

SHORT TAKES

Fire dept to conduct course for nursing homes staffers

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

The Delhi Fire Service is planning to conduct a basic fire fighting course for the staff of nursing homes and hospitals to better equip themselves in case of any emergency, officials said on Saturday. Atul Garg, the director of Delhi Fire Service (DFS), said the fire department has proposed to conduct a half day basic fire fighting training programme at Fire Safety Management Academy in Rohini where training will be imparted to the staff of nursing homes and hospitals in different batches. "Each batch would have a maximum of 40 participants and this basic safety training is essential for the employees of nursing homes and hospitals to keep themselves acquainted with evacuation and fire fighting procedures. This will help them in dealing with any fire-related emergency while keeping in mind the safety and care of patients," he said. The fire department said that depending on the number of nominations received from different organisations, staffers will be given training on a first-come-first-serve basis against the prescribed fee of ₹1,000 per candidate. In January, a minor fire broke out in a room used by the nursing staff in the OPD block situated on the fourth floor of the Safdarjung hospital. Seven fire tenders were rushed to the spot and the fire was brought under control. No one was injured in the incident. To prepare themselves in dealing with any such incident in the near future, the DFS has advised the owners of nursing homes and hospitals to nominate their staff either directly or through their respective associations for their basic fire fighting training. Meanwhile, the DFS is also planning a technology overhaul to reduce response time and increase efficiency. From GPS-enabled computer systems for automatically redirecting calls to area fire stations to equipping fire fighting vehicles with tablets and Wi-Fi for receiving instructions from control rooms in real-time, the fire department is planning to modernise its functioning with the help of technology.

Air quality panel shut down in 5 months

New Delhi: The central government's Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas has been shut down within five months of its constitution. The commission, which was established by the Centre in October last year, has shut down as the ordinance under which it was set up has lapsed. Talking to PTI, Union Environment Secretary R P Gupta said since the ordinance was not introduced in Parliament within six weeks of its convention, it has lapsed and consequently, the commission also stands shut. "The ordinance never became an Act. Any ordinance has to be introduced within six weeks of the convening of Parliament. It did not happen, so the ordinance has lapsed and hence, the commission is dissolved," he said. The commission was headed by M M Kuttly, a former secretary in the ministry of petroleum and natural gas.

— PTI

Delhi's maximum temp rises to 31.2°C

New Delhi: Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 31.2 degrees Celsius on Saturday, two notches more than normal, the India Meteorological Department said. The minimum temperature settled at 15.2 degrees Celsius, normal for this time of the year. On Friday, light rains and cool, strong winds had brought the mercury down to 30.7 degrees Celsius. It was 35.2 degrees Celsius on Thursday, the highest this year so far, according to the IMD. The maximum temperature is predicted to hover around 33 degrees Celsius over the next two days, the weather department said. A bout of light rains under the influence of a fresh Western Disturbance had brought the mercury down by a few notches in the national capital on Friday.

— PTI

₹1cr aid given to family of deceased 'corona warrior'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday met the family members of a civic hospital's lab technician who died due to Covid-19, and offered them a compensation of ₹1 crore, officials said. He met the mother, wife and children of Rakesh Jain, who was working at the Hindu Rao Hospital in north Delhi.

"While working on Covid duty, Jain got contracted the Covid-19 infection. He was shifted to the Metro Hospital, but later he lost his life due to Covid. He was martyred but till his last breath, he served the citizens of Delhi. The Delhi government salutes such frontline workers who have served relentlessly the citizens of Delhi," Kejriwal was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the chief minister's office.

"Today, on behalf of the Delhi government, I have handed over a cheque for ₹1 crore to the family



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal hands over a cheque for ₹1 crore on Saturday to family members of Rakesh Jain, who died due to Covid-19 while working as a lab technician in Hindu Rao Hospital in New Delhi. — PTI

members of Rakesh Jain," he said. He continued to serve the people till his last breath, the chief minister said.

"There is no compensation for anyone's life, but I am hopeful that this financial assistance will provide some ease to his family," he added.

A large number of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers and frontline workers, have contacted the infection in the past one year, and some of them have also died to the Covid-19.

Jain got infected by Covid-19 while serving coronavirus patients and was admitted to the Metro Hospital at Preet Vihar on June 17, where he died the next day. A resident of Delhi, he had joined the service in 1988, and was due to retire in 2022, officials said.

He is survived by his mother, wife and two children. His wife is a homemaker, while the elder son is preparing for jobs, the younger son is pursuing a bachelor's course, the statement said.

Man shot dead over argument during brother's birthday party in Najafgarh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

A 28-year-old man was arrested for shooting dead another man allegedly after an altercation between them over playing DJ songs during a birthday party in Najafgarh area here, police said on Saturday.

The man, Anuj Sharma, was shot dead by accused Naveen Kumar on Thursday during the birthday celebrations of the victim's younger brother held at a farmhouse in Najafgarh area of the national capital, they said.

An altercation took place between Naveen and Anuj over playing DJ songs during the birthday celebrations. The accused, who was under the influence of alcohol, opened fire at Anuj and fled from the spot, a senior police officer said.

The injured Naveen was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared brought dead, he said.

A case was registered and with the help of technical surveillance and using call detail records of the accused, Naveen was arrested on Friday from Baba Haridas

Nagar, said Santosh Kumar Meena, deputy commissioner of police (Dwarka).

"During interrogation, the accused confessed that he had a small altercation with Anuj on the issue of playing DJ songs during birthday celebration and he was also in an inebriated state. Hence, he fired at him," he said.

The accused was found in possession of an illegal firearm along with two live cartridges, police said, adding that both items have been seized and further investigation of the case is underway.

HC asks accused to do gurdwara community seva, quashes FIR

New Delhi, March 13: The Delhi High Court has directed a 21-year-old man to do community service at Bangla Sahib gurdwara here for a month while quashing a criminal case against him. While imposing a fine of ₹1 lakh, the court said the man must learn to control his anger and not take law in his hands.

Justice Subramonium Prasad quashed the FIR lodged against the man for the offence of attempt to murder, noting that he was a 21-year-old youth with his entire life ahead of him and the fact that the parties have entered into a settlement.

The court directed him to do one month community service at Bangla Sahib gurdwara from March 16 to April 16, 2021 and added that after completion of one month, he should submit a certificate from the gurdwara to show compliance with the order.

"The youngster must learn to control his anger and keep in mind that he cannot take law in his hands," the judge said.

— PTI

Man arrested for duping people by posing as MLA

New Delhi, March 13: A 30-year-old man was arrested from Mumbai for allegedly duping people by posing as an MLA, police said on Saturday.

Bhalinder Pal Singh, who hails from Dehradun, had been living in Mumbai's Andheri west for the last two years and also owns a footwear shop there, they said.

He belongs to a reputed family and was also involved in other cases, including cheating, registered in Chhattisgarh and Punjab, they said. A probe was initiated against Singh after the police received a complaint from a Delhi-based man.

The man, whose brother was close to his local MLA, alleged that he received a call from a man who claimed to be the local MLA and asked him to transfer ₹6 lakh to the party fund. The man transferred the amount, but later found out that no such call was made from the local MLA's office, police said.

Based on his complaint, a case was registered under section 419 (punishment for cheating by personation) and 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property) of the Indian Penal Code, said Urvija Goel, Deputy Commissioner of Police

▶ The man, whose brother was close to his local MLA, alleged that he received a call from a man who claimed to be the local MLA and asked him to transfer ₹6 lakh to the party fund. The man transferred the amount, but later found out that no such call was made from the local MLA's office.

(West).

Using technical surveillance, the location of the accused was traced to Mumbai. A team was sent there and he was arrested, she said.

"During interrogation, Singh revealed that his father is a reputed businessman who used to be wholesale dealer of potatoes and onions. He used to carry out business with his father but they incurred losses due to his lack of professionalism. "Thereafter, he shifted to Mumbai and got involved in criminal activities. He started cheating people and mostly targeted businessmen," the DCP said.

The accused confessed to have cheated a number of people by posing either as an MLA or an MP. He has been taken on two days police remand for further investigation.

— PTI

Governing body representatives of 12 DU colleges allege financial irregularities

New Delhi, March 13: Governing body representatives of 12 Delhi government-funded colleges of DU on Saturday alleged irregularities in management of funds meant for clearing pending staff salaries, and questioned whether the principals are using the surplus amount as their "personal kitty".

Their remarks came a day after Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia set up an enquiry committee to look into alleged irregularities of funds in 12 city government-funded colleges. Demanding a high-level

probe, the representatives from all the 12 colleges alleged that despite the Delhi government releasing funds regularly, the colleges have not paid the salaries to the teaching and non-teaching staff for the past several months.

"Despite the Delhi government clearing the third instalment in December 2020 and the remaining fourth instalment has also been released on March 12, 2021, the colleges have not paid the salaries to their teachers and staff for the last several months yet," said Rita Benjamin, chair-

▶ DEMANDING A high-level probe, the representatives from all the 12 colleges alleged that despite the Delhi government releasing funds regularly, the colleges have not paid the salaries to the teaching and non-teaching staff for the past several months

person of the governing body at Bhim Rao Ambedkar College in a statement.

The representatives said the colleges have surplus funds and they have not submitted the fund utilisation

▶ Delhi govt wants to paralyse 3 civic bodies, allege mayors of BJP-led MCDs

Mayors hit out at AAP govt over cut in funds for MCDs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

Mayors of the BJP-led municipal corporations on Friday alleged that the Delhi government in its Budget has reduced allocation to the local bodies as it wants to paralyse the three civic bodies. The charge was made in a joint press conference held by North Delhi mayor Jai Prakash, South Delhi mayor Anamika, and East Delhi mayor Nirmal Jain at the Civic Centre, where other senior officials were also present.

The three mayors jointly said that the Delhi government has reduced Budgetary allocation of all three corporations as it wanted to paralyse the civic agencies, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation said in a statement. The three leaders claimed that the Delhi government's Budget has been increasing every year while the corporations' share is decreasing.

The Delhi government on March 10 had presented a ₹69,000-crore budget themed on "patriotism"



Jai Prakash



Anamika



Nirmal Jain

for the financial year 2021-22, announcing free Covid-19 vaccination to all in its hospitals in the coming phases of the ongoing inoculation drive.

Presenting the Budget for the seventh consecutive time in the Assembly, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia had proposed to allocate ₹16,377 crore, one-fourth of the total Budget for the education sector while the health sector got ₹9,934 crore. In other allocations, Sisodia had said, "Our government will provide financial support of ₹4,367 crore to the local bodies."

This includes an amount of ₹2,298 crore as a tied fund for the implementation of schemes, programs, projects by the

local bodies and ₹2,069 crore as Basic Tax Assignment (BTA)". In addition to the above, an amount of ₹1,805 crore has been provided for the local bodies as a share in stamps and registration fee and one-time parking fee. The government is thus giving total financial support of ₹6,172 crore to the local bodies in the Budget, he had said.

South Delhi mayor Anamika alleged that the Delhi government is paralysing the civic agencies by reducing budget allocation every year. She said the government is trying to derail the ongoing development works of all three corporations so that it could get political benefits in the upcoming municipal elections.

North Delhi mayor Prakash said the Budget presented by the Delhi government was baseless and far from the reality. He said in 2018-19, the Delhi government made a provision of ₹6,930 cr for the corporations, in 2019-20 it was ₹6,380 cr, in 2020-21 it made a provision of ₹6,828 cr and in 2021-22 it is just ₹6,172 cr, which is nearly ₹700 crore less than the last year.

East Delhi Mayor Jain said that the city government is busy with sloganeering and releasing advertisements as they have nothing to do with the development of the city. The AAP government has constantly accused the three corporations of indulging in corruption and misusing funds.

Cops visit Tihar jail to quiz Mujahideen leader Akhtar

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

The Special Cell of Delhi Police on Saturday visited at Tihar Jail to question Tehseen Akhtar in connection with a mobile phone recovered from his barrack in Central Jail No 8 where he is lodged. Tehseen Akhtar, alias Monu who was arrested by the Special Cell team of Delhi Police in 2014 was the chief of terror outfit Indian Mujahideen. He was then heading the Indian Mujahideen after the arrest of Yasin Bhatkal, co-founder of the terror outfit.

