

SHORT TAKES

ASI shoots self
dead inside PCR

New Delhi: An Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Delhi police allegedly shot himself dead with his service pistol in a PCR van while he was on duty at Zakhira floyer in west Delhi on Saturday morning, officials said. The ASI, Tej Pal (55), was attached with the Police Control Room (PCR) unit. He was residing in Rajnagar in Ghaziabad, they said. Police were informed about the incident at around 7 am, they said, adding no suicide note was recovered from the spot. The ASI allegedly shot himself in the chest, a senior police officer said. He was rushed to ABG hospital by the PCR van driver where he was declared brought dead, he said. The PCR van was examined by the crime team, police said, adding further investigation is going on.

Woman, son stabbed
for objecting to noise

New Delhi: A woman and her 19-year-old son were stabbed allegedly by four boys in their neighbourhood in Punjabi Bagh area on Saturday when they told them not to make noise, police said. Both the injured, Moin and his mother who is in her late 40s, were taken to Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospital, they said. In his statement, Moin told police that four boys, all residents of his locality in DDU camp area of Punjabi Bagh, were making noise. When his parents tried to stop them, they started fighting and one of the boys stabbed his mother in the chest. Moin suffered a thigh injury in the knife attack, a senior police officer said. The injured are stated to be stable, he said. A case has been registered. The accused are below 18 years of age and have gone absconding, the police officer added.

Woman murdered by
hubby after quarrel

New Delhi: A 28-year-old woman was killed allegedly by her husband following a quarrel between them in Budh Vihar, police said on Saturday. The incident took place on Friday night after a quarrel broke out between Chetan Prakash Solanki and his wife Geeta over some dispute, they said. Police said that prima facie, it appears that the woman was thrashed and hit with stick by her husband who was suspected to be under the influence of alcohol during the time of incident. On reaching the spot, police broke out the door and found the injured woman while her husband was also found lying unconscious in the room. The two were rushed to BSA hospital where the woman was declared brought dead and her husband was also admitted to the hospital, a senior police officer said.

COVID-19: CITY SET
FOR 2ND PHASE OF
VACCINATION DRIVE

New Delhi: After injecting shots against Covid to over 3.6 lakh beneficiaries, authorities in Delhi are now set for the roll-out of the second phase of the inoculation drive on March 1. In the second phase, people aged above 60 years and those over 45 with comorbidities will be vaccinated. At Delhi government hospitals, doctors and other medical staff were upbeat about the second phase of the drive. Over 13,000 beneficiaries had received anti-Covid vaccine on Friday, a significant fall from the number of people who had got the shots a day before, according to data shared by officials. More than 3.6 lakh beneficiaries have received the vaccine till Friday in Delhi since the start of the inoculation drive a month ago, with over 18,900 people receiving jabs on Thursday. Sources in the Delhi government said preparations are in full swing for the next phase. However, the number of vaccination centres and modalities with empanelled private hospitals are still being worked out. While the vaccination will be free at government vaccination centres, a set charge with a cap of Rs 250 per dose could be taken by any of these empanelled private facilities, the officials said. Under the second phase, eligible beneficiaries would be able to register themselves on the Co-WIN platform from Monday itself. — PTI

Boy stabbed for confronting sister's stalkers

5 people arrested in connection with the case, says cops

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

A teenager was beaten up and stabbed for allegedly opposing three boys who were stalking his sister and passing "indecent remarks" on her in Kalkaji area, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place near the girl's school on Friday, when she was returning home along with her 17-year-old brother after attending classes, they said.

The injured boy, a resident of Kalkaji, was taken to the AIIMS Trauma Centre, police said.

In her statement, the victim's sister said while she was with her brother on Friday, three boys followed her and passed indecent remarks on her.

When her brother objected to it, they all started beating him and one of them stabbed him in the abdomen and fled the spot, a senior police officer said. The victim is still unfit to record his statement, he said.

▶ The incident took place near the girl's school, when she was returning home with her brother. The victim's sister said while she was with her brother three boys followed her and passed indecent remarks on her

▶ When her brother objected to it, they all started beating him and one of them stabbed him in the abdomen and fled the spot. The injured boy, a resident of Kalkaji, was taken to the AIIMS Trauma Centre

The victim's sister, who is a class 12th student, told reporters that she was returning home from school around 1 pm when the incident took place.

"My house is near, walking distance of 10-15 min from the school. The boys were following me. They have been stalking me for the past two-three days. Police took me to the station and I filed the complaint," she said.

DCP (Southeast) R.P. Meena said, "We have registered a case under Indian Penal Code sections 307 (attempt to murder), 354 D (stalking), 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) and

34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention)."

The Delhi Police has arrested 5 people in connection with the incident. Out of the 5, two are minors.

Police said the victim's parents run an ice-cream stall and the accused are known to the victim.

Delhi commission for Women has issued a notice to the Delhi Police in connection with the incident and have sought a detailed report on the action taken by the force by March 3.

Taking to Twitter, Anurag Kundu, Chairperson, Delhi for

Protection of Child Rights said he met the victim's family at AIIMS and expressed concern about the deteriorating law and order situation in the city, particularly for children.

Taking suo-moto cognizance of the case, the commission has directed the police to expedite inquiry as well as conduct regular patrolling in and around the concerned school at the time when it gets over, the child rights body said in a statement.

They have been asked to submit a status report in the matter on or before March 10, it said.

It further asked the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to depute at least two civil defense volunteers around the concerned school at the time when it gets over, it said.

The District child Protection Officer have been directed to depute a counsellor both for the girl and the boy to ensure their emotional and psychological well-being, the statement added.

Kejriwal: Delhi's law & order
situation in 'serious turmoil'AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday questioned the law and order situation in the national capital and urged Union home minister Amit Shah and lieutenant-governor Anil Bajjal to take action citing two crimes in the last 36 hours.

Taking it to Twitter, Mr Kejriwal tweeted, "Deeply concerned by the murder of a 8-yr-old girl in Khichdipur and attack on a 17-yr-old boy in Kalkaji. Delhi's law and order situation is in a serious turmoil, I appeal to Hon'ble home minister and L-G to take appropriate action to address the situation."

His tweet came after a 17-year-old boy was beaten up and stabbed for allegedly opposing three boys who were stalking his sister and passing "indecent remarks" on her in Kalkaji area.



Arvind Kejriwal

According to a senior police official, the incident took place on Friday near a school in Kalkaji area.

AAP MLA from Kalkaji Atishi met the family members of the boy who she said was stable and recovering.

