajinikanth and Ganguly were recently hospitalised following a medical emergency. The BJP ran out of luck with Rajinikanth, who had first declared his intention to float a new political party and contest the forthcoming Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, but decided not to take the plunge after his short stint in hospital. However, there is no clarity about Ganguly's political ambitions. But the BJP has not given up on him and is working hard on roping in Ganguly. The saffron party wishes to project the former cricket captain as its chief ministerial candidate since the party does not have a state leader who can take on West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. The BJP has apparently

put together a copious dossier on Ganguly and his family's business interests in its effort to persuade him. The BJP's eagerness here is understandable as word on the street is that the ruling Trinamul Congress will be routed if Ganguly decides to enter the fray.

Both politicians and journalists from Tamil Nadu get extremely agitated when they are spoken to in Hindi, insisting that since they do not understand the language, they should be addressed in English. It was, therefore, a surprise when Tiruchi Siva, DMK's Rajya Sabha member, belted out several Hindi film songs at a farewell dinner organised by him for Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad who retired from the Upper House earlier this month. His rendition of "ek pyaar ka nagma hai" and "kabhie kabhie mere dil mein" drew an instant applause from the guests who demanded an encore. Azad, who walked in while Siva was singing, remarked laughingly that there could not be a better welcome when one is greeted by a

Tamilian singing Hindi songs.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has finally bestirred herself and begun touring Uttar Pradesh in an effort to revive the party in the electorally crucial Hindi heartland state. She recently reiterated Congress support for the agitating farmers at several mahapanchayats in Western UP and later travelled to Allahabad where she took a holy dip in the Sangam on the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya. According to Congress insiders, Priyanka will be spending more time in the state with an eye on next year's Assembly polls. As a result, the Congress office in Lucknow has been renovated and a special vehicle has been purchased for her travels. Priyanka's communications team has also been beefed up. Social media experts, filmmakers and researchers have been specially drafted for the UP challenge. This team's task is to build the Congress profile in the state. Not an easy task given that the party has been out in the cold in UP for over

three decades.

Despite Congress president Sonia Gandhi's intervention, differences between Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh and his bete noire Navjot Singh Sidhu are yet to be sorted out. Harish Rawat, Congress general secretary in charge of Punjab, has held a series of meetings with Amarinder Singh to arrive at a compromise formula but to little avail. The former cricketer is keen on taking over as president of the Punjab Congress but the chief minister has said an emphatic "No" and has instead grudgingly offered to accommodate Sidhu in the Cabinet. But Sidhu is not keen on joining the Captain's Cabinet. Sonia Gandhi wants Sidhu to be rehabilitated soon as assembly elections in Punjab are due next year, especially since there is talk that if he does not have his way, Sidhu will start addressing farmers' meetings in the hope of emerging as a rallying force for the peasantry currently agitating against the Centre's farm laws. While the Central leadership is worried, it could prove difficult to persuade Amarinder Singh who is

feeling emboldened after the Congress swept the civic polls.

It is ironic that at a time when the Congress has come out in strong support of the farmers agitating against the Centre's farm laws, the party's department/cell mandated to study and take up issues pertaining to farmers and agriculture has been headless for nearly a year now. The party's All-India Kisan Congress was headed by Nana Patole who was subsequently named Speaker in the Maharashtra Assembly when the Congress joined the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party to form a coalition government in the western state. Patole recently resigned as Speaker after he was appointed president of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee. Most departments/cells set up by the Congress are virtually defunct, having little to offer in terms of programmes or activities. It appears they exist only to placate members with posts which, in reality, do not mean anything.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

UKRAINE FREEZES ASSETS OF PUTIN ALLY MEDVEDCHUK

Kyiv, Feb. 19: Ukraine's national security council on Friday placed sanctions on Viktor Medvedchuk, a politician and tycoon who is a close friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin, freezing his assets for three years and preventing him from doing business in the country.

The security council accused him of financial terrorism, but details were not immediately available.

The move came two weeks after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ordered the closure of three Medvedchuk-owned television channels that he accused of spreading propaganda financed by the aggressor country, a reference to Russia.

ULTRAS KILL 5 PAK SOLDIERS IN BALOCHISTAN

Karachi, Feb. 20: At least five Pakistani soldiers were killed and two others injured when suspected terrorists carried out attacks through remote-controlled bombs in two separate areas in the restive Balochistan province.

The first attack took place in the Bypass area outside Quetta when a remote-controlled bomb fixed to a motorcycle was detonated near a Frontier Corps (FC) convoy in which a soldier was killed and two others injured. The explosion took place near an FC vehicle on patrol duty.

In the second attack in the remote Kahan area of Kohlu district, terrorists attacked a FC checkpoint at night in which four soldiers were killed.

RAINS FLOOD INDONESIA'S CAPITAL

Jakarta, Feb. 20: Whole neighbourhoods of Indonesia's capital Jakarta and dozens of major roads were flooded on Saturday after torrential rains pounded the Southeast Asian city overnight.

More than 1,300 residents have been evacuated to temporary shelters, with parts of the capital under four to nine feet (1.2 to 2.7 metres) of water.

Images showed rescuers on rafts battling to evacuate the elderly and children from submerged houses in hard-hit southern and eastern areas of the city, and dozens of cars were seen submerged on waterlogged streets.

National rescue agency spokesman Yusuf Latif said the floods were triggered by extreme downpours.

SPYING CHARGES ON 4 EX-INTEL TAIWAN OFFICERS

Taipei, Feb. 20: Four retired Taiwanese military intelligence officers — including a major general — have been indicted for spying for China, prosecutors said Saturday.

The quartet were charged with developing a spying network and collecting confidential information for Beijing, the Taipei district prosecutors' office said. The two sides have been spying on each other since the Nationalists fled to the island to set up a rival government in 1949, having lost a civil war on the mainland to the communists.

Two Taiwanese former colonels were recruited by a Chinese national security official in the southern province of Guangdong, the government lawyers said.

