

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SUNDAY 28 | FEBRUARY 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 36°C  
**Min:** 21°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Maasi 16  
**Tithi:** Prathamai/ Thuvithiyai  
**Star:** Puram/ Uthiram  
**Rahukalam:** 4.30 pm to 6 pm  
**Yamagandam:** 12 noon to 1.30 pm  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.15 am  
**Zohar:** 12.27 pm  
**Asar:** 3.43 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.17 pm  
**Isha:** 7.29 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.18 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.26 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 7.26 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 7.58 AM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+16,741)	(+110)
1,10,96,378	1,57,085

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+486)  
TN: 8,51,063 12,493

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,41,84,766

### DEATHS

25,32,854

219

worldometers.info

## Woman injured in crude bomb blast in Pondy, hospitalised

**Puducherry:** A 41-year-old woman sustained injuries to her face when a country bomb exploded in neighbouring Odianmpet village on Saturday, police said. The woman picked up a paper parcel lying near her house and when she opened it, the crude bomb concealed in it, exploded, they said. The woman was rushed to the government general hospital. Police registered a case and were investigating. — PTI

## Chidambaram slams govt over its stand on farmers' protest

**New Delhi:** Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Saturday attacked the government over the ongoing farmers' protest, saying the reward to the farm sector for growing at 3.9 per cent in a recession year is to treat the protesting farmers as if they are enemies of the state. He asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi why did he not travel 20 km to talk to the protesting farmers sitting on Delhi's borders, even though he was travelling to Kerala and Assam.

## SC not to use WhatsApp groups to share VC links for hearings

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court will no longer use WhatsApp groups to share video conference links for court hearings, the apex court registry said on Saturday. In a circular, the registry said that instead of WhatsApp, the links for virtual court hearings in the apex court will be shared on registered email ids and registered mobile numbers of the concerned advocates-on-record and party-in-person.

## COUNTER

## POINT



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

## CITY | 2

**Modi govt a pick-pocket: Brinda Karat**



## NATION | 4

**Maha minister criticises Centre's OTT regulations**



## SPORT | 8

**Ashwin hits back at pitch critics**



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CONGRESS LEADER KICKS OFF POLL CAMPAIGN IN TN

# 'Made in TN' is my vision: Rahul

**ARULOLI M. | DC with agency inputs**  
THOOTHUKUDI, FEB. 26

Kicking off the Congress campaign for the Tamil Nadu Assembly election in Thoothukudi district, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday he wanted his shirt, mobile phone and camera to be 'made in Tamil Nadu' to compete with the Chinese industries.

Employment generation is a major issue to be addressed in the country, the former Congress president said, adding loan disbursement process should be made easy to help young entrepreneurs in the state

Mr Gandhi warned the electorate to be cautious about the BJP and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted to rule Tamil Nadu from New Delhi though he has little understanding of Tamil culture. Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami



Rahul Gandhi attempts salt scraping at a salt pan during his election campaign at Govangadu village in Thoothukudi district on Saturday.

— DC

is hand in glove with Modi on this count, Mr Gandhi said.

Training his guns on the Prime Minister over the Sino-India border stand-off, he said Mr Modi is 'scared' of the eastern

neighbor. "He is useful for only two persons," he said, taking a swipe at Mr Modi. "Essentially the Chinese occupied certain strategic areas in our country. They first tested the idea in Doklam to see

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

Campaigning in Sathankulam in the evening, Rahul Gandhi met Percy, elder sister of Benickson, victim of police torture who was killed along with his father, Jayaraj, last year. Listening to Ms Percy's complaint about the dragging of the case, Mr Gandhi promised all possible help from his side to speed up the case.

Earlier, Mr Gandhi visited a salt pan and interacted with the salt pan workers at Kovangadu village near Thoothukudi. Later interacting with a group of lawyers here the same day, he said with pride, "the BJP government cannot touch me, as I have been honest all through my political career."

## A-G declines permission for contempt case against Gogoi

**New Delhi, Feb. 27:** Attorney General K.K. Venugopal has refused to grant sanction to initiate contempt proceedings against former Chief Justice of India (CJI) and Rajya Sabha lawmaker Ranjan Gogoi for his alleged statements against the apex judiciary.

Activist Saket Gokhale had sought consent, a condition precedent for initiating criminal contempt proceedings, of the top-most law officer to initiate the case against the former CJI who had reportedly said at an event that the judiciary is "ramshackled" and it is quite unlikely for a person to get a timely verdict.

"I had the occasion to watch the entirety of the interview. It is obvious that all that has been said was good for the institution and will not any manner scandalise the court or lower its authority in the eyes of law," Venugopal said in his letter to the activist, denying consent for initiating the proceedings. Venugopal said though ex-CJI's statements were strong, but they reflected his views on the ills of the judiciary. The plea, seeking consent to initiate contempt proceedings against the nominated Rajya Sabha MP, had specifically referred to the statements of Justice Gogoi who had said, "You want a 5 trillion dollar economy but you have a ramshackled judiciary...if you were to go to court, you would only be washing your dirty linen in court. You won't get a verdict. I have no hesitation in saying it." — PTI

# G-23 says Cong is getting weaker, Jammu meet to strengthen party

**Jammu, Feb. 27:** In a public show of dissent, the 'G-23' leaders, including Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma and Kapil Sibal, who have been pressing for a leadership change and organisational overhaul in the Congress, gathered on one stage here on Saturday, saying the party is weakening and they have come together to strengthen it.

"It is an occasion to speak the truth and I will speak the truth. Why have we gathered here? The truth is we can see that the Congress is weakening. We had gathered earlier also and together we have to strengthen the Congress," Mr Sibal said addressing an event dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi.

● **The Congress leaders praised Azad for his contribution, with Sibal saying he is unable to understand why the party is not using the experience of a person like him**

The event was also attended by Congress leaders Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Manish Tewari, Vivek Tankha and Raj Babbar of the group, now called 'G-23', which had triggered a storm in the party last year with their letter to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, expressing unhappiness over its functioning and demanding a full-time party president.

The Congress leaders praised Mr Azad for his

contribution, with Mr Sibal saying he is unable to understand why the party is not using the experience of a person like him.

Mr Azad, who was among the vocal letter-writers and was not given a renomination after his Rajya Sabha tenure ended recently, said he has only retired from the Upper House and not from politics.

He was the leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha.

Asked about the Jammu meet of the leaders, the Congress said they were senior and highly respected members of the party and their best contribution to the Congress' cause would be to get active in five poll-bound states and strengthen the party there. — PTI ■ P2

## DISTRICT ADMIN ORGANISES FUNCTION

## Naveen blesses newly-wed HIV positive couple

**KSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC**  
BERHAMPUR, FEB. 27

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 Chief Minister talked to the newly-weds and extended his best wishes on the occasion.

The marriage of the couple was solemnised by Ganjam district administration at Shradddha 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 ritual. He also presented gifts on behalf of the state government to the couple. In their mid-twenties, the newlyweds arrived at Shradddha Sanjivani a few days ago for the solemnisation of their marriage. "We were brought up here at Shradddha Sanjivani and it gives us special feeling when we are getting married here," said the groom.

# ■ Seat-sharing discussions begin AIADMK clinches deal with PMK

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

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

Also the possibility of the third coalition emerging was visible with the actor Sarathkumar who heads the All-India Samathuva Makkal Katchi calling on Makkal Needhi Miaam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan and exploring the potential for a third front in Tamil Nadu. Sarathkumar claimed that the AIADMK did not even call the party for talks.

Leaders of the India Janayaka Katchi (IJK), which is now part of the DMK-led coalition, are also negotiating with the MNM for an alliance as the party is peeved over the less number of seats being offered to it.

Similarly, the DMDK, founded by actor Vijayakanth, is also pissed off with the AIADMK and organised a protest against the hike in petrol and diesel prices. But later on top leaders of the AIADMK called on party leader Vijaykanth to appease him and request him to continue with the alliance.

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

The meeting between the PMK and AIADMK, held in a hotel in Chennai, was attended by top leaders of the PMK Anbumani Ramadoss, G.K. Mani, A.K. Moorthy and Advocate



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss display the letter of agreement between the two parties on the matter of seat sharing for the upcoming Assembly elections in Chennai on Saturday.

