

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SUNDAY 21 | FEBRUARY 2021

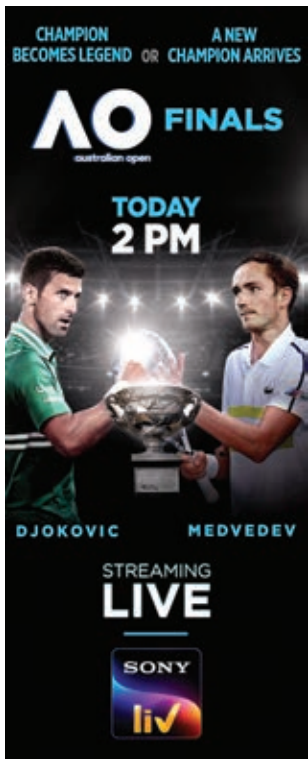
## WEATHER



Max: 30°C  
Min: 20°C  
Rainfall: 2 mm

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Maasi 9  
**Tithi:** Navami/ Dashami  
**Star:** Mrigashirsham  
**Rahukalam:**  
4.30 pm to 6 pm  
**Yamagandam:**  
12 noon to 1.30 pm  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.20 am  
**Zohar:** 12.28 pm  
**Asar:** 3.44 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.15 pm  
**Isha:** 7.27 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.16 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.29 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 12.56 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 2.08 AM**



### Karnataka minister seeks FM Nirmala's help in setting up AIIMS in state

**Bengaluru:** Karnataka health and medical education minister K. Sudhakar on Saturday met Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman with a proposal to build 'Health City', as he also sought her support for an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the state. On meeting Sitharaman, who is in the city, the Minister congratulated her for presenting a "pragmatic budget" with health and well-being as one of the key pillars, and sought her assistance to get an AIIMS for Karnataka," his office said in a statement.

### Nadda chairs meets ahead of Modi's address to key BJP leaders

**New Delhi:** The BJP on Saturday held some key organisational meetings on the eve of the first physical meeting of its new set of national office-bearers, which will be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. BJP president J P Nadda chaired meetings of the party's national general secretaries and also general secretaries (organisation) of states.

### Lt. Gen. B.S. Raju to be new Director-General of Military Operations

**New Delhi:** Lt Gen B S Raju, the General-Officer-Commanding of the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps, will be the new Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the Indian Army, official sources said on Saturday.

## COUNTER POINT



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

## STATE | 3

**Sagayam expected to announce his future plans**



## WORLD | 5

**Court rejects Navalny appeal**



## SPORT | 8

**Novak faces 'challenger' Medvedev in final**



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# Respect and promote private sector for economic growth, PM tells states

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday spoke of the "untapped potential" of the farm sector while marking out areas for improvement to push the country out of the economic slump.

Addressing the sixth governing council meeting of NitiAayog, he said, "Even today, despite being called an agricultural country, we bring edible oil worth Rs 65,000-70,000 crores from outside". The country, he added, should stop this. "The money can go to our farmers' account. Our farmers are entitled to this money, but for this we have to make our plans that way," the Prime Minister added.

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

"Even during Covid-19, India saw a rise in exports in the agriculture sector.



PM Narendra Modi chairs the 6th meeting of Governing Council of NITI Aayog via video conferencing. — ANI

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

Mr Modi also advised extending help to the private sector as a key move to seek foreign investment and emphasised on strengthening micro-small and medium enterprises and start-ups.

He also made a strong case for repealing archaic laws and making it easier to do business in India, stating that the centre and states need to work closely to boost economic growth.

The Prime Minister said the private sector should

be given full opportunity to become a part of government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat programme. "The Centre and states should work together for the nation's progress... The government has to respect and give due representation to the private sector for economic progress," Mr Modi said. With the prime focus on developing agricultural best practices, strengthening local manufacturing in states and improving health care facilities, the meeting witnessed suggestions by several chief ministers on improving logistical support and reducing input costs to enable increased manufacturing in states.

## CORPS COMMANDERS MEET

# India-China meet to push for faster border disengagement

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

India and China Corps Commanders on Saturday held 10th round of talks to discuss disengagement from Depsang plains and Gogra-Hotsprings friction points in Ladakh.

The meeting was held in Moldo on Chinese side and started at around 10 am. The Indian delegation was led by 14 Corps commander Lt-General P.G.K. Menon. Naveen Srivastava, Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the Ministry of External Affairs was also part of Indian delegation.

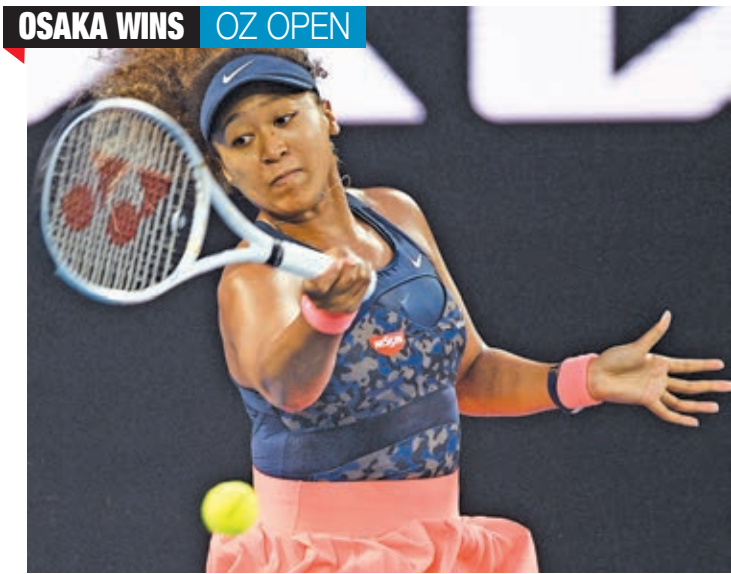
The 10th round of Corps

Commanders meeting is being held after Indian and Chinese troops completed disengagement from Pangong Tso in Eastern Ladakh after nine months of stand-off. India and China are now discussing modalities of the second phase of disengagement in Depsang, Gogra, Hotsprings and Demchok.

It is expected that India and China will first be able to reach an agreement on Gogra-Hotsprings. Even last year both sides had agreed to move back their troops from these two friction points. As per the understanding last year a buffer zone on both sides of the

LAC was to be created in these areas of stand-off. However the disengagement was not fully implemented at Gogra-Hotsprings.

As per the agreement on Pangong Tso, Chinese troops will move east of Finger 8 in the north bank of Pangong Tso and Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3. There will be a "temporary" freeze in the patrolling by both sides in the area between Finger 4 to 8 on the northern banks of Pangong Tso till both sides reach an agreement in diplomatic and military talks.



Japan's Naomi Osaka hits a forehand return to United States' Jennifer Brady during the women's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, on Saturday. Osaka beat Jennifer Brady 6-4, 6-3. — AP  
■ **Report on P8**

## Arrested BJP leader names party colleague as plotter

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

# Ulfa-I threatens to kill 2 abducted oil firm staff

**MANOJ ANAND [DC 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 out-

● **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**

fit 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 Infrastr-ucture, were kidnapped by Ulfa-I rebels on December 21 last year from Kumchaikha hydrocarbon drilling site in Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh. While Mr Gogoi is a native of Assam, Mr Kumar hails from Bihar.