RUSSIAN AIR HIT IN SYRIA KILLS 21 ISIS JIHADISTS

Beirut, Feb. 20: A wave of air strikes by government ally Russia killed at least 21 Islamic State group jihadists in the Syrian desert over the past 24 hours, a monitor said Saturday. The 21 were killed in at least 130 air strikes "carried out over the past 24 hours by the Russian air force targeting the Islamic State group" in a vast area stretching from the central province of Homs to the border with Iraq, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The raids, which continued into Saturday, follow a series of IS attacks Friday on government and allied forces that killed at least eight members of a pro-Damascus militia.

More than half of the jihadists were killed in strikes on the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, near the Iraqi frontier.

Texans queue for water as US counts cost of winter storm

This after 'polar plunge' burst pipes, left millions shivering without power

Houston, Feb. 20: Frustrated Texans queued for hours for safe drinking water Friday, after an unprecedented and deadly "polar plunge" burst pipes and left millions in the US state shivering without power or clean water for days. The extreme winter weather system wreaked havoc across much of the southern and central United States this week, reportedly killing at least 40 people and igniting anger in Texas as authorities scrambled to turn the lights back on.

Houston resident Percy McGee rated his frustration level at "number 10" as he waited his turn at the city's Delmar Stadium, now a mass bottled water distribution site.

"I've been up since five o'clock. And I've been on the road since six. And I know it's 11:30 but I'm gonna sit here until, I mean, I have no choice. All the stores in my area are out of water," he said.

"I'm very frustrated. I'm a diabetic. I have a 94-year-old senior as a diabetic. We haven't had no medicine. Nothing... So I'm really frustrated mentally. But I'm keeping it together," he said.

Erica Granado, another Houston resident, said she had rushed to the site after seeing it on the news.

"I gotta be early because I knew everybody — yeah, everybody wants water and so it's a difficult time for everybody," she said, adding: "Thank God I had gas in my car." On Friday the weather system was slowly moving northeast, where hardy New Englanders — far more used to



The George Washington Bridge is blanketed with snow on Friday, in Fort Lee, New Jersey.

— AFP

scouring winter storms than residents of the Lone Star state — were batten down.

But even as the temperature rose above freezing in Texas — and the National Weather Service forecast weekend weather in the 50s Fahrenheit (10-15 Celsius) — state governor Greg Abbott said some 165,000 people were still without power Friday.

Water pressure problems meant nearly seven million Texans were being advised to boil their water before drinking it or using for cooking, said Toby Baker, who heads the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

— AFP

Kerry: China, India, Russia, need to lower emissions

United Nations, Feb. 20: The world's big emitting countries, including China, India, Russia and Japan, need to really step up and begin to lower greenhouse gas emissions, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry

has said as he called on all nations to raise their ambition to fight against climate change.

Kerry on Friday joined UN Secretary-General An-

tonio Guterres for a special virtual event to mark the United States rejoining the Paris Agreement.

We need the United States and every country to determine they will get on a path toward net-zero emissions by 2050. That is not something we will do by countries just stepping up and saying, Hey! We commit, here we are. Yeah, we'll do it by 2050. That doesn't work. That doesn't

cut it. That is not the way that we get to go to Glasgow, Kerry said.

The United Kingdom will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow in November this year.

The COP26 summit will bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

— PTI

Russia says detected first case of H5N8 avian flu in humans

Moscow, Feb. 20: Russia said Saturday its scientists had detected the first case of transmission of the H5N8 strain of avian flu to humans and had alerted the World Health Organisation.

"Information about the world's first case of transmission of the avian flu (H5N8) to humans has already been sent to the World Health Organisation," the head of Russia's health watchdog Rospotrebnadzor, Anna Popova, said in televised remarks.

The highly contagious strain is lethal for birds but has never before been reported to have spread to humans. Popova said that

ARGENTINE HEALTH MINISTER RESIGNS

Buenos Aires, Feb. 20: President Alberto Fernandez removed Argentina's health minister Friday after a well-known local journalist said he had been given a Coronavirus vaccination preferentially after requesting one from the minister.

— AP

MAR. 8 LOCKDOWN IN TORONTO

Toronto, Feb. 20: A lockdown and stay at home order is being extended in Toronto, Canada's largest city until at least Mar. 8.

Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott said Saturday that extension was a difficult but necessary decision.

— AP

important scientific discovery," saying "time will tell" if the virus can further mutate.

"The discovery of these mutations when the virus has not still acquired an ability to transmit from human to human gives us all, the entire world, time to prepare for possible mutations and react in an adequate and timely fashion," Popova said.

Located in Koltsovo outside the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, the Vektor State Virology and Biotechnology Center has developed one of Russia's several Coronavirus vaccines.

— AFP

Nasa releases pic of rover's Mars landing

Cape Canaveral, Florida, Feb. 20: The world got its first close-up look at a Mars landing on Friday, as Nasa released a stunning picture of its newest rover being lowered onto the dusty red surface.

The photo was released less than 24 hours after the Perseverance rover successfully touched down near an ancient river delta, where it will search for signs of ancient life and

set aside the most promising rock samples for return to Earth in a decade.

Nasa equipped the spacecraft with a record 25 cameras and two microphones, many of which were turned on during Thursday's descent.

"This is something that we've never seen before," flight system engineer Aaron Stehura noted at a news conference. "It was stunning, and the team was

awestruck. There's just a feeling of victory that we were able to capture these and share it with the world."

Chief engineer Adam Iltzner called the picture "iconic," putting it right up there with photos of Apollo 11's Buzz Aldrin on the moon, Saturn as seen by Voyager 1, and the Hubble Space Telescope's "pillars of creation" shot.

— AP

Court rejects Navalny appeal

Moscow, Feb. 20: A Moscow court on Saturday rejected Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's appeal against his prison sentence, even as the country faced a top European rights court's order to free the Kremlin's most prominent foe.

Navalny was sentenced earlier this month by a lower court to two years and eight months in prison for violating terms of his probation while recuperating in Germany from a nerve agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusation. Navalny, 44, an anti-corruption crusader and President Vladimir Putin's most vocal critic, appealed the prison sentence and asked to be released. The Moscow City Court's judge on Saturday only slightly reduced his sentence to just over 2 1/2 years in prison, ruling that a month-and-half Navalny spent under house arrest in early 2015 will be deducted from his sentence.

