

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SUNDAY | 21 FEBRUARY 2021



NATION | 4
Disha bail order on Tuesday



WORLD | 5
Russian court rejects Navalny plea

SPORTS | 8
Osaka is Australian Open champion



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WEATHER

Max: 31.0°C
Min: 19.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Mostly.
Max/Min temp.
31/19 °C

COVID-19 C U N T

CASES	DEATHS
(+14,589)	(+100)
1,09,90,977	1,56,337

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+157)	(+0)
TS: 2,97,435	1,623
(+54)	(+0)
AP: 8,89,210	7,167

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

11,14,24,608

DEATHS
24,67,212

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

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
HUIJI CALENDAR
Rajab 8,1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.25 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.07 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.41 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 02.09 AM

COUNTER POINT

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

SHORT TAKES

₹1cr paid to Vizag gas victims kin: AP

New Delhi: The AP government has informed the NHRC that an ex gratia of ₹1 crore each has been paid to the families of the 12 people who died in the styrene gas leak tragedy in Visakhapatnam last May, officials said on Friday. The National Human Rights Commission had taken *suo motu* cognisance of media reports about the death of several persons and over 5,000 others falling sick due to leakage of styrene gas in the district on May 7.

Petrol in Mumbai for ₹97 per litre

New Delhi: Petrol price on Saturday touched an all-time high of ₹97 per litre in Mumbai while diesel rate crossed ₹88 -mark. Petrol price was hiked by record 39 paise per litre and diesel by 37 paise a litre, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. This the 12th straight day of price hike and the largest daily increase.

FM asks pvt sector to unleash spirits

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday exhorted the private sector to take advantage of corporate tax rate cut and other initiatives of the government, and unleash 'animal spirits' by enhancing investments to make India one of the fastest growing economies of the world.



The Air India Express flight which hit an electric pole while landing at Vijayawada International Airport at Gannavaram near Vijayawada on Saturday. — DC

Plane hits power pole at Vij airport, 70 escape unhurt

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Seventy persons on board an Air India Express flight had a lucky escape when a wing of the aircraft hit an electric pole while the aircraft taxiing to the terminal building at the Vijayawada international airport at Gannavaram near the city on Saturday. The aircraft had arrived from Doha with 19 passen-

gers for Vijayawada and the rest for Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu, the next destination. The aircraft was carrying 64 passengers and six crew members at that time. All of them were reported to be safe. Flight IX 1676 is operated once a week on the D o h a - V i j a y a w a d a - Tiruchirapalli route. Vijayawada airport director G. Madhusudhana Rao said, "While taxiing, the pilot took a

wrong turn and hit an electric pole at 4.52 pm. All passengers and crew are safe."The aircraft suffered some damage. The airport director said it had been grounded. "We have made arrangements for Vijayawada-bound passengers to reach their destinations while an alternative flight is being arranged for those who were to fly onward to Tiruchirapalli," Madhusudhana Rao said.

Phase IV Gram Panchayat polls today, 67 lakh to vote

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

The Phase IV of Andhra Pradesh gram panchayat polls will be held on Sunday. Nearly 67.75 lakh voters are expected to cast their vote between 6.30 am and 3.30 pm. Polling is scheduled to be held in 16 revenue divisions covering 161 mandals in all 13 districts in the state. Out of 3,299 positions of sarpanch notified, 554 were elected unanimously and no nominations were filed for two positions. With this, polling will be held for election of 2,743 sarpanches and 7,474 contestants are in the fray. Similarly, with regard to positions of ward member, out of 33,435 notified, 10,921 were elected unanimously while no nominations were filed for 91 positions. With this, polling will be held for election of 22,423 ward members and 52,700 contestants are in the fray. The authorities have set up 28,995 polling stations for the voters to turn up and exercise their franchise and of them, 6,047 have been identified as sensitive while 4,967 are hypersensitive. Security has been beefed up especially in these sensitive and hypersensitive polling stations to avoid any untoward incidents. Polling to be held in rev-

CANDIDATE VOWS FREEBIES LIKE BP, SUGAR TESTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 20

While candidates contesting gram panchayat polls are luring voters with gifts, cash and liquor in most places, Padala Ranga Reddy (48), a candidate from Ubalanka village in Ravulapalem mandal has adopted a novel approach. He has promised voters free medical diagnoses like B.P., diabetes and other tests, with cable TV connection and free ration thrown in for one year.

■ Page 2: Promises
notarised on stamp paper

enue divisions district-wise include: Srikakulam-Srikakulam, Tekkali and Palakonda; Vizianagaram-Vizianagaram; Visakhapatnam-Visakhapatnam; East Godavari-Amalapuram; West Godavari-Eluru; Krishna-Nuzvid; Guntur-Guntur; Prakasam-Markapur; Nellore-Nellore; Kurnool-Adoni; Anantapur-Penukonda; Kadapa-Jammalamadugu and Kadapa and Chittoor-Tirupati.

The authorities have set up 15,268 big size, 12,033 medium size and 10,583

CHICKEN, WHISKY TO LURE VOTERS FOR ELECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 20

1 kg of chicken and a quarter bottle of whisky are making voters decide on who they will vote for in the fourth phase of gram panchayat elections being held on Sunday. In Halaharvy village, six tonnes of chicken and a whisky quarter for each of 1,750 voters have been distributed. Neighbouring Jammalamadugu division also saw chicken-whisky combo incentivising voters.

■ Page 2: Hatcheries
minting money

small size ballot boxes for the benefit of voters to cast their vote. Covid-19 protective material is provided at the polling stations in order to protect both the polling staff and also the voters from getting infected with the virus. Coronaivrus infected patients are being allowed to cast their vote in the last one hour before completion of polling as a precautionary measure.

■ Page 2: Counting of votes
soon after voting

Different pitch



Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Karambir Singh along with Commander-in-Chief of Eastern Naval Command, Vice-Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, right, chat with former Indian Cricketers, Syed Kirmani and Roger Binny during the inauguration of Championship Golf Course at East Point Golf Club in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — K. MURALI KRISHNA

India, China talk to disengage more

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

India and China Corps Commanders on Saturday held their 10th round of talks to discuss disengagement from Depsang plains, Gogra-Hot Springs and Demchok friction points

in Ladakh, following the disengagement of the two sides on the north and south banks of Pangong Tso lake. The meeting was held in Moldo on Chinese side and started at around 10 am and was going on till reports last came in at 9.30

pm. The Indian delegation was led by 14 Corps commander Lt Gen. P.G.K. Menon. Naveen Srivastava, joint secretary (East Asia) from the ministry of external affairs was part of Indian delegation. India and China are likely to issued a joint state-

ment on the meeting. It is expected that India and China will first be able to reach an agreement on Gogra-Hot Springs. In the Depsang plains, Chinese troops are blocking Indian patrols from going to Patrolling Points 10 to 13.

Committee chairman plans to supply water from dam for cultivation to farmers by kharif in 2022

PROJECT | GOAL

Polavaram dam design panel for speeding up work

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

The Polavaram irrigation project's dam design review panel chairman A.B. Pandya has called for expediting the pace of works and preparations for standard procedure of taking up several works. A meeting chaired by the DDRP chairman and the Polavaram Project Authority chief executive officer Chandrasekhar Iyyacheri and other senior officials was held in Rajahmundry on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, Pandya stressed on speeding up the pace of works of various components of the project to ensure water is supplied for cultivation of crops to the farmers by completing execution of earth-cum-rock-fill dam by kharif season in 2022. He laid out a plan to handle the ensuing flood season to Godavari river in the June, 2021 and asked the officials to make arrangements to release flood water through the spillway. He felt the need to expedite works pertaining

to concrete works of spill channel and also other works pertaining to various components of the project. On construction of piers and erection of crest gates for spillway, he asked for the methodology used for such works and instructed the concerned authorities to prepare a standard procedure to be adopted for various works for better understanding of the works and also to take up a thorough scrutiny of such works also for maintaining quality.

