

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SUNDAY | 28 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 38.0°C
Min: 19.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
38/19 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Padyami till 11.17 am
Star: Pubba till 9.33 am
Varjyam: 4.10 pm to 5.38 pm
Durmuhurtam: 4.45 pm to 5.31 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 15,1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.21 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.09 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.17 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.52 AM

COUNTER POINT



Can we request the EC to change the dates... our poll strategist is not satisfied!

SHORT TAKES

Fog delays flight to Vijayawada

Vijayawada: Fog delayed landing of two aircrafts in Vijayawada International Airport causing concern to passengers for some time here on Saturday. A flight from Bengaluru carrying the passengers arrived at the Vijayawada airport and as there was heavy fog at that time, there was some delay in getting clearance for landing.

■ Page 2: Delhi flight's landing delayed

50 lakh users set as SM threshold

New Delhi: The government has fixed 50 lakh registered users as the threshold for defining 'significant social media intermediary', which will have to adhere to additional obligations and compliance under the new IT rules that seek to crack down on misuse of social media platforms. The new rules require 'significant social media intermediaries' to follow additional due diligence.

Min faults talk against judges

Patna: Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Saturday expressed strong disapproval of legal activists making objectionable comments about judges who do not pass favourable orders on their petitions, calling it a "disturbing new trend". Prasad was addressing a function here organised to mark the inauguration of a new building of the Patna High Court.

Kuldiep Singh is CRPF in charge

New Delhi: IPS officer Kuldiep Singh has been assigned to "look after" the charge of CRPF director general (DG) after incumbent chief A.P. Maheshwari retires on Sunday, an order issued by the Union home ministry said on Saturday. It said Singh will hold the additional charge of the CRPF head till "the appointment and joining of the successor or until further orders."

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Rahul launches tirade against Modi



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US indicts Saudi for Khashoggi murder

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Motera pitch to favour batsmen



Snow scuttles Gulmarg Games



Skiers during a heavy snowfall at the ski resort of Gulmarg on Saturday. Most events of 2nd Khelo India winter games were cancelled due to heavy snowfall. — PTI

₹250 per Covid vaccine dose in private hospitals

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

Covid-19 vaccines in the private sector will be priced at ₹250 per person, per dose. Accordingly, the two-dose immunisation schedule will cost a person ₹500 in private hospitals and clinics while the vaccination will be free of cost in all government (both Central and state) healthcare centres, with the Central government bearing the full cost of the vaccination.

From March 1, all citizens above 60 years of age, and those within the age bracket of 45 to 59 years with specific comorbidities will be able to get the vaccine. To ramp up the Covid vaccination capacity, a large number of private facilities are being involved. Around 10,000 private hospitals empanelled under Ayushman Bharat PMJAY, more than 600 hospitals empanelled under CGHS and other private hospitals empanelled under state government's health insurance schemes can participate as Covid Vaccination Centres.

Errant pharmacists set to lose licence

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

The state government is to act tough against pharmacists and wholesale drug dealers for a series of violations in the sale and storage of medicines. The government recently issued an order for district sales licensing authorities, specifying standard operating procedure or guidelines in taking action for violation of provisions under Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945. The drugs control administration's assistant directors working in districts act as district sales licensing authorities. As there is no uniformity in initiating action against wholesale and retail licensees for violations, the director general, drugs control administration, has come up with SOPs and guidelines. The DG urged the state

government to accord permission, which was duly obliged. Accordingly, if the drug intended for distribution to government institutions is found stored, the licence of such entities would be cancelled and they would be subject to prosecution. If medicines intended for distribution to medical practitioners as free samples are found stored, then the licence would be suspended for 30 days for a first-time offence. A repeat of the same would entail cancellation of the licence and steps would be taken to prosecute the offenders. A similar punishment would be meted out if the medicine is sold by a registered pharmacist, who is employed elsewhere. Supply of any drug either by retail or by wholesale to be made against cash or credit memo and any violation leads to suspension of licence for 90 days.

TTD Board offers to build Srivari temple in Ayodhya

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 27

In a significant move, the TTD Trust Board has resolved to construct either a Srivari temple, *Bhajana mandiram* or pilgrim amenities complex in Ayodhya if the Ram Mandir Nirman Trust offered a plot of land for the TTD.

The board under the chairmanship of Y.V. Subba Reddy passed this as also some other resolutions at its meeting in Annamayya Bhavan in

Tirumala on Saturday. After approving the annual budgetary estimates for financial year 2021-22, the board also resolved to soon perform the 'bhumi pujas' for construction of Srivari temples in Mumbai and Jammu. The board urged the Centre to declare cow as a national animal.

The trust board resolved to install APSPDCL meters at all rest houses, cottages and choultrys in Tirumala to ensure checks on power consumption. It decided to

produce 50 megawatts of green power or conventional energy in Tirumala. The board gave its nod to resume arjitha sevas at Tirumala temple from April 14 and allow devotees' physical presence for advance bookings of arjitha sevas. Devotees with arjitha seva tickets should observe Covid-19 guidelines and get Covid-19 test done three days ahead of their Tirumala visit.

■ Page 2: Free vaccine to TTD employees

BJP COUNTERS MAMATA WITH 'REAL DAUGHTERS OF BENGAL'

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

Intensifying the slogan war in West Bengal, which faces an eight-phase election from March 27 to April 29, ruling Trinamul Congress and the Opposition BJP are now emphasising on who is the "real daughter" of the state.

After TMC countered the BJP's assertion that only a "son of Bengal" will be the next chief minister once it comes to power, with the slogan of "*Bangla nijer meyeket chay* (Bengal wants its own daughter)" on posters that had Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's photo, the BJP has now come out with the slogan "*Bangla nijer meyekte chai, Pishi nai* (Bengal wants its own daughter, not pishi (paternal aunt))."

The BJP's poster carrying this slogan has nine women leaders of the state, including Rupa Ganguly, Debashree Chaudhary, Locket Chatterjee, Bharti Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul and Mafuja Khatun among others.

Poll strategist Prashant Kishor, assisting Ms Banerjee in her bid to stop the BJP, on Saturday reiterated the challenge he laid down to the BJP in December — that if the Opposition party crossed the double-digit mark he would "quit this space".

12 contestants from EG, WG teachers' constituency

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 26

As many as 12 candidates are contesting from the teachers constituency of East and West Godavari districts for getting into the State Legislative Council. Majority of the candidates have active teaching experience.

Andhra Pradesh United Teachers Federation (APUTF), which is having the highest membership from among teachers, has fielded its state president Sabji Shaik in the forthcoming elections. Gandham Narayana Rao, said to be a YSRC-supported candidate, is expected to give a stiff fight to the APUTF nominee.

Private Teachers Union president Ambedkar Didde, Ila Satyanarayana of Amalapuram, Ganta Nageswara Rao of Khandrikagudem in Eluru of West Godavari, Cherukuri Subhashchandra Bose of Palangi in Undrajavaram mandal, Tidde Ravi of Mortha in Undrajavaram mandal of West Godavari, M. B. Nageswara Rao of Tadepalligudem, Palivela Veerraju of Rajamahendravaram

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR
and D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

The Election Commission of India's announcement of April 6 as the date for elections in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry triggered hectic discussions on seat sharing between the various parties in the two major alliances led by the Dravidian majors, DMK and AIADMK, on Saturday.

BJP leaders in Tamil Nadu, including G. Kishan Reddy, L. Murugan and C. T. Ravi, too held talks with AIADMK leaders and demanded at least 25 seats for their party. It was indeed a big climb down as the BJP was initially asking for 40 seats.

However, it is believed that Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam would call on Union Home Minister Amit Shah when he visits Chennai and finalise the seat sharing.

When Kamal was asked about the Congress joining it, he gave an ambiguous answer that triggered speculations of the Congress tying up with MNM.

● **ANDHRA PRADESH** United Teachers Federation (APUTF), which is having the highest membership from among teachers, has fielded its state president Sabji Shaik in the forthcoming elections. Gandham Narayana Rao, said to be a YSRC-supported candidate, is expected to give a stiff fight to the APUTF nominee.

Urban, Badugu Saibaba of Chennadam in Razole mandal of East Godavari, Ramakrishna Prasad Yadavilli of Rajamahendravaram and P. Vamsi Krishna Raja of Kakinada are others in the contest.

APUTF strongly believes that its candidate will win the election as the federation has higher membership from among teachers than other unions. However, UTF has so far won only one election, with its candidates who contested defeated twice earlier. Present MLC Ramu Surya Rao won with the support of UTF.

Cherukuri Subhashchandra Bose was a strong leader for UTF previously. He contested as MLC twice with the support of UTF but lost. Later, he resigned from UTF and

● **IT IS** believed that Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam would call on Union home minister Amit Shah when he visits Chennai and finalise the seat sharing.

Also the possibility of the third coalition emerging was visible with the actor Sarathkumar's All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi calling on Makkal Needhi Miaam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan and exploring the potential for a third front in Tamil Nadu. Sarathkumar claimed that the AIADMK did not even call the party for talks. Leader of the India Janayaka Katchi (IJK), who are now part of the DMK-led coalition, are also negotiating with the MNM for an alliance as the party is peeved over the less number of seats offered. Similarly, the DMDK, founded by actor Vijayakanth, is also angry with the AIADMK, protested against the hike in petrol and diesel prices. But later on top leaders of the AIADMK called on Vijaykanth to appease

him and request him to continue with the alliance. The PMK, an ally of the AIADMK, was the only party that finalised its alliance by agreeing for 23 seats, which would be identified later on, and thanking the ruling party for bringing in the 10.5 per cent reservation for the Vanniyar community.

The meeting between the PMK and AIADMK was held at a star hotel in Chennai. The two parties are fighting an Assembly election together after 2001, pointed out Anbumani Ramadoss, who said that the PMK agreed for lesser number of seats because the 10.5 per cent exclusive quota for Vanniyaars was announced by AIADMK government.

In the DMK camp, the talks with the Congress have been put on hold as the TNCC leaders have rushed to southern Tamil Nadu in view of Rahul Gandhi's visit. Their talks on seat-sharing had hit a road block as the DMK had only offered them only 15 to 20 seats and the Congress had told them that they will get back after discussing the issue with the high command.

BALAKOT ANNIV: IAF CARRIES OUT LONG-RANGE PRECISION STRIKES

New Delhi, Feb. 27: The Indian Air Force carried out a long-range precision strike against a practice target to mark the second anniversary of the Balakot Operation, sources said on Saturday.

The strike was carried out by members of the squadron which conducted the air strikes on terror launch pads in Balakot in Pakistan.

The sources added that the strike was in the "very recent past".

Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria on Saturday flew a multi-aircraft sortie with the units to commemorate the occasion along with the squadron pilots. The sources added that sortie comprised three Mirage 2000 and 2 Sukhoi-30 MKIs. Bhadauria flew the Mirage 2000. On the first anniversary of Balakot air strike, Bhadauria flew a five aircraft mission from Srinagar air base along with air warriors who were part of the operation to pound a terrorist training camp deep inside Pakistan.

— PTI

SC not to use WhatsApp groups to share VC links

New Delhi, Feb. 27: The Supreme Court will no longer use WhatsApp groups to share video conference links for court hearings, the apex court registry said on Saturday.

In a circular, the registry said that instead of WhatsApp, the links for virtual court hearings in the apex court will be shared on registered email ids and registered mobile numbers of the concerned advocates-on-record and party-in-person.

The step was taken in the wake of the newly notified Information Technology (Guidelines for intermedi-

aries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (IT Rules, 2021).

"It is notified for the information of the Advocates-on-Record /Party-in-Persons that the creation of groups in WhatsApp for sharing of VC links for hearing of their matters is restricted/barred due to new guidelines or regulations issued by government of India pertaining to social media Apps and OTT platforms, it said. It said the VC links shall be shared "w.e.f. March 1, 2021 through registered email ids as well as by SMS on

registered mobile numbers of the Ld. Advocates-on-Record / Party-in-Persons".

The government on Thursday announced sweeping regulations for social media firms like Facebook and Twitter as well as OTT players. The guidelines also make it mandatory for platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp to identify the originator of a message that authorities consider to be anti-national and against the security and sovereignty of the country.

— PTI

OTHER STORIES

Delhi flight's landing delayed

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Similarly, another flight from New Delhi carrying the passengers also arrived at the airport only to be delayed for landing for some time due to heavy fog. It has become a regular practice of late for aircrafts to get delayed for landing due to inclement weather conditions resulting in poor visibility.

21 DY COLLECTORS TRANSFERRED IN STATE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

The AP government has transferred 21 deputy collectors on Saturday. Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das issued orders about the transfers under which M.V. Suryakala was transferred to Simhachalam temple as executive officer.

N. Vijaya Kumar, deputy collector, working as special deputy collector (LA), P.S. Veligonda Project, R&R Unit, Cumbum is transferred and posted as special deputy collector, Telugu Ganga Project (TGP), Nellore unit, Nellore.

J. Siva Srinivasu was under the orders of posting as joint-collector (Aasara & Welfare), Nellore district, is retained as assistant secretary, o/o chief commissioner of land administration, A.P., Vijayawada.

D. Kodandaram Reddy, DC, was posted as Forest Settlement Officer (FSO), Chittoor.

A. Sree Rama Chandra Murthy, special grade deputy collector, was posted in Andhra Pradesh Vigilance Commission.

M. Sri Devi, DC, was posted as special deputy collector-Competent Authority (CA), Multi-Product Krishnapatnam-Hyderabad Pipeline Project of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) in Ongole.

The services of K. Addaiah, DC, are placed at the municipal administration & urban development department's disposal as special deputy collector, Machilipatnam Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

G.V. Subba Reddy, DC, K.R.R.C., Prakasam district, is transferred as executive officer, Sri Venkateswara Swamy Vari Devasthanam, Dwaraka Tirumala.

ABVSB. Srinivas, DC, was posted as special deputy collector, KRRC, East Godavari district.

M. Sreenivasulu, DC, is posted as deputy collector, Legal Cell, Tirupati.

A. Mahalakshmi Devi, DC, was posted as assistant secretary, o/o chief commissioner of Land Administration, A.P., Vijayawada.

E. Sadhana, DC, was transferred and posted as special deputy collector, Amaravati Metropolitan Region Development Authority (AMRDA).

D. Ramu Naik, DC, was posted as special deputy collector, GNSS Unit - 3, Muddanur, Y.S.R. Kadapa district.

B. Chinnna Obulesu, DC, was posted as district revenue officer, SPSR Nellore district.

K. Hemalatha, DC, was posted as special deputy collector, Land Acquisition, National Highway-16, Visakhapatnam.

T. Bapi Reddy, DC, is transferred and posted as joint-collector (Aasara & Welfare), SPSR Nellore district.

K. Krishna Veni, DC, posted as joint-collector (Aasara & Welfare), Prakasam district.

G.V. Satyaveni, DC, is transferred, and her services are placed at the disposal of the Department for Women, Children, Differently Abled And Senior Citizens for posting her as project director, ICDS, East Godavari district.

The services of K.M. Barta Rosemond, DC, working as district manager, AP State Civil Supplies Corporation (APSC-SCL), Nellore are withdrawn from the CAF & CS department and her services are placed at the disposal of the Department for Women, Children, Differently Abled And Senior Citizens for posting her as project director, ICDS, Nellore district.

The services of K.S. Bhagya Rekha, DC, working as project director, ICDS, Kurnool district are withdrawn from the Department for Women, Children, Differently Abled And Senior Citizens and she is posted as assistant secretary to government, Revenue Department.

K. Dinesh Kumar, assistant commissioner of Labour, Tirupati, is transferred and posted as Chief Executive Officer, APNRT Society, on deputation.

● Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das issued orders M.V. Suryakala was transferred to Simhachalam temple as executive officer.



Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu makes Dosa as part of his campaign for Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— DC

Parties step up campaign for Vijayawada civic polls

It will be four-cornered contest in many VMC divisions

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

Ruling and opposition parties have speeded up their campaign in Vijayawada city for the municipal corporation elections scheduled on March 10.

With internal conflicts within Telugu Desam over choice of candidates resolved with intervention of party supremo Chandrababu Naidu, the party is hoping to regain power in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC), which it won in 2014.

Electioneering by ruling YSRC is in full swing. Endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas Rao, elected from Vijayawada West constituency, is campaigning vigorously. The Jana Sena-BJP alliance and communist parties have also intensified their campaigns. Thus, in many of the divisions in VMC, it will be a four-cornered contest.