Navalny's arrest and imprisonment have fuelled a huge wave of protests across Russia. Authorities responded with a sweeping crackdown, detaining about 11,000 people, many of whom were fined or given jail terms ranging from seven to 15 days. Russia has rejected Western criticism of Navalny's arrest and the crackdown on demonstrations as meddling in its internal affairs.

In a ruling Tuesday, the



Alexei Navalny

European Court of Human Rights ordered the Russian government to release Navalny, citing "the nature and extent of risk to the applicant's life."

The Strasbourg-based court noted that Navalny has contested Russian authorities' argument that they had taken sufficient measures to safeguard his life and well-being in custody following the nerve agent attack. The Russian government has rebuffed the Strasbourg-based court's demand, describing the ruling as unlawful and "inadmissible" meddling in Russia's affairs.

In the past, Moscow has abided by the ECHR's rulings awarding compensations to Russian citizens who have contested verdicts in Russian courts, but it never faced a demand by the European court to set a convict free. In a sign of its long-held annoyance with the Strasbourg court's verdicts, Russia last year adopted a constitutional amendment declaring the priority of national legislation over international law.

— AP

Oppn to Biden budget nominee

Washington, Feb. 20: The nomination of Neera Tanden to lead the White House Office of Management and Budget was thrown in doubt Saturday as Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia became the first Democratic lawmaker to oppose her confirmation. During her confirmation hearings, Tanden apologised for spending years attacking top Republicans on social media. She is a former adviser to Hillary Clinton and served as president of the liberal-leaning Center for American Progress.

With the Senate evenly divided between 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats, she'll likely need support from at least one Republican to win confirmation. "I believe her overtly partisan statements will have a toxic and detrimental impact on the important working relationship between members of Congress and the next director of the Office of Management and Budget," Manchin said in a statement.

He went on to say that, at a time of grave crisis, "it is more important than ever that we chart a new bipartisan course that helps address the many serious challenges facing our nation." It's the first real test that Biden has faced on a nomination, with most of his picks for Cabinet positions sailing through the chamber with bipartisan support.

Tanden had also disparaged some Democrats on social media, most notably Sen. Bernie Sanders, the independent from Vermont. Biden, asked Saturday whether he would pull Tanden's nomination, said he wouldn't. "I think we are going to find the votes and get her confirmed," Biden said.

Moments earlier, the White House had issued a statement defending her. "Neera Tanden is an accomplished policy expert who would be an excellent Budget Director and we look forward to the committee votes next week and to continuing to work toward her confirmation through engagement with both parties," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

Tanden would be the first woman of colour to lead the OMB, which leads efforts to ensure an administration's priorities are reflected in legislation and regulations. The Senate Budget Committee is scheduled to vote on her nomination next week.

— AP

3 SEPARATE KABUL BLASTS KILL 5, HURT 2

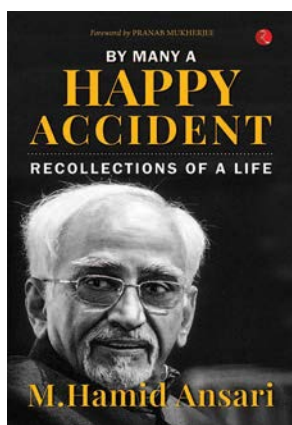
Kabul, Feb. 20: Three separate explosions in the Afghan capital Kabul on Saturday killed at least five people and wounded two others, a police official said.

No group claimed responsibility. The first blast targeted a civilian car wounding both travellers inside the vehicle. The second explosion targeted a car in a north-western Kabul neighbourhood in which national army soldiers were travelling, killing two soldiers. A civilian passerby was also killed.

The third explosion destroyed a police car in western Kabul killing two police officers. Kabul police said investigations were underway.

— AP



**INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS
NON-FICTION**


**1 BY MANY A
HAPPY ACCIDENT:
RECOLLECTIONS
OF A LIFE**
M. Hamid Ansari
Rupa, ₹795

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

**3 THE BATTLE OF
BELONGING**
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph, ₹799

4 A PROMISED LAND
Barack Obama
Penguin Viking, ₹1,999

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

**6 MISSION ECONOMY- A
MOONSHOT GUIDE TO
CHANGING CAPITALISM**
Mariana Mazzucato
Allen Lane, ₹799

**7 HOW TO AVOID A
CLIMATE DISASTER**
Bill Gates
Allen Lane, ₹999

**8 AGENT SONYA- LOVER,
MOTHER, SOLDIER, SPY**
Ben Macintyre
Penguin, ₹799

**9 JUGALBANDI: THE BJP
BEFORE MODI**
Vinay Sitapati
Penguin Viking, ₹799

**10 EMPIRELAND: HOW
IMPERIALISM HAS
SHAPED MODERN
BRITAIN**
Sathnam Sanghera
Penguin Viking, ₹999


FICTION

1 SHUGGIE BAIN
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹499

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

3 THE LAST QUEEN
Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni
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4 A TIME FOR MERCY
John Grisham
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₹699

5 WRITERS & LOVERS
Lily King
Picador, ₹699

6 HOMELAND ELEGIES
Ayad Akhtar
Tinder Press, ₹1,050

7 HAMNET
Maggie O' Farrell
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8 A BOOKSHOP IN PARIS
Ellen Feldman
Simon & Schuster, ₹399

**9 WHAT THE BODY
REMEMBERS**
Shauna Singh Baldwin,
Tara- India Research
Press, ₹599

**10 SINBAD AND THE
TRUMPET OF ISRAFIL**
Kevin Missal
Penguin, ₹250

Bahrison, New Delhi

Conversations from JLF 2021, largest literary show on earth



Sucheta Dasgupta

diary

The world's largest literature festival, JLF, is back again with its lavish intellectual fare, albeit in an online-only avatar. Thanks to the hard work of the organisers, that has not turned out to be limiting or constraining in any fashion.

Saraswati ke bhaandar kee badhi apoorav baat, jyo kharche tyon tyon badhe, bin kharche ghat jaat. With knowledge is associated this counterintuitive fact; that in the places where you expend it, it expands and, in the absence of that, it does verily contract. Novelist and festival co-director Namita Gokhale opened the 14th edition of JLF with this couplet from the quill of Vrind, the 17th century Marwari saint.

Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world. That is what Albert Einstein believed, and that is the connect between science and the arts. In the very next session, Tilly Blyth, head of collections and principal curator at the Science Museum in London, came out with this mind-expanding thought.

India is a little bit like Italy but with a billion people, said quantum physicist Carlo Rovelli, writer of *Helgoland*, during a scintillating conversation with astronomer Priyamvada Natarajan. Rovelli is the founder of the loop quantum gravity theory. What brought you to Buddhist philosophy as a way of understanding these complex concepts, said Natarajan to Rovelli. Rovelli said, quantum mechanics tell us three things. Two of them are relatively simple and one is mysterious. Quantum physics tells us about granularity. It tells us that the space in which we live is granular, not continuous. The second thing it tells us is that this space consists of things that move randomly. The third and mysterious thing is that quantum mechanics is a theory that tells us about not how things are at a given place and time but what you are going to see. If you try to fill in the gaps in-between it does not always work. So the mystery of quantum mechanics is still open. And that is where my interest in Buddhist thought emerged. It is the breakdown of determinism and the fact that an observer can alter the results just by being present, that is



Carlo Rovelli

what is interesting, Natarajan summarised quite cogently. Nagarjuna, the third century Mahayana philosopher, said that all notions are provisional after a point. There is no ultimate essence to anything, Rovelli explained. There are no qualia, Natarajan agreed. An object manifests only in relation to others. Without them, the object is "empty". Is this what is then meant when one is asked not to take anything too seriously?

S. Hareesh's controversial novel, *Moustache* (original *Meesha*) has won the 2020 JCB Prize for Literature. It is all about the fascination of the familiar, says Professor Tejaswini Niranjana, depicting as it does life in the Kuttanad region of Kerala. To her credit, translator



S. Hareesh

Jayasree Kalathil ably conveys the mesmerising quality of Hareesh's prose to non-Malayali readers. But author Aruni Kashyap says it is also a novel that misbehaves. We expect novels to run in a linear way, to follow one story or one character. Here, there are multiple worlds, multiple stories, multiple protagonists. And in many ways that is the Indian reality, it is very polyphonic, multi-layered. What gets published in the British, American and Canadian literary markets, kind of, decides how a novel should be. But growing up reading Indian literature one sees how we have



adapted the European form to ourselves. One of the big things is that we never have a single character; he informs his audience. Interestingly, the introduction to Hareesh's book has the following, liberating, lines: Novels are free countries. You cannot take responsibility for what your characters do.

The first amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1951 started the tradition of Indian governments using executive power to subdue the judiciary, posited journalist Karan Thapar to which historian Tripurdamani Singh agreed. Singh has recently published his *Sixteen Stormy Days: The Story of the First Amendment of the Constitution of India*. The justification about "the will of the people" that was used by Jawaharlal Nehru (to curb free speech in order to abolish zamindari, introduce caste-based reservations and censor publications deemed as national security threats) really set a trend from which there was no going back, he added. Sedition seems to be one of the favourite instruments of the Narendra Modi government, but it was pretty favourable to previous governments as well, said Thapar. In 1950, the



Tripurdamani Singh

Punjab high court famously read down the law of sedition in the Master Tara Singh case and the first amendment in 1951 reintroduced the law of sedition. Thus Nehru, Sardar Patel and B.R. Ambedkar, the three people that we regard as champions of democracy don't emerge brilliantly from this story, he concluded. Singh responded: Nehru is a complex figure. He had moral uncertainties. But he had so much public support that he did what he wanted. It was juxtaposed by a very pedantic commitment to the procedures of democracy, he was, for



Namita Gokhale

instance, very fastidious about attending parliament. Ambedkar, who only resigned several months after the passing of the amendment, was a bit of a misfit in the Nehru government and did not carry too much weight, did not get much of a say in matters. He probably went along because of the social justice aspect of the amendment. Patel, considered free speech as irrational exuberance. Nehru had used the powers of Article 392 to pass the amendment, much the same way as Modi used Article 370, Thapar commented.

The paradoxes of the life of

What gets published in the British, American and Canadian literary markets, kind of, decides how a novel should be. But in Indian novels, there are always multiple arcs, many characters.

— ARUNI KASHYAP

the nineteenth century Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt are movingly rendered in a play, titled *Betrayed by Hope*, co-authored by Namita Gokhale and Professor Malashri Lal. You have made Jaipur famous not only in Jaipur but the world over, given it a brand name really, Lal said to Gokhale at the panel discussion. Interestingly, Dutt, too, has a connection with Rajasthan. The play that he wrote called *Krishnakumari* is based on a legend that is coming to us through Colonel James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Why Dutt now?

What if I were to invite Dutt to JLF, mused Gokhale. How would he behave? How would we handle him? I am sure he would be a difficult writer to look after, but a brilliant speaker. I am obsessed by the writing process. In 2004, I wrote a review of *Heart of a Rebel Poet* as well as another book on Dutt, and I resolved there and then to do a play around them because the letters in the *Heart of a Rebel Poet* were automatically, naturally, spontaneously, forming a sequence of five acts. We have tried to pay a tribute to

the great genius of this man overshadowed by the dramatic and colourful and ultimately tragic details of his life.

The Booker-shortlisted Adam Foulds's new novel, *Dream Sequence*, is about the brutality of fame and what happens when fandom turns to obsession. *Dream Sequence* explores what it is to live in our current moment, with its porous borders between the inner and the outer life. Foulds was asked by Elaine Canning to talk about the blurring of the dream and the magical with the real in the novel. In the



Priyanka Chopra Jonas

word, dream, we have the double meaning of ambition, in the sense of something that we aspire to and the sense of something that is unreal, a fantasy. Both these meanings are captured in the lives of the two main characters. In life, too, there is more and more the saturation of fantasy and the liquefying of reality in people's lives that is happening in so many ways, in terms of our online life and political life, where we are entering a kind of dream sequence very frequently. Unlike in earlier times, today, with social media, we can track the celebrities we are

interested in real time, in terms of where they are and what they are doing, and we can interact with them and have them respond to us, and yet it is all saturated with fantasy and does not really mean what we might hope it could mean, Foulds said. His observations were immediately relatable.