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

accordingly, take the final actions against the two employees." The outfit said this in a letter addressing the people of Assam, the governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and the families of the kidnapped duo. "If our instructions are ignored, then in the case of any unfortunate situation, the employees, Quippo authorities, OIL, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh governments will be responsible for the consequences," the outfit said in the email written in Assamese.

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 20

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami Saturday declared a cut in the ticket fares for commuters of Chennai Metro Rail that will come into effect on February 22. There will be no change in the fares for short distance travel (₹10 for up to 2 kilometre and ₹20 for 2-5km but the present fare of ₹40 will be reduced to ₹30 for 5to 12-km. The new fares for the other distances are ₹40 (12 to 21-km) instead of ₹50; and ₹50 (21 to 24-km) instead of ₹70. ₹50 will be charged for North-South travel.

Meanwhile, Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) has already introduced an additional discount of 20 per cent to those who travel using smart card or book tickets using the QR code. Commuters, who currently avail unlimited day passes at ₹100 for the 45km long phase I of Chennai Metro, can use the same passes to travel till Wimco Nagar. The monthly passes will also be extended at the existing rate. Further, 50 per cent discount will be given to passengers during week-ends or public holidays.

V. Ramarao, project director, Traffic and Trans-

● **The fare revision comes a week after PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the passenger service operations between Washermenpet-Wimco Nagar**

portation Forum (TTF), a city-based non-governmental organisation which is fighting for fare reduction for long, said that the cap put as ₹50 on par with Delhi Metro was still high compared to Kolkata that is ₹25. "We are demanding that the fare be capped at ₹35. The revised rate is still unaffordable to the poor people especially in the northern part of the city. The new rate will be beneficial for long-distance travellers as the cap is reduced from ₹70 to ₹ 50," he said.

The CMRL covers a stretch of 54.15 km and has two corridors, one from Airport to Wimco Nagar and the other from St Thomas Mount to Dr Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Central Metro with 21 underground and 18 elevated stations. Now, the passengers from North Chennai can reach Chennai International Airport within 60 minutes.



### 'Bengal wants its own daughter': TMC launches poll slogan

**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," party's 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.

— PTI



## OTHER STORIES

**False marriage promise: Man cheats woman of ₹10L**DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 20

The Saidapet police on Saturday arrested a 45-year-old man from Andhra Pradesh for cheating a 40-year-old woman in Chennai of ₹10 lakh after promising to marry her.

The victim, a divorcee from Chennai had registered on a popular matrimonial site and the accused Manoharan from Andhra Pradesh allegedly approached her claiming to be a divorcee with a monthly income of ₹3 lakh.

The woman, mother of a 13-year-old boy from the previous marriage agreed to marry Manoharan and allegedly gifted him a mobile phone. Manoharan soon left for Andhra Pradesh and was in touch with the woman over the phone.

Sources said that a few days later, Manoharan told her that he had met with an accident and was in need of ₹10 lakh for medical expenses. However, after she sent him the money, Manoharan allegedly blocked her and went incommunicado.

On realising being cheated, the victim approached the police and based on her complaint, the Adyar traffic cell traced Manoharan. Investigation revealed that he was not divorced but had been living with his wife and two children.

The police said that Manoharan put up his profile on matrimonial sites claiming to be a divorcee to cheat single women looking for a life partner and extort money from him. Police arrested and remanded him to judicial custody.

The police are checking whether the victim has cheated any other women in the city under the pretext of marriage.

**PM to lay foundation stone for ₹2,000 cr highways project in Pondy on Feb. 25**

**Puducherry, Feb. 20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of four-lane highways project worth Rs 2,000 crore during his visit to poll-bound Puducherry on February 25.

According to official sources, the project would cover Karaikal district on the Villupuram to Nagapattinam highways.

The Prime Minister would also lay foundations of ₹491 crore campus of Karaikal branch of the JIPMER and a minor port worth ₹44 crore being developed under Sagar Mala scheme here.

He would also declare open the reconstructed structure of Puducherry Municipal office (Mairie), which had been raised at a cost of Rs 14.83 crores under Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction Project.

The building was earlier slated for inauguration on February 11.

The PM would unveil all these projects at the A P J Abdul Kalam Convention Centre in JIPMER campus through video conference mode.

Meanwhile, Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal told reporters that Modi would address a public meeting here hereafter participating in the government functions at JIPMER.

Noting that the Prime Minister's visit was important, he alleged that the Congress government has done nothing for the development of Puducherry.

On the coming assembly elections, he asserted that the BJP led alliance was poised to register a historic win in the polls.

"Our focus would be on development of Puducherry post elections and to provide employment to the youth," he added.

— PTI



The Prime Minister would also lay foundations of ₹491 crore campus of Karaikal branch of the JIPMER and a minor port worth ₹44 crore being developed under Sagar Mala scheme here

**Al Tiruchy flight hits electric pole, passengers safe**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 20

Seventy-one 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 interna-

tional airport at Gannavaram near the city on Saturday.

The aircraft had arrived from Doha with 19 passengers for Vijayawada and the rest for Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu, the next destination. The aircraft was carrying 64 passengers and six crew mem-

bers 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 - Tiruchirappalli 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 Tiruchirappalli," Madhusudhana Rao said.

&gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;

Tiruchy bound Air India flight which hit an electric pole at Vijayawada airport.

**Justice league**

T20 Cricket match between Chief Justice's XI vs Advocate General's XI held at M A Chidambaram stadium in Chepauk on Saturday.

— E.K. Sanjay

**Contempt of court provision applies only to criminal case: HC**DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 20

The Madras high court has ruled that though there is a limitation of one year for invoking the provisions of Section 20 of the Contempt of Courts Act to punish the contemnor, the provision will apply only to a criminal contempt and not civil contempt.

Justice S. Vaidyanathan gave the order while dismissing a petition, filed by S. Jubithabi, which sought a direction to the state government to implement the orders of the court dated April 11, 2019.

According to the petitioner, she was initially appointed as a female escort warder on daily wage basis on December 31, 1992 and after a long struggle, she was appointed as female grade-II warder with effect from April 22, 2009, pursuant to the orders of this court dated July 21, 2010. Even though she obtained a favourable order from this court on April 11, 2019 with regard to regularisation of her service with effect from September 29, 2000, till now no order was passed, despite sending a representation dated May 30, 2019. Aggrieved by the wilful disobedience of the orders of this court, the petitioner invoked the writ jurisdiction of the court with the above relief.

The judge said the question whether there was a wilful disobedience of the orders of this court or not

**Can registrar accept deed of cancellation? HC refers to larger bench**DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 20

In view of conflicting judgments, the Madras high court has referred to a larger bench to decide whether the sub-registrar/registrar has the power to accept the deed of cancellation to nullify the deed of conveyance made earlier, when the deed of conveyance has already been acted upon by the transferee.