"Met the family of the boy who was stabbed in Kalkaji yesterday. Have assured them of full support. Also spoke to the doctors at the AIIMS Trauma Centre, who said that the boy is stable and recovering," she tweeted.

The MLA also spoke to the deputy commissioner

of police of southeast Delhi and sought swift arrest of the accused.

Earlier, two days ago, a body of a nine-year-old girl, who was kidnapped from Khichripur three days ago, was found in the sugarcane fields of a village in Modinagar, near Ghaziabad, on Friday morning.

The police had said that the autopsy has ruled out sexual assault. Four alleged kidnappers, who live in the same neighbourhood as the girl's family, have been arrested in connection with the kidnap and murder.

The arrested persons were identified by their first names — Johnny alias Shiva, the key suspect, his cousin Nareish, Kailash and Tarun. "In the kidnapping and murder case of Kalyanpuri, four persons have been arrested and the weapon of the offence has been recovered," said a senior police official.

2 hired to kill
human rights
activist held
in R.K. PuramAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

Two miscreants, both residents of Punjab, were arrested in R.K. Puram area. They were conspiring to kill an activist who speaks on Kashmir. Two pistols, two country-made guns, and four live bullets were recovered from them. The seized pistol is of the kind manufactured in Pakistan.

The accused have been identified as Sukwinder Singh (25), a resident of Faridkot, and Lakhana (21), a resident of Kotpura. According to DCP (Southwest district) Ingat Pratap Singh, both of them are acquaintances and were sent to Delhi at the behest of one person identified as Prince alias Lutti.

"They were promised ₹10 lakh cash if they assassinated one Sushil Pandit, who is a human rights activist and CLO of Hive Communications India Pvt. Ltd. The duo also revealed that they were provided with four pistols, two of which are country-made, along with four cartridges, and one mobile phone containing the photograph of Sushil Pandit," said the DCP in a statement issued on Saturday.

"While they were on the lookout for a rented accommodation in Southwest district they were nabbed by the local police of R.K. Puram police station on specific inputs," said the DCP.

"A case under Sections 25/54/29 of the Arms Act and Sections 120B (punishment of criminal conspiracy) and 115 (abetment of offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life) of the IPC has been registered in R.K. Puram police station," said the DCP adding that further investigation is going on.

MCD bypolls: AAP,
BJP and Congress
set to battle it out

Bypolls are seen as semifinal ahead of the civic body elections in 2022

New Delhi, Feb. 27: The stage is set for bypolls in five municipal wards in Delhi on Sunday with all three main contenders — the Aam Aadmi Party, BJP and the Congress — exuding confidence of emerging victorious.

The bypolls are being seen as the semifinal ahead of the civic body elections for 272 wards of three municipal corporations in early 2022.

According to the State Election Commission, around 2.42 lakh people are eligible to cast their votes in these municipal wards — Rohini-C, Shalimar Bagh (North), Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Chauhan Banger.

Voting will be held from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm. The results will be announced on March 3, officials said, adding that there are 327 polling stations. Twenty-six candidates are contesting the elections.

Officials said that Covid patients can vote during the last hour of polling following laid down guidelines.

The AAP has claimed that it will make a clean sweep in the bypoll as Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had recently asserted that the party can challenge the BJP while terming the Congress its "B team".

The main candidates in the by-elections are Dharendra from the Aam Aadmi Party, Siyaram Kanojia from the BJP and Dharampal Maurya from the Congress in the Kalyanpuri ward.

Vijay Kumar from the AAP, Om Prakash Gugarwal from the BJP and Bal Kishan are contesting from Trilokpuri

▶ **VOTING WILL** be held from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm. The results will be announced on March 3, officials said, adding that there are 327 polling stations. Twenty-six candidates are contesting the election

ward. Former AAP MLA Haji Ishraq Khan is pitted against Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad of the Congress and Nazir Ansari of the BJP from Chauhan Bamgar ward.

These three wards are under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation. The AAP held these wards which were vacated after sitting councillors contested the assembly polls last year and became MLAs.

From the Shalimarbagh North ward that fell vacant after the death of BJP councillor, the contest is between Surbhi Jaju of the BJP, Sunita Mishra of the AAP and Mamta of the Congress.

The Rohini-C ward will witness a keen contest among former Bawana MLA Ramchandra of the AAP, Rajesh Goyal of the BJP and Mewati Barwala of the Congress.

The AAP and the BJP have been attacking each other over a range of issues, including corruption, during the campaigning.

Earlier this week, senior AAP leader Raghav Chadha had alleged that the BJP, ruling the three municipal corporations, has turned the city into a "heap of garbage".

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta said that the party will win all the five wards. — PTI



Indian Youth Congress workers carry an LPG cylinder during a protest against the price hike of petroleum products in New Delhi on Saturday.

Fire at factory
in Pratap Nagar
area, one deadAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

A charred body was recovered after a fire broke out at a factory in Pratap Nagar area of North Delhi in the early hours of Saturday, a Delhi Fire Service official said. No other injuries or death has been reported, he said.

One of the firemen sustained minor injury on his finger during the fire-fighting operation but was given first aid at the spot, the official said.

A call about the fire was received at around 3.47 am and 18 fire tenders were pressed into service, he said.

Later, 10 more fire tenders were rushed to the spot and the fire was brought under control while the cooling process is underway, he added.

Covid: 243 new cases, 3 more
fatalities recorded in Delhi

New Delhi, Feb. 27: Delhi recorded 243 new Covid cases on Saturday, while three more fatalities pushed the death toll to 10,909, according to the data shared by the city health department.

This is the fourth successive day when the count of daily cases have stood at 200-mark or beyond.

On Friday, 256 Covid cases were registered, the highest number of single-day incidences in February, while on Thursday and Wednesday the count stood at 220 and 200, respectively.

On all preceding days, spanning February 1-23, the count of daily cases had been below 200, according to official data.