In her chat with author Shobhaa De on her autobiography, *Unfinished*, actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas spoke highly of her co-actor in the film, *The White Tiger*, Adarsh Gourav, as well as the success of the OTT (over-the-top) platform. Adarsh has done tremendous work and might be nominated as one of the first Indian leading men, she averred. But Chopra Jonas has an unfinished agenda. It wasn't in people's consciousnesses that a brown person can be the lead of the show, she said to De. Literally, there used to be a saying in Hollywood during that time that black and brown movies do not work for audiences outside America. This was the insider's myth and, incredibly, we have been able to change that in just five years' time. *The White Tiger* is probably historic. It has an all-Indian star cast that was the No. 1 movie in the world on the largest streaming platform in the world. That's what I want to normalise — seeing people who look like us. We have the largest movie industry in the world. Why can't we have that kind of representation in English speaking entertainment? Talk about game changers?

Visit www.jaipurliteraturefestival.com to register and attend. February 28 is the last day.

Clever treatise marries economics, storytelling



Savita Patel

review

What does Economics have to do with how I protect my shoes from thieves outside a temple, or with the "atithi devo bhava" motto, or whether to wear a seatbelt versus solely relying on a prayer to keep me safe while driving? Virginia Tech's Dr Sudipta Sarangi's book *The Economics of Small Things* entertains us with often witty anecdotes as he brings out connections between economics and everyday choices. Delightful incidents from films, music industry, social media, history, and author's personal experiences intersect in this book to reveal how laws of economics govern social norms and preferences.

Mahatma Gandhi's economically non-defensible complaint against the railways makes for an interesting case to talk about economic motives behind pricing of goods. Laws of demand explain why the best alphonso mangoes get exported from India and become cheaper abroad. The financial success of the

music company T-series and the profitable placement of breakfast cereals in a grocery store, demonstrate how you can benefit from writing a resume that uses the concept of product differentiation. Managers can learn team building skills from a gang of Scandinavian shoe stealers via the complementary goods theory. The story of Pied Piper of Hamelin is analyzed using game theory to prove that it is wise to not keep your work skills a secret if you want to be paid for them. I wish I had such an easy to read and humorous collection of examples to relate complicated economic theories with, when I was studying for my Bachelors in Economics.

Dr Sarangi weaves anecdotes, recent and historical economic incidents with fascinating studies by economists, including Nobel laureates, to create stories that elucidate the reasoning behind human exploits. To give an example, here is an excerpt from the chapter "A Tale of Two Bounties" — Apparently, worried about the number of cobras in Delhi, the British colonial

government had started offering a bounty to anyone who turned in a dead cobra. The story goes that in response to this, some smart people started farming cobras. As a result, the government finally had to kill the programme. The German economist, Horst Siebert, is supposed to have coined the term 'Cobra Effect' to describe the phenomenon in a book where he provided numerous examples of such perverse incentives. The author describes various riveting incidents to interpret that incentives impact human behaviour but large incentives like bounties can distort human behaviour. Hence nation states don't deal with hostage takers or protect falling banks to not encourage more hostage taking or risky financial practices.

Economics of Small Things comprises of chapters that don't have to be read in any particular order. The flexibility allows one to read the book in small chunks over time or smile through it in one go, like I did. Professor Sarangi's book tells tales of everyday economics, in a style that makes one reminiscent of long conversations with friends over endless cups of tea. The book has elements of a travelogue-cum-memoir, the author drawing upon personal encounters, funny anecdotes, and travels to

show how the world can be explored through the spectrum of economics. This excerpt is from the author's time in Istanbul for the Fourth World Congress of the Game Theory Society aka Game Theory Olympics in the chapter "Palaces, Raki and Game Theory" — Drinking raki usually requires a group of good friends and plenty of food, especially cheese (peynir in Turkish) and kebabs, and the circle that is formed is the equivalent of the Indian adda. So gather up a bunch of friends, order plenty of food, eat a bit and raise a toast (serefe in Turkish) and take a sip; no bottoms up

here. If you are looking to generate some surefire table talk, this book is brimming with tales, incidents, events and phenomenon — a conversation starter, its engaging stories and facts make it a delightful read for fiction and non-fiction lovers. Dr Sarangi teaches a popular course, "Economic Puzzles in History, Literature & Movies" at Virginia Tech.

Being easy to relate to, *The Economics of Small Things* appeals to both young minds like my tween son who could connect with many concepts including that of "the free rider", and to specialists like Kaushik Basu, who wrote the foreword. Cornell University professor, Kaushik Basu was formerly the chief economist at the World Bank and chief economic advisor to the Government of India.

The word, economics, is synonymous with complex and difficult to grasp terms such as income, inflation and interest rates. This is a rare storytelling from an economist. It builds a lot of anticipation as chapters progress, hence it could have ended with a crescendo rather than a summation. If economics were a stand-up comedian, it would become *The Economics of Small Things*.

Savita Patel is a writer and producer, based in San Francisco Bay Area, USA



**THE ECONOMICS OF
SMALL THINGS**
By SUDIPTA SARANGI
Penguin Books
₹299

SHORT TAKES

Alfiya punches 1st gold for India

New Delhi: Indian women boxers continued their fine run as Alfiya Pathan (81+kg) claimed the country's first gold medal even as five others stormed into the finals of the 30th Adriatic Pearl Tournament in Budva, Montenegro. Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg), Vinka (60kg), Arundhati (69kg) and Sanamacha Chanu (75kg) have made the finals in their respective categories. An Asian junior girls champion in 2019, Alfiya notched up an easy 5-0 win against Daria Kozorev of Moldova. Nagpur's Alfiya looked in complete control throughout the bout and made the opponent work hard with her swift movement and precise punches. The Indian contingent has so far assured itself of 12 medals with five women eyeing gold. — *PTI*

Manu miffed with Air India officials

New Delhi: Tokyo Olympics medal prospect Manu Bhaker has demanded action against two Air India employees for allegedly "harassing" and "insulting" the pistol shooter while she tried to board a flight to Bhopal from Delhi. The 19-year-old Commonwealth Games and Youth Olympics gold medalist pistol shooter eventually managed to board the aircraft on Friday evening after the intervention of Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju. Manu, one of the country's brightest medal hopes at the upcoming Games, thanked Rijiju for his prompt intervention but is also hoping for action against the Air India officials at Delhi airport. Later, Air India, too, apologised for the conduct of of its staff. — *PTI*