Justice S. Vaidyanathan directed the registry to place a batch of four petitions from Prabadevi and others, relating to deed of cancellation, before the chief justice for constitution of a larger bench to decide the issue.

According to Prabadevi, a property measuring 1 acre, 16 cents and a residential building at Pappinayakkanpatti village in Madurai district originally belonged to Ramar. Ramar developed an illicit intimacy with another lady and when it was questioned by his first wife, he executed a gift settlement deed in favour of his two minor daughters, Illavarasi and Malar, and they were in



exclusive possession and enjoyment of the property. Thereafter, they were married and settled in their matrimonial home. On September 13, 2005, Illavarasi died leaving behind her husband and daughter Prabadevi. Thereafter, on June 23, 2020, Prabadevi and her maternal aunt Malar partitioned their property which was registered. When Prabadevi approached the sub-registrar to get back the partition deed, the sub-registrar orally informed that since Ramar had already cancelled the settlement deed, the partition deed cannot be registered. Ramar was not entitled to cancel the settlement deed after four years of the death of her mother and it

can be gone into by the court only in contempt proceedings, if any such petition was moved by the petitioner and the writ

jurisdiction was not an alternative forum for the petitioner to ask for implementation of the orders of this court dated April 11,

was void ab initio, she added.

The judge said the grandfather of the petitioner submitted that as there was a disputed question of fact, it has got to be moved before the civil court. This court was in entire agreement with him that the civil court was competent to decide the issue. However, as to the question that who has to approach the civil court, this court was of the view that only Ramar was entitled to do it and there was no need for the petitioner to approach the civil court. This court was concerned only with regard to the unilateral cancellation and not with regard to the disputed question of fact. When a particular document was already entertained and registered, it was for the parties to approach the competent court and the competent court alone was empowered to cancel the settlement deed and the judgment and decree can be registered by the office of the sub-registrar. In this case, there was no judgment and decree cancelling the settlement deed, the judge added.

2019. Hence, finding no merits in the petition, the petition was ordered to be dismissed, the judge added.

**Two masked men rob mobile shop in city**DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 20

The St Thomas Mount crime police are investigating after two masked men robbed a mobile shop in Kathipara on Friday night.

According to the police, Jalaluddin (40), a resident of Alandur, who owns a mobile sales and services shop at Guindy Kathipara junction closed his shop around 10 pm on Friday.

On Saturday morning, when he came to open the shop he found the shutter was opened. He was shocked to find mobile

phones and cash stolen from the shop. Jalaluddin subsequently alerted the St.Thomas Mount police about the theft, where mobile phones worth ₹50,000 and ₹27,000 in cash kept in the locker were stolen

phones and cash stolen from the shop. Jalaluddin subsequently alerted the St.Thomas Mount police about the theft, where mobile phones worth ₹50,000 and ₹27,000 in cash kept in the locker were stolen.

The St. Thomas mount police registered a case and further investigations are on. The robbers had

also damaged the CCTV camera making it difficult for the police to identify them. However, the police retrieved the CCTV footage of the robbery, where two masked men were seen robbing the shop in the early hours of Saturday. Police are also scrutinizing the CCTV cameras in the locality to nab them.

**Disband NIA, demand MDMK, DK**DC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, FEB. 20

Members of MDMK, DK and other organisations staged a demonstration here on Saturday demanding dissolution of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) alleging that it is functioning infringing upon the investigation work of state governments. They also demanded the repeal of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act as it is being allegedly misused against social activists, Muslims and Leftists.

Ayanapuram Murugesan of Thamizhar Desiya Munnani led the agitation. Representatives of MDMK, DK, CPI, CP-IM and several other organisations participated in the agitation.

**When a poll campaign assumes corporate hues**

G. Babu Jayakumar

**Just spamming**

Whether one notices or not, the ongoing election campaign in the State looks more like a corporate war that breaks out once in a while when companies promote their products in a competitive market. Some might remember Coke and Pepsi fighting it out through commercial advertisements, much to the delight of media houses that ran those advertisements and to the amusement of readers and viewers, quite some time ago. Now the poll campaign by the two main contenders for the throne at Fort St George resembles more like those corporate battles fought

on the media turf. Of course those who are in the know are aware of the reasons for the political battle talking the hues of business rivalry – both Dravidian majors have hired professional agencies to handle their campaigns, like corporates.

So, we are living in an era that is quite different from the earlier times when elections were fought on the basis of political ideology and agenda, propounded through a wide network of cadre who carried the message of their leaders and parties to the voters. Those were the days when the grassroots workers

personally stood for causes advocated by their parties and leaders, connecting with the people on their own. Of course, we heard that the style of wooing changed in the interim with crisp currency notes doing the talking, but in the hands of the same foot soldiers. Even if those sweeping charges of cash distribution remain unproven, there was no denying the fact that the party workers were guided by his seniors and leaders, who shared the same loyalty and dedication.

Even now the quintessential party worker is around. But what has changed is the one who activates or guides him. Unlike those above him in the party hierarchy giving directions on what to speak in public or do in his domain or tell the local people, young greenhorns in politics are now issuing dictats. Those young men and women in modern attire often stand out of the crowd in many rural

and semi-urban milieu but nevertheless can be spotted managing events for party leaders to address, deciding on the kind of banners and such paraphernalia to be displayed, which were hitherto the prerogative of the party cadre and functionaries.

In the case of DMK events, those outside kids employed by I-PAC are conspicuous since the roping in of the organization for working out the poll strategy has been made open. But in AIADMK events they remain in the shadows.

Of course, like the I-PAC, there is a group chalking out the path that Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami should take to hit the highway to electoral triumph. The appointment of Sunil Kanugolu, who is also a poll strategist like I-PAC founder Prashant Kishor, is still kept under wraps and one is not sure if his assignment is to ensure the victory of

Palaniswami or the AIADMK. Whatever it is, he too has a team of young people, roaming around the State.

But unlike the I-PAC employees, Kanugolu's boys and girls do not reveal their group's identity. It is not even known if the group has a collective name. The youth, however, go around the State in cars, stay in hotels at various places, meet people, interview them on camera, take surveys and gauge the pulse of the people. They have been instructed to stress on the DMK engaging an external agency ie I-PAC and give rise to the impression that the AIADMK was facing the election on its own strength.

Whatever their strategies are, these external agencies have made the election campaign resemble a corporate fight with two brands of the same commodity vying for supremacy. So, through media advertisements the

two brands speak highly about their USPs and run down the other. Also the trend has engendered a practice of copying the other's idea. One example is the illumination boards in shops with the top portion devoted to the DMK's campaign and shop's name emblazoned in a small portion in the bottom. Of course this was a trick employed by big brands that made sign boards for shops with their product highlighted on the top more prominently.

The DMK, thus found space to advertise itself with a slogan that reads something like Stalin is anyway coming back and will do good things. A photo of Stalin, the party symbol and also a combo photo of the party's icons make the brief narrative complete. It is a different matter that some boards were even put up above shops that don't even have a hole in a wall but just operate on the platform with a makeshift struc-

ture. The point is that the boards provided advertisement space in urban areas where no writing on the wall would be permitted by the Election Commission once the Code of Conduct kicks in.