— DC

● **"As per the agreement reached between AIADMK and PMK, 23 seats have been allotted to PMK," in the ruling party-led alliance, AIADMK coordinator and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam said**

● **BJP leaders in Tamil Nadu, including Union minister Kishen Reddy and state president L. Murugan and C.T. Ravi, too held talks with AIADMK leaders and demanded at least 25 seats for their party**

Balu and the top honchos of the AIADMK led by party coordinator O. Panneerselvam and co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

The two parties are fighting an Assembly election together after 2001, pointed out Dr Ramadoss, who said the PMK agreed for lesser number of seats because the 10.5 per cent exclusive reservation for Vanniyars was announced by the AIADMK government in the Assembly.

He also assured that the PMK would strive for the victory of the alliance in the elections and urged his followers to work towards that.

In the DMK camp, the talks with the Congress have been put on hold as the TNCC leaders have rushed to southern Tamil Nadu in view of party leader Rahul

Gandhis' visit. Their talks on seat-sharing had hit a road block as the DMK had only offered them only 15 to 20 seats and the Congress had told them that they would get back after discussing the matter with the high command.

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

However, it is believed that Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam would call on Union home minister Amit Shah when he visits Chennai and finalise the seat sharing. ■ P2

# IAF chief flies sortie on Balakot anniversary

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

To mark the second anniversary of the Balakot Operation, Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria on Saturday flew a multi aircraft sortie along with the squadron pilots who were involved in Balakot strike two years back. A few days back the IAF had 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 26th February 2019, some 20 IAF Mirage 2000



IAF carries out a long-range precision strike against a practice target to mark the second anniversary of the Balakot Operations.

— DC

took part in the pre-dawn strike at Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) major

camp at Balakot by crossing LoC. Some six Israel made precision-guided

# Centre fixes Covid-19 vaccine price at ₹250 per dose

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

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

From March 1, all citizens above 60 years of age, and those within the age bracket

● **"Emphasis was laid on the need for effective testing, comprehensive tracking, prompt isolation of positive cases and quick quarantine of close contacts," a Union health ministry official said**

of 45 to 59 years with specific comorbidities will be able to get the vaccine. To ramp up the Covid vaccination capacity, a large number of private facilities are being involved. Around 10,000 private hospitals empanelled under Ayushman Bharat PMJAY, more than 600 hospitals empanelled under CGHS and other private hospitals empanelled under

state government's health insurance schemes can participate as Covid Vaccination Centers (CVCs).

Government health facilities which will be used as CVCs include medical college hospitals, district hospitals, sub divisional hospitals, CHCs, PHCs, health sub centres and health and wellness centres.

Meanwhile, alarmed with

the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Cabinet secretary on Saturday held a meeting with the chief secretaries of Telangana, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and West Bengal. These states/UT were asked not to lower their guard, enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour and deal firmly with the violations. States have also been asked to follow effective surveillance and tracking strategies in respect of potential super-spreading events.

"Emphasis was laid on the

need for effective testing, comprehensive tracking, prompt isolation of positive cases and quick quarantine of close contacts," a Union health ministry official said.

These eight states/UTs have been reporting a high active caseload due to an increasing trend in new cases in the last week. Six states — Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat — have shown a surge in new cases. In the last 24 hours, 16,488 new cases were registered and 85.75 per cent of the new cases are from these six states.

# US House passes \$1.9tn coronavirus relief plan

**Washington, Feb. 27:** The US House passed an enormous, \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package Saturday, hailed by Democrats as a critical step in funneling new funding toward vaccinations, overburdened local governments, and millions of families devastated by the pandemic.

Four days after the Covid-19 death toll surpassed 500,000 in the United States, the sprawling measure backed by President Joe Biden and seen as a moral imperative by many now

heads to the Senate for consideration next week.

"After 12 months of death and despair, the American recovery begins tonight," congressman Brendan Boyle told the House chamber shortly before lawmakers approved the package on an rare post-midnight vote of 219 to 212. No Republicans voted for the bill. The sharply partisan result comes weeks after Biden's January 20 inauguration, when he called for unity in the face of a once-in-a-century health crisis. — AFP



## SHORT TAKES

## 3,520 cookers seized in Ariyalur district

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ARIYALUR, FEB. 27

Election flying squad officials seized 3,520 cookers worth Rs 12 lakh bearing photos of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam and its founder TTV Dinakaran, at Varnavasi near here on Saturday.

Official sources told DC that the flying squad headed by Saravanan engaged in a routine vehicle check, intercepted two lorries and found the cooker boxes with stickers in the name of 'Thanjai Mavatta AMMK Jayalalithaa Piranthanaal Vizha', and photos of J Jayalalithaa, Sasikala and TTV Dinakaran and party's advocate wing secretary, Velu Karthikeyan's name, on them. The officials brought the lorries to RDO office at Ariyalur, and seized the lorries. Returning officer of Ariyalur Assembly constituency, Ezumalai, is holding an enquiry, sources added.

## Returning officers appointed in Thanjavur dist

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, FEB 27

Collector M. Govinda Rao here has appointed returning officers for the eight assembly segments in the district. The district supply officer will be the returning officer for Thiruvudaimaruthur (reserve) assembly segment (Phone - 9445000286). RDO, Kumbakonam, is the returning officer for Kumbakonam assembly constituency (Phone - 9445000466). District Adi Dravida welfare officer will be returning officer for Papanasam assembly constituency (Phone - 9786759657), District backward class welfare officer will be returning officer for Thiruvaiyaru (Phone - 9442149101). RDO, Thanjavur, is the returning officer for Thanjavur assembly constituency (Phone - 9445000465). Asst. commissioner, excise, is the returning officer for Orathanadu assembly constituency (Phone - 9445074594), sub-collector, Pattukottai, is the returning officer for Pattukottai assembly constituency (Phone - 9445000467), and Registration special assistant collector will be returning officer for Peravurani (Phone - 9600175148).

**The district supply officer will be the returning officer for Thiruvudaimaruthur (reserve) assembly segment (Phone - 9445000286). RDO, Kumbakonam, is the returning officer for Kumbakonam assembly constituency (Phone - 9445000466)**

## Collector holds poll preparatory meet

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, FEB. 27

With the moral code of conduct coming into force following the announcement of elections for the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly on April 6, Collector M. Govinda Rao here on Saturday, set in motion preparatory works for the election.

Following a meeting held with members of recognised political parties and officials to be on

## ₹100 plus cr needed to conduct polls: Dy CM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam on Saturday told the Assembly that Rs 102.93 crore is needed for holding the April 6 assembly elections.

He presented the final supplementary estimates for the year 2020-21 in the State Assembly on Saturday, the last day of the session, for the approval of the House.

"I would like to highlight that Rs 102.93 crore is

required for the conduct of the Assembly election, of which a sum of Rs 102.38 crore has been provided in the supplementary estimates," he told the

House presenting the final supplementary estimates for 2020-21.

The provision has been made under the public department and the remaining amount would be met by re-appropriation within the grant, he said.

Placing the final supplementary estimates for Rs 21,172.82 crore, Panneerselvam, who holds the Finance portfolio said it

includes various items of additional expenditure necessitated on government account in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and other urgent requirements.

"I strongly believe that democratic norms need to be observed. As the Election Commission has announced the general election for TN Legislative Assembly yesterday, it would not be appropriate for me to specifically mention some of the important items of expenditure which is the normal practice," he noted.

He said for all items of expenditure, necessary government orders and sanctions have already been issued or these are ongoing schemes.

"None of these, which is being included in the final supplementary estimates is a new announcement or a new item of expenditure." Later, after Panneerselvam's reply to the general discussion on the interim budget for 2021-22, and passage of Appropriation Bill and Vote on Account, Speaker P Dhanapal adjourned the House sine die.



After wrapping up the last day of the Assembly session, CM K. Palaniswami and Deputy CM O. Panneerselvam along with ministers pay homage at Jayalalithaa's memorial on Saturday.

— DC



Stalin shaking hands with people during his election campaign at Padapai near Tambaram on Saturday.

— DC

## I'm honest, BJP govt can't touch me: Rahul

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THOOTHUKUDI, FEB. 27

Interacting with a group of lawyers here the same day, Rahul said with pride, "The BJP government cannot touch me, as I have been honest all through my political career."