Pak may push for T20 WC relocation

Karachi: Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ehsan Mani said they will push for the upcoming T20 World Cup's "relocation" to the UAE if India doesn't provide a written assurance that its team, fans and scribes will be granted visas for the event. During an interaction at the PCB headquarters, Mani said his board had expressed their views to the ICC. "We are not seeking written assurances for the visas of the national team only, but for the fans, officials and journalists as well," Mani added, "We have told the ICC that India should give written assurances by the end of March so that we know where we stand or we will push for the relocation of the World Cup from India to UAE," he said. India will host the T20 WC in October-November. — *PTI*

Pakistan League hit by Covid-19

Karachi: One player has tested positive for coronavirus while another player and an official were quarantined after breaching disease protocols ahead of the start of the Pakistan Super League in Karachi on Saturday. Six teams are vying for the title in the sixth edition of the Twenty20 league, which runs from February 20 to March 22 in Karachi and Lahore. — *AFP*

Live on TV

TENNIS

Australian Open: Men's doubles final from 9.30 am; Men's singles final from 1.30 pm on Sony Six, Sony Ten 2, HD

CRICKET

South Africa T20 Challenge: Cobras vs Titans from 1.30 pm; Warriors vs Dolphins from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

PSL: Lahore Qalandars vs Peshawar Zalmi from 2.30 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Bengaluru vs Goa from 4.50 pm; Kerala Blasters vs Chennaiyin from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: West Ham vs Tottenham Hotspur from 5.30 pm; Aston Villa vs Leicester City from 7.30 pm; Arsenal vs Manchester City from 10 pm; Manchester United vs Newcastle United from 12.20 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: AC Milan vs Inter Milan from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 1; Atalanta vs Napoli from 10.30 pm; Benevento vs Roma from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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O! SAKE TIME

Japan's Naomi dominates Brady to win Oz Open again

Melbourne, Feb. 20: Japan's Naomi Osaka dismissed Jennifer Brady in straight sets to win the Australian Open and underline her growing hold on women's tennis on Saturday.

Osaka edged a tight first set but controlled the second to win 6-4, 6-3 in 77 minutes in front of 7,381 fans at Rod Laver Arena.

Third seed Osaka preserves her 100 percent record in Grand Slam finals after winning the 2018 and 2020 US Opens and the 2019 title in Melbourne.

The reigning US Open champion, who beat her idol Serena Williams in the Melbourne semi-finals, has now won two of the last three Grand Slams as her status and reputation soars.

"We played in the semis of the US Open a couple of months ago and I told everyone that you're going to be a problem," Osaka told Brady at the trophy presentation.

"And I was right. It's really incredibly to me to see your growth over the past few months, it's really cool for me to see."

Osaka, 23, is only the third player after Monica Seles and Roger Federer to win their first four major finals, and will now rise to second in the world rankings.

She saved two match points in the fourth round against Garbine Muguruza and swept past Williams in straight sets in the semis.

On Saturday, Osaka wore down fellow big-hitter Brady, and then lifted her racquet above her head in celebration of her win as the crowd roared. After sealing back-to-back Slam titles twice, Osaka has won half the majors she's contested since beating Williams to win her first in 2018.

"Thank you for coming and watching, it feels really incredible for me," she told the crowd, which was capped at half-capacity over coronavirus concerns. I didn't play my last Grand Slam with fans so just to have this energy really means a lot."

US OPEN REMATCH

The Japanese survived a



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates with the winner's trophy after her women's singles final match against Jennifer Brady of the USA in the Australian Open on Saturday. — *AFP*

You don't go into a final wanting to be the runner-up. For me, I feel like every opportunity that I play a Slam is an opportunity to win a Slam.

— **NAOMI OSAKA** after winning the Australian Open crown

seesaw start to gain control, reeling off six straight games en route to the title.

It was a rematch of last year's epic US Open semi-final, described by some as the best match of 2020, but Osaka triumphed far more comfortably on this occasion.

Before the match, Osaka

had pinpointed her return as the key, but she was helped out by a shaky Brady who lost her serve in the fourth game after two double faults.

But Brady, the 22nd seed, hit back with a break and she continued to pile pressure on Osaka's serve.

A brilliant lob winner,

showcasing her trademark athleticism, gave a pumped-up Brady a break point in the ninth game, but Osaka held on.

Brady then played a sloppy game on serve to hand over the set to Osaka, who had a 20-0 record at Melbourne Park when winning the first set. — *AFP*

MIXED DOUBLES TITLE FOR RAM & KREJCIKOVA

Melbourne, Feb. 20: Barbora Krejcikova and Rajeev Ram won their second Australian Open mixed doubles title in three years on Saturday with a 6-1, 6-4 win over home pairing Sam Stosur and Matthew Ebden.

For Krejcikova it was her third Australian Open title in a row after combining with Nikola Mektic of Croatia to win the mixed doubles a year ago. She had lost in the women's doubles final with fellow Czech Katerina Siniakova on Friday to Elise Mertens and Aryna Sabalenka, but put her disappointment behind her in just 59 minutes on Rod Laver Arena. "We had a year off as a team, but she didn't have a year off and won this thing last year," Ram said of Krejcikova at the presentation ceremony. — *AFP*

LOW-KEY CELEBRATION FOR OSAKA

Melbourne, Feb. 20: Japan's Naomi Osaka said she's living her "dreams" after winning the Australian Open, adding that she'll celebrate with anime and pizza. "I'm really just living my dreams," she told Channel Nine after her win.

"I'm always shaking a little bit (at the end). Thank God I had three match points."

Reinforcing her reputation herself as tennis's leading light, having won four of her last eight Slams she's played, Osaka warned she was not satisfied. But after her triumph, Osaka planned a low-key celebration.

"I'm probably going to watch some anime... Maybe (eat) pizza... And go to sleep." — *AFP*

Novak faces 'challenger' Medvedev in final

Melbourne, Feb. 20: Novak Djokovic says going unbeaten in eight Australian Open finals will give him confidence in Sunday's decider, but he'll need more than that to overcome "the man to beat" — red-hot Russian Daniil Medvedev.