According to a senior police official, a permission was sought from a Delhi court here by the team of Special Cell to question Akhtar in connection with a phone recovered from his barrack which is suspected to have been used for operating Telegram channels used recently for claiming responsibility for terror acts/ threats.

"On Saturday police team questioned Akhtar. Police have sought permission from the court to question him and based on

▶ ACCORDING TO a senior police official, a permission was sought from a Delhi court by the team of special cell to question Akhtar in connection with a phone recovered from his barrack which is suspected to have been used for the recent terror threat acts/threats

it, we may question other inmates if needed," he added.

On Friday, the Delhi Police had said that Based on information provided by the Special Cell, Tihar Jail authorities had seized a mobile phone from a jail where certain terror convicts are lodged and suspected that this phone was used for operating Telegram channels used recently for claiming responsibility for terror acts/ threats.

On Thursday, a senior Mumbai Police official had said a Telegram channel through which an organisation named Jaish-ul-Hind had claimed responsibility for placing an explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Ambani's residence in

Mumbai last month was "created in the Tihar" area of Delhi.

According to police sources, the Telegram channel was created on February 26 and the message claiming responsibility for placing the vehicle outside Ambani's residence was posted on the Telegram messaging app late in the night on February 27.

The message had also demanded payment in cryptocurrency and mentioned a link to deposit the same.

During the probe, the link was found as not available, due to which the investigators suspected it to be mischievous. On February 28, another message from Jaish-ul-Hind surfaced on a social media platform, claiming that the organisation did not have any role in the incident.

The investigation in the case was initially conducted by the Crime Branch of the Mumbai police. The SUV, Mahindra Scorpio car with gelatin sticks was found parked near Antilia, the multi-storey residence of Ambani, in south Mumbai on February 25.



Agitating farmers construct a permanent shelter as the summer season approaches at Tikri border in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

JNU central library's ground floor reading rooms reopened

New Delhi, March 13: The Jawaharlal Nehru University on Saturday announced the reopening of ground floor reading rooms of its Dr B R Ambedkar Central Library.

The university also allowed entry for vehicles "with JNU stickers" through the Saraswati Puram and east gates as part of its phased reopening process.

The visitors may also enter through the IIMC

gate, the varsity said. "The re-opening of ground floor reading rooms inside the Dr B R Ambedkar Central Library is allowed in a phased-manner. Librarian may devise standard operating preventive (SOP) such as mandatory wearing of the face masks and maintaining social distancing norms, etc in library premises as per the Government of India guidelines issued from time to time," the univer-

sity said in a notification. The notification has asked the Dean of Schools and Chairpersons of the special centres to look into the reopening of the reading rooms as per the guidelines issued by the government and the university itself.

The university also allowed the reopening of 'Mugal Darbar' and '24x7 Food Court' with take-away facility only with immediate effect.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Assam: Shah on 2-day campaign

New Delhi: Union home minister Amit Shah will be on a two-day visit to poll-bound Assam and West Bengal from Sunday during which he will address public meetings and attend other political programmes. The BJP said Shah will address two public meetings at Margarita and Nazira in Assam on Sunday. He will then leave for Bengal where he will hold a road show in Kharagpur in the evening. On Monday, Shah will address public meetings at Jhargram and Ranibandha in West Bengal before flying to Guwahati where he will address a Town Hall programme, the BJP said. Senior party leaders said Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda are also expected to meet the family members of 129 party workers in West Bengal who were allegedly killed in political violence in the state in the last few years. — PTI

Assam BJP Leader stabbed to death

Tinsukia: A BJP booth committee president was stabbed to death in Assam's Tinsukia district by one person, who has already been arrested, police said on Saturday. According to a senior police officer, the incident took place on Friday night at No 1 Doomdooma Nagaon village under Bordumsa police station of the district. After a minor altercation, one Jay Chandra Gogoi several times stabbed BJP member Deba Gogoi, who died of the injury, police said. The accused was later arrested and further investigation is on, he added. Meanwhile, the Tinsukia Information and Public Relations Officer said in a statement that there is no political angle in the murder and appealed to the people to maintain peace. "As per preliminary reports, the incident took place due to family feud," the official release said. — PTI

₹2 crore worth gold ornaments seized

Puducherry: Gold ornaments worth ₹2 crore have been seized from a vehicle by election department officials at the border village of Gorimedu here, a senior official said. The vehicle, coming from neighbouring Tamil Nadu, was intercepted by the flying squad of the election department on Friday night and checks revealed it to be carrying the ornaments without proper documents, Chief electoral officer Shurbir Singh told PTI. The same day, ₹50 lakh cash was seized from a vehicle in Karaikal and 3,700 litres of rectified spirit worth ₹17 lakh, in Puducherry, he said. The vehicle has been impounded and a probe was on, he said. The seizures were effected in the run up to the Assembly polls, to be held on April 6. — PTI

BJD DEMANDS APOLOGY FROM BJP LAWMAKER

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 13

Odisha's ruling Biju Janata Dal members on Saturday demanded unconditional apology from BJP MLA Subash Panigrahi who on Friday attempted to kill himself by consuming hand sanitiser in the State Assembly. The BJD MLAs and ministers trooped into the well of the House and raised slogans stating that they would not let the Assembly run till the BJP MLA apologised for his act in the Assembly. On the other hand, Congress MLAs created ruckus by raising the mandi issue in the Legislative Assembly, especially in western Odisha. Following the pandemonium, Speaker Surjya Narayan Patro adjourned the proceedings of the second phase of the Budget session of Odisha Assembly. On the other hand, Congress MLA Tara Bahinipati said that the BJD MLAs intentionally disrupted the proceedings to avoid discussion on the mandi issue. "This is the first instance when the BJD ministers created ruckus in the well of the House. We will not allow the Assembly to function until they seek apology," said Mr Bahinipati. Opposition chief whip Mohan Majhi said, "The Speaker has the power, he should take the decision. When the government didn't listen to him. We are having an anti-farmer government here which never cares for the farmers' problems."

BJP calls on TMC veteran Sisir ahead of polls

Hooghly BJP MP Locket Chatterjee meets head of Adhikari family

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MARCH 13

After roping in his two sons: Shuvendu and Soumendu Adhikari, the BJP has finally reached out to three-time Trinamul Congress MP of Contai: Sisir Adhikari, also a rebel face in his party, with an offer to come to its fold on an invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mega campaign rally for the West Bengal Assembly Election in his Lok Sabha constituency on March 24.

On Saturday afternoon Hooghly BJP MP Locket Chatterjee met the head of the Adhikari family at their residence in Shantikunja in East Midnapore and had lunch also. Another brother of Shuvendu, Dibyendu who is also a TMC MP was present there.

According to sources, Mr Modi has wished to see Mr Adhikari at his proposed rally where he would campaign for Shuvendu who is contesting from Nandigram against Trinamul Congress supremo and chief minister: Mamata Banerjee and other BJP candidates.



Tollywood actress and TMC candidate Sayantika Banerjee during an election campaign rally ahead of the West Bengal Assembly polls in Bankura on Saturday. — PTI

"I had *Shukto* and *Machh Bhat* which is a favourite Bengali dish. Sisirda and other in the family, present there, hosted me nicely. Sisirda's wife gave me a *Paan* after lunch. Shuvendu da is *Bhoomiputra* of Midnapore. He lives with his father and family members in Shantikunja. Like a

son stands by his father, father also stays on the son's side always. This is the norm in our family," she said. Asked about the possibility of the senior TMC MP's defection to the BJP, Ms Chatterjee however added, "No political talk was held. But a man like him, whom Midnapore and Bengal needs, will always

be welcomed if he joins. He is known to me for a long time. Whenever I made a speech in parliament, he encouraged me. He praised me for my fight. I sought his advice and blessings. Shuvenduda will definitely win here because Midnapore means Shantikunja and the Adhikaris."

Days after quitting, Assam MLAs return to NDA fold

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MARCH 13

Days after dissensions over denial of party ticket, the BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has succeeded in its reconciliation drive with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) veteran Brindaban Goswami withdrawing his nomination as an independent candidate from Tezpur and BJP MLA Shiladitya Dev, who gave his resignation from the party earlier this week, returning to the party fold.

Assam minister and North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) convenor Himanta Biswa Sarma and BJP national general secretary Dilip Saikia met Mr Dev at his home on Friday. Mr Dev, who had announced that he will contest as an independent, has now decided to sit out this three-phase

election to the 126-member Assembly.

"I cannot allow Congress to win because this will lead to the dominance of All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) chief Badruddin Ajmal as both the parties are in alliance. So, I decided to stay with my party," Mr Dev said.

Mr Dev, a BJP old-timer with deep roots in the party's ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), was replaced by Mr Ramakrishna Ghosh in the Hindu Bengali-dominated constituency of Hojai.

The Assembly seat turned into a BJP stronghold following the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act.

He is among the 12 BJP MLAs who were denied tickets this time. The BJP named 12 new faces for their seats.

RJD says Rai involved in illicit liquor trade Ruckus in Bihar House over allegation against minister

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, MARCH 13

The opposition RJD on Saturday created a ruckus in the Bihar assembly over revenue and land reforms minister Ram Surat Rai's alleged involvement in the illicit liquor trade, forcing adjournment of the house till noon.

The situation occurred when the leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav urged the chair that an adjournment motion against the minister's alleged involvement be taken up for discussion.

Later while talking to reporters, Tejashwi Yadav said that he had "concrete evidence" against Mr Rai and wanted to place it before the house. He said that the ruckus was created by ruling parties because they are in fear of being exposed for patronizing

people involved in the illicit liquor trade in a dry state like Bihar.

"It seems that people with lesser knowledge about the proceedings of the house has been made ministers. Why did the deputy chief minister intervene while I was giving a speech? The government is not allowing us to put our views in the house", the Leader of the opposition in the Bihar Assembly, Tejashwi Yadav said. Earlier a delegation led by Tejashwi Yadav had met Bihar governor Phagu Chauhan and apprised him of the situation. He had also demanded the resignation of revenue and land reforms minister Ram Surat Rai over his alleged involvement in the illicit liquor trade.

Minister Ram Surat Rai has been in the eye of the storm ever since liquor cartons were seized from a school campus in

Muzaffarpur district. According to Tejashwi Yadav, the school belongs to the brother of the minister whom the state government has been trying to save.

"As per the prohibition law, a police station should be opened in the building where liquor is seized. Alcohol was seized in November but no action has been initiated against anyone in this case", Tejashwi Yadav said.

Peeved over the allegation against him, the minister reacted sharply and said that "I don't understand why questions are being raised against me when the school belongs to my brother. Action should be taken against my brother if he is found guilty in the investigation. I want to ask him (Tejashwi Yadav) will he resign just because his father is in jail".



D.Y. Chandrachud

JUSTICE CHANDRACHUD was speaking at a farewell ceremony organised by the SC Young Lawyers Forum to honour Justice Indu Malhotra. Justice Malhotra said that for a lawyer it was important to conduct yourself with high degree of professionalism.

more diverse judiciary is an end, a goal in itself and worth pursuing in its own sake.

"Instrumentally, having a more diverse judiciary, ensured diversity of perspectives is fairly considered, instills high degree of public confidence," he said.

He said that it was required that stories such as Justice Malhotra become more common place.

"As members of legal fraternity we do our bit to ensure that it doesn't remain as hard as it was for Justice Malhotra for women to climb upper

Do not vote for BJP: Tikait at Mahapanchayat in Nandigram

Kolkata/Nandigram, March 13: Farmers held Mahapanchayats on Saturday in the city and at Nandigram, where chief minister Mamata Banerjee is in the fray, at the call of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha and urged people not to vote for the BJP in the coming Assembly poll in West Bengal.

Farmer leader and Bharatiya Kisan Union chief Rakesh Tikait, one of those spearheading the about four-month-old farmers' stir against the Centre's farm laws, reached the state during the day to be part of the Mahapanchayat.

Tikait, who was received at the airport by TMC MP Dola Sen, later addressed gatherings of farmers in the city and at Nandigram in East Midnapore district along with social activist Medha Patkar.