Delhi had a recorded 199 new Covid cases on January 28. A



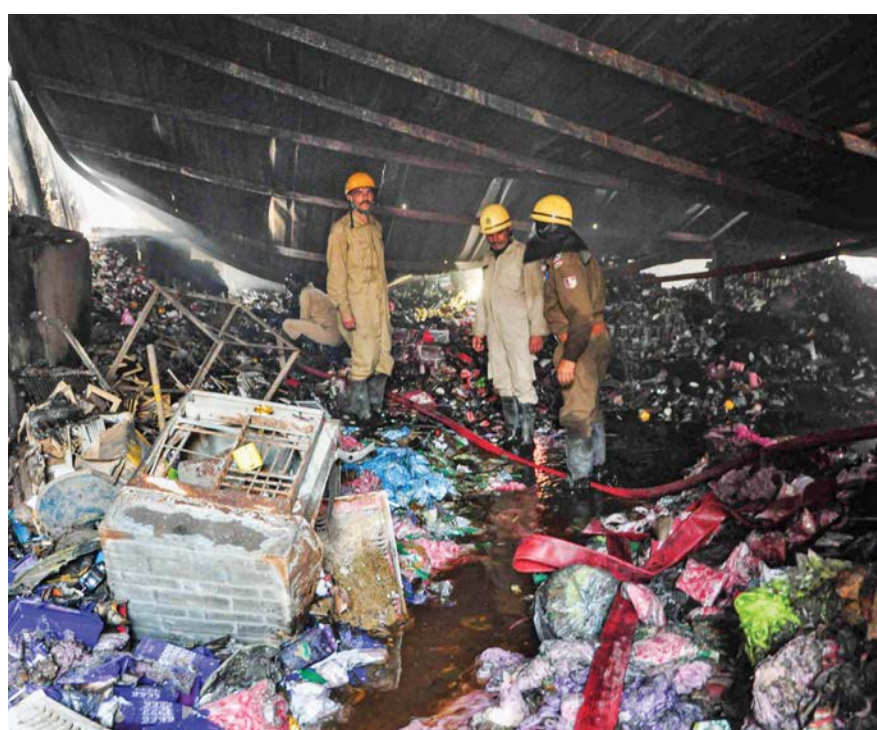
A health worker collects swab sample for Covid in Gurugram on Saturday.

From January 15-26, the daily figures ranged from 148 on January 25 to 299 on January 16, it said.

On Saturday, DelhiA recorded 243 fresh Covid cases and a positivity rate of 0.36 per cent, authorities said,

adding the infection tally in the city has risen to 6,39,092.

These new cases came out of the 67,484 tests conducted the previous day, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the city government. — PTI



Fire brigade personnel douse a fire which broke out in a factory at Pratap Nagar industrial area in New Delhi on Saturday.

DU awards 'digital degrees' to nearly 180K
students during its 97th annual Convocation

New Delhi, Feb. 27: The Delhi University became the first institution in the country to award "digital degrees" to its 1,78,719 students during its 97th annual convocation on Saturday, its acting vice-chancellor P C Joshi claimed.

Owing to the Covid pandemic, the convocation ceremony was conducted in a hybrid manner — a mix of both online and physical mode.

"It is for the first time, not only in the history of DU but all universities, that with a click of a button, nearly 1,80,000 students received their Bachelors/Master degrees in various disciplines in their mail. This is a historic step for all of us," claimed Tyagi.

Over 156 medals and 36

▶ **OVER 156** medals and 36 prizes were also awarded to the students in person by Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank", who was the chief guest of the occasion

prizes were also awarded to the students in person by Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank", who was the chief guest of the occasion. Over 600 doctoral degrees and 44 DM/M CH degrees were also awarded in person during the ceremony.

Speaking about the university's achievements, Joshi said despite being a "pandemic year", the institute has emerged as a front-runner in setting new hallmarks in the field of educa-

tion — be it making a smooth transition to online mechanisms, digital learning, conducting open book examinations or having contactless admissions.

"All stakeholders insured that there was no disruption in the holistic development of our students. Though physically the libraries were closed, but electronic resources were made available for the university constituents by providing access to them within the comforts of their home. "It is a matter of immense pride for us as we have emerged as the first university in the country to conduct open book examination in accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Education for keeping the safety and health of the students as

the top most priority," he said, adding that the varsity will implement the National Education Policy 2020 at its earliest.

Tyagi also talked about DU's new "Vidya Vistar Scheme" (V2 Scheme), which proposes to make available its faculties, library and other academic facilities to the partnering institutions for academic cooperation and collaboration.

"The scheme would establish academic linkages between partner colleges and departments of fellow universities. It aims at maximizing the utilization of existing resources available with the university through academic collaboration and cooperation with partner institutions.

— PTI

■ We have cater to the global market, says Modi PM opens India's 1st toy fair, pushes for use of less plastic

New Delhi, Feb. 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday exhorted toy manufacturers to use less plastic and more eco-friendly and recyclable material in a bid to increase the share of the domestic industry in the global market.

Inaugurating the first India Toy Fair, the Prime Minister said, "We have to become Aatmanirbhar in the toy sector and also cater to the global market".

Observing that India's share in the \$100 billion global toy market is very small, and 85 per cent of the toys in the country are sourced from abroad, Mr Modi said there is a need to change this situation.

"In the field of toys, India has tradition and technology, India has concepts and competence. We can take the world back towards eco-friendly toys. Through our software engineers, computer games can bring the stories of India to the world," he said.

While referring to the traditional toy industry, the Prime Minister underlined the need for promoting Handmade in India.

If there is a demand for Made in India today, then the demand for Handmade in India is also increasing equally, he said, adding "today people do not only buy toys as a product, but also want to connect with the experience associated with that toy. So, we have to promote Handmade in India as well".

The Prime Minister appealed to the manufacturers to make toys that are better for both ecology and psy-

'Hunar Haat' playing key role in making 'vocal for local' mass movement: Naqvi

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

Describing the minority affairs ministry's initiative — Hunar Haat — as the "Kumbh of backers of brilliance" which is playing a "phenomenal and perfect" role in making the "Vocal for Local" campaign a "mass movement," minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi informed that 7.50 lakh artisans and craftsmen will provide employment opportunities through 75 Hunar Haats by the 75th Independence Day. As of now, more than 5.30 lakh artisans and craftsmen have been provided with such opportunities.

Addressing the Hunar Haat in the national capital, where more than 12 lakh people have visited, the min-

ister said that more than 600 artisans and craftsmen from more than 31 states and UTs participated. Defence minister Rajnath Singh had inaugurated the event which was visited by various Union ministers, MPs, various diplomats, renowned industrialists to encourage the artisans and craftsmen.

Some of the crafts at display are applique work, brass products, wooden and clay toys, Ajrakh block print, Blue Art pottery, Khadi products, wooden Furniture, Rajasthani jewellery, Phulkari, leather products, Khurja pottery, antiques made of glass among other things. Traditional delicacies from every region of the country are also available and artists are also performing.

chology, using less plastic and more of such things that can be recycled.