Telugu Desam had been divided into two groups, one belonging to Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani and another led by TD MLC Buddha Venkanna and Nagulmeera.

TD MLA SEEKS SPECIAL PACKAGE FOR TRANSPORT INDUSTRY IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

The Repalle Telugu Desam MLA Anagani Satya Prasad has pleaded that the YSRC government provide immediate tax relief and Covid-lockdown assistance to rescue lorry workers and the transport sector from the present crisis.

He urged Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy to also reduce the tax on petrol and diesel and waive the penalties being imposed on lorry owners. "Please also cut the toll tax and extend the time-limit for payment of e-way bills," he said in an open letter to the CM. He pleaded that the government cancel the labour cess and road cess as these are not being collected in any other state. He also urged the CM to grant a financial assistance of ₹10,000 to drivers and cleaners as Covid relief.

Satya Prasad said the badly damaged roads needed urgent repair. "The hike in fuel prices has affected the livelihood of workers in the transport sector over and above the hit they took from the long lockdown and the pandemic. These had a huge adverse impact on both the passenger and transport vehicles."

The TD MLA said lorry owners were under stress because of pressure from banks for repayment of EMIs, and from the government for tax payments. "The vehicle tax was cancelled in Delhi and TS by way of a relief but no such step was taken in AP till now."



Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas interacts with a woman voter during a campaign for Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— DC

The two groups clashed with each other in selection of the 39th division TD candidate. Finally, Chandrababu Naidu and TD state president K. Atchannaidu resolved the issue by supporting former YSRC leader K. Siva Sarma as the party candidate, honouring MP Nani's choice.

The TD chief then directed party leaders to shun group politics and work towards regaining the

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation. However, differences arose on Saturday with the change in 34th division TD candidate. Kotteti Hanumantha Rao, who had earlier been nominated from the division, rushed to MP Nani's office and staged a protest with family members and TD cadres. He pointed out that earlier Nani had given the TD ticket to him and he had already launched his campaign. But he

has now been replaced by a follower of ex-MLA Vangaveeti Radhakrishna. The conflict in TD over division 34 is yet to be resolved.

MP Nani and Vijayawada East TD MLA Gadde Ram-mohan, along with other leaders, are spearheading their party's election campaign in Vijayawada city. Telugu Desam is contesting the election in alliance with CPI, with the latter allotted six divisions. Another red party CPM is contesting in 22 divisions.

Campaigning is in full swing by YSRC leaders and cadres. Ministers Vellampalli Srinivas Rao and Kursala Kannababu, MLA Malladi Vishnu, Devineni Avinash and other leaders are conducting door-to-door campaigns, explaining the welfare schemes being provided to people in each division in the hope of winning the elections.

BJP-Jana Sena alliance is highlighting the failures of TD and YSRC governments in developing Vijayawada city. Leaders of the two parties are asking voters to give their alliance a chance instead to develop Vijayawada city.

Naidu complains to DGP against violence in EG

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu has complained to Director General of Police Gautam Sawang over unprecedented violence in aftermath of gram panchayat elections in East Godavari district. He went on to accuse a section of police being hand-in-glove with ruling YSRC leaders in harassing Dalits and TD cadres by registering false cases against the latter.

In a letter to DGP, Naidu recounted that YSRC-sponsored candidate Lolita Bhadrani won as sarpanch of Illapalli panchayat in Biccavolu mandal in phase-II of gram panchayat polls held on February 13, 2021. He then took out a victory procession and created a ruckus in front of the house belonging to Tanuku Sridhar, who con-

tested against him. Subsequently, when the procession reached SC Peta, ruling party hooligans started creating a major scene in front of TD leader Kannuri Raghava's house. Raghava requested the YSRC leader not to blast crackers in front of his house but carry on. Following this, Raghava was physically attacked by the precisionists. Raghava's son and daughter too were attacked when they intervened.

Naidu said within half-an-hour, Biccavolu SI Pati Vasu, along with his staff, barged into the house of Raghava and started beating his son Vinod. When daughters of Raghava tried to rescue their brother, the SI abused them along caste lines.

The TD chief alleged that the following day - February 14, 2021, YSRC activists attacked Dalit

families in Tummalapalli on outskirts of Illapalli. On a complaint, the Biccavolu SI took counter complaints from YSRC and filed false cases against TD sympathisers.

Similarly, in Anaparty gram panchayat elections, a Dalit, Gangadhar, who worked against YSRC-sponsored candidates, was attacked and injured by ruling party workers.

The TD chief said it is high time that DGP, as head of the police in Andhra Pradesh, took cognisance of a section of police unilaterally favouring ruling party leaders.

He wanted the DGP to act against such a tendency. He stated that DGP's silence in such cases will only further encourage violence against cadres of opposition parties. He demanded that swift action be taken against the culprits involved.

Volunteers shouldn't be utilised in distributing voter slips: SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 27

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar has made it clear that services of volunteers must not be utilised for distributing voter slips in the upcoming civic body polls in various corporations and municipalities scheduled on March 10.

The SEC was in Tirupati on Saturday to review arrangements for municipal polls with officials of Chittoor, Kurnool, Kadapa, Anantapur and Nellore districts.

Addressing media persons, Ramesh Kumar clarified that voter slips should be distributed only by municipal staff or other official machinery under supervision of respective district collectors.

SEC has instructed officials to strictly implement the model code of conduct in the state, as municipal polls are being held on party basis. "Mobile squads will be in service. Those

● The SEC also made it clear that permissions for road shows will be through a single window system.

● Strict vigil will be kept over flow of liquor and money during electioneering.

who violate the code will have to face criminal charges. In view of Covid-19 restrictions, only less than five people from a party will be allowed to conduct door-to-door campaigns," he stated.

The SEC also made it clear that permissions for road shows will be through a single window system. Strict vigil will be kept over flow of liquor and money during electioneering.

"Campaigning will not be allowed within 100 metres from the polling booths. Helplines will be set up in every municipality to help voters know their polling booths and

other information. Videography and webcasting will be done at all sensitive and hyper sensitive polling stations, with micro-observers closely monitoring the situation," he explained.

Ramesh Kumar also made it clear that nominations, which were rejected during scrutiny in the poll process last year, will not be considered this year. "Candidates who withdrew nominations due to pressures can, however, be considered, provided they give a written complaint. Cases of those who show proof of being obstructed from filing nominations will also be reconsidered," he assured.

EC secretary Kanna Babu, commissioner and director of municipal administration M.M. Nayak, Additional DGP Sanjay, Anantapur range DIG Kranti Rana Tata, collectors, SPs and municipal commissioners took part in the meeting with SEC.

NETA'S NATTER

Srilakshmi's promotion as Special Chief Secretary hits roadblock

The efforts to promote Y. Srilakshmi as special chief secretary are facing some hurdles. The 1989-batch IAS officer had been transferred to AP cadre from Telangana in December 2020 after she secured an order for this from the central administrative tribunal. The YSRC government welcomed the official and soon posted her as principal secretary in the municipal administration and urban development (MAUD) department.

Now, the buzz in AP bureaucratic circles is that the Jagan-led government is likely to promote her as special chief secretary.

Another rumour taking the rounds of these circles a while ago was that Srilakshmi would eventually be promoted as chief secretary after incumbent CS Adityanath Das retires on June 30. The rank of special chief secretary is cited a pre-requisite for an official to get promoted as CS.

The departmental promotion committee is examining the issue of promoting Srilakshmi as special CS. DPC has a representative from DoPT alongside state government representatives.

It is pointed out that some charges are pending against Srilakshmi in the Jagan's disproportionate assets case. The state government responded to this by saying IAS officers Manmohan Singh and BP Acharya, who too were facing charges in Jagan's case, had been promoted as Special chief secretary. Meanwhile, Reddy Subrahmanyam, an AP cadre IAS officer currently on central deputation and representing DoPT in the DPC, reportedly expressed reservations over Srilakshmi's promotion as Special CS.

He is favouring a regular promotion for Srilakshmi and not ad hoc promotion as per the DoPT rules framed in 2000. It remains to be seen how the Andhra Pradesh government will handle this matter.

VEXED WITH LEADERS IMMORAL POLITICS, JS CADRE IS JOINING YSRC: VELLAMPALLI

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

Endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas Rao has alleged that Jana Sena is secretly colluding with Telugu Desam towards ensuring victory of TD in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections. The minister said this is immoral politics of Jana Sena, which is officially in alliance with the BJP. This the minister said is making JS leaders and cadres joining the YSRC.

The minister asserted that YSRC will win from all 64 divisions of Vijayawada. He stated that if anyone comes from Jana Sena saying injustice has been done, YSRC will stand by them.

● The minister asserted that YSRC will win from all 64 divisions of Vijayawada. He stated that if anyone comes from Jana Sena saying injustice has been done, YSRC will stand by them.

● Srinivas Rao was reacting to Jana Sena candidate Kamaraj Harish Kumar joining the YSRC.

joining the YSRC with his followers.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said many JS activists are supporting YSRC after they came to know about the leaders colluding with TD for ensuring the latter's factory in VMC. He said that JS chief Pawan Kalyan staying in his farmhouse has no inkling of what was going on locally.

JOB | CLAIM

Re-consider petitioner's case for appointment on compassionate grounds, says Judge

HC strikes down discriminatory rule for dependents

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

In a recent judgement, the Andhra Pradesh High Court has struck down a rule on the ground that it showed discrimination in providing employment on compassionate ground to the spouse or dependents of a government servant who died in harness or the one who went missing.

A single judge bench headed by justice Battu Devanand pronounced the judgement in a case where the son of a missing government servant

was denied job on compassionate ground for the reason that his father was not having the minimum required seven years of service to retire from the date on which an FIR was filed about his missing.

The judge struck down Condition 3 (b) (i) of GO issued by the general administration department dated 24-08-1999.

It had stipulated a minimum seven years of service left for an employee to retire from the date of filing of FIR about his disappearance, in order for

his dependent to get a job on compassionate grounds.

The court set aside memo dated 03-03-2009 that had rejected the claim for job on compassionate ground by saying it failed to fulfil the norm of seven years.

The judge directed the respondents to re-consider the case of the petitioner for appointment on compassionate grounds, in any suitable post, within a period of six weeks.

T. Srinivasa Rao in his petition filed in the High Court in 2012, stated that

his father T. Subba Rao worked as a plant attendant at the Narla Tatarao thermal power plant in Vijayawada.

He went missing on August 26, 2001. Subba Rao's wife lodged a missing-complaint at the local police station.

After investigation, the police filed a final report on December 31, 2001, saying the person was 'undetectable.' Thereafter, Srinivasa Rao made a representation at the power plant for a job on compassionate ground. He cited that seven years

were completed from the date his father was missing. He said the power plant authorities rejected his claim on the ground that there was no left-over service of seven years to his father on the date of lodging the missing-complaint.

Petitioner's counsel argued that the government was providing employment under compassionate grounds to the spouse/dependents of deceased employees, who died in harness, without putting any condition of the length of service left-

over, except that the family should submit a claim for job on compassionate grounds within a year from the date of death of the employee.

He called it illegal and arbitrary and also violative of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution for not extending the same benefit to the spouse/dependents of government servants who went missing on the ground that they were having less than seven years of service from the date of filing of FIR about their disappearance.

IN BRIEF



Ajendra to assume charge at ENC

Visakhapatnam: Vice admiral Ajendra Bahadur Singh to assume charge as flag officer commanding-in-chief of Eastern Naval Command at a ceremonial parade to be held at Naval Base on March 1. Vice admiral to take charge from Atul Kumar Jain as he is moving to New Delhi to assume the charge as the chief of integrated defence staff to the chairman of chiefs of staff committees. A ceremonial parade comprising ceremonial guard and platoons of naval personnel drawn from various ships, submarines and establishments of the ENC, will be held at the Naval Base. The parade to be attended by all flag officers and commanding officers of ships, submarines and naval establishments.

AP REPORTS 118 COVID CASES, NO DEATH

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

Andhra Pradesh registered 118 fresh cases of Covid-19 infections and no death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Saturday that out of 37,041 samples tested, 118 persons were infected with confirmed Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,39,15,009 samples tested so far in the state, 8,89,799 persons were infected with the virus, and of them, 8,81,963 recovered in the course of treatment while 667 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor registered highest of 33 followed by 14 each in East Godavari and Visakhapatnam, 13 in Guntur, 9 in Krishna, seven each in Anantapur and Kadapa, five each in Kurnool and Srikakulam, four each in Nellore and West Godavari, three in Prakasam and zero cases in Vizianagaram.

With regard to the active cumulative Covid-19 cases, Chittoor topped the state with 110 followed by 89 in Krishna, 74 in East Godavari, 63 in Nellore, 50 each in Guntur and Kadapa, 42 in Srikakulam, 38 each in Anantapur and West Godavari, 36 in Prakasam, 34 in Visakhapatnam, 29 in Kurnool and 14 in Vizianagaram.

No new Covid-19 death was reported.

3 INFECTED WITH VIRUS IN PVT FIRM

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

Three employees of a private firm supplying aerated drinks were found infected with Covid-19 at Pedavadlapudi village of Mangalagiri mandal in Guntur district on Saturday.

The three employees hailed from Tenali, Pedavadlapudi and Mangalagiri and two of them were shifted to the government hospital in Guntur for medical treatment. The authorities say that nearly 760 employees were working either on a permanent or contract basis at the firm, and as part of routine checking for Covid-19, three were found infected with the virus. Following the development, the revenue authorities instructed the firm's management to shut down the unit for the day.

All the primary contacts of the infected employees were checked, and some of them were found negative to the virus. The entire premise of the firm was sanitised to avoid the spread of the infection. Mangalagiri tahsildar G.V. Rama Prasad said, "Only three employees were found infected with the Covid-19 and they were shifted to government hospitals for treatment. We asked the firm to close the unit for the day to avoid the spread of the virus. We appeal to the people in the mandal to wear a mask, maintain social distance and use sanitisers to wash their hands and also to the political leaders to strictly comply with Covid-19 protocol to avoid getting infected with the virus."

TTD approves ₹2,927.82cr budget, more for security

Allocations enhanced for educational institutions and hospitals too

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 27

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Trust board has approved its annual budget for the financial year of 2021-2022 with an estimated outlay of ₹2,937.82 crore, registering a marginal dip in comparison to last year's budgetary estimates.

The board, headed by chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, held a meeting in Tirumala on Saturday to approve the temple body's annual budgetary estimates - 2021-2022.

They hope to earn ₹1,131 crore from Srivari hundi, while the major expenses are towards salaries and wages, which has been pegged at ₹1,308.15 crore.

The trust board is estimating to earn ₹533.10 crore from interest on investments, ₹375 crore from prasadam sale, ₹210 crore from darshanam, ₹121 crore from

FREE VACCINE TO TTD EMPLOYEES

FROM PAGE 1

The board decided to provide free Covid vaccination to all TTD employees.

The TTD board also approved a Thulabharan Seva at the Sri Padmavati temple of Tiruchanoor on the lines of the Tirumala

Kalyanakatta, ₹70 crore from arjitha seva receipts, and ₹100 crore through monetisation funds from unviable properties and vacant cottages under cottage donation scheme.

The board expects a revenue of ₹93 crore from accommodation facilities and Kalyana mandapam, followed by loans and advances to employees, EMD, security and deposits - ₹66.78 crore, rent, electrical and water charges - ₹42 crore, publications - ₹22.15 crore, trust receipts - ₹50 crore

temple.

It decided to frame guidelines for takeover of temples and providing financial assistance for this from the Srivani Trust. The board decided to frame uniform guidelines for lease and construction of the TTD kalyana mandapams.

and other receipts to the tune of ₹23.30 crore.

On the other hand, the trust board also presented the annual expenditures for the fiscal 2021-22. The estimated major expenditure would be ₹1,385.09 crore for paying wages and salaries to employees, ₹574.99 crore for procurement of materials for temples and other TTD institutions, ₹250 crore for engineering works and ₹50 crore for Garuda Varadhi construction works.

Similarly, ₹51 crore has been earmarked for

On Saturday morning, Dr G. Vani Mohan, Principal Secretary of AP Endowments, was sworn-in as Ex-officio member of the TTD trust board at Srivari temple in Tirumala. TTD Additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy served the oath of office on Dr Vani Mohan.