Alleging that the BJP-led government at the Centre is intent on breaking the backbone of the farmers



Don't vote for BJP. If voted to power they will give away your land to big corporates and industries. They will hand over the country to big industrialist groups putting your livelihood at stake and in danger

— Rakesh Tikait, Farmer leader

and their movement, Tikait said it is "anti-people".

"Don't vote for BJP. If voted to power they will give away your land to big corporates and industries and make you landless. They will hand over the country to big industrialist groups putting your livelihood at stake and in danger," he said.

Calling BJP "a party of cheats" which hides its sympathy for the rich, Tikait said "We will be on the side of those who oppose BJP, those who will stand by the farmers and the poor".

Clarifying that the Krishak Mahapanchayat

in Bengal is not meant to pledge support to any particular non-BJP party in the state, the Bharatiya Kisan Union chief said "I am not here to seek votes for a particular party. We are here to issue an emphatic appeal to start the battle against BJP on behalf of the farmers in Bengal."

Referring to Nandigram, he said the land of farmers' agitation will give new direction to the movement against the farm bills.

On the ongoing farmers' stir in Delhi, he said the protestors are ready to continue their agitation for a long period as their morale is high. — PTI

'Elements from Bangladesh could disrupt Bengal election' B'desh border: Additional troops deployed Parody tracks add heft to poll battle cry

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

An additional 10,000 troops have been deployed to completely seal the nearly 2,200 km long Bangladesh border with West Bengal amid intelligent inputs that subversive elements from Bangladesh could cross over into Bengal to disrupt the election process.

This additional deployment will remain in place till May 2, the counting day. Bengal shares the longest border with Bangladesh as compared to any other Indian state.

Sources said the issue of possible infiltration by subversive elements from Bangladesh into India with a plan to disrupt the Bengal elections was also discussed in detail during a security review meeting of the home ministry and the Election Commission top brass.

Kolkata, March 13: With election campaigning in West Bengal having reached fever pitch, parties are looking for ways to spice up the battle cry, with some of them launching snappy poll slogans and parodies of popular songs to take a jibe at rival camps.

After the raging success of TMCs khela hobe number, the Left has come up with its own version of Shah Rukh Khans lungi dance hit song from Chennai Express, as it sought to mellifluously

criticise the policies of the BJP-led Centre as well as the Mamata Banerjee government in the state.

Sharpening its attack on the TMC, the parody touches various issues such as coal pilferage from abandoned mines, Sarada scam, cut-money allegations.

It does not spare the saffron camp either, calling out the party over escalating fuel prices, privatization of profit making PSUs among other issues. The 3.14-minute song -- Hal pherao lal pherao --

asks people to vote for the Left Front to restore West Bengal's glory.

Senior party leader and its candidate from Jadavpur, Sujana Chakraborty, said the parody, which has gone viral on social media, aims to reach out to a wider audience.

Shubhajit Sarkar, the state committee member of SFI -- the CPI(M) students wing said, "We hope to drive home our inherent messages through music."

— PTI

During the meeting it was decided that in addition to the BSF, which was already present along the Indo-Bangla border, additional reinforcements of the Central forces would be rushed to virtually seal

the entire border. The additional deployment of more than 10,000 troops at Bangladesh border in Bengal would remain in place till at least the counting day on May 2. Central intelligence agen-

cies are closely monitoring the situation along the Indo-Bangla border and sharing their inputs with the home ministry regularly so that appropriate action can be taken in the coming days.

'Economy poised for V-shaped recovery'

Mumbai, March 13: There are green shoots visible in various sectors of the economy and the country is already looking at a 'V-shaped' recovery, minister of state for finance and corporate affairs Anurag Thakur said on Saturday.

"India is already looking at 'V-shaped' recovery. Along with the green shoots in various sectors, in the month of February, FPI inflows were ₹25,787 crore," Mr Thakur said at a virtual conclave organised by the Institute of Actuaries of India. After two consecutive quarters of contraction, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) entered into a positive territory with a growth of 0.4 per cent in the October-December quarter of the current fiscal, according to the data released by the NSO in February. — PTI

'SC left with one woman judge is deeply worrying'

New Delhi, March 13: The Supreme Court having left with only one woman judge is "deeply worrying" and must promptly receive serious introspection, apex court judge, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, said on Saturday. Justice Chandrachud was speaking at a farewell ceremony organised by the Supreme Court Young Lawyers Forum to honour Justice Indu Malhotra, who was the first woman lawyer to be appointed directly as a judge of the Supreme Court, retires from the

apex court on Saturday. "Justice Malhotra's retirement means that the SC now has only one female judge on the Bench. As an institution, I find that this is a deeply worrying fact and must promptly receive serious introspection," Justice Chandrachud said.

He said that "as an institution whose decision shape and impact lives of everyday Indian, we must do better".

"We must ensure the diversity of our country find reflection in making up of our court. Intrinsically having a

echelons of our profession," he said.

Speaking at the occasion, Justice Malhotra said that for a lawyer it was important to conduct yourself with high degree of professionalism. "You must be properly attired, professionally at all times and be punctual in your engagements. One issue I flagged when I was called by women lawyers to Bar room after becoming a judge, I said please don't wear fashionable clothes, which you must keep for the evening and not while you are at work. — PTI

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Sr. DEE/EMU/GZB for and on behalf of President of India, Invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work:		
1	N.I.T.No.	232-Elect-EMU-WC-04-20-21
2	Name of the work	Complete overhauling of Kirloskar make Transmission type KTC-100.20 of Tower wagon.
3	Tender cost	Rs.0.00
4	Approximate cost	Rs.32,31,206.89
5	Earnest Money	Rs.0.00
6	Completion period	24 Months
7	Validity of offer	45 days
8	Date & Time from tender advertised on IREPS website	13.03.2021 (15:34Hrs.)
9	Date & Time from tender submission start and end	25.03.2021 (00.00 Hrs.) to 08.04.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
10	Tender closing Date & Time	08.04.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
11	Date & Time of tender Opening (immediately when tender submission ends)	08.04.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
Note 1: All participant Tenderer/Tenderers will submit their requisite documents along with their tender offer. "No post tender correspondence for submission of additional document shall be entertained after opening of the Technical & Commercial offer. Even suo-moto post tender letters of the tenders shall be treated as null & void". Note 2: Duplicate documents should not be enclosed/up loaded. Tender Notice is available on website of www.ireps.gov.in . 232-Elect-EMU-WC-04-20-21 Date: 13.03.2021		
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SHORT TAKES

Fire at matches unit kills 1, injures 3

Virudhunagar: One worker was killed and three others were injured in a fire that broke out due to friction at a colour matches-manufacturing unit in Sivakasi near here on Saturday. Puduraja (40), among the four injured workers rushed to the government hospital, succumbed to burns, police said. The injured, including a woman, all aged 50-55, are undergoing treatment, the police said. The fire had partly damaged the chemical-dipping room in which the workers were making the colour matches for children, they said. The blaze occurred due to friction of chemicals. Even before the staff could realise and respond to the disaster, the flames engulfed the entire room, choking the workers, a senior police official said. The fire and rescue services personnel doused the flames and rescued the trapped workers. A case has been registered, the police said. In February, six people died in an explosion at a fire-cracker factory near here. More than ten sheds where chemicals had been stored were razed to the ground in the mishap. — PTI

Singer tries to end life, streams it on FB

Nagpur: A singer in Nagpur facing financial woes due to the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown attempted suicide by cutting his wrist on Saturday and uploading it live on Facebook, police said. However, he was saved by friends who saw the social media upload in time and rushed him to hospital, police added. "While the 35-year-old man was attempting suicide, his wife and children were crying for help. Several of his friends who saw the live stream reached his house in Pardi area here and took him to a nearby hospital. His condition is critical," an official said. Incidentally, he was among a group of people who had met authorities demanding help for artists affected by the lockdown. — PTI

MP doc gets Covid after second dose

Jabalpur: A senior doctor with the state-run Gandhi Medical College in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh has contracted COVID-19 despite taking both vaccine doses, officials said on Saturday. People close to the 48-year-old doctor said she believed not wearing a mask after getting the second dose and a general lowering of guard may have caused the infection. She got the first dose of the Covishield vaccine on January 16 and the second one on March 1, they said. The doctor tested positive on March 10, and has been advised home quarantine for 14 days. — PTI

TMC ropes in Sinha

■ **Continued from Page 1** state minister Subrata Mukherjee welcomed Mr Sinha, now 83, to the party in Kolkata. Mr Sinha asserted that the 'attack' on Ms Banerjee during her poll campaign in Nandigram was the 'tipping point' behind his entry to the Trinamul Congress. "I then decided to join the TMC and support Mamata," he said. Sources revealed that both had a conversation of around 40 minutes over phone. Hailing the chief minister for her patriotism, Mr Sinha claimed, "Mamata has always been a fighter. She is still a fighter. I would like to tell you that when we were at a Cabinet meeting after the Indian Airlines flight (IC-814) was hijacked by terrorists and was taken to Kandahar, she proposed the cabinet that she was ready to offer herself in exchange of the hostages. She would be taken into their custody and make whatever sacrifice possible. All of it was for the country." The veteran politician also spewed venom against the BJP government at the Centre over its style of rule and decisions including the three farm bills, asking "Who stands by it now?" He alleged, "The country is facing an unprecedented situation today. The strength of democracy lies in the institutions of democracy. All these institutions including the judiciary have become weak now."

Amaranth yatra to begin June 28

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, MARCH 13

The authorities have increased the pilgrims' intake by five thousand a day at Amaranth during this year's yatra to the revered cave-shrine tucked away in Kashmir lower Himalayas at a height of 13,000 ft (3882 m). The yatra spreading over 56 days will begin from both traditional Pahalagam and shorter Baltal routes on June 28, coinciding with Ashaad Chaturthi, an auspicious day in the Hindu calendar, and conclude on Shraavan Purnima (Raksha Bandhan) on August 22, the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) announced in Jammu on Saturday. It said that a meeting of

the board held in the winter capital decided to enhance the daily route-wise pilgrim ceiling from 7,500 to 10,000 on each route excluding the pilgrims who would be flying in helicopters to Amaranth. The pilgrims' intake has been increased "considering the carrying capacity of the existing tracks and other available infrastructure in the yatra area." However, the SASB also said that the yatra would be held "as per COVID-19 SOPs developed by the government". Last year, the yatra was cancelled at the eleventh hour in the face of the threat posed by the pandemic whereas in 2019 the government had asked devotees who had arrived in the Valley to pay obeis-



Lt. Gov. Manoj Sinha chairs the 40th board meeting of Amarnathji Shrine ahead of the annual procession in Jammu on Saturday.

sance at Amarnath and also tourists to cut short their visit and leave immediately, claiming that Pakistan-sponsored militants were planning a terror attack against the yatra whereas the lives of the outside holidaymakers

official agencies right from mid-July 2019 were part of the government's strategy to ensure the return of pilgrims and tourists from the Valley before the Centre's stripping Jammu and Kashmir of its special status under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and splitting it up into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019. A statement issued by the SASB said that Saturday's meeting which was presided over by lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha, who is also the board chairman decided to open the registration of pilgrims through 446 designated branches of Punjab National Bank, Jammu and Kashmir Bank and YES Bank, located in 37 states and UTs, from April 1.

Water war leaves 1 dead, 2 hurt in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, MARCH 13

A war over water late on Friday night broke out at a village in Madhya Pradesh, leaving one person dead and two others injured. The incident took place in the village of Chikli under Simrol police station in the Indore district, police said on Saturday. According to the police, a dispute overuse of water from a bore well in the village led to bloody clashes between 2 groups in the village, causing the tragic incident. The bore well was the only source of drinking water in the village. The village has been divided into 2 groups over access to bore well water and used to witness verbal wars between the rival groups over sharing of water of the bore well. The declining water level in the bore well has flared up a rivalry between them, investigating officers in Simrol police station said. The rival groups clashed Friday evening over drawing water from the bore well. But, some

elderly people in the village intervened and separated the rival groups. But the group allegedly led by Umrao Bhil attacked one Raju Bhil of the rival group after midnight, leading to violent clashes between them. Raju was allegedly hacked to death by the attackers, the slain villager's son Lakhan said in an FIR filed in the Simrol police station on Saturday morning. Two villagers, Umrao and Siddhu, were injured in the incident. Five people were arrested in connection with the incident, the police said. Water wars are a common sight in interior areas of parched belts of Bundelkhand and Chambal every summer. With the summer already setting in, several parts of the two parched regions have started reporting a shortage of drinking water. "Water crisis is looming in many parts of the parched regions of Bundelkhand and Chambal with water bodies drying up fast in the areas," a senior officer of Tikamgarh district in Bundelkhand in the state, told this newspaper.