Referring to the initiatives of the government, Modi said the country has now graded the toy industry in 24 major sectors.

The National Toy Action Plan has also been prepared, he said, adding, "it has included 15 ministries and departments to make these industries competitive, the country to become self-reliant in toys, and India's toys also go into the world. Throughout this campaign, state governments have been made an equal partner in developing the toy clusters".

He said along with this, efforts are made to strengthen the possibilities of toy tourism. Toyathon-2021 was also organised to promote Indian sports-based toys and more than 7,000 ideas were brainstormed.

The Prime Minister also used the occasion to interact with traditional toymakers from Chennai, Varanasi and Jaipur and impress upon them the need to innovate and make toys more relevant keeping in view the changing taste of children.

More than 1,000 exhibitors participated in the Toy Fair 2021, which will continue till March 2. — PTI

Centre's OTT rules dictatorial, Maha minister

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, FEB. 27**



Satej Patil

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 The Asian Age 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.

Odisha CM blesses newly-wed HIV +ve couple; DC performs kanyadan

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BERHAMPUR, FEB. 27**



Ganjam collector Vijay Amruta Kulange performs kanyadan during the marriage of the HIV infected youths

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday joined a video conference to bless a newly-wed HIV positive couple in Gopalpur of Ganjam district.

Through a video conference, the CM talked to the newlyweds and extended his best wishes on the occasion.

The marriage of the couple was solemnised by Ganjam district administration at Shradha Sanjivani Daycare Home in port town Gopalpur.

Earlier, the two were staying at the daycare home for their education in the district and currently doing their jobs in Hyderabad.

Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange was present at the event among others and performed the Kanyadaan ritu-

al. He also presented gifts on behalf of the state government to the couple.

In their mid-twenties, the newlyweds arrived at Shradha Sanjivani a few days ago for the solemnisation of their marriage.

"We were brought up here at Shradha Sanjivani and it gives us special feeling when we are getting married

here," said the groom.

In 2007, Odisha's ST (technology, teamwork, transparency, time and transformation) secretary V.K. Pandian had founded Shradha Sanjivani when he was Collector of Ganjam for the HIV infected orphans. The institution has given the orphans and vulnerable children a new lease of life.

Rahul launches tirade against Modi

Talks about 'connect' with Tamil Nadu, says PM Modi wants to 'remote control' state

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 Mr 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.



Rahul Gandhi

Training his guns against Modi over the Sino-India border standoff, he charged the PM with being 'scared' of the eastern neighbour and took a swipe at him for being only "useful to two people." "Essentially the

Chinese occupied certain strategic areas in our country. They first tested the idea in Doklam."

"They tested the idea to see how would India react and they noticed India did not react. And then they carried out the idea again in Ladakh and also I believe in Arunachal Pradesh," he said.

Mr Gandhi said Mr Modi's first reaction to the Chinese incursions was "that nobody has come into India."

"That indicated to the Chinese that the Prime

Minister of India is scared of them.. they understood it. And since then the Chinese have negotiated on that principle," he said.

"They know that the Prime Minister of India cannot stand up to them. Mark my words, our land in Depsang, which is the most important land, is not going to come back to under this government."

Giving such a message to the Chinese was "very dangerous to the future because the Chinese are not going to stop with Ladakh," he alleged. — PTI

NARVA GARVA GHURVA BAARI

A Revolution Transforming Village Economy

NARVA

(Rivulets and Streams)

Regenerating and Conserving Water Resources

- ❖ 3,272 drains indentified for rejuvenation
- ❖ 19,48,417 water conservation works approved
- ❖ 11,44,598 works related to water conservation completed
- ❖ In 5 years irrigation facilities to double

GARVA

(Livestock Management)

From Cow Protection to Entrepreneurship

- ❖ Approval for 9,182 Gothans (cowsheds) across the state, 5,102 Gothans already functional
- ❖ Govt purchasing cow dung at the rate of ₹2 per kg from Gothans
- ❖ Collected cow dung repurposed into organic manure and other useful items, providing livelihood to the villagers

BAARI

(Cultivation of Fruits & Vegetables in Backyards)

Availability of Nutrition Food

- ❖ Cultivation of fruits and vegetables providing additional income and nutrition supplement
- ❖ Plantation of large scale trees

GHURVA

(Bio-Composting from Farm Waste)

Organic Farming Becoming a Movement

- ❖ 51,849 quintal bio compost made by self-help groups
- ❖ Sale of 27,695 quintal repurposed compost

- ❖ ₹5750 cr to 19 lakh farmers under **Rajiv Gandhi Kisan NYAY Yojana**
- ❖ Waiver of **₹9000 cr** short term agricultural loan of **18 lakh farmers**
- ❖ **₹244 cr** irrigation tax pending since decades waived off, benefitting **17 lakh farmers**
- ❖ Record paddy procurement at MSP in **20 years**
- ❖ **First State** to Monetize Cow dung, payment of **₹80.42 cr** towards purchase of cow dung

Shri Bhupesh Baghel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

Pro Active - Pro People

S-280179

SHORT TAKES

25 test Covid +ve at Odisha college

Bhubaneswar: As many as 25 students of Odisha's top engineering varsity — Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology (VSSUT) at Burla — have tested positive for Covid-19 since Friday, official sources said on Saturday. While 24 students had tested positive for the virus on Friday, one student tested positive for the virus on Saturday. The Covid-19 outbreak in VSSUT has now triggered an alarm thereby forcing the district Sambalpur district Sub-Collector and other administrative officials to review the situation at the VSSUT hostels. At least 84 new cases of Covid-19 infections have been reported from several parts of Odisha in the past 24 hours. Sundergarh district reported a maximum of 10 new COVID-19 cases, followed by 9 cases each in Sambalpur and Khordha, Balasore (7), Bolangir (6) and Cuttack (5).