Participating in a lawyers' gathering organised at the VOC College here on the first day of his three-day tour in the southern districts, Rahul Gandhi came down heavily on the BJP and the RSS of having destroyed the secular fabric of the Constitution and political institutions including the judiciary and the media.

Stating, "We cannot rely on our constitutional and political institutions anymore, as all of them including Parliament have been penetrated, disturbed and destroyed by the concentrated capital combined with the RSS," Rahul said that the country was going through a

challenging period. Those questioning the RSS and the BJP were threatened with sedition charges and thrown away."

"I am however lucky, as all through my political career I have been honest, and this gives me the strength to fight the RSS and the BJP. They cannot use the ED (enforcement directorate) or the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) against me, as they are very well aware that I am not corrupt," added Rahul.

Stating that the country in the last six years has been witnessing a systematic attack on all constitutional institutions, on the judiciary and the free press, by the RSS and its allies, the only way out from this dangerous situation would be through people's movement. "People's action is possible only when ordinary citizens realise that this country is not run by mandates, but by undemo-

cratic forces," he added.

Rahul also faulted the RSS' display of money and muscle power for its MLAs in states like Madhya Pradesh and Pondicherry, with which the BJP managed to topple elected Congress governments.

The BJP has monopolised the political financing system in its favour, he added.

Terming the 'Citizenship (Amendment) Act' (CAA) as highly discriminatory, Rahul reaffirmed his party's fight against the three farm laws which according to him were framed for the benefit of the two corporate friends of the Prime Minister. Adding that reforms in Indian agriculture and agricultural marketing system was essential, Rahul Gandhi said that it should be done in consultation with the farmers, labourers and small farmers.

election duty, to discuss preparations for the elections and the poll code to be followed, the collector told presspersons that 24 flying squads have been formed at the rate of three per assembly constituency for the eight constituencies, to keep vigil on the election process.

"Nine border checkpoints have been formed to intensify checking. Those who carry cash more than ₹50,000 should do so with proper documents. A round-the-

clock control room has been set up at the collectorate. People can dial 1950 for information about elections," the collector said.

There are 2,885 polling booths in the district. One hundred and two polling stations have been identified as sensitive. Political parties have been asked to remove flags and banners put up in public places by February 28. A total of 14,000 personnel will be on poll duty in the district, the collector added.

**In fact, there were too many attempts in the department to hush up the case and the only silver lining behind the dark cloud was that the entire police force was not behind him**

of IPS officers, is one pointer to the mood in the department, where most officers were against letting a sexual predator escape unscathed. If an IPS officer tried his level best to stop the victim officer from proceeding to Chennai, the episode came to light only because there were policemen who squeaked.

Then, of course, the IPS Association, particularly the young officers, put pressure on the government to act on the woman's com-

plaint. Besides, the government also faced a threat of exposure from the DMK, whose MPs had started tweeting about the molestation of a woman officer inside the car of a senior officer the moment the news came out. The DMK was even otherwise angry with Rajesh Das for mistreating its cadre and functionaries arrested for holding protests. Udhayanidhi Stalin, the young wing secretary of DMK, openly told a meeting that when the DMK came to power the name of Rajesh Das would be remembered.

The extraordinary loyalty of Rajesh Das to a ruling party is common knowledge. Of course, he had been servile to governments all through his career since 1989, often earning the wrath of common people and social activists for his oppressive actions and

uncouth style of breaking protests. That was one reason there were too many people baying for his blood after the young officer filed the complaint against all odds. The government too had no alternative other than to take action against him. Yet, he was not suspended. Only put on compulsory wait. Then the committee was not seemingly given any time limit to complete the investigations.

But one big flaw in the police department that some activists point out is the lack of an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), which was part of the guidelines issued by the Supreme Court in the Vishaka case. If an ICC had been in place in the police department, women facing sexual harassment in the workplace could easily file a complaint without going through the hassles that the

due to the excise duty and tax of 70 percent levied by the Union Government, petrol prices are going up day by day, which crossed Rs 100 per litre in many parts of the country. The CPI(M) and Left parties are continuously fighting to reverse the abnormal price hike on petrol, she added.

Brinda also blamed the Centre for its farm laws. The farmers have been agitating for more than the last three months for repeal of the 'three black farm laws'.

The Centre, not only attacks the farmers but also their basic rights. It was very shameful that

the Tamil Nadu government kept silent over the farmers' cause, she added.

To a question, she said the CPI(M)-led Left government in Kerala is doing its best and saving the public sector undertakings from privatization, besides ensuring social security and standing against the new labour policies of the Centre. She said there is going to be a change in the state government in Tamil Nadu. People are awaiting an opportunity and predicted that the BJP-AIADMK combination is going to be soundly defeated in the April 6 elections.



CPM leader Prakash Karat is seen addressing a public meeting organised at Madurai on Saturday.

— DC



## Kamal is CM candidate of 'third front'

From P1

However, it is believed that Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam would call on Union home minister Amit Shah when he visits Chennai and finalise the seat sharing. When Mr Haasan was asked about the Congress joining it, he gave an ambiguous answer that triggered speculations of the Congress tying up with MNM. When Mr Sarathkumar, who showed interest in tying up with Mr Haasan was asked who the chief minister candidate would be, he replied that it would be decided later on.

Mr Haasan, however, is clear that he would be the chief ministerial candidate of his alliance. So it needs to be seen who all would come together to form the third alliance, if at all that happens.

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MNM leader Kamal Hassan greets Pzha Karupiah who joined his party on Saturday.

— DC

## Modi govt a pick-pocket: Brinda Karat

R. VALAYAPATHY/DC  
TIRUCHY, FEB. 27

Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) politburo member, Brinda Karat, said that the election commission of India has a crucial role in ensuring free and fair elections in the West Bengal state assembly that is to be held in eight phases, but so far, the election commission did not take up any steps to ensure free and fair elections there.

In a press conference here on Saturday, Brinda Karat came down heavily on the Narendra Modi government 'a pick pocket government'.

She also said, although crude prices are very low compared to olden days,



the people in several possible ways, especially in the rise of fuel prices. She termed the Narendra Modi government 'a pick pocket government'.

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the people in several possible ways, especially in the rise of fuel prices. She termed the Narendra Modi government 'a pick pocket government'.

## Why predators in khaki continue to prowl



G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

Why is there a general perception that nothing will come of the committee set up under senior IAS officer Jayashree Raghunadhan to probe the charges of sexual harassment against DGP Rajesh Das? One may blame it on the general scepticism that has come to grip society but in this particular case activists and common people who closely watch the happenings in the police department have too many questions to raise against the government.

For those not aware of the

case in point, this is it: Rajesh Das, who was till the other day a Special DGP in charge of Law and Order in the State, was accused of sexual harassment by a young woman IPS officer working as an SP in a district and the government 'quickly' reacted to it by keeping him on compulsory wait and constituting the committee.

How 'quickly' was the government action is a question of rights activists, to which we shall come a bit later. Before that, when the State Human Rights

Commission (SHRC), taking into account a newspaper report, seeks a report on a senior IPS officer trying to prevent the victim from proceeding to Chennai to file a complaint, it only points to a canker that had set in the police department. Also, the government did not crack down, taking the DGP grade officer from the Law and Order and ordering the inquiry by a six-member committee comprising three IPS officers and also an external person, immediately after it came to know of his transgression.

In fact, there were too many attempts in the department to hush up the case and the only silver lining behind the dark cloud was that the entire police force was not behind him. The DGP himself had to threaten to sue other officers, who spoke ill of him in the closed WhatsApp group

Or, should the government set up another committee to track down the past crimes of Rajesh Das vis-à-vis his behaviour with women police? Of course peccadillos of police officers - leave alone the policemen - have always gone unreported and rather overlooked all these years.

But what gives officers like Rajesh Das the audacity to misbehave with a junior colleague and then try to hush it all up is the power they derive by being servile to politicians. Maybe he even drew some extra arrogance that added to his impertinence from his wife's clout as a bureaucrat. Whatever it is, police officers running roughshod over women, within their department and outside, can be stopped only if politicians stop using the police force to further their own narrow gains.



## IN BRIEF



Naviramalai stone inscription found at Puthurnad in Javdhu hills in Tirupathur district on Saturday.