Disha Ravu: Pronounced guilty by seekers of TRPs

When it became crime to think of envn, wonders activist

Bengaluru, March 13: Climate activist Disha Ravi, who was arrested in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest and released on bail later, wondered on Saturday when it became a crime to think of sustenance on earth. "Locked in my cell, I wondered when it became a crime to think the most basic elements of sustenance on this planet were as much mine as theirs," the 22-year-old activist from Bengaluru said in her four-page statement posted on Twitter. Wondering why were millions paying the ultimate price for the greed of a few hundred, Ravi said the human race would be inching closer to its own expiry "if we did not act in time to stop the endless consumption and greed."



I was lucky enough to have excellent pro bono legal assistance but what of all those who do not? What of all those still in jail whose stories are not marketable? What of the marginalised that are not worthy of your screen time?

— Disha Ravi, Climate activist

The activist claimed during her arrest her autonomy was violated and her photographs were splashed all over the news. "My actions were pronounced guilty — not in the court of law, but on

flat screens by seekers of TRPs," Ms Ravi lamented. Expressing her gratitude to the people who came out in her support and fought her case pro bono (term usually refers to services that are rendered by a professional for free or at a lower cost), she said the past few days had been painful. "I was lucky enough to have excellent pro bono legal assistance but what of all those who do not? What of all those still in jail whose stories are not marketable? What of the marginalised that are not worthy of your screen time?" Ms Ravi argued. Underlining that truth, no matter how long it took, always revealed itself, the activist quoted Soni Sori, an activist from the Bastar region of

Move comes amid concerns over side-effects of Covaxin India studies vaccination adverse events

New Delhi, March 13: Amid concerns over dangerous side-effects of the Oxford's Covid-19 vaccine, India is evaluating all serious adverse events post-vaccination to determine the causality aspects of Covishield and Covaxin, an expert associated with the process said Saturday. His comments came in the backdrop of some European countries suspending the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine Covishield over fears that it may be causing dangerous blood clots in some people. India has reported 234 adverse events following immunisation (AEFIs), including 71 deaths, for both the vaccines till Friday, said Dr N.K. Arora, an advisor to the national AEFI committee. Manufactured in India by the Serum Institute of India (SII), the Oxford vaccine is one of the two vac-

cines being used in India currently, the other being Covaxin made by domestic company Bharat Biotech. Till Friday, 234 AEFI's (adverse events following immunisation) (for both the vaccines) including 71 deaths have been reported. The district and state level initial investigations have found no causal relationship vaccine and these events, Dr Arora, an advisor to the national AEFI committee, said. "No specific vaccine is being looked at. We are carrying out a detailed evaluation of all the serious adverse events including deaths and hospitalisations following vaccination to determine the causality aspect for the both vaccines — Covishield and Covaxin. If any cause of concern emerges, it will be conveyed," Dr Arora said. — PTI

Last warning, follow rules, Maha CM to hotel bodies

Mumbai, March 13: Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday ordered hotels and restaurants to ensure strict adherence to Covid-19 protocols in their premises and not force the state to enforce drastic measures like lockdown. Speaking at a virtual meeting attended by representatives of hotel and restaurant associations, shopping centre groups, the CM said a "lackadaisical" attitude towards outbreak norms had crept in lately. "Do not force us to impose a strict lockdown. Consider this as the last warning. Follow all the rules. Everyone has to realise there is a difference between self-discipline and restrictions,"

Mr Thackeray said. The CM pointed out that crowds had increased in most places since activities resumed in a phased manner from October, and safety rules were not being followed and this had resulted in a steep surge in cases. Maharashtra recorded 15,602 Covid-19 cases and 88 deaths, taking the tally to 22,97,793 and the toll to 52,811. "Last week, a Central team visited Mumbai and one of the members told me no one was wearing masks or following social distancing at a hotel they visited. Initially, hotels, restaurants were adhering strictly to Covid-19 norms, but now everyone has become lackadaisical," he said. — PTI

India, Uzbek armies to hone counter-terror skills

PAWAN BALI CHAUBATIA (RANIKHET), MARCH 12

The Indian Army is conducting anti-terror exercise with Uzbekistan troops at Foreign Training Node Chaubatia, Ranikhet (Uttarakhand). The Indian Army has high expertise in counterterrorism operations and Uzbekistan soldiers are getting a handle on how to conduct such operations either in urban or jungle areas. This is the second edition of the annual bilateral joint exercise "DUST-LIK II" between the two armies. The exercise which started on March 10 will continue till March 19, 2021. The first edition of the exercise was held in Uzbekistan in November 2019. Forty five soldiers each from Uzbekistan and



India and Uzbekistan Army personnel participate in a joint military exercise at Chaubatia in Almora district.

the Indian Army are participating in the exercise. Uzbekistan Army soldiers are also learning to handle Sig Sauer assault rifles from Indian Army troops. Uzbekistan troops usually use AK-47. "At present Uzbekistan troops are learning firing from Sig Sauer assault rifles. Both the contingents are sharing best practices with each other," said Colonel Amit Malik, Commanding

Officer of 13 Kumaon Regiment known as the Rezang La battalion famous for its heroics in the battle of Rezang La in the 1962 war with China. Uzbekistan is currently not facing any major threats but there is concern regarding the growing influence of Islamic fundamentals. The exercise will culminate into a 36 hours joint validation exercise scheduled from March 17 to 18, 21.

Didi injury due to accident

■ **Continued from Page 1** to Ms Banerjee, who is also the TMC supremo, in the incident, the report also said that "the suddenness of the incident led to it. "There was no conspiracy behind the incident." The report took into account the details provided by eye witnesses present during the incident as well as the video grabs collected from them. It also referred to the failure of the police personnel in charge of the chief minister's security in controlling the crowd which came "too close" to her. "The local police and CM's security failed to control the crowd and that led to the untoward situation," the source said referring to the report. Following the Nandigram incident, state ADG (law and order) and nodal officer Jagmohan

on Saturday directed all district administrations to arrange for the strictest security measures for the chief minister during her tours for campaigning in the districts for the eight-phase poll beginning on March 27. "Security measures should be stringent for the CM. Security for other star campaigners must be tightened. We cannot take any chance after the Nandigram incident," the source at the CEO said quoting Jagmohan. According to another official at the office of the CEO the two observers may visit South 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly districts starting March 18. Meanwhile, state chief secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay in a reply to the EC for a detailed report stated that the

cause of the incident at Nandigram was "not clear from the video grab" collected from the place. A second report was submitted on Saturday evening after the EC called the one submitted on Friday by the state administration "sketchy" and asked the state administration to furnish a detailed one. "The CM's vehicle was passing through a crowded area. It was then that there was a push on the door of her car. But it's not clear whether the push was deliberate or not. The video grabs collected are not very clear," a source at the CEO said quoting Mr Bandyopadhyay's second report. The chief secretary was learnt to have attached one video grab along with the report, he added. — PTI

Army gets US Sig Sauer

■ **Continued from Page 1** said an official. Sig Sauer has an effective killing range of 600 meters against around 400 metres for Insas. Another advantage is that Sig Sauer can be used by both left and right handed soldier. It has sights to aim fire. "Sig Sauer fire is very precise and the metal is also very good," said the official. Earlier, India had signed a contract with a US firm Sig Sauer for 72,400 assault rifles at a cost of around ₹700 crore. The assault rifle was bought through the fast-track procurement (FTP) route. In September 2020, Defence Acquisition Council had approved purchase of second batch of 72,000 SIG Sauer assault rifles from US for frontline for ₹780 crore.

THE ASIAN AGE

14 MARCH 2021



Sriram Karri

Off the beaten track

When your imposter sends a friend request

Don't worry, all of my dear 4,789 Facebook friends, and relax. The world is not coming to an end just because someone from Nigeria or Hong Kong or Sweden has faked your profile and is sending friend requests to your friends.

No, we don't need your hysterical postings, warning us of a future scam. We have all received emails with \$4,340,234,092,408,434 or more lottery wins for years and have managed. No, you won't be held guilty of any sin of omission if you don't adequately warn us either.

It is actually a confession of something else. Firstly, it is our secret desire for being famous, or at least relevant and noteworthy to a large group of people (whom Facebook dubbed friends), which is back at work. It is the original kitsch of social media. As FB grew as a network, we had more people linked to us by technology, and the phantasmagorical algorithms decided to understand us better, and who to link whom when, how frequently et al., it kept that one magical allure kicking — we speak, reveal, expose, confess — and they respond.

So today we warn people, with the acquired air of a benevolent premise, ha, please don't fall for tricksters; they are after our relationship. They will pretend to me be and ask you for money. Don't fall prey.

Actually, you are the one who has fallen prey to the algorithms' illusion. No one will give you money, at least not your friends on Facebook. It is your mistaken notion of your importance that is coming to the fore. You are too important and your friendships on Facebook are too strong, too real. Sorry, but you must wake up and smell some coffee. The real one.

For one, FB friends barely meet it when they like your photographs, and one can hardly fault them. I mean, your home, your car, your children, your pets, and your real micro details. Like the juice you drank, the kilometres you ran, the exact spot you were at five minutes ago, all with a hashtag.

Understand, this is a mutually convenient interactive play — they click on likes for you in exchange of your clicks of likes for them. That is all. Else, the biggest hashtag response from everyone else you are connected with on social media would be a choice between #WhoCares and #SoWhatShouldIDo?

People when not bartering flattery and attention will only be as liable to any courtesy or goodwill or friendship on FB as in real life. If people have a reason to pretend to love your children, or pets, or care about your diet and exercise, or your last holiday in real life, then only is their pretence "a real fake", else just a solicitation for a barter.

Are you a rock star? Are you a film star? A sport icon? The president or CEO of a billion dollar corporation? Or powerful enough to make people's dreams come true in real life? Like you can give them a break? No?

What then, let us suppose, are the chances of a random stranger, or someone merely familiar on sight, opening up her or his wallet and giving you a loan of several thousands of rupees. Or on receipt of an email, will transfer several hundreds of dollars by wire on flash mode? Nope?

Trust me, no one is rushing to helping your fake profile owner loads of money on his mere pretence of being in trouble. Now, if that the original you were in trouble and put it up as a post, they have icons for it. Love. Care. Sad. Wow. Even Angry.

Does it anywhere say transfer money? If it was a real option, would the genius of Mark Zuckerberg have missed it? No sirs, you are in no real danger of benefitting from money transfers from your FB friends. What then are the chances of some impostor successfully collecting it from them? Just about as much as sending the lottery email.

There is a lot one can expect from FB friends. They will wish you on birthdays with virtual cake and other icons of party paraphernalia. They will say happy anniversary with digital flowers. They will click icons on a barter deal, unless they are really trying to please you on FB for a larger return, a real good deed from you in real life. They will share your anger and feel equally offended when you share something political.

They will join you in making fun of a third party you both share contempt for, or pretend to play along, for a larger fun of telling them you said such things to that person. In short, they can be coaxed to do a lot of things they needed an excuse to do. They will feel secret envy at your success but pretend to be happy. They will fake sadness at your losses for a real dose of schadenfreude later.

But they will not give money. Or come to actually attend your book launches and buy a copy for you to sign. Or buy tickets to hear your singing concert or watch your dance performance. Or to actually stand with you holding a candle when you lead a protest.

That is what real life friends do and the rest you have to earn. Then you don't need friends to do all that — you have a real following. It is not Shah Rukh Khan's friends who go to watch his movies. Or his real life friends who attend Narendra Modi's rallies. Or Kohli's friends, real or on FB, who fight for tickets to watch him play.

The pretend likes that you are as good an actor, writer, singer, thinker, politician, activist will end on Facebook. And seldom translate into money.