3 held for filming indecent videos

Mumbai: Three persons, including a tuition teacher, have been arrested for allegedly touching minors and women inappropriately in public places and using obscene language on the pretext of shooting "prank videos", police said on Saturday. The trio allegedly uploaded these videos on social media and video-sharing websites and earned at least Rs 2 crore during the COVID-19-induced lockdown with revenue generated from the sites and advertisements, an official said. The cyber police station received a complaint that some men were shooting videos of women and minors, in which male characters touch them inappropriately and use obscene language, joint commissioner of police (Crime) Milind Bharambe said. The victims in these videos lodged a complaint against the accused. — PTI

HP SPEAKER FILES PLAINT AGAINST 4 CONGRESS MLAs

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh Speaker Vipin Parmar has lodged an FIR against the five Congress MLAs suspended from the state assembly for the entire Budget session after they allegedly manhandled governor Bandaru Dattatraya. The Speaker told PTI that the FIR was lodged at 3 pm on Friday. The Speaker said he will give details about the case after reaching Shimla on Monday. Earlier on Saturday, Assembly Secretary Yash Paul Sharma had told PTI that the Speaker has submitted a formal complaint to DGP Sanjay Kundu for registering an FIR against the Congress legislators. Meanwhile, police did not give any details about the case with the DGP saying as the Assembly session in progress, they can inform about it only to the Speaker. The alleged incident had taken place outside the Speaker's office on Friday when the governor was leaving for the Raj Bhavan after he cut short his address in the House following a ruckus created by the Congress on the opening day of the Budget session. After the incident, the Speaker suspended Leader of the Opposition Mukesh Agnihotri and four other Congress MLAs Harsh Vardhan Chauhan, Satpal Raizada, Sunder Singh and Vinay Kuma for the entire Budget session till March 20 on a motion moved by parliamentary affairs Minister Suresh Bhardwaj. — PTI

RJD eyes Bihar votes

■ Continued from Page 1
of the RJD, will also visit Kolkata to discuss the poll related issues with political leaders. Meanwhile, the JD(U) which is an alliance partner of the BJP in Bihar, is also gearing up to field candidates in West Bengal and Assam in the coming Assembly polls. Sources in the JD(U) said that leaders in both the states have been asked to identify seats to contest. JD(U) national secretary Sanjay Verma is camping in Assam and the final decision regarding alliance and seats will be taken by the party leadership after the assessment of Assembly constituencies in both the states. The LJP is also planning to contest the polls in West Bengal and Assam and is currently assessing its party's position in both the states.

In view of polls, EC blocks 18 police officers' transfer

12 IPS and 6 APS officers were transferred on February 26

AGE 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 in several states including Assam.

"The Commission vide its press note dated February 26, 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 the model code of conduct have come into force with immediate effect, which includes a total ban on the transfers/postings of all officers connected with the conduct of elections. It has come to the notice of the 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 till further orders," the Election Commission of India said in a statement.

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



Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha National president Tejasvi Surya is felicitated and welcomed by BJP workers at Guwahati airport on Saturday. — PTI

Bengal's ADG removed a day after announcing poll

Kolkata, Feb. 27: A day after announcing the dates for Assembly polls in West Bengal, the Election Commission on Saturday removed additional director-general of police (law and order) Jawed Shamim and brought in Jag Mohan in his place, an official order said.

Mr Shamim, a 1995-batch IPS officer, will replace Mohan as the DG fire services in the rank of ADG, the chief electoral officer (CEO) of the state said in the order.

The shuffle came hours after a BJP delegation, which included MPs Swapna Dasgupta and Arjun Singh, met CEO Ariz Aftab and urged him to remove "biased" police officers from election duty. The Mamata

Banerjee government had made Shamim, who was special commissioner of police (II) of the Kolkata police, the state ADG (law and order) earlier this month ahead of the Assembly polls.

Elections in West Bengal will be held in eight phases. The first and last phase of polling will be held on March 27 and April 29 respectively. Votes will be counted on May 2.

On the increased number of phases in the state, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora on Friday said when the EC assesses the law and order situation, the assessment is based on several factors and it also has to take into account charges and counter-charges by political parties. — PTI

Cops adopting unfair mean: Bengal BJP

Kolkata: The BJP lodged a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal against some police officers for allegedly resorting to unfair means to prevent free and fair polls in the state.

Senior BJP leader Swapna Dasgupta said it had come to the notice of the party that the police officers have been demanding submission of Aadhaar cards and other documents from officials designated for election duty. "We smell a rat in the whole exercise and have been seeking an appointment with the commissioner of Kolkata police for the last four days, but in vain," he told reporters. — PTI

Will bring law to prevent 'love jihad' in Kerala: BJP

Palakkad, Feb. 27: The NDA in Kerala would bring in a law to prevent "love jihad" in the state, if voted to power in the April 6 Assembly elections, as such cases are "more prevalent" here than in Uttar Pradesh, BJP state chief K. Surendran said here on Saturday.

"Love Jihad" is a term used by right wing activists to refer to an alleged campaign of Muslims forcing Hindu girls to convert in the guise of love. Mr Surendran said the Christian community was now more worried about the practice as they were reportedly being targeted, and had sought stringent action against it. "Love Jihad is more prevalent in Kerala than in Uttar Pradesh and a law is required to prevent it. The Christian community in the state is worried and have sought stringent action against love jihad.. This is of serious concern for them," Mr Surendran told reporters here.

BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh

and Madhya Pradesh had earlier brought in religious freedom laws to stop conversions through marriage or by any other fraudulent means.

Asked about senior BJP leader Shobha Surendran's recent statement that IUML was welcome to the NDA if they leave behind their 'communal agenda' and accept the leadership and policies of the Narendra Modi led government, the state chief said the party would join hands only with those who leave their affiliation with the IUML, Congress and CPI(M).

"The BJP in Kerala will not join hands with the IUML, CPI (M) and the Congress. We will accept only those who leave their affiliation with these parties," Surendran said.

He was speaking to reporters at a press meet at the end of the Palakkad leg of the 15 day state wide 'Vijay yatra', which got underway at Kasaragod on February 21, which was seen as the official launch of the BJP's poll campaign. — PTI

■ BJP chief also promises to make state free from violence and terror
Ghosh vows single phase poll if BJP wins

Kolkata, Feb. 27: Slamming West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee for raising questions over eight-phase assembly elections, state BJP president Dilip Ghosh Saturday said it was required because of the "political violence unleashed by the ruling TMC", and asserted that his party will ensure single-phase poll if voted to power.

He also vowed to make the state free from violence and terror if the BJP comes to power. "The eight-phase poll in the state is to ensure a free and fair election. Political violence unleashed by the TMC is rampant in the state," Mr Ghosh said during a 'chai pe charcha' (discussion over tea) session.

The BJP MP said it will be a matter of pride if the polls are conducted in a single-phase.

Ms Banerjee on Friday questioned the decision of the Election Commission of India to conduct the assembly polls in Bengal in eight phases and suspected that the dates were



BJP vice-president Mukul Roy presents a party flag to Trinamul Congress leaders after they joined BJP in Kolkata on Saturday. — PTI

announced as per the suggestions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah for better management of the BJP's poll campaign.