The Serbian world number one is into his ninth decider at Melbourne Park as he targets an 18th Slam title to close the gap on Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who have 20 each.

It has been a rollercoaster ride to get there, with Djokovic uncharacteristically dropping five sets as he battled an abdominal injury that nearly forced him to pull out.

But after his semi-final, Djokovic said he was feeling better than at any time

during the past fortnight as he prepares to defend his crown against a man on a 20-match unbeaten streak.

The Serb heads into the showpiece on Sunday evening with the phenomenal record of never losing a final on Melbourne's famous blue courts in eight attempts spanning 13 years.

Djokovic will also be playing his 28th Grand Slam final, in contrast to the Russian's second.

But the 33-year-old, who swept past qualifier Aslan Karatsev in the semi-finals, said while experience was clearly an advantage, Medvedev was also in electric form.

"Of course it contributes to more confidence, prior to coming into the finals knowing that I never lost



Novak Djokovic

in the finals or semi-finals just makes me feel more comfortable being on the court," he said.

Medvedev is unbeaten since last November, including a straight-sets drubbing of the Serb at the ATP Finals in London, with Djokovic deeming

him "the man to beat".

"He's just so solid. Also, I heard (commentator) Jim Courier calling him a master chess player because of the way he tactically positions himself on the court, and it's true," he said.

"He's definitely a very

smart tennis player."

'HE'S THE FAVOURITE'

Medvedev, who has dropped just two sets so far, insisted that despite having all the momentum he was still the underdog.

"He's the favourite because he didn't lose. On eight occasions that he was here in the semis he won the tournament," said the 25-year-old.

"Me, I'm... The challenger, the guy that challenges the guy who was eight times in the final and won eight times. And I'm happy about it."

"I know that to beat him you need to just show your best tennis, be at your best physically maybe four or five hours, and be at your best mentally maybe for five hours," he added. — *AFP*

VIJAY HAZARE | TROPHY

Rinku stars as UP stun K'taka

Bengaluru, Feb. 20: Rinku Singh smashed an unbeaten 62 as Uttar Pradesh stunned defending champions Karnataka by nine runs via the VJD Method in their rain-truncated Vijay Hazare Trophy Group C opener here on Saturday.

Chasing 247 in the stipulated 50 overs, Uttar Pradesh had a slow start and were 150/4 in 32 overs, but then, the Kolkata Knight Riders left-hander took charge of the proceedings, hitting seven boundaries and one six in his 61-ball knock.

Rain halted play at 45.2 overs with UP placed at 215/4, which was nine runs more than the par score of 207.

UP's opening duo of Abhishek Goswami (54 off 67 balls) and Karan Sharma (40 off 74 balls) initially struggled to get going against the Karnataka new ball bowlers, Abhimanyu Mithun and Prasidh Krishna, managing only nine runs in the first five overs.

The pair put on a century stand but they lost three wickets for nine runs as the defending champions looked to seize the momentum, But Rinku turned it

around with his brisk half-century.

A depleted Karnataka, who were missing the services of K.L. Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Manish Pandey and K Gowtham, also got off to a slow start.

The promising Devdutt Padikkal (52 from 84 balls; 7x4) laid the foundation before No. 6 Aniruddha Joshi's blazing 48-ball 68 (4x4, 6x4) propped up their total.

At Alur, veteran opener Robin Uthappa led Kerala's chase of 259 runs with an explosive 85-ball 107 (10x4, 4x6) before rain stopped play in 38.2 overs with Kerala 233/4, which was above the par score as per the VJD Method.

In the second match at Alur, Railways thrashed Bihar by 10 wickets with openers Mrunal Devdhar (105 not out) and Pratham Singh (72 not out) taking 29 overs to cruise to a 190-run target.

Opting to bowl, Railways exploited the conditions beautifully as pacer T Pradeep rattled the top six batsmen to reduce Bihar to 64/6 in 13.3 overs on the way to his 6/43, before his new-ball parter Amit Mishra (3/30) cleaned up the tail to bundle out Bihar for 189 in 45.5 overs. — *AFP*

BRIEF SCORES

■ Karnataka 246/8 in 50 overs (Aniruddha Joshi 68, Devdutt Padikkal 52; Shivam Sharma 3/40) lost to Uttar Pradesh 215/4 in 45.2 overs (Rinku Singh 62 not out, Abhishek Goswami 54, Karan Sharma 40) by nine runs (VJD Method).

■ Odisha 258/8 in 45 overs (Sandeep Pattnaik 66, Gourav Choudhury 57, Kartik Biswal 45 not out) lost to Kerala 233/4 in 38.2 overs (Robin Uthappa 107, Sachin Baby 40; Sourav Kanoja 3/43) by 34 runs (VJD Method).

■ Bihar 189 in 45.5 overs (Anuj Raj 72, Shabbir Khan 46 not out; T Pradeep 6/43, Amit Mishra 3/30) lost to Railways 190 for no loss in 29 overs (Mrunal Devdhar 105 not out, Pratham Singh 72 not out) by 10 wickets.

■ Goa 263 all out in 49.1 overs (Snehal Kauthankar 81; K D Eknath 43; Atit Sheth 3/50; Krunal Pandya 3/62) lost to Baroda 264/5 in 48.3 overs (Vishnu Solanki 108, Krunal Pandya 71; Amit Verma 2-39, Amulya Pandekar 1-35) by five wickets.

■ Hyderabad 349/5 in 50 overs (Tilak Verma 156 not out, Tanmay Agarwal 86; R A Dey 2/45, A S Sarkar 1/42) beat Tripura 236 in 42 overs (Milind Kumar 67, Bikram Kumar Das 65; C V Milind 5/43, B Sandeep 2/37) by 113 runs.

■ Chhattisgarh 231 all out in 48.5 overs (Shashank Chandrakar 92, Ashutosh Singh 47; Arzan Nagwaswalla 6/54, Chintan Gaja 2/50) lost to Gujarat 232/7 in 48.1 overs (Dhruv Raval 38, B H Merai 38; Veer Pratap Singh 2/38) by three wickets.