Till then, let it sink in. They won't even come for your funeral, but make no mistake, on FB, they will RIP you. With a hashtag. The chimera that is Facebook is our real hearts and souls. The real fear of the denizen is he will find out the truth he deeply already knows and fears.

Don't worry. Quote Rumi. Be carefree. When your impostor sends a friend request, and then asks for money, he will get my like. And nothing more.

**Are you a rock star?
Are you a film star?
A sport icon?
The president or CEO
of a billion dollar
corporation?
Or powerful enough to
make people's dreams
come true in real life?
Like you can give them
a break? No?**

Subhani



Does India have strategic interests in Afghanistan?



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

Consider the following vignettes. A child born in the December of 1979 in Afghanistan would be today 41 years old. Across four decades that middle-aged person now has only known strife, violence and bloodshed as the only normal. It was on the 24th of December of that year, Soviet Tanks had rolled across the Amu Daraya to commence a brutal nine-year occupation of that antediluvian acreage situated on the crossroads of time.

It was the year 2016. For 15 long years Afghanistan had now been free of the malevolent influence of the Taliban. At a Track-2 event, I ran into a former chief of the Afghan National Army early one morning. I asked him, how is the situation in Afghanistan currently? He said we have democratic government, a free and a vibrant press — print, TV, radio and digital — encompassing over 1,800 media outlets, girls and women in schools and colleges. Any Afghan can even tell the President that he is in the wrong. It was a learning to see that a former military man was calculating the achievements of the past decade-and-a-half in intangibles rather than gain or loss of territory qua the Taliban.

Cut to 2021 and Joe Biden is the third consecutive President wanting to end America's longest war. Two decades ago, the Americans had gone into Afghanistan after 9/11 hunting for Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda after the Taliban leader Mullah Omar refused to turn them over to the US. While Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar were both dead, the Taliban and even the Al Qaeda are both

alive and kicking.

In fact, the United States, after holding leading elements of the Taliban leadership in primitively medieval incarceration in Guantanamo Bay for over 15 years or more, in a complete volte-face on February 29, 2020, cut a deal with the "same emulences" in Doha. One of the essential elements of the deal being total withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan by 1st of May 2021.

In a recent letter to President Ashraf Ghani, the new US Secretary of State Antony Blinken virtually read out the riot act to the Afghan government to fall in line with the latest US approach to the Afghan quagmire. The letter has been made public by the Afghan news outlet Tolo News. Neither has it been denied by the US or the Afghan government, respectively.

The missive sketches out the following modes for an across-the-board settlement to the Afghan imbroglio pegged on the desirability of an enduring ceasefire by the Taliban. It, therefore, envisages ministerial-level parleys under the auspices of the United Nations between Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran and India and the United States of America to deliberate upon a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan, a senior-level meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government hosted by Turkey to take place shortly to finalise a peace agreement between the two.

It mentions a revised plan to operationalise a ninety-day reduction in violence programme predicated upon thwarting a spring offensive by the Taliban. The dispatch further calls upon

President Ghani to consider US proposals for a roadmap targeted at a new and inclusive Afghan government.

The letter closes with a rather portentous caveat stating: "We are considering the full withdrawal of our forces by May 1st, as we consider other options. Even with the continuation of financial assistance from the United States to your forces after an American military withdrawal, I am concerned the security situation will worsen and that the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains."

Since India is now going to sit at the high table to decide the future of Afghanistan it must seriously consider what "real" strategic interests it has in Afghanistan.

Writing a decade earlier on the same question veteran journalist Shekhar Gupta opined, "It will still be a country of great strategic importance. But for whom, is the question. It will be of no strategic importance to us. None of our supplies or trade comes to Afghanistan. None of our bad guys hide there. No Afghan has ever been involved in a terror attack on India. In fact, almost never has a terror attack on us been even planned in the more precise AfPak region. They have all been planned and executed between Muzaffarabad, Muridke, Karachi and Multan. Almost never has an Afghan, Pakhtun, Baluch, Tajik, any ethnicity, been involved in a terror attack in India. It's always been the Punjabis. Ask anybody in the Indian army who

has served in Kashmir and he will tell you that the intruders he fought were exactly of the same ethnic stock as the bulk of the Pakistani army he may have to fight in a real war: the Punjabi Muslims. Leave Afghanistan to the Pakistanis. If the Pakistani army thinks it can fix, subdue and control Afghanistan, after the British, Soviets and Americans have failed to do precisely this at the peak of each one's superpowerdom, why not let the Pakistanis try their hand at it? If they pour another ten divisions and half of the ISI into that hapless country now, isn't it that much of a relief for us on our western borders?"

This assessment is as relevant today as it was a decade ago. Hard questions with regard to our "real interests" in Afghanistan were never asked then and are not being asked even now. Would a foothold in Afghanistan help us in the event of a two-front war with China and Pakistan? Highly unlikely till the time we are not willing to put boots on the ground in Afghanistan. Is it desirable to put boots on the ground even if the Afghans were to request Indian military presence after the Americans leave? Highly undesirable. The last time India had seriously considered such a request was in early 2003 to deploy US forces in Iraq. Prime Minister Vajpayee had rightly refused to do so. Does a presence in Afghanistan open up new vistas for India in Central Asia? Not really, after Iran dropped India from the Chabahar to Zahedan just before it inked a USD 400 billion 25-year strategic partnership with China.

While it is heady to be invited to the high table, as the saying goes, there is no free lunch in life. India needs to be careful.

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

LETTERS ON A NEW COURSE

For three decades, the class-centric Left ideology in Bengal had muted the caste and creed calculations in the state, so unavoidable to the Indian political milieu. Sadly, that liberation did not quite translate to economic growth. Other factors had dimmed the spirit of entrepreneurship replacing it with a herd mentality sans ambition. Now, new nodes of affluence are energising Bengal politics. The BJP and its majoritarian outlook have only served as a catalyst. Irrespective of the election outcome, Bengal is set for a sharp change in its sociopolitical discourse.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

BEYOND GANDHI'S

APROPOS "Gandhis have had it if Congress flops in May" by Saeed Naqvi, 23 senior Congress leaders, now called G-23, had sent a letter to interim Congress president Sonia Gandhi in August last year calling for internal democracy and sweeping changes, from top to bottom. Three months later, in December 2020, Congress leader and spokesperson, Randeep Singh Surjewala, quite aptly called by the author as "Rahul Gandhi's most reliable town-crier", said that the party would soon begin the process to elect a new president. However, he claimed that 99.9 per cent of the party members wanted Rahul Gandhi to be chosen as president. What basis had he for such a claim? It is sycophants such as him that have brought the party to this pass. Its only future lies in looking beyond the Gandhi family.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

COURT MUST GUIDE

THIS REFERS TO the report, "No govt official can act as state election commissioner, rules EC". Indisputably, a permanent executive is subservient to the political executive and has to do its bidding under all circumstances. The Supreme Court chiding the Goa government for its law secretary doubling as state election commissioner is a sound judgment. This is a prerequisite for free and fair elections. Having said so, are so-called independent persons serving as election commissioner independent for all practical purposes? Many of their actions betray their pliability towards the government of the day. The court ought to spell out what it implies by an independent person under the prevailing circumstances.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

KOHLI 'MILESTONE'

ENGLAND CAME out with all guns blazing to steamroll India in the first T20 at Ahmedabad and draw first blood in the five-match series. After the bowlers led by "Man of the Match", Jofra Archer restricted India to 124, opener Jason Roy's quick-fire 49 enabled the Poms to canter home in a hurry. Shreyas Iyer (67) ploughed a lone furrow for the hosts. Meanwhile, India skipper Virat Kohli was dismissed for a duck for the third time in his last five innings. Sourav Ganguly was dismissed without score 13 times in all formats of cricket. Kohli surpassed Ganguly with his 14th dismissal.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

SHORT TAKES

4 KILLED IN PLANE CRASH IN KAZAKHSTAN

Moscow: A military plane crashed in Kazakhstan on Saturday, killing four of its crew and injuring the other, officials said.

The ex-Soviet country's Emergencies Ministry said the two survivors were hospitalised. The ministry said that Soviet-built An-26 two-engine turboprop crashed while trying to land at the airport of the country's largest city, Almaty.

The plane had flown from Kazakhstan's capital, Nur-Sultan, with only six crew and no passengers on board. The *Interfax news agency* said the plane was operated by Kazakhstan's border guard agency.

The cause of the crash wasn't immediately clear. The An-26 was designed in the 1960s and built in great numbers for both civilian and military use.

CAR BOMB KILLS EIGHT, WOUNDS 47 IN AFGHAN

Herat, Afghanistan: A powerful car bomb in western Afghanistan killed at least eight people and wounded dozens more, authorities said on Saturday, as the United Nations condemned attacks on civilians in the country.

The blast targeted a police headquarters in the city of Herat around 10 pm on Friday, damaging dozens of houses and shops, Jailani Farhad, the spokesman for the Herat provincial governor, said. "The death toll from a car bomb in the city of Herat increased to eight, and 47 others are wounded," he said, adding that women, children and security personnel were among the dead.

The interior ministry spokesman, Tariq Arian, confirmed the death toll, adding that 54 had been wounded.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the blast in Herat had no links to their group.

However, the group's insurgents are active in the western province and have carried out recent attacks against Afghan government forces.

LANKA BRINGS IN DETENTION, BANS BURQA

Colombo: Sri Lanka Saturday announced using a controversial anti-terror law to deal with religious extremism and gave itself sweeping powers to detain suspects for up to two years for "deradicalisation".

Separately, the government also said it will soon outlaw the burqa, formalising a temporary ban imposed in April 2019 after deadly bomb attacks blamed on local jihadists.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa promulgated regulations allowing the detention of anyone suspected of causing "acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill will or hostility between different communities".

The rules, effective on Friday, have been set up under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which both local and international rights groups have repeatedly asked Colombo to repeal.

Sri Lanka's previous government, which was defeated by Rajapaksa at 2019 elections, had pledged to repeal the PTA after admitting it seriously undermined individual freedoms, but failed to do so.

RUSSIAN POLICE DETAIN DOZENS OF OPPOSITION

Moscow: Russian police on Saturday arrested around 200 opposition politicians and municipal deputies at a Moscow conference as authorities tighten the screws on Kremlin critics ahead of parliamentary elections.

A police raid on an opposition conference dedicated to running for municipal office came after President Vladimir Putin's top critic Alexei Navalny was jailed for two and a half years last month and more than 10,000 protesters detained across the country.

While Russian police routinely break up opposition protests, the mass arrests of municipal deputies at a conference in Moscow were unprecedented.

Participants from more than 50 of Russia's regions had gathered to discuss parliamentary and local elections in September at a forum organised by a project backed by prominent Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

AstraZeneca announces vaccine shortfall for EU

Under-fire firm to collaborate with EU to address the supply challenges

London, March 13: Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca on Saturday announced a fresh shortfall in planned vaccine shipments to the European Union, citing production problems and export restrictions.

"AstraZeneca is disappointed to announce a shortfall in planned Covid-19 vaccine shipments to the European Union (EU) despite working tirelessly to accelerate supply," it said in a statement.

The company had previously warned it was facing shortfalls from its European supply chain due to "lower-than-expected output from the production process."

It was hoping to compensate for part of the shortfall by sourcing vaccines from its global network, with half of the EU's supply in the second quarter and 10 million doses in the first quarter due to come from its international supply chain.

"Unfortunately, export restrictions will reduce deliveries in the first quarter, and are likely to affect deliveries in the second quarter," it added.

AstraZeneca started delivery of the vaccine to the EU in February, and still aims to deliver 100 million doses in the first half of 2021, of which 30 million are due to be delivered in the first quarter.

The under-fire firm said it was "collaborating with the EU Commission and member states to address the supply challenges."

"It remains confident that productivity in its EU supply chain will continue to improve, to help protect millions of Europeans against the virus." — *AFP*

UK: CHINA NOW NON-COMPLIANT WITH HONG KONG

London, March 13: China is no longer compliant with Hong Kong's joint declaration after Beijing announced sweeping changes to the region's electoral system, Britain said Saturday.

"The UK now considers Beijing to be in a state of ongoing non-compliance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The treaty was signed before Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997 and was designed to allay fears about its future under Beijing's rule.