He said that out of planned erection of 48 crest gates on spillway, so far 29 gates were set up and gave a series of suggestions to the officials to follow while installing the remaining gates. He also said that construction of 52 metres height spillway pillars was completed while works were in progress to lay the spillway bridge to a stretch of 1,128 metres and so far works on 1,105 metres were over. He further said that erection of 192 girders for construction of the spillway was also over.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has sought quick approval of revised cost estimates of Polavaram national project, and facilitating power utilities to swap high-cost debt with low-cost long term debt and to provide

access to low-cost finance to the state government for developing social infrastructure. The Chief Minister, interacting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Niti Aayog's Governing Council meeting, held virtually on Saturday, sought Centre's cooperation. He said that the aim of

policy formulation with respect to agriculture and allied sectors should be to reduce risks and difficulties faced by farmers. He drew attention to five key policy interventions to provide support to agriculture and allied sectors.

■ Page 2: Minimise cost of
crop production: Jagan

SHORT TAKES

4 file nominations for MLC polls

Vijayawada: Four independent candidates filed their nomination papers to contest in the biennial election to the AP Legislative Council from teachers' constituency on Saturday. From East-West Godavari teachers' constituency, Gandham Narayana Rao and Palivela Veerajai filed their nominations. From Krishna-Guntur teachers' constituency, Nageswaram Narasimham and Yarrakula Thulasiram filed their nominations.

VELLAMPALLI SAYS TD AND BJP DOING IMMORAL POLITICS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Minister for endowments Vellampalli Srinivas Rao alleged that Telugu Desam president N. Chandrababu Naidu and BJP leaders Somu Veerajai, and G.V.L. Narasimha Rao, a Rajya Sabha member, are trying to create communal disturbances despite Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy initiated measures for the protection of religious places. He stated that YSRC government had constructed the Antarvedi chariot within 90 days after it was commissioned by the Chief Minister, which shows the government's respect for all religions.

He alleged that Telugu Desam and BJP are misleading people in the name of religion for achieving political gains. However, the public seeing through such vindictive politics gave a befitting lesson to them by electing YSRC supporters in the gram panchayat elections.

Srinivas Rao visited various areas in the city under municipal election campaign in support of YSRC candidates.

He stated that people had no trust in Naidu and hence had defeated TD-backed candidates in his native Chandragiri constituency. He said Naidu was levelling baseless allegations on the issue of protection to temples and claimed that the government had initiated strong measures for the safety and protection of religious places. He added that Naidu, Narasimha Rao and Veerajai were trying to accuse the YSRC government in the Antarvedi issue despite Jagan Mohan Reddy asking for a CBI probe.

STEP UP EFFORTS TO PROTECT SANDERS, SAYS KISHAN REDDY

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 20

Union minister of state for home affairs G. Kishan Reddy called upon the AP government to step up efforts to protect the red sanders trees, endemic to Seshachalam forests, by bringing the smuggling activities to a complete zero.

The Union minister offered his prayers to lord Venkateswara in Tirumala on Saturday. Speaking to the media, Kishan Reddy expressed concern over the growing illegal red sanders smuggling activities in Seshachalam forest. He appealed to the state government to act tough on smugglers.

HATCHERIES TAKE ADVANTAGE, MINTING MONEY

from page 1

The story is no different in Mylavaram and Kondapuram mandals of Jammalamadugu, apart from Mantralayam and Adoni constituencies of Kurnool district. They have seen a surge in distribution of chicken and whisky. Villages in Adoni share their borders with Karnataka and they are also witnessing free flow of cheap liquor.

Though the Special Enforcement Bureau has been focussing on curbing flow of liquor by setting up checkpoints at several vantage points, availability of alcohol is as easy as attempting a song, said Munikrishna, a sarpanch aspirant.

Hatcheries and broiler producers are minting money due to the unexpected surge in demand for birds. A live bird is being sold for ₹100 in wholesale, while it retails at ₹160.

Meanwhile, the district administration is all set to conduct the fourth and final phase polling for 265 of total 292 gram panchayats on Sunday in 14 notified mandals of Adoni revenue division. 27 panchayats have been elected unanimously. 844 persons are in contesting in the 265 gram panchayats, district collector G. Veera Pandian said. A large number of police have been deployed to ensure that polling passes off smoothly, he stated.

GP 4th phase polls: Intense fight between YSRC, TD in Konaseema

Jana Sena is paying main attention to Razole, Amalapuram, P. Gannavaram

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 20

Both Ruling YSRC and Telugu Desam are carrying out more intensive campaigns in Konaseema Panchayats in East Godavari district for the fourth phase grama panchayat elections on February 21.

In many of these panchayats, the TD-supported candidates have not filed nominations while the Jana Sena nominees entered the fray. The Telugu Desam felt that with the Jana Sena support, the TD can get a majority of the seats in Konaseema area. Konaseema region is strong in political awareness and caste factor will be dominant in the villages.

The three parties are having their special strengths. G. Harish Mathur, son of the late Lok Sabha Speaker GMC Balayogi, is participating in the election campaign on behalf of TD-supported candidates in Konaseema.

He is touring the villages where TD supporters are in the fray. The people are welcoming him by showering flower petals on him.

"I want to function on the lines of my father. The YSRC got some seats via unanimous elections. But, I can confidently say that the TD would triumph in a majority of the panchayats where the contest is taking place," said Mathur.

He said that he is always available and people can approach him to sort out their problems. Mathur had unsuccessfully contested from Amalapuram Lok Sabha constituency in the 2019 polls.

Meanwhile, at Ravulapalem, former district cooperative marketing society president KV Satyanarayana Reddy is taking pride in campaigning for TD supported candidates as many of these were fielded by him.

However, ruling YSR Congress leaders are confident that they would win a majority of the seats in Konaseema. According to them, the TD lost its base in the region since the 2019 elections.

They said YSRC-supported candidates won in the elections in a majority of the seats due to the welfare schemes and development works of the Jagan government.

BC welfare minister Ch. Venugopal Krishna said the people of Konaseema are honouring YSRC as chief minister Jagan won the hearts of the people of the area by fulfilling his promises.

The housing and other welfare schemes would be a boon to the people of the area, he said.

Jana Sena-supported candidates are also campaigning vigorously in the elections. The party is paying main attention to Razole, Amalapuram and P. Gannavaram constituencies.



Polling staff collect election material at Gannavaram in Krishna district on Saturday for the fourth and last phase of Gram Panchayat elections.

NAGIREDDY TO INSPECT POLLING IN KRISHNA, WG

Vijayawada: Special Election observer V. Nagireddy to visit parts of Krishna and West Godavari districts to observe the election process of Gram Panchayat polls in phase-4 on Sunday. The special election observer and former Telangana election commissioner met the state election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar at his office on Saturday. Nagireddy inspected the arrangements for conducting the polls in both Krishna and West Godavari districts on Saturday.