SVIMS engineering capital works and revenue grants, ₹180 crore for engineering wing maintenance, ₹51.36 crore towards loans and advances to employees and ₹109.55 crore for HDPP and allied projects. Other expenditures include ₹91 crore for grants to other institutions, ₹75 crore for pension fund contributions, ₹150 crore for corpus and other investments.

There are other expenditures including other maintenance works - ₹43 crore electrical charges -

₹45 crore, contributions to state government- ₹50 crore, other payments - ₹32.08 crore, tender publications and advertisements - ₹10 crore and closing cash and bank balances ₹17.58 crore.

There has been an enhancement of budget for vigilance and security departments, which are now allocated ₹146 crore as against previous fiscal's ₹135 crore.

It is likewise for educational institutions run and managed by TTD. They have been allocated ₹153.50 crore while it was ₹139.50 crore last year.

Similarly, allocation of funds for TTD hospitals and dispensaries, grants to SV Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS), Balaji Institute of Surgery, Research and Rehabilitation for the Disabled (BIRRD), Sri Srinivasa Sankara Nethralaya Trust and Sravanam project has been increased to ₹141 crore from ₹133 crore.

PRAKASAM YOUTH FOUND DEAD IN OZ

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, FEB. 27

A native of Pamidipadu village of Korisapadu mandal in Prakasam district was found dead under mysterious circumstances at his residence in Salisbury, a northern suburb in Adelaide, South Australia. The deceased identified as Harish Babu has been living in Australia for the last six years and he was married two years back.

He sent his pregnant wife to her parent's home India for delivery last year.

She got stuck in India after delivery because of the outbreak of Covid-19 and lockdown.

As the travel restrictions are lifted now, Harish made arrangements for his wife to travel to Australia and the woman left for Chennai to board a flight on Friday.

However, she grew suspicious over the wellbeing of her husband after he failed to answer the calls she made soon after reaching Chennai.

Following her request, the neighbours of the couple at Salisbury went to check for Harish and found him dead. The shocked woman, who obtained the boarding pass and about to board the flight, cancelled the trip and returned to Pamidipadu after coming to know about the death.

Father of the deceased Ravi Poornachandra Rao appealed to the state and central governments to help them to get the body of Harish from Australia.

Stressing that Harish is mentally strong person, he ruled out the possibility of suicide and suspected foul-play behind the death.

A pale of gloom descended at Pamidipadu village following the sudden demise of Harish.

Fun on the run



Children enjoy skating on the beach road during the no vehicle period in the early morning in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

APHEPB to strengthen institutional relationship

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 27

Minister of education A. Suresh said that the Andhra Pradesh Higher Education Planning Board (HEPB) had been constituted to strengthen the inter-institutional relationships and bondage between the various central and state institutions in the state.

The first meeting of HEPB was held under the aegis of the AP education minister at IIT, Tirupati on Saturday. The planning board comprises Vice-Chancellors and Directors of Central and State Universities in AP. After inaugurating the meet, Dr Suresh said that the important objective of HEPB is to suggest new courses of contemporary relevance, support in design and development of curriculum and facilitate the organisation of

● The first meeting of HEPB was held under the aegis of the AP education minister at IIT, Tirupati

academic events involving national and international organisations. The minister said that the board is looking into the formulation of state higher education policy for comprehensive development of higher education in AP, while the special CS for Higher Education Mr Satish Chandra, said that the planning board objective is to foster qualitative and inclusive growth of higher education in the state.

The chairman of APSCHE, Prof. Hemachandra Reddy, said that the main functions of the board are to suggest the ways to promote inter-institutional research projects, credits transfer, share the best

practices in the higher education system, sharing of resources, develop the ecosystem of harmonious relationships among all state and central institutions.

Further, Prof. K.N. Satyanarayana, director IIT Tirupati, has given a brief outline of the institute's progress in terms of academics and infrastructure in the last six years. He showcased various technologies being used in setting up the permanent campus of IIT Tirupati.

Later, the session on the promotion of institutional cooperation and enhancing the quality standards of higher education in the light of NEP 2020 was conducted. Senior Professors and Deans of IIT Tirupati, APSCHE Vice Chairman and Secretary and other important officials have attended the event.

WATER GRID TO MITIGATE PROBLEMS

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, FEB. 27

Minister for IT, skill development and industries Mekapati Goutham Reddy said that a detailed project report is being prepared for an MSME Park proposed at an estimated cost of ₹1,000 crore in Atmakur constituency represented by him in the Assembly.

During a visit to Gandlavedu village in Atmakur segment on Saturday, the minister said they would establish a Water Grid to mitigate the drinking water problems in the water-starved backward areas of SPSP Nellore district.

After walking around the village, Gautam Reddy said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had responded positively to the water issues.

WOMAN | POWER Fatima started Beti Padaavo, worked for girls

Book on first Mulsim teacher

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

The book on the first Muslim teacher in India "Fatima Sheikh" would be released on March 10 in Andhra Pradesh and the Telangana. Historian and famous writer Syed Naseer Ahmed said Fatima Sheikh launched Beti Padaavo movement promoting education among girls and women 170 years ago with Phule.

Book author Naseer Ahmad said that a lot of literature was available about Phule, but sadly

● Historian and famous writer Syed Naseer Ahmed said Fatima Sheikh launched Beti Padaavo movement promoting education among girls and women 170 years ago with Phule

there was no proper information on Fatima Sheikh, who provided shelter to the Phule couple when Phule's father Govind Rao Phule forcibly thrown them out from their house. He recalled that Fatima Sheikh with her brother Usman Sheikh provided shelter to the Phule couple in their house. After

● A lot of literature was available about Phule, but sadly there was no proper information on Fatima Sheikh, who provided shelter to the Phule couple

getting teacher training with Savitri Bai Phule, Fatima worked as a teacher and later as a head mistress.

He said that Fatima started Beti Padaavo by asking everyone to send girls to the schools and worked relentlessly for girl education.

He called Fatima Sheikh not only the first Muslim

teacher but the first Muslim feminist in India.

Naseer Ahmad said that the book *Fatima Sheikh* would be provided to all libraries for free of cost and would be distributed in 150 centres in AP and Telangana on March 10 on the occasion of Savitri Bai Phule's 127 death anniversary. He said that they are ready to provide Fatima Sheikh books for free distribution among the masses to awaken them about Fatima Sheikh.

Interested organisations and person can contact on 9440241727 phone number to get the books.

Vijaya Dairy hikes ₹2 per litre milk

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, FEB. 27

Vijaya Dairy hiked ₹2 per litre milk on double toned and ₹4 on full cream milk per litre in West Godavari District. Andhra Pradesh Dairy Development Cooperative Federation West Godavari unit said that due to the increasing gathering of milk, transport charges and other expenses, the milk prices have to be hiked, and the new price will be implemented from March 1. Though there are old rates in the milk packets, the new prices would be collected

from the consumers. The advance card buyers can be supplied milk as it is till March 9.

The Federation says 200 ml packet double toned milk with 1.5 fat and 9 SNF prices have not been hiked and it will be sold at ₹9. However, 500 ml double toned milk with 1.5 fat and 9 SNF will be sold at ₹22 from ₹21 existing price and tone milk with 3 per cent fat and 8.5 SNF per cent of 500 ML will be sold at ₹24 from ₹23 existing price. The Full cream milk of 500 ML quantity with 6 per cent fat and 9 per cent SNF per cent will be sold at ₹30 from the existing ₹28.



A couple from Nellore district at Secretariat near Velagapudi on Saturday.

— DC

NELLORE COUPLE TRIES TO END LIFE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 27

A couple belonging to Nellore tried to commit suicide near AP Secretariat at Velagapudi on Saturday by pouring petrol, alleging Duttaluru tahsildar collecting ₹1 crore by for online registration of their farmland. Arigela Nagarjuna, with his wife and two children, came to the secretariat with petrol.

He alleged that Duttaluru tahsildar Chandrasekhar promised to regularise their farmlands through an online process and collected ₹1 crore rupees in several instalments.

He lamented that they asked Chandrasekhar to

● The couple alleged that they paid ₹1 crore to tahsildar for online registration of their farmland. They came to the secretariat with their two children

return their money but in vain and further lodged a complaint with other officials but of no use. He lamented that vexed with the behaviour of Chandrasekhar, he decided to commit suicide with family and tried to do so by pouring petrol. The nearby people stalled the effort and informed the police, who rushed to the spot and foiled the bid. The police had taken the couple into custody and started the inquiry.

Student JAC stir over Vizag steel

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, FEB. 27

A protest was held on Saturday at the Ambedkar statue near the Kadapa RTC bus stand to stop the privatisation of Visakhapatnam steel plant under the auspices of the student youth associations joint action committee (JAC). They demanded an end to the privatisation of

Visakhapatnam steel, which was achieved with many sacrifices.

JAC chairman Salavuddin speaking on the occasion said that the agitations will continue up to repeal the decision made by the central government. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the PM for the nation and not for the corporate giants Adani and Ambani.



A priest helps the devotees to offer prayers to the sun god after having a holy dip at the Ramakrishna Beach to mark Magha Pournami in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

Beneficiaries told to start house construction

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, FEB. 27

The Joint Collector Keethi Chekuri suggested the housing beneficiaries should start their housing constructions immediately as if there will be a rainy season coming, the housing activity can't be gone on. She inspected the central layout in 136.52 acres of land in 14 layouts in Karapa on Saturday. She said that Mahasivarathri day is a very auspicious day and the beneficiaries should start their housing activities and complete the rainy season. She said that sand coupons

● SHE SAID that Mahasivarathri day is a very auspicious day and the beneficiaries should start their housing activities and complete the rainy season, sand coupons would be given to the beneficiaries.

would be given to the beneficiaries and level their sites by taking loans through Self Help Groups. The beneficiaries said that they can't start the housing activity until celebrating Sri Rama Navami festival. But, she said that if the

beneficiaries start the houses quickly, they need not pay rents for their residences to the owners. She said that bricks, sand and metal would be given to low prices.

The Deputy Tahsildar Ponnammada Srinivas said that 74.37 acres of site has to be levelled yet. Ms.Keerthi instructed the Drainage Engineers to complete the constructions and level the grounds. The Mandal Parishad Development Officer K. Swapna, Transco Engineer Mr Prasad and , Housing Project Director G.V. Prasad and others were present.

IN BRIEF

RAHUL LAUNCHES
TIRADE
AGAINST MODI

Tuticorin/Tirunelveli, Feb 27: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over issues including the Sino-India standoff and sought to establish an emotional connect with the people of poll-bound Tamil Nadu, saying he wants to have a relationship with them marked only by respect and affection.

Launching his three-day Tamil Nadu tour ahead of the April 6 assembly elections, he attacked Modi, BJP and the RSS on a number of issues and charged the Prime Minister with seeking to “remote control” Tamil Nadu through Chief Minister K Palaniswami.

He also billed himself as a ‘honest’ man and therefore Modi “cannot control me” but was being targeted by him.

At public interactions and meetings at different locations in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli districts, during some of which he mingled with the public, Gandhi missed no chance to take a swipe at Modi and also hit out at the ‘corrupt’ ruling AIADMK.

CONG ‘GETTING
WEAK’,
SAYS SIBAL

Jammu, Feb 27: Senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal Saturday said here the party was “getting weak”, but was not utilising the vast political experience of veteran leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who recently retired from Rajya Sabha.

Sibal was among several party leaders including Manish Tewari, former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Raj Babbar and Anand Sharma who joined Azad at a function organised by the Gandhi Global family in a show of strength by the ‘G-23’ faction of the party. These leaders were among the 23 Congress members who had recently written to party chief Sonia Gandhi seeking an organisational overhaul. “We feel the Congress is getting weak and time has come to rejuvenate the party to make it regain its lost glory,” Sibal said in his address to the function.

“Why we came together here?” Sibal questioned to answer, “The truth is that we are feeling the Congress is getting weak. And therefore we came together, like in the past, to work for strengthening the party.”

Taking a pledge from the podium, he said there are many leaders who were not present at the function who support them, and “we will sacrifice whatever is necessary to make the nation and the party strong.”

‘SUSPECTS HAD
DONE RECCE OF
AMBANI'S HOUSE’

**BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 27**

The Toyota Innova linked to a bomb scare near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's home in Mumbai on Thursday has been spotted on CCTV feed as it leaves the city via the Thane-Mulund toll plaza earlier that same day, Mumbai Police's Crime Branch said on Saturday. According to the police, the suspects had done a thorough recce.

The CCTV feed shows a white Innova pulling up to the toll gate at around 3 am on February 25 - the day that an abandoned SUV filled with explosives - 20 gelatin sticks and several detonators - was found metres away from Antilia, Mr Ambani's home.

According to police, the two cars, which were captured on CCTV footage, were deployed in tandem - with both driving up to Mr Ambani's residence the day before. The driver of the SUV - a Mahindra Scorpio - got out of that car and into the Innova after parking it at the spot from which it was later recovered.

On Thursday, Mumbai Police recovered 20 gelatin sticks from a Scorpio car found parked outside Mukesh Ambani's home Antilia. The police also found several number plates inside the vehicle, some of them matching the number plates of vehicles used by the Ambani family's security team. A threatening letter addressed to Mukesh Ambani and his wife Nita Ambani was also recovered from the Scorpio. The letter said that the unassembled gelatin sticks and the SUV outside Antilia were just a “trailer”.



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi has langar after paying tribute on the occasion of Ravidas Jayanti in Varanasi.

- PTI

Parties begin seat
sharing talks in Kerala

LDF, UDF to finalise their candidates by next week

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 27**

A day after the Election Commission announced the dates for Assembly polls in Kerala, the principal political formations led by CPM, Congress and BJP began preliminary discussions on seat sharing, probable candidates and manifesto.

The CPM-led
ruling LDF

The CPM leadership said the talks with coalition partners on seat sharing will be completed in two days. The crucial CPM state committee meeting will be held on March 4. Prior to the meeting, the district committees will finalise the preliminary list of candidates. The list would be placed before the state committee which will take a final call. The CPM and other constituents are hopeful of finalising their candidates within 10 days.

In 2016 assembly polls, the CPM had contested 92 seats and the CPI 27. With new parties like Kerala Congress (M) and Loktantrik Janata Dal demanding 15 and 7 seats respectively, the CPM will have to part with some of its seats.

CPM acting state secretary Mr A

Vijayaraghavan said the party enjoyed the goodwill of people and it will reflect in the polls.

Congress-led UDF

AICC general secretary incharge of Kerala Mr Tariq Anwar has said that the high command will announce the screening committee members soon for finalising the candidates.

The Congress will give priority to new faces, youth, women and prominent people from various

Janata Dal - have quit the Front.

Former union minister and veteran Congress leader A K Antony cautioned the UDF leadership against over confidence.

“Gone are the days when anyone could win on the UDF ticket. The candidates must be decided after due discussion, considering their victory prospects,” he said.

BJP-led NDA

Senior BJP leader and

● **CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER** of Kerala said that central paramilitary forces would be deployed in polling booths while Kerala police will be deputed for external duties. The first batch of 5 companies of BSF arrived in the state on Saturday.

fields, he said.

The Congress State leadership will complete bilateral talks with UDF coalition partners on seat sharing by next week.

This will be followed by meetings of DCC, state election committee, PCC executive, working committee to finalise list of candidates. The names will be sent to screening committee for approval.

The Congress is likely to contest more seats this time as two of its major allies - Kerala Congress (M) and Loktantrik

Union minister V Muraleedharan said the first list of candidates would be finalised within a week. The BJP is planning to field all its top leaders in the state.

‘Metroman’ E Sreedharan is likely to be fielded from Palakkad or Thrippunithura.

The party is planning to bring more prominent faces in electoral fray including actors, former judges, former DGP rank officers.

Muraleedharan alleged understanding between CPM and Congress on 20

seats to defeat the BJP.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Shobha Surendran caused embarrassment to the leadership when she said that even Muslim League was welcome to join hands with the party if it shed its communal ideology and accepted Modi's policies.

Soon other leaders came out with a clarification that there was no move to have any tie up with the Muslim League.

Meanwhile, Chief Electoral Officer of Kerala Mr Teeka Ram Meena on Saturday said that central paramilitary forces would be deployed in polling booths while Kerala police will be deputed for external duties.

The first batch of 5 companies of BSF arrived in the state on Saturday.

The CEO directed the poll officials to discharge their responsibilities without succumbing to the threats of government and political parties.

He said the poll officials need not be afraid by the incumbent government or the future government while discharging their duties.

The election commission will provide protection to the officials, he said.