Drawing inspiration from it, the AIADMK also have started finding shops that would allow their boards designed almost in the same fashion but with the legend proclaiming the State's growth, citing surveys by news outlets. In fact, taking election surveys, which were once done by independent agencies and news organisations to know who would win, has also become a job of the agencies engaged by the parties, just like companies taking market surveys before launching a product.

To put it otherwise, parties have become corporate houses selling their 'promises' and 'achievements' like products, turning the voter into a consumer.



## OTHER STORY

## CM's plan of withdrawal of cases not viable

ARULOLI MJD  
TIRUNELVELI, FEB. 20

Chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami's promise of withdrawing cases registered between 2011 and 2014 against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) protestors, may not be practically viable, say police sources.

Terming the chief minister's assurance at an election campaign in Tenkasi district 'a political gimmick', a police officer in Tirunelveli district said that the government would not easily withdraw any of the 37 cases on which chargesheets have been filed and cases are pending in court, since the judiciary would not accept political reasons to withdraw cases pending before it.

Further, stating that around 21 cases under section 124A of IPC were filed against the anti-KKNPP protestors is the highest number of sedition cases filed against any particular protests in the country since independence. In addition to cases registered on charges of waging a war against the nation under Section 121 of IPC, the police officer wondered if the state government can make a mockery of justice by withdrawing cases bearing such severe charges, merely to gain political mileage.

"Had the Jayalalithaa administration felt that all the cases registered against the anti-KKNPP protestors were eligible for withdrawal, it would not have dropped only 244 cases leaving out 105 cases to continue?" opined the police officer, adding that this kind of promises given by leaders to retain their political vote bank would affect the morale of the police force, apart from setting a dangerous precedent of encouraging similar demands from different quarters.

The police officer also pointed out that the chief minister had also promised to positively consider the demand of anti-Sterlite protestors to withdraw all cases registered against them, despite the fact that the cases are in the hands of the CBI.

## Centre, states must work together to lower fuel prices: FM

**Chennai, Feb 20:** Amid an outcry over record high petrol and diesel prices, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the Centre and state governments will have to together work out a mechanism to bring retail rates to reasonable levels. As much as 60 per cent of the retail price of petrol, which shot above ₹100-mark in some places in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and is at an all-time high elsewhere in the country, is made up of central and state taxes. Taxes make up for about 56 per cent of the record high diesel rates.

Sitharaman, who had increased central excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record margin last year to mop up gains arising from international oil prices plunging to two-decade low, remained non-committal on cutting taxes to give relief to consumers. "This is a very vexatious issue. An issue in which no



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at an event organised by the Chennai Citizens' Forum on Saturday.

—DC

answer except reducing the price (of fuel) will convince anyone. I know I am treading on an area and whatever I may say, to bring in the reality into picture, will only sound like I am obfuscating." "I am avoiding my answer. I

am shifting the blame," she said addressing a gathering at an event organised by the Chennai Citizens' Forum here. She went on to explain the tax structure and how production cuts by oil cartel OPEC and its allies had led to a rally in

the international oil prices, leading to a hike in retail rates in India.

She, however, said the answer may lie in bringing petrol and diesel under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, which will end the cascading

impact of taxes and bring uniformity.

Currently, the central government levies a fixed rate of excise duty while states levy different rates of VAT. Under GST, the two would merge and bring uniformity, solving the problem of fuel rates being higher in states with higher VAT. "What I am saying is that this is a vexatious issue and no Minister can ever convince anybody because Indians being Indians and I am one of them, (will not be convinced)," she said. "It is a matter of fact that both Centre and states will have to talk."

Stating that the states levy ad valorem rates of sales tax or VAT which help them get more revenue whenever prices go up, she said it won't serve any purpose if the Centre were to take the moral high ground and bring down excise duty to zero.

"I can do that (cut taxes) if I have a certain guaran-

tee that my revenue foregone will not be an opportunity for somebody else to get into this space and gain that," she said.

"If all of us are talking about consumer prices (on fuel) to come down (and the) tax raised by the Centre, tax raised by the states are not holier than one another." The taxes by centre and states equal, she said.

Nirmala said as a finance minister she cannot be one minister in the Union government to say how much the price can be decreased and whether that would not guarantee the States to earn more money.

"Because every government needs more money, needs revenue and at the same time I can see a relief that not one additional paisa is being demanded from the taxpayers (from the budget)," she said.

Asked whether bringing the fuel prices under Goods and Service Tax would lead to an answer,

she said, "it can be."

"But to get it (fuel prices) under GST needs to be a thorough discussion in the GST Council (comprising Centre and the states)," she said.

The finance minister said if the GST Council agrees on one rate then all over the country there can be one fuel price rather than Chennai being more expensive than New Delhi or New Delhi more expensive than Mumbai.

"That anomaly can be addressed if it is under GST. And that can be just one tax which can be shared by both Centre and State," she said.

Petrol and diesel prices have been increased for 12 straight days, taking them to an all time high of Rs 97 per litre for petrol in Mumbai and over Rs 88 mark for diesel. Retail pump prices differ from state-to-state depending on the local taxes (VAT) and freight. —PTI

## Sagayam expected to announce his future plans

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR &  
D. SEKAR | DC  
CHENNAI, FEB. 20

Popular IAS officer U Sagayam, who applied for voluntary retirement last October and got it earlier this year, is expected to reveal his future plans on Sunday at a meeting organized by his supporters and other social activists in Chennai.

Calling themselves supporters of 'honest Sagayam for political change', the activists had organised the meeting at J P Paradise Grounds in Adambakkam at 4 pm on Sunday, which happens to be the 'International Mother Language Day'.

During his stint with the government, the 57-year-old Sagayam was not just known for his love for his mother tongue, Tamil, but

was also for his drive against corruption that prompted a group of youth under the banner 'Ezhuchi Tamilagam' (Revival of Tamil Nadu) to invite him to join politics.

Sagayam has been in the news for many reasons, ostensibly fighting corruption and taking on powerful persons. In Madurai he stayed for a night in a crematorium, lest some evidence would be tampered with by some people connected with illegal granite quarrying.

In his government service spanning 30 decades he had been transferred 25 times and the farmer's son who did his schooling in Tamil medium was posted in an insignificant job at the Science City in Chennai for seven years.

His image as an honest officer — a board Avoid

bribes, hold you head high' adorned his work place and he was the first officer to declare his assets when he was Collector of Namakkal in 2009 — led to people expecting him to enter politics and clean the system after he was relieved from government service.

However, he kept quiet all these days. Now, the meeting has been organized by his supporters, most of whom are social activists. Many civil society members are said to be in touch with Sagayam, who even mentored an NGO, Makkal Pathai (People's Way) while in service.

Wall posters have been put up all over Chennai to mobilise a huge gathering at the meeting, which the organisers hope would usher in a socio-political change in Tamil Nadu.