CPM CONTESTING 22 DIVISIONS IN VIJAYAWADA CITY

Vijayawada: The CPM is contesting from 22 divisions of Vijayawada city in the municipal corporation elections. CPM state executive committee member Ch. Babu Rao asked people to elect honest persons as corporators for curbing corruption and developing Vijayawada city.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 20

The ruling YSR Congress leaders have firmly resolved to win the forthcoming Kadapa Municipal Corporation (KMC) elections. Even though it is quite likely that the civic body will inevitably be won by the ruling party, no prediction could be made for sure until the last day of withdrawals is over on March 3.

KMC has total 50 divisions. Nominations for these segments were received from March 11 to

Promises notarised on stamp paper

from page 1

Ranga Reddy has notarised his promises on a sworn affidavit. As per the affidavit, cable connections, ration and mineral water will be provided to people free of cost from March 1 to February 28. BP and diabetes tests too will not cost them anything. Rs. 10,000 scholarship will be extended to each of the 10 meritorious students of ZP High School. He would cancel house tax and water tax for the year 2022-23.

Padala Ranga Reddy has filed his nomination from ward member three and is supporting Medisetty

Surekha for the post of sarpanch. He told Deccan Chronicle that his village has not seen any development since his childhood. "There is no drainage to my village Ubalanka. Cement roads are in bad shape and there are no infrastructure facilities in the village. Still, there are nearly 1,700 cable connections in the village. I will not collect the monthly cable fee from the people in the village for one year," the candidate promised.

Ranga Reddy made it clear that he is not luring voters, but only telling them what he would do if he wins the election.

Counting of votes soon after voting

from page 1

Soon after polling is over at 3.30 pm, counting of votes will begin and the authorities have arranged counting centres with all requisite security arrangements to avoid any untoward incidents.

Apart from State Election Commission

authorities, the panchayat raj and rural development officials are also keeping watch on conduct of polling and counting of votes.

A command and control centre is set up at the office of commissioner of panchayat raj to monitor the election process at the respective centres.

Ruling party leaders determined to capture Kadapa corporation

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 20

The ruling YSR Congress candidates filed 85 of them, main opposition TDP 61, Congress 32, BJP 18, Jana Sena 5, CPI and CPM 12, other parties eight and independents 80. In six of these divisions – number 4, 12, 20, 21, 32 and 47 only YSR Congress candidates filed their nominations.

In 22 other divisions, except the ruling party contestants, all others withdrew from contest, just two days before the last date for withdrawals.

It is stated these withdrawals were owing to

threats, appeasement and temptations.

However, State Election Commission postponed the KMC elections following outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic.

Elections for Kadapa Municipal Corporation have been again announced exactly one year later. Ruling YSRC has reportedly started making efforts to ensure that maximum divisions are won by its candidates unanimously "by all means".

However, the state leadership of Telugu Desam

Party is trying to ensure that its candidates remain in fray.

Kottamaddi Suresh Babu, who is expected to be the mayoral candidate of YSRC, will contest from the 4th division and is expected to get elected unanimously.

Kadapa became a corporation in 2005, with Ravindranath Reddy, now MLA from Kamalapuram assembly constituency, being elected the first mayor. The second was Kottamaddi Suresh Babu, who is most likely to come back as mayor.

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States, Centre must engage in talks: CM

From page 1

He stated that it is imperative that during these critical times, state governments and the Centre should explore opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions to adopt a unified approach towards policy formulation for the country's economic revival. Complimenting Modi for his visionary leadership and Niti Aayog for specifying six pertinent agenda points for the meeting, he said that these points relate to vital areas and require utmost emphasis.

The Chief Minister said that with respect to the first agenda point of making India a global manufacturing hub, the give significant impediments to the manufacturing sector's growth are the exorbitant cost of funds available from financial institutions, high cost of power, delays associated with land procurement, delay and complexity in the grant of statutory clearances and rigid labour laws. He said state governments and the Union Government must take a deeper drive to understand the root-cause and make a conscious effort to introduce reforms to mitigate the hurdles.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said that for building infrastructure, state government's undertakings

take loans from financial institutions like PFC and REC at higher rates of interest of 10 to 11 per cent per annum. With this enormous debt-servicing requirement, the manufacturing units cannot hope to offer products that can compete with those from other states, where loan is available at interest rates as low as 2 to 3 per cent. He said that the state government was encouraging a performance-linked incentive scheme for new manufacturing units and compiled 229 reforms under the district business reform action plan of the Union government.

The Chief Minister said, "Despite my state's commitment to provide a business-friendly environment, industrialisation is yet to gather growth momentum. This is due to several constraints, resulting from the unjust and inequitable bifurcation of the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh.

"The bifurcation resulted in my State being deprived of tier I city status, infrastructure, employment opportunities and financial resources. The rapid industrialization of my State is possible if only "Special Category Status" is accorded. This was a commitment made on the floor of the Parliament and was a pre-condition to the bifurcation."

Minimise cost of crop production: Jagan

From page 1

He said, "Minimize costs associated with crop production, ensure availability of quality certified seeds, quality certified fertilisers and quality certified pesticides, ensure availability of post-harvest technologies and facilities such as storage, grading, processing etc. thereby enhancing quality and marketability of agricultural produce and given the vulnerability of the sector to vagaries of nature, ensure that the farmer is provided timely compensation for the loss suffered by him."

He added, "We have established 10,731 Rythu Bharosa Kendralu, one at every village, to provide a comprehensive solution to all agricultural needs that range from providing quality certified key farm inputs to enabling the sale of produce."

He said multipurpose facility centres are being created in coterminous with RBKs to provide facilities like dry storage and drying platforms, godowns, collection centres, cold rooms, primary processing and assaying equipment, bulk milk cooling units, automatic milk collection units and food processing units, which the farming community needs to enhance income not only from agriculture but also from allied activities as well.

"Specific to my state, to provide sustainable irrigation, I seek your sup-

port for quick approval of revised cost estimates and the timely completion of Polavaram irrigation project declared as a national project. The project is regarded as my state's lifeline and the completion of the same would contribute significantly to an increase in irrigated area."

Jagan Mohan Reddy urged the Centre to facilitate power utilities to swap high-cost debt with low-cost long term debt as this was the need of the hour for the sector's sustainability and survival.

He stated that for tertiary care, they were setting up 16 new medical colleges in different parts of the state and five multi-specialty hospitals in scheduled tribal areas under which three colleges have already been accorded sanction by GOI for part-funding. He requested funding for the remaining 13 medical colleges.

The Chief Minister said, "I believe that the services will be further improved with access to internet at the village level. In line with the vision of Bharat Net project, we seek to provide internet to every citizen and the public institution at the village level. We are also establishing digital public libraries in the villages, bringing the concept of 'work from home' closer to the people by providing them uninterrupted access to quality internet in these libraries at every village."

Naidu blames money for loss of TD in Kuppam

since 1989.

Instead of accepting defeat gracefully, Naidu went back to his old trick of describing the trouncing as loss of democracy and not that of his party. He attributed the drubbing to the State Election Commission's failure to prevent free flow of money aka purchase of votes by the rival YSR Congress-backed candidates in the polls.

Initially Naidu blamed the ruling party for forcing his party candidates to withdraw from the contest. When there were no such incidents, at least in Kuppam, and there was a contest everywhere, Naidu blamed the voters for falling prey to the inducements. If victory is due to "buying of votes" will it not apply to his seven consecutive victories from Kuppam?