LEFT-CONG-ISF
RALLY TO KICK
OFF BENGAL
CAMPAIGN

Kolkata, Feb 27: The Left-Congress-ISF alliance will kick-off its campaign for the upcoming assembly elections in West Bengal with a mega rally at the Brigade Parade Grounds in Kolkata on Sunday.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress have already sealed a seat-sharing agreement, while the talks between the Left and Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui's ISF have concluded with both agreeing on 30 seats for the newly-floated outfit. The negotiations between Congress and the Indian Secular Front are at present underway, and both sides are hopeful that the differences over a few seats would be resolved, sources said.

“The mega rally at Brigade will mark the beginning of our campaign for the assembly elections. We want to provide an alternative to the anti-people and communal politics of the TMC and the BJP,” senior Congress leader Pradip Bhattacharya said. “A section of the press, and the TMC and the BJP are trying to project it as a two-cornered contest, but it will be a three-way fight in Bengal,” he added.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, state Congress president Adhir Chowdhury, ISF's Siddiqui will be the main speakers at the rally.

- PTI

TRANSFERS IN
ASSAM PUT ON
HOLD BY ECI

**DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27**

The Election Commission of India has kept in abeyance the transfer and postings of the 12 IPS and 6 APS officers in Assam. These transfers were ordered by the state government on February 26, the same day when the ECI announced the schedule of the assembly polls.

“The Commission vide its press note dated 26th February, 2021, had announced the schedule of General Elections to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry. With this announcement, the provisions of Model Code of Conduct has come into force with immediate effect, which includes total ban on the transfers/postings of all officers connected with conduct of elections. It has come to the notice of Commission that Govt. of Assam has, on 26th February 2021, ordered the transfer of 12 IPS and 6 APS officers. The Commission has, therefore, decided to keep the transfer/posting of these police officers in abeyance,” the ECI said.

In West Bengal, the ECI has replaced the top cop in charge of law and order. Mr Jag Mohan, who previously held the rank of DG (Fire Services) has been named as the new Additional Director-General and Inspector-General (Law and Order), replacing Jawed Shamim.

‘WB people want
its daughter back’

Kolkata, Feb 27: With the stage set for high-octane assembly elections, poll strategist Prashant Kishor Saturday exuded confidence of TMC returning to power as the people of West Bengal are ready to bring back their rightful leader.

Kishor, whose team I-PAC is working in planning TMC's election campaign, in his latest tweet said that one of the key battles for democracy in the country will be fought in the West Bengal.

The people of the state want its daughter back and the public could hold him to this tweet on May 2, the day the results of the elections will be declared.

“One of the key battles FOR DEMOCRACY in India will be fought in West Bengal, and the people of Bengal are ready with their MESSAGE and determined to show the RIGHT CARD - #BanglaNijerMeyekeiChay (Bengal Only Wants its Daughter) PS: On 2nd May, hold me to my last tweet,” he tweeted.

Planned and conceptualised by I-PAC, TMC last week had unveiled a poll slogan- “Bangla Nijer

Maha minister
criticises Centre’s
OTT regulations

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 27**

A Maharashtra minister on Saturday opposed the central government's regulations for social media platforms and over-the-top (OTT) players, terming them as “dictatorial” and a “threat” to democracy. The Minister of State for IT (Information Technology) Satej Patil also said these regulations need to be opposed strongly as they infringe the privacy of individuals and free speech given by the Constitution.

The Central government on Thursday notified new guidelines and self-regulatory mechanism for video streaming service providers Netflix, Amazon Prime Video among other OTT platforms even though the OTT platforms were in the process of implementing their own self-regulation code. The government has put in place a three-tier redressal system, with the information and broadcasting ministry exercising complete oversight over the process.

Speaking with this newspaper on Saturday, Mr. Patil said that the communication between two people were encrypted earlier. It was not accessible. “Now, they (read government) are going to access the conversation (communication) easily immediately,” he added. The things, which

are 'so called' anti-nationals are removed by the social media like Twitter. Recently, the former US president Donald Trump's twitter account had been suspended due to his tweets, which were said to be anti-national. He also said that facebook and twitter are already monitoring the contents and if they find some anti-national, they suspend the accounts and delete the contents.

“Why did the government want more access to the contents?,” he asked.

“This move by the Centre needs to be fought tooth and nail. Such dictatorial regulations will not be accepted by the people of this democratic country,” he said.

He also said that some bureaucrats are deciding on what needs to be published and what not on any media platform is nothing but an attack on the freedom of press in Country.

“Such orders will not have any standing in the court of law,” he said.

When asked if the vulgarity and violence was shown on OTT platforms, Mr. Patil said that the government should call them and they would immediately stop it. “The Supreme Court has already directed the centre to come up with a privacy law. What is going to happen with the privacy law which is with a joint parliamentary committee? Let us first see that...” he added.

GUJARAT LOCAL
BODIES POLLS
TODAY

Ahmedabad, Feb 27: Polling for 81 municipalities, 31 district panchayats and 231 taluka panchayats in Gujarat will take place on Sunday while counting of votes will be held on March 2, the State Election Commission said.

The SEC officials said voting for 8,473 seats, comprising 2,720 in 680 wards in municipalities, 980 in district panchayats and 4,773 in taluka panchayats, will take place across 36,008 booths.

Some 3.04 crore people in the state are eligible to vote for these polls, and over 44,000 police personnel, including state reserve police units, 12, CAPF companies and 54,000 homeguards, will be in place to ensure incident-free voting, they added.

While the BJP has been the dominant force in the state for several years now, the Congress believes the fuel price hikes and disenchantment of the people with the ruling party will help it.

- PTI

MVA govt under pressure
ahead of Assembly session

**BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 27**

The budget session of the Maharashtra Legislature beginning from Monday is likely to be a stormy affair over the issue of atrocities against women. With two ministers - Sanjay Rathod and Dhananjay Munde - finding their names in controversies, the Uddhav Thackeray-led government will face a stern test to stave off flak from the aggressive opposition BJP on the issue.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, the MVA government has decided to curtail the budget session, which will be held from March 1 to 10. On Monday, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari will address the joint session of the Maharashtra legislature, while on March 8, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who holds the finance and planning portfolios, would table the state budget for the year 2021-22.

However, with two ministers facing allegations of atrocities against women, it has put the government on a sticky wicket going into the session.

Forests minister Sanjay

Rathod of the Shiv Sena is connected to the death of a social media star Pooja Chavan. After remaining uncommunicated for a fortnight, he staged a show of strength when he visited the Pohradevi temple in Washim district, where hundreds of his supporters thronged, flouting the Covid-19 pandemic norms. The act has incurred the wrath of Mr Thackeray, who is likely to act strictly against the minister, said party sources.

State BJP chief Chandrakant Patil said, “If the Chief Minister fails to ask Mr Rathod resign before the start of the session, we will now allow the assembly to function. Mr Thackeray should make a statement on this issue on the first day of the session.” NCP's Dhananjay Munde, who is a social justice and special assistance minister, was accused of rape by a Mumbai-based singer Renu Sharma, with whose sister Karuna Sharma he has admitted to have a long relationship and two children.

Later, however, Renu withdrew the complaint. Karuna later alleged that

Mr Munde had confined their two children in Chitrakoot, the official bungalow of the minister.

In addition to this, issues like current surge in the Covid-19 cases, inflated electricity bills, Maratha reservation are also likely to be major topics of the budget session.

The elections of the new speaker of Vidhan Sabha will be an interesting issue following the resignation of Nata Patole from the post after becoming the State Congress president. Recently, the governor sent a letter to Mr Thackeray to conduct the election of the Speaker during the session. Mr Koshiyari and the MVA Government have been at loggerheads over the nomination of 12 legislators from the Governor's quota. In November last year, the MVA government had forwarded 12 names to be nominated as members in the Vidhan Parishad.

However, the Governor has not yet cleared the names. Among the names recommended are Urmila Matondkar, who had joined the Shiv Sena and Eknath Khadse, who left the BJP to join the NCP.

SHORT TAKES

NOD TO \$650M
FB PRIVACY
LAWSUIT DEAL

San Francisco, Feb. 27: A federal judge on Friday approved a \$650 million settlement of a privacy lawsuit against Facebook for allegedly using photo face-tagging and other biometric data without the permission of its users.

US District Judge James Donato approved the deal in a class-action lawsuit that was filed in Illinois in 2015. Nearly 1.6 million Facebook users in Illinois who submitted claims will be affected. Donato called it one of the largest settlements ever for a privacy violation. "It will put at least \$345 into the hands of every class member interested in being compensated," he wrote.

U.S. LAWSUITS:
TIKTOK AGREES
TO \$92 MN DEAL

San Francisco, Feb. 27: TikTok has agreed to pay \$92 million in a deal to settle a cluster of US class-action lawsuits accusing the video-snippet sharing platform of invading the privacy of young users.

A legal filing Friday in federal court in the state of Illinois urged a judge to approve the settlement, which includes TikTok being more transparent about data gathering and better training employees about user privacy. The litigation combined 21 class-action cases taking aim at TikTok and its China-based parent company ByteDance. Attorneys estimated in a filing that the settlement would apply to 89 million TikTok users in the US, with most of them eligible for payments of 96 cents each.

SHARIF NEPHEW
RELEASED FROM
JAIL ON BAIL

Lahore, Feb. 27: Pakistan's deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif's nephew and leader of the Opposition in Punjab Assembly, Hamza Shehbaz, was released from jail on bail on Saturday after spending 20 months in connection with a money laundering case.

Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz reached the Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail to receive Hamza and both led a rally of the PML-N workers from the jail to his home. The Lahore High Court granted bail to Hamza, son of PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif. Hamza had sought bail primarily on the ground of "inordinate delay" in conclusion of the trial proceedings after the Supreme Court denied him the relief with a direction to approach the high court.

PROTESTS OVER
WRITER'S DEATH
IN B'DESH JAIL

Dhaka, Feb. 27: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday shrugged off criticism of her government's rights record as hundreds marched in a second day of protests over the death of a prominent writer in prison.

Demonstrators marched at Dhaka University chanting slogans condemning the government's treatment of dissident Mushtaq Ahmed as well as other journalists and activists.

Another protest was staged at the National Press Club, while dozens of people carried a symbolic coffin to Hasina's office demanding the scrapping of the Digital Security Act (DSA) under which Ahmed was detained last May.

The protests followed clashes between police and security forces in the capital on Friday.

NIGERIA SCHOOL
ABDUCTION: 42
VICTIMS FREED

Lagos, Feb. 27: Kidnappers have freed 42 people, including 27 children, snatched from a school in central Nigeria 10 days ago, officials said on Saturday, a day after more than 300 schoolgirls were abducted by gunmen in the northwest.

"The abducted students, staff and relatives of Government Science College Kagara have regained their freedom and have been received by the Niger state government," Niger state governor Abubakar Sani Bello said on Twitter.

In mid-February, gunmen in military uniforms raided the college, killing one student and taking 42 others. Northwest and central Nigeria have seen a surge in attacks by heavily armed criminal gangs who raid villages, killing and abducting residents after looting and torching homes.

US: MBS approved
Khashoggi murder

Despite publicly accusing the Crown Prince, Washington doesn't impose sanctions on him

Washington, Feb. 27: The United States on Friday for the first time publicly accused Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of approving the gruesome murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but stopped short of targeting the powerful heir apparent.

The prince, who is de facto ruler of the US ally and oil provider, "approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi," said an intelligence report newly declassified by President Joe Biden's administration. The report said that given Prince Mohammed's influence, it was "highly unlikely" that the 2018 murder could have taken place without his green light. The killing also fit a pattern of "the crown prince's support for using violent measures to silence dissidents abroad," Khashoggi, a US resident and critic of Prince Mohammed who wrote for *The Washington Post*, was lured to Istanbul's Saudi consulate in October 2018, then killed and cut into pieces.

The Treasury Department announced it was freezing assets and criminalizing transactions with a well-known intelligence official as well as the Rapid Intervention Force, an elite unit the report said "exists to defend the crown prince" and "answers only to him." Biden said Friday that "we are going to hold (Saudi Arabia) accountable for human rights abuses. This report has been sitting there, the last administration wouldn't even release it... it is outrageous

what happened." But the US stopped short of directly targeting the 35-year-old crown prince, known by his initials MBS. In honour of the slain writer, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the "Khashoggi Act" that will ban entry into the US of foreigners who threaten dissidents or harass reporters and their kin and immediately placed 76 Saudis on the blacklist.

"We have made absolutely clear that extraterritorial threats and assaults by Saudi Arabia against activists, dissidents and journalists must end. They will not be tolerated by the United States," Blinken said in a statement.

Blinken, questioned by reporters, said "this is bigger than any one person," explaining Biden was trying "not to rupture the relationship, but to recalibrate to be more in line with our interests and our values." An advocacy group founded by Khashoggi, Democracy for the Arab World Now, called on the president to impose sanctions on Prince Mohammed — with a number of lawmakers from Biden's Democratic Party also pushing for more action.

"We must also ensure that there are real consequences for individuals like MBS; if not, autocrats around the world will get the message that impunity is the rule," said Bob Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Saudi foreign ministry in a statement denounced the "negative, false and unacceptable assessment".

— AFP

US DOESN'T WANT
RUPTURE WITH
SAUDIS: BLINKEN

Washington, Feb. 27: The United States wants change but not a "rupture" in relations with Saudi Arabia after the publication of intelligence on Jamal Khashoggi's killing, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"What we've done by the actions that we've taken is really not to rupture the relationship, but to recalibrate to be more in line with our interests and our values," Blinken said while addressing reporters.

The report declassified by President Joe Biden found that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman approved the 2018 killing in Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate of Khashoggi, a US-based dissident writer.

The Biden administration announced a series of steps, including leveling sanctions on an elite Saudi unit but stopped short of imposing actions against the powerful 35-year-old prince personally.

"I think that we have to understand as well that this is bigger than any one person. This recalibration goes to the policies that Saudi Arabia is pursuing and the actions that is taken," Blinken said when asked why the prince was not targeted.

— AFP

Dems reintroduce law to
stop future Muslim bans

Washington, Feb. 27: As many as 140 Democratic lawmakers have reintroduced a legislation in the US Congress to prevent future Muslim bans and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion. The Muslim travel ban, introduced by former US President Donald Trump, targeted several Muslim-majority nations and restricted the entry of people from Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Venezuela.

President Joe Biden ended the Muslim ban on his day one in the office last month. In the House of Representatives, the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants (NO BAN) Act was reintroduced on Friday by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler and Judy Chu, while in the Senate it was done by Senator Chris Coons. Indian-American lawmakers Ami Bera, Ro Khanna, Pramila Jayapal and Raja Krishnamoorthi are among those who are supporting the bill.

The legislation strengthens the Immigration and Nationality Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, and restores the separation of powers by limiting overly broad executive authority

US for end to China
multi-entry visas

Washington, Feb. 27: A legislation has been introduced by a group of influential Republican senators to end China's access to 10-year multi-entry visas until it is certified that Beijing has ceased its campaign of economic and industrial espionage against the US. The legislation, Visa Security Act, was introduced by Senators Marsha Blackburn, Tom Cotton, Rick Scott, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio on Friday.

It would prohibit Chinese nationals from receiving 10-year B-1/B-2 visas until the Secretary of Sta-

te certifies that China has ceased its campaign of economic and industrial espionage against the United States and ended its provocative and coercive behaviour towards Taiwan. The B-1/B-2 visas are issued to those who come to the US for business, visit or tourism purposes. Under this legislation, Chinese citizens would be eligible for one-year multi-entry visas.

This policy would represent a return to the pre-2014 visa status quo and does not apply to Taiwan or certain residents of Hong Kong.

— PTI

to issue future travel bans. "When the Trump Administration issued its xenophobic Muslim ban, it was immediately apparent that it was unconstitutional, discriminatory, and morally reprehensible," said Nadler. "I am grateful that President Biden took bold action on day one to repeal this ban and reunite families, but we cannot risk the possibility of any

future President reinstating this heinous policy," he said. The Muslim ban was a hateful stain on the United States. Inspired only by bigotry and not any genuine national security concerns, the ban served only to separate families while stoking bigotry, xenophobia, and Islamophobia, said Congresswoman Judy Chu.