TN records 438 new Covid-19 infections, 6 more fatalities  
Second wave unlikely, says minister

**Chennai, Feb. 20:** Tamil Nadu added 438 new Covid-19 cases and six more fatalities, taking the caseload to 8,47,823 and the toll to 12,457, the health department said on Saturday.

Recoveries eclipsed new infections with 459 people being discharged, taking the tally to 8,31,246, leaving 4,120 active cases. Chennai accounted for the maximum number of infections with 139, taking the tally to 2,34,191. The metropolis also accounted for a little over one-third of the COVID-19 fatalities at 4,137 deaths.

All the six deceased had pre-existing morbidities, which include a 29-year-old woman from neighbouring Chengalpattu district. As many as 24 districts reported new infections in single digits, while three — Perambalur, Karur, Villupuram — recorded 'nil' fresh cases.

Out of 37 districts, 33

**Chennai, Feb. 20:** Health minister C Vijayabaskar got the second dose of Covid vaccine at the government medical college and hospital in Tiruchirappalli on Saturday. "I got inoculated with the second dose of COVAXIN today....I continued my routine work after the jab," he said in a tweet.

Tourism Minister 'Vellamandi' N Natarajan and College Dean Vanitha were present. The minister took the first shot on January 22 at the Rajiv Gandhi government general hospital in Chennai. Later talking to reporters, he said the department of health and preventive medicine vaccinated over 3.51 lakh people till date.

reported nil fatalities.

A total of 51,046 samples were tested on Saturday, taking the total specimens



The total comprised health care workers and frontline personnel including those from the police department. "There is no hesitation among anyone (to get vaccinated). There is a possibility to reach 'nil' Covid-19 cases with the declining trend of virus on one side and vaccination drive hap-

pening on the other side," he said. Asked whether there was a possibility of a second wave of virus in the state, he said, "chances are remote as the state has been ranked top in RT-PCR testing and doctors are handling the COVID-19 cases very well." "Even the mortality rate (due to COVID-19) has come down drastically. I must extend my appreciation to the medical team and also thank our Chief Minister (K Palaniswami) for taking measures to control the spread of virus," he said.

Asked when the government would commence vaccination for the general public, he said, "very soon". —PTI

## Frost bite chars Nilgiris tea gardens



A tea garden in Nilgiris which is charred due to frost-bite.

—DC

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC  
OOTY, FEB 20

As frost bite has already begun to scorch tea gardens and cripple tea yield, the heavy rains that pounded the Nilgiris on Friday night was a solace.

The wet spell that stretched up to mid-January had helped tea cultivation and also standing vegetable crops here. The winter mode and frost that set in from the third

week of January, saw a cold wave sweep unexpectedly in the later part of winter this season.

The heavy frosting also resulted in frost bite that sapped the tea leaves and charred tea gardens, especially in the low-lying areas, thus improving the yield.

N. Varadaraj, manager, Doddabetta tea factory here, said that his factory used to get around 4,000 kgs of green tea leaf in a

day for regular black tea/made tea manufacturing process. But, for the past couple of weeks, this has drastically dropped to 1,800 kgs.

"This shows how frost affects tea cultivation in the hills. Quite a few tea factories here run their factories once in two or three days in a week due to the impact of frost on tea gardens and tea yield. The late winter effect of frost has come as a big blow to

the tea industry this year. This negative trend may continue till the end of March. Only a good pre-summer would tilt the balance in favour of the tea industry." Varadaraj added. Meanwhile, unexpected heavy rains pounded the Nilgiris, especially Coonoor and Kotagiri taluks on Friday night. While Kotagiri recorded 92 mm, Yedapalli recorded 50 mm and Coonoor recorded 32.50 mm of rain.

## Film tries to channel Vishal's chakra magic! Well-intentioned film worth a watch

## Movie review

ANUPAMA  
SUBRAMANIAN

Vishal's forte are his lively action entertainers and Chakra has channeled all the delightful parts of the actor's past successes namely mysterious crimes, adrenaline filled fight scenes, use of new internet technologies, and nefarious businesses into a cohesive whole. Does it live up to the expectations?

On the 73rd Independence Day, when police personnel are busy on security duty for political leaders, Chennai city witnesses multiple robberies at various locations. Initial investigations by ACP Gayathri (Shraddha Srinath) lead to two masked men who have targeted only senior citizens' homes and ran away with jewels and cash. This includes Gayathri's beau and military officer Chandru aka Subash Chandra Bose house as well, where along with the booty, the burglars also stole his dad's prestigious Ashok Chakra medal. How Chandru along with Gayathri start hunting down the criminals and unravel the mastermind behind the break-ins with the major twist opening in the midway forms the remainder of the plot.

It's a cakewalk for Vishal



## CHAKRA

CAST: Vishal, Shraddha  
Srinath, Regina Cassandra

Direction: M.S. Anandhan

RATING: 2.75/5

and the actor with his robust physique and amazing screen presence does a great job. He is good and convincing in action sequences as well. Shraddha Srinath shines in the given role. However, her character, which started with much hype, tapers off as Vishal takes center stage. Regina as Leela, the chess coach and hacker, a role with grey shades though a revelation. Robo Shankar's comedy is annoying.

Though the director has con-

ceived a solid story, there are few issues with logic going for a toss and screenplay lacking the punch. Aren't army officers supposed to follow and not interfere in local police investigations? There are hardly any challenges for the protagonist as he seems to know everything. All right, Leela has a disturbed childhood, but why she chose a criminal route is not explained properly. However, the racy narrative somewhat comes to the film's advantage. Also, opting to steer clear of cinematic frills like romantic numbers and comedy tracks is a relief for viewers.

Technically, Yuvan Shankar Raja's BGM elevates the mood of the genre. Balasubramaniam's cinematography is just about adequate. The movie ends with an open climax suggesting a sequel!

ANUPAMA  
SUBRAMANIAN

Kamali (Anandhi) is a fun loving plus one student from a remote village Nadukkaveri in Thanjavur. A prankster in nature, Kamali often indulges in annoying a retired professor Arivudai Nambi (Pratap Pothan) who has settled in the village, by rewriting the proverbs he writes on his compound wall slate every morning. Kamali is also not very serious about her studies and is not averse to the idea of her dad (Azhagam Perumal) getting her married soon. However, things take a drastic change when she sees the interview of CBSE topper Ashwin (Rohit Saraf) on television and falls for him instantly. When he says that he wants to join the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, the love smitten Kamali also aspires to pursue higher studies in IIT. Now, Nambi steps in and after vigorous training she enters IIT-Madras. But the reality of the campus is altogether different.

Anandhi has performed brilliantly and it is undoubtedly a milestone film in her career. She pulls off the transformation from a naive girl to a matured confident woman

KAMALI FROM  
NADUKKAVERICAST: Anandhi, Rohit  
Saraf, Pratap Pothan,  
Azhagam PerumalDirection: Rajashekar  
Duraiamy

RATING: 3/5

effortlessly. Rohit Saraf looks handsome and does his part neatly. Pratap Pothan brings his versatility to the fore. Azhagam Perumal, Imman Annachi, and the girl who plays her friend in the village chip in

their best.