—K.Senthil Nathan

## Free temples from gov't's hold: Sadhguru

DC CORRESPONDENT  
COIMBATORE, FEB. 27

In a stern tweet, Sadhguru, founder - Isha foundation, called on the state government to free temples from its control to enable their upkeep, preserve their sanctity and reverse their alarming state of decline.

To protect the thousands of temples that are gradually being ruined, the government should free temples from its clutches and hand them over to devotees, added Sadhguru in his tweet to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palanisami, Opposition leader MK Stalin and actor Rajinikanth.

The tweet was part of a series of tweets that Sadhguru has recently released to highlight the pathetic state of temples under the state's control.

In a video message released on Twitter, Sadhguru called the temples 'the source of our Tamil culture', and said that they must be cared for and managed by devotees who "value temples more than their lives."

He termed the desecration of temples a 'slow poison', adding that he was pained by the neglect of these places of worship.

# Pandemic takes heavy toll on rare disease patients

T. SUDHEESH | DC  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

The restrictions and financial setbacks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have affected the diagnosis and treatment of rare disease patients across the country. On the occasion of Rare Disease Day 2021, which falls on Sunday, activists, and caregivers have asked for support from the governments to improve the quality of service to the patients including medical and surgical management, rehabilitation, daycare facilities, and in-patient services.

The Voluntary Health Services had started a centre in the state in 2019 to cater to the multi-organs care that persons with rare diseases require. The centre is aimed to identify persons with rare diseases and

ensure supportive care infrastructure as the treatment is expensive.

A former official with the Organisation for Rare Diseases India (ORDI) told DC on condition of anonymity that fund crunch was always an obstacle in providing proper care and protection to persons with rare diseases. When the pandemic situation unfolded, the allocation of the government came down substantially affecting many projects', the official said.

M. Raja, joint secretary, and state co-ordinator, Lysosomal Storage Disorders Support Society, India (LSDSS), pointed out that the travelling restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns had badly affected the health of persons with rare diseases. The patients are unable to

avail the benefits of government schemes as travelling has become a risky affair in this period. The governments should come up with policies that would make life of persons with rare diseases easier', he said.

It may be recalled that in May 2014, LSDSS had filed an application with the state government to provide free treatment to patients suffering from rare diseases. According to the LSDSS, 600 people across the state have registered with the society.

Meanwhile, Chirag Trivedi, president, Indian Society for Clinical Research, said that 1 in 20 persons will have to live with a rare disease at some point in their life. The large number of rare disease patients living without access to treatment and management of their con-

ditions either because of lack of awareness, lack of appropriate diagnosis, and lack of treatment options should be a wake-up call for the clinical research community. There is an urgent need for extensive research across the spectrum so that rare disease patients and their caregivers can look forward to a life of better quality. Rare Disease Day is a reminder to researchers, universities, students, companies, policymakers, and clinicians to do more study and to make them aware of the importance of research for the rare disease community', he said.

There are at least 7,000 known rare diseases across the globe. However, most have no treatment or very limited treatment options available. A total of 70 million out of 300 million rare disease patients worldwide are currently in India.



TN Chief Secretary Rajeev Ranjan and DGP J.K. Tripathy give away Presidents Police Medal for distinguished service at RR Stadium in Egmore on Saturday.

—DC

## 26 flights delayed in Chennai due to dense fog

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

At least 26 flights were delayed due to dense fog at the Chennai Airport on Saturday morning, the officials said.

The thick blanket of fog reduced the visibility, making it difficult for the flights to take off and land at the airport, the airport officials said.

According to the sources, a Chennai bound Spicejet flight from Delhi was diverted to Bengaluru Airport due to heavy fog.

Flights from Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Hoogley were delayed for more than one hour.

Similarly, around 20 flights from Chennai to Trichy, Madurai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Thoothukudi, Kolkata, Pune, Doha were also delayed.

## Harvested heart flown in, transplanted

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

A live heart harvested from a brain-dead person in Madurai for transplantation on a 36-year-old critically ill female patient was flown in an air ambulance to Chennai on Saturday. It reached the city hospital in 45 minutes, saving the life of the recipient thanks to the prompt intervention by doctors, government officials and traffic police.

The police created a green corridor route from Velammal hospital to Madurai airport and from Chennai airport to Rela Hospital in the city. The organ reached the hospital at 12.35 pm.

Tamilmani, a resident of Madurai city, met with an accident near Sivagangai on February 23 and was declared brain dead on February 26. Although the brain became defunct, other organs like a kid-

ney, liver, and the eyes were in good condition and functioning.

The doctors at the Madurai hospital counselled the brain-dead patient's family members for organ donation and the family wholeheartedly agreed to organ harvesting and transplantation. Permissions were immediately sought from the government via email and phone calls, and the state government wasted no time and promptly responded by clearing all legal formalities.

Tamilmani had completed his catering course and was planning to go abroad. But he was stranded here due to Covid-19. He is a regular blood donor. The transplant team headed by Dr Sranep Attawar, programme director - heart and lung transplant, Rela Hospital, and KIMS performed the heart transplant. It took around four hours to complete the procedure and the patient's condition is stable.

## Vaccination for elders to start soon

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

The Tamil Nadu health department has made elaborate arrangements to vaccinate senior citizens and those aged between 45 and 59 with co-morbidities, following the Centre's nod to start vaccination drives for elders.

In a statement on Saturday, the department said that as many as 761 empanelled private hospitals have expressed willingness to function as Covid-19 vaccination centres.

As a result, a meeting has been convened twice with the nodal officers of these hospitals.

Vaccines will be made available depending on the need

of government and private vaccination centres.

For self-registration, a COWIN 2.0 application is being introduced based on Aadhar and other permitted proofs such as voter ID card, driving licence, PAN card or pension document with photographs.

In addition to this, on-site walk-in registration and on-site group mobilisation such as pensioners' association, residents' welfare associations, employee associations bringing in eligible persons will be permitted.

For co-ordination, Dr T.S. Selvavinayagam, the director of public health, on Saturday communicated detailed guidelines to the district

authorities. Sivagnam, project director of the Tamil Nadu Health System Reforms Project, also reviewed the arrangements at the empanelled hospitals.

Meanwhile, the union government has permitted the private hospitals functioning as Covid-19 vaccine centres to charge Rs 250 per person as cost of vaccine.

According to the health department, the state has so far received 23.77 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccines, of which 21 lakh are Covishield.

A total of 4.57 lakh health workers and frontline workers have been vaccinated so far in Tamil Nadu against the target of 8.21 lakh beneficiaries.



Heavy mist causes low visibility at Koodal Nagar area in Madurai on Saturday. Two-wheeler riders use headlights early in the morning.

—K.Manikandan

## TN transport workers withdraw strike for now

Chennai, Feb 27: The Tamil Nadu government transport workers, who have been on indefinite strike since the last three days, on Saturday decided to call off their strike for now and resume work.

The Confederation of All Transport Employees Unions, comprising nine trade unions, commenced the indefinite strike on February 25 demanding that the state government conclude the 14th wage revision talks immediately.

It also demanded pending terminal benefits of workers retired since 2020 and non-allocation of funds in the budget to compensate the losses incurred by the corporation which is a service sector. The strike was

withdrawn following tripartite talks between the trade union leaders, state transport officials and labour department authorities here on Saturday evening.

"All the trade unions involved in the strike have decided to withdraw the strike and to defer the strike till a new government is in place after the April 6 Assembly election," M Shanmugam, general secretary of Labour Progressive Federation (LPF), affiliated to the DMK, told reporters here.

He said the unions have resolved not to cause any inconvenience to the members of the public as the election commission's model code of conduct has come into force. "We will

pursue our demands when a new government is formed after the election," he added. CITU, AITUC and INTUC are also among the unions that had participated in the indefinite strike.

At the talks held here, the state government assured them an interim relief of Rs 1,000 for workers in lieu of wage revision, till the negotiations are completed. Further, the officials reportedly assured them that disciplinary action will not be taken against workers who were on strike for three days nor their wages deducted from salaries during the strike period. Following this, the trade unions announced withdrawal of strike with immediate effect.

—PTI



## Movie review

ANUPAMA  
SUBRAMANIAN

Sangathalaivan, based on a novel Thariyudan and written by Bharathinathan, speaks about labour welfare in power loom textile units.

Set in a small town, Rangan (Karunas) is a straightforward worker in a power loom mill run by his materialistic relative (Marimuthu).