— PTI

SHARP | CRITICISM

Host developing a plan to address lack of diversity issue

Will recruit PoC members: Globe org

Los Angeles, Feb. 27: The organisation hosting the Golden Globes says it is developing a plan to recruit PoC members after falling under sharp criticism for lacking diverse members.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association said in a statement Friday that an "action plan" is under development to admit PoC members. The group currently has 87 members who are journalists, but none are PoC.

Former HFPA president Meher Tatna told Variety in an interview that the organisation hasn't had a PoC member in nearly two decades. The Mumbai-

born board chair said she couldn't recall when there had been a Black member, but she says the organisation will keep trying.

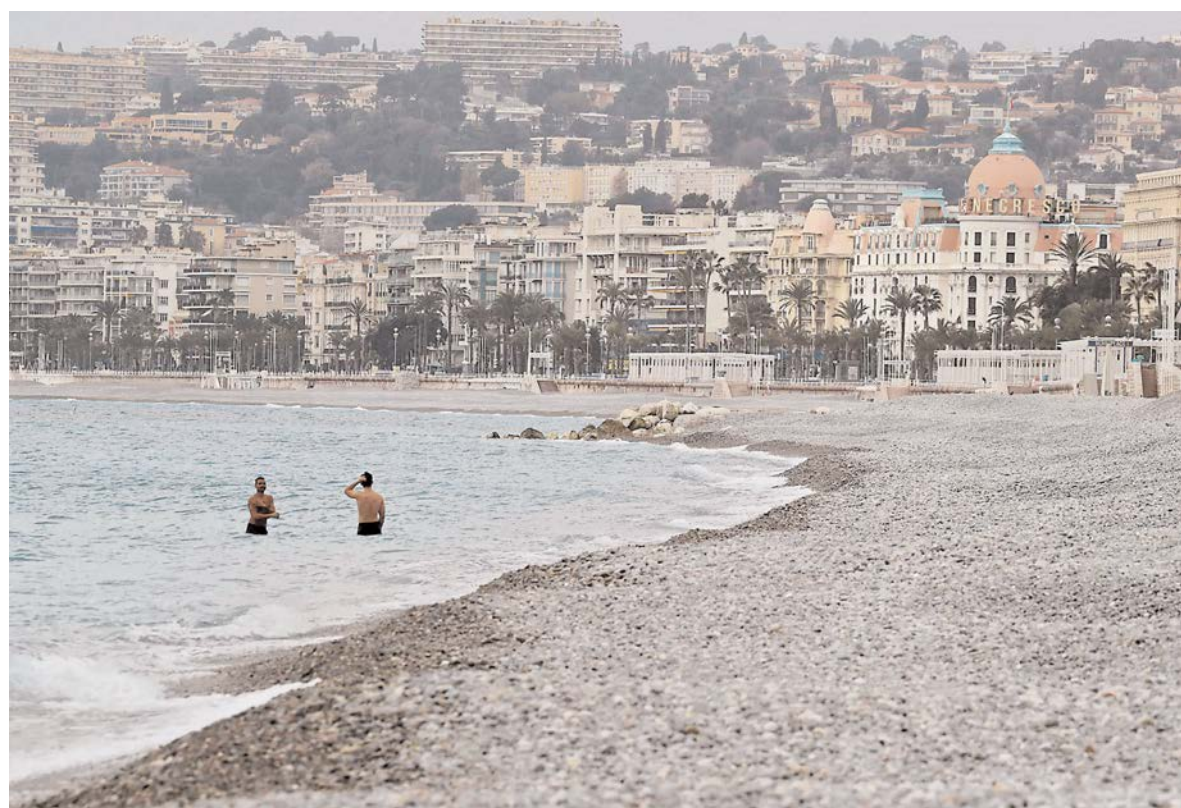
Some including Time's Up and presenter Sterling K. Brown are among those who have criticised the HFPA's lack of inclusion and diversity. The criticism comes just days before the Globes air live on Sunday.

An HFPA spokesperson said it welcomes the opportunity to meet with groups such as Time's Up and prospective PoC members who are interested in joining the organisation.

"We are fully committed to ensuring our member-

SOME INCLUDING Time's Up and presenter Sterling K. Brown are among those who have criticised the HFPA's lack of inclusion.

ship is reflective of the communities around the world who love film, TV and the artists inspiring and educating them," the HFPA statement read. "We understand that we need to bring in PoC members, as well as members from other underrepresented backgrounds, and we will immediately work to implement an action plan to achieve these goals as



Two men bathe in the sea in the French Riviera city of Nice during the first weekend lockdown put in place by authorities to attempt to halt the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, on Saturday.

— AFP

House passes \$1.9T pandemic
bill on near party-line vote

Washington, Feb. 27: The House approved a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief bill in a win for President Joe Biden, even as top Democrats tried assuring agitated progressives that they'd revive their derailed drive to boost the minimum wage.

The new president's vision for flushing cash to individuals, businesses, states and cities battered by Covid-19 passed on a near party-line 219-212 vote early Saturday.

That ships the massive measure to the Senate, where Democrats seem bent on resuscitating their minimum wage push and fights could erupt over state aid and other issues. Democrats said the still-faltering economy and the half-million American lives lost demanded quick, decisive action. GOP lawmakers, they said, were out of step with a public that polling shows largely views the bill favorably.

"I am a happy camper tonight," Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., said Friday. "This is what America needs. Republicans, you ought to be a part of this. But if you're not, we're going without you." Republicans said the bill was too expensive and said too few education dollars would be spent quickly to immediately reopen schools.

They said it was laden with gifts to Democratic

Auckland back
in lockdown

Wellington, Feb. 27: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern ordered New Zealand's largest city back into lockdown on Saturday as Covid-19 cases continued to be detected in the community. The latest restrictions in Auckland will last at least seven days and come less than two weeks after a three-day shutdown in the city.

Ardern said a new Coronavirus case confirmed on Saturday could not be directly connected to other positive tests over the last two weeks, although a school in South Auckland was a common link.

From Sunday morning the city's 1.7 million residents must stay at home except for essential shop-

ping and work.

Schools and non-essential shops will close, and entry in and out of the city will be restricted.

The remainder of the country will be under level two restrictions which include limits on the size of public gatherings.

Ardern said there was "cause for concern" that the latest case involved a person who had been infectious for a week but had not been in isolation.

Since the latest outbreak first emerged in a family of three, several people have reported symptoms, with the school in South Auckland the connecting factor. Ardern blamed the creeping spread on people not isolating.

— AFP

constituencies like labour unions and funnelled money to Democratic-run states they suggested didn't need it because their budgets had bounced back. "To my colleagues who say this bill is bold, I say it's bloated," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

Denouncing junta:
Envoy to UN fired

Yangon, Feb. 27: Myanmar's junta fired its United Nations ambassador Saturday for breaking ranks to denounce the military's ouster of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, as police stepped up a crackdown on protesters across the country.

The country has been shaken by a wave of demonstrations since a coup toppled civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. Authorities have ramped up the use of force to suppress dissent, deploying tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to disperse some protests. Live rounds have

been used in isolated cases. In justifying its seizure of power, the military has alleged widespread fraud in the November elections, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide, and promised fresh polls in a year.

But its ambassador to the United Nations on Friday broke ranks and made an emotional appeal to the international community for "the strongest possible action... to restore democracy".

Kyaw Moe Tun also pleaded with his "brothers and sisters" in Burmese to keep fighting.

— AFP

WTC bombing:
Sentences of 4 cut

New York, Feb. 27: Decades after going to prison, some of the men responsible for the World Trade Center bombing that killed six people 28 years ago Friday are still trying to whittle down their onetime life sentences on the remote chance that they could someday be freed.

And they are having some success. In the last year, four men implicated in the 1993 bombing have won reductions to their sentences after one part of their convictions was dropped to be consistent with a recent US Supreme Court ruling. Once each sentenced to 240 years in prison, appeals have won them sentence deductions as they continue efforts to get judges to take fresh looks at their cases.

While unlikely, all four could be freed if they live long enough. Ahmad Mohammad Ajaj, 55, could be freed when he is 96 after 30 years were shaved off his sentence last month. Nidal Ayyad, 53, Mohammad A. Salameh, 53, and Mahmud Abouhalima, 61, could be freed if they each live to be 100.

All received sentence reductions in the last year. All would face deportation. Historically, incarceration has not been recommended for longevity.

Ajaj noted in a court filing last year that he has chronic health problems after facing cancer, the removal of his left lung and a severe spinal disorder. Friends and relatives of the six bombing victims participated Friday

Nashville, Feb. 27: Tennessee's top health officials revealed Friday the state has requested federal law enforcement to investigate alleged theft of Coronavirus vaccine doses in the state's most populous county, and also announced that a volunteer improperly vaccinated two children despite the shot not being cleared for young minors.

The details come after the state previously announced that roughly 2,400 Covid-19 vaccine doses had been wasted in Shelby County over the past month due to miscommunication and insufficient record-keeping inside the local health department. The county had also built up nearly 30,000 excessive vaccine doses in its inventory.

Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey declined to give details on the extent of the theft allegations, but said the Shelby County Health Department only alerted the state about the stolen doses after the state had asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to launch their own investigation.

— PTI



DECCAN Chronicle

28 FEBRUARY 2021



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

Ode to sleep, and sleepless spirits

So many of us have struggled to slumber in lockdown. Here in England, we are locked into one still, and its inertia, the absence of change in the day, has changed our body clock. It's broken it. It's resulted in hours of tossing and turning before we are able to settle down at night, leaving us exhausted in the mornings, and somnambulating through the rest of the day. My children's sleep has been shattered to the extent that I had to seek medical advice. On the phone of course, because face-to-face meetings are history. Lockdown, they explained, has affected all our routines, and therefore our physiological rhythms. Sleep has been one of the biggest casualties. So prevalent is this new disturbed sleep, affecting a quarter of the world population, they've given it a name — Coronasomnia. Even out of lockdown, as you now are in India, you might continue to feel its effect on your body's workings.

Of course insomnia is not peculiar to lockdown, though impacting fewer people outside it. For those of us already struggling to snooze, it has done the unthinkable — made it worse! Voltaire, Tesla, and Edison, famously couldn't sleep. George Clooney, Mariah Carey, Roxane Gay and Indra Nooyi, amongst contemporary heroes, have found the Land of Nod the one unconquerable territory. But hadn't Churchill suggested it was *because* he couldn't nap that his conquests were so vast (Or was it Shrek who said that)? Did these lions of industries and nations, lords of our jungle, turn insomnia, that waking torment, to their advantage, whilst us sheep-like commoners slept?

Another lion, with a mane to match, Jon Bon Jovi, sang at the height of his fame in 1993, that he would "live while he's alive, and sleep when he's dead." Nineteen and brimming with energy, barely in need of sleep, this made perfect sense to me. Over the next decade, burning the midnight oil, or the candle at both ends, proved no problem at all. I often did my best writing in the dead of night. Nor did you need to like nightclubs to go clubbing all night; t'was just a rite of passage. In New Delhi in my early twenties, I'd tag along with my television friends to Fireball, a Darth Vader's helmet-shaped nightclub. I didn't care for the lame music or the frenzied dancing, but the people-watching was a blast, and fabulous grist for the writing mill. Imprinted on my mind to this day is the hulking, scarlet-trenchcoated mass of Biddu Kung Fu Fighting, or dancing to his own tune!

Fast forward 25 years and I no longer agree with Bon Jovi. Rather, I'm with William Wordsworth who lamented that he could not "win sleep" however hard he tried. Whilst Keats, comparing it to death, entreated it still to "seal the hushed casket of his soul". Dark as that may be, I'm almost inclined to agree, so elusive has slumber become. In a road accident in my twenties, that left me with fractured bones, I was prescribed drugs that ruptured my sleep too. Particularly deep through my childhood, I then merely skimmed its surface. Treating it as an interesting new experience, I did get back some semblance of sleep in the succeeding years.

When I lost my sleep again in my mid-thirties it was not the result of an accident, but planned parenthood. Two babies in quick succession meant nightly feeds, soothing night terrors, even the occasional midnight storytelling, and years before I could expect to slumber successfully. They grew well; bright, loving and creative, but they never learnt to sleep. Though one, subjected to years of school-bullying, despite our best efforts to prevent it, has struggled more than the other with snoozing. And I never really slept again. Even now when both unexpectedly drift to the Land of Nod, and I have no deadlines to meet or other reasons not to catch forty winks, I still cannot. My body's disrupted rhythms refuse to fall back in step. Not that different from what's happened to many in the lockdown months; their physiologies have grown unused to so much.

Lack of sleep not only fuels fatigue however, and bodily dissonance, it could also introduce a psychological kink. You might find yourself rabbit-holing for example; dipping your toes into unlikely puddles you'd skip right over in the morning. Those breathless, deathless hours when all else is asleep, are the devil's workshop. "Sleep is the most innocent creature there is and a sleepless man the most guilty," Franz Kafka said, meaning many things as he did, but it does hint at his familiarity with the impish side-effects of not sleeping. Isn't there an implication of mischief to "sleeping together" when it involves anything but? Don't burglars strike in the wee hours? Saboteurs and serial killers? Isn't there a supervillain actually called Insomniac?

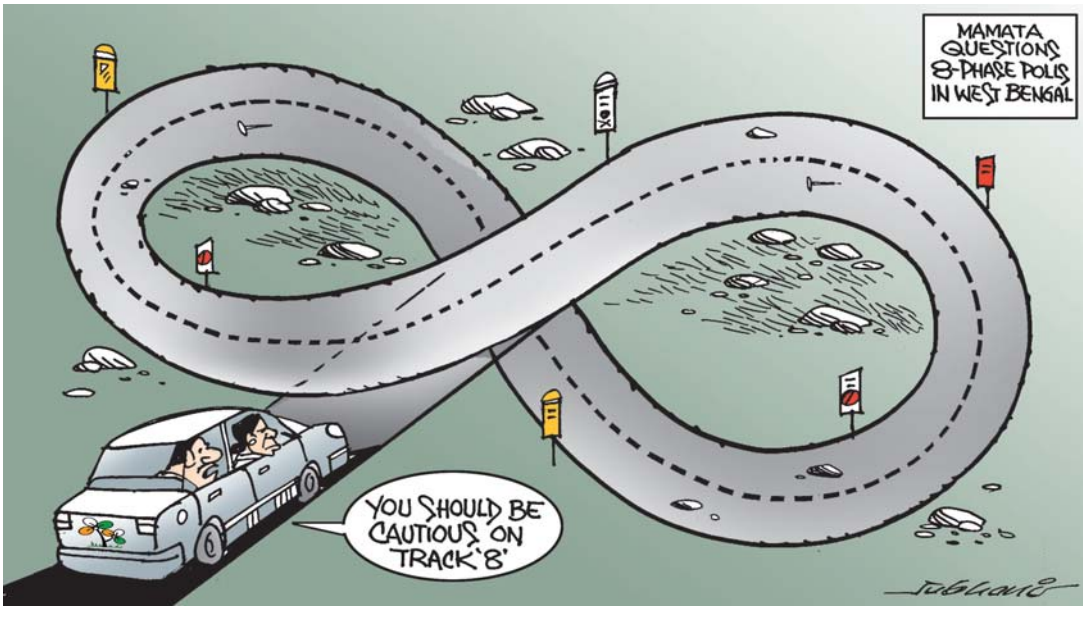
I am past becoming a supervillain; after all, doesn't world-domination have to be embarked on early (but, psst, should I worry about the potential threat posed by my nap-dodging children)? Very much a petty misdemeanour person myself, to help me sleep or fill sleepless nights, I've tried reading, herbal remedies, the occasional tippie, and (some, not all, of) the internet's 'delights', including random chats with strangers. But, trust me, peeps you encounter past the witching hour are very unbewitching indeed. So now I count sheep, or my version of it — I decorate houses in my head. Not a thwarted interior designer, I have no clue why I do this. I suspect I'm looking for the perfect bed, with that gentle, form-hugging dip in the middle that will cradle me to sleep. Like fairy tale insomniac Goldilocks braving a den of bears to find sleep, I've tried this solution and I've tried that. But when all's said and done, throughout my life, what's worked best on restless nights is the soothing act of writing. Sometimes about sleep.

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the recently published *Strange: Stories, the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, and a forthcoming book of travel misadventures*. Her Twitter and Insta handle is @shreyasenh.



Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), Bedroom in Arles, 1888

Subhani



The Pak arithmetic: Strategy over ideology



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

With the disengagement process between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Indian army on the north and south banks of Pangong Lake winding down and the rest of the disentanglement stalled because of alleged Chinese unwillingness to take the process any further, the time has come to ask a fundamental question, why didn't Pakistan take advantage of the Sino-Indian stand-off? After all, the relationship between the Pakistani military brass and the PLA leadership is as historical as is the relationship between the Pakistani defence establishment and the US Pentagon.

Pakistan has very successfully finessed these two relationships. While, on one hand, it became a member of the US anchored and backed SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation) way back in 1954 and 1955, respectively, on the other hand, it sealed its relationship with China by ceding the Shaksgam valley to it in 1963 in terms of the Sino-Pak boundary agreement.

Lest it be forgotten, it is Pakistan, and specifically General Yahya Khan, who facilitated Henry Kissinger's visit to China in July 1971. Interestingly, the US U-2 spy flights over the Soviet Union were based out of Badaber in the erstwhile NWFP (North West Frontier Province) of Pakistan. This was at a point in time when the Soviet Union and China were still allies till the Sino-Soviet split of 1960 that really exacerbated during the middle of that decade.

Over the years, the Pakistani-Chinese relationship has deepened politically, economically and, of course, in strategic terms. As the bond with the US soured, its dependence on China only increased fur-

ther. The China Pakistan Economic corridor (CPEC) that traverses the length of Pakistan has become the proverbial umbilical cord that ties Pakistan inextricably to China now. About 15 per cent of its foreign debt amounting to over USD \$17.1 billion (6.15 per cent of the total GDP) is owed to China. It would not be very far in the future that Pakistan goes the Sri Lanka way with Gwadar becoming another Hambantota.

Pakistan has been waging a proxy war against India now for over four decades. It went ballistic when the NDA/BJP government decided to change the administrative architecture of Jammu & Kashmir in the August of 2019. However, it has been strangely quiet since the Sino-Indian stand off commenced in April 2020.

There is no credible explanation for this behaviour despite various theories being propounded. One hypothesis holds that it is primarily because of Western pressure that Pakistan held its hand. This does not seem to be correct for the West's influence has been on the wane despite Pakistan's reluctant or even forced acquiescence to become a cat's paw once again in the West's move against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan since 2001.

However, the neutralisation of Osama bin Laden nine years later in Abbottabad only served to underscore the elastic imperatives of Pakistan's Afghan strategy. The fact that the Pakistanis were instrumental in facilitating the Doha engagement between the US administration and the Taliban makes it self-evident that it never ever gave up on its erstwhile progeny the Talibs. Rather than the West having leverage on Pakistan the shoe seems to be on the other foot.

Another theory that has been bandied about is that

the surgical strikes of 2016 and the Balakot-Jabba Top Air strikes of 2019 have had a salutary impact on Pakistan. However, the fact remains that Pakistan barely acknowledged the strikes and non-partisan analysts also did not find it to be of any serious deterrent value beyond optics for domestic consumption.

One plausible reason could be that China itself has told Pakistan to hold off. Pakistan's involvement would have made the situation unstable and complicated. It would not have allowed China to calibrate the situation in line with its larger geo-strategic designs. For no one in the Indian strategic community has been able to answer the question with any degree of conviction as to why China transgressed into Indian territory and that too during Covid-19 times.

As I had argued even in my last piece in these columns that the triple inflection points that China created by declaring administrative districts in the South China Sea, moving on the political sovereignty of Hong Kong and raising temperatures on the Sino-Indian border in Eastern Ladakh, was to send out a broader message. The mischievous being that if the world beat down too hard on China for being the irresponsible proliferator of the coronavirus China would then play hardball across the board.

It would be instructive to note that the transgressions into Indian territory happened exactly a month before India took over as the current chair of the World Health Organisation (WHO). All these things are, of course, settled much in advance and known to the stakeholders.

The intrusion, therefore,

Pakistan is cognisant of the fact that its economic dependence will come at cost of its political sovereignty qua China. It perhaps wants to hedge its bets vis-a-vis China by seeking a new normal with India.

was never about capturing and holding frozen rocks in a windswept countryside; the intent was something else. Two days after China got a clean chit from the WHO that it wasn't the "deliberate" spreader of the Covid-19 virus the disengagement deal was set in motion. If Pakistan would have been another joker in this pack the dynamic could then have become volatile and the situation may have escalated beyond even China's control.

There could also be another reason. Pakistan has learnt much to its own peril that no purpose is served by becoming someone else's "agent provocateur". It comes at a cost. It became the frontline ally of the US and the West in the Afghan Jihad of the 1980's and it is still bearing the brunt of that adventurism. That is why from 2001 till now it chose to hedge its bets in Afghanistan. It ran with the hare and hunted with the hound simultaneously for that it is where it thought its national interest lay.

Similarly, the China-Pakistan relationship is fraught with heavy tensions today if not stretched to a breaking point. For, Pakistan is cognisant of the fact that its economic dependence will come at cost of its political sovereignty qua China. It perhaps wants to hedge its bets vis-a-vis China by seeking a new normal with India. In any case Pakistan's behaviour during the preceding nine months should merit a rigorous examination by the Indian strategic community rather than being dismissed at the altar of some jingoistic brouhaha.

The ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan announced on Thursday, the 25th of February 2021, after a meeting or a conversation between the respective DGMOs further reinforces the above hypothesis. For India, this is also a welcome step. With a battered economy, it is hardly the time to engage in a two-front brinkmanship.

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

LETTERS

LIQUOR EARNINGS

This is a measure of liquor consumption in the state (*Liquor earnings soar during panchayat polls, DC, Feb. 27*). The high cost does not seem to be a deterrent at all. As predicted, liquor played a crucial role in the local body elections. If such is the situation with liquor, introduction of prohibition in a phased manner before 2024 Assembly polls might become a distant possibility as the youth are rather addicted to liquor for anything. In order to meet its target, the State government should start a campaign against liquor consumption in the state.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

SOCIAL MEDIA RULES

The new rules framed by the Centre for social media and OTTs are welcome (*Centre tightens rules for social media, OTT, DC, Feb. 26*). It will check the excesses of digital world to some extent. The explosion of online content has brought enormous good and humongous evil to society. The considerable obscenity, hatred and sleaze on digital platforms is doing intangible harm to society due to its capacity to reach millions in no time. Fake news has also potentially gone viral and did harm before the world knew the truth.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

NIRAV'S FALL

The million-dollar question which begs an answer is when and how the billion-dollar swindler diamantaire Nirav Modi will leave the safe shores of Britain to the barrack#12 in Arthur jail, Mumbai. Being a genius swindler, Nirav has engaged brainy lawyers to circumvent the law and as a last resort sought asylum (*An act of sycophancy, DC, Feb. 26*). Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijay Mallya and their ilk know well how to browbeat legal and political tangles and flaunt their ill-gotten wealth. Only when they land in India, our laws deal with their cases in a leisurely fashion for years.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Fifth general elections

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY. 27 Pre-poll lull descended on 101 of the 518 Lok Sabha constituencies of the country and parts of 79 others this evening in preparation for the first round of polling in the fifth general election on Monday.

Nearly 73 million of the total electorate of about 275 million, which makes this country the world's largest democracy, will figure in the first day's polling.

Voters in the 101 constituencies where polling will be completed in a day have a wide choice with 564 aspirants in the field.

Top leaders like Mr. Jagjivan Ram, Mr. Y.B. Chavan and Mr. K.D. Malaviya of the Congress (R), Mr. Morarji Desai, Mr. K. Kamaraj and Dr. Ram Subhag Singh of the Congress (O), Mr. M.R. Masani (Swatantra) and Mr. A.B. Vajpayee (JS) are among them.



A.G. Noorani

Are we failures? How 3rd World has copied its past oppressors

You praise the firm restraint with which they write — / I'm with you there, of course: / They use the snaffle and the bit all right. / But where's the b— horse? Roy Campbell's critique of *Some South African Novelists* makes one wonder if it was not true of the leaders of the freedom movement as they began constructing their brand of the democratic state after they won independence for their countries.

They drank freely at the fount of democratic states and admired hugely the working of democracy in the European countries which had oppressed them. Unforgivable, however, is their donning the mantle of Caesar after their countries' independence. The leaders of the Third World were not shining examples of democratic rule. They emulated their erstwhile oppressors.

A former foreign secretary of India who fancied himself as an 'intellectual' delighted in asserting sweepingly that "decolonisation was a failure". None shed any tears when the rank courtier was booted out of his post by Indira Gandhi.

It is not altogether correct to lay the blame on the inexperience of the people of the developing states. The conduct of the leaders of Hungary and Poland in recent years have not been shining examples of democratic leadership. The truth is that those two countries departed from democracy. So did Italy under Silvio Berlusconi — but only to return to democratic functioning.

The Third World shared some common threads. Their leaders were deluded by the huge praise they received at home and abroad — especially from the US. They knew perfectly well that they faced enormous challenges, not least in building a democracy. In this, those leaders of newly independent states failed. Obsessed with the trappings of power, they were content to have the skeletal framework of a democracy without the flesh and blood — elections (though not always free and fair), prime ministers and the rest. Avid for power, they did not educate the people in the democratic system's core lest their own power was curbed. Most did not

shun corruption.

The wise C. Rajagopalachari, as early as the 1920s when he was languishing in prison, wrote in his diary: "Elections and their corruptions [sic], injustice and life power and tyranny of wealth, and inefficiency of administration will make a hell of life as soon as freedom is given to us. Men will look regretfully back to the old regime of comparative justice and efficient, peaceful, more or less honest administration. The only thing gained will be that as a race we will be saved from dishonour and subordination."

On December 19, 1930, the Liberal leader, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru wrote to a friend in India just as he was about to leave London after attending the Round Table Conference: "I am coming back with an absolutely changed outlook, for while the Congress people may talk of independence and others may talk of dominion status, just to spite the British, I do not think that we have yet got the necessary mentality for democratic form of government. It may be a bitter confession to make

to personal friends, but there it is."

The framer of India's constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar was acutely aware of those problems. He told the constitutional assembly of India on Nov 25, 1949, "...however good a constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are to work it happen to be a good lot. ... The constitution can provide only the organs of state such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the state depend are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics."

The real test was prevalence of 'constitutional morality'. But in India and elsewhere in the Third World there was another serious problem — communal diversities, caste and tribal loyalties. The leaders profited by all these and perpetrated their hold on power. It is

necessary to be realistic but unwise to be despondent. The Third World does have achievements.

During Indira Gandhi's emergency some in the UK were fond of chattering about the lack of democracy in the Third World. Prof W.H. Morris-Jones retorted in a letter to *The Times* in June 1976 that the "jibe about 'exhibit A' of the Westminster model abroad" misses the point that it had become a specifically Indian achievement; it only adds insult to the injury already suffered by Indian democrats. ... Are habits never modified?

Had not growing numbers of Indians begun to make the habits of liberal democracy indigenous? Surely it is a 'massive' loss when damage is done to a way of political life which in two decades had already converted into citizens so many who had subjects beyond the political pale."

Moral: Do not lose heart in the pursuit of reform.

By arrangement with Dawn

INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

NON-FICTION

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

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

3 **A PROMISED LAND**
Abdul Ghaffar Khan,
Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada
(Translator)
Roli Books, ₹695

4 **THE FRONTIER GANDHI**
Aanchal Malhotra,
HarperCollins, ₹599

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

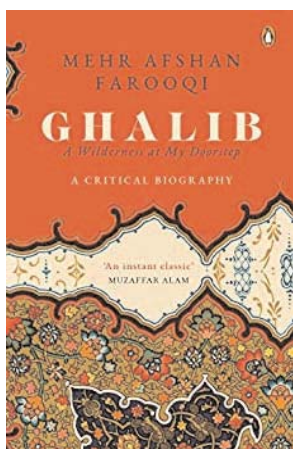
6 **THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph, ₹799

7 **UNFINISHED: A MEMOIR**
Priyanka Chopra Jonas,
Penguin Viking, ₹699

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

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

10 **UGALBANDI: THE BJP BEFORE MODI**
Vinay Sitapati
Penguin Viking, ₹799



FICTION

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

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

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

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

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

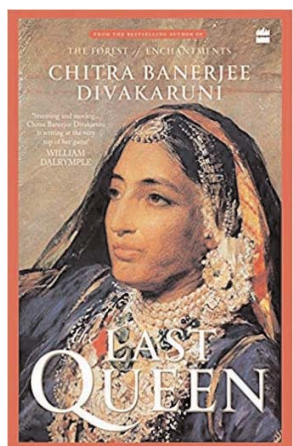
6 **HOMELAND ELEGIES**
Ayad Akhtar
Tinder Press, ₹1,050

7 **A BOOKSHOP IN PARIS**
Ellen Feldman
Simon and Schuster, ₹399

8 **JUNGLNAMA: A STORY OF THE SUNDRABAN**
Amitav Ghosh,
HarperCollins, ₹699

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

10 **CIVIL LINES**
Radhika Swarup,
Simon & Schuster, ₹499



Bahrison, New Delhi

How atavism became ideology and Hindutva ambushed India



Ranjona Banerji

review

This book is a disquieting, even distressing, journey into how India has reached the place we are today. It is called *Our Hindu Rashtra* but Aakar Patel sets it against the backdrop of India's neighbourhood. He briefly examines how independence from colonial rule and the foundations of democracy were set in the subcontinent. India stands out because it was not established as a Hindu majoritarian state nor as a theocratic democracy.

But before we congratulate ourselves, Patel reminds us of all the steps we have taken in the last seven decades to undo what our founders and our Constitution had set up for us.

Many people, even those who claim admire it, are unaware of the origins of the Hindu majoritarian movement, how it began, how it insinuated itself into everyday politics and what exactly it stands for. Just for that knowledge itself, this is a worth-

while investment. Who are these "heroes" of Hindutva, the "ideologues" of the RSS, the creators of this thought process of Hindu supremacy and exclusion of all others?

From Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the inventor of Hindutva to 'Guru' Golwalker, the stalwart of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, and his *Bunch of Thoughts*, they are all here. And Patel has read through (a task which requires immense valour and patience) and provided the reader with salient features of their arguments, their "vision" for India and sectarian principles.

Most of which, as Patel ably demonstrates, are hollow and incoherent. He finds no exact declaration of what this large shadowy movements wants and what they stand for. Except that the RSS wants religious minorities to be subdued and persecuted and for Hindus to be supreme. For everything else, from foreign affairs to the economy, all we have is waffle and changing positions.

He says of Savarkar: "His convoluted rules for Hindutva mean that even a Muslim who lights a lamp on Diwali, who shoulders the corpses of Hindus abandoned by relatives, who knows more about the Hindu faith and custom through scholarship than most Hindus, can never be acceptable as an Indian."

These anti-Muslim expressions by Savarkar define Hindutva and the ethos of the RSS. I quote Patel's summary of Golwalker's *Bunch of Thoughts*: "India is special in the world because it offered something nobody else could and that was Hindu thought". Whatever that means. This is the basis of the RSS,

later the Jana Sangh and eventually the BJP. The rest, as Patel discovers, was a reaction to whatever was happening in India in the early years. As he amusingly points out, if the ruling government, usually Congress, promised to do X, the Jana Sangh manifesto would promise to do X even better. This did not do much for them electorally, until L.K. Advani picked up from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad the idea of building a temple at the site of a mosque in Ayodhya. We have travelled from the 1920s to 1983 and the beginning of the Ram Janma-bhoomi movement. As Patel says, "Advani's success was built on the corpses of Indians and cemented with their blood".

Through this book, even as he traces the political history of Hindu majoritarianism, Patel reminds us that much of this sectarianism already existed within Indian society. It took immense effort by the framers of the Constitution, as is evident in the Constituent Assembly debates, to keep India on track to become a secular democracy with fundamental rights for all.

The judiciary comes in for particular scrutiny as judgments by our venerable Supreme Courts over the years allowed this underlying feeling of Hindu supremacy to gain prominence. The book also examines the bogus claims of Muslim "appeasement" which is what

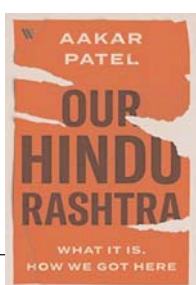
causes the maximum resentment in the minds of "Hindu" voters and of supporters of the BJP.

We meet current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the culmination if you will of almost a century of Hindu supremacist hopes and dreams. Patel looks at ghettoisation of Muslims, at methods of persecution like anti-conversion and anti-cow slaughter laws, at the bogey of "love jihad" and even at the protests against the Modi government's contentious "citizenship" laws.