Kamali from Nadukkaveri has good intentions behind it but not without its flaws. Director Rajashekar Duraisamy's core theme is laudable, but the execution is found wanting. Some of the scenes are too predictable and they don't develop organically. At times, it looks like propaganda for IIT.

Jegadeesan Logayan's visuals are eye catchy and Dheendrayalan's music is good. Overall, despite its inadequacies, KFN is worth a watch for its commendable idea and great performances from the entire cast.

Ruckus over  
Gandhi statueR. VALAYAPATHY | DC  
KARUR, FEB. 20

Tension prevailed for a while at the busy lighthouse corner here on Saturday, when police forcibly removed Karur Lok Sabha Congress member Jothamani and a section of Congress party workers and subsequently arrested them, when they staged a dharna there protesting the removal of Gandhi's statue in the lighthouse corner traffic island.

It was removed by mid-night Thursday, and was kept in the municipal office here. On information, volunteers of the Congress and the DMK laid a siege to the municipal office here on Friday and had a wordy quarrel with Ashok Kumar, regional director of municipalities, while another group assembled at lighthouse corner and wanted to know the reason behind the removal of the statue. However, police told them that they were going to arrest the agitators, following which the protesters dispersed peacefully. Then, the municipal authorities erected an eight-feet new statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the same place.

Despite repeated request by police, the dharna continued and subsequently women police forcibly removed Jothamani who staged dharna to replace old statue and arrested 67 agitators including six women.

Cong members protest  
against fuel prices hikeDC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, FEB. 20

Congress members staged demonstrations at three places in Thanjavur district on Saturday protesting against the increasing petrol and diesel prices and demanding rollback of the hike.

T. Krishnaswamy Vandayar, Thanjavur South district Congress president, led the agitation near railway station while P.G. Rajendran, Thanjavur city corporation district secretary, led the demonstration from Sivaganga Park to Keelavasal. At Papanasam, Congress members led by T.R. Loganathan, Thanjavur north district secretary, took out the protest. They also demanded the repeal of three farm laws enacted by the central government and wanted release of activists who were arrested for their actions supporting farmers.

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## SHORT TAKES

INDIA-CHINA MEET  
TO PUSH FOR  
DISENGAGEMENT

From Page 1

In Depsang plains, Chinese troops are blocking Indian patrol teams from going to Patrolling Points 10 to 13. A Major-General level meeting was also held on August 8 last year at Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) to discuss disengagement at the Depsang plains.

The Corps Commanders meeting is held a day after China on Friday for the first time after nearly eight months officially acknowledged that its four soldiers were killed and one officer seriously injured during clashes with Indian troops in June last year in Galwan Valley. Indian Army had lost 20 soldiers including Col B. Santosh Babu, Commanding Officer of 16 Bihar during the clash.

Earlier this week Indian Army's Northern Commander Lt. Gen. Y.K. Joshi had referred to the Russian news agency TASS report which had put out a figure of 45 Chinese soldiers killed during the clash.

ULFA THREATENS  
TO KILL OIL FIRM'S  
EMPLOYEES

From Page 1

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

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

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

Though the exact whereabouts of the kidnapped employees were not known to police, security sources feared that they have been taken to neighbouring Myanmar where a united front of banned outfit United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFWSEA) and other rebel bodies have their base camps.

It is significant that the press statement of the outfit was issued jointly by Ulfa-I and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and signed by Rumel Asom, a member of its publicity wing. It also said that if negotiations turn futile, Quippo will be banned from operating anywhere in South East Asia.

The family members of Mr Gogoi and Mr Kumar had recently called on Paresh Barua's brother who also appealed to the Ulfa leader to release the two.

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was formed in 1979 to establish a sovereign Assam through an armed movement. Paresh Barua was once the chief of its military wing. After a split in the organisation in 2011 over the leadership's decision to join peace talks with the government, he led a faction called Ulfa (Independent).

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 said it is important that individual and personal philanthropy is separated from a company's CSR efforts. "When I meet our teams and our partners' teams who have single-mindedly dedicated their lives to helping the country improve, that is about the biggest satisfaction one can derive," he said.

## 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 autocratDC 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.

## Govt must withdraw farm laws, demands Kharge

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb. 20: Opposing the government just for the sake of doing so was not his style of functioning, new leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said, but made it clear there would be no compromise on issues affecting the common man.

"We are not opposing the government just for the sake of opposition. We oppose the government's wrong policies affecting the common man," he said.

Mr Kharge, who became LoP this week following the retirement of Ghulam Nabi Azad, flagged the ongoing farmers' stir demanding repeal of the three farm laws enacted by Parliament last year, "flouting all procedures"

and demanded that they be withdrawn.

He suggested that the government come up with fresh proposals after withdrawing these controversial laws and refer them to a parliamentary standing committee for scrutiny.

The senior Congress leader visited Kerala on Friday to address a public meeting organised in Kollam as the Congress-

led UDF's 'Aiswarya Kerala Yatra', led by senior party leader Ramesh Chennithala arrived in Kollam.

The yatra is being organised to reach out to people ahead of the assembly polls likely to be held in April-May.

Mr Kharge, a hardcore Gandhi family loyalist, said his party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul

Gandhi had asked him to "highlight the issues of the poor people" on the floor of the House.

"We raise the issues (in Parliament) not to become famous. We take up the issues affecting the poor. Somebody should talk," the senior Congress leader said.

The 78-year-old veteran leader, with over 50 years' experience in politics,

urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP to listen to the voices of agitating farmers and address their grievances.

"The farmers have been agitating against the new farm laws for past few months and demanding that they be withdrawn as it abolishes the MSP and the Mandi system. We are all supporting their demand," he said.

After completing his two-day visit on Sunday, the EAM will visit the small Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius on February 22-23.

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.

Covid numbers  
see sudden rise

Tally is up by 13,993; steep hike after 22 days

New Delhi, Feb. 20: Daily Covid-19 cases in the country climbed to about 14,000 after nearly 22 days taking India's tally to 1,09,77,387, while the recoveries surged to 1,06,78,048, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Saturday.

A total of 13,993 new cases were registered in a span of 24 hours. The death toll increased to 101 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

On January 29, 18,855 daily cases were recorded. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,06,78,048 which translates to a national recovery rate of 97.27 per cent and the case fatality rate stands at 1.42 per cent.

The Covid-19 active case-load remained below 1.5 lakh.

There are 1,43,127 active cases of coronavirus infections in the country which comprise 1.27 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh

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

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

The 101 new fatalities included 44 deaths from Maharashtra, 15 from Kerala and 8 from Punjab.

A total of 1,56,212 deaths have been reported so far in the country, including 51,713 from Maharashtra followed by 12,451 from Karnataka, 10,897 from Tamil Nadu, 12,287 from Delhi, 10,242 from West Bengal, 8,712 from Uttar Pradesh and 7,167 from Andhra Pradesh.