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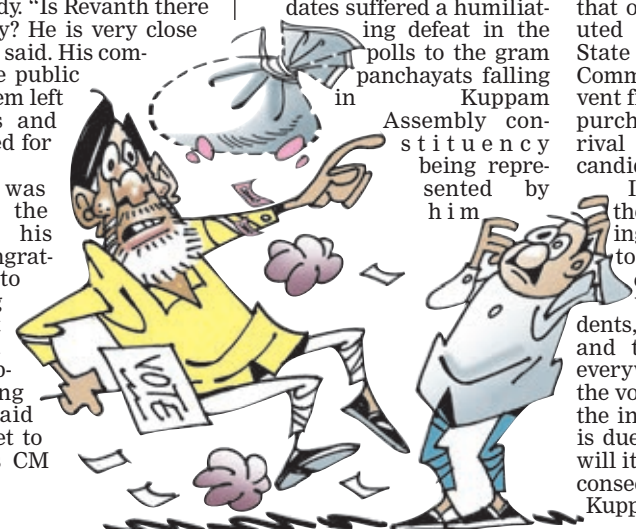
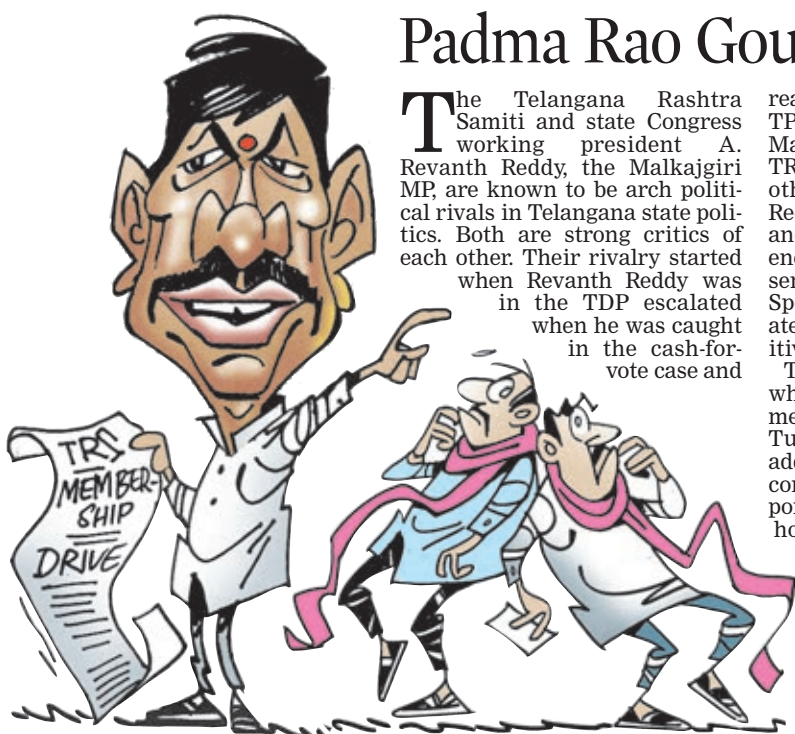
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SHORT TAKES

AP RECORDS 54 COVID-19 CASES, NO DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Andhra Pradesh registered 54 fresh cases of Covid-19 and no deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities on Saturday reported that out of 26,436 sample tested, 54 persons were found infected with confirmed Covid. Out of 1,36,97,048 samples tested so far in the state, 8,89,210 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,81,439 were recovered in the course of treatment while 604 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Covid-19, Chittoor registered the highest number of 19 followed by six each in East Godavari and Kurnool, five in Guntur, three each in Anantapur, Nellore and Visakhapatnam, two in Kadapa, one each in Prakasam and West Godavari and zero cases in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram.

With regard to the cumulative Covid-19 active cases, Krishna topped the state.

HOUSEWIFE FOUND DEAD IN NELLORE

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 20

A housewife was found dead under mysterious circumstances in her house in Thiruvengalaya Palle village in Gudur mandal of Nellore district. She was found in a hanging position from the ceiling fan.

According to reports, the victim was identified as Yanamala Venkata Ramanamma, who was married to Venkateswarulu, a lorry driver by profession, hailing from Thiruvengalaya Palle. Recently, he got addicted to alcohol and used to quarrel with his wife every day.

In this regard, her family members found Ramanamma hanging to the ceiling in her room on Saturday morning. She was immediately shifted to hospital, where doctors declared her as brought dead. A police team rushed to the spot and shifted the body to government hospital.

PRESERVE HERITAGE OF FORT, SAYS PARVATI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Telugu Academy chairperson N. Lakshmi Parvathi praising the efforts of preserving ancient heritage Kondaveedu fort said that everybody should respect and protect our rich culture and tradition for future generations.

She with Kondaveedu Fort Development Committee convenor Kalli Siva Reddy and eminent persons visited the Kondaveedu fort on Saturday.

Ms Lakshmi Parvathi said that the renovation of the Kondaveedu fort giving chance to people climb the fort through ghat road and further to view historical structures situated on the hilltop.

MINI RICE MILLS AT AGENCY AREAS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 20:

The ITDA Project Officer of Rampachodavaram C. Adhitya Praveen proposed to set up mini rice mills in the agency area to provide marketing facilities to paddy crops of the tribal people in seven mandals of the division. He convened a meeting with Horticulture and agriculture officials and reviewed the progress in Ramapachodavaram on Saturday. He said that the mandal officials should submit a report about the mini rice mills' and the areas where the mills are needed. He said that if there were any proposals of setting up of mini rice mills' by the entrepreneurs, the ITDA would give permissions to them. He said that the horticulture officials should take steps to protect and increase the crop of mango and cashew net in coming summer and steps are being taken for supplying pesticides and sprayers to 500 horticulture farmers through the micro irrigation scheme.

The Project Horticulture Officer Y. Satyanarayana, Agriculture Department Assistant Director Mr Ratnakumar and Syamala, Animal Husbandry Veterinary Doctor Gopika and others were present.



Huge numbers of people take part in Padayatra during a protest against the central government's move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant near Asilmetta junction in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

TD launches missed call campaign to save VSP

Impressive response to the campaign, more than 20,000 calls received in 2 days

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Telugu Desam, which is conducting protests and agitations against the Vizag Steel Plant privatisation move, launched a 'missed call' campaign. The 'Save Visaka Steel' missed call campaign records people's voices supporting the stir. In two days, it has received more than 20,000 missed calls.

TD leaders informed that it has begun this campaign urging supporters to give a missed call to 80999-981981. They stated that this is part of the TD's efforts to utilise social media to step up the agitation in the coming weeks. There has been an impressive response to online campaigns

- #JusticeForVizag and #VisakhaUkkuAndhrula

Hakku that are trending on Twitter and Facebook.

Andhra Chambers seeks captive mine for Vizag Steel

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

The Andhra Pradesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Association recommended allotment of the captive iron mine and debts restructuring for the protection of Vizag Steel from privatisation. It conducted a round-table meeting on the 100 per cent disinvestment of Vizag Steel Plant and the economic development of Andhra Pradesh here on Saturday.

Andhra Chambers pres-

Meanwhile, senior party leader Bandaru Satyanarayana Murthy

ident K.V.S. Prakash Rao and general secretary Potluri Bhaskara Rao said that the meeting has opined that the 100 per cent disinvestment of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (RINL) announced by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs earlier this month was not a welcome move and the state government should seriously relook at the process and weigh other options to make the plant viable and sustainable.

They said that the round-table unanimously

on Saturday accused YSRC MP Vijaya Sai Reddy of playing with

recommended allotment of a captive iron mine to Vizag Steel, debt restructuring as the steel plant is paying an interest rate of 14 per cent, which is very high and if required, 10 per cent equity can be given to the public. The meeting decided that associations will support the movement to stop the disinvestment of Vizag Steel Plant as it is the largest PSU in Andhra Pradesh and people are emotionally attached to RINL.