Having presented with historical evidence of a depressing past and a worse future, for all Indians who want a democratic India that is, Patel then ends on a note of hope. He uses the citizenship protests to look at how young people, activists and citizens came together to make their voices heard.

The book was written before the ongoing farmers' protests, which have also used civilian anger to push for democracy. Patel is a journalist but although this book sources some of his experiences, *Our Hindu Rashtra* is more a presentation of our recent history from the perspective of democracy. It is also a warning and a reminder of where we are headed.

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



OUR HINDU RASHTRA:
WHAT IT IS. HOW WE
GOT HERE

By AAKAR PATEL
Westland, ₹799

A ROMEO AND JULIET-LIKE TRAGEDY IN UTTAR PRADESH

Victoria Schofield

review

In the early hours of 28 May 2014 the bodies of two young girls were found hanging from the branches of a mango tree in the small village of Katra in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Their deaths caused outrage locally and attracted attention worldwide, as domestic and foreign media descended on Katra, the case gaining international notoriety less than two years after the gang rape of a young woman, Jyoti Singh, on a bus in Delhi in 2012.

The Good Girls is a tragic tale, both in terms of what it reveals about village life and also about what women in India can expect in a society hidebound by tradition. Having researched for four years — twice as long as she first anticipated — Sonia Faleiro has taken exceptional pains to recreate the events as they unfolded, interviewing as many of the key players as would come forward, their names helpfully listed in an 'index of characters'.

Most surprisingly, perhaps, for western readers, a sub-theme of her narrative is the absence of toilet facilities, which means that before going to bed, the women have to go into the fields to relieve themselves. So when two young

cousins, 16-year-old 'Padma' and 14-year-old 'Lalli' (not their real names) told their parents that they were going into the fields around 9 p.m., their departure did not arouse suspicion. But, as is later revealed, they went to meet a young boy, Pappu Yadav, with whom the elder girl, Padma, had already begun an intimate relationship, while Lalli assumed the role of look-out. When they were caught by another cousin, Nazru, who had been told to keep an eye on the girls, Pappu fled in one direction and the girls in another. Although Pappu was later apprehended at his home, the girls were nowhere to be seen, until their discovery several hours later hanging in an orchard.

What happened to them is described against the backdrop of life in rural India — tending buffaloes, farming water melons and harvesting mint — characterised by poverty, corruption and caste. In a modern variation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Pappu's account of his actions was rejected by the girls' families, the Shakyas, their disbelief fuelled because he came from a rival low-caste family from the neighbouring hamlet of

Jati. Instead, long before an investigation could begin, the girls' parents accused not only Pappu but also his two older brothers and two policemen of having raped and then killed the girls, the allegation gaining widespread credibility. In a macabre twist, the bereaved parents were so mistrustful of the police that they refused to let the girls' bodies be removed — and so, for several hours, they were left hanging in the heat; as word spread, the orchard became a tourist attraction, with interested voyeurs and the media flooding in from far and wide, contaminating the scene and making what had happened even harder to determine.

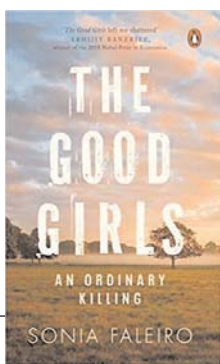
Faleiro's description of the post-mortem examination would be farcical if it wasn't so serious. It was undertaken at night on one of the hottest days on record, in a small room with no air conditioning and no fan, with the bodies by now in rigor mortis. The mortician had no formal training but had started work in the hospital as a sweeper. The lady gynaecologist, who was especially requested to be present, had no experience of post-mortems and eventually had to admit that the girls had not been raped, as she initially claimed. Instead

of cooperating with the police, the two fathers took pains to destroy evidence — including a mobile phone which Padma had obtained, lest the contents of the messages besmirch the family's reputation.

This comes to the heart of the story, signalled in the title: 'good girls' do not talk to boys, nor should they use phones. During a psychological assessment, Padma's father was asked what he would have done if the girls had lived. 'We would have killed them,' he replied. But such a drastic step was not necessary. The investigators finally concluded that, having been discovered by their cousin and aware of the shame they would bring on their families, they took their own lives, neatly placing their shoes at the bottom of the tree and hanging themselves by their long scarves. What had been broadcast as a rape was just 'an ordinary killing' of two young women who were too afraid of returning home. The final irony was that the need to go to the toilet in the fields had facilitated the illicit relationship; had there been a toilet in the house it would have been more difficult for the girls to absent themselves from the scrutinising gaze of adults.

This compelling 'whodunit' is a desperate reflection on the status of women. As Faleiro's contextual statistics make clear, upholding the family 'honour' is paramount not only in Katra but throughout India.

By arrangement with the Spectator



THE GOOD GIRLS: AN
ORDINARY KILLING

By SONIA FALEIRO
Penguin Random House, ₹599

FAST FACT

Harlan Jay Ellison (d. 2018) wrote over 1,700 short stories, novellas, screenplays, comic book scripts, teleplays, essays and criticisms. He worked in the genre of New Wave speculative fiction and was known for his combative personality. He is best remembered for the short fiction, *Earth, Air, Fire and Water*, adapted for the TV series, *Ghost Story*.



The ocean, not Himalayas: Presenting the South India story



R. Mohan

review

A lesser known fact may be that the Venetian merchant-explorer Marco Polo came to Pulicat Lake where he berthed his boat in 1292 and travelled towards what would have been ancient Madras. Of course, the history of visitors to South India goes way back to Greek and Roman traders. The history of far flung parts of the world trading with South India goes back centuries, beyond Vasco Da Gama who was one of the most famous traders to come south. A historic visitor in the first century CE was the doubting apostle Saint Thomas, who is celebrated in Chennai with the famous St Thomas Mount named after him and long before that had the Portuguese naming the village of San Thome after him. In the first century CE, he was interred in the basilica in Santhome. It is a matter of curiosity

that South Indian history must somehow seem so laid back like its people that it rarely speaks reverently of such old ties as those brought by the likes of Marco Polo. You may not find a plaque or a memorial honouring Marco Polo around Pulicat Lake. Also, given the nature of our school history books, it might appear that the history of India is that of the Mughals and then that of the occupiers who first came here as traders and then became rulers after the Indian Mutiny — the British and their Raj.

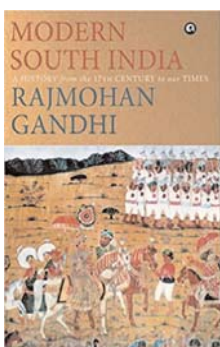
It was most fascinating to pore over the book by Rajmohan Gandhi on modern South India which is a history from the 17th century right up to the modern times. This book helps remove the lacuna created by a blind belief in the seat of the Mughal empire and then the capital of the British after they moved to

imperial Delhi from trading Calcutta being thought of exclusively as the centre of India and the cradle of its modern history. It might have taken me a while to read this detailed history put down in this great Dravidian story by a scholar and descendant of Mahatma Gandhi. The pandemic helped in creating the time to read such a valuable and well-researched tome.

The author defines the South India story attempted in the book as one of a peninsular region influenced by the oceans, and not by the Himalayas. We must first doff our hats to the scholar who had the vision to see the south, the land of the Dravidians and home of four prominent cultures — Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu — and their myriad subcultures as an entity that stood out on its own and not just an appendage, as a very political India ruled by North Indians thinks of the South in most modern times. In restricting himself to far more modern centuries, Rajmohan cannot dwell on the brilliance of Chola or Pallava architecture or that of the Hoysalas.

He does concede that his book does not seek to unearth hidden knowledge about

the past. Selection being a bigger challenge than exclusion, the author brings out people and events from at least four centuries that would help us define South India even better. It enhances our understanding of a diverse land that was attractive enough for northerners to come to conquer far more often than any south Indian ruler looked north to expand his kingdom.



MODERN SOUTH INDIA
— A HISTORY FROM
THE 17TH CENTURY TO
OUR TIMES

By RAJMOHAN
GANDHI
Aleph, ₹799

Perhaps, that itself is a definition of South India and its sensibilities through the ages. Raja Raja Cholan may have been an exception in an expansionist view of his grand empire that encompassed vast areas across the eastern seas.

The author's four important dates for perspective are well worth remembering — 1498 and the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Kerala, 1565 when the Vijayanagara Empire began disintegrating, 1619 and the birth of Fort St George and 1687 when by forcing the independent Sultan of Golconda to surrender, Aurangzeb enforced Mughal authority in the south. Between the first and last dates there are countless personalities of history who are brought to life in colourful manner by a fine storyteller. In describing the fall of the Nayakas or viceroys who ruled after the Vijayanagara Empire collapsed, the author has it that the ruler's eye was "more interested in the courtier's smile than the contentment of the peasant's wife or the pride of the artisan's mother".

Today we speak of political conquerors like MGR who were not from Tamil Nadu and still ruled the land. But

there could have been no more colourful conqueror than Chanda Sahib, whose real name was Shams-ud-daula Husain Dost Khan, and who was born into the Navaiyat branch of South India's Muslims whose Arab forefathers had landed on the Konkani coast.

Chanda deposed the Rani of Madurai and proclaimed himself heir to the Hindu Nayaka throne. He was removed in a couple of years by the Nizam who came from the south but climbed back and became the Carnatic Nawab with the help of the French general Dupleix.

Long before he was beheaded by his captor in another of an endless series of succession battles and his head sent to Muhammad Ali Walajah, Chanda was an enigmatic ruler and able military strategist.

There isn't a page you can turn without learning of old intrigues, battles, conquests and defeats in a land ruled by princes but terrorised by their tax collectors who were ruthless. To evolve into true modernity may have taken centuries, but the book also places in perspective the power of one of Tamil Nadu's greatest sons — C. Rajagopalachari, whose primary edu-

cation as a child was in Telugu, and who went on to shine on the national stage. The author brings out the secret of why Rajaji didn't rise to even greater prominence, which is because Nehru treated him as a go-between to Sardar Patel and after Patel's untimely death simply ignored Rajaji.

The governor general of India, chief minister of Tamil Nadu and once de facto head of the Congress and its freedom movement in the south, may have been wrong in trying to thrust Hindi on Tamil Nadu.

But there are few in TN's history who could have matched his intellectual brilliance and his honesty to human principles as portrayed in his allowing an "Untouchable" of his time to open a tap in the Brahmin quarters in Salem. He had also said, presciently, in 1919 — "Let it be clearly understood that we would oppose such legislation vesting in the government the absolute right to suspect and imprison without trial even if the government is democratic and purely Indian, and not bureaucratic and foreign."

Look around us today and the import of those words will become obvious.

JLF '21: Tharoor skewers Sandel

Not just about creative writing, the Jaipur Literature Festival is a festival of ideas. And this year's edition went on and lived right up to that definition. So, even though the conversation between "the world's last great intellectual" Noam Chomsky and TV anchor Sreenivasan Jain was rather underwhelming, and the chemistry between the two men frankly painful to watch, leaving, for the most part, the question built into the theme, "who rules the world", unanswered, the one between philosopher Michael Sandel and Shashi Tharoor more than made up for it by nudging out into the open a host of exciting observations. Suffice to say, in the course of it, it was Tharoor who skewered the "rockstar".

Sandel's book, *The Tyranny of Merit*, has made waves in academia. His earlier book, *What Money Can't Buy*, on the moral limits of markets, had sealed his reputation as a formidable critic of free market orthodoxy. In *Tyranny*, he posits a politics centred on dignity, arguing that pursuing meritocracy has betrayed, in many ways, the working classes. Sandel believes, radically, that merit is not an antidote but a justification for inequality. It is corrosive of the common good, Sandel said. If I believe that my success is my own do then I conclude that those who aren't successful are responsible for their own distress. Emphasis on merit completely ignores the role of luck and good fortune, indebtedness to cooperation and collaboration and the joys of solidarity. But Tharoor ably countered this point by saying that it is very well known that inequality of opportunity existed in the world. Also, it is not always the meritorious who are the most successful; for example, a hedge fund manager may not be where he is because of merit. With oligarchy and aristocracy alive and well, if not gaining in strength and influence, how fair is it to not reward talent and hard work was the question that came through, even as Tharoor argued that merit, in fact, had historically been the antidote to both the advantages of having inherited wealth and caste. While admitting that he, personally, would prefer a surgeon who got his degree on merits, Sandel found himself unable to sufficiently answer Tharoor's question on anti-intellectualism and the rise of Donald Trump. To start with, he set aside Tharoor's suggestion that the working classes were co-opted into voting for him by racial tensions, thus taking a blinkered view on the reality of white supremacism. Instead, he said, Trump came because deregulation of education under the Democrats put a high premium on college fees. The progressive parties kept telling people to pull themselves up and fulfil the requirements of getting a university degree though they themselves are essentially comprising of the well-credentialed elite, even as the working classes had been their traditional base. And now they are seen rejecting them for voting Trump. That last statement rang a bell.

Can we not, by ensuring healthcare, universal education, equal opportunity and daycare, achieve your objectives of the highest common good without throwing out the baby of meritocracy with the bathwater of injustice, Tharoor summarised.

The iconic Ursula K. Le Guin, indeed, has made a far more powerful case against meritocracy than Sandel himself. Her 1973 story, *Those Who Walk Away from Omelas*, is about a dystopian city where the genetically less endowed are made an example of. On the other hand, Kurt Vonnegut's *Harrison Bergeron*, on a different dystopia where the intelligent have their attention spans curtailed by the state and ballet dancers must wear handicaps so they are no more graceful than the less agile, is almost equally compelling a counter-argument, if not as emotionally affecting. For lovers of the short story, these two are must-reads.

Bill Gates' *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* is, per COP 26 chief Alok Sharma, a pretty upbeat book. Helpfully for viewers, Sharma asked Gates to highlight some technologies to mitigate it. Gates was more than forthcoming. The most mature would be electric cars with the lithium ion battery. Kind of in the middle is the offshore wind and there the UK is the leader in saying who can give us this technology at the lowest premium. And that green premium has been coming down. For electric buses, China is doing a lot of pioneering work. Agriculture is a sector that has surprised. There are a lot of companies, like Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat, that are looking at ways to do away with slaughtering animals, production of methane and so on. However, there is essentially no green steel and no green cement today. Aviation fuel is also a big problem area.

— Sucheta Dasgupta



diary

SHORT TAKES

Deepak settles for silver at Strandja

New Delhi: Indian boxer Deepak Kumar's stupendous run at the 72nd Strandja Memorial tournament ended with a silver medal in Sofia, Bulgaria, after he lost a fiercely-contested flyweight (52kg) final on Saturday. Deepak, an Asian silver-winner, was up against Bulgaria's Daniel Asenov, a two-time European championships gold-medallist. The bout ended in a split verdict in favour of the local favourite. The Indian had created quite a flutter in the tournament when he stunned reigning Olympic and world champion — Uzbekistan's Shakhobidin Zoirov — in his semifinal showdown. Earlier, Naveen Boora (69kg) settled for a bronze medal after going down to Asian Games gold medallist Bobo-Usmon Baturov of Uzbekistan in his semifinal bout. With this, India signed off with two medals at the event this year. — PTI

Akmal's ban cut down to one year

Karachi: Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal on Saturday claimed that he did not report the PCB about the spot-fixing approach made to him which led to his ban last year as he thought the information would not remain confidential. Akmal is now eligible to resume his cricket career after the Court of Arbitration for Sports on Friday reduced his suspension to 12 months and imposed a fine of 42.50 lakh Pakistani Rupees for breaching the Anti-Corruption Code. Akmal was initially banned for three years from all cricket activities on February 20 last year for not reporting approaches made to him for spot-fixing in the Pakistan Super League. "I opted against reporting the matter to the PCB's Anti-Corruption Unit as I was concerned the information would be leaked out," he said. — PTI

Woods in 'good spirits' after crash

Los Angeles: Tiger Woods is recovering and in "good spirits" after a second day of treatment at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center following his horrific rollover solo car smash that left him with serious leg injuries. The golf superstar was transferred to Cedars-Sinai on Wednesday night after undergoing emergency surgery the day before at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center to repair compound fractures sustained in each leg in addition to a shattered ankle. "Tiger and his family want to thank you all for the wonderful support and messages they have received over the past few days," said a statement on Woods' Twitter account. Woods was driving alone Tuesday morning in a south Los Angeles suburb when his SUV hit the centre median, crossed into the opposing lane, struck a tree and then rolled over several times. — AFP

Ministry restores recognition of GFI

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry has restored the recognition of the faction-ridden Gymnastics Federation of India (GFI) after 10 years, taking into records Sudhir Mittal's election as president in the polls held in November 2019. The recognition has been granted for the period till December 31, this year. The GFI was de-recognised by the ministry in 2011 because of infighting in the body and since then it remained so till the ministry's order on Friday to recognise it. Currently, sports ministry grants annual recognition to National Sports Federations. "It has been decided to restore the recognition of GFI with immediate effect and up to 31.12.2021," a ministry letter to GFI issued on Friday said. — PTI

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Goa vs Hyderabad FC from 4.50 pm; Mumbai City vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Leicester City vs Arsenal from 5.30 pm; Tottenham vs Burnley from 7.30 pm; Chelsea vs Manchester United from 10 pm; Sheffield United vs Liverpool from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Sampdoria vs Atalanta from 5 pm; Inter Milan vs Genoa from 7.30 pm; Napoli vs Benevento from 10.30 pm; Roma vs Milan from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2

BATTING PARADISE

Motera strip promises to favour batsmen in final Test

New Delhi, Feb. 27: The Motera track may have received a lot of flak after the pink ball Test ended inside two days but it is unlikely to attract any severe sanctions from the game's governing body ICC with the pitch for the final game set to be a batting beauty.