She said the poll panel should not look at the state "through the eyes of the saffron camp" — a reference to the BJP.

Elections for the state will be held in eight phases, up from seven last time, beginning with polling for 30 seats on March 27, Chief Election Commissioner

Left-Cong-ISF front to hold mega Kolkata rally today

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 also concluded with both agreeing on 30 seats for the newly-floated outfit.

The negotiations between Congress and the Indian Secular Front (ISF) 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.

Chattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel will also be present, besides state leaders of the Congress and the Left parties. The state Congress and the Left wanted Rahul



Left Front chairman Biman Bose with party leader Sujana Chakraborty inspects the preparations at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Saturday. — PTI

Gandhi or Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to address the rally, which would have given a major boost to the alliance's campaign, but both refrained from it, considering the compulsions of the Kerala elections where the Congress-led UDF is in a direct contest against the LDF, sources said.

The CPI(M) has gone all out to campaign for the rally — branded as 'People's Brigade', launching innovative ways, from on social media to the streets.

The party's youth activists have been hosting flash mobs over the past few weeks at several locations across Kolkata, including shopping malls, busy traffic intersections and crowded localities.

A parody of hit Bengali number 'Tumpa Sona' on social media, asking people to attend the Brigade rally has also created a wave.

"At the Brigade rally, we will speak about alternative policies. We are fighting against both the TMC and the BJP, which are communal forces," senior

CPI(M) leader Md Salim said.

The Left-Congress, the vote share of which has been on a decline in West Bengal with the rise of the BJP, received a shot in the arm with Siddiqui joining the alliance ahead of the West Bengal polls, which is being seen mostly as a bipolar contest between the Trinamul Congress and BJP.

Siddiqui, a pirzada at one of the holiest shrines among Bengali Muslims — Furfura Sharif in Hooghly, launched the ISF last month. He created a flutter by meeting AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi ahead of the elections but ditched him for the Left-Congress.

West Bengal has 30 per cent Muslim population — a deciding factor in around 100-110 seats.

In case of a close contest, the Left-Congress-ISF alliance will become a deciding factor.

In 2016, the Congress and Left Front had fought together and bagged 77 seats in the 294-member Assembly. — PTI

Bengalis want its daughter back: PK

Kolkata: 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.

Mr Kishor 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 MES-SAGE 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. — PTI

IAF marks 2nd Balakot anniv with long-range precision strike mission

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

To mark the two-year anniversary of the Balakot strike, pilots of the squadron who carried out the operation held a long-range precision strike against a practice target. Indian Air Force (IAF) chief R.K.S. Bhadauria on Saturday flew in a Mirage 2000, part of a multi-aircraft sortie, with the same squadron pilots. The five-aircraft formation consisted of Mirage 2000s and Sukhoi-30 fighters.

A few days back, IAF carried out a long-range precision strike against a practice target to mark the second anniversary of the Balakot operations. The strike was carried out by members of the same squadron who carried out the actual operations.

On February 26, 2019, some 20 IAF Mirage 2000 took part in the pre-dawn strike at Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) major camp at Balakot by cross-



Precision strike carried out by Mirage 2000s against a dummy target by the squadron that carried out the Balakot air strike on February 26, 2019 on the occasion of its second anniversary on Saturday. — PTI

ing LoC. Some six Israel made precision-guided SPICE bomb of 1000 kg were dropped on the camp. The attack was in response to a terrorist attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama on 14th February in which 40 soldiers were killed.

The entire IAF operation had taken over 20 minutes, starting at 3.45 am and ending at 4.05 am.

This was the first time since the 1971 war that India has used air power against Pakistan. Even during the Kargil war, IAF had not crossed the LoC.

The Balakot attack was significant as it is not in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir but in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This signalled India's willingness to strike even assets inside Pakistan.

Army: Indo-Pak ceasefire won't hit anti-terror ops

Udhampur/Kupwara (JK), Feb. 27: Two top Army commanders said the fresh ceasefire between India and Pakistan will have no bearing on the counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir and that the force will exercise "maximum restraint" in the event of any violation by the neighbouring country.

The comments by the Army's northern commander Lt. Gen. Y.K. Joshi and General Officer Commanding, 28 Infantry Division, Maj. Gen. V.M.B. Krishnan at separate events came two days after India and Pakistan issued a joint statement to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the LoC and other sectors. The decision came into effect from the midnight of February 24/25. — PTI

Rare coin goes under hammer, fetches ₹56L

Bengaluru, Feb. 27: A rare 10.9 gram gold coin of Kam Bakhsh, the fifth son of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, went under the hammer here, fetching ₹56 lakh.

Marudhar Arts, a leading numismatic auction house here, held the auction at a price ranging between ₹45 lakh and ₹50 lakh, but it was sold for ₹56 lakh.

Rajendra Maru, the CEO of Marudhar Arts, told PTI the gold "Mohur" of Bijapur Daruz-Zafar mint has a Persian legend and brought in ₹56 lakh.

He, however, did not disclose the name of the buyer.

"The coin, weighing 10.90 gram, is almost uncirculated. So it's unique," Mr Maru, who is organising the auction, said.

According to a statement on Marudhar Arts' portal, Kam Bakhsh took active part in the wars.



A rare 10.9 gram gold coin of Kam Bakhsh, the fifth son of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

In 1707, he seized the control of the Bijapur fort and declared himself the king.

Gradually, Kam Bakhsh sway extended across much of Deccan winning control over Hyderabad, erstwhile Gulbarga (now Kalaburagi), Shahpur and Wackinkhera.

His inefficiency in handling administration led to the collapse of his kingdom, they said.

The older son of Aurangzeb, Shah Alam Bahadur after taking

reins of the Mughal empire took a serious note of Kam Bakhsh striking coins in his name.

In a pitched battle that ensued between the two armies on 13 January 1709, Kam Bakhsh was captured and the next day he died of wounds.

This coin is unusual and important, Marudhar Arts said explaining that coins of Kam Bakhsh are known from a number of mints: Bijapur, Ahsanabad, Nusratabad, Haidarabad, Torgal, Gokak.

Imtiyazgarh but this combination is not yet recorded for any of these issues. "We do not know when Kam Bakhsh declared himself the emperor but it must have been sometime in March 1707, soon after the fort of Bijapur came under his control, but we don't know the exact date for this event," the statement said. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

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?