The plant earned profits from 2002 to 2014.

people's lives with his double standards on the critical issue.

● Bandaru accused YSRC MP Vijaya Sai Reddy of playing with people's lives

He termed it as "regrettable" that Vijaya Sai Reddy started a fake padayatra after having played a sinister role in the secret deal to sell the steel plant to Posco company.

Murthy claimed that Y.S. Avinash Reddy was a member of the Parliamentary Standing Council but he did not question the Centre on the VSP issue even once. He recalled that the AP Chief Secretary and Industries Principal Secretary themselves attended the disinvestment meeting in Delhi. He demanded the YSRC MPs to explain why they had not expressed their protest in the Parliament.

Naidu writes to Modi on VSP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu wrote a letter on Saturday to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking cancellation of Vizag Steel plant privatisation proposal.

In his letter Mr Naidu recalled that the Government of India (GOI) in its budget for the financial year 2021-2022 has proposed to privatise Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), commonly known as Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. He stated that the Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) announced that the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)



has approved the proposal to privatise RINL on 27th January 2021.

Mr Naidu recalled that the RINL Steel Plant, Visakhapatnam in 1971, Visakhapatnam Steel Plant was founded under the corporate entity of the SAIL. Later, the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant was brought under the corporate entity of RINL in 1982. This is the only steel plant in India located on the seashore that makes it unique in many ways.

Mr Naidu said that the RINL Steel Plant,

Visakhapatnam is facing losses due to reasons such as the absence of captive mines and high interest rates on loans.

He sought that the Government of India or the Government of Andhra Pradesh may provide captive mines to the RINL Steel Plant, it will provide the opportunity and the potential to turn the fortunes of RINL steel plant. Mr Naidu said, "Personally and on behalf of the people of Andhra Pradesh, appeal to you (PM Modi) to cease the privatisation process of RINL. It is necessary to look for alternative actions that could turn the fortunes of the RINL Steel Plant for the better, creating a win-win situation for all the stakeholders."

Vijaya Sai vows to fight for VSP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 20

The ruling YSR Congress Parliamentary party leader and MP V. Vijaya Sai Reddy vowed to fight until the Centre withdrew its plan to privatise the VSP.

Addressing a large number of people at a public meeting held in front of the steel plant here on Saturday, the MP asserted that as the plant was not having its own mines to get raw material for its production, it was incurring losses and added that the plant was having a

huge debt of ₹25,000 crore. He opined that if the debt could be converted as equity, it would help the plant to start earning profits.

Referring to the letter written by the CM to the PM, the MP said that the CM explained in detail from the sacrifices rendered by the people to protect it, till several ways and means to revive it from the loss making unit. He laid stress for stabilisation of production and cautioned that in case of any disruption in the production, it would result in the steel plant running into further losses.

Private schools must reserve 25% seats for downtrodden sections

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 20:

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights member Dr R.G. Anand directed the Education department to take steps for allotting 25 per cent of seats to downtrodden sections in private schools and they should give education to those sections free of cost. Reviewing on taking steps for child protection and their welfare by the government in West Godavari District on Saturday, Mr Anand said that as per the Right To Education Act, the private schools should allot 25 per cent of seats to weaker sections and provide education free of cost. If the private schools are not implementing the guidelines of the Act, the education department should take action against those schools within 3 months and also should cancel their recognition. The Education Department Assistant Director R.V. Ramana said that there are 1,100 private schools in West Godavari District and they have not allotted 25 per cent of seats to downtrodden sections.

The Joint Collector Himanshu Sukla said that

200 students from 12 social welfare hostels have been given training for JEE Mains, out of which 88 students bagged ranks and got seats in recognised colleges. He said that stringent steps are being taken for protecting the child from sexual harassment through DISHA - one stop centre police stations and the infrastructure facilities have been improved in the government schools through Naadu-Nedu programme in the district. The Children Welfare Committee chairperson Madhavi Latha said that there are 60 police stations in West Godavari District and 192 cases have been registered under POCSO Act in 2020 and 16 cases in 2021 so far. DISHA DSP Mr Satyanarayana said that the police department was implementing Kavacham programme with a motive of six issues like women, children, health and self defence and special police personnel have been deployed for protecting the children in every police station.

The ICDS Project Director K. Vijaya Kumari said that 1,345 children were saved and 36 were provided rehabilitation in 2020 and 2021 until now.

Nellore bags PM Kisan nat'l award

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 20

Nellore district has been awarded the PM Kisan National Award for achieving more than 90 per cent grievance redressals under the Central government's Pradhan Mantri Samman Nidhi Scheme meant for the farmers.

The district collector K.V. N. Chakradhar Babu and officials of the agriculture department, will receive the award at the second anniversary celebrations of 'PM Kisan' in New Delhi on Feb. 24. Commenting on the

achievement, collector Mr Chakradhar Babu said that the timely redressal by the officials and quality in resolution of the farmers' problems gave this award to the district.

"Though we had untimely cyclones and floods, we have completed all enumerations and distributed the farmers crop damages to a tune of ₹215 crores, insurance amounts of ₹347 crore and subsidy seeds of 30,000 quintals. The distribution has been done within a month of the incidents. This helped the farmers in the district," he said.

Representatives of IRMA met V-C

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 20

Representatives of the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) in the state of Gujarat, Professor Biswas, Professor Rakesh Kumar and Pulivendula Andhra Pradesh Center for Advanced Research in Livestock (APCARL) Assistant Director Shiv Prasad visited Yogi Vemana University on Saturday evening.

They met University Vice Chancellor Prof. Munagala Surya Kalavati, Registrar

Prof D. Vijaya Raghava Prasad, Head, Department of Commerce and Management in the VC Chamber. They revealed its intention to start a rural management course at APCARL from the next academic year. They said that a mutual agreement (MOU) was being signed with the institute. Many topics such as agriculture, business management and rural conditions in rural areas were discussed.

They have learned the positives from the village for the rural management course.

AP Veteran team beats Hyderabad

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 20

A T-20 veterans cricket match was organised between Anantapur-Hyderabad veteran cricket teams at RDT stadium at Ananta Sports Village in Anantapur on Saturday. RDT (Rural Development Trust) Programme Director Moncho Ferrer, Former Cricketer Srinath, Hyderabad Veteran Cricketers Indian Player Noel David, Hyderabad state selector Swaroop, CCL Player Sesha Giri were among the veterans from both teams played for the game. Anantapur veteran team won the T-20 match by five runs against Hyderabad.

The toss won by

Hyderabad Veterans and elected to field first. Anantapur Veterans scored 135 runs by losing three wickets in 20 overs. Sanjeeva Reddy made 41 runs of 34 balls, N.Sardar made 35 runs while Moncho Ferrer made 23 runs out of 26 balls along with a sixer.

However, the Hyderabad Veterans team made 130 runs by losing seven wickets in 20 overs. R.A. Swaroop scored 62 runs in 48 balls along with five boundaries and a sixer. Another batsman Sesha Giri made 33 runs from Hyderabad team.

Anantapur bowlers- G. Harinath Reddy took three wickets by giving 25 runs and Inayathulla got two wickets by giving 24 runs.

SEB SEIZES LIQUOR BEING SMUGGLED

Tirupati: The Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) officers, Nellore, on Saturday seized ₹2.50 lakh worth liquor bottles, which are being smuggled illegally from Goa to Prakasam dis-

trict. Officials suspecting that this illegal contraband is being smuggled to Prakasam district to distribute to voters in the final phase of Panchayat polls.