■ Jharkhand 422/9 in 50 overs (Ishan Kishan 173, Anukul Roy 72; Virat Singh 68; Gourav Yadav 4/73, Shubham Sharma 1/44) beat Madhya Pradesh 98 all out in 18.5 overs (Abhishek Bhandari 42; Venkatesh Iyer 23; Varun Aaron 6/37; Bal Krishna 2/8) by 324 runs.

■ Punjab 288/4 in 50 overs (Gurkeerat Mann 139 not out, Prabhsimran Singh 71; Baba Aparajith 1/15, R Sai Kishore 1/31) lost to Tamil Nadu 289/4 in 49 overs (N. Jagadeesan 101, Baba Aparajith 88; Shahrulkhan Khan 55 not out; Siddharth Kaul 2/47, Karan Kalra 1/44) by six wickets.

■ Vidarbha 331/6 in 50 overs (Yash Rathod 117, Faiz Fazal 100; C Stephen 3/66, Girinath Reddy 2/79) lost to Andhra 332/7 in 49.2 overs (Ricky Bhui 101 not out, Hanuma Vihari 65; Darshan Nalkande 3/76, Aditya Thakare 2/76) by three wickets.

CLARKE FINDS IT HARD TO SEE SMITH PLAYING IN NEXT IPL

Melbourne, Feb. 20: Former Australia captain Michael Clarke finds it difficult to see premier batsman Steve Smith playing in the next IPL after fetching just ₹2.2 crore in the recent auctions, which left many surprised. Clarke was surprised that a batsman of Smith's calibre could not command more than what Delhi Capitals paid to buy him and felt he might pull out of the tournament due to "little hamstring strain".

"I know his T20 performances haven't been as good as he would have like — last year's IPL he wasn't great. I'm very surprised he has gone for the amount of money he

has, just under \$400,000 — which is still good money."

"But when you look at what he was getting (last season) and his role as captain of Rajasthan, don't be surprised if there's a little hamstring strain the little plane is meant to fly to India," Clarke said on the Big Sports Breakfast Podcast.

"For him to go away for an eight-week tournament and quarantine before the tournament starts — call it 11 weeks. I don't think he is going to give up 11 weeks away from his family and his partner for \$380,000."

Royals released Smith and he was bought by last-years runners-up Delhi Capitals. — *PTI*

Price paid for Morris this IPL would seem out of whack



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

Chris Morris was bought by Rajasthan Royals for a record-smashing ₹16.25 crore in the IPL's 'mini' auction last week. According to Kumar Sangakarra, cricket director of the franchise, Morris was seen of great and valuable support to spearhead Joffra Archer.

Those with longer memories might remember that Archer was purchased by Rajasthan Royals in 2018 for ₹7.20 crore. Even allowing for inflation, the price paid for South African all-

rounder Morris this time would seem out of whack. Imagine a support actor getting paid more than the lead star in a movie?

So, what exactly are the benchmarks for pricing players?

There are none. The IPL auction has its own logic, often at variance with linear logic. And yet, it is not entirely bereft of method and built only around madness, as some bewildered commentators have proclaimed last week.

In mini auctions particularly, franchises are look-

ing to augment strength by plugging gaps, building buffers, adding a sharper edge to the squad — that something extra that could take the team's performances higher and further. This can skew the bidding pattern dramatically.

Morris's selection is instructive in this respect. On the face of it, he was a run of the mill player among the 292 who went under the hammer last Thursday.

This was also reflected in his base price of ₹75 lakh, way below what most star international players command.

This is because his credentials at the international level were hardly stellar: 4 Tests matches (debut 2016), 42 ODIs (debut 2013) and 23 T20is (debut 2012).

His last Test came in 2017,

last ODI in the 2019 World Cup and last T20i a few months earlier the same year.

A highest Test score of 69, 62 in ODIs, 55 not out in T20is is nothing to gush over. The tally of wickets is 12 in Tests (36.25), 48 in ODIs (average 36.58), again very modest. It gets somewhat better in T20is (34 wickets at 20.50), but not earth shattering.

Unspectacular performances, compounded by politics of SA cricket marginalized Morris's appearances for his country.

However, take his displays in T20 cricket generally, which means largely in professional leagues across the world, and Morris becomes an altogether different player.

In 219 matches, he's scored 1,785 runs. The

average is modest, 21.25, but the strike rate of 151.78 is fantastic. In bowling, he has 275 wickets in 219 matches. The cost per wicket is low (22.05), the economy (7.74) and strike rates (17.00) impressive.

He can bowl at the start and at the death, and can hit the ball hard and long. Both these facets taken together make Morris a valuable commodity in this format.

Other multi-tasking international players who bagged huge purses are Glen Maxwell (14.25 crore), Kyle Jamieson (15 crore), Moeen Ali (7 crore), Sakib Al Hasan (3.5 crore).

Among uncapped India players, big gainers Krishnappa Gowtham (9.25 crore), Shahrulkhan (5.25 crore) and Shivam Dube (4.20 crore) were

those both bat and bowl. The clamour from franchises last week was largely for all-rounders and to some extent for in-form pace bowlers.

So Jhye Richardson and Meredith got handsome bids from Punjab for instance, but Aaron Finch and Shaun Marsh, were overlooked.

Steve Smith didn't go unsold but got only ₹20 lakh more from his base price of ₹2 crore — a mighty fall from what he was earning earlier.

Whether Morris is worth ₹16.25 crore is a question that will be asked through the season I suspect. Sangakarra admitted later that they could have got him for much less if there hadn't been a three-way bidding war. By the time this war ended, Morris

was laughing all the way to the bank.

Every auction throws up unexpected buys (remember Pawan Negi getting ₹8.5 crore from Delhi Daredevils a few seasons back?) though it is usually big stars — outside of 'icon' players like Dhoni, Kohli, Rohit, Tendulkar — who command most attention and money. Players like Kevin Pietersen, Yuvraj Singh, Pat Cummins for instance.

But getting a mega deal, while newsworthy, does not guarantee success. The three players mentioned in the preceding para — and Maxwell over several years for different franchises — could not justify the hype or the price. Can Morris, thrust into the limelight unexpectedly, break the jinx?