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

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of

Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Andhra Pradesh recorded 54 new COVID-19 cases, 70 recoveries and no deaths in 24 hours ending 9 am on Saturday, even as the active caseload came down to 604. According to the latest bulletin, the cumulative coronavirus positives in the state touched 8.89 lakh after close to 1.37 crore sample tests.

Telangana recorded 157 fresh cases, taking the total positives to over 2.97 lakh, while no deaths saw the toll remain at 1,623, the government said.

Karnataka reported 490 new cases and 5 related fatalities on Saturday, taking the total number of infections to 9,47,736 and the death toll to 12,292, a release said.

Kerala registered 4,650 new cases and 13 related deaths taking the total number of those affected in the state by the deadly virus to 10.30 lakh. — PTI

Kejriwal to host leaders  
of farmers' unions todayDebt-ridden farmer,  
son commit suicide

New Delhi, Feb. 20: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will host protesting farmer leaders at a lunch at the Vidhan Sabha here Sunday afternoon where he will discuss with them the three contentious Central agricultural laws and other related issues, government sources said Saturday.

However, the government as well as Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders were tight-lipped about the names of the union leaders invited for the meeting.

Farmer leader Darshan Pal said they had not received any invitation from the Delhi government till Saturday evening.

A senior AAP leader said, "Discussions will be held at the meeting on various concerns of farmers over the agri laws and also the various aspects of the laws and its impact."

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at Delhi border under the banner of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) for nearly three months now against the three agricultural laws enacted by the Centre in September last year.

Earlier this month, a delegation of SKM leaders had met Kejriwal, urging him for a judicial enquiry

into the alleged "conspiracy" against the protesting farmers.

The Delhi Chief Minister had said his government will help trace the farmers who have been missing since the violence on January 26 during a tractor parade by the protesting farmers, and asserted that if needed, he will approach the Lieutenant Governor and the Centre in this regard.

The farmer, Jagtar Singh (70), and his son Kirpal Singh (42) were found dead at their residence in Muhadipur village on Saturday morning, Deputy Superintendent of Police Munish Kumar said.

They had allegedly consumed a poisonous substance, police said.

In a suicide note recovered from their residence, they wrote that they were taking the extreme step because of debt.

They also accused the Congress government in Punjab of not honouring its promise of waiving their farm loans.

They further mentioned in the note that they were also distressed as the Union government had not repealed the new farm laws.

The two owned one acre of land. Their bodies were sent to Dasuya civil hospital for post-mortem, police said, adding they are investigating the matter. — PTI

Mr Kejriwal had also visited one of the protest sites at Singhu border in December and challenged the Centre to have an open debate with them in the three laws.

The AAP government has extended full support to the protesting farmers. Mr Kejriwal in a gesture of his party's support had torn the copies of farm laws in Delhi Assembly in December last year. — 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

with which an air bubble was operationalised and this boosted their tourist inflow.

India had also undertaken a series of economic and financial initiatives at the peak of the pandemic

go 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.



## 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 batten down.

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

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

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

**United Nations, Feb. 20:** The world's big emitting countries, including China, India, Russia and Japan need to really step up and begin to lower greenhouse gas emissions, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry has said as he called on all nations to raise their ambition to fight against climate change.

Kerry on Friday joined UN Secretary-General An-

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

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

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

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

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

## Russia says detected first case of H5N8 avian flu in humans

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

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

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

## ARGENTINE HEALTH MINISTER RESIGNS

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

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 out-

## 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.

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## 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

Germany and Poland, are under a complete lockdown. The number of new infections per 100,000 inhabitants in the last seven days there is around 1,000.

Further measures, including a complete lockdown of more counties, will be discussed over the weekend. The government is also planning to make Covid-19 tests mandatory for all employees not working from their homes.

The Czech government wants to go ahead with a plan to partially reopen schools, with the students of the final grade at high schools coming back on March 1. All students will have to get tested regularly, with the government providing all necessary tests. — AP

The central European region saw very few infections when the virus first arrived in Europe a year ago, only to see a huge spike in infections and deaths in the fall of 2020.

In the Czech Republic, the three hardest-hit counties, on the border with





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.

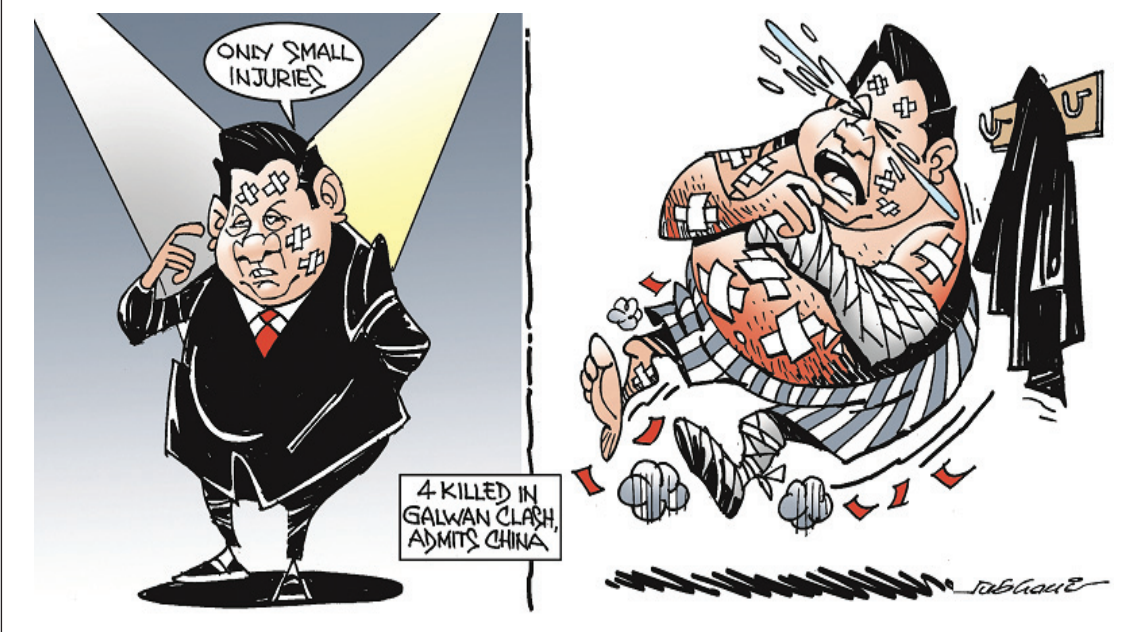
So while I can raise my eyes to the hills and this new-old life. It's spring. The bignonia venesta is a riotous celebration of colour. And I pretend I can't see that ugly new building beyond.

*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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LETTERS

## WELCOME DECISION

It is good that Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has taken the sagacious decision to cancel all the pending police cases filed against the citizens for traffic violations etc. during the corona lockdown last year. The number of cases pending disposal is stated to exceed ten lakhs throughout Tamil Nadu. Most of the cases being minor and civil in nature it's good that all those involved are granted a general pardon from punishment for the violations. It should be noted that even such violations were committed due to anxiety and mental pressure created out of continued confinement at one's own homes for days together of which people had no experience before. The Chief Minister deserves all praise for removing the fear of prosecution in courts by the single order written with his pen.