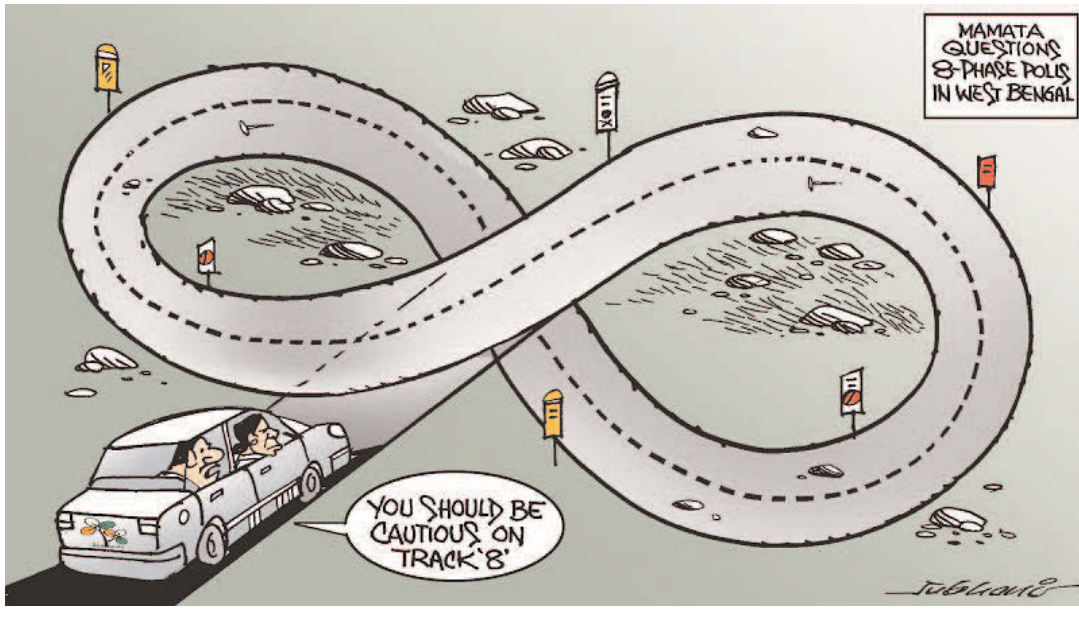
I am past becoming a supervillain; after all, doesn't world-domination have to be embarked on early (but, psst, should I worry about the potential threat posed by my nap-dodging children)? Very much a petty misdemeanour person myself, to help me sleep or fill sleepless nights, I've tried reading, herbal 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

TOO MANY PHASES

The Election Commission has sounded the poll bugle by announcing Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, West Bengal, and Assam's election schedule. Tamil Nadu will see a multi-cornered contest with umpteen parties in the fray, and the BJP and Congress will piggy-back on the local players. In West Bengal, chief minister and Trinamul Congress chief will have her task cut out in staving off the saffron challenge. The Congress whose fortunes are sliding downhill would fancy its chances in Kerala.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

SHIA FEINT BY US

IS THE WHITE HOUSE trying to win over Iran at the cost of its most trusted ally in the Muslim world, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? In the process, the Washington regime may end up sans any ally in the Middle East. One can draw this inference from the fact that the Joe Biden administration is leaving no stone unturned in winning the trust of Teheran. Its recent report has supposedly blamed the crown prince of the Riyadh royal family for the murder of the dissident leader Jamal Khashoggi. The Shia rulers of Iran are as untrustworthy as their Sunni arch-foes.

Arun Malankar
Mumbai

DON'T BE ELATED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Diamonds aren't forever". Hopefully, the fraudster Nirav Modi shall be served his just desserts. Given that he may be going for an appeal there might be many a slip between the cup and the lip. It begs the question whether his extradition shall help in any way in recovering the whopping swindled amount of ₹14,000 crores. Seemingly, it shall be flogging a dead horse. The RBI has always been reactive and is surprising that such an embezzlement took place under its very nose.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

CENSOR NEGATIVITY

THE NEED FOR setting up a mechanism to regulate Over-The-Top platforms and social media has its merits. Sometimes unreliable information tarnishes the image of a particular section of society. Such content needs to be filtered. Yet others misuse the platforms to indoctrinate people. Sometimes, people spread rumours and negativity about friends they envy. Some people are always bashing the Narendra Modi government to signal their own purported virtue by comparison.

Yugal Kishore Sharma
Faridabad

ROOT'S DREAM

ALTHOUGH THE THIRD India-England test match resulted in ignominious defeat for the visitors, Joe Root, the English skipper will certainly never forget Motera Stadium in his lifetime for another reason. In the wildest of his dreams, he could have never fathomed his unbelievable exploits as an occasional off-spinner, which catapulted him to the record books after this match. His five-wicket haul with a fantastic economy rate is certainly a dream come true for any part-time spinner, probably never to be replicated in the annals of cricketing history. Such are the quirks of the game!

Amit Banerjee
Mumbai

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

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

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 an 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".

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 recalculation 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 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

in a pair of events to mark the anniversary of the terrorist attack, in which 1,200 pounds of explosives hidden in a van detonated in a garage beneath the twin towers. It left a crater half the size of a football field.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey held a virtual Mass at the St. Francis of Assisi Church in Manhattan, honouring the four employees it lost in the attack: Robert Kirkpatrick, 61, Stephen Knapp, 48, Bill Macko, 47, and Monica Smith, who was 35 and pregnant when she died. Also killed were John DiGiovanni, 45, who had parked in the garage, and Wilfredo Mercado, 37, who worked for the Windows on the World Restaurant. Because of the pandemic, the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum held a hybrid memorial, with some relatives and survivors gathering at the 9/11 Memorial for a private midday ceremony and about 60 others watching a Zoom feed.

Flowers and small flags affixed with photos of the victims were placed next to their names on a plaque overlooking one of the site's two reflecting pools. The names of the victims were read, a bell tolled at the time of the attack — 12:17 pm — and a pipe and drum band performed "Amazing Grace." Some of the people watching the stream wiped away tears or placed a hand to their face as the ceremony concluded.