Initially, he avoids getting close to Shivalingam (Samuthirakani), the revolutionary union leader who toils for the betterment of the workers, as he fears antagonizing his 'mudha-

lali'. However, he has a change of heart after his colleague meets with a ghastly accident and his owner's true color is revealed. When Lingam and Rangan raise their voices to compensate the affected person, the owner uses his influence, and the former is subjected to police brutality.

On coming out of the

## Moderately engaging

**SANGATHALAIVAN**  
CAST: Samuthirakani, Karunas, Ramya Subramanian, Sunulakshmi

Direction: Manimaaran  
RATING: 2.5/5

police case with Lingam's help, Rangan decides to work for his peers and joins the union. When Lingam is arrested in Goondas Act, Rangan takes over as Sangathalaivan. Chaos ensues, and Rangan's life goes for a wild ride.

Karunas is the heart and soul of the movie and he simply excels in the given character. Samuthirakani in a tailor-made role as

usual mouths plethora of messages in a preachy tone. Ramya as Kani's wife does a neat job. Marimuthu as the ruthless factory owner and Sunulakshmi, who is forced to sacrifice her love for Karunas do their parts well. Manimaaran has touched upon several issues in the textile industry like low wages, unreasonably long working hours, poor facilities including lack of restrooms and social security measures like insurance for the workers and how labour unions strive to ensure welfare for the workers.

After a point, the film becomes preachy and predictable with no real twists and turns, which reduces the engagement quotient.



ANUPAMA  
SUBRAMANIAN

Unlike other gangster stories, which are usually set in the backdrop of North

Chennai, Madurai or Tirunelveli, director Jaishankar has chosen the hilly terrain of Kodaikkanal for his Vettai Naa.

Sekar (RK Suresh), a local

## VETTAI NAAI

CAST: RK Suresh, Ramki, Subhiksha, Rama

Direction: Jaishankar  
RATING: 2.25/5

thug is a loyal servant to his master (Ramki), who controls the entire area. Sekar chances upon a schoolgirl Rani (Subhiksha) and falls hook-line-sinker for her and stalks her to achieve his goal. The duo gets married. However, Rani insists that

Sekar leaves rowdiness and takes up a job instead. Slowly, Sekar also has a change of heart and wants to turn a new leaf in life. But the repercussions from various quarters including his boss are unimaginable.

RK Suresh fits the role of a ruffian perfectly and shines in action sequences. The first half portrays him in a role with grey shades. However, when there was a lot of scope for him to perform post-intermission after the story takes a diversion, the actor somewhat struggles to emote natural-

ly. Ramki is adequate. Subhiksha in a role with multiple shades around whom the story revolves simply excels. Rama and Namo Narayana in the supporting cast chip in their best.

Jaishankar's story might be as old as a hill, but one hopes he could have infused some freshness to its screenplay and proceedings.

Technically, Munish Easwaran's cinematography and Ganesh Chandrasekaran's music are functional.

## HC declines to quash criminal proceedings against R.S.Bharathi

J.STALIN | DC  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

The Madras high court has declined to quash the criminal proceedings against DMK MP R.S.Bharathi, pending before the Special Court for the trial of criminal cases related to MPs and MLAs of Tamil Nadu in Chennai, for allegedly making disrespectful remarks against retired judges of high court belonging to a lower caste.

Justice N.Sathish Kumar, who dismissed the petition filed by R.S.Bharathi, directed the trial court to strictly follow the provisions under section 309 of Cr.PC and the guidelines given by the Supreme Court in Vinod Kumar Vs State of Punjab case and complete the trial on day-to-day basis expeditiously, without any further delay.

The prosecution case was based on a complaint given by one Kalyana Sundaram alleging that while speaking at a public meeting on February 15, 2020, R.S.Bharathi had made disrespectful remarks on the members of the oppressed class stating that the appointment of

Justice A.Varadharajan, a retired judge of the Madras high court, who belongs to lower caste and other 7 or 8 appointments of lower caste judges of the high court were at the alms rendered by the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, an FIR was registered and after investigation, a charge sheet was filed before the special court. R.S.Bharathi filed the present petition to quash the charge sheet.

Senior counsel R.Shanmugasundaram, appearing for the petitioner submitted that the defacto complainant selec-

tively extracts few lines from the speech of the petitioner. The entire prosecution has been made due to political animosity with mala fide intention since the petitioner belongs to a different political party. The petitioner has simply thought to give credit for the appointment of judges among the members of the Scheduled Caste. His remarks were not intended to disrespect judges. Hence, the speech of the petitioner should not be construed to mean that he has insulted or humiliated other judges of the Scheduled Caste or the members of Scheduled Caste, he added.

State public prosecutor A.Natarajan, assisted by advocate M.M.Muzammil, submitted that the entire speech of the petitioner not only disrespects the judges from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, but also insulted the other members of the Scheduled Caste. His entire allegations when read together, the same lead to the conclusion that the accused has intended to mean that Scheduled Caste members have no merit to hold higher posts. The prosecution has examined 30 witnesses and collected several materials to prove the charge. Hence, as a matter of right, the charge sheet filed against the petitioner cannot be quashed, he added.

The judge said when the allegations put against the accused carefully perused, the remarks made by the accused prima facie show that he has remarked that the people, except in Tamil Nadu, were idiots. He has also stated that till now, no one from the Scheduled Caste become a judge of the high court of Madhyapradesh. Only the leader Karunanidhi, made

Justice Varadharajan, who belongs to Scheduled Caste as judge of Madras high court. Similarly, 7 or 8 judges from the Scheduled Caste were also appointed at the alms rendered by the DMK. The statements prima facie indicate the allegations targeted against Scheduled Caste. This court restrains itself from expressing any views as to whether such utterance attracts the offence or not, the judge added.

The judge said the allegations prima facie show that such statement leads inference as if except the alms rendered by the DMK, the members from Scheduled Caste would not have become a judge of the high court. It was nothing but humiliation and insult to the oppressed community. The entire statements made by the person were not in good taste. Intellectual debates have been forgotten by the so-called leaders. On the other hand, under the guise of freedom guaranteed under the Constitution, the persons claiming to be public leaders spitting venom against opponents. It has become routine affairs. Such debate was not good for society or the younger generation. The leaders were required to engage with an intellectual debate and not on a personal grudge. "Be that as it may, the prosecution has also examined as many as 30 witnesses and collected several documents also. With the available materials, whether the offence is made out or not, could be seen only after the appreciation of entire evidence and it is the domain of the trial court to test the credibility of the case put forward by the prosecution", the judge added.



## IN BRIEF

## G-23 SAYS CONGRESS HAS WEAKENED

From Page 1

However, it did not comment on the leaders' concern over the "weakening" of the Congress.

In Jammu, Mr Sharma echoed his Mr Sibal saying that the party has weakened over the last decade. He said none of the leaders present there have come into the party through shortcuts and nobody has the right to tell "if we are Congressmen or not".

He said they can visit any part of India and have come here to send a message that they are thankful for Mr Azad's contribution and are standing with him.

"A party can make you an office-bearer but only a few who are recognised by the people go on to become leaders," he said at the event, where the Congress leaders, wearing saffron headgears, posed for pictures.

Mr Hooda said there are two kinds of people in the Congress. "Some who are in Congress and others like Mr Azad who have Congress in them."

"All of us have covered a very long distance to reach where we are today. We have not come from above, through the window or the skylight, all of us have walked through the door. We have come through the students' movement and the youth movement," Mr Sharma said.

"I have not given anyone the right to tell me if we are Congressmen or not. Nobody has that right. We will build the party. We will strengthen it. When the Congress is united... it will also raise the morale of the people of the country," he said.

This is the first time that the dissenters have together publicly vent out their anger and comes ahead of elections in Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

"I have no hesitation in saying... an organisation can give you an office. The Congress can make you an office-bearer but not every office-bearer can become a leader. Only some become leaders, those who are recognised by the people, not just in one state but far off in Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, UP and Karnataka," Mr Sharma said.

Former Haryana chief minister Hooda said only when the Congress and the opposition are strengthened, will the country be strengthened.

Mr Babbar said the "G-23" stands for "Mahatma Gandhi's 23". "With their firm resolve, Mahatma Gandhi's 23 will work to strengthen Congress and make Congress victorious," the former UP Congress chief said.