**Marudamalaiyan,  
Coimbatore**

## CHANGE OF TRACK

FORMER MD of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation E. Sreedharan, who is waiting in the wings to join the BJP, has said that he is ready to be the Chief Minister, if the party comes to power in Kerala, as he is keen on doing something substantial for the development of the state. All these years, the 88-year-old technocrat has had a clean image. He had earned a good reputation for steering several important infrastructure projects across the country. Today's politics being what it is, one wonders whether Sreedharan would be able to maintain his uprightness and steadfastness in a murky atmosphere. A political career in India is certainly not suitable for an honest man, for he can be pulled down any time by people surrounding him. Most of them are wolves in sheep's clothing. Only time will tell whether the 'Metroman' has switched over to the right track.

**P.G. Menon, Chennai**

## KILLER DOCTOR

THE REPORT of a doctor Gokul Kumar stabbing his wife Keerthana at his house and dragging her to the car parking lot and crushing her to death by driving over her is horrendous and unbecoming of a doctor. The doctor not sparing the parents of his wife who were also stabbed (the father-in-law being seriously injured in the abdomen) reveals the killer maniac attitude of the doctor. It is really disturbing to note that Keerthana was run over by the doctor in full public view. A doctor who has to save the lives of others has turned into a killer. The medical council should cancel his licence and debar him for life. Allowing such maniacs will be a danger to the patients if he is allowed to practice medicine.

**M.C.Vijay Shankar,  
Chennai**

**Mail your letters to  
editor@deccanmail.com**

Anita Katyal

Political  
Gup-ShupBJP for Sourav  
as Bengal CM;  
Cong farmer  
cell has no chief

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

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

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

Tamilian singing Hindi songs.

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

three decades.

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

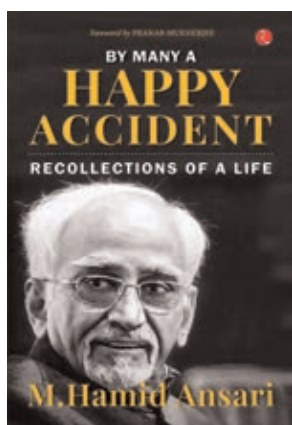
feeling emboldened after the Congress swept the civic polls.

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

*Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist*



## 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  
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## 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 her credit, translator



S. Hareesh

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



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

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



Tripurdamani Singh

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



Namita Gokhale

instance, very fastidious about attending parliament. Ambedkar, who only resigned several months after the passing of the amendment, was a bit of a misfit in the Nehru government and did not carry too much weight, did not get much of a say in matters. He probably went along because of the social justice aspect of the amendment. Patel considered free speech as irrational exuberance. Nehru had used the powers of Article 32 to pass the amendment, much the same way as Modi used Article 370 to read down Article 370, Thapar commented.

The paradoxes of the life of

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

— ARUNI KASHYAP

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

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

overshadowed by the dramatic and colourful and ultimately tragic details of his life.

The Booker-shortlisted Adam Foulds' 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](http://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.

## 'Definitely Not' T-shirt launched

**Chennai:** Chennai Super Kings officials turned many a head when they sported yellow t-shirts with M.S. Dhoni's iconic line 'Definitely Not' embossed on them at the IPL auctions recently. It went viral on social media. Now, the die-hard CSK fans can get their hands on the souvenir. The franchise and their official merchandise partner, The Souled Store, have released a special edition, 'Definitely Not' t-shirts, and are available on their website. The collector's item is made in limited quantities.

## Live on TV

## TENNIS

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

## CRICKET

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

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

## FOOTBALL

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

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

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

Regd. No.  
TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by  
**K. Sudhakar** on behalf of  
Deccan Chronicle Holdings  
Limited and Printed at  
Deccan Chronicle Press situated at  
No 2/22, Sengalipalayam Road,  
N.G.G.O Colony Post,  
Kurudampalayam Village,  
Coimbatore - 641 022. RNI  
Registration No: TNENG/2010/35692  
Ph No : 2231252,253,255,257 & 358  
Editor: **KAUSHIK MITTER**

## 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 &amp; 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

## Jagadeesan hits ton in TN's win

**Indore, Feb. 20:** Tamil Nadu's new batting sensation Shahrulkh Khan scored a 36-ball 55 to give finishing touch to their challenging chase of 289 against Punjab in the Vijay Hazare opener on Saturday. N. Jagadeesan's century and B. Aparajith's well-crafted 88 laid a strong foundation for the chase before Shahrulkh's blitzkrieg.

**Ishan stars in Jharkhand's big win**  
Skipper Ishan Kishan smashed a blistering 173 off just 94 balls to lead Jharkhand to a massive 324-run victory over Madhya Pradesh.

Ishan, who has done well for his IPL franchise Mumbai Indians, served a timely reminder to the national selectors before the white-ball series against England, which comprises five T20s in Ahmedabad and three ODIs in Pune.

Invited to bat, Jharkhand posted a mammoth 422 for nine, shaped by Kishan's whirlwind knock, and then bundled out the opposition for a meagre 98 in 18.4 overs, with pacer Varun Kumar (6/37) doing the bulk of the damage.

The 22-year-old left-handed Kishan single-handedly tore apart the MP attack,



N. Jagadeesan

striking 19 fours and 11 sixes in his knock. After Jharkhand lost opener Utkarsh Singh (6) early, Kishan conjured up a 113-run second-wicket stand with Kumar Kushagra (26) to lay the foundation for a big score.

Kishan, who opened the innings, continued playing his shots before being caught by Shubham Sharma off Gaurav Yadav. Kishan reached his individual 50 in 42 balls, 100 in 74 balls and 150 in 86 balls. Courtesy Kishan's heroics, Jharkhand posted the highest total by an Indian domestic side.

Virat Singh (68 off 49 balls; 5x4, 3x6) and Sumit Kumar (52 off 58 balls, 5x4) also played their parts to perfection as all the MP bowlers had an off day in the field. — *Agencies*

## BRIEF SCORES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CLARKE FINDS IT HARD TO SEE SMITH PLAYING IN NEXT IPL

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

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

has, just under \$400,000 — which is still good money. "But when you look at what he was getting (last season) and his role as captain of Rajasthan, don't be surprised if there's a little hamstring strain the day the plane is meant to fly to India," Clarke said on the Big Sports Breakfast Podcast. "For him to go away for an eight-week tournament and quarantine before the tournament starts — call it 11 weeks. I don't think he is going to give up 11 weeks away from his family and his partner for \$380,000."

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

## Novak faces 'challenger' Medvedev in final

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

him "the man to beat".

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

"He's definitely a very

smart tennis player."

## 'HE'S THE FAVOURITE'

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

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

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

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

— *AFP*

## Price paid for Morris this IPL would seem out of whack



Ayaz Memon  
Over The Top

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

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

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

So, what exactly are the benchmarks for pricing players?

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

In mini auctions particularly, franchises are look-

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

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

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

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

His last Test came in 2017,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

was laughing all the way to the bank.

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

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