It guarantees the financial hub special status including a high degree of autonomy to manage its own affairs and the right to freedom of speech.

But British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said that Beijing's decision "to impose radical changes to restrict participation in Hong Kong's electoral system" was a "further clear breach" of the agreement.

"This is part of a pattern designed to harass and stifle all voices critical of China's policies and is the third breach of the Joint Declaration in less than nine months," he said. — *AFP*

ANCIENT HISTORY

Athens, March 13: Hundreds of rare items dating to the 1821 Greek revolution go on virtual display in Athens this month, with bicentenary events scaled back because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A new museum dedicated to the Philhellene foreign volunteers who fought and died for Greece will be inaugurated in April, featuring contemporary paintings, weapons, ornaments and personal items of the fighters,



A man carries a cross during a march demanding the national government allow the private sector and local governments to buy COVID-19 vaccines in Lima, Peru. — *AP*

5 EU nations seek talks on vaccine

Berlin, March 13: The leaders of Austria, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Bulgaria are calling for talks among European Union leaders about the distribution of vaccines within the 27-nation bloc.

Austrian media reported Saturday that the five leaders wrote a joint letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles

● **OFFICIALS ELSEWHERE** have noted that countries have wanted differing amounts of various vaccines and have not always taken up their full allocation.

Michel. That came after Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz complained on Friday that, even though the EU had

agreed on distribution of the vaccines on a per-capita basis, some countries were receiving considerably more than others.

The letter asserted that "if this system were to carry on, it would continue creating and exacerbating huge disparities among Member States by this summer." Officials elsewhere have noted that countries have wanted differing amounts of various

vaccines and have not always taken up their full allocation.

Austria's health ministry — which is run by Kurz's junior coalition partner — was among those rejecting Kurz's criticism. Oe1 radio reported that its general secretary, Ines Stilling, said negotiations on distributing the vaccines had been "balanced and transparent." — *AP*

Biden government to reconsider Trump objections to H-1B visas

Washington, March 13: The Biden administration has said it is willing to reconsider the objections or adverse decisions to foreign workers on visas like H-1B, the most sought after among Indian IT professionals, due to the three policy memos by the previous Trump regime which now have been rescinded.

The move is expected to come to the rescue of a large number of Indian IT professionals who were having a tough time during the previous Trump administration due to various policies and memorandums on non-immigrant work visas, in particular the H-1B.

● **THE MOVE** is expected to come to the rescue of a large number of Indian IT professionals.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on Friday announced "it may reopen and/or reconsider adverse

decisions" on Form I-129, Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, made based on three rescinded policy memos.

The USCIS said it will generally use its discretion to accept a motion to reopen filed more than 30 days after the decision, if filed before the end of the validity period requested on the petition or labour condition application, whichever is earlier, and the decision was based on one or more policies in the three rescinded H-1B memoranda.

On June 17, 2020, the USCIS issued Policy Memorandum 602-0114, which officially rescinded two prior policy memo-

randas. First titled "Determining Employer-Employee Relationship for Adjudication of H-1B Petitions, Including Third-Party Site Placements," that was issued on January 8, 2010; and second "Contracts and Itineraries Requirements for H-1B Petitions Involving Third-Party Worksites," issued on February 22, 2018.

On February 3, 2021, USCIS issued Policy Memorandum 602-0142.1, which officially rescinded PM-602-0142, "Rescission of the December 22, 2000 'Guidance memo on H1B computer related positions'," issued on March 31, 2017. — *PTI*

NY gov refuses to resign over harassment

New York, March 13: New York's embattled Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Friday he will not step down despite calls to do so by heavyweights within his Democratic Party, as he faces multiple allegations of sexual harassment and inappropriate touching.

"I am not going to resign. I did not do what has been alleged," the 63-year-old Democrat said on a call to reporters, referring to

accusations made by six women since February.

Cuomo also implored his critics to "wait for the facts" to emerge in a new investigation of the claims. The governor first refused publicly to step down last week, but the crisis has only mushroomed since. After his latest comments, the calls for him to quit his post redoubled, with New York's two US senators including Senate Majority Leader

Chuck Schumer saying the "multiple, credible" allegations mean Cuomo has lost the ability to govern.

"It is clear that Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of his governing partners and the people of New York," Schumer said in a statement with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. "Governor Cuomo should resign." A formal investigation was greenlighted this week to probe the claims, which

now come from six women who say Cuomo sexually harassed or inappropriately touched them.

Cuomo, who won national acclaim last year as a straight-talking pragmatist in the first onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic, now stands increasingly isolated.

Earlier Friday, US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a popular progressive representing parts of New York City,

Floyd family agrees to \$27M settlement

Minneapolis, March 13: The city of Minneapolis on Friday agreed to pay \$27 million to settle a civil lawsuit from George Floyd's family over the person of colour man's death in police custody, as jury selection continued in a former officer's murder trial. Council members met privately to discuss the settlement, then returned to public session for a unanimous vote in support of the massive payout. It easily surpassed the \$20 million the city approved two years ago to the family of a white woman killed by a police officer.

Floyd family attorney Ben Crump called it the largest pretrial settlement ever for a civil rights claim, and thanked city leaders for "showing you care about George Floyd." "It's going to be a long journey to justice. This is just one step on the journey to justice," Crump said.

"This makes a statement that George Floyd deserved better than what we witnessed on May 25, 2020, that George Floyd's life mattered, and that by extension, Black lives

matter." "Even though my brother is not here, he's here with me in my heart," Philonise Floyd said.

"If I could get him back, I would give all this back," L. Chris Stewart, another attorney who worked with the family, said the size of the settlement "changes evaluations and civil rights for a person of colour when they die." "And what happens is that trickles down to decisions in the communities across this country. When there is a city council or a mayor deciding, 'Oh, should we get rid of no-knock warrants, should we get rid of chokeholds, do we want to change these policies?' They have 27 million reasons now why they should. And that will make decisions happen. That will make accountability happen."

The settlement includes \$5,000,000 for the south Minneapolis neighborhood that includes the 38th and Chicago intersection that has been blocked by barricades since his death, with a massive metal sculpture and murals in his honour. — *AP*



People protest against the military coup and takeover of Myanmar, at the Town Hall Square in Copenhagen, on Saturday. — *AFP*

3 more Myanmar protesters killed

Yangon, March 13: Three anti-coup protesters were killed overnight in Myanmar's largest city on Saturday, as hundreds defied a curfew to hold vigils in honour of those killed since the military seized power.

The junta has deployed increasing use of force against daily protests since the February 1 coup, with more than 70 people killed according to the UN's top rights expert on the country.

But hundreds of thousands have continued to gather across the country to call for the release of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi — who was detained in the February 1 putsch — and a return to democracy.

While the crackdown on demonstrations has mostly taken place in the daytime, security forces have been sighted patrolling streets at night and carrying out arrests.

Footage shared on social media late Friday showed police pulling three residents out on the streets of Thaketa township in Yangon, beating them on the head and hauling them away.

"They are beating them without reason," said the person who shot the footage.

Angry residents went to the police station to protest, and sounds of gunshots were heard hours later in the township, including by a reporter. — *AFP*

Greek state will issue 1.5 mn commemorative two-euro coins showing the flag, laurel wreaths

Museums, coins to mark Greek Revolution

among them celebrated 19th century poet Lord Byron.

"The Philhellenic movement seduced all social classes...it was a vertical and horizontal movement without precedent," says museum founder Constantinos Velentzas, a private collector and IT entrepreneur.

"We are preparing a 3D virtual tour...we have to address a wide public that is not only based in Greece," he said this week.

Items on display include Byron's weapons, a letter by American revolutionary war hero and French aristocrat the Marquis de Lafayette, early drawings of the Greek revolutionary flag, and the logbook of a warship that participated in the pivotal naval Battle of Navarino that led to Greek independence.

Two key Greek museums are also holding exhibitions to mark the revolution against Turkish rule.

Greece's National Gallery will reopen on March 24 after an extensive eight-year renovation that more than doubled its display capacity.

Among priceless items on display at the Benaki is a wall-sized political map of the Balkans and Greece published in Vienna in 1796-7.

The map by Rigas Feraios, a liberation pioneer who sought aid from Napoleon Bonaparte and was imprisoned and mur-

dered by the Turks, helped inspire the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire.

A committee overseeing this year's commemorative events has produced over a dozen limited-edition coins for the bicentenary, including reproductions of coins minted in 1828 and 1832.

The Greek state will also issue 1.5 million commemorative two-euro coins showing the Greek flag and laurel wreaths. — *AFP*



Books on Greek revolution by Samuel Howe, items and articles are displayed at the new museum dedicated to the Philhellene foreign volunteers who fought and died for Greece. — *AFP*

INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

NON-FICTION

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

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

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

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

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

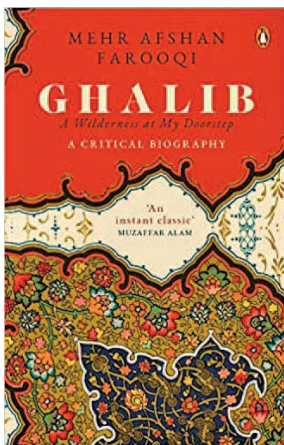
6 **THE TALE OF THE HORSE**
Yashaswini Chandra
Picador, ₹699

7 **A PROMISED LAND**
Barack Obama
Penguin Viking
₹1,999

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

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

10 **DESPITE THE STATE**
M. Rajshekhar
Context Westland
₹499



FICTION

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

2 **SPARKS LIKE STARS**
Nadia Hashimi
William Morrow, ₹499

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

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

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

6 **THE MOUNTAINS SING**
Nguyen Phan Que Mai
Oneworld, ₹399

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

8 **TAKEDOWN**
Brad Thor
Emily Bestler Books-Atria, ₹599

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

10 **A BOOKSHOP IN PARIS**
Ellen Feldman
Simon & Schuster
₹399



Bahrison, New Delhi

Welcome to Kuttanad's wry, twisted and magical world



Ajith Pillai

review

Noted Malayalam poet and critic K. Satchidanandan heralded S. Hareesh's *Moustache* as a literary work of "epic proportions." It is not often that a debut novel is accorded such high praise, and this in turn raises expectations. But for those unfamiliar with Kerala, encountering place names — Kaipuzha, Athirampuzha, Paivattomkarukappadam, Maniyanthuruthu, Makkothara — in the first few pages can be more than a mouthful and a veritable turn-off. Luckily, once you come to terms with the phonetic complexities, there is a twisted, brutal, black humour-laden and yet magical world waiting to be discovered.

Hareesh's novel, set in the first half of the last century, is a phantasmagorical journey through Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala and one of the few places in the world noted for its below sea level farming. Some 900 square kilometres of delta is the novelist's easel — a water-scape, as he calls it, crisscrossed by canals, marshlands, paddy fields, embankments, rich black soil and presided over by the Vembanad Lake which empties out into the Arabian Sea at Kochi.

Spiritual leaders, social reformers, literary greats,

legends, and mythical heroes from the region pop in and out of the narrative. And then there is the flora and fauna — the lush green paddy fields, the areca nut and coconut palms, tapioca, banana, the pangolin, crocodiles, water snakes, cobras, fish, birds and what have you. All of them collectively constitute more than a backdrop for the story — they almost breathe like living characters with a role to play, reflecting varied emotions ranging from calmness to fury, romance to reflection and bear witness to the drama that unfolds.

The core of the narrative revolves around Vavachan, a Dalit Pulayan converted to Christianity. His was a non-descript existence till fate willed otherwise. The life-changing moment came when he was discovered and cast in the role of an awe-inspiring policeman in a travelling troupe. Vavachan was chosen by the director because of the dense growth of hair that covered the young man's cheek, chin, and upper lip. He was immediately asked to grow and shape his moustache to fit his part.

His brief appearances on the stage were nothing short of electric. The muscular body, threatening looks and the face dominated by the fierce moustache, was like an apparition from hell. Here was a Dalit acting the role of a policeman invoking images of rakshasas from the mythologies. A 'lowly' Pulayan invoking awe and sporting a moustache that only the upper castes were privileged to grow. Was he for real?