Mr Sibal said they came here to take forward the Congress party to new heights. -PTI

## 'SUSPECTS HAD DONE RECCE OF AMBANI'S HOUSE'

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 27

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

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

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

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



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

- PTI

## Parties begin seat sharing talks in Kerala

## LDF, UDF to finalise their candidates by next week

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 27

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

**The CPM-led ruling LDF**

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

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

CPM acting state secretary Mr A

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

## Congress-led UDF

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

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

Janata Dal - have quit the Front.

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

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

## BJP-led NDA

Senior BJP leader and

seats to defeat the BJP.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LEFT-CONG-ISF RALLY TO KICK OFF BENGAL CAMPAIGN

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

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

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

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

## TRANSFERS IN ASSAM PUT ON HOLD BY ECI

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 27

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

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

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

## Maha minister criticises Centre's OTT regulations

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 'WB people want its daughter back'

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

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

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

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

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

Meyekei Chaye", portraying Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee mascot with a focus on women voters and Bengali sub-nationalism.

The BJP, however, mocked Kishor and said he has no idea about the ground reality in Bengal.

It may be recalled that earlier, in a tweet in December, Kishor had vowed to quit Twitter if the BJP crossed double digits in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections.

Kishor then wrote that BJP would struggle to secure even double digits in the West Bengal assembly election.

His tweet was in response to Home Minister Amit Shah setting a target of winning more than 200 out of 294 seats in West Bengal assembly polls in 2021.

The Election Commission has announced eight-phase elections in West Bengal from March 27 to April 29. Results will be declared on May 2 along with the three other poll-bound states and the union territory of Puducherry.

West Bengal has a 294-member assembly. -PTI

## GUJARAT LOCAL BODIES POLLS TODAY

Ahmedabad, Feb 27:

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

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

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

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

## MVA govt under pressure ahead of Assembly session

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 27

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

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

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

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

State BJP chief Chandrakant Patil said, "If the Chief Minister fails to ask Mr Rathod resign before the start of the session, we will now allow the assembly to function. Mr Thackeray should make a statement on this issue on the first day of the session."

NCP's Dhananjay Munde, who is a social justice and special assistance minister, was accused of rape by a Mumbai-based singer Renu Sharma, with whose sister Karuna Sharma he has admitted to have a long relationship and two children.

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

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

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

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

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



## SHORT TAKES

NOD TO \$650M  
FB PRIVACY  
LAWSUIT DEAL

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

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

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

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

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

SHARIF NEPHEW  
RELEASED FROM  
JAIL ON BAIL

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

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

PROTESTS OVER  
WRITER'S DEATH  
IN B'DESH JAIL

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

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

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

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

NIGERIA SCHOOL  
ABDUCTION: 42  
VICTIMS FREED

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

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

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

US: MBS approved  
Khashoggi murder

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

US DOESN'T WANT  
RUPTURE WITH  
SAUDIS: BLINKEN

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

Dems reintroduce law to  
stop future Muslim bans

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

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

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

US for end to China  
multi-entry visas

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

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

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

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

— PTI

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

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

— PTI

## SHARP | CRITICISM

## Host developing a plan to address lack of diversity issue

## Will recruit PoC members: Globe org

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We are fully committed to ensuring our member-

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

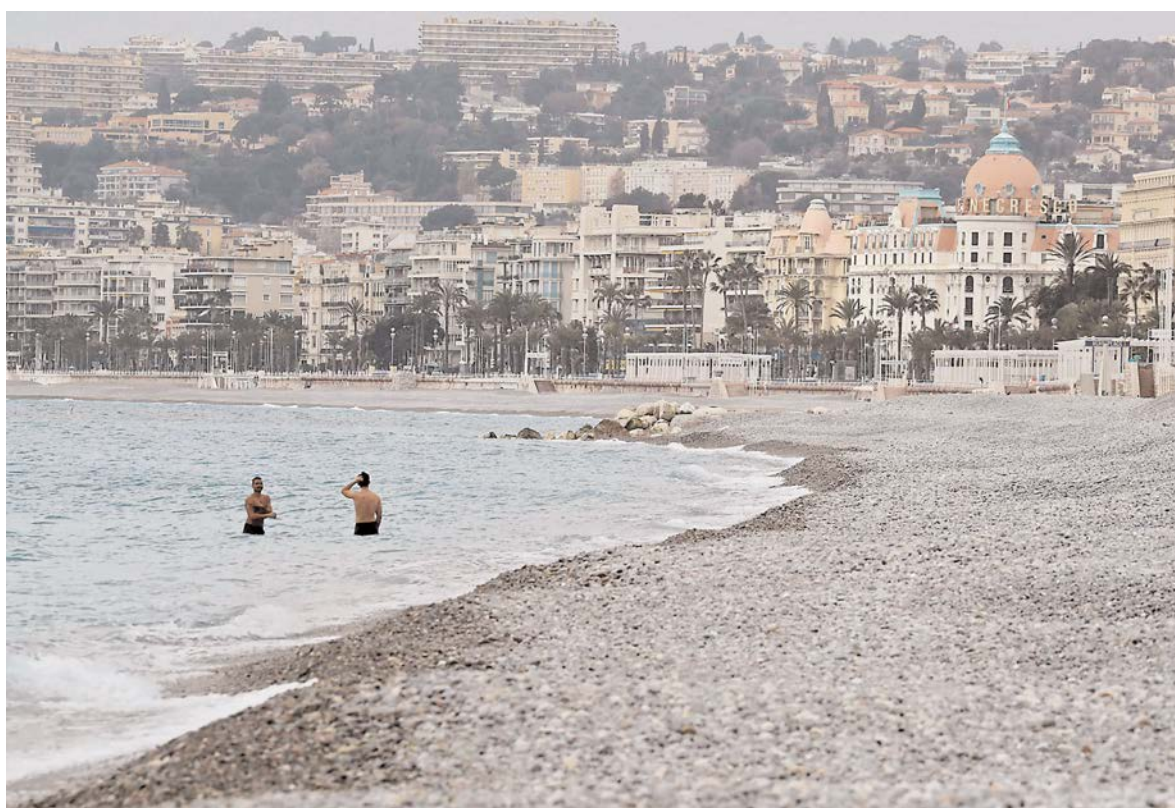
soon as possible."

Time's Up took aim at the HFPA in a tweet saying "a cosmetic fix isn't enough." The activist organisation also included the hashtag #TimesUpGlobes.

Brown, an award presenter, posted the Time's Up photo on social media with his own criticism.

"For any governing body of a current Hollywood award show to have such a lack of voting representation illustrates a level of irresponsibility that should not be ignored," he said.

Brown said the HFPA must do better. He said the organisation has a responsibility to show its "constituency is fully reflective



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



## DECCAN Chronicle

28 FEBRUARY 2021



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

## Ode to sleep, and sleepless spirits

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

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

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

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

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

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

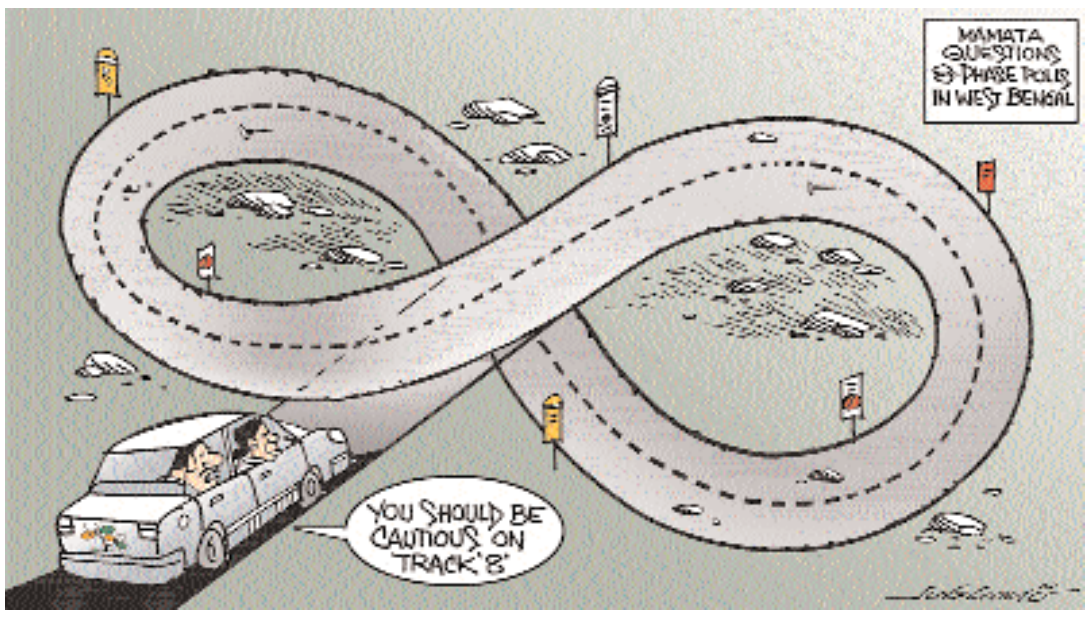
I am past becoming a supervillain; after all, doesn't world-domination have to be embarked on early (but, psst, should I worry about the potential threat posed by my nap-dodging children)? Very much a petty misdemeanour person myself, to help me sleep or fill sleepless nights, I've tried reading, herbal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