SHORT TAKES

ULFA-I THREATENS TO KILL CAPTIVE EMPLOYEES

BY 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 Kumchaikha hydrocarbon drilling site in Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh. While Gogoi is a native of Assam, Kumar hails from Bihar.

CONGRESS BANDH IN MP RECEIVES BACKLASH

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, FEB. 20

The half-day bandh call given by Congress to protest against the fuel price increase on Saturday evoked mixed response in Madhya Pradesh. Though petrol stations remained closed, normal life remained unaffected in most places.

Congress workers and leaders who were enforcing bandh in their respective areas were seen facing resistance from local businessmen at some places.

One Krishna Pachouri, a local businessman, lodged a complaint with the Korada police station in Bhopal alleging misbehaviour by Congress men who were trying to intimidate him to close his shop. Yogesh Bhatia, a cloth merchant in Jabalpur, lodged a complaint against some Congress workers in Ranji police station alleging intimidation to force him to close his shop.

INDIA WITNESSES SPIKE IN DAILY COVID-19 CASES

DC 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. Recoveries surged to 1,06,78,048, according to Union health ministry data that was updated on Saturday.

A total of 13,993 new cases were registered in a span of 24 hours and there were 101 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed. The active case-load remains below 1.5 lakh, at 1,43,127. The 101 new fatalities included 44 deaths from Maharashtra, 15 from Kerala and 8 from Punjab.

Worryingly, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have recorded an “upsurge” in daily new cases of Covid-19, the Union Health Ministry said on Saturday.

CSR SHOULD NOT BE MANDATORY: AZIM PREMJI

New Delhi, Feb. 20: IT czar and philanthropist Azim Premji on Saturday said companies should not be legally mandated to engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) as such contributions to society need to “come from within”.

Premji, who donated ₹7,904 crore in donations last year (₹22 crore a day), also highlighted that the Covid-19 crisis was a “wake up call” to look at fundamental issues like the need to improve public systems like health, and changing the structure of society to become more equal and just.

“I do not think we should have a legal mandate for companies to do CSR. Philanthropy or charity or contribution to society must come from within, and it cannot be mandated from outside. But that's my personal view.

As of now, this is the law and all companies must follow it, Premji said.

He added that it is important that individual and personal philanthropy is separated from a company's CSR efforts.

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

Get out of election mode: Patnaik

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
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 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 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 BJD government on various issues, including chit fund and mining scams, irregularities in procurement of healthcare hardwares and mismanagement Covid-19 crisis.

‘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 Chief Minister 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 as national project

DC 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 council 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 percent) 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 nd employ-

ment potential of 76,835 persons had been cleared.

He also listed the various business projects launched in the State like the Multi-Modal 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 agricultural

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.

Disha bail plea order on Feb. 23

Cops allege she deleted evidence like emails

New Delhi, Feb. 20: If highlighting farmers' protest globally is sedition, then she is “better in jail”, activist Disha Ravi told a Delhi court which on Saturday reserved for February 23 its order on her bail plea in the toolkit case after police alleged that she was part of a plan to instigate violence in India and had deleted “evidence” like emails.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana posed some scathing questions to the probe agency during the hearing on Ravi's plea, asking if it was only acting on “surmises, inferences, and conjectures” and questioned how the toolkit was connected to the violence during the farmers' march. “...Unless I satisfy my conscience, I don't move ahead,” the judge said.

Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing for the Delhi Police, told the court that the hyperlinks in the toolkit connected people to Khalistani websites that propagate hatred towards India. “This was not just a



Disha Ravi

toolkit. The real plan was to defame India and create unrest here,” he said. Ravi's counsel, however, claimed there is no evidence linking the toolkit to the violence during the farmers' march on January 26. He also questioned the contents of the FIR. “We all have different opinions. You may have a problem with farmers' protest, I may not. If highlighting protest globally is sedition, I (Ravi) am better in jail. I (defence counsel) also support farmers. But if that's an offence, let's all go to jail,” defence counsel Sidharth Agarwal said. “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,” the counsel said.

Ravi was arrested in Bengaluru on Saturday by a Cyber Cell team of the Delhi Police for allegedly creating the toolkit and was brought to Delhi. She was booked on sedition and other charges.

Opposing Ravi's bail plea, the police alleged that she was preparing the toolkit with those advocating Khalistan. It alleged that Ravi deleted WhatsApp chats, emails and other evidence and was aware of legal action that she could face. Why did Disha Ravi cover her track and delete evidence if she did not commit wrong, the police said, alleging that his shows her guilty mind and sinister design.

“My part is that I sought support from Greta Thunberg, that too for farmers' protest and not for Khalistan,” the defence counsel countered, and claimed that Ravi acted due to fear of being wrongly prosecuted. — PTI

TMC poll slogan: ‘Bengal wants its own daughter’

BJYM leader held with 90gm cocaine

Kolkata, Feb. 20: The Trinamool 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 Banerjee's photo was put up on hoardings across Kolkata as the state's ruling party officially launched it from its headquarters off EM Bypass.

“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 don't want outsiders to call the shots in Bengal,” TMC secretary-general Partha Chatterjee said. The Trinamool Congress is engaged in a bitter political fight with the BJP, pitching the opposition party's leaders as outsiders who are on “election tourism” to the state.

“The upcoming election is not a big factor for the Trinamool Congress. The entire country is watching how the Constitution can be protected and the outcome of the polls will prove that,” TMC's Rajya Sabha MP Subrata Bakshi

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 CID probe into the matter.

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,” Goswami told reporters while being taken to lock-up from a city court.

Singh, a BJP state committee member, alleged that the ruling Trinamool Congress and the Kolkata Police were conspiring against him and have “brainwashed” Goswami. He said that he has not been in touch with 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,” Singh said. — PTI

He said the chief minister has already submitted a report card of the work done in the last ten years to the people of the state. “Which state has done so much? None,” Bakshi added.

State Minister Panchayat Subrata

Mukherjee said that while other parties are struggling to find a chief ministerial face, the Trinamool Congress has Banerjee who knows the pulse of the people of Bengal. Mukherjee said she knows how to protect the women. — PTI

TOURISM | SUPPORT

Foreign minister Jaishankar begins two-day visit to India's south-western maritime neighbour

Indian tourists boost cash registers in Maldives

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

Even as External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar began his two-day official visit to the Maldives on Saturday, Indian tourists are setting the cash registers ringing in the tourism-dependent economy of India's tiny south-western maritime neighbour.

As per statistics of 2021 so far, a whopping 30,000 Indians have visited the Maldives till mid-February out of a total of

1,38,000 foreign tourists this year, the highest number from any foreign nation visiting the Maldives. Even with the pandemic, a total of 62,905 Indians, largest number of tourists, visited the Maldives in 2020.

It became possible due to the creation of an ‘Air Travel Bubble’ to facilitate the movement of people from both sides for the purpose of employment, tourism, medical emergencies and so on. Maldives was the first neighbouring country

New Delhi, Feb. 20: India on Saturday gifted another one lakh doses of Covid-19 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 on Saturday.