— AP

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

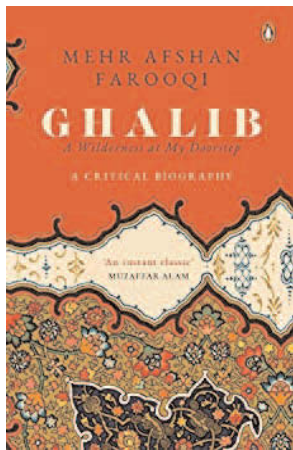
6 **THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph, ₹799

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

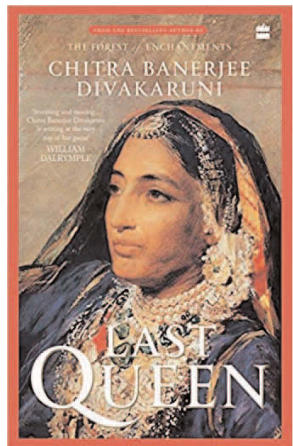
6 **HOMELAND ELEGIES**
Ayad Akhtar
Tinder Press, ₹1,050

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

8 **JUNGLENAMA: 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

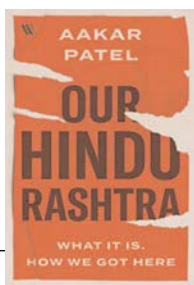
causes the maximum resentment in the minds of "Hindu" voters and of supporters of the BJP.

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

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 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 supremacy. 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.



diary

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 handcaps 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

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.

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 Game 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 courtesan'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-udaula Husain Dost Khan, and who was born into the Navaayat branch of South India's Muslims whose Arab forefathers had landed on the Konkan 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 foraging 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.

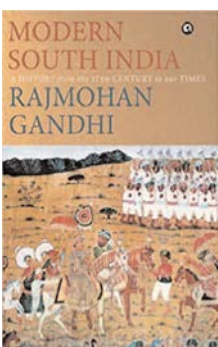
There isn't a page you can turn without learning of old intrigues, battles, conquests and defeats in a land ruled by princes but terrorised by their tax collectors who were ruthless. To evolve into true modernity may have taken centuries, but the book also places in perspective the power of one of Tamil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



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

By RAJMOHAN
GANDHI
Aleph, ₹799

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. — 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. — 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

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BATTING PARADISE

Motera likely to escape ICC 'Red Eye' as final Test pitch promises high scores

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.

"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 panicking. 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. 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 they only last two or three days." 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

GAYLE RETURNS TO WINDIES 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. — PTI

Prerak's 174 powers Saurashtra to big win

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

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, Satyajeet 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.

end their innings on a high.

MUMBAI CONTINUE DOMINANT SHOW

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

SHIKHA IS AXED, SHAFALI STILL NOT PICKED FOR 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. "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, who sounded miffed with the move, said on condition of anonymity. — 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



Manchester City's John Stones (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against West Ham in their English Premier League match at the Etihad stadium in Manchester on Saturday. The hosts won 2-1. — AP

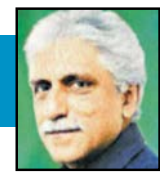
Stones seals it for leaders Man City

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. Antonio Michail 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. — PTI

THE RESULT	
Manchester City (Dias 30, Stones 68)	2
West Ham (Antonio 43)	1

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. They survived a stern test from fourth placed West Ham and home games against Wolves and Manchester United next week offer a chance to put the title within touching distance. — AFP

Pitch can't be blamed alone as England show no fighting spirit



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

The day-night, pink ball Test at Amdavad's new Narendra Modi Stadium finished in less than two days, creating a furore about whether the pitch was befitting a five-day match. Expert opinion was divided down the middle. Michael Vaughan and Dilip Vengsarkar thought the 22-yard rectangle strip was undercooked, unfair to batsmen, and poor advertisement for Test cricket. On the other hand, Sunil Gavaskar, Kevin

Pietersen, Geoff Boycott believed it was more poor batting, rather than the pitch, which was to blame. It's a compelling and complex debate. What transpired in the match itself throws up a certain argument but juxtaposed with everything else that has happened in the series, also spells out a different one. That the pitch was poor is without doubt, whatever the rationalisations — especially by India's players — after the match. Thirty wickets fell in two

days and the match was completed in 142.2 overs. In fact, this was the shortest Test match since 1935, when wickets wouldn't be covered and the elements had a greater influence on the surface. Given that the weather had no role to play, and that both sides possessed enough batsmen of calibre, it is not difficult to deduce that the 'pitch factor' was indeed crucial. The batting performance of both sides provides statistical support to this argument. England made a paltry 112 in the first innings and fared even worse in the second, scoring 81. Failure to score runs was not one-sided. India were bundled out for 145 in their innings, losing seven wickets in less than a session, with

Joe Root, a part time bowler, becoming destroyer in chief! By the time the floodlights came on, the match was over and done with. Matches finishing prematurely is not rare. In fact most results in Test matches come not in the final over, or even the last hour on the fifth day, but much earlier. Some fantastic contests have finished in 3-4 days. Weather, pitches, floodlights, colour, condition of the outfield, make of ball all have a huge bearing in this format. Players respond with high skills, sturdy temperament, patience, aggression, astute game sense to come out better in the contest. If one of the imponderables overwhelms all others, it skews a match badly.

If a pitch has such a strong influence as to make batting pure lottery — for both teams — there should be concern if one skill (even bowling on featherbeds) is taken out of the equation because of the pitch, the Test cricket loses flavour and pertinence. That said, the second aspect of the debate, about how England failed because of technical inadequacies, inability to learn swiftly from errors and perhaps most because of lack of gumption has deep relevance too. For some reason, after winning the first Test handsomely (by 217 runs), England fell into a defensive mode — compounded by a dubious rotation policy — and ended up playing into India's hands. The debacle at Amdavad

must be prefixed by what happened in the second Test at Chennai. Some unnecessary changes were made to the side. Anderson who had been so crucial in the first Test win, was rested for instance, making the bowling weak. More surprising was the approach of the batsmen. The first Test win had come on the back of a masterly double century by Root and a refreshingly forthright approach in taking on the Indian spinners, Ashwin included. If, in the second, the England batsmen looked inexplicably unsure, in the third they looked doomed. Having read the pitch wrongly and selected four pacers (including Stokes), the onus was on the batsmen to put up a decent score even if some balls

were turning square from the time the spinners came on. Winning the toss was a huge advantage which was squandered. A score of 225-235 could have put England in the driver's seat. As Nasser Hussain, former captain highlighted, to slump from 73-2 could not be attributed to the pitch alone, but showed the mindset of the players. They were petrified. It was no different in the second innings. There was no show of positivity, no enterprise to take the fight to the bowlers. The batsmen seemed resigned to horrid fate. The rout was inevitable. The Amdavad pitch was no help to their cause, of course. But neither did they help themselves by abject pusillanimity.