Overnight Vavachan meta-

morphosed into a persona that he never imagined he would ever be. From then on, the moustache became his USP and began to acquire a life of its own. All attempts to persuade him to shave it off were in vain. The bristly and luxuriant growth above his upper lip soon became a symbol of his muscular strength, his rebellious nature and a means by which he invoked fear, both among the commoners and the ruling upper castes.

The symbolism of the Dalit with the imposing moustache must be seen in the context of the time frame of the novel. The first half of the twentieth century, which witnessed two world wars, was a period of much turbulence in Kuttanad. It was also the time when caste dominated and determined every aspect of life. A person's work, the food he/she ate, the

clothes worn, who one could marry and have sexual relations with were all supposedly ordained at birth. Even people you could touch and must keep a distance from was bound by the barriers put up by caste.

In this compartmentalised world Vavachan was a misfit. The upper castes saw him as a troublemaker who needed to be hunted and tamed. They held him responsible for several crimes and misfortunes that befell them. The ordinary folk saw him as an omnipresent and mysterious force that defied description. For many he was a moustachioed apparition that often emerged from the shadows and suddenly disappeared into the night.

In fact, rather early in the novel, a sitrep submitted by a local official to his superior captures the fear that Vavachan invoked. To quote: "It is known that contrary to the customs of the land and in a manner unsuitable to the hereditary work of Pulayans this man (Vavachan) has established a great big moustache on his face...Farmers are afraid to go into the fields alone as it is said that the party referenced herein is known to use shapeshifting tricks, attack people and steal the bundled sheaves of paddy stored in threshing yards."

It is the moustache that is central to all the myths built around Vavachan. Songs are sung about him and stories narrated and repeated till the awesome growth above his upper lip becomes greater than the man himself. Indeed, as the novel progresses, the narrative becomes a collage of stories about the

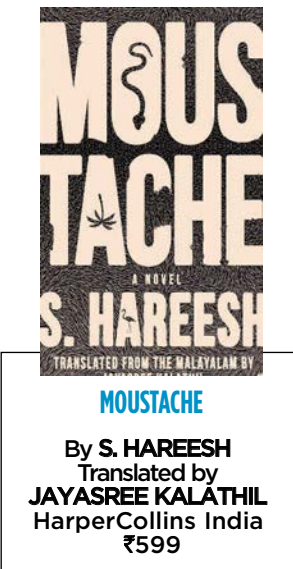
moustachioed Vavachan's attempt to flee his detractors, the many people he encounters during his seemingly mindless wanderings through Kuttanad, his love for Seetha and his dream of going to Malaya (Malaysia).

Almost as if to shake the past and bring us back to our world of satellite TV, NASA spaceships and motorbike rides is the narrator — a father who keeps his five-year-old son engrossed with stories about Vavachan. He occasionally intervenes in the story adding a parallel and personal layer to the narrative. Like his discovery that the Air India mascot, the Maharaja with a pointed moustache, was not inspired by royalty but by tales of Vavachan that its creator, Bobby Kooka, had heard from relatives in Alapuzha!

Is *Moustache* a political work? It is, although Hareesh maintains that he did not set out to write a novel about caste politics. However, his research led him to "listen intensely to Dalit history, their knowledge about their own history, and consequently to the history of caste politics in Kuttanad."

Finally, a word about the translation. Jayasree Kalathil, has managed to retain the flavour of the original without "inventing approximations" in English. To render the nuanced beauty and rhythm of any work in a foreign language is indeed a daunting task. That the translator has achieved this with an impressive measure of success is commendable.

The writer is a senior Delhi-based journalist and author



WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS IN DHUMKETU'S BEST CLASSIC SHORT STORIES



Kushalrani Gulab

review

The title story of *Ratno Dholi: The Best Stories of Dhumketu*, translated from the Gujarati by Jenny Bhatt, is by no means the only one in the book that grabbed my attention and kept it.

In fact, I liked the opening story in the collection the best, though less because it's better than the rest than because it was my introduction to Dhumketu (Gaurishankar Govardhanram Joshi), a writer I had never heard of before, though he was a contemporary of Munshi Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore and Saadat Hasan Manto.

This story, "The Post

Office", is about an old man who visits the post office every morning without fail, hoping to hear from his daughter who had married an army man five years earlier, moved away with her husband and had never been heard from since.

There's more to the story of course: the old man, Ali, had once been a hunter who had delighted in watching the chicks of the partridges he killed running around, frantically looking for their mothers. The parallels with Ali's own story in his old age are stark; but there's even more to "The Post Office" than that. You can read this story twice, five times, nine times and still

find more and more. You find this kind of depth in each of the 22 stories in this book, which means that a) the translator has done an excellent job and b) every

story in the book is satisfying, something that does not often happen with short story collections. Which is why it's best to read these stories not all at one time, but over days and weeks and in no particular order.

I read the title story, for instance, some weeks after I began the book. Ratno, the dhol player, lives in a small hut beneath a stony hill that threatens an avalanche of rocks every day. The dhol is his soul and so is Sundari, a woman who can't stop herself from dancing whenever Ratno plays.

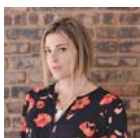
Of course there is a snake in this Garden of Eden; there are always snakes. And so Ratno's life changes when the rules of religion are invoked by a man who, for no particular reason, cannot bear to see happiness in other people.

But there are no villages in "The Rebirth of Poetry", a sci-fi story set in a future where people, tired of the con-

licts caused by differences, live perfectly unemotional and homogenous lives in a perfectly flat social structure until poetry and music arrive via visitors from the moon.

In this collection of stories, you go back in time to the age of Bimbisara, move to Darjeeling just before and after a world war, swing into a newly Independent India, turn into the galls of a slum, listen to a story that never continues beyond its opening line, feel the emotions of a man whose freedom fighting son was hanged. Dhumketu opens worlds upon and within worlds, swooping through times, places, moods and narrative styles in an intoxicating manner. Read it slowly. Savour it. And oh — never cover the book's cover: It is truly a work of art.

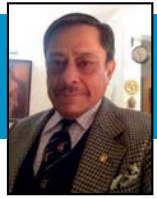
Kushalrani Gulab is a freelance editor and writer who dreams of being a sanyasi by the sea



FAST FACT: A transwoman has been nominated for the prestigious UK Women's Prize for Fiction for the first time. **Torrey Peters'** debut *Detransition, Baby* follows transwoman Reese, her former partner Amy, now Ames, who has detransitioned, and ciswoman Katrina, with whom Ames has been having an affair, and who is now pregnant. Witty and elegant, it has been described as "a modern comedy of manners".



Navy's 1971 covert exploits make for breathless reading



Anil Bhat

review

In 1971 the then Naval Chief Admiral S.M. Nanda got the green signal from then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for the Indian Navy (IN) to participate in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. It was the first time since Independence that the Navy was used and it performed brilliantly.

While IN's actions on India's Western seaboard were quite visible and lethally effective in achieving a blockade of Pakistan's Karachi ocean front in the Arabian Sea, not all its actions on the eastern seaboard/Arabian Sea and East Pakistan were known. And that was because a bold decision was taken by Indian Navy to launch a covert special operation to target Pakistan's maritime activity and assets in and around erstwhile East Pakistan.

Conceived by a few hard core professional IN officers in 1971, Operation X was innovatively conceived and meticulously planned and executed. Being the kind of operation which must be kept secret, it was also one with which the launching country would want to ensure that it cannot be connected.

Codenamed 'Operation X', the untold story of India's covert naval war in East Pakistan in 1971 was put together in a book with the same title by Captain M.N.R. Samant, one of IN's hardcore professionals and Sandeep Unnithan, the journalist son of a naval officer, and it turned out to read like an unputdownable thriller.

The book recorded the painstaking process of preparing and training young men into combat divers. The first lot of trainees were some Bengali personnel of Pakistan navy, who hearing about atrocities by Pak army against Bengalis in erstwhile East Pakistan, were trying to desert and escape to get back there. Their attempts led them to be selected for this covert operation and they turned out to be master divers of a group raised in utmost secrecy by Indian Navy.

Trained as clandestine swimmers, they eventually succeeded in devastating Pakistani warships and merchant vessels ferrying important stores for Pakistani forces before and during the 1971 India-Pak war and, importantly, contributed in the effort to liberate East Pakistan.

The book describes how between April and November 1971, this covert naval unit trained 432 Bengali youth and launched them to destroy merchant shipping which sustained the Pakistan Army in the run-up to the 1971 War.

The naval commandos, under the operational control of Naval Intelligence, sank and disabled over 1,00,000 tonnes of shipping destined for the ports of East Pakistan. Operation Jackpot involved 176 combat swimmers launching simultaneous attacks on the ports of Chittagong, Chalna-Mongla, Narayanganj and Chandpur on the night of August 15, 1971. They sank 44,500 tons of shipping and damaged 14,000 tons, the single largest attack by naval saboteurs since the Second World War.

On completion of the phase of training as clandestine swimmers, the next phase was to

train the swimmers to go underwater a few feet to reach a ship's hull and place limpet mines and swim away fast enough to escape death or injury by the explosion of the mine. All this was achieved by very exacting standards of tough training and, above all, secrecy.

Two of the key figures involved in what is considered as one of the largest covert maritime warfare operations since

the Second World War spoke about their experiences in public for the first time in Mumbai on October 12, 2019, when this book was launched. They were Commander Vijai Prakash Kapil, Vir Chakra (retired) and Petty Officer Chiman Singh, Maha Vir Chakra (retired) were part of an ultra-secret Naval Intelligence unit which trained Mukti Bahini naval commandos before the outbreak of the 1971 India-Pakistan War. They spoke about their experiences during the book release function at the Indian Merchant's Chamber, Churchgate, Mumbai. The book authored by the late Captain M.N.R. Samant, MVC, and journalist Sandeep Unnithan, was released by Admiral V.S. Shekhawat, former Chief of the Naval Staff and a decorated 1971 war veteran submariner. However, Captain Samant, the staff officer planning and training this covert unit, missed the launch of his book as he passed away in Mumbai on March 20, 2019, after a brief illness.

Anil Bhat, a retired Army officer, is a defence and security analyst based in New Delhi



OPERATION X
By CAPT. MNR SAMANT, MVC and SANDEEP UNNITHAN
HarperCollins India, ₹499

SHORT TAKES

Archers escape train fire unhurt

New Delhi: Ten members of the Madhya Pradesh archery contingent escaped unhurt after their coach of the Dehradun-bound Shatabdi Express caught fire on Saturday.

The train's C-5 bogie caught fire near Kasro railway station. The train was coming from the national capital and all passengers, including the 10 members of the archery contingent, were evacuated and shifted to another compartment.

"The fire spread out fast from near the bathroom and all our equipment and luggage were burnt. Thankfully, we all are evacuated and safe," recurve women archer Amey Rai said. To ensure that their participation at the Nationals is not affected, the Archery Association of India (AAI) has arranged the equipment and clothes for the archers. — PTI

Winning return for Yuki in Dubai

Dubai: Comeback-man Yuki Bhambri proved he is back to his best with a convincing win over India number one Prajnesh Gunneswaran in the Qualifiers of the Dubai Duty Free Championships on Saturday. Yuki, who is competing on a Protected Ranking (PR) knocked out his seventh seed compatriot 6-1, 6-4 in the opening round of the hard court tournament. Yuki has not lost to Prajnesh in three meetings. Yuki recently returned to competitive tennis after more than two years of injury-forced break when he competed at the Singapore Open, where he lost to Matthew Ebden. The 28-year-old is now up against another compatriot Ramkumar Ramanathan, who knocked out sixth seed Russian Evgeny Donskoy 6-4-6-4. — PTI

Mithali & Co. look to up the ante

Lucknow: The absence of power-hitters has been Indian women's bane for the longest time and they would expect all-rounder Deepti Sharma and wicketkeeper-batter Sushma Verma to up the ante at the back-end during the fourth ODI against South Africa here on Sunday.