This takes the overall gift of Covid vaccine doses for the Maldives to two lakh from India since New Delhi had gifted one lakh doses earlier. The EAM also announced a “stand-alone new Line of Credit (LoC) worth US\$40 mil-

lion” from India for the 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.

to revive Maldivian economy and provide the much-needed budgetary cushion to its dwindling revenues,

primarily driven by tourism. These included the extension of soft loan of US\$250 million for budgetary support of the Maldives for the implementation of Greater Male Connectivity Project which is the largest civilian infrastructure project in the Maldives, connecting Male with three neighbouring islands by the construction of a bridge-and-causeway link spanning 6.7 km, through a financial package consisting of a grant of US\$100 million and a new Line of Credit

of US\$400 million. In addition, Maldives was the first country to receive Covid vaccines from India, with New Delhi gifting one lakh doses to the tiny archipelago nation. Indo-Maldivian ties have become extremely close ever since President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih assumed office in the November, 2018. After completing his two-day visit on Sunday, the EAM will visit the small Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius on February 22-23.



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 I.S. 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 battenning 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 Antonio 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

scientists at Russia's Vektor laboratory had isolated genetic material of the strain from seven workers of a poultry farm in southern Russia, where an outbreak was recorded among the birds in December.

The workers did not suffer any serious health consequences, she added. Popova praised "the

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

break was recorded among the birds in December. The workers did not suffer any serious health consequences, she added. Popova praised "the

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

Give Latifa's proof of life, UN to UAE

Berlin, Feb. 20: The UN human rights office said Friday that it 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 was raised with the

UAE's mission to the UN on Thursday.

Earlier this week the BBC released excerpts from video diaries Sheikhha Latifa said were recorded in a locked bathroom inside the Dubai villa where she was being held. She was detained by commandos off the coast of India in 2018 after she tried to flee Dubai in a yacht. "We raised our con-

cerns 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 say

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 United Arab Emirates. — AP

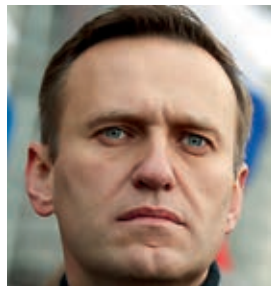
Court rejects Navalny appeal

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.

● **DURING HER** confirmation hearings, Tanden apologised for spending years attacking top Republicans on social media.

● **TANDEN HAD** also disparaged some Democrats on social media, most notably Sen. Bernie Sanders from Vermont.

● **BIDEN, ASKED** Saturday whether he would pull Tanden's nomination, said he wouldn't.

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



DECCAN Chronicle

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.

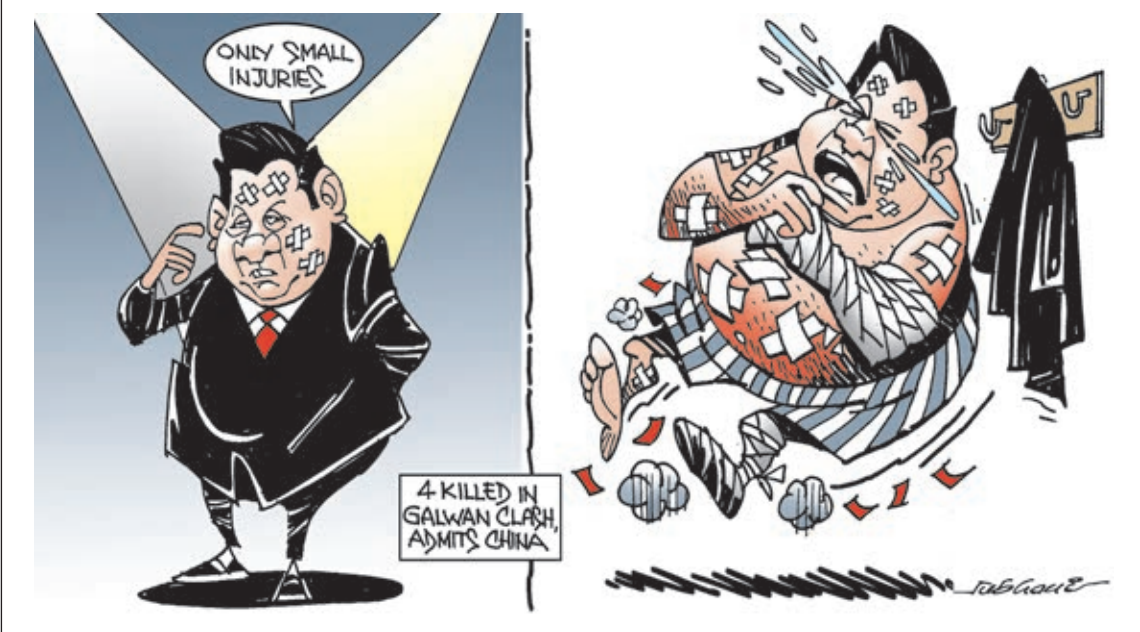
So while I can I raise my eyes to the hills and this new-old life. It's spring. The bignonia venesta is a riotous celebration of colour. And I pretend I can't see that ugly new building beyond.

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 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

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 (*kripala*), 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

PUNJAB LESSONS

It is true that the Modi government and the ruling BJP noticed the strength of Rakesh Tikait was enhanced after the Punjab civic polls. The BJP leadership also knows that the enhanced power can create problems for them in poll-bound states. Now, it is a testing time for Modi government and the BJP as dissatisfaction is rising among public with Centre's policies which have fuelled unemployment apart from the relentless climb in diesel and petrol prices. There is no way left for the BJP other than going for better policies.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

The Congress' win in the recent civic elections in Punjab is spectacular and impressive. It has indeed been a shot in the arm for the Grand Old Party. It is also a big blow to the ruling dispensation at the Centre and AAP. The results can be read as an outcome of the angry farmers' agitation. Further, it makes it clear that it may not be an easy task ahead during the Assembly elections due on early 2022 for the BJP and SAD.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

JAGAN'S REIGN

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu's hopes are shattered after the drubbing his party got in the Gram Panchayat polls. No doubt this dubious visionary has miscalculated his support base even after the devastating loss at the hands of YSR in the 2019 Assembly polls. Yes, it would be next to impossible for him and TD to stage a comeback. His own diminishing supporters would not want either him or Nara Lokesh to be at the helm of affairs. It will be good for him to fall back on the kin of NTR for a frontline leadership to steer the party out of the woods for now. Late NTR's grandson Jr NTR is far better to take the mantle than N. Balakrishna.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

PROTEST TO MODI

Let us call 1800117800 on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* and register our protest against privatising VSP.

Teki Suresh Kumar
Rajamahendravaram

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Forward Bloc Chairman assassinated

CALCUTTA, FEBRUARY. 20 Forward Bloc Chairman and veteran freedom fighter Hemanta Kumar Bose was assassinated near his residence at Shyampur in North Calcutta at about 11-00 this morning.

The murder came as a culmination to the run of savage violence which has held the State in its vicious grip for over a year and claimed about 170 lives in the last seven weeks.

Mr. Bose, who was a candidate for the Shyampur Assembly seat, had held since the first General election.

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.

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 Gulam 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 wel-

come 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.