With India 2-1 up in the four-Test series and needing a draw to qualify for the World Test Championship final at Lord's from June 18-22, another turner is currently out of question as the home team will be aiming to take minimal risks as far as the track is concerned.

"Expect a good hard surface which will be firm and even bounce. It will be a batting beauty and since its a traditional red ball match, one can expect a very high scoring contest here from March 4-8," a senior BCCI official privy to the developments told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

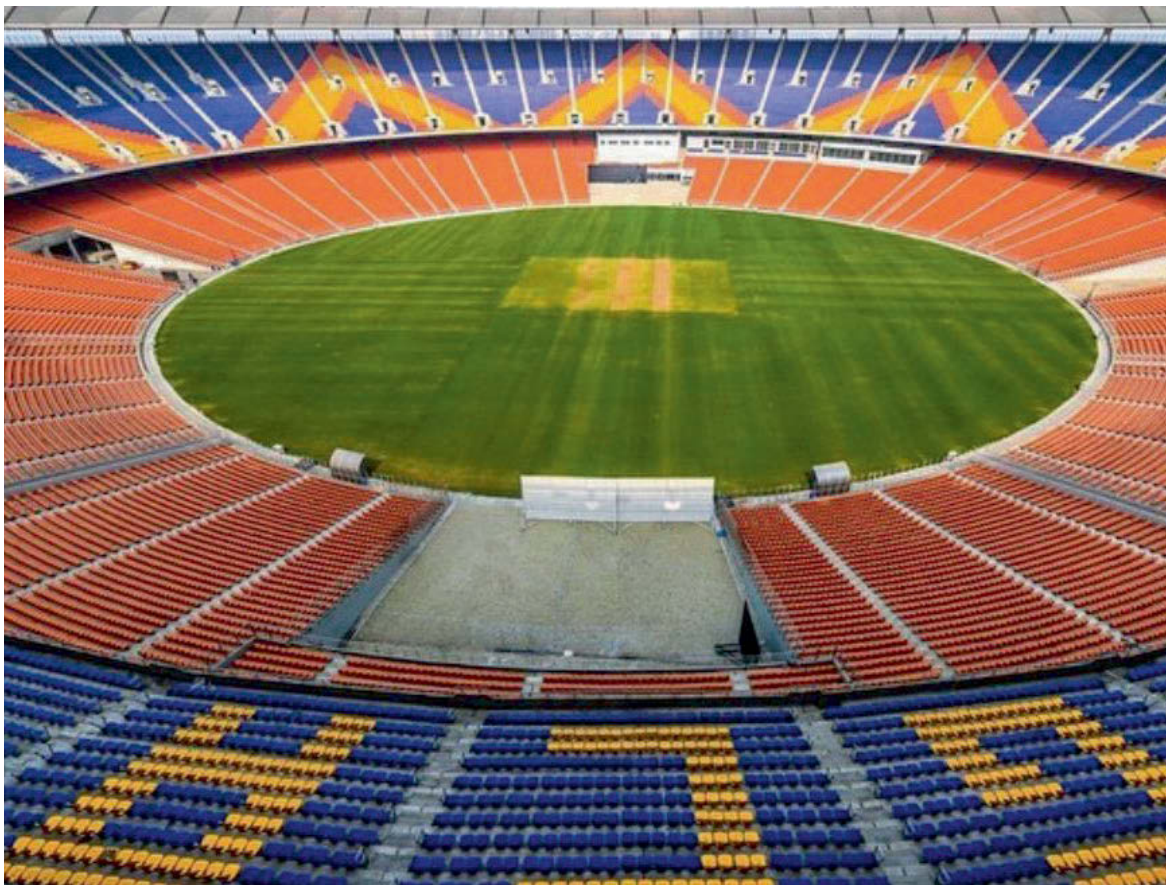
Also the BCCI bigwigs along with the team management understands the fact that another dust bowl won't augur well for the new venue which is expected to host a lot of important matches during IPL as well as ICC T20 World Cup.

"If there are two matches played at the same venue, you can't hold one result in isolation. Let the final Test be over and then only based on match referee Jagavallab Srinath's report can ICC decide its course of action. Also as of now, the England team hasn't lodged any official complaint," the BCCI official said.

If there has been one good and one bad pitch at the same venue, the ICC is unlikely to take any action.

While India would be happy with a 3-1 margin, they will not require a result oriented turner as a draw would suffice their purpose.

Also the Indian team management doesn't want to prepare a track that can ideally backfire on them in a very high-stake game of cricket.



A view of the Narendra Modi Stadium which will host the India-England fourth Test at Motera in Ahmedabad.

"The pink ball Test went well because it was more about the ball and the way it skidded rather than the pitch which many English former greats are paning. It was straight deliveries that they couldn't counter. But having said that these kind of tracks have a tendency to backfire and BCCI is well aware of that," he said.

The team combination for the next Test will be an interesting one after Jasprit Bumrah was released from the squad due to personal reasons.

Emerging India's star bowler Mohammed Siraj has a better chance than Umesh Yadav of being Ishant Sharma's new ball partner, while it is expected that all three spinners will be automatic picks.

Washington Sundar's superior batting skills might come in very handy in the middle order for the last Test match.

— PTI

Vaughan slams BCCI for producing poor pitches

London, Feb. 27: Former England captain Michael Vaughan has slammed the BCCI for producing pitches that are not deemed good enough for Test cricket and said the more India is allowed to "get away with whatever they wish", the more "toothless" the ICC will look.

England on Thursday suffered an embarrassing 10-wicket defeat in the third Test against India on a spin-friendly Motera track to go down 1-2 in the four-match series.

The match ended inside two days with the pitch drawing flak from former players like Vaughan, though batting legend

Sunil Gavaskar credited the Indian spinners rather than blaming the surface.

"The longer powerful countries like India are allowed to get away with it the more toothless the ICC will look," Vaughan wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*.

"The governing body are allowing India to produce whatever they wish and it is Test cricket that is getting hurt," he said.

"It is a real concern for the game that we have seen India respond to going 1-0 down by producing pitches which turn prodigiously from ball one and which they know full well will only last two or

three days," the former England skipper further added.

Vaughan, who has led England from 2003 to 2008, felt broadcasters asking for refunds if a match finishes too soon may help change things. "They are left with three blank days but are still having to pay for production. They will not be happy and might think twice about good money for Test rights," Vaughan said.

He called India's win "a shallow victory" but admitted that the home team is much better equipped to deal with the conditions.

— PTI

Men's skeet team bag bronze at WC

Cairo, Feb. 27: The Indian trio of Mairaj Ahmed Khan, Angad Vir Singh Bajwa and Gurjoat Khangura won the bronze medal in the men's skeet team event at the ISSF Shotgun World Cup here.

The Indians beat the Kazakhstan team of David Pochivalov, Eduard Yechshenko and Alexandr Mukhamediyev 6-2 in the bronze medal match on the third competition day of the International Shooting Sport Federation tournament.

The trio reached the bronze medal match when they combined to shoot a score of 491 after the qualification stage comprising seven rounds of 25 shots each on Friday evening here. They could have made it to the finals too, but lost a shoot-off to the Russians 6-5.

Bajwa was the star of the bronze medal match, hitting all his 16 targets.

Russia won the gold medal, beating the Czech Republic 6-0 in the finals.

The Indian women's team, comprising Ganemat Sekhon, Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Kartiki Singh Shaktawat, also made it to the bronze medal match, but lost out to the Kazakhs

● **The Indians beat the Kazakhstan team of David Pochivalov, Eduard Yechshenko and Alexandr Mukhamediyev 6-2 in the bronze medal match at the ISSF Shotgun World Cup.**

narrowly with the final score reading 4-6.

Kazakhstan were represented by Olga Panarina, Rinata Nassyrova and Assem Orynbay.

They had earlier shot 462 to qualify for the bronze medal match. Here too, Russia won the gold and the Czech Republic the silver with the result going 6-2 in favour of the champions.

Earlier on the second competition day in the Egyptian capital, Indian shooter Gurjoat narrowly missed out on a chance to advance to the finals of the men's individual skeet competition.

Despite two solid final qualification rounds of 24 and 25, Gurjoat's score added up to 119 at the end of five rounds, giving him a credible 10th place finish.

— PTI

STONES STUNNER SEALS IT FOR LEADER MAN CITY

Manchester, Feb. 27: Manchester City moved 13 points clear at the top of the Premier League as John Stones sealed a 2-1 win against West Ham that made it 20 successive victories in all competitions for the leaders.

Pep Guardiola's side are closing in on their third Premier League in four seasons thanks to priceless contributions from their in-form centre-backs.

Ruben Dias, imperious since signing from Benfica in September, put City ahead with his first goal for the club.

Michail Antonio equalised for West Ham just before half-time, but the revitalised Stones bagged the winner with a fine strike after the break.

City are enjoying the longest ever winning streak by an English top-flight team, with 14 of those 20 victories coming in the league to leave their title rivals trailing in their wake.

They are unbeaten in 27 games across all competitions, one match shy of their longest run without defeat under Guardiola in 2017.

Second placed Manchester United and third placed Leicester can close the gap back to 10 points if they beat Chelsea and Arsenal respectively on Sunday.

But it is hard to imagine anyone catching City over the last 12 games of the season.

— AFP

GAYLE IS BACK IN WI FOLD AFTER 2 YEARS

St John's, Feb. 27: Veteran batsman Chris Gayle has returned to the West Indies squad for the first time in nearly two years for the three-match T20 International series against Sri Lanka, beginning on March 3.

The 41-year-old top-order batsman was recalled to the 14-man squad under Kieron Pollard on the basis of his good performances in recent tournaments, including the IPL and the Pakistan Super League.

Senior fast bowler Fidel Edwards, 39, is also back in the national squad after a nine-year hiatus.

The three matches of the T20I series will be played on March 3, 5, and 7 in Antigua.

The big-hitting Gayle last played for West Indies in their home series against India in August 2019 after the 50-over World Cup that year.

"Chris Gayle has performed very well in recent tournaments and the selection panel thinks that he can still add great value to our team," Roger Harper, Cricket West Indies' (CWI) lead selector, said in a media release.

— PTI

SHIKHA IS AXED, SHAFALI NOT INCLUDED IN ODIs

New Delhi, Feb. 27: Veteran medium pacer Shikha Pandey was on Saturday dropped from India's ODI and T20 squads that will take on South African women in a twin series starting March 7. The most debatable decision by the Neetu David-led selection committee, however, was the exclusion of teenage batting sensation Shafali Verma in the ODI squad which has plodders like skipper Mithali Raj and Punam Raut, whose strike-rates have come under the scanner time and again.

With 19 T20 Internationals under her belt and an amazing Women's T20 World Cup last year, Shafali is a box-office cricketer.

"It will be interesting to know whether skipper Mithali Raj, who herself loves to bat at the top of the order and consumes more deliveries than permissible, had at all wanted Shafali in the ODI squad," a senior BCCI official said.

"Her absence means that India lack firepower save Harmanpreet and Srmriti. We lost out on a big hitter," he further added.

— PTI

Prerak's 174 sinks Chandigarh

Kolkata, Feb. 27: Middle-order batsman Prerak Mankad on Saturday took Eden Gardens by storm with a sensational 174 to power Saurashtra to a 62-run win over Chandigarh in a group E clash of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here.

The 26-year-old plundered six sixes and 16 fours in his knock from 130 balls to propel Saurashtra to a massive 388/7 after Chandigarh opted to bowl.

In reply, Chandigarh, who have been impressive in their debut Elite season with three wins on the trot, could manage 326/7.

The win helped Saurashtra consolidate their lead with 16 points, four clear of Chandigarh to close in on a quarterfinal spot. Chirag Jani too scored a quickfire 30 not out from 10 balls (3x4, 2x6) to end their innings on a high.

Saurashtra lost both their openers, Avi Barot (25) and Snell Patel (20) inside 11 overs but there-

BRIEF SCORES

■ Saurashtra 388/7 in 50 overs (Prerak Mankad 174, Vishvaraj Jadeja 50; Jaskaran Singh 4/60) bt Chandigarh 326/7 in 50 overs (Ankit Kaushik 54, Manan Vohra 50, Gautam Gambhir 40 not out) by 62 runs.

■ Services 287/5 in 50 overs (Rajat Paliwal 78 not out, Shivam Tiwari 74) bt Haryana 175 in 43.3 overs (Jayant Yadav 59) by 112 runs.

■ Bengal 368/4 in 50 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 99, Anustup Majumdar 92 not out, Ritwik Roy Chowdhury 55, Shahbaz Ahmed 48 not out) bt Jammu & Kashmir 286 in 45.3 overs (Abid Mushtaq 68, Parvez Rasool 50; Arnab Nandi 4/46) by 82 runs.

■ Mumbai 317/7 in 50 overs (Shreyas Iyer 116; Shubham Sharma 3/59) beat Rajasthan 250 in 42.2 overs (Mahipal Lomror 76, M. Singh 40; Shardul Thakur 4/50; Dhawal Kulkarni 3/26) by 67 runs.

■ Maharashtra 328/7 in 50 overs (Azim Kazi 91, Kedar Jadhav 86; Lalit Yadav 3/69) lost to Delhi 330/7 in 49.2 overs (Shikhar Dhawan 153, Satyajeeet Bachhav 3/68) by three wickets.

■ Puducherry 227/9 in 50 overs (Sheldon Jackson 104, Sagar Trivedi 51; Rishi Dhawan 4/44, Pankaj Jaswal 2/23) beat Himachal 123 in 34.5 overs (Abhimanyu Rana 27; Sagar Udeshi 4/35, Kannan Vignesh 3/30) by 104 runs.

after it was all about Prerak, who stitched two century-plus stands with Vishvaraj Jadeja (50 off 53 balls; 3x4, 2x6) and Arpit Vasavada (71 off 52 balls; 5x4, 2x6) to lead the charge. The No. 4 batsman paced his innings brilliantly taking 53 balls for his half-century before he stepped up to race to his second List A century in the next 39

balls. There was no stopping Prerak as he took another 27 balls to cruise to 150. He was dismissed by Jagjit Singh in the final over but the damage had been done.

MUMBAI ON A ROLL

In Jaipur, skipper Shreyas Iyer's fluent 116 and an impressive show by India speedster Shardul Thakur powered

Mumbai to a 67-run win over Rajasthan in an Elite Group D game.

This was Mumbai's fourth successive win, having earlier defeated Delhi, Maharashtra and Puducherry.

Opting to bat at the KL Saini stadium, Mumbai rode on Iyer's 103-ball knock to post a competitive 317/7. The elegant right-handed batsman led from the front before his bowlers bundled out the opposition for 250 with Thakur (4/50) doing the bulk of the damage.

Yashasvi Jaiswal (38) and Prithvi Shaw (36) gave the domestic giants a strong start, adding 71 for the first wicket. But Rajasthan pegged back Mumbai by removing both the openers in quick succession as they slipped to 83/2.

Iyer anchored the innings before toying with the Rajasthan attack, scoring his second century of the tournament with the help of 11 fours and three sixes.

— PTI

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