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



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

Subhani



## The Pak arithmetic: Strategy over ideology



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another theory that has been bandied about is that

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

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

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

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

The intrusion, therefore,

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LETTERS

### MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

It is welcome that the Model Code of Conduct for concerned governments and competing political parties came into force the moment the poll schedule was announced by the Election Commission on February 26 for Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala Assembly elections and for byelections to two Lok Sabha seats, one each in TN and Kerala. While the official notifications are another two weeks away, bringing Model Code of Conduct with immediate effect helped to provide a more or less level mat for the wrestling parties. Perhaps, a review of rules and practices, on the period of Model Code of Conduct for increasing it to six months, would be ideal as Government-financed election oriented media advertisements, intended to advance the prospects of ruling parties, are regularly seen in our democratic governance. An incidental advantage to voters is that they would be saved from such advertisements, most of the pieces being boring, allergic and nearly breeding contempt. The savings on state exchequer would really be huge. Hope the EC would take up the matter at an appropriate time.

**Vijayachandran, Chennai**

### INDISCIPLINE

**THE BELLIGERENCE** and anger shown towards the Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatreya while reading the Governor's address by the Congress members is really despicable. The physical assault on his back with rolls of copies of Governor's speech seems to be an unprecedented happening in India's legislative history. The members concerned should be handed exemplary punishment under the rules book concerning the conduct of MLAs within the floor of the Assembly. As far as the voters and commoners like me are concerned we expect sober and dignified conduct on the part of any elected representatives of the people irrespective of the political party on which he or she got elected.

**Kongunaattan, Coimbatore**

### GODSE DEVOTEE'S INDUCTION

**THIS REFERS** to the news *Godse 'devotee' inducted in MP Congress* (Feb. 26). It is shocking to learn that MP Congress Committee president, Mr. Kamal Nath has inducted Babul Chaurasia, a staunch devotee of Mahatma Gandhi assassin Nathuram Godse into the Congress party without any shame. The grand old party, nurtured by umpteen great personalities who sacrificed a lot for the sake of nation and party, has now stooped down to this low ebb of admitting a man who is notorious for sending Godse's last court statement to one lakh people, is condemnable. At this juncture, the present unwise induction will ruin the party's image further and affect its fortunes very badly.

**M. Govindaraj, Gudiyatham**



A.G. Noorani

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

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

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

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

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

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

shun corruption.

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

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

to personal friends, but there it is."

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

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

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

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

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

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

*By arrangement with Dawn*



INDIAN TOP 10  
BESTSELLERS

## NON-FICTION

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

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

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

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

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

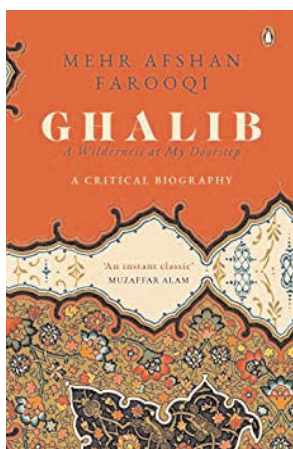
6 **THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**  
Shashi Tharoor  
Aleph, ₹799

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

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

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

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



## FICTION

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

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

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

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

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

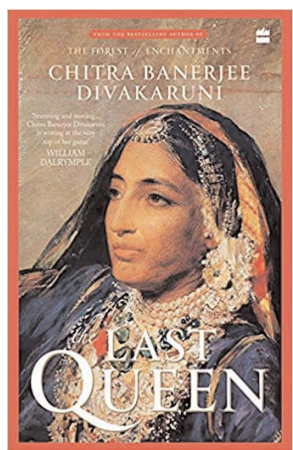
6 **HOMELAND ELEGIES**  
Ayad Akhtar  
Tinder Press, ₹1,050

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

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

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

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



Bahrison, New Delhi

# How atavism became ideology and Hindutva ambushed India



Ranjona Banerji

review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

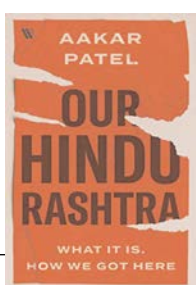
causes the maximum resentment in the minds of "Hindu" voters and of supporters of the BJP.

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

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

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

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



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

By AAKAR PATEL  
Westland, ₹799

## A ROMEO AND JULIET-LIKE TRAGEDY IN UTTAR PRADESH

Victoria Schofield

review

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

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

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

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

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

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

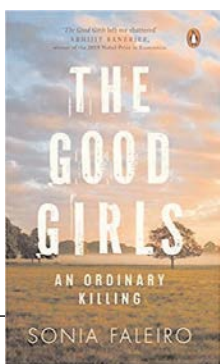
Faleiro's description of the post-mortem examination would be farcical if it wasn't so serious. It was undertaken at night on one of the hottest days on record, in a small room with no air conditioning and no fan, with the bodies by now in rigor mortis. The mortician had no formal training but had started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

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

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

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

*By arrangement with the Spectator*



THE GOOD GIRLS: AN  
ORDINARY KILLING

By SONIA FALEIRO  
Penguin Random  
House, ₹599

## FAST FACT

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

## The ocean, not Himalayas: Presenting the South India story



R. Mohan

review

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

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

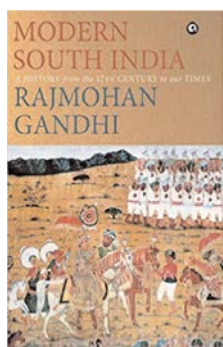
It was most fascinating to pore over the book by Rajmohan Gandhi on modern South India which is a history from the 17th century right up to the modern times. This book helps remove the lacuna created by a blind belief in the seat of the Mughal empire and then the capital of the British after they moved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

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

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

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

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



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

By RAJMOHAN  
GANDHI  
Aleph, ₹799

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## JLF '21: Tharoor skewers Sandel

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

Sandel's book, *The Tyranny of Merit*, has made waves in academia. His earlier book, *What Money Can't Buy*, on the moral limits of markets, had sealed his reputation as a formidable critic of free market orthodoxy. In *Tyranny*, he posits a politics centred on dignity, arguing that pursuing meritocracy has betrayed, in many ways, the working classes. Sandel believes, radically, that merit is not an antidote but a justification for inequality. It is corrosive of the common good, Sandel said. If I believe that my success is my own do then I conclude that those who aren't successful are responsible for their own distress. Emphasis on merit completely ignores the role of luck and good fortune, indebtedness to cooperation and collaboration and the joys of solidarity. But Tharoor ably countered this point by saying that it is very well known that inequality of opportunity existed in the world. Also, it is not always the meritorious who are the most successful; for example, a hedge fund manager may not be where he is because of merit. With oligarchy and aristocracy alive and well, if not gaining in strength and influence, how fair is it to not reward talent and hard work was the question that came through, even as Tharoor argued that merit, in fact, had historically been the antidote to both the advantages of having inherited wealth and caste. While admitting that he, personally, would prefer a surgeon who got his degree on merits, Sandel found himself unable to sufficiently answer Tharoor's question on anti-intellectualism and the rise of Donald Trump. To start with, he set aside Tharoor's suggestion that the working classes were co-opted into voting for him by racial tensions, thus taking a blinkered view on the reality of white 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 handicaps so they are no more graceful than the less agile, is almost equally compelling a counter-argument, if not as emotionally affecting. For lovers of the short story, these two are must-reads.