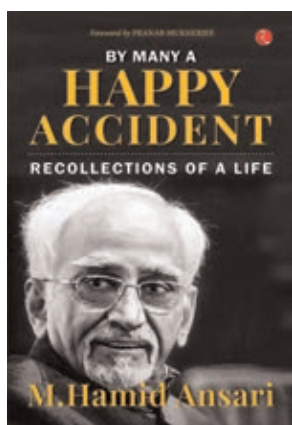
Despite Congress president Sonia Gandhi's intervention, differences between Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh and his bete noire Navjot Singh Sidhu are yet to be sorted out. Harish Rawat, Congress general secretary in charge of Punjab, has held a series of meetings with Amarinder Singh to arrive 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 resigned as Speaker after he was appointed president of the MPCC. 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

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
HarperCollins, ₹599
 - 4 **A TIME FOR MERCY**
John Grisham
Hodder & Stoughton, ₹699
 - 5 **WRITERS & LOVERS**
Lily King
Picador, ₹699
 - 6 **HOMELAND ELEGIES**
Ayad Akhtar
Tinder Press, ₹1,050
 - 7 **HAMNET**
Maggie O' Farrell
Tinder Press, ₹699
 - 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 bhandaar 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



S. Hareesh

her credit, translator 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 Tripurdaman 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,



Tripurdaman Singh

said Thapar. In 1950, the 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 to read down Article 370, Thapar commented.

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 paradoxes of the life of 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' 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 word, dream, we have the double meaning of



Priyanka Chopra Jonas

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 consciousness 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.

The paedophile who hid in plain sight

Until this book was published, Gabriel Matzneff was a respectable man. The French author may have written about his affairs with young girls and his travels to the Philippines in search of pre-pubescent boys — insert Gallic shrug here — but he still won literary prizes and enjoyed a state stipend. He was celebrated by the chattering classes, who said little when he brought different adolescent girls as his plus one to interviews.

Little V, or V sometimes, was one of those girls. She had slipped in and out of his autotification for decades. In *Consent*, her memoir, Vanessa Springora returns the favour and refers to him by his initial. She first met G. at a dinner party in 1986. She was 13, dragged along by her single mother who worked in publishing. He was the guest of honour: He was over 50.

The grooming process she describes was both assiduous and unoriginal. He sent her letters for weeks (her mother was likely to answer the telephone). He started to bump into her in her neighbourhood. He organised a meeting outdoors, then told her that he had afternoon tea ready at his flat. By the second date she thought she was ready to lose her virginity. She had only just turned 14.

Over a decade before, Matzneff had written what was really a playbook for paedophiles (reprinted as late as 2005). Springora describes how she furnished him with the perfect victim. Her parents were divorced and she was precocious, book-smart and hungry for attention — quite ordinary, in other words. Jane Eyre is loved by so many teenage girls for a reason.

The suspense in *Consent* comes from waiting for someone to step in: Springora's father, a doctor, a family friend, a teacher or the police. But, slowly, she herself began to see through Matzneff. She started to read his books. In them she discovered he had copied out letters he'd received from young girls. He thrived on hiding in plain sight. Now a respected literary editor, Springora is no puritan; she has no interest in condemning a relationship simply because of an expansive age gap. The word rape is too simple. Her contempt is cool and sardonic and the prose spare. It is his sordid repetitiveness she objects to, and his hypocrisy.

This isn't a misery memoir, or an account of survival against all odds. It reads like a dark fairy tale. Alice has fallen through the looking-glass. I can't help but cheer her on. Matzneff's legacy is now enmeshed forever in this clever, thoughtful and honest book.

Written by Fleur Macdonald. By arrangement with the Spectator.

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 behavioural 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*.



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

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

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 assurance 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. "A player from a franchise team who had shown symptoms and was in isolation has tested positive," the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement. "He will now remain in quarantine for 10 days and will require two negative tests in order to rejoin the side." The identity of the player was not disclosed. — *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 7.50 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

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 incredible 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*

VIJAY HAZARE | TROPHY

Ricky, Vihari set up Andhra's win

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 20

Ricky Bhui smashed an unbeaten century as Andhra made a screaming start to their campaign in the Vijay Hazare Trophy with a three-wicket win over Vidarbha on Saturday. Chasing Vidarbha's strong 331 for 6 that was built on centuries from Yash Rathod (117) and Faiz Fazal (100), Ricky slammed 101, hitting six boundaries and six sixes in his 78-ball knock as Andhra chased down the total with four balls to spare.

Captain Hanuma Vihari contributed 65 while Nitish Kumar Reddy made 54 to help Andhra's cause.

TILAK, MILIND SCRIPT HYDERABAD VICTORY

Meanwhile, the lefties got it right for Hyderabad. Consistent performer Thakur Tilak Varma smashed another century while seamer C. V. Milind scalped five wickets as Hyderabad beat Tripura.

Opener Tilak thumped 10 fours and five sixes in his 156 that came off 145 balls to bolster the side's total to 349 for 5 in 50 overs after being put in to bat. Captain Tanmay Agarwal (86), B. Sandeep (41) and Himalay Agarwal (38) played supporting roles.

Tripura found the total too steep, especially up



Thakur Tilak Varma

against Milind's deliveries and were all out for 236 in 42 overs. Milind returned with fine figures of 5 for 43 as Hyderabad collected four points.

In Bengaluru, Rinku Singh smashed an unbeaten 62 as Uttar Pradesh stunned defending champions Karnataka by nine runs via the VJD Method in their rain-truncated Group 'C' opener.

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

BRIEF SCORES

■ Vidarbha 331/6 in 50 overs (Yash Rathod 117, Faiz Fazal 100; C. Stephen 3/66, Ginnath Reddy 2/79) lost to Andhra 332/7 in 49.2 overs (**Ricky Bhui 101 not out — 78b, 6x4, 6x6**, Hanuma Vihari 65; Darshan Nalbande 3/76, Aditya Thakare 2/76) by three wickets.

■ Hyderabad 349/5 in 50 overs (**Thakur Tilak Varma 156 — 145b, 10x4, 5x6**, Tanmay Agarwal 86, Himalay Agarwal 38, B. Sandeep 41, R. A. Dey 2 for 45) bt Tripura 236 in 42 overs (Bikram Kumar Das 65, Milind 67, **C. V. Milind 5/43 — 8-0-43-5**, T. Ravi Teja 2/60, B. Sandeep 2/47). **Points:** Hyderabad 4, Tripura 0.

■ 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 Kanojia 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 (Murali Devdhar 105 not out, Pratham Singh 72 not out) by 10 wickets.

■ Goa 263 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 Pandrekar 1-35) by five wickets.

■ Chhattisgarh 231 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 2/36) 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 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 55 not out; Siddharth Kaul 2/47, Karan Kalia 1/44) by six wickets.

Djoker takes on 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 phenom-



enal 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 con-

tributes to more confidence, prior to coming into the finals knowing that I never lost 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 has 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*

Suryakumar, Ishan in T20I squad

New Delhi, Feb. 20: Young wicket-keeper batsman Ishan Kishan, Suryakumar Yadav and Rahul Tewatia were on Saturday named in India's 19-man squad for the five-match T20 series against England.

Yadav finally breaks into the team after consistent performances for Mumbai in domestic cricket as well as Mumbai

Indians in the Indian Premier League.

Kishan, who also plays Mumbai Indians, has been been in red hot form in white-ball cricket and has been rewarded and will be second stumper in the side along with Risabh Pant.

Haryana's Tewatia too made the cut after a memorable IPL.

Left-arm wrist spinner

Kuldeep Yadav and Manosh Pandey have been dropped while pacer Jasprit Bumrah has been rested.

The T20 series will be played in Ahmedabad from March 12.

THE SQUAD

Virat Kohli (Captain), Rohit Sharma (vice-captain), KL Rahul, Shikhar Dhawan, Shreyas Iyer,

Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Ishan Kishan (wicket-keeper), Yuzvendra Chahal.

Varun Chakravarty, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Rahul Tewatia, T. Natarajan, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Deepak Chahar, Navdeep Saini and Shardul Thakur. — *PTI*

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