Blown away in the series-opener, India had bounced back in style in the second ODI but Mithali Raj's side couldn't go the distance in the third game, going down narrowly by six runs via D/L method. "We definitely need to have batters playing the last 10 overs because obviously the sort of game that a batter has and can improve it to the optimum, the lower or tail-ender may not, so it is important that we have the batters playing the last 10 overs," skipper Mithali Raj had said on Friday. — PTI

Philadelphia ease past Wizards

Los Angeles: NBA MVP candidate Joel Embiid emerged from quarantine Friday only to exit in the third quarter with a left knee injury as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Washington Wizards 127-101 in Washington. Embiid, who missed Sunday's All-Star Game because of Covid-19 restrictions, threw down a dunk and landed awkwardly on his left knee before falling to the floor halfway through the third quarter. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

Vijay Hazare Trophy: Final — Mumbai vs Uttar Pradesh from 9 am on Star Sports 1, HD

India vs South Africa: Fourth Women's ODI from 9 am on Star Sports 2, HD

India vs England: Second T20 from 7 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Brighton from 5.30 pm; Liverpool vs Fulham from 7.30 pm; Arsenal vs Tottenham Hotspur from 10 pm; Manchester United vs West Ham from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1

Italian League: Bologna vs Sampdoria from 5 pm; Torino vs Inter Milan from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 2; Parma vs Roma from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 1; Cagliari vs Juventus from 10.30 pm; Milan vs Napoli from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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RHYTHM & BLUES

India look to grab momentum in second T20 game

Ahmedabad, March 13: Left shaken by a bunch of world-class operators, the Indian team's white-ball stars will be aiming to put up an improved batting effort in the second T20 International against England here on Sunday.

It was India's first white-ball game in three months and the rustiness of some of the premier shorter format players like K.L. Rahul, Hardik Pandya, and Yuzvendra Chahal's showed in the first game in which the hosts were clinically outplayed.

One defeat is never the end of the story and no critic can rule this Indian team out of the series on the basis of a singular performance especially because of their zeal to fight.

However, as skipper Virat Kohli talks about players with X-factors doing the job, he would expect Rishabh Pant and Pandya to do a bit more with their explosive hitting, which should not be confined to one audacious reverse scoop (Pant off Jofra Archer) or a falling ramp shot (Pandya off Ben Stokes).

They are more than capable and will be expected to give a far better account of themselves, trying to play more shots square of the wicket like Shreyas Iyer did during his innings of 67 off 48 balls. Both Pandya (19 off 21 balls) and Pant (21 off 23 balls) weren't able to gauge the pace of the track as Archer and Mark Wood bowled fast and straight denying them any width for the cut shot. The extra bounce also didn't allow them to drive on the up.

"The wicket didn't allow you to hit the kind of shots you wanted to. Shreyas' innings was an example of how you could use the depth of the crease, ride the bounce because there was variable bounce at times, and hit the areas square of the wicket which others failed to do.

"It was just a below-par batting performance and England made us pay for it," Kohli said after the match.

However, Kohli's propensity to change his playing XI at the drop of a hat is well documented.

— PTI

Windies win thriller to clinch ODI series

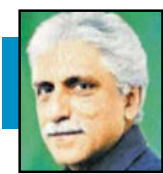
North Sound (Antigua and Barbuda), March 13: West Indies turned a leisurely canter into a desperate scramble to achieve a series-clinching five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka with two balls to spare in the second One-Day International of their three-match series here on Friday.

A fourth ODI hundred by Evin Lewis and an elegant supporting 84 by opening partner Shai Hope seemed to have set the home side up for an effortless stroll to the target of 273 as the pair put on 192 for the first wicket.

However, Lewis' dismissal for 103 in the 38th over triggered a surprising level of indecisiveness with the Sri Lankans coming to life in the final stage of the match as seamers Nuwan Pradeep and Thisara Perera claimed two wickets each.

But when he most needed to be on target, Pradeep's final two overs were plastered for 28 runs with Nicholas Pooran's unbeaten 35, which included two boundaries in the last over of the match, taking the West Indies to an unbeatable 2-0 lead ahead of the final match at the same venue on Sunday.

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 273/8 in 50 overs (Gunathillaka 96, Hasaranga 47, Mohammed 3/47) lost to West Indies 274/5 in 49.4 overs (Lewis 103, Hope 84).



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

England's 8-wicket win in the first T20 match was emphatic and comprehensive. The shortest format is notoriously fickle and volatile, but the manner in which India were overwhelmed holds out serious threat in the remaining 4 matches of the series too.

England are the no. 1 ranked team in T20, India no. 2, but the first match ended up being a no-contest. The gulf in performance between the two



Hardik Pandya



Rishabh Pant

NUMBERS GAME

RECORDS ARE EVEN FOR INDIA AT MOTERA:

● India have won one and lost one in two Twenty-20 Internationals played at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad where the second Twenty-20 International match of the series will be played on Sunday.

● The home team recorded a 11-run victory over Pakistan in the first encounter here on December 28, 2012. England defeated India by 8 wickets in the second match at this ground which was also the first of the five-Twenty-20 International matches series.

● India have won three and lost two in last five Twenty-20 Internationals played against England.

● Virat Kohli, who scored 2,928 runs in 80 innings of 86 matches at an average of 49.62 and a strike rate of 138.11, needs 72 runs to become the first batsman to score 3,000 runs in Twenty-20 cricket.

● Yuzvendra Chahal with 60 wickets at an average of 25.00 in 46 innings of as many matches is the highest wicket taker for India in Twenty-20 Internationals.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

Auction for 2 new IPL teams in May

ARCHER'S IMMEDIATE AIM IS TO GET HIS ELBOW FIXED

Ahmedabad, March 13: England pacer Jofra Archer said he needs to look after his troublesome elbow first before setting sights on his twin targets of playing in the T20 World Cup in India and the Ashes Down Under.

After missing two Tests in England's 1-3 series defeat recently, the 25-year-old fiery pacer bounced back strongly taking three for 23 to restrict India to a modest 124 for 7 in the first T20I at the Motera here on Friday.

"I need to take care of my elbow first before I think about what is going to happen," Archer said in the post-match interview.

"For me, in the immediate, I want to get through this series and then I will do everything in my power to make sure I'm going to the World Cup and the Ashes."

— PTI

time," the source added.

NO PRITHVI OR PADIKKAL FOR ODIS

The Indian ODI team will

be announced on Sunday but none of the senior players have opted for any rest for the timebeing.

"The team is expected to

be announced tomorrow. Neither skipper Virat Kohli nor his deputy Rohit Sharma has opted for rest. There aren't many surprises as we prepare for World T20," the influential official informed.

He said that both Prithvi Shaw and Devdutt Padikkal will have to wait for their chance.

"They have done exceedingly well but will have to wait for their turn," he said.

WOMEN'S TEAM TO TOUR NZ, AUS IN 2022

After a disappointing 2020 when they didn't have a single international tour, the Indian women's team ahead of the 50-over World Cup will be touring Australia at the end of the year followed by a short preparatory series in New Zealand before the World Cup.

— PTI

ISL-7 | FINAL



Mumbai City FC players celebrate with the trophy after beating ATK Mohun Bagan in the Indian Super League Season 7 final in Goa on Saturday. Mumbai won 2-1. — ISL

Maiden title for Mumbai

Goa, March 13: Mumbai City FC muscled their dominance in the seventh edition of the Hero Indian Super League with an emphatic 2-1 win over ATK Mohun Bagan at the Fatorda Stadium, pocketing an enviable achievement of capping the season title with the League Shield.

● Bipin Singh scored a 90th-minute winner after a Tiri own goal (29') had dragged Mumbai level. Bagan had earlier taken the lead through David Williams (18').

Sergio Lobera's men made it two trophies in two weeks becoming just the second team to top the group phase and win the title. Bipin Singh scored a 90th-minute winner after a Tiri own goal (29') had dragged Mumbai level. Bagan had earlier taken the lead through David Williams (18').

Mumbai continued with their usual possession-based football but for Bagan who were out of the blocks early, it was all about surging ahead. While the islanders had over 60% possession in the first quarter, Bagan had more shots on target.

There was an early penalty call when Bipin Singh was challenged in the box by Pritam Kotal, but the referee displayed no inter-

est.

Thereafter, it was all about the Mariners. The Kolkata side pinned their opponents with a high pressing game which forced the islanders into errors. The first real threat for Mumbai came from a Javier Hernandez free-kick which brushed the crossbar. Roy Krishna then forced a save from Amrinder Singh from a tight angle.

With pressure mounting on Mumbai's defence, the Kolkata side broke the deadlock first. Krishna dispossessed Ahmed Jahouh just outside the box and slipped a pass to Williams. The Australian got on to his stronger right foot and fired a firm shot past Amrinder. — Agencies

KENYAN RUNNER SENTENCED FOR FAKING DOCUMENTS

Nairobi, March 13: Kenyan long distance runner Florence Jepkosgei Chepsioi has received a one year community service sentence for faking documents as part of her defence on a doping charge, the Anti-Doping Association of Kenya (ADAK) announced.

She becomes the first Kenyan athlete to be found guilty in a criminal court.

The verdict was handed down after the trial in Eldoret following an investigation lasting a number of years.

The 36-year-old marathon runner was banned for two years in 2017 for using performance-boosting drug Prednisolone. She was found guilty of providing false medical records from Eldoret's Uasin Gishu Hospital to support her defence case when she appeared before the Kenyan Sports Disputes Tribunal. — AFP

OLYMPIC PROBABLE ATHLETES FAIL NADA DOPE TESTS IN IGP

New Delhi, March 13: Two athletes, who are in contention for the Olympic Games, have failed dope tests conducted at the Indian Grand Prix in Patiala last month, the National Anti Doping Agency's Director General Navin Agarwal revealed on Saturday.

It is understood that one of the athletes is a high profile female quarter-miler, who has won multiple gold medals in the 4x400m relay event and was supposed to be a part of the Tokyo-bound team. However, neither NADA nor the Athletics Federation of India have divulged any names.

— PTI

India had been outclassed in all departments in first T20

Morgan's luck with the toss influenced the outcome of the match. If anything, it put on him onus of making the decision of whether to bat first or bowl on an unknown pitch. Had the Indian batting clicked, Morgan would have been castigated for making the wrong decision.

What helped England's cause was splendid fast bowling by Archer, Wood, Jordan and Stokes, with excellent support from leg spinner Adil Rashid, and India going into the match with confused selection about the playing XI.

England's fast bowlers deserve credit in bending their backs for express speed, and managing to extract disconcerting bounce from a sluggish

pitch. India, with better knowledge of the conditions having won two successive Tests on this ground, had picked three spinners.

They may have read the pitch right but were undone by pace, stemming from quirky selection. On the eve of the match, captain Kohli had announced that the opening pair would be Rohit Sharma and K.L. Rahul. After the toss, it was revealed that Sharma would not only be skipping this match, but also the next, to give him rest.

Given the hectic workload modern cricket imposes, especially those who play all three formats, it is prudent to provide them rest and recovery

periods. Also, since these are the only T20 matches India will play before the World Cup later this year, several players need to be tried out.

Yet, it may have made more sense to play Rohit at the start and rest him towards the latter half. There is little point in holding back a major player till the series is almost lost.

Rohit's sublime form with the bat this season, albeit largely in red-ball cricket, would have given the Indian batting heft at the top of the order in the first match.

Just as it was important to play Rishabh Pant, not originally in the T20 squad, because of his current form, so it should

have been with Rohit whose presence may also perhaps have compelled Morgan to switch tactics.

Both Rahul and Shikhar Dhawan looked rusty and were dismissed cheaply. Kohli, without coming to terms with the pace and bounce of the pitch, tried to muscle Rashid over the infield to fall for a blob. The Indian innings never recovered from those three early blows.

While Rohit is not expected to play the second match too, I wonder if the massive defeat in the first game will have caused a rethink in the Indian think-tank. I hope it does. There is no harm in eating humble pie, and doing a course correction when it can still make a difference.

Batting is not the only cause for worry for India going ahead in the series. The bowling looked thin too. While the target for England was meagre negating the possibility of an upset, India's bowlers could not exercise any degree of control on the top order.

Bumrah's absence was sorely felt as all bowlers — pacers and spinners — leaked runs, leaving Kohli scratching his head in despair. India had been thoroughly outclassed in all departments. A swift recovery would entail revision in approach. Not on the tactic of 'total aggression', which is not ill-founded, but on which players can make this work.