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

— Sucheta Dasgupta



## SHORT TAKES

## Deepak settles for silver at Strandja

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

## Akmal's ban cut down to one year

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

## Woods in 'good spirits' after crash

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

## Ministry restores recognition of GFI

**New Delhi:** The Sports Ministry has restored the recognition of the faction-ridden Gymnastics Federation of India (GFI) after 10 years, taking into records Sudhir Mittal's election as president in the polls held in November 2019.

## 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*

## CHENNAI 'A' DIV VOLLEY LEAGUE FROM MARCH 1

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

Chennai District 'A' division volleyball league will resume at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium from March 1.

Indian Overseas Bank are the defending champions. Teams will play each other in round robin format. The team that scores the highest points will be declared the champions. The last four teams will be relegated to the lower division.

The tournament is sponsored by Dr. Rela Institute & Medical Centre.

## Participating teams

Indian Overseas Bank, Customs, Indian Bank, Income Tax, Tamil Nadu Police, ICF, SRM University, Panimalar Engineering College, St. Joseph's Engineering College, Chepauk Friends Club.

## Vaughan slams BCCI for producing 'poor' pitches

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

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

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

though batting legend Sunil Gavaskar credited the Indian spinners rather than blaming the surface.

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

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

"It is a real concern for the game that we have seen India respond to going 1-0 down by producing pitches which turn prodigiously from ball one

and which they know full well will only last two or three days."

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*

## Velavan, Sunayna emerge champions in state squash

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

Velavan Senthilkumar and Sunayna Kuruvilla emerged champions in the men's and women's sections in the state closed squash championship at the Indian Squash Academy on Saturday. Velavan got the better of Navaneeth Prabhu in straight games while Sunayna defeated Aparajitha Balamurugan.

## RESULTS (ALL FINALS)

**Men:** Velavan Senthilkumar bt Navaneeth Prabhu 11-6 11-5 11-4.

**Women:** Sunayna Kuruvilla bt Aparajitha Balamurugan 11-7 11-1 11-8.

**Boys:** U-11: Shrinish Subramanian Arun Subhas bt Aryan Prabhu 11-2 11-4 11-2.

**U-13:** Darshil Parasrampur bt Lokesh 9-11 11-5 11-4.

**U-15:** Arihant Ks bt Sandhesh Pr 11-3 11-7 11-9.



Winners of the state closed squash championship pose with their trophies.

**U-17:** Sreekartikayan R bt Ashvin Ganesh 12-10 11-6 8-11 6-11 11-8.

**U-19:** Shreemann Raghavan bt Navaneeth Prabhu 11-8 11-9 10-12 9-11 11-3.

**Girls:** U-11: Diva Parasrampur bt Priyal R 8-11 11-8 11-9 12-10.

**U-13:** Ananya Narayanan bt Yaavnaa Saravanakumar 11-7 11-4 11-6.

**U-15:** Khushboo bt Ananya Narayanan 7-11 11-9 7-11 11-4 11-6.

**U-17:** S Akshaya Sri bt Pooja Arthi 11-8 11-4 7-11 11-7.

**U-19:** Abhisheka Shannon bt Pooja Arthi 9-11 11-6 9-11 11-5 11-5.

**U-13:** Ananya Narayanan bt Yaavnaa Saravanakumar 11-7 11-4 11-6.

**U-15:** Khushboo bt Ananya Narayanan 7-11 11-9 7-11 11-4 11-6.

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**U-17:** S Akshaya Sri bt Pooja Arthi 11-8 11-4 7-11 11-7.

**U-19:** Abhisheka Shannon bt Pooja Arthi 9-11 11-6 9-11 11-5 11-5.

## Ashwin hits back at pitch critics

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 27:** Premier spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Saturday said he is hardly perturbed by all the talk surrounding the surface winning over skills set and took a dig at critics seeking to undermine India's massive wins in recent times.

Ashwin, who on Friday, had put out a series of tweets in which he tried to emphasise how a particular thought process is being "marketed" and creating an issue.

"I am absolutely not disturbed with things being taken away from the context because this is what's been happening for the last decade, if not more," Ashwin, who is now the second fastest to 400 Test wickets, said during a virtual media meet.

"That is why I put out the tweets that I did yesterday. I think people need to get the context of what's happening here. There have been some people who have messaged me and said match has finished in two days." When a British journalist asked if he felt the pitch used for the third match against England at Motera was good for Test cricket, Ashwin gave him a prompt counter: "I have a question back. What is a good cricket surface?," Ashwin shot back.

"I am the one asking the question... good contest between bat and ball?" the journalist was insistent. "What makes a good surface? Who defines this? Seam on the first day and then bat well and then spin on the last two days? Come on! Who makes all these rules, we need to get over it and not talk about whatever picture you want to paint," Ashwin's sarcasm was not lost on anyone.

"If you are asking if it is a good Test surface, I don't see any of the players coming from England having an issue with the surface. They want to improve, they look like they want to have a contest.

"Is it the players and the



R. Ashwin

people who are reporting back that want their players to not complete and complain about the pitches? Because we have never done that on any of the tours."

The scribe had a follow-up question. "Hoping for a similar surface in the next Test?"

"It depends on what you're hoping for. We are hoping for a good cricket match."

Ashwin feels that it's difficult to explain how a match pans out to those who haven't played the game but forms an opinion based on a third person's view point.

"What about all the three pink-ball Test matches we've played, everything has ended within three days' time."

"I do not know what to say because when somebody just throws an opinion out there about the surface — and having had played the game — unfortunately maybe they've not played the pink-ball Test matches so they do not understand this facet of the game."

Asked if he felt hurt by Yuvraj Singh's tweet, he said: "The reason behind my tweets were definitely not in context to anybody in particular. When I read Yuvi pa's tweet, I actually didn't get affected at all."

— *PTI*

## Shomesh, Vignesh fire IOB into final

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 27

R. Shomeshwaran and C. Vignesh took five wickets as Indian Overseas Bank Staff Club beat Indian Bank Sports and Recreation Club by six wickets in the semifinal of the TNCA second division (elite) league.

## BRIEF SCORES

RKS Cricket Academy 236 for 8 in 50 overs (Paras Dogra 63, P. Nirmal Kumar 51, S. Lakshay Jain 40, J. Suresh Kumar 30) lost to United Friends Cricket Club (T. Nagar) 242 for 6 in 46.3 overs (Swapnil Mansukh Gugale 101 not out, P. Sugnedhiran 40, Ch. Jitendra Kumar 30). Indian Bank Sports and Recreation Club 87 in 24.5 overs (P. Satish 40, R. Shomeshwaran 5/18 C. Vignesh 5/22) lost to Indian Overseas Bank Staff Club 91 for 4 in 26.3 overs (Abhishek M Hegde 30 not out).

**V-DIVISION 'C':** Globe Cricket Club 262 for 9 in 50 overs (K. Srihar Srinivasan 63, R. Gopi 49, S. Gopala Krishnan 44, R. Dinesh 30 not out, R. Sai Bharat 3 for 43, V.



R. Shomeshwaran, C. Vignesh

Murali 3 for 33) beat Triplicane United Club 122 in 35.5 overs (S. Praveen Kumar 42, G. Shailender 4 for 37, P. Sanjay Kumar 4 for 33). ICI Sports Recreation Club 211 for 9 in 50 overs (S. Kumar 64, K. Sivasankaran 3 for 25) bt Eccentric Cricket Club 64 in 19.2 overs (K. Jeevarathinam 5 for 33, V. Rajesh 3 for 29). Unicorn Cricket Club 245 for 8 in 50 overs (S. Indra Kumar 83, S. Prem Kumar 42, B. Ramasethu 41, M. Arun Kumar 31, K. Siddeshwaran 3 for 59) beat Triplicane Recreation Club 106 in 36.3 overs (Shiva Shankar Devendran 53, B. Ramasethu 4 for 19, Raghavendra Narayanan 3 for 15), Grove Cricket Club 148 in 42.4 overs (K. Ajith Kumar 47, K. Mohamed Azharuddin 37, A. Dhanaraj 5 for 28) bt Nungambakkam Sports Club 87 in 29.5 overs (R. Sri Raghavendra Prasad 4 for 22, D. Sathyanathan 3 for 39)

## 